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Ambivalent Mourning: Sacramentality, Idolatry, and Gender in "Since she whome I lovd hath payd her last debt"

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In a 1613 letter to Henry Goodyer, Donne comments on his freedom during Anne's recovery from childbirth: "I have now two of the best happinesses which could befall me . . . which are to be a widower and my wife alive."[1] This quibble on present absence, life and death, is Donne's version of "Take my wife... Please." But as the sonnet on Anne's death bears witness, his little joke turns out to be no laughing matter. After Someone *has* taken his wife, Donne endures two of the worst *sadnesses* which could befall him, which are to be still a husband—not yet truly widowed—and his wife dead.

The sonnet is an attempt to cope with those sadnesses, to define who and what he has lost and, in so doing, to redefine himself; for Anne remains, even beyond this life, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. He remains her husband, though he knows that he must become a bride of Christ. As, in life, Anne bore many children fathered by John Donne, so in death—and in the sonnet—she bears a wealth of symbolic meanings that the poet's ever-masculine mind seems unable to cease begetting. Indeed, death has deprived him not only of the woman he loves, but of a human sacrament, a tangible sign that both reveals and conceals divinity.

Toward this sign, this woman—and part of Donne's problem is that neither word will do on its own—the poem directs a mixture of passionate devotion and ingenious anxiety. Such a divided mood is typical of Donne's work; but the sonnet's imagery and theme evoke in particular the unresolved conflicts in Donne's sense of the sacramental. His response to the absent presence of Anne parallels his response to the Eucharist, the most hotly-debated absent presence of the period. And his fears about marriage reflect his fears about the efficacy of both Baptism and the Eucharist, for he defines these two sacraments in conjugal terms, as the earthly means by which the soul is wedded to God.[2]

The sonnet suggests that Donne's profound ambivalence toward sacramental signs, including Anne herself as such, springs from the difference between sacramental experience and anagogical orientation. As Donne explains in an Easter sermon, "there are mysteries of two kindes":

> [S]ome things are [mysteries] . . . Because, though the thing be near enough unto me, yet somthing is interposed between me, and it, and so I cannot see it: And some things are so . . . because they are at so remote a distance, as that . . . my sight cannot extend to them. . . . Sacraments are mysteries, because though the grace therein bee neare mee, yet there is *Velamen interpositum*, there is a visible figure, a sensible sign, and seale, between me, and that grace, which is exhibited to me in the Sacrament. . . . [whereas] the resurrection is a mystery, because it is so farre removed, as that it concernes our state and condition in the next world. (7: 98)

In the sonnet, Donne contemplates both kinds of mystery and finds that they are in tension with one another. He looks to the "state and condition" his soul is to assume "in the next world" when he will be wedded to the celestial Bridegroom who now woos him; but even as he resolves to ponder such "heavenly things,"[3] his thoughts remain preoccupied with more earthly mysteries, and particularly with Anne herself as a "visible figure" that came "between [him], and [the] grace . . . exhibited to [him]" in her.

I: Sacramental Wife

Anne's spiritually salutary role in Donne's life is defined in lines 5-6 of the sonnet: "Here the admyring her my mind did whett / To seeke thee God; so streames do shew the head." Gazing upon Anne's goodness was a powerful aid to his salvation; for, as the Anglican marriage ceremony reminds brides, husbands may be won for Christ when "they behold [their wives'] chaste conversation."[4] But for Donne, Anne was more than a model of virtue; she was a sacramental sign, a stream which showed the Head. The image recalls a commonplace based on John's Gospel: Christ's body was, as Donne puts it in a sermon, "the spring-head of both Sacraments" (9: 333); after his death, water and blood flowed from the wound in his side. Like the fluid elements of Baptism and Eucharist, Anne was a stream flowing out from the Lord; she was able to "shew" the God-head, to direct human perception toward her divine source.[5]

Though Anne could not provide a eucharistic banquet, she was the sacramental appetizer which stimulated Donne's piety and prepared him for a full spiritual meal.[6] With a pun that tastes of gastronomic, religious, and erotic arousal, Donne declares that Anne *whetted* his mind to seek the One who could truly drench his parched soul. And in line 7, he tells the Lord that his search has been successful: "I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed." It is through participation in the Lord's Supper, the soul's banquet, that Donne can make such a proclamation; the virtuous wife has shown her husband the way to the Communion Table. But now she is gone.

II: Bereaved Husband

The sonnet begins with the widower's reflection on what has happened and how it has altered his perspective:

> Since she whome I lovd, hath payd her last debt
> To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead
> And her Soule early into heaven ravished,
> Wholy in heavenly things my mind is sett. (1-4)

Donne's thoughts are fixed upon things celestial because Anne's death was the end of his earthly "good," the good of marriage itself. The passing of the wife returns her husband to the alone-ness of Adam before Eve's creation, to the solitude which God pronounced "not good."[7] It also deprives him of the good promised by Psalm 128, a wife like a "fruitful vine."[8] For Anne was nothing if not fertile.

The fruitfulness of her womb was, of course, a mixed blessing; for she died of complications attendant upon the birth of her twelfth child. Donne may thus be punning on "whome" in the opening line; the "she whome [he] lovd" was the she-womb he made almost constantly pregnant, and he is reflecting on the implications of how she died. In observing that Anne has "payd her last debt / To Nature, and to hers," Donne genders even that most generic of human experiences, death. As Faulkner and Daniels explain, Anne has discharged not only "her debt to Nature as a human being (all must die)" but also her debt "to her own nature as a woman (the danger peculiar to all women of dying in childbirth)."[9] And because 1 Timothy identifies childbearing as a woman's best assurance of salvation, Donne can hope that the labor which killed her body is the seal of her soul's new life, a life in which all earthly "debts" are canceled.

But behind the death that canceled all Anne's obligations, behind the fatal pregnancy itself, lay her frequent fulfillment of one obligation in particular: the "marriage debt" she owed as a wife. St. Paul asserts the doctrine that a husband's body is not his own, nor a wife's her own, and that they must fulfill their conjugal duties to one another (1 Corinthians 7: 3-4). The payment of this debt may involve a different way of being "into heaven ravished": that is, the "death" of sexual climax. Whether or not Anne experienced such expiration on a regular basis during her marriage, we may assume that her husband believed she did; given the Renaissance theory that female satisfaction is necessary for conception, there was certainly plenty of evidence. At any rate, Anne had clearly paid the marriage debt "to hers" time and again; but as Donne goes on to admit in lines 8-9 of the sonnet, he still thirsts for "more love." Thus, in saying that Anne "has payd her last debt," he is acknowledging her release from all earthly obligations even as he ponders the melancholy fact that she will never again make love to him.

Her name is expansive and abundant; it suggests copiousness, plenty, even excess. And there's the rub. For according to Pauline and Augustinian theology, the husband is a type of the reason, while the wife is a type of the flesh over which the reason should rule. The flesh is the *caro conjux*, the complaining wife who forever leads her better half astray.[13] Thus, though Anne the Woman was a saint, More the Wife symbolizes a part of Jack that has always caused him trouble: like Jack Falstaff, he has "*more* flesh than another man, and therefore *more* frailty."[14] In a sermon, Donne argues that practically every sin "comes within the name of *workes of the flesh*" and that all manner of "abundance and superfluity begets these workes of the flesh" (6: 197). In the sonnet, God has taken away his abundance—his More—but he still thirsts for that fleshly abundance, and thus finds himself still wedded to carnal desire.

He admits this hard fact even as he tries to deny it in line 4: "Wholy in heavenly things my mind is sett," he says, imaging thought as a mode of penetration. The poet's mind is not *on* but *in* the objects of contemplation. Though his *body* can no longer enter Anne's, and his *soul* cannot yet enter heaven, his *thoughts* find their way into a delightful enclosure. Donne's assertion that his mind is set "Wholy" in such a matrix resonates four lines later in the description of a "*holy* thirsty dropsy"; but clearly, neither the way his mind is "sett" nor his craving for "more love" is wholly holy. In fact, wholeness of any kind eludes him, for he is inwardly torn between his continuing husbandly emotions and his need to become a bride of Christ. As Anne's husband, he has not come to terms with what he sees as a rape, a violation of his spousal rights. But the God who has "into heaven ravished" Anne's soul (3) is also pursuing Donne's. If he is to respond to the divine suitor, he must abandon his masculine role and prepare to live in a mansion where Christ, not he, is the head of the household.[15]

In some ways, Ann's sacramental function in his life has helped him to prepare for this unmanning. For, though John was Ann's "head" according to Paul's teaching ("the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church" [Ephesians 5: 23]), she was his leader in the search for God. In the phrase "so streames do shew the head," Donne conflates direct and indirect objects, himself and Christ; Ann shows the One Head of the whole Mystical Body *to* her "head," her husband. The conflation underscores the ironic implications of Ann's directive role; as God's sacramental instrument, she is a spiritual support to Donne, a "help meet" for one who has authority over her. But she helps him by directing his attention toward a higher marriage in which he is to take the subordinate, feminine position.

The gender-crisis evoked by the language of the sonnet ironically recasts the allegory of regeneration outlined in Chapter 7 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Comparing the Law of the Old Testament to a first marriage, Paul explains that a Christian is like a woman whose first husband has died and who is therefore free to remarry. Under the Law, he explains, "we were in the flesh" and "the motions

III: Husband of the Flesh / Bride of the Spirit

Not surprisingly, Donne's ongoing desire for Anne is ridden with guilt; there is too direct a relation between his conjugal activities and their lethally fruitful consequences. As the cause of his wife's pregnancy, the collector of her marriage debt, he is implicated as the agent of her undoing. He has been the death of his own "good." And the sonnet's conclusion implies that, if God had not intervened, she might—on a more spiritual level—have been the death of him.[10] Donne's carnal thirsts might eventually have destroyed his soul even as they did destroy her body. If God had allowed him to continue embracing Anne as his "good," he implies, she would have become his god: no longer a "[thing] divine" (12)—a sacramental intermediary connecting man and God—but rather a thing *divinized*, an idol standing between and dividing them. As Donne puts it in a sermon (citing Augustine as his source), the things God gives us as helps may destroy us if we misuse them. Men must be certain to use marriage "to pay a debt, not to satisfie appetite; lest otherwise she prove *in Ruinam*, who was given *in Adjutorium*, and he be put to the first mans plea, . . .*The woman whom thou gavest me, gave me my death*" (2: 345). In other sermons, Donne speaks of sacraments in the same biblical language he uses here to refer to wives: they are gifts given *in Adjutorium*, "helps, which God in his Church hath afforded us" (6: 175).[11] Yet, as we have seen in his homiletic discussion of the two kinds of mystery, he also stresses that a sacrament is "somthing . . . interposed between" human perception and the divine (7: 98). As sacramental wife, then, Anne was the first kind of mystery; she both "shew[ed] the head" and veiled it. Deprived of her, the poet looks to the other kind of mystery, to that which is at such a distance that his "sight cannot extend" to it (*Sermons* 7: 98). This mystery is "the resurrection, [in which human beings] neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22: 30).[12]

In one of his wedding sermons, Donne attempted to explain this disconcerting text by urging that "mariage is ordained for *mutuall helpe* of one another," but in heaven, "God himself shall be intirely in every soul; And what can that soul lack, that hath all God?" (8: 99). His question is, of course, rhetorical; a soul that *has* "all God" can lack nothing. But what of the soul that is *offered* God's all? The sonnet makes clear that, until a soul possesses that offering fully, it will persist in longing and questioning: "A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett. / But why should I begg more Love, when as thou / Dost woe my soule, for hers offring all thine[?]" (8-10). In these lines, Donne's continuing thirst is partly for the celestial wedding feast yet to come, but it is also for conjugal joys now past. Unable to separate devout apocalyptic yearnings from potentially idolatrous desire, he remains suspended between a sacramental mystery—Anne the earthly bride—and an anagogical mystery—God, the celestial bridegroom. He longs to have "more love" from God than can be conveyed in any earthly sacrament, but he also thirsts for "more love" from a woman called More.

of sins . . . did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law . . . wherein we were held" (7: 5-6). Paul stresses vehemently that the New Testament's abrogation of the Law does not imply that the Old Covenant was evil; but though "holy, and just, and good" (7: 12), the Law could not bring salvation. Similarly, Anne's marriage to Donne was not evil, but within it Donne's soul remained fleshly and procreation meant death; indeed, Anne's flesh was impregnated with children who were literally "fruit unto death." Only the second marriage—that of the soul and God—can bring life. Donne's problem is that he can take personal comfort from Paul's allegory only if he learns to identify with the wife who survives her husband and joyfully remarries. As the Geneva Bible gloss on the passage from Romans explains:

> Bothe in this first mariage & in the seconde, the housband & the wife must be considered within our selues: the first housband was Sinne, and our flesh was the wife: their children were the frutes of the flesh. . . In the seconde mariage the Spirit is the housband, the new creature is the wife, & their children are the frutes of the Spirit.[16]

But the language of the sonnet shows that he has not properly internalized the allegory. Indeed, as we have seen, the circumstances surrounding Anne's death still lead him to think of Anne as "flesh" and of himself as "the first housband ... Sinne" whose conjugal embraces of that wife "bring forth fruit unto death." From one perspective, then, the sonnet is Donne's attempt to read Romans 7 aright, to realize that despite his status as sorrowful widower, he must conceive of himself as a newly-liberated widow and bride-to-be if he is to enter into the joy of spiritual union with God.

To read Romans 7 correctly would be to understand and embrace the full implications of baptism, for Saint Paul introduces the allegory of the newly-liberated widow precisely in order to explain the difference between carnal existence and the new life of those "dead to sin" through the sacrament (Romans 6: 2). In lines 13-14 of the sonnet, however, an allusion to the liturgy of baptism makes clear that Donne remains uncertain about the validity of his own baptismal vows. In these lines, Anne's death is associated with, if not directly attributed to the Lord's "tender jealosy" in the face of three deadly rivals: "the World," the "fleshe," and the "Devill" (14). These are the three forces formally rejected during Baptism, the marriage ceremony that weds the soul to God. Just as the bride and groom promise that they will "keep" themselves "only to" one another, "forsaking all other" (*BCP* 291, 292), so in the rite of Public Baptism, the new Christian vows to "forsake the devil and all his works, the vain pomp, and glory of the world,...[and] the carnal desires of the flesh, so that [he will] not follow, nor be led by them" (*BCP* 273). In the sonnet, then, Donne seems to feel that despite Anne's personal virtue, she was symbolically that uncooperative "wife," the Flesh;

she was his own fleshly part, and it was necessary for him to cease following or being led by her. Indeed, she had to die if he was to hold himself truly baptized, truly wedded to Christ; for Baptism is a dying with Christ in which the sinful flesh—"the body of sin"—is destroyed (Romans 6: 3-6).

IV: The Peril of "things divine"

The death of the flesh in Baptism should, Paul says in Colossians, lead to a new, more spiritual existence: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God" (3: 1). But this is where Donne discovers "Catch 22." Paul's counsel does not solve his problem, for his dead wife is now one of "the things which are above," one of those heavenly things in which his mind is set. As one of the "saints and Angels, things divine" (12), Anne looks all the more like the deity who is her rival for Donne's love.

Indeed, Anne's new, heavenly status by no means puts an end to all idolatrous possibilities. In some ways, it makes things even more difficult; for although a wife is a "help meet" while she is on earth, the Protestant husband must no longer call upon her as such after her death.[17] Although saints' prayers may assist us, the Dean of Saint Paul's explains in a sermon, we should address only God in our prayers:

> [A]ll that can be had, is to be asked of him, and him onely[;] . . . a man . . . cannot take the water so sincerely, so purely, so intemerately from the channell as from the fountaine head. (5: 360)

Streams that show the head may be abused even when they have become heavenly; as long as Donne is still tempted to refresh himself with downstream waters, Anne remains dangerous, and God must fear "least [Donne] allow/ [His] Love to Saints and Angels."

As a divinely-inspired poet whose thoughts are turned toward heaven yet still marred by idolatrous tendencies, Donne has an illustrious precedent in the book of Revelation. His namesake, Saint John, twice falls down to worship an angel and is twice told that he must not do so (Revelation 19: 10 and 22: 8-9). John first tries to worship his "fellow servant" immediately after the angel has proclaimed blessing upon those invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb (19: 9). Similarly, the peril of idolatry becomes an issue in Donne's sonnet as soon as the poet begins to reflect upon the divine Bridegroom who wishes to wed his soul. In Revelation, Saint John hears and records the very promise that might comfort a man melted by "holy thirsty dropsy"—"I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely" (21: 6)—yet he remains prone to idolatry; in the very last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, having been shown "the pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb" (22:1),

Saint John once again abases himself before the angel (22: 8-9).[18] Donne, too, is continually tempted to worship the guide who shows him the way to divine refreshment.

Has Donne's spiritual peril been increased, then, by God's transformation of a fleshly wife into a heavenly saint? The concluding section of the poem suggests that the tactics of the divine suitor are problematic:

> [Thou] dost not only feare least I allow
> My Love to Saints and Angels, things divine,
> But in thy tender jealosy dost doubt
> Least the World, fleshe, yea Devill putt thee out.
> (11-14)

Something is wrong here.[19] The Old Testament conception of a jealous divinity is clear enough, but the emphasis seems inverted. If Donne is trying to explain why God went so far as to take away his saintly wife; it *should* say something like, "Thou dost not only fear lest I love the World, the Flesh, and the Devil; but in thy tender jealousy dost doubt lest holy saints and angels put thee out." Donne would thus confirm Anne's goodness even as he took comfort in God's remarkable solicitude. But the poem puts it the other way; God is so careful that He worries *not only* about the dangers involved in loving saints and angels *but even* about the threat posed by the world, the flesh, and the devil. The forces of evil are cast as the lesser threats; it is as though a woman were to say to her husband, "You're jealous not only of your tried-and-true friends, but even of Don Juan, Casanova, and the Vicompte de Valmont." The emotional logic is twisted: it is the logic of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, sure that his best friend *is* most likely to have cuckolded him; it is the logic of Donne's own resentment, filtering through and warping his portrait of God's jealousy; it is the logic of a fallen world where sacraments are sinful, where marriage is adulterous, where "woo" is spelled "woe" (10), and where husbands—both human and divine—are destructively possessive of their spouses.

V: "all thine" / all mine

Not all interpretations of the poem are as dark as the one just suggested. In his edition, A. J. Smith preserves the manuscript punctuation emended by Shawcross and other editors, putting the pause in line 10 *after* "hers": "thou / Dost woo my soul for hers; offering all thine."[20] On the basis of this punctuation, Smith argues that God is wooing John on Anne's behalf, intending to reunite the couple in heaven.[21] Though Gardner is certainly right to see such a reading as "inconsistent with the . . . theme of God's 'tender jealousy,'"[22] Donne is nothing if not inconsistent. And here he does want to have his bride and be one too. God is a suitor

in His own right, but the line stresses that He courts Donne by offering him all that is His, and Anne herself is thus a part of the bride-price. A human bridegroom endows his new wife "with all [his] worldly goods" (*BCP* 293), and God—in marrying Himself to Donne's soul—endows it with all heavenly goods, including all heavenly souls. Donne cannot hope for a heavenly continuation of his marriage with Anne, but he can anticipate their reunion as members of the one Body which is the Bride of the Lamb.[23]

His soul can also look forward to a reunion with its "wife"—the risen body. In a sermon, Donne envisions the Resurrection and contrasts earthly experience with the existence to come:

> [G]ladnesse shall my soul have, that this flesh, (which she will no longer call her prison, nor her tempter, but her friend, her companion, her wife) that this flesh, that is, I, in the re-union . . . of both parts, shall see God. . . . It was the flesh of every wanton object here, that would allure it in the petulancy of mine eye. . . . And in the grave, it is the flesh of the worm; the possession is transfer'd to him. But, in heaven, it is *Caro mea, My flesh*, my souls flesh, my Saviours flesh. (3: 112)

In heaven, Donne will at last be the only one. The tired old feeling of suspicion and jealousy, so familiar to readers of the *Songs and Sonets*, is at last to be fully relieved in an ecstatic confirmation that he is the sole possessor of the body he loves.[24] Though taken away through death, the flesh Anne represents—and in another way Anne herself—will finally be restored. At the resurrection, they will be all the more Donne's because they have become God's.

VI: Always a Bridegroom, Never a Bride

The sonnet, however, is not as joyful as the sermon on the reunion of body and soul; Martz observes that "the ending is a most precarious resolution."[25] We are left with the image of the poet's divine spouse as full of doubt, uncertain that the poet will remain faithful to his baptismal wedding vows. The idea of a jealous God is of course an Old Testament commonplace; but insofar as God's fears reflect the poet's own jealousy over Anne's ravishment, they testify to a persistent masculinity of perspective which is—in the spiritual order of things—Donne's most serious problem.[26] He has professed his thoughts' entry into a heavenly matrix, declaring that now "in heavenly things [his] mind is sett"; but the ingressive masculine stance of that image is in tension with the sonnet's final image. In the closing lines, the question is not what place John Donne's thoughts will occupy, but who or what will occupy John Donne.

In the sermon on the reunion of resurrected body and soul, Donne's joy seems dependent on the fact that he is *not* preoccupied with gender distinctions. The flesh

"allured" by "every wanton object . . . in the petulancy of mine eye" is both the scented and beckoning young vixen of Proverbs and the foolish young man she entices. And the soul in heaven is an *anima* reunited with "*her* wife." Such liberating confusion of gender is not available to him in the sonnet. Donne's diction throughout the poem shows how much he still clings to a husband's role, which he must abandon in order to become a Bride in the heavenly wedding feast. His wife is dead, but he is—alas—no widower. Thus, when he speaks of Anne, she is at once the celestial model he emulates and the beloved woman on whom, *in* whom, his amorous thoughts are wholly set. The dilemma of his all-too-husbandly soul is that it cannot gaze upon the example of her femininity without responding to it as a man. He looks to the absent bride of Christ that he may become, like her, a responsive and utterly wifely creature; but in doing so, he makes present to himself the earthly bride he still desires. In showing her husband how to welcome the Bridegroom, Anne can't help but remind him of how good it felt to be one.

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Notes

[1] Edmund Gosse, *The Life and Letters of John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's*, vol. 2 (N.p.: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1899; Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1959) 18.

[2] See, for example, a sermon in which Donne stresses the conjugal nature of the baptismal "contract" (*The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter, vol. 9 [Berkeley: U of California P, 1953-62] 399); he also refers to the Eucharist as the soul's marriage to Christ (6: 85) and calls it the "consummation" of the marriage which took place in Baptism (9: 399). All subsequent quotations from the Sermons are taken from the Potter and Simpson edition and are cited parenthetically by volume and page number.

[3] "Since she whome I lovd hath paid her last debt," line 2. *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979) 349. Except where otherwise noted, all subsequent quotations from the sonnet refer to Shawcross's edition and are cited parenthetically by line number.

[4] *The Book of Common Prayer 1559. The Elizabethan Prayer Book*, ed. John E. Booty (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1976) 298. All subsequent quotations from the *Book of Common Prayer* cite this edition parenthetically (as *BCP*) by page number. The instruction for brides is based on 1 Peter 3: 1-2.

[5] Cf. Michael F. Moloney, *John Donne: His Flight from Medievalism* (N.p.: Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, 1975). Defining Dante's *Vita Nuova* and *Divine Comedy* as the works in which medieval "artistic idealism based upon the sacramental ideal was the most completely objectified" (97), Moloney calls Holy Sonnet XVII "Dantesque" (144) and notes: "It would be difficult to find a more definite reflection of the sacramental ideal in English love poetry than that in the lines 'Here the admyring her my mind did whett / To seeke thee God...' (145). Moloney says nothing, however, about the second half of line 6 and makes no attempt to deal with the ambivalence in Donne's attitude toward Ann. For him, the "reverence for womanhood" expressed in the poem is "exemplative of the true mediaeval spirit" (144) and is thus atypical for Donne.

[6] Cf. Donne's analogy linking both physical and spiritual nourishment to the conjugal union in which two become "one flesh": "[A]s the end of all bodily eating, is Assimilation, that . . . that meat may be made *Idem corpus*, the same body that I am; so the end of all spirituall eating, is Assimilation too, That . . . I may be made *Idem spiritus cum Domino*, the same spirit, that my God is" (*Sermons* 6: 223).

[7] Cf. *Sermons* 2: 340, in which Donne is at pains specifically to explain why marriage is good: "[U]pon God's contemplation, that it was not good, that man should be alone, there arose a goodnesse, in having a companion." He notes that Saint Augustine "observes in mariage, *Bonum fidei*, a triall of one anothers truth, and that's good; And *bonum prolis*, a lawful means of propagation; and that's good; and *bonum Sacramenti*, a mysticall representation of that union of two natures in Christ, and of him to us, and to his Church; and that's good too."

[8] The psalm, used in the Anglican marriage rite (*BCP* 294), promises that the two kinds of labor which came into the world at the Fall will bear fruit in the virtuous man's marriage: "[T]hou shalt eat the labor of thy hands . . . / Thy wife shall be as the fruitful vine: upon the walls of thy house."

[9] Eleanor Faulkner and Edgar F. Daniels, "Donne's Holy Sonnet XVIII ('Since she whom I lovd'), 1-2," *Explicator* 34 (1976): Item 68.

[10] It is toward this interpretation that Helen Gardner points when she suggests that there is more than one way to read the second line of the sonnet. One may, Gardner notes, read "and to hers" as a phrase attached not to the preceding phrase, "to nature," but rather to the words following. Read this way, the construction "and to hers, and my good is dead" parallels "hers" and "my," meaning that "Her death is for her good, since by it she enters heaven early, and it is for his good, since now all his affections are set on 'heavenly things'" (Helen Gardner, ed., *The Divine Poems of John Donne*, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1982] 154). M. E. Grenander ("Holy Sonnets VIII and XVII: John Donne," *Boston University Studies in English* 4.2 [1960]: 101) points out that reading "hers" as modifying "good" is ungrammatical; but Donne is ever aware of the different directions any given set of words can point. The sonnet has been misread by critics who perceive only the poet's fears and negative emotions; cf. Harry Morris ("John Donne's Terrifying Pun," *Papers on Language and Literature* 9.2 [1973]: 134) and John Carey (*John Donne: Life Mind, and Art* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1981] 59).

[11] Calvin strongly emphasizes the idea of a sacrament as a form of assistance God provides to bolster the feebleness of human faith (*The Institution of the Christian Religion*, trans. Thomas Norton [London: Thomas Vautrollier for Humfrey Toy, 1578], IV. xiv. 1).

[12] *King James Version* (New York: American Bible Society, n.d.). All subsequent scriptural quotations are from this version.

[13] The Latin phrase puns on the popular epitaph "cara conjux," "beloved wife." Cf. *Sermons* 3: 77, where Donne alludes to Augustine's allegorical interpretation of Job's wife: "This flesh, this sensuall part of ours, is our wife: and when these temporall things by any occasion are taken from us, that wife, that flesh, that sensuality is left to murmure and repine at Gods corrections."

[14] William Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, III.iii. 167-68 (*The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. Blakemore Evans [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974] 870); emphasis mine.

[15] It seems likely that Donne's feelings on this score had something to do with his decision never to remarry. See his discussion of why, despite God's pronouncement at Genesis 2:18, not every man is expected to marry: "God . . . does not say now, *non bonum hunc hominem esse solum*, It is not good for any man to be alone; for . . . says Christ: . . . *some make themselves Eunuchs for the kingdome of heaven* [Matthew 19: 12]: that is, the better to un-entangle themselves from those impediments, which hinder them in the way to heaven, they abstaine from mariage" (*Sermons* 2: 339).

[16] *The Geneva Bible: A facsimile of the 1560 edition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

[17] Cf. John Stachniewski, "John Donne: The Despair of the Holy Sonnets," *ELH* 48 (1981): 687.

[18] The gloss on this passage in the *Geneva Bible* notes: "Now this is the seconde time that he suffered him self to be caried away with the excellencie of the persone: which is to admonish us of our infirmitie & readines to fall, except God strengthen us miraculously with his Spirit."

[19] Cf. Barbara Lewalski, who feels that this sonnet "especially its conclusion, seems less unified and effective than is usual with Donne" (*Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth -Century Religious Lyric* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979] 273).

[20] *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin, 1971) 316.

[21] "Two Notes on Donne," *Modern Language Review* 51 (1956): 405-407. Cf. M.E. Grenander, "Holy Sonnets VIII and XVII: John Donne," *BUSE* 4 (2) (1960): 105.

[22] *Divine Poems* 154.

[23] Cf. *Sermons* 3: 244, where Donne prays for a newly married couple that "if they may not die together... he that died for them both, will bring them together again in his everlastingnesse." In another sermon, Donne tells the congregation that Christ's teaching that there is no marrying in heaven "excludes not our *knowing*, or our *loving* of *one another* upon former knowledge in this world" (8: 99). See also Claude J. Summers, "The Bride of the Apocalypse and the Quest for True Religion: Donne, Herbert, and Spenser," "*Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse*": *The Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987) 72-95. Summers notes the links between "Since she whome I lovd" and "Show me deare Christ" in an "apocalyptic reading" (81) of the latter, stressing Donne's sense of the disjunction between the Bride of the Lamb, the Church Triumphant, and any "merely historical and transient" incarnation of the Church Militant (78).

[24] See *Sermons* 3:254, in which Donne specifically notes that in heaven "I shall see all the beauty, and all the glory of all the Saints of God, and love them all, and know that the Lamb loves them too, without jealousie, on his part, or theirs, or mine . . ." Summers cites this passage in a note, contrasting the "decorous expression" of such ideas in the *Sermons* with the "deliberately graphic and shocking quality" of Donne's "Show me deare Christ" ("The Bride of the Apocalypse," 80, n. 9).

[25] Louis L. Martz, "The Action of the Self: Devotional Poetry in the Seventeenth Century," *Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, *Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies* 11 (London: Edward Arnold; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970) 108.

[26] Cf. Roger B. Rollin, "'Fantastique Ague': The Holy Sonnets and Religious Melancholy," *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986) 131-46. Rollin argues that the poem's last four lines are an attempt "to defend against anxiety by projecting that anxiety onto God, attributing to the Omniscient some uncertainty as to whether he (the speaker) will ultimately attain salvation" (145).