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ELEMENTS AND SPRITES: THE COHESIVE PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE IN DONNE'S

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Critical approaches to John Donne's poetry share a general perspective that alleges a dichotomy between the representation(s) of love in his romantic and devotional works. Starting from a position that acknowledges the metaphysical composition of human beings as constituted by equally important body and soul as central to the ontology that informs Donne's work, I posit that the connection between body and soul is fundamental to Donne's vision of love—a philosophy of love that can be traced across the corpus of his work. For Donne, fully realized love involves the engagement of both body and soul along with reciprocation. Tracing this pattern through close analysis of Donne's poetic techniques including his metaphysical conceits, Renaissance cosmography, reversals, and imagery in poems ranging from samples from the *Songs and Sonnets*, the *Elegies*, and the *Holy Sonnets*, I endeavor to build a comprehensive picture of a philosophy of love that engages the whole person. In this era when modern critical concepts of identity increasingly dictate scholarly approaches to love, Donne's fundamental perspective grounded in the metaphysics of body and soul is rarely a topic of serious exploration, yet serious attention to the interplay of body, soul, and love in Donne is imperative to an informed understanding of his work.

Elements and Sprites: The Cohesive Philosophy of Love in Donne's Romantic and Devotional Poetry

Introduction

Of the images and ideas that recur throughout John Donne's poetry, one of the most significant to his understanding of human experience is the principle of metaphysical human anatomy—the dual composition of body and soul that comprises each individual.[1] Critics have observed the role of this dual nature of humanity in many of Donne's romantic poems.[2] Ramie Targoff, who approaches the relationship of an individual's body and soul as a central concern of Donne's work, argues that the union of the two forms the basis of self for Donne (22-23, 120). She notes that the "relationship between the body and soul, . . . [which is] so crucial to nearly all of [Donne's] writing—his letters, love lyrics, elegies and obsequies, meditations, devotional sonnets, and sermons—has not been fully acknowledged by centuries of readers and critics" (2).[3] However, for Targoff, it is the separation of soul from body that is located at the heart Donne's thinking and writing, leading her to state that "Donne's poetics of love is a poetics of taking leave" (50).[4] In this way, she looks closely at Donne's emotional and spiritual psychology without analyzing his concept of love apart from loss (whether it be anticipated, experienced, or avoided). Furthermore, in turning from his romantic poems to his devotional works, she replaces almost all consideration of love with the navigation of judgment (107). This approach reflects one of the predominant critical orientations toward Donne's poetry: that a dichotomy exists between the erotic and divine poems, and between the concept(s) of love represented in each. However, close attention to his engagement with love throughout his works reveals a principle of love that consistently involves both the body and the soul—the whole person—in both romantic and devotional contexts. Because culture (both early modern and present-day) readily calls any

number of interactions between the sexes "love," and Donne uses the word without particular nuance or precision in much of his erotic poetry, it is important to distinguish the philosophy of love that requires body and soul involvement—a real or "whole" love—from other implications of the word.[5] To overlook this distinction is to overlook the connections that resonate across Donne's work.

The urge to bring Donne's oeuvre under the control of a readily articulable schema governed by context (or content) largely prevents us from "getting anywhere with Donne," in William Kerrigan's view, as this critical totality or "[*c*]*omprehension* is precisely what Donne studies have always been forced to defer" (emphasis original, "What" 2-3).[6] Scholarship typically seeks to taxonomize Donne's poems, resulting in classifications that serve either as a goal in themselves or as a basis for further analysis, with a few axes of organization commonly emerging to divide the poems by topic, theme, perspective, or any other hospitable metric. The resulting pictures of love are bifurcated along lines including the physical and spiritual, the "human and divine" (Osterwalder 199), *eros* and *agape* (Vann 53), or adolescent and mature affection, often with a thread of evaluation privileging one type of "love" over another. A biographical lens is sometimes overlaid on these binary themes as well to suggest direct connections to developments in Donne's romantic or religious life, despite a general consensus that chronologies for the poems are inconclusive (Low 466; Edwards 196), undermining efforts to contextualize the poet's work as an expression of his changing situation.[7]

Donne's preference for paradoxical metaphor and reversals of imagery, along with a visible division between his sacred and profane poems, invites what Lindsay Mann describes as the "dominant view . . . of a fundamental dualism . . . in Donne" (353), seen as a dichotomy in his poetry or in the man himself. Molly Murray traces this critical line back to Izaak Walton's

1640 biography of the poet (70). These divisions offer convenient lines along which to interrogate the poems, providing meaningful avenues of insight into their primary reasoning, but to assume these lines reflect Donne's underlying philosophy of love would be to accept the surface of his words as their full implication. In this paper, I endeavor to resist approaches to Donne's poetry that foreground potentially reductive duality and to push back against the perceived dichotomy of sacred and profane love(s) that often characterizes critical thought on love across Donne's poetic works. In the absence of an expectation of binary results, careful attention to Donne's thought on the metaphysics of the person and the dynamics of human love reveals a cohesive philosophy of whole love visible across the romantic/erotic and devotional sides of Donne's corpus. This is not to suggest that Donne's ideas about love are fixed across his career, or that nuance and experimentation are absent in his work; but, rather, that his continual engagement with love through the lens of the metaphysics of body and soul creates a consistent attitude toward the fully realized operation of love that holds equally true in meaningful relationships between lovers or with God.

Taxonomies of Donne

Donne highlights and extends differentiations through his unconventional choices of imagery. His metaphors exaggerate the lines between concepts, pushing his themes far enough apart that the strain itself becomes a kind of focal point, at times even challenging social conventions of acceptable taste, according to Kerrigan ("Fearful" 337). Nevertheless, the strained lines in these metaphysical conceits remain unbroken and the comparisons hold, standing in silent witness to the fundamental importance of connections in his works. As Samuel Johnson has famously noted, metaphysical conceits are driven by a "*discordia concors*" or discordant

harmony wherein the "most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together" (24). While the violence of the conceits in Donne's work ensures their effect on the reader, it is the "yok[ing] . . . together"—the emphasis on synthesis and connection—that best defines his approach. Just as the bite and body of a flea stand in the place of physical intercourse and matrimony in "The Flea," and a type of apparent denial is recast as radical submission to the flagellation of mercy in "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward," both elements of Donne's metaphors (or all elements, as his conceits often carry multiple valences) contribute to the complete implication of the poems that contain them, relying not on the sharp division or contrast but on the connection between the unlikely elements of a comparison to convey significance.[8]

For Osterwalder, Donne's metaphors formulate "distinct concepts of human and divine love" (199) as a result of the disparity or "paradoxical reversal" of imagery employed in the different contexts of his secular poems and the *Holy Sonnets* (200).[9] While generalizations can easily be made categorizing and contrasting the conceits Donne employs in these respective contexts, it does not necessarily follow that the qualities of love he explores represent separate and distinct concepts of love. No doubt, Donne would have been familiar with the "sentiment of human and divine love" as two separate themes embodied in the concepts of *eros* and *agape* and circulated in the art and literature of the continental Renaissance (Zarri 53-54). Without subscribing to this or any binary system of "loves," however, he leverages the conventions of Italian and English poetry to wrestle with the question of love itself.

Modern focus in Donne scholarship tends to conflate questions of love with critical perspectives that have developed during the latter half of the twentieth century, when, as Catherine Bates explains, "a certain putting of sex into discourse, the rise of the 'heterosexual imaginary,' . . . and a sexual revolution" inspired new interest in the poet (178).[10] At the same

time that modern concepts of identity increasingly determine critical approaches to love, Donne's fundamental perspective grounded in the metaphysics of body and soul is seldom explored in earnest. In his essay purportedly exploring "The Metaphysics of the Metaphysicals," Gordon Teskey dismisses Donne's personal metaphysics as "true but uninteresting" (242).[11] While Targoff's recent work seriously considers metaphysical anatomy in Donne, her primary focus is the relationship between body, soul, and self, rather than their intersection with love. Consequently, Donne's personal philosophy of metaphysics and love continues to be neglected by modern critics. In her 1967 book, *John Donne: Conservative Revolutionary*, N. J. C. Andreasen addresses the interplay between Donne's foundational metaphysics (as Christian Platonism) and the human experience of love. Critical approaches have changed in the decades following Andreasen's work, and some of her conclusions invite thorough scrutiny; nevertheless, her approach to Donne's corpus facilitates an important opportunity to engage with questions of fundamental significance to an understanding of his poetry, and few critics sense have attended to the intersection of body, soul, and love throughout Donne's verse.

Commonplaces of Renaissance cosmology and ontology such as the Great Chain of Being, universal order, the importance of hierarchy to that order, and the place of humanity—body and soul—within it, are all evident in Donne's poetry.[12] Nevertheless, critical analyses of Donne's approach to love reflect surprisingly divided opinions about his relationship to Italian and Christian Platonist conventions. This variety of conclusions derives in part from the nuanced spectrum of definitions that each scholar draws from, with the range of approaches to Platonism and the Neoplatonic yielding opinions that conflict on contradicting grounds and, as a consequence, do not actually meet at all. Some detail Donne's indebtedness to Neoplatonism—or even his role in developing the Neoplatonic tradition in England alongside Sidney and Spenser

(Martin 145)—all while Douglas Peterson unequivocally claims that the poet's "anti-Platonism is commonly recognized" (296). Leading up to this claim, Peterson characterizes Neoplatonism as an "absolute dualism" (285), further defining it for his purposes as the assumption of "dichotomies . . . between the profane and the divine, reason and appetite, matter and spirit, and body and soul" (290). A fundamental irreconcilability of opposites informs Peterson's idea of the Neoplatonic, against which he positions Donne's romantic verse.[13] Andreasen is among those who discuss specifically Christian Platonism as a philosophical scheme that "ting[es] . . . the idealistic love poems" (197). She neatly summarizes the characteristic body/soul dualism at work in all these competing scholarly positions, noting that, despite appreciation of bodily beauty, human beings "must also love spiritual qualities" leading to the apprehension of and devotion to the *imago Dei* "which shines within the beloved" (197). While her definition agrees with the critical conversation about seventeenth century Christian Platonism, it side-steps one of the most striking elements of Donne's philosophy of love—physicality. From his *Songs and Sonnets*, to his *Holy Sonnets*, Donne animates an image of human being as body and soul, where these elements represent imperative parts of the whole person, rather than antithetical aspects of a divided being. A close reading of a few works selected from across his canon, when taken in the context of each other along with the Biblical tradition informing his philosophy, illustrates the pervading deeper truth of a whole love expressed in Donne's poetry.

The Direct/Devoted Love Poems

Donne's merger of his meditation on love with another of his favored themes—the contemplation of death—provides a useful entry point for an investigation of the poet's theory of love as a human experience involving the participation of body and soul. Physical death, as an

absolute of human existence, paradoxically undoes the individual while also connecting us all. This connection itself is multivalent. In one way, as a shared experience, death touches everyone. Together, mankind "run[s] to death," physically burning out in an inexorable race toward entropy.[14] It also represents a final liminal mystery that no one can fathom or explain, yet that all will individually come to face. The philosophical contemplation of mortality was commonplace in Donne's time, yet, rather than simply crafting *memento mori* as an exercise in meditation, he routinely faces death's touch on life with an immediacy that speaks to timeless human experience, bridging not only the prospect of living and dying, but of loving as well.[15] Donne emphatically believed in continued physical existence after death through the Christian doctrine of bodily resurrection. He explains in a March 8, 1622, sermon that, "The Kingdom of Heaven hath not all that it must have to consummate perfection, till it have bodies too" (305). After moving through the concept of cosmic order and its enactment in nature, he adds, "So also the Heaven of Heavens, the Presence Chamber of God himself, expects the presence of our bodies" (306). For Donne, the body is equally as vital to the individual as the soul and even in paradise "consummate perfection" requires the connection of both.

As fearful as death can be in the face of wasting "feeble flesh," metaphysical human anatomy complicates the inevitable, offering the possibility of hope.[16] The psalmist asks, "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?" With heightened intensity, he asks, "shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?" (Psalm 89:48). This distinction between mortality of the body as the living man encounters death, and the intensification represented by death of the soul as it separately finds itself in the physically embodied hands of the grave, articulates the relationship between the separate yet connected physical and spiritual elements that define humanity for Donne. Just as both facets of a person encounter death, both must be invested in

meaningful, whole love.

From the outset, the speaker in “The Dissolution” is brutally direct. In a terse declarative, he states, “She’s dead” (1), but what strikes as a tone of finality instead serves as an overture for her lover’s visceral tour of the relationships between death and life, between the body and the soul, ultimately revealing something of the fundamental nature of love itself. Tied to the observation of the lady’s death and borrowing something of its perfunctory clarity, is the notion that “all which die / To their first elements resolve” (1-2). Two physical realities are suggested at once in this moment: the basic composition of the universe, classically divided into its component forces or its own “first elements”; and the material construction of mankind at creation out of the dust of the earth from which God fashioned physical man, and the breath that carried life separately into him. Of these two elements—dust and breath, earth and air—“man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7), a whole being made possible by the combination of physical parts and intangible, essential life. The *resolution* experienced at death not only suggests a breaking apart or fragmenting into constituent parts, but also connotes a sort of willing determination in accordance with natural laws. According to this natural paradigm, the lovers “were mutual elements . . . / And made of one another” (3-4), sharing in a materiality common to all humanity, but suggesting as well the particular union of individuals made possible through love. Having lost his beloved, the speaker imagines that she remains with him in a way, not as a treasured memory or other tritely sweet endearment, but in the fundamental composition of his body, which “doth hers involve” (5). As the things composing his being “abundant grow,” he finds them “burdenous” as well (7), and in a reversal wherein the material stuff of life brings death instead, he finds they “nourish not, but smother” (8). Through unity with his beloved, the lover experiences an equivalent displacement of life by death, and as she shares existence

through him, he shares in her death.

While critics routinely note the roles of material and spiritual relationships in Donne's poems, they inspect them in isolation or, more often, focus on a perceived commentary about the importance of balance between the two as possible extremes or varieties of love. Rather than a scale that must balance body and soul, however, Donne's canon suggests an equation where the physical and spiritual are compounded on one side and the solution itself is love. That is, it is not a matter of body measured against soul on a scale of love, but instead of body in combination with soul to equal an involved love. In Donne's idea of whole love, equilibrium is less important than the connection between physical and spiritual elements in any relationship. Balance and moderation may be important principles for human existence, particularly to the early modern worldview, but it is the synthesis of corporeal and metaphysical that defines Donne's philosophy.[17]

The title "The Dissolution" encapsulates the breaking down of this unity brought about by the death of the speaker's beloved. What was previously a whole dissolves into lesser parts. As the woman's body and soul are no longer connected, the essence of a love defined by relationships between body and soul and between individuals is lost. Despite the fact that the woman's body has already failed, the poem's analysis of the resulting dissolution is anchored in the physical materiality of life. The classical elements return as the "fire of passion, sighs of air, / Water of tears, and earthly sad despair" that make up the speaker's "materials" (9-11) and yoke the spiritual to that materiality by pairing the elemental makeup of his body with the substance of his heart. With his beloved's death, his store of tears, despair, and destructive passion is renewed. Physical equilibrium is destroyed in the absence of connection, because love cannot be complete outside of a relationship and the "she" of the poem no longer exists as a party.[18] Consequently,

the speaker's "fire doth with [his] fuel grow" (15). Understanding the ramifications, he anticipates that the spiritual blow of his loss will manifest in his own physical death. While their terrestrial existence has ended, the trajectory of the lovers' souls suggests a transition into the connective mystery of human experience. If his spirit overtakes hers along the way as he expects, perhaps they will make the journey together; for, as Donne elsewhere explains to Death itself, "those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow / Die not."[19]

Whereas "The Dissolution" explores the connection of physical and spiritual elements vitally important to human relationships, "The Ecstasy" approaches from a different angle to construct a picture of whole love by speaking to the physicality of spiritual union. This poem is a particular favorite of critics. Perhaps because it so openly seems to deal with the "reconciling [of] neo-Platonic opposites" that Peterson anatomizes throughout the *Songs and Sonnets* (291), or because it showcases Donne's ability to crystallize ineffable experience and translate it into profound comprehension, "The Ecstasy" continually inspires critical attention without generating particularly strong consensus. In an unfavorable comparison to "The Undertaking" with its celebration of "loveliness within" (13) to the exclusion of material reality, Andreasen finds that the "Ecstasy" lovers' "smugness leads them to self-deception and hypocrisy" (108). She explains that, "[a]fter persuading themselves that they really love one another spiritually, they use their supposed spirituality as a justification for recalling the 'Hee and Shee' [ostensibly transcended by the lovers in "The Undertaking"] rather than forgetting it." As a sort of final offence for Andreasen, "they offer their love as an example for mankind to follow" (208).

Andreasen's core assumption is that the Platonic ideal she finds in "The Undertaking" is both desirable and sustainable, when a close reading of "The Ecstasy" suggests that more complete experience is possible. Ironically, the smugness she imputes to the lovers is

considerably more evident in her own analysis, as no evidence in the poem, whether suggested by Andreasen or otherwise, supports the assertion that the lovers' interpretation of experienced love is anything but genuine, despite the disdain peppering Andreasen's remarks. To label their ecstasy "self-deception" because it does not align with a paradigm of love that is philosophically recognizable and observable in another poem seems hasty at best and, at worst, reductive. Instead of rendering them hypocrites, the lovers' "use [of] their supposed spirituality as justification" for physical intimacy along with their exemplification of their love, embodies the entire point of the poem (208). As Osteterwalder neatly summarizes, "the upshot is that both the bawdy sensuality and the lofty Platonism are presented seriously to lead the reader to the conclusion that both form a whole" (204). Particularly because this is a message of a new sort of love, the lovers' inclination to share their example perhaps comes across more accurately as goodwill than smugness or self-congratulation.

Bryson and Movsesian suggest, "Donne's work demands that we see . . . past the fragmented, past the commitments of any contemporary critical school, in order to understand his desire" (442). This desire, like the intent of the lovers in "The Ecstasy," manifests in the expression of a philosophy of love that accepts the physical and spiritual as together constituting human beings and their experience. Though Donne sets out to describe the union of souls achieved by the lovers, and spends essentially the first two-thirds of the poem developing that idea, from the first word—"Where"—it is also firmly seated in physical space and time in a way eschewed by many of his other poems, including all those discussed so far. Critical attention to the first stanza typically focuses on the heavily suggestive imagery of the "pregnant bank" (2), the "reclining head" of the violet (3), and the bedroom setting evoked for an outdoor scene—itself a rarity in Donne's oeuvre. While these details are certainly relevant to the poem's tone and

direction, the deictic “Where” pointing to the scene the lovers inhabit is an equally powerful note allowing a place and a moment to receive the lovers’ bodies. The reminder of time with the repeating “All day” and “all the day” (19-20) emphasizes that, no matter how much like statues they become, their bodies are still subject to temporal laws.

The second stanza couples the idea of a Neoplatonic union of souls with the theme of physical union. Though the lovers’ clasped hands—“firmly cemented / With a fast balm” issuing from them (5-6)—acutely suggest reproductive biology, they do so at a remove as a synecdoche for sexual union, while their shared line of sight penetrates their eyes like a thread passing through beads, realizing their souls’ communion. After sharing textual space in one stanza, the themes of physical and spiritual union themselves begin to merge in the next. Observing that the entirety of their physical connection is contained in the linking of their hands through the horticultural image of “intergraft[ing]” (9) that suggests primitive vitality without requiring it to be human, the lovers return to the theme of reproduction: one physical consequence of union and another liminal mystery of human experience. As the natural miracle of two becoming one and producing another is bodily unavailable in this moment, they turn to their souls’ congress as a sort of surrogate union and are reproduced as reflections in each other’s eyes.

The lovers eventually describe the “new soul” that they have become together (45), and the wedding of their souls apparently transcends the physical experience it initially represented. Yet, where union of bodies leads to a new thing and inevitable change in the form of pregnancy and propagation, union of souls creates a new thing of unchanged spirits in a seeming paradox.[20] Change is figured as a natural consequence of physical existence and an inherent aspect of biological vitality. At the same time, change appears to be antagonistic to the soul in theory, but unable to compromise it in practice, for the lovers explain, “th’ atomies of which we grow”—the

individual spiritual anatomies contributing to the new, unified soul—"Are souls, whom no change can invade" (47-48).[21] As an invading force, change would threaten destruction or distortion of the ethereal composition it breaches; however, by the poem's definition, souls are proof against the assault. Recalling the horticultural imagery of intergrafting and the original reclining violet, "A single violet transplant" suggests invigorating growth instead of compromising change (37). Before the flower's transition, the "strength, the colour, and the size" of the bloom were "poor and scant" (38-39), but coming together with a new bed quickly "[r]edoubles . . . and multiplies" these qualities (40). Similarly, the new, "abler soul" produced by the "Interinanimat[ion]" of two souls through love (41-43) now has the ability to repair "[d]efects of loneliness" (44). This, taken together with the notion that an observer of the lovers' rarified spiritual conversation will "part far purer than he came" by virtue of the encounter (28), correlates with the idea that spiritual union is superior to material experience.

Up to this point, the argument of the poem would seem to largely agree with Neoplatonic principles of the primacy of the soul championed by the speaker in "The Undertaking." Immediately after contemplating the qualities of their interinanimated soul(s), however, the lovers of "The Ecstasy" recall their corporeal selves with an exclamation of contrition:

> But O alas, so long, so far,
> Our bodies why do we forbear?
> They are ours, though they're not we; we are
> The intelligences, they the spheres. (49-52)

Though their bodies do not define their individual identity or self—they do not represent the definition of "we"—they remain as an integral part of the whole. As both the celestial spheres themselves and their guiding intelligences are necessary components of the Aristotelian universe,

sphere and spirit, body and soul, are equally relevant to their system. Elsewhere, Donne notes, "I am a little world made cunningly / Of elements and an angelic sprite," emphasizing the physical and spiritual as a whole wherein his "world's both parts" are equally involved.[22] Similarly, the lovers apprehend the conjunction of body and soul as a "subtle knot which makes us man" (64), distinguishing essential human nature from anything else in creation.

Tracing the lovers' use of personal pronouns illustrates their evolving understanding of the profound truth they ultimately express. Their sense of self first appears as separable from their souls when they explain that "whilst our souls negotiate there [in the space between them], / We like sepulchral statues lay" (17-18). As their spiritual communion continues, the referent for their *we* shifts from body to soul. They become "We . . . , who are this new soul" (45), and though they possess their bodies, they are not defined by them. Finally, they layer these ideas together, grateful for the role of the physical that "thus / Did us, to us, at first convey" (53-54). *Us* becomes an expression of self that contains individual and interinanimated soul, and leads to the possibility of discovering whole self and whole love. They recognize the materiality and sensory capacity of the body as precious, not "dross . . . but allay" (56). Consequently, "pure lovers' souls" (65) must embrace inhabitance of their physical bodies. Sensory experience and material affection—whether as simple as holding hands or as viscerally biological as the reproductive union the lovers' clasped hands represent—requires a descent from idealized spiritual ecstasy to the here and now that sets the scene on the bank from the very beginning. Rather than limiting the soul, the body liberates it to participate in tangible reality, "Else a great prince in prison lies" (68). Thus capacitated, a lover is free to commit to the reality of love that demands participation in body and in soul. The lovers observe that, "Love's mysteries in souls do grow, / But yet the body is his book" (71-72), affirming that, while the substance of love is

spiritual, it is physically inscribed for accessibility by the material in human nature. Rather than expressing arrogance or exhibitionist tendencies, the lovers' conclusive hope that "Weak men on love revealed may look" (70), and that "some lover" who overhears the conversation of their souls might "still mark us" and note "Small change when we'are to bodies gone" (73-76), suggests the lovers represent an exemplar of reconciled physical and spiritual/intellectual union. The totality of their experience stands as evidence of whole love and as a reference for others to recognize and attain.

The Wayward "Love" Poems

Poems like "The Dissolution" and "The Ecstasy" directly deal with questions of the physical and spiritual makeup of individuals and how that relates to love, making them clear proving grounds for a new philosophy of love that accepts and involves metaphysical human anatomy in its entirety. Looking to other poems that deal with romantic relations in Donne's canon offers an opportunity to explore the nuance in his theory of whole love, with a sample from his *Elegies* providing insight into the way Donne's philosophy interacts with common expectations on various levels. Notably, most of Donne's elegies—like many of his satires, sonnets, and other works—do not directly participate in his philosophy of involved, whole love. In an influential 1990 essay, Achsah Guibbbory condemns Donne scholarship for exercising a selective attention that avoids or excuses potentially uncomfortable content in his works, particularly in the *Elegies*. With a focus on what she identifies as "the interrelationship between love and politics" (260), Guibbory sets out to "deal with the misogyny evident in many of these poems, but often repressed in critical readings" (261). Observing a relentless focus on relations between the sexes and on the female body throughout the *Elegies*, Guibbory notes that the poems

"[r]epeatedly . . . represent women, not as idealized creatures, closed and inviolable in their chastity, but as low, impure, sometimes even disgusting creatures" (264).[23] Donne's satiric distortion of generic conventions associated with the Petrarchan lover and courtly love emphasize the bodily not as it relates to love, however, but as it relates to convention and expectation.[24]

Even alongside the biting tones of satire and postures toward the female body that Guibbory questions, it is possible to trace Donne's philosophy of love in the *Elegies*. As its title suggests, "Elegy XVIII: Variety" presents an extended argument extolling inconstancy as a sort of devotion to the perceived virtue of variety in physical and emotional "love." [25] The speaker develops a superficial egalitarianism, finding attractive worth equally in women's physical features, eloquence, or social standing, and his devotion to these surfaces is, on its own surface, sincere.[26] For each of the ladies he finds "loveable" he "would, if need were, die, / To do her service" (19, 21-22). While the sexualized implications of "die" as a metaphorical commonplace for sexual climax are obviously applicable here, the statement's sincerity is reinforced by the repeated expression of willingness to "venture with her to the grave" (28). After two and a half pages of similarly inspired rakish proclamations, the speaker's reversal culminating in an oath of constancy is particularly meaningful, as it encourages a different kind of scrutiny of what was said before. The speaker characterizes himself as a willing servant of an enthroned ideal of "that part of love" that recognizes no inhibitions (63), a supposed old god of love with "wings" and "darts" suggesting Cupid (58-59) and promising "ancient liberty" (63).[27] In an ironic evolution, the speaker acknowledges he must abandon this service if he wants to exercise love in true freedom, for, "With firmer age returns our liberties" (76). While this turn serves another kind of variety by introducing fidelity as novel, and the speaker affirms that his "allegiance [to the fickle

part of love] temporary is" (75), this is not simply a new way to chase change. Unconvinced, Guibbory reads the speaker's conversion to a faithful lover as evidence of "a succession of allegiances, all of which are provisional and temporary," and suspects "the cycle of constancy and change will begin again" for the speaker of this elegy (278). But, to stop at the final moment of shifting allegiance, as Guibbory does, without following through to the poem's final lines overlooks the concluding sentiment of permanence in the speaker's intention to "love her ever, and love her alone" (82).

Knowing the poem makes an ultimate statement of singular devotion, the fallacy with which the speaker launches his argument suggests the tension between his words and the theory of love underlying the work. He observes, "The heavens rejoice in motion; why should I / Abjure my so much loved variety" (1-2), asserting for his behavior the same sanctity of celestial authority with which the psalmist declares, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Psalm 19:1), and echoing the refrain of cosmic approval. However, the behavior he defends is essentially random and chaotic—the pursuit of any woman who appeals to him, regardless of their interest or even his success—whereas the heavens' motion embodies systematic order. At one point, he admits that, "though I fail of my required ends, / The attempt is glorious and itself commends" (35-36), revealing that, rather than pursuing even a distorted impression of love, he knowingly completes little more than an exercise in self-gratification at a remove, congratulating himself for a pursuit that embodies its own reward. He argues in terms of "[p]leasure" and "appetite" (4, 10), seeking to divide love "with many" (3) in direct contrast with the theory of entirety that echoes through Donne's treatment of love.

By focusing so much of its energy on this contrasting position, the poem brightly outlines some of the controlling principles of Donne's philosophy of whole love. In defense of his

profligacy, the speaker posits that "a dead lake, that no strange bark doth greet, / Corrupts itself, and what doeth live in it" (13-14). His metaphor requires new paramours to circulate continually through the circle of his love life. It assumes the self to be inherently corrupting, and as a consequence, lovers must always be *other*. If they were to commune as the single interinanimated soul of the "Ecstasy" lovers, both would be corrupted in the stagnation the speaker imagines in "Variety." The speaker hints at the hollowness of his hypothesis in a question even before disowning it outright at the poem's conclusion. On the heels of his claim avowing willingness to serve a "lovable" woman even to the death (19), he asks if it follows "that I / Must serve her only, when I may have choice?" (21-22). Choice is an imperative element in love, but not in the way the speaker's question implies.[28] Instead of representing a license to pursue any woman who interests him, and in the constraint of which a relationship becomes an obligation, the option to choose another gives the choice not to do so significance. Without choice, constancy is meaningless. Though he may not be ready to adjust his behavior, the speaker is fully aware of the reciprocal commitment that will be required for him to experience more than the suggestion of love. When he embraces "beauty with true worth . . . / assembled in some one" (80-81), he will recognize value that exceeds the merely physical or superficial and appreciate the totality of body and spirit.

"The Indifferent" advances a similar argument as that for "Variety," yet it is simultaneously developed and undercut more aggressively. In the first stanza, this speaker rattles off a dozen different examples of women he can love. Surveying physical, emotional, geographical, and economic differences, his list concludes with a cheeky couplet declaring, "I can love her, and her, and you, and you; / I can love any, so she be not true" (8-9). In this way, his energetic paean to "love's sweetest part, variety" (20) redefines "love" to avoid the covenant

of constancy that whole love requires. Rather than arguing his position philosophically to society, he spends the next stanza beseeching women to understand, accept, or take advantage of his mode of love. Conjured as the embodiment and enforcer of faithless romance in the final stanza, Venus reinforces the notion that the speaker's definition of "love" represents society's majority position, for only "some two or three / Poor heretics in love" stand against it (23-24). Through their example which might "'stablish dangerous constancy" (25), these devoted couples and sincere lovers pose a threat by embodying a counter-culture of dedication.

This "modern god" of a redefined love appears in "Love's Deity" (15), both producing "destiny" through the opinions of the majority and produced by it as "that vice-nature, custom lets it be" (5-6). Whereas the "Indifferent" speaker aligns himself with the love god's principles, the narrator of "Love's Deity" struggles against them. As one of the heretics in love, he declares himself a "Rebel and atheist" (22), resisting the world's constructed "god" of love with its arbitrary, capricious rules and fundamentally harmful dogma. By imagining a conversation with a lover who lived "before the god of love was born" (2), he attempts to see beyond the way his world understands love, to access a new philosophy by contemplating an old one. Rage, lust, and objectification are all customs of modern romance that allow the speaker to languish in a one-sided "love" (17-21). Caught in the contemplation of a woman who is not free or willing to return his feelings, in one of his most perceptive moments he realizes that "it cannot be / Love, till I love her, that loves me" (13-14). This is another redefinition of love, but, where the speaker in "The Indifferent" distorted the word to serve his behavior, this man acknowledges reciprocity as a requisite for a loving relationship. "Love" without it is not really love at all.

The Devotional Poems

To embrace for a moment that convenient line of division seen between Donne's profane

and holy topics, while remembering that it does not necessarily represent a division in his controlling philosophy, turning to the *Holy Sonnets* allows a comparison of the whole love experienced between human beings and that shared with God. While the nuance between these two kinds of relationships is understandably different, Donne develops an approach to love that incorporates broad truths that hold across situations in his works. The clearest underlying assumption of the theory of whole love conveyed in Donne's canon is the foundational principle that the body and soul together constitute an individual human being, and, while a person inhabits this world, both parts are equally vital to their experience. Consequently, the genuine commitment to love another requires the investment of both parts—the whole person. Though she writes from a perspective that seeks to contextualize Donne specifically in terms of sexuality, Rebecca Ann Bach offers an observation that is nevertheless useful in this context. "Most of Donne's critics," she finds, "are embedded in a twentieth-century approach . . . that assumes that the self is constituted in sexual desire and that separates, *as he could not have*, the 'sacred' from the 'secular'" (emphasis added, 266). Bach is occupied with the question of apprehending Donne's individual sexuality and is therefore not concerned with the aspects of his philosophy of love that are not purely physical or that bridge the physical and spiritual. Nevertheless, she points to an experiential and historical truth that affirms some inseparability of his topically divided poems. If, for Donne, the subject is constituted in ways that do not isolate and compartmentalize "sacred" and "secular," it follows that the spiritual cannot successfully be parted from any element of total human experience.[29]

In general, it is easier to perceive the participation of the body in a romantic/erotic relationship and the soul in a spiritual relationship. As a result, the spiritual connection between the human soul and God throughout the *Holy Sonnets* is reasonably apparent, while the task of

isolating the role the body plays, as required by the paradigm of wholly involved love, is more difficult. Offering some clarity for the issue, Gary Kuchar helpfully summarizes the orthodox Christian doctrine "that God is immanent within the soul at the same time that he is radically transcendent to the self" (535-536).[30] In a way, this simultaneous immanent and transcendent nature of God parallels the human body and soul in Donne's philosophy. The transcendence of God speaks to the human soul: elevated away from the body, the soul communes with the divine outside of time or material concern, like the lovers' spirits in "The Ecstasy." Immanence, meanwhile, allows the presence of God within a person. What Kuchar describes as Donne's reaction to the "simultaneously consoling and terrifying nature" of this quality (535) silently acknowledges the intense physicality of the experience, not that the presence is necessarily tangible, but that terror and consolation are states that elicit both emotional and physiological response. For Donne, the individuals' relationship with God requires the realization that "we are nothing in our selves" while at the same time, the Lord is "all things unto us" (qtd. in Kuchar 535). The dependence, vulnerability, and subjugation of self in the service of another recalls the lovers' interinanimation in Donne's model of love.

Andreasen offers a strangely flattening assessment of Donne's work, saying the poet "began by being more or less conservative in form and revolutionary in content, but he ended by being revolutionary in form and conservative in content" (192). Even assuming a generalization holding broadly orthodox religious themes to be categorically "conservative" to be accurate (a particularly shaky assumption in the religious landscape of Donne's time), the *Divine Poems* and *Holy Sonnets* frequently express radical submission and a startlingly complex love between God and the speaker. One of the most overtly physical of the *Holy Sonnets*, "Batter my heart" showcases these qualities with particular clarity. The speaker has a relationship with God, but

finds it devastatingly incomplete. Beseeching the Lord with a list of imperatives, his tonal reversal reveals his desperation through the intensity of his commands and the violence of his motifs. This violence, which carries through the sonnet, concentrates in the first quatrain:

> Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
> As yet but knock; breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
> That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
> Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new. (1-4)

Acknowledging that God works to improve him by tapping and buffing out imperfections through steady, gentle attention, the speaker needs more. Nothing short of God's conquest will satisfy, and in place of improvement he begs to be remade. Although the battery and material reconstitution the speaker requests are metaphorical, the poem's opening line anchors the experience both figuratively and bodily in the speaker's heart. With his heart at the center of the experience, the speaker positions himself to be overwhelmed by the force of escalating metaphors.

The intensity of his feeling imparts physicality to his spiritual circumstance, similar to the lovers in "The Ecstasy" who explain that physical senses are necessary to experience affection or exercise human faculties. Christopher Tilmouth notes that Donne "understand[s] that passionate experiences are physiologically grounded" (186). Though Tilmouth's point relates to negative effects, the premise extends to the overwhelming intensity of the metaphorical experience the speaker describes in "Batter my heart." The speaker struggles to align himself, body and soul, with God. By avowing, "dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain" (9), he seeks not only to submit but also to be desired wholly. However, his power alone is insufficient to effect change, for he "Labour[s] to admit" the Lord "to no end" (6), suggesting in one breath both failure and

endless effort.

At the same time that this metaphor expresses the speaker's self as a town under hostile control, it reflects the immanence of God that he hopes to surrender to. With the closing sestet, the imagery of remaking that replaces gradual improvement is itself surpassed by imagery of undoing. Significantly, the speaker sees himself as "betroth'd unto [the Lord's] enemy" and in another reversal asks, "Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again" (10-11), endorsing dissolution in the name of loyalty. Unable on his own to attain the commitment that whole love requires, he begs, "imprison me, for I / Except you enthrall me, never shall be free" (12-13). To keep the covenant of faithfulness, it must be enacted for him.

Carried to its conclusion, the violent totality of his submission adopts an image of rape. In addition to never being free, he finds he cannot "ever [be] chaste, except you ravish me" (14). The paradox of this final conceit leverages the same force of Donne's intensely erotic works with the shock of this metaphor deriving not entirely from its explicitness but from the seemingly unimaginable juxtapositions of consent and violation, of caring spiritual authority and sexual assault. Notably, "ravish" carries with it also the less sinister yet equally visceral connotation of succumbing to overwhelming wonder. The intensity of the sonnet's pitch, along with the physicality of its imagery sketch the speaker's effort to make himself both spiritually and materially available to God's love, while his earnest desire for fidelity completes the overture for a relationship with God that can be every bit as complex, rewarding, and entire as human intimacy.

From the impassioned desperation of the individual seeking to commune with God, Donne turns to the honest evaluations of the individual searching for His community.[31] In "Show me, dear Christ," the Biblical metaphor of the Church as the bride of Christ informs the entire

sonnet. The speaker asks that Christ reveal His "spouse so bright and clear" (1), and proceeds to question religious establishments of Christendom new and old. With shades of irony, he wonders if she truly is the painted whore of Rome, or the despoiled virgin of the Reformation (3-4), or whether she might be any institution, recognized or not. The speaker navigates this uncertainty alongside the eroticism of the bride trope. Not only does he ask for the bride to be delivered, but he questions every interaction he thinks he may have had with her up to this point, asking, "Doth she, and did she, and shall she evermore / On one, on seven, or on no hill appear?" (7-8). Although he characterizes himself as an "adventuring knight" eager to "make love" to the lady (9-10), his rapid sequence of questions suggests the vulnerability he feels without answers as he struggles to exercise the commitment that whole love requires.

The marital relationship between Christ and the Church has been recognized since antiquity, with the Apostle John describing the "marriage of the Lamb" whose "wife hath made herself ready . . . in fine linen, clean and white" (Revelations 19:7-8). Heavily symbolic language in the sonnet makes it clear why the speaker would seek clarification in his search, though the reward for finding her is manifest. John writes, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelations 22:17). In the speaker's understanding, to find and possess the Church is to secure life itself. Donne's philosophy of love contextualizes the speaker's "amorous soul" (12) and the conceit of physical eroticism as the mechanism of spiritual devotion. The speaker argues that the bride he seeks is "most true and pleasing . . . / When she is embraced and open to most men" (13-14). What comes across as the paradox of a wanton bride captures something of the radical nature of whole love. As seen in "The Indifferent" and "Love's Deity," it defies conventions of the world around it and seeks a lasting connection that is both

materially fulfilling and spiritually transcendent. Accordingly, finding and loving the bride will render the speaker one with her in interinanimated spirit and in the "one flesh" that unites a man to his wife (Genesis 2:24). Joining the body of the Church, his person will become part of the material essence of the bride. Thus the system of love that connects him to the community that is the bride, and connects the individuals within that community to each other, will extend through the bride to join the speaker to Christ.

If Donne's whole love constitutes a total system incorporating relationships between individual lovers, among communities, and with God, it remains to be explored how these coexist and interact. Because most of his works look closely at one relationship (or the rakish relations of one with many), Donne does not produce many examples of the simultaneous commitment to a lover and to the Lord. One example—his *Holy Sonnet* "Since she whom I loved"—addresses the question of conflict between these precious obligations of love, though critical interpretations produce unusually inconsistent answers. In the first quatrain, the speaker establishes that his beloved has died early, her soul having been whisked into heaven, and his focus now lands "Wholly on heavenly things" (4). Responses to this sonnet frequently infer that the speaker's attention turns to heaven because he has no one on earth to detain it; his celestial gaze is framed as a sort of default posture in the absence of a human object. However, the understanding that his soul and hers were united in love introduces the possibility that his spirit was in a way carried to heaven with her, guaranteeing the direction his mind would be set.

Corporeal love figures as a reflection of spiritual devotion as the speaker notes, "Here the admiring her my mind did whet / To seek thee, God; so streams do show the head" (5-6). Again, rather than finding a hasty replacement for the woman he loved, having experienced the completeness of love in another, he is equipped to seek it out and recognizes God as the ultimate

source of the woman he loved and of love itself. Extending the water metaphor, the speaker finds that, despite discovering the fountainhead of love in God, who has "fed" his thirst (7), "A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet" (8). Knowing this, he struggles with the discrepancy between his understanding that he possesses God's complete devotion and the sense that he needs more. Kuchar suggests that, "For this speaker, the insatiable love of God is only tolerable if such love is mediated through . . . something accessible to the senses" (567). Although this hypothesis acknowledges the role that the body plays in the system of complete love by noting the importance of sensory experience, it overlooks the way that emotions themselves represent physical and sensory involvement. It seems more likely that the speaker's almost pathological thirst for love in excess of infinity reflects his continuing grief over the loss of a specific love. No matter how completely God fills him with love, and despite the wholeness of his relationship with the Lord, he still aches without her completing presence. Each relationship itself is a complete experience entailing the devotion of the speaker's whole self, and one kind of love cannot replace the other. While it does not dispel his grief, the love the speaker shares with God offers a sustaining force, preventing him from sharing the lover's fate in "The Dissolution."

For Kuchar, the sonnet's final sestet is full of bitterness where the speaker "berates . . . God for pettiness" and interprets His jealousy as weakness (568). On the surface, Kuchar's textual evidence helps this seem like a plausible interpretation, but it disregards the sincerity and power of the love that informs the entire poem. When the speaker observes of the Lord that, "thou / Dost woo my soul, for hers offering all thine" (9-10), instead of representing an exchange by a jealous God who disposes of a woman to prevent this man from continuing to lover her, it resonates more clearly as profound consolation for the grief the speaker has just expressed. More than anything else, critical perception tends to turn on the nature of the Lord's "tender jealousy"

(13), with scholars who, like Kuchar, see a petty, challenged God looking no further than the equally petty jealousy of shallow, insecure "love." Traditionally, however, God's jealousy is unlike any other. In establishing His relationship with the Hebrew people, His command to worship only Him, "for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:5), is grounded not only in possessiveness, but in the protective desire to shield His people from foreign nations as well. Mercy figures in divine jealousy also, as the prophet Joel writes, "Then will the Lord be jealous for his Land, and pity his people" (Joel 2:18), delivering them from their enemies. Finally, the Apostle Paul demonstrates human capacity for this divine jealousy by his own experience, writing to the church at Corinth, "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy" (II Corinthians 11:2). In this way, he distinguishes between the jealousy of human beings and that of the Lord. It is this protective, merciful impulse, together with the reasonable possessiveness of a lover, that motivates the "tender jealousy" with which God suspects the world, the flesh, and the devil of distracting the speaker's heart (13-14).

The concept of whole love visible through Donne's work entails body and soul and a commitment to another. In addition to the predominance of bodily metaphor in the devotional poems, Donne also includes a framework for a relationship with God that involves both aspects of metaphysical human anatomy. Because the Lord figures as transcendent spirit relating directly to the soul and indirectly to the body through physical metaphor and the bodily experience of intense feeling, it is not always evident how the divine participant in the relationship can truly relate to bodily humanity. Offering clarification on this point, Donne's holy sonnet "What if this present were the world's last night?" outlines something of the physicality of God's love embodied through Christ as "God . . . manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16).[32] Addressing his own soul, which he locates in his body in the metaphorical seat of the heart (2), the speaker

directs his soul's attention to the "picture of Christ crucified" that he imagines there as well (3). Rather than addressing the picture—or Christ—directly, or simply soliloquizing, the speaker's choice to actively communicate with his soul not only underscores the importance of the connection between it and his body, but enacts that connection through the overture of dialogue.[33] Without physically existing, the picture introduced in the first quatrain doubly focuses the spiritual question of the sonnet onto material experience, as a picture simultaneously evokes the ideas of a material object (the picture) and a material body (the subject).[34]

Moving beyond metaphor, the poem bodily renders Christ through reference to His physical experience on the cross and the involvement of His body in the physical trauma and emotional turmoil of the crucifixion. The speaker draws his soul's attention to Christ's "countenance" (4), considering not only His expression, but His face itself as he itemizes the actions of its parts in search of grace:[35]

> Tears in his eyes quench the amazing light;
> Blood fills his frowns, which from his pierc'd head fell.
> And can that tongue adjudge thee unto hell,
> Which pray'd forgiveness for his foes' fierce spite? (5-8)

Though a picture by definition is static, the tears, blood, and tongue of this quatrain actively participate in constituting the speaker's relationship with his Redeemer. Each of the bodily elements performs its own action and contributes to the significance of the whole: tears quench, blood fills, and the tongue can both adjudge and pray forgiveness. Poet and critic Alicia Ostriker observes "an underlying eroticism" in Donne's devotional poems visible "in his ongoing evocations of flesh, blood, sweat and tears" (85).[36] These physical references in "What if this present" do not, on their own, create an erotic tone, however. Donne introduces a play on

eroticism together with the idea of possible sin for which the speaker's soul could be "adjudge[d] . . . unto hell" in the sestet when the speaker recalls a past argument made to "all [his] profane mistresses" (10) in his "idolatry" (9). In applying the correlation of "beauteous form" and "piteous mind" found in his mistresses to the form and content of Christ's passion, Donne leverages the erotic suggestion of a game of seductive logic played now in earnest. But the space between bodily and erotic remains, emphasizing the personal and the intimate in the picture, rather than directly relating the speaker's experience with his mistresses to his idea of Christ. By leading with the demonstrative "This," the final line's "This beauteous form" refers directly to the image of Christ crucified (14). Leaving the profane lovers behind, the speaker invokes an unconventional beauty derived from physical sacrifice as an act of love.[37] Jesus Christ's existence as spirit made flesh offers the reciprocal involvement of body and soul where His crucifixion directly involves body in the commitment of whole love.

Conclusion

Although Donne uses the word *love* freely, he generally imagines authentic human connection as a particular commitment dictated by the unique composition of the human body and soul. Ultimately, the love that Donne engages so deeply throughout his poetry is not a distinction between kinds of love or extremes in love so much as an extended definition of what love actually is: of what it entails and what it does not. Thinking of this definition as "whole love" constructively illustrates both the vital importance of its constituent elements and the profound value it has for any who discover it.[38] Validating humanity instead of condemning it, this love involves the whole being without disowning the body or neglecting the soul. From the mechanics of his metaphors, to the spiritual dynamics of erotic relationships, to the physical

experience of spiritual devotion, Donne's consistent attitude toward whole love emphasizes a poetics of connection that allows the disparate sides of his corpus to be synthesized into a cohesive whole, at the heart of which lies "th'eternal root / Of true love."[39]

Notes

1. See A. S. Byatt for a fascinating discussion of the implications of emerging neuroscience and the "*intellectual-bodily* imagination of the embodied soul" in Donne (emphasis original, 251).

2. Melissa E. Sanchez considers body and soul in Donne as dealing with the "relationship between appearance and reality" in a material world that defies access to the "world of mind or spirit" (58). In his chapter on Donne in *The Form of Love*, James Kuzner approaches "The Ecstasy" by separating the poem's suggestions about love from what he sees as its "lengthy and dry disquisition about the soul-body problem" (29). More obliquely, in a study of the poetics of material craft, figurative language, and framing devices, Rayna Kalas discusses the importance of physical and conceptual connections in Donne's "A Valediction of my name, in the window." She positions the etched name as "a sign that is both material and transparent, . . . that holds in balance lover and beloved, writer and reader, subject and object, and finally matter and meaning" (199-200). Without being directly mentioned, the relationship between body and soul fits neatly in this balance for Kalas and echoes the idea of matter and meaning.

3. Elaborating, Targoff adds that her intention "is not to say that no one has recognized the importance of this relationship in isolated poems or works, but the absolute centrality of the body and soul's union, and Donne's preoccupation with its inevitable rupture, has largely escaped our attention" (2).

4. Targoff states, "The parting between body and soul is . . . the great subject of Donne's writing" (2), and that, "Donne's expression of his belief in the mutual necessity of body and soul, and his obsessive imagining of their parting, is the most continuous and abiding feature of his collected works" (5). In this, my analysis departs from Targoff to interrogate the interplay

between the body/soul dynamic and the shared experience of love. Targoff approaches love in Donne as relating to an anticipated rupture of body and soul and subsequent rupture of self for the poet.

5. Despite a free use of *love* in any number of contexts, and possibly even as a necessary reaction to the ambiguity, Donne expends considerable effort to articulate the importance of both body and soul to the experience of love. In a letter to his friend Sir Henry Wotton, he writes, "You (I think) and I am much of one sect in the philosophy of love; which, though it be directed upon the mind, doth inhere in the body" (qtd. in Gosse 291).

6. In an effort to contextualize and reconcile love and sexuality in Donne, Catherine Bates reiterates Kerrigan's claim over thirty years later (178).

7. It is not my intention to refute any chronologies for Donne's works or the relevance of the man's life experiences to that work. I emphasize, rather, the importance of an approach that does not rely on biography as the key to explication. For additional commentary on the chronology of the *Holy Sonnets*, see "Dating and Order" in *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*.

8. The speaker declares:

I turn my back to thee, but to receive
Corrections till thy mercies bid thee leave.
O think me worth thine anger, punish me,
Burn off my rust, and my deformity (37-40)

9. Osterwalder notes in particular that, "the vehicles for human love are drawn from Christian Neoplatonism, whereas in some of the Holy Sonnets rape and prostitution are the chief metaphors" (200).

10. For a discussion of gender in Donne's romantic poetry, see Ilona Bell, who suggests that "Donne's most daringly innovative poems describe not only male desire but intimacy itself" (214).

11. Teskey focuses instead on "the ontological ground of figurative language" (emphasis omitted, 242).

12. For a detailed account of early modern cosmology and ontology, see E. M. W. Tillyard's *The Elizabethan World Picture*. For a condensed review of the development of Platonist and Neoplatonist theories, focusing primarily on the contributions of Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke. Goodrick-Clarke traces the development in Western thought through a "shift in philosophy [that] favored Plato over Aristotle, whose works had formed the mainstay of medieval thought and science following their introduction to the Arab world in the eleventh and twelfth centuries" (34).

13. Peterson suggests that, among other poems, "Love's Growth," "The Primrose," "Elegy XVIII," and, perhaps most surprising, "The Ecstasy" all entail "explicit criticism of the Platonic position" (296), though he does not elaborate and, instead, leaves his readers to fill the space between his logic and his conclusions. In this instance, Peterson seems to extend his assertion that "the dualism of neo-Platonic thought . . . [has] been reconciled" in these poems (293). Making a slightly different distinction, Peterson remarks that, "it is obvious that the mistress addressed in such poems as 'Womans constancy,' 'The Flea,' and 'Witchcraft by a picture' is the antithesis of the neo-Platonic prototype" concluding that, "the various poems in praise of indifference, variety, and inconstancy mock the notion of chaste service due a mistress whose physical beauty is a reflection of the ideal virtues" (296).

14. Donne. "Thou Hast Made Me." (3).

15. Targoff notes that the opening lines of Donne's Last Will and Testament "affirm his belief that God desires equally both parts of the self" (5): "First I give my good & gracious God an intire Sacrifice of Body & Soule with my most humble thankes for that assurance which his blessed Spiritt ymprintes in me nowe of the Salvation of the one & the Resurrection of the other" (qtd. in Targoff 5). Not only does this illustrate God's desire for both parts, as Targoff observes, in that a sacrifice of both is offered, but it also underscores the eternal duration of both body and soul, marked by a hiatus at death.

16. Donne. "Thou Hast Made Me." (7).

17. Consider the commonplace organizing principles of elemental and humoral theories in early modern Europe. For a succinct description and an interdisciplinary perspective on the relevance of the theories to the period, see Jones et al. They note that, "for at least the last 2,500 years, all aspects of human life, lifestyle and behaviour were—to a greater or lesser extent . . . —perceived, explained and dictated by the principles of the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) and their corresponding humours (melancholy, sanguine, choler and phlegm)" (176).

18. While the scope of this analysis is necessarily limited to the interpersonal love that interested Donne, this could arguably hold true for relationships not commonly held to be interpersonal as well, such as charity, patriotism, etc.

19. Donne. "Death be Not Proud." (3-4).

20. In a seeming paradox, the unchanged souls come together while losing nothing of their own nature. It would seem the new soul is composed of the original, individual souls, each of which retains its original self. *Cf.* "The Dissolution," where physical substance is elemental.

21. According to the *OED* contemporary usages of *atomy* include both the sense of an atom or mote ("Atomy, *N*. (1)"), or a skeleton or anatomy ("Atomy, *N*. (2)").

22. Donne. “I am a Little World.” (1-2, 4).

23. Guibbory mentions a “mutual love” that likely reflects the philosophy of love that this paper endeavors to outline.

24. Yet, for Guibbory, “male/female relations” are synonymous with love (261), including relationships limited to physical involvement and those where the speaker of a poem generalizes about women he has no involvement with at all (e.g., in “The Anagram,” one of Guibbory’s central examples), and love is synonymous with power, politics, and control. This and similar perspectives informing related critical arguments emphasize and interrogate Donne’s varied depictions of women, which—in itself—is a fruitful and relevant line of inquiry, but it does not bear on a definition of love that requires both a physical and a spiritual component. This is not to directly contradict or necessarily undermine Guibbory’s analysis, which is insightful. Rather, it is to carefully contextualize Donne’s treatment of topics to clarify the analysis of his philosophy of love as distinct from generic satire or the related but distinct category of sexual relations.

25. Exploration of the textual history and resulting varying order and numbering of Donne’s Elegies and Holy Sonnets is necessarily outside the scope of this paper. It is helpful to be aware, however, that these numbers do vary among publications (e.g., “Love’s Progress” is variably identified as Elegy 13, 14, 18, and 19 in the 2000 Oxford UP, 2007 Norton Critical, 2014 *DigitalDonne Online Variorum* index, and the 2019 Arcturus editions, respectively). For a relatively concise explanation regarding the numbering of the Holy Sonnets and the complex textual history contributing to it, see T.-L. Pebworth.

26. The speaker commends in turn one woman’s “nymph-like features” (37), another’s “discourse” (30), and “Others, for that they well descended were” (31). All in his “love obtain as

large a share" as each—or the next (32).

27. For a thorough catalogue of Cupid's complex ubiquity in early modern culture, see Jane Kingsley-Smith. Quoting from Andrea Alciato's 1531 emblem "*Anteros, id est amor virtutis*," Kingsley-Smith isolates the attributes of one aspect of Cupid's identity: "Tell me, where are your arching bows, where your arrows, Cupid . . . where your wings?" (4). The study features expansive research and a rich bibliography to counter Kingsley-Smith's occasionally reductive conclusions equating the criticism of sexual desire to Protestant perspectives.

28. Choice figures as an element of the philosophy of love visible across Donne's secular and devotional poems. Molly Murray observes that, "To use one of his favorite words, Donne emphasizes the need to 'choose,'" noting that iterations of the word "appear twenty-six times in Donne's poems, half of them in poems on religious subjects" (72).

29. This is not to discount the meaningful distinctions between things of this world and the extra-physical Kingdom of God that Donne would readily accept.

30. While Kuchar primarily situates the doctrine as a Protestant one and points to Martin Luther, he also gestures briefly toward Augustine's earlier expression of the same concept. In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes, "*interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*"— "Thou wert more inward to me than my most inward part; and higher than my highest" (36; bk. 3, ch. 6, par. 11). The principle of immanence would hold true for Donne at any point in his religious life, from his start as the child of a Catholic family through his transition to Anglican priesthood.

31. Though it is non-standard, I adopt the convention of capitalizing pronoun references to deity as the clearest and most succinct way to avoid ambiguous pronoun reference or circuitous language that would result from bypassing the pronoun altogether. Where no ambiguity is possible, I maintain the convention for consistency.

32. The verse reads in full: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim. 3:16). See also the Apostle Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews, which states, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14), positioning the embodiment of God through Christ as a method of sharing the human experience of flesh and mortality, and of connecting with humanity.

33. The sonnet takes the form of a monologue where the soul’s response can be expected to be emotional/experiential rather than verbal.

34. The “picture of Christ crucified” within the speaker’s heart perhaps suggests the *imago Dei* as well. In an April 30, 1615, sermon, Donne explores the involvement of the image of God in the human soul. Considering its permanence in light of premeditated sin, he suggests that:

> [W]hensoever we commit any sin, upon discourse, upon consideration, upon purpose, and plot, the image of God which is engraved and imprinted in us, and lodged in our understanding, and in that reason which we employ in that sin, is mingled with that sin; . . . . we carry his image down with us, to eternal condemnation: . . . . The image of God burns in us in hell, but can never be burnt out of us: as long as the understanding soul remains, the image of God remains in it. (264)

35. The *OED* records both usages of the word dating to the latter half of the fourteenth century (“Countenance”).

36. Ostriker notes as well Donne’s “startlingly amorous figurations of religion as female”

and traces the “image of the beloved spouse” to the Song of Solomon (85-86).

37. Pointing to a Calvinist perspective, R. V. Young suggests the “interpretation of the ‘picture’ in the persona’s heart . . . is contingent upon the speaker’s emotional response to Christ’s countenance. To find this tearful, bloody visage beautiful is not a natural response; it requires grace” (388). Without entirely accepting the limitations of determining a “natural” response, I agree that emotional response is a powerful determining factor in the speaker’s experience.

38. While the term “true love” could nicely distinguish it from other ideas that purport to be “love” by emphasizing the ontological essence of fully realized love, or from the elements of this philosophy (“spiritual love” and “physical love”), too many definitions already attach to it, and the triteness of the expression alone is prohibitive.

39. Donne. “A Hymn to Christ, at the Author’s Last Going into Germany” (15-16).

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