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"nor in nothing, nor in things": The Case of Love and Desire in Donne's *Songs and Sonets*

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Written in an era when casuistical treatises flourished as a popular literary genre, Donne's poetry and prose mark the emergence of an incipiently modern literary subjectivity. Whatever Donne's position or intentions as writer of his work, and however they changed over the course of his life, a casuistical subjectivity informs his work much as a psychoanalytic subjectivity informs modern writing. Donne's writing interrogates and reveals the relation of individual desire to the law whether his concern is with matters of conscience, as in *Biathanatos* and *Pseudo-Martyr*; matters of the soul, as in the "Anniversaries" and *Divine Poems*; or matters of sexual desire, love, and love poetry itself, as in the *Songs and Sonets*. The influence of casuistical discourse appears not only in his overt staging of cases *per se*, but in the pre-novelistic, divided subject of literary representation which is discernible in his writing.

The link between casuistical literature and the eighteenth-century novel has been made, but the link between this novelistic subjectivity and the seventeenth-century literature which was allied organically with casuistical practice—meditational poetry, for example—has not.[1] Scholars have limited themselves to finding clear patterns of applied case divinity and to assuming a unitary (and male) subject as Donne's speaker, most often Donne himself.[2] Many readers, however, have rightly observed the novelistic and dramatic sensibilities at work in Donne's prose and poetry.[3] I extend these observations by arguing that the importance of casuistical discourse to Donne's writing inheres in his radical structuring of dialogue, and in an epistemology embodied in the psychoanalytic notion of transference.

The division in consciousness that Freud explores and the division in conscience that the casuistical literature both exposes and interrogates are linked in the notion of a dialogue that aims to heal the rupture between what can be known and what cannot be known. The exercise of conscience, the final effect of conversion at the end of the successful casuistical exercise,

repositions the subject in the dialogue's structure. Like psychoanalysis, casuistry discovers that the condition for knowledge is not in the one way, monologic transfer of truth from master to student, but in a dialogue in which each participant may cross over, or convert, to the position of the other. The importance of a transferential model to my discussion is that it is structural, dramatic, and imaginative. The person who draws the transference love or hate to him or herself is in the position of neither yielding to nor rejecting the desire of the other, but of making use of the transference to create the conditions of further dialogue and further learning. In terms of the poetic conventions Donne is working with in the *Songs and Sonets*, the transference love defeats both courtly love and Petrarchism on the one hand, and libertinism on the other. Donne's love poems point toward an ideal of love that is always in the future of the subject, neither denied nor granted, but always in process. Just as the transference is the condition of interpretation and of learning in the psychoanalytic dialogue, love is both an enabling relationship and a condition for knowledge of the other in Donne's love poems.[4]

Donne's love poems stage a casuistry of love which proceeds by first rendering love itself as an "indifferent action," subject to constructions and conventions, specifically those of neo-Platonism, of Petrarchism, and of courtly love poetry.[5] Donne sets these conventions into dialogue with the lover-speakers of his poems who are invariably beset with the problem of how best to love and how to speak about or represent love; the lover and the poet are in this sense joined in a problem of language. Following on the traditions of the Platonic and neo-Platonic love dialogues, Donne examines love's binaries, desire and enjoyment, separately and together in his poems. Speakers in a "rage" of unsatisfied desire and speakers in the "stupidity" of possession with no desire speak poems from and about their conditions. There are, as well, poems which interrogate the conditions of concurrence, of desire and enjoyment together. Like the problem of suicide that Donne examined in *Biathanatos*, the problem of love and desire involves charting a path through the twin tyrannies of mastery and submission.

In the formulations of the sixteenth-century neo-Platonist, Leone Ebreo, wanting to have or to possess is inferior to wanting to be. Desire and Love, as the two axes of being, generate figures of algebraic elegance and formality as they are plotted with reference to their degrees and their various objects: ellipses and loops of lust and dissolution, undulating sine waves of continence and moderate pleasure, and straight radiant lines of love and desire, convergent and coterminous in their eternal ascent towards goodness and virtue. Ebreo's formulations depend upon the objects of love and desire: seeking after

profitable objects results in asymptotes or ellipses, that is, love and desire as incompatible with one another, or love which destroys desire and cancels it completely; seeking after pleasant objects results in a wave motion, an undulating curve of love and desire, fed by the imagination and fancy; seeking after virtuous objects and moral goodness results in a perfect balance of love and desire, ascending toward infinity.[6] I, and not Ebreo, have charted these graphs, but what is important is Ebreo's introduction of the structuring third term or object into the equation of love and desire as well as the notion of use and value.

Donne, like Ebreo, sought a mediating path between the tyranny of passions unleashed against the other and the tyranny of repression. In a sermon preached to Queen Anne in December of 1617, four months after the death of his wife and last, stillborn child, Donne spoke of the preservation and the conversion of the self in its dialogue of love with God.[7] He makes the provocative point that whatever qualities or affections one possesses or makes use of toward worldly ends will be retained at one's conversion, only their object will change: "A covetous person, who is now truly converted to God, he will exercise a spiritual covetousness still, he will desire to have him all ..."(I, 236). The rule he adumbrates is the following: "All affections which are common to all men, and those too, which in particular, particular men have been addicted unto, shall not only be justly employed upon God, but also securely employed, because we cannot exceed, nor go too far in imploying them upon him" (I, 237). How humane and how conservative and how truly economical this rule is! It depends, of course, on the secure placement of the ideal object or Other. It depends on God, as Ebreo's *Dialoghi* depended on God as "active intellect," as the *Symposium* depended on Socrates. Donne himself, however, does not lay claim to this position of idealized object in his love poems.

Donne, instead, identifies with the questioning and uncertain position of the human lover. His love poetry moves toward locating the human subject in the signifying field of this Other. The language of Donne's sermons makes plain the position of God as ideal object of human love and desire. Honor your desires, he tells his congregation, because your desires are called into being by God's first desire for you. Only recognize this and your desires will be honorable. He gives the example of Solomon in the same sermon:

> And according to this Rule too, *Salomon*, whose disposition was amorous, and excessive in the love of women, when he turn'd to God, he departed not utterly from his old phrase and language, but having put a new and spiritual tincture, and form and habit into all his thoughts, and words, he conveyes all his loving approaches and

> applications to God, and all Gods gracious answers to his amorous soul, into songs, and Epithalamions, and meditations upon contracts, and marriages between God and his Church, and between God and his soul; (I, 237)

Donne describes a translation, perhaps even Augustine's Christian allegorical translation of The Song of Songs.[8] It is a different reading of the same text, a different reading depending on a different kind of love, a love directed toward a different object. The conjunction of love and desire, however, remains constant in this text:

> In which words is expressed all that belongs to love, all which is to desire, and to enjoy; for to desire without fruition, is a rage, and to enjoy without desire is a stupidity: In the first alone we think of nothing, but that which we then would have; and in the second alone, we are not for that, when we have it, for we have no pleasure in it; nothing then can give us satisfaction, but where those two concur, *amare* and *frui*, to love and to enjoy. (I, 237)

This sermon of Donne's serves well as a gloss on his own love poetry, in which the range of relationships between human desire and love are examined and honored. It suggests as well, perhaps, the possibility of a different reading—a translation such as Augustine performed for Solomon—a rereading by Donne that conserves his own work in the manner he recommends to his congregation.

Donne goes on to assert that love is not possible in the absence of an initiatory desire and a responsive desire: "except God love us first, we cannot love him; . . . . All the sunshine, all the glory of this life, though all these be testimonies of Gods love to us, yet all these bring but a winters day, a short day, and a cold day, and a dark day, for except we love too, God doth not love with an everlasting love" (I, 244). In a beautiful passage on the origination of God's love, on its radical priority, Donne catalogues God's constant "seeking" after and desire for our love:

> he sought thee before that, in the catalogue of all his Creatures, where he might have left thee a stone, or a plant, or a beast; . . .yea, he sought thee, when thou was nowhere, nothing, he brought thee then, the greatest step of all, from being nothing, to be a Creature; . . . yea

> millions of millions of generations before all this he sought thee in his own eternal Decree; And in that first Scripture of his, which is as old as himself, in the book of life he wrote thy name in the blood of that Lamb which was slain for thee, not only from the beginning of this world, but from the writing of that eternal Decree of thy Salvation. . . . In his Creatures amongst creatures of an ignoble nature, and in the first vacuity, when thou was nothing he sought thee so early as in *Adam*, so early as in the book of life, and when wilt thou think it a fit time to seek him? (I, 248-249)

In his regress, Donne arrives at a place of two origins: Adam, the first father, and the divine text, the book of life, in which all the names are already written. We begin in the cells of Adam's body, in his "confused loynes" as well as in God's text or book. Even though we were nothing, we were still able to be sought, as if we all do have an existence prior to being sought by God, and as if this previous existence, or profession, or language, may undergo a conversion or translation as we direct our desire back to its original divine text.

In this sermon, Donne manages to encompass a stunning scope of before-and-after scenarios: before and after Creation, before and after the Fall of man, before and after the sacrifice of Christ, before and after the establishment of the Christian Church, before and after the Reformation, before and after the Church of England. He also suggests that in the lives of people who undergo conversion there is a way to read them before and a way to read them after both their conversion and our own. Narratives of conversion, narratives of desire and love, and narratives of writing and reading converge in Donne's text. In these narratives, death is the turning point of a plot that may continue to be read and reread. Death drives these narratives into new forms of life. What remains constant from Plato to Ebreo to Donne is the linkage of sex to death by tying love and knowledge so intimately to procreation and parturition. Carnal knowledge, the Biblical use of "know," the Elizabethan substitution of "die" for orgasm, would all seem to derive from a profound ambivalence about the act of sexual intercourse and its consequences. In addition to the real, life-threatening conditions attending sex and childbirth, there was the theological belief, held to by Ebreo and presumably by Donne, who differed from Milton in this, that intercourse begins after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, outside Paradise, as both punishment and "remedy for their mortality" (Ebreo, 352). The act of conception, from the first fusion and division of cells, implies a self-murder and a parturition, a

separation from the self, a sacrifice of the self in the interest of generation and immortality. Epistemology as well, we should expect, depends on a death, a self-sacrifice, for the sake of some new creation, some new knowledge.[9]

At the end of the *Symposium*, Socrates enters the dialogue at last by rehearsing "a tale of love which I heard from Diotima of Mantinea," a wise woman.[10] In this tale, and for the finale of the dialogue, the questions of love and origination are entwined. Love is described as spirit, interpreter, mediator (193); love's origins are in Plenty and Poverty, the child of Poros and Penia; love is described as a motion, a mean, not an object or a subject but a transitive verb (194-195). "All creation or passage of non-being into being is poetry or making," says Socrates (196). He defines love as both the "desire of union" and the universal principle of "succession" and "substitution" (198-199). Poetry and love are connected then by way of this metaphoric and metonymic dynamic; love is the bringing into being, which Socrates labels as procreative and parturitive, of "immortal principles in the mortal creature" (197).

This profound conundrum of existence—no sexual intercourse, no death, but no death, no life—is the subject of Donne's interrogations in his love poetry. The desire to know another is often countered by fear of the one who may already possess the knowledge one desires; the desire to be known is countered by a fear of exposure, by a resistance to being known. The desire for secrecy can be thought of as a desire not to signify so as not to be subject to death. The speaker of "The Curse," for example, wishes to remain outside the law of death, but he cannot have it both ways. Moreover, the most fervent desire of Sapho for Philaenis is that her love, unlike heterosexual love, might entail none of the risks of procreation, might, in fact, be a charm against aging and death themselves: "And so be *change*, and *sicknesse*, farre from thee,/ As thou by comming neere, keep'st them from me."[11]

In these poems the language of love and desire is imbricated with sexuality and sensuality as well as epistemology, cognition, and spirituality. One is not merely the metaphor, allegory, or repression of the other. In this regard, Julia Kristeva, for example, suggests that the Song of Songs (and all amorous discourse) is an open text whose allegorization by Augustine was not a censorship but a "simple recognition of the rhetorical infinity—of the metaphysical proliferation—present at the foundations of amorous discourse."[12] Donne draws an intimate connection between love and knowledge when he writes, "Now love presumes knowledge; for . . .we can love nothing, but that which we do, or think we do understand" (IX, 128).[13] Love considered as an ideal condition of being would subsume profitability or possession as

well as pleasure or enjoyment; it would converge with ideals of wisdom and justice as well.

Whether or not we choose to read it as an allegory of divine love, Ebreo's *Dialoghi* is first a series of dialogues about human sexual relations. The split or division between being and having, between life as a condition of desire and love as a condition of deathlike possession is the subject of Ebreo's dialogue as well as Donne's in the *Songs and Sonets*. Ebreo's ideal of love is a philosophical ideal, as mystical as that of the anonymous fourteenth-century author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, coterminous with the ideal of perfect understanding. The original split that Ebreo presupposes between love and desire is also a cognitive split between earthly and divine knowledge or understanding. To be human, imperfect, and subject both to temporality and gendered sexuality, is to be in a condition of "dual cognition": "...[Love] and desire are means of raising us from imperfect knowledge to the perfect union, which is the true end of love and desire; and these are affects of the will, which translate 'dual cognition' into enjoyment of 'perfect cognitive union'" (*Dialoghi*, 48). Thus, desire originates in a condition of radical lack, the knowledge that we do not know, the love that we do not possess.

Ebreo's notion of "intimate cognitive union with God" as a condition of perfect happiness conjoins with his definiton of perfect human love between man and woman as "the conversion of each lover into the other" (50, 55). It is not the *possession* of each lover by the other, but the *conversion* of each lover into the other. *Conversion* resonates with all its meanings in this context: change of place, change of form, change of belief, change of perspective. It suggests the erasure of sexual difference itself so that, ideally at least, the man assumes the place of the woman and the woman the place of the man in this perfect union.

Donne's "Epithalamion" for Lady Elizabeth and Count Palatine suggests just this idea of conversion into the other, a marriage blessing that proposes the ideal of a transitive sexuality to each partner:

> Here lyes a shee Sunne, and a hee Moone here,
> She gives the best light to his Spheare,
> Or each is both, and all, and so
> They unto one another nothing owe, (ll.85-88)
> . . .
> And by this act of these two Phenixes
> Nature againe restored is,

> For since these two are two no more,
> There's but one Phenix still, as was before.
> (ll.99-102)

Certainly the fusion is complete in this formulation of perfect married love in which the lovers possess each other by becoming the other; each takes on the traditional symbols of the other's sexuality, by this act effecting the eradication and not just the simple reversal or overturning of the traditional hierarchy: she becomes the sun and he the moon "or each is both." Ebreo stresses the term "conjunction" or "cleaving" (50) to describe this perfect union with God or with one's beloved. Moments of sexual ecstasy and comtemplative ek-stasis, "union with the Godhead"(200), both cause the soul to leave the body. At such moments, the divisions between self and other and between sexed selves are also temporarily left behind.

The pervasive, transcultural myth of an original division endeavors to explain not only the existence of sexed beings, but the cognitive division within the self and its yearning after wholeness in dialogue with another. Freud, speculating on this myth in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, offers the theory that the first motions of primordial life are fragmenting and splitting and that the sexual instincts serve ever after as a drive toward reunification.[14]

In Julia Kristeva's reading of the myth of the androgynes in the *Symposium*, their halving made them signifiers, broken halves of a sign whose signified was always the other:

> One should understand that each sex is the 'symbol' of the other, its complement and support, its bestower of meaning. Love, as tendency toward synthesis, would be precisely that which creates the recognition of signs, a reading, significations, and would thus set itself up in opposition to the closed, egg-shaped world of androgynes. (*Tales* 70)

Separation, therefore, entails both opportunity and risk for the emerging human subject, and the subject of representation as well.

Donne, for example, uses "valediction" to mean both words of farewell and a farewell to words.[15] In his four "Valediction" poems, Donne figures ways for the parting lovers to represent themselves in absence so as not to be forgotten. In these poems, the signature fails, as does the text of their love letters, as does grief itself. Absence is not overcome by writing; but, the

engulfment of grief, of many tears, also represents a threat to the lovers. Donne resolves the dilemma of relationship, to the extent that he does in the poems, by the use of two instrumental figures: the sextant and the compass. A relationship that cannot be fixed in the inscription of the signature, or in the text of the love letters, or in the grieving body itself, can be figured in a more mechanical or mathematical way. The sextant takes both time and space into consideration, as well as full light and "darke eclipses," and the compass inscribes movement around a fixed point to which the moving foot returns. A more geometrical ideality, perhaps, is being substituted for the neo-Platonic ideal of spiritual union. Both instruments, however, figure metonymically more than metaphorically or symbolically for compensatory relations of power, for movement, change, and temporality; and, both depend on separation, or disparity, in order to function at all.

In an odd way, in these poems, love is removed both from the body of each lover and from their individual representations—signature, book, tears—and relocated in acts of representation, in ways of knowing rather than in knowledge itself. In this move, Donne focuses on the tradition of the Platonic and neo- Platonic love dialogues in a very particular and very modern way, emphasizing the transferential qualities of love.

Psychoanalytic dialogue as well has moved historically to relocate the site of truth from the body to the relationship between two speakers. The *locus classicus* for this shift is, of course, Freud's famous case study of Dora, in which he learns about the crucial role of the transference from his failure with his young female patient.[16] The last ten lines of Donne's "Elegie: Going to Bed" resonate with a passage in Dora in which Freud is defending himself for speaking frankly of sexual matters to a young and possibly sexually innocent girl; the two texts, paired, are instructive on the relations between love and knowledge.

In Donne's poem, women's bodies are figured as "mystick books" (l.41) and their clothes and jewels as "pictures or like books gay coverings made/ For lay-men" (ll.39-40). The lover, like the contemplative, has access to the mystic text, figured as the naked body of the woman which the man, presumably, is in a position to "read." In the next figure, however, the woman is urged to show herself "As liberally, as to a Midwife" (l.44), and to cast off her "white lynnen" (l.45), as it signifies neither penance nor innocence at this point. In what I have come to see as typical of Donne's language, there is, even in this rather light and bawdy poem about undressing for sex, a radical transitiveness, a tightly woven interplay of the male and female. The poem

begins with the male speaker figuring his erection, his sexual arousal, as a kind of pregnancy: "Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defie/ Until I labour, I in labour lie" (ll. 1-2). At the end, she is asked to show herself to him as if to the midwife—a reversal of roles again, though he is still cast as a woman—but not before he has performed the same exposure of his own nakedness: "To teach thee, I am naked first: why than/ Why needst thou have more covering then a man?" (ll.47-48). The dramatic situation in which his speech may be directing or only describing her undressing reveals itself, as we might expect, as one of mutual nakedness, culminating in lovemaking. The lovemaking itself figures as a mutual labor, a figurative deliverance of both the man and the woman who are each pregnant with desire. Finally, desire, love, and knowledge are figured by each other; the lover wishes to see so that he "may know" and his being "naked first" is by way of teaching his mistress as well.

Freud, writing in defense of his own psychoanalytic practice in the case of Dora, twice claims the privileges of the gynecologist by way of disclaiming the possibility that any untoward sexual desires of his own might come into play in the analysis of the young woman. His defensiveness with regard to his practice is understandable, but his disavowal of his own desires seems peculiarly foregrounded and finally counterproductive on this account. First he defends his frank and open language, calling the "organs and functions of sexual life . . .by their proper names," and assuring the "pure-minded reader . . .that [he has] not hesitated to converse upon such subjects in such language even with a young woman." He asks,

> Am I, then, to defend myself upon this score as well? I will simply claim for myself the rights of the gynaecologist—or rather, much more modest ones—and add that it would be the mark of a singular and perverse prurience to suppose that conversations of this kind are a good means of exciting or gratifying sexual desires. (9)

This is all well and good, even if he does seem to protest a bit too much; however, he repeats the defense and the example of the gynecologist a second time:

> It is possible for a man to talk to girls and women upon sexual matters of every kind without doing them harm and without bringing suspicion upon himself, so long as, in the first place, he adopts a particular way of doing it, and in the second place, can make them feel convinced that it is unavoidable. A gynaecologist, after all,

> under the same conditions, does not hesitate to make them submit to uncovering every possible part of their body. (48)

Freud compares his privilege of speaking freely about sexual matters to a female patient to the gynecologist's privilege of looking at the sexual parts of her body. But there is an elision here in this analogy, and a significant one, for it is the patient's own confession of sexual desire, and of sexual activity, that Freud is determined to expose and look at in this particular analytic encounter. It is not, after all, his role as sexual educator of Dora or any other female patient, that is at issue. In fact, Freud goes on to assert that such an education would be either impossible or redundant. "There is never any danger of corrupting an inexperienced girl," Freud asserts. "For where there is no knowledge of sexual processes even in the unconscious, no hysterical symptom will arise; and where hysteria is found there can no longer be any question of 'innocence of mind' in the sense in which parents and educators use the phrase" (49). Freud's theory, at this point, and his working epistemology, operated on the assumption that a somatic symptom was a sign of a repressed and then converted sexual trauma. For Freud, what was at issue in Dora's cure was neither innocence nor penance, but her own confession. And yet, it is not her freedom to talk about "sexual matters" that Freud is defending above, but his own.

If the analogy that Freud wished to make was between Dora's sexual confessions and the naked body of the female gynecological patient, he has skewed the relationship by introducing the question of his own freedom to speak of "sexual matters" to her. In his postscript to the case of Dora, his analysis of his unfinished analysis of her, Freud admits that he had failed "to master the transference" in time in Dora's case (118). The epistemological model provided by the gynecologist was finally inadequate to the psychoanalytical cure; evoking the speech of sexual desire is not simply analogous to examining a naked body. To "master the transference," after all, is to master the art of listening to the play of desire in the relationship at hand, between analysand and analyst, well beyond the level of signification that the naked body reveals to the gynecologist with his instruments for probing and seeing, or that the hysteric's symptoms seem to confirm about her sexual past.

By making an interpretation that reaches to the unconscious structuring of the analysand's discourse, the analyst exposes himself and his desire as well. He risks rejection and implication in the neurosis itself simply by saying, as Freud will learn to say, *But it is me whom you love (or hate) now. At the*

same time, it is not me but your father whom you desire. In this epistemology, the analyst does not first see and then pursue the truth of the analysand; he does not just read her naked body like a mystical text. Rather, he first disrobes and becomes the site of the transference, of her reading of him. Only in this position of being the loved one, and the traumatizing one, for the analysand, can the analyst become the midwife for the desire that had remained unspoken before.

Love and casuistry are joined in a mediatory function, an oscillation between conjunction and division, a transitive position. The promise of representation is the promise of a reading or a recognition that rebounds to the affirmation of the writer or lover. Kristeva reminds us that ecstasy, rooted in going out of place, being transported, is also "the transfer of meaning . . . the transfer of the subject to the place of the Other" (*Tales* 91). "The Exstasie" speaks to this conversion or transfer and its figuring as a reading. If the body is love's book, then the body is always the body of the other and there are always two bodies and two books and two readings in the dialogue of love. But Donne says it has been a "dialogue of one," the ascent from body to soul having left behind sexual difference. When the poem's speaker says to his lover, "To' our bodies turne we then," he yet refers to the body of love as "the body": "But yet the body is his booke." I read this not as a denial of the female body, but as a flattening of sexual difference, of the problem of gendered sexual relationship resolved by sexual ecstasy itself, figured as a perfect "reading" of one lover by the other.

Donne, like Ebreo, also charts the problematic relationship of love and desire. Love is always threatening to kill desire; desire is always outdistancing love. "Negative Love," a poem that turns on the notion of the impossibility of knowing or defining love perfectly, ends on a note that comes very close to repudiating desire itself: "As yet my ease, and comfort is,/ Though I speed not, I cannot misse" (ll.17-18). By thus avowing the *via negativa*, the way of unknowing, the speaker is also avoiding the pitfalls of craving and having: "For may I misse, when ere I crave,/ If I know yet what I would have" (ll.8-9). The condition of being, the final "is" of the penultimate line (17), seems at odds with a desire that can be known and named and had; on the other hand, being cannot be missed. There is an admitted silliness or ignorance in the speaker's reasoning; but, the original sense of silly, as happy or blessed, is present as well.

Perhaps the most bitter poem on the vanity of possession, of the bankruptcy of what Donne referred to as the "stupid" condition of enjoyment without desire, is "Love's Alchymie." For this speaker, the sequence "have

lov'd, and got, and told" (l.3), comprises the history of his love life: a series of past participles signifying nothing. He has dreamed "a rich and long delight" but got "a winter-seeming summer's night"(ll.11-12). Donne's sermon on the uses of the affections for good or ill, preached to Queen Anne (quoted above, pp.5-6), besides echoing the language of this poem, gives us a way to reread it by reminding us that love is dialogic and performative, not fixed in objective reality—in sunshiny days, beautiful women or sexual enjoyment. While objects or states of being may be "testimonies" of love, they are not love itself, which is predicative and dynamic.

This courtier speaker, identified by his sneering contempt and envy of the simpleminded happiness of his "man" in love, remains enthralled by a meaning of love that he, nevertheless, identifies as empty and meaningless. Looking for a "centrique happinesse" (l.2), for a "hidden mysterie" (l.5), he mocks the alchemist in the first stanza, then reveals his own blindness and misogyny in the second: "Hope not for mind in women; at their best/ Sweetnesse, and wit they'are, but *Mummy, possest*" (ll.23-24). The central dilemma of the poem, however, is not the slur against women, comparing them to embalmed corpses, any more than it is the slur against the "man." This speaker's misogyny and snobbery are symptoms, not causes. The dilemma originates in the notion that love and women are things to be possessed, and possessed at their "best"; it lies in the idea that a woman is so other, so mysterious, that she has something which may supply endless delight, something precious and not common; and by this logic, she is implicitly commodified and expensive. The notion that even his "man" may have all these riches simply by getting married repels him: hence, the revolting and degrading image of the last couplet. This notion of the idealized (and profitable) woman has no possible end but the one Donne does not shrink from giving it, that it is "but, *Mummy, possest.*"

There is another change that could be rung on this poem as well. Not forgetting that love and knowledge are tightly woven concepts in this work, another gloss on the poem is supplied by Donne's sermon preached at the funeral of Sir William Cokayne, in December 1626. Donne's subject is, in part, the imperfect state of human knowledge of both earthly and spiritual things:

> And how imperfect is all our knowledge? What one thing do we know perfectly? Whether wee consider Arts, or Sciences, the servant knows but according to the proportion of his Masters knowledge in that Art, and the Scholar knows but according to the proportion of

> his Masters knowledge in that Science; . . . Almost all knowledge is rather like a child that is embalmed to make Mummy, than that is nursed to make a Man; rather conserved in the stature of the first age, than growne to be greater . . . .(VII, 260)

The notion that what we know about anything, including love and the opposite sex, comes to us in a dead form, a preserved body, incapable of further growth or change, would seem to place perfect knowledge and perfect truth always in the future of the human subject. Learning conceived as mere acquisition of existing knowledge is here subordinated to a different model, a procedural one which Donne does not articulate as such, but which may be safely inferred to be, at the least, a continual interrogation or questioning of the status of received knowledge, both scientific and spiritual.

This casuistical model of knowledge emphasizes not the prescriptive role of the casuist (or poet) but the dialectic of the method and the intensive, and possibly interminable, dialogue lately updated by the psychoanalytic concept of the transference. To be "possessed," then, is to be rendered lifeless; we may, as readers, be suspicious of Donne's speakers when their goal is possession. A person "possessed" by demons, for example, is no longer speaking in her own voice. To be a woman "possessed" by such a man as the speaker of "Love's Alchymie" is to be idealized at first and then inevitably mummified, preserved at the level of a mindless, more, a speechless child. Love, like knowledge, is not a fixed entity in Donne's poems, and when it is sought as such, paradox, at best, and revulsion, at worst, ensues.

The logical complement of possessive love is the "rage" of unsatisfied desire. In "Farewell to Love," it is not love between man and woman, but the male sexual orgasm alone that is the source of profound disappointment. This is a very funny poem, as I read it, not the least because "some Deitie in love" (l.1), some "thing," that cannot be named, is nevertheless implicitly phallic from the first stana to the last pun, "Taile." Given this rather limited equation, this restricted definition of love and desire, the ending of this poem, like the ending of "Love's Alchymie," seems destined by its grounding in male sexuality. I read this not as a repudiation of poetry-making, as at least one reader has, but as a joke on male desire whose implicit punchline is that the man himself is helplessly in the thrall of his own penis and must resort to "worme-seed" as a cure.[17]

The masculine "thing" which keeps popping up in these stanzas is, like the feminine "nothing" in other poems, a play on having or not having as the essence of love. "Things" are defined as the props of a dying desire, indeed,

of a dying subject of desire; and this false worship of things, this idolatry of the phallus itself, "His highness sitting in a golden Chaire" (l.12), is repudiated by the end of the poem and in purely material terms. When all else fails, one may literally apply an anaphrodisiac, "worme-seed to the Taile" (l.40), the penis itself. A desire which begins by giving form to "things not yet knowne" (l.8) ends by literally deforming the body. The speaker has invoked Nature in stanza three, making of the male orgasm a metaphor for mortality itself. Every act of intercourse "diminisheth the length of life a day" (l.25), even as it increases the opportunity "to raise posterity" (l.30). The ending, therefore, by refusing sexual intercourse as if to refuse mortality, instead ensures the death of the self by refusing the risks of generation. Donne writes poems whose premises contain the seeds of their own logical working-out; in this case, the logic of the phallus ends in a suicidal cancellation of desire. These speakers are caught in monologic epistemologies; their positions do not convert but involute by the end of their speeches. It is the reader who must be engaged casuistically; it is the reader who psychoanalyzes or is psychoanalyed by these poems.

Indeed, readers who fail to be so engaged tend to identify themselves with the conventions that Donne is subjecting to questioning and analysis. For example, both J.E.V. Crofts and Christopher Ricks after him fault Donne for not adhering to the Petrarchan conventions of blazoning the body of the woman in his poetry:

> Even the mistress of his most passionate love-verses, who must (one supposes) have been a real person, remains for him a mere abstraction of sex: a thing given. He cannot see her—does not apparently want to see her; for it is not of her that he writes, but of his relation to her; not of love, but of himself loving.

And, again: "The beauty of the visible world meant nothing to him and yielded him no imagery for serious purpose."[18] The last accusation is clearly wrong-headed and has been disproved by the loving attention given to Donne's imagery by John Carey and Elaine Scarry, among others. This affront at Donne's emphasis on relationship rather than visual image, however, is easily turned into a positive valorization of his different aesthetic assumptions. For Crofts it is a serious fault that Donne is more concerned with the tactile and the spatial than he is with the visible; for me, obviously, these qualities recommend Donne as a poet for women, not just a male coterie.

Donne writes another kind of love dialogue, one that attempts to dislodge the dualistic grip of having and being on the lovers. These are poems where the relations between the sexes are figured as a signifying difference and not a polar opposition. Instead of monologue and monologic knowledge, there is an implied dialogue between the lovers and an invitation for them to "read" one another, as in "The Extasie." Instead of an aesthetics of the visual ideal and its accompanying epistemology of totalizing possession, there is an aesthetics of the tactile, the spatial, and the relational, as in "A Valediction forbidding mourning," or "The good-morrow." In these poems, Donne's eschewal of the idealization of woman is also an eschewal of the degradation of woman which, as Kristeva and Freud both have observed, forms the necessary complement of idealization.[19]

This degrading notion of woman is exemplified in Donne's "Elegie: The Comparison" where the woman, ugly or beautiful, is represented as a space of nothing onto which men may project their own images and contest their own masculinity. The women are the neutral ground, what Kristeva has called the "permutative center," for the men, in this case the male courtiers. The dynamics of that poem are such that one man compares his mistress, figured as ideal and elevated, to another man's, figured as ugly and degraded. At the end, the speaker says that if his friend will give up his mistress, he will give up on comparison, as both are odious. The misogyny is not redeemed in these lines, but it is analyzed at the linguistic and the social level. First, misogyny inheres in such comparisons; the ugly mistress is a structural complement of the beautiful one and vice versa. Second, the women, beautiful or ugly, are the empty space, the nothing, on which the males form their friendships or contest their masculine superiority.[20]

In "Aire and Angels," Donne converts this notion of woman as "ground" for relationships between men to the minimal difference necessary for signification, figured as sexual difference.[21] In this sense, what is idealized or fantasized is relationship itself and not the visual object, or the woman's ideal beauty. Donne pushes at the limits of the specular fantasy in this poem, finally merging origins and ends in an attempt to represent poetically the act of signification itself. The last two lines of this poem, it seems to me, are read as more or less misogynist only by reference to an aesthetic and an ethic of the feminine ideal embodied in the poetry of courtly love. The reading of misogyny or anti-feminism in these lines depends, in fact, on the simple notion that angels are always male and that they have no other function, epistemological or otherwise, as figures or images in this poem, except as assertions of a significant, if slight, masculine superiority: men's love is more like angels; women's love is more like air.

Donne, in fact, employs angels in more complex and interesting ways than his critics have allowed. In a marriage sermon preached for Lady Mary Bridgewater and Lord Edward Herbert on November 19, 1627, Donne talks about Angels as the first creations of God:

> They are *primogeniti Dei*, Gods eldest sonnes; They are super-elementary meteors, they hang between the nature of God, and the nature of man, and are of middle Condition; And, (if we may offencelessely express it so) they are *aenigmata Divina*, The Riddles of Heaven, and the perplexities of speculation. (VIII, 106)

Any sense of sexed beings, suggested by "sonnes," seems superseded and subsumed by the angels' association with the "Riddles" and "perplexities" of language and cognition; their "middle Condition" suggests that the terms of human sexual difference, "the nature of man," cannot be used to describe them. It seems equally, if not more, valid to think of them as neither male nor female, in the human sense, than it does to think of them as necessarily male. Donne, in fact, in his sermons, uses angels to speak about knowledge and knowing, as well as to speak about the "indifference" of the angels to human sexual difference.

In an Easter Monday sermon preached in 1622, Donne talks about what Angels know and how they know it:

> Neither doe the Angels know *per species*, by those resultances and species, which rise from the Object, and pass through the Sense to the Understanding, for that's a deceiveable way. (IV, 127)

Angel knowledge, therefore, is not tied to the visual, the specular, the object world, but to an immediacy of apprehension that joins the knower and the thing known. Donne seems to employ this example as an ideal of knowledge itself, not self-reflexive or split, not "dual cognition," but immediate and intuitive; this represents a fantasy of the ideal love relationship as well.[22]

In an Easter day sermon, 1630, Donne affirms that Angels may appear as women as well as men by arguing that gender is subordinate to use and to role. Donne is, in effect, rendering sexual difference "indifferent":

> And to recompence that observation, that never good Angel appeared in the likenesse of woman, here are good women made Angels, that

> is, Messengers, publishers of the greatest mysteries of our Religion.(IX, 190)

Furthermore, he explicates the text of the sermon, Matthew 28:6, where the Angel leads the women to the emptied tomb of Christ, as if to equate in a profound way, this place of death and resurrection, with an idea of woman, herself:

> And though the principall purpose of the Angell, in shewing these women the place, were to assure them, that Christ was risen, yet may there also be an intimation of the helpe and assistance that we receive from holy places, in this their *Ecce locus, Come, and see the place.* (IX, 209)

The sermon begins in defense of women as both "Angelicall" and "Evangelicall" and ends in a defense of holy places, "which in themselves, and in their owne nature are indifferent."

Donne's line of reasoning is clear; sexual difference, like place, is not essentially, or visibly valuable or holy, but is made so by holy use. In reasoning so, Donne makes women equal to men in terms of spirituality or "Angelicall" and "Evangelicall" qualities and uses. By equating "place" and "woman" in his argument, Donne affirms that in his theology, as in his aesthetics, ideals of relationship and structure take priority over ideals of the visible object.

In "Aire and Angels," the poet-lover, in attempting to define a love relationship, begins, in Platonic fashion, with the Idea of Love, expressed, significantly, as language itself, as an Angelic communication "in a voice, so in a shapelesse flame" (l.3). When Love finally assumes the body of his beloved, he becomes the poet of her body, and sets out to describe her parts:

> and now
> That it assume thy body, I allow,
> And fixe itselfe in thy lip, eye, and brow.
> Whilst thus to ballast love, I thought,
> And so more steddily to have gone,
> With wares which would sinke admiration,
> I saw, I had love's pinnace overfraught,
> Ev'ry thy haire for love to worke upon
> Is much too much, some fitter must be sought;

For, nor in nothing, nor in things
Extreme, and scattring bright, can love inhere;
(ll.12-22)

The dilemma is clearly expressed here as a linguistic, poetic, and gendered one. The dilemma of the sexual relation and its representation remains for both the man and the woman. What is rejected as inadequate is both the blazoning of the woman's body *and* its preconditioning absence or "nothing." And what is proposed by way of resolution in the sestet of the second sonnet is "disparitie":

Then as an Angell, face, and wings
Of aire, not pure as it, yet pure doth weare
So thy love may be my loves spheare;
Just such disparitie
As is twixt Aire and Angells puritie
'Twixt womens love, and mens will ever bee.
(ll.23-28)

This "disparitie" is not by way of disparaging "womens love" as less pure than "mens," but by way of defining a signifying relationship between the sexes, figured as the difference in "puritie" between "Aire and Angells," a difference that does not imply a hierarchy of value in which men (Angells) are purer than women (Aire), but that would make it possible to distinguish the one from the other. The alternative to this ongoing dialogue, this signifying, is suggested by the first sonnet in the poem: to "fixe" love in the "lip, eye, and brow" of the beloved, to load the beloved with the symbolic freight of the visual. As the final word of the poem brings home, "Just such disparitie" is the condition of love's being.

Moreover, this final condition of being brings one around to the originating condition, but with a difference. By the end of the poem, the lover's relation to his (or her) beloved has changed; the idealizations of the visual give way to a condition of relationship. The resolution of the love dialogue inheres not in the capturing of an object, but in structuring this relationship so that speech or dialogue may continue. To the extent that the "disparitie" remains between "Aire and Angells," the possibility for relationship between one and another, not the same, remains.

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Notes

[1] See A.E. Malloch, "John Donne and the Casuists," in *Studies in English Literature* 2 (1962): 57-76, for his discussion of the "double man" created by the convergence of casuistical practice and print culture. Malloch makes use of Walter J. Ong's work in *Ramus: Method and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958). See also G.A. Starr, "From Casuistry to Fiction: The Importance of the *Athenian Mercury*," in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (1967): 17-32.

[2] See Camille Wells Slights, *The Casuistical Tradition in Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert, and Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981); and Dwight Cathcart, *Doubting Conscience: Donne and the Poetry of Moral Argument* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1975). Slights finds that only Donne's *Satires* fit into the casuistical tradition; Dwight Cathcart, on the other hand, interprets the *Songs and Sonets* as cases in which Donne invariably argues for the rightness of the unconventional or immoral act as the speaker or casuist of his poems. By reading the influence of casuistical discourse in terms of a divided subjectivity and a transferential epistemology, I attempt to avoid what I see as the impasses of both of these readings: in the first, a restrictive sense of casuistry as a specific procedure rather than as a broadly defined discourse; in the second, a unitary sense of the speaking subject, both Donne and his poetic speakers conflated to a single voice, always arguing for, and from, the position of "doubt" itself.

[3] See, for example, Evelyn M. Simpson, *A Study of The Prose Works of John Donne*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1948); J.B.Leishman, *The Monarch of Wit* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951); Pierre Legouis, "The Dramatic Element in Donne's Poetry," in *John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Helen Gardner (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.,1962).

[4] For discussions of the transference in Freud's writings, see "Observations on Transference-Love" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, tr. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1959), vol. 12 (1915): 149. Hereafter *SE* will be used to refer to this edition. See also "An Outline of Psycho-Analysis," *SE* 23 (1938): 141; also, Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) and *Black Sun* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), chapter 1, "Psychoanalysis—a counterdepressant," on hatred in the transference; Jacques Lacan, "From Interpretation to the Transference," *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 1981) 254; also, "The direction of the treatment and the principles of its power," *Ecrits* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978); and Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, chapter 10, "The Human Sciences" (New York: Random House, 1970); also, Cynthia Chase, "Transference as Trope and Persuasion" in *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

[5] For a discussion of "things indifferent" see Slights, pp.15-16; also, William Perkins, *A Discourse on Conscience* and *The Whole Treatise of Cases of Conscience*, ed. Thomas F. Merrill (Niewkoop: B.DeGroaf, 1966). Perkins defines "things indifferent" as "such things as are neither expresly comaunded or forbidden by God" (33).

[6] Leo Hebraeus (Leone Ebreo), *Dialoghi d'Amore*, Tr. F.Friedeberg-Seely and Jean H. Barnes (London: The Soncino Press, 1937).

[7] *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. G.R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkely: University of California Press, 1953; reissued 1984). Hereafter I will make parenthetical references to this edition in the text by volume and page number.

[8] St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, tr. D.W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1958) II, vi, 7, 8; II, xxxii, 45.

[9] See John Brenkman, "The Other and the One: Psychoanalysis, Reading, *The Symposium*" in *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1982); also, Julia Kristeva's discussion of *The Symposium* in *Tales of Love*; also, Jacques Lacan, "Of the subject who is supposed to know, of the first dyad, and of the Good" in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: W.W.Norton, 1981).

[10] Plato, *The Symposium*, tr. B.Jowett, ed. Louise Ropes Loomis (Roslyn NY: Walter J. Black, 1942).

[11] *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross, (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967) 75-77, ll.63-64. Subsequent references to this edition will be made by line numbers parenthetically in the text. Though Donne's authorship of "Sapho to Philaenis" has been disputed by Dame Helen Gardner, it has been upheld by other editors and the poem contributes yet another perspective, the lesbian lover's, to Donne's interrogation of love and to Donne's ability to write outside of his own, heterosexual male persona. In this poem, the women, because they are not sexually different, leave behind no traces, no "signes" that they have loved: "But of our dallyance no more signes there are,/ Then *fishes* leave in streames, or *Birds* in aire" (ll.41-42).

[12] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, p. 99.

[13] The sermon from which this citation is taken was on a text from Matthew 11:16:"And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." Donne expands and develops the connection between love and knowledge in the context of our love and knowledge of God, stressing again the interdependence of knowing, loving, possessing, and enjoying, culminating in a *vision*, described as "not onely a seeing, but a beholding, a contemplating of God . . . an un-interrupted, an un-intermitted, an un- discontinued sight of God" (IX, 128). The "vision" that Donne describes is founded first on relationship and then on mystical unity, rather than on the absence which founds poetic vision, especially the male poet's typically fragmenting vision of the body of his beloved.

[14] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *SE* 18 (1920-22): 3-64.

[15] In a letter to Henry Goodyer, 20 December 1614, Donne refers to the act of publishing his poems in order to pay off old debts before he takes orders as a "valediction to the world, before I take orders." *John Donne: Selected Prose*, chosen by Evelyn Simpson, ed. by Helen Gardner and Timothy Healy (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 145.

[16] Sigmund Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria," *SE* 7 (1905): 7-122.

[17] See Christopher Ricks, "Donne After Love," in *Literature and the Body* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1988) 33-69, for his equation of male sexual orgasm and poetry making in Donne's poems, and on Donne's repudiation of both, in his reading.

[18] J.E.V. Crofts, "John Donne: A Reconsideration," *John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 82-84.

[19] Kristeva, *Desire in Language* (New York: Columbia UP, 1980), p. 52-53; also Freud, "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life," *SE* 11 (1912), *passim*.

[20] It is also interesting to think about Castiglione's *The Courtier* in relation to this question of woman as the middle term. J.R. Woodhouse, in *Castiglione: A Reassessment of The Courtier* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1978), speaks to the anxiety about feminization on the part of the male courtier when he notes that Castiglione "studiously avoided" using "cortegiana," the feminine equivalent of "cortegiano," in his text, because of "its undertones of 'prostitute';" it was a word that would remind the male courtier of the "moral servility of [his] own situation"(55). In fact, male courtiers do constitute the middle ground and are, by analogy, in the position of women. Courtiers are to princes (or queens) as women are to men in Renaissance society. So the turn against women and against male sexuality and poetry itself that readers have noticed in Donne's poetry seems of a piece with Donne's own bitterness at, and critique of, the meretricious relations between men, women, and poetry at court. Wherever there is a "use" that reflects a relationship of tyranny or exploitation, Donne seems to use comparison as an instrument of exposure. To compare courtiers to women by way of a dialogue between courtiers comparing women is to expose the unequal relationships of power between the sexes as well as between the levels of court hierarchy. I would just point out that Donne is not necessarily implicated, as speaker, in his poetic analyses of these conditions; that is, he is not only capable of irony, but of insight and self-reflection as well.

[21] Kristeva, in *Tales of Love*, writes on the logic of the Ideal: "Such a logic of idealizing identification leads one to posit, as lining of the visual, specular structure of the fantasy . . . [here she writes Lacan's formula for the fantasy] in search of the ever inadequate image of a desired other, the existence of a preliminary condition. If the object of fantasy is receding, metonymical, it is because it does not correspond

to the preliminary ideal that the identification process [the fantasy itself] has constructed. Transferred to the Other [the fantasy] as to the very place from which he is seen and heard, the loving subject does not have access to that Other as to an object, *but as to the very possibility of the perception, distinction, and differentiation that allows one to see*. That Ideal is nevertheless a blinding, non-representable power—sun or ghost"(36; emphasis mine). Or "aire or angell." Donne is indeed, more enthralled by the possibility of representing the possibility of representation, than he is in representing more things, more objects. A.J. Smith's note to "Air and Angels," in his edition of *The Complete English Poems*, with its extensive grounding in scholastic metaphysics, makes the point from another perspective.

[22] See Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," in *Tales of Love* (234) on primary narcissism. She theorizes that fantasy originates from an idealized relationship rather than a specular or visual image; it is an older, more archaic state of things—developmentally speaking—which is fantasied in the worship of Mary as the Blessed Mother, for example.