John Donne Journal
Vol. 21 (2002)

"differing" Donne

Edward W. Tayler

H.L. Meakin, *John Donne's Articulations of the Feminine*. "Oxford English Monographs," Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1998. Pp. xiii + 273.

This will not do, though not for the usual reasons. The usual reasons, these days, usually include flagrant acts of personal aggrandizement and ill-concealed attempts at theoretical terrorism, usually in combination; and it is true that in this book every major theoretical formulation but one derives from Luce Irigaray in some of her least consensual moments. Nevertheless, Meakin quite deliberately undertakes to avoid one of those self-congratulatory performances in which the gallophiliac critic rises effortlessly, and complacently, superior to the great poets of the past simply by finding them Politically Incorrect or Gender Insensitive. Meakin explicitly acknowledges "the need for wonder or *admiration* as a response" (paraphrasing Irigaray, as if *admiratio* had no history of its own), the obligation to "treat texts 'with almost infinite respect'" (quoting Catherine Belsey), and the desirability of reading "as if for the first time" (quoting Carol Thomas Neely). These are indeed laudable aims, and they are made to seem even more attractive by Meakin's assertion that wonder and respect permit her to find "ways of balancing the current trend in critical practice"—the trend, she supposes quite rightly, away from "humility" and toward undue confidence in one's own theoretical preconceptions (16-17).

Meakin proposes to "respond" to "three trends": the fuss over "Donne's attitude to women," the "paucity of feminist work on Donne," and the "neglect" of certain "parts of" the "canon." Accordingly, she will devote her first chapter to "Donne's relationship with the Muse in the early verse letters" (sixty pages), her second to the soft-core "Sapho to Philaenis" (fifty-three pages on thirty-two

couplets that have been the focus of a spate of gender criticism over the last fifteen years), her third to an "early epithalamium" (Lincoln's Inn) and the "marriage" sermon on Genesis 2.18 (sixty pages on "marriage, murder, and the maternal"), her fourth on the "nearly anonymous" [sic] Elizabeth Drury (thirty-seven pages on her "sexualization/textualization" [sic] in the most remarkable poetry in the English language between Spenser and Milton). These four chapters—the number of pages lavished on "Sapho to Philaenis" compared to those allotted to *The Anniversaries* goes unexplained—are bracketed by a densely-argued Introduction (twenty-three pages) and a Coda (two pages): Aristotle might feel that this book has a beginning, a middle made up of unrelated parts, and no logical ending.

Meakin, adopting "Irigaray's strategy of 'going back through the dominant discourse' in order to read 'suspiciously' (Turner 1993b: 7) but also from a stance of wonder" (22), plunges into her investigation of Donne's Muse and "Engendering Poetry in the Early Verse Letters." This chapter, like the others, gives the impression in its opening pages of having been written by a diligent instructor of composition determined to teach students to write themes rather than essays (I quote the *propositio* in full to illustrate the kind of mind at work): "In exploring how gender functions in the exchange between poet and Muse, and in the creative process generally, this chapter will be divided into four sections: (1) a theoretical framework which establishes the co-ordinates of my enquiry; (2) a review of the status of the Muse among Donne's contemporaries; (3) an in-depth discussion of Donne's early verse letters and the Muse's role; (4) a brief coda [the book itself ends with an even briefer one] in which I consider the Muse's 'interre [ment]' and Hazlitt's comment as an epigraph for this chapter" (25). Some twenty-five pages farther along we are treated at long last to an analysis of an actual poem ("Shall I goe force an Elegie?"), though not one that modern editors accept as Donne's. Galvanized by this descent to specificity, Meakin then proposes that the "Muse in the early verse letters [is] a domesticated figure" and begins her analysis proper by considering the "group of poems Donne wrote to Thomas and Rowland Woodward," which will "show that even a lesbian Muse who would seem to co-opt both the creative and the procreative functions still figures as a token within masculine exchange, however many different 'positions' the

sexualization of textual production assumes." And how does this sort of thing apply to Donne? "In Donne ... where the Muse is domesticated—either married or widowed—what looks like a kind of Protestant valorization of marriage still maintains the supremacy of male friendship over the love of women ..." (57-58). And indeed, in case anyone had been taken in by that "Protestant valorization," Meakin goes on to "show" precisely what she had set out to show. As indeed she could with just about any other text written at just about any other time. When Scott Fitzgerald writes Max Perkins about his latest "attempt at a big novel" and opines that "I really believe I have hit it, as immediately I stopped disciplining the muse she trotted obediently around and became an erratic mistress if not a steady wife," Fitzgerald meant to amuse Dear Max, as Donne meant to amuse the Woodwards; and any one of us who is not amused and who wants to asseverate that Fitzgerald's "Muse is [not yet] domesticated" (an "erratic mistress") and that *this* "maintains the supremacy of male friendship over the love of women" may do so with complete impunity. All we have to do is tweak the apostrophes to the Muse in the way our theories dictate. It's a win-win situation in which we may have it, whatever it is, either way, as with the "conclusion" to this chapter on the verse epistles: "But even Donne's phallic 'phansie' is never able to banish entirely the feminine Muse from his masculine exchanges [they just can't stop jawing about women in the locker-room?]. Despite the avowed self-sufficiency of, and identification between, male friends, the feminine ... is still indispensable to poetic creativity and the perpetuation of hom(m)osexual culture; 'she' is both there and not there, dead or alive, consigned to '*internal exile*'" (84). In other words (Irigaray's), the muse has been "domesticated," and Donne has been put in his (patriarchal) place.

When I began my first reading of the second chapter, "Lesbian 'Likenesse' in 'Sapho to Philaenis'," I confess that I was bracing myself against the anticipated barrage of *sexe* and *sexué*, *autre* and *même*; but Meakin proved to be more interested, to my relief, in "feminine erotics" (85) and managed to wend her way without recourse to the usual blunt-edged binaries in the course of examining "Donne's articulation of female bodies and desire as it accords with or disturbs the constructs of femininity established through literary exchange between men within patriarchal culture." As a result we will be able to

see that Donne "goes further" than anyone before him in imagining a "female subject" who is not merely a "womb or a seductive mask," not merely Irigaray's "negative" male or "the means of conception, growth, birth, and rebirth of *forms* for the other" (well, yes, there's a little of the usual *autre*, but it's not one of those formulations mouthed by a devoted disciple on verbal autopilot [86]). There is in this chapter, as in the others, a good deal of expository footwork ("The structure of this chapter will be as follows," followed indeed by a page or two of getting ready . . .), and I have to admit that in general I found Meakin's strenuous efforts to be clear a trifle obfuscating (major "thesis" statements occur on pages 1-6, 14, 17, 20-22, 31, 85-88, 144, 148-49, 200, 205, 217-18, and 222, with subordinate theses on pp. 24-25, 29, and elsewhere), especially in this chapter where the complications begin with the authenticity of the poem itself. Grierson had paused over the morality of the epistle, not its authorship; but Dame Helen, as Meakin is well aware, consigns this cellulite poem to the category of "dubia" because it is "uncharacteristic of Donne in theme, treatment, and style"; and goes on to make a number of uncomplimentary remarks, including the observation that its "metrical dullness is matched by the poverty of its vocabulary" (it would be more accurate to say that there is no "poverty" of hackneyed sentiments expressed in hackneyed language). No one would be likely, I think, to take strong exception to these adverse judgments; I would only add, not in any way expecting to command assent, that the poem cannot possibly be by Donne—not because Donne did not toss off callow or careless poems, but because this one, lacking his articulate energy, also lacks his metrical signature. I am not referring to those monotonously end-stopped couplets, to the relative lack of Donnean elision, or even to the absence of "scholasticall quiddities" fashioned into iambic "love-knots." Although one line, and one line only ("Admit the tillage of a harsh rough man"), could have been written by Donne while sober and fully awake, the poetaster who in this instance tried to hold the mirror up to art could not, by accident or intention, repeat his triumph even once more in the other sixty-three lines; it's a matter you see, and have to hear, of the relation of speech stress to metrical ictus—John Donne, his signature or poetical fingerprint.

But Meakin is not the only responsible scholar to suppose the poem to be by Donne, and she goes about as far as is humanly possible in thoroughly reviewing the scholarship (on these as well as other matters) and in carefully developing her "close analysis" of the poem. It seems under the circumstances only fair to give her argument a hearing, though at times it's hard to figure out just what the argument is. There is, to begin with, a good deal of pop, or even gratuitous, psychologizing. Why, for example, did Donne do it? "Perhaps Donne's motivation for writing such a poem is the need, at least metaphorically, to escape from that universal [sic] malady, 'postcoital sadness'. . . . In other words, Donne uses lesbianism vicariously, to compensate for the anticlimax of detumescence, fetishizing lesbianism within an economy of the male gaze. . . . In such a reading he is guilty of a kind of mental onanism, the desire not for *coitus interruptus* but *coitus in aeternum* or, more technically, *coitus reservatus*, in which orgasm is delayed or avoided . . ." (100). The slide—this goes way beyond trendy slippage—begins at "metaphorically," accelerates past "universal" right through "vicariously," and then crashes into the false equivalencies and nonsense of the final sentence; it sure does take one's breath away to watch *coitus in aeternum* (Mae West knew that Too Much Of A Good Thing Is Wonderful) turn into *coitus reservatus* by a sleight of "more technically"! And anyway, if we could indeed agree on a "universal" (*pace* your average male praying mantis), might not one of the best candidates be a "desire" to avoid the "sadness" of *coitus interruptus*, "at least metaphorically"?

Meakin's argument in this chapter, where it does not divagate into psychologizing the (male) author, proceeds by old-fashioned illogic. Sapho, in an entirely conventional manner, proposes to reject conventional similes in praising Philaenis ("Thou art not [*nota bene*, please, this unobtrusive "not"] soft, and cleare, and strait, and faire, / As Down, as Stars, Cedars, and Lillies are."), which prompts Meakin, after a page or two on "blasphemy" and the "micro/macrocosm comparison," to a disquisition on negation, quoting from "Negative Love" and the negative theology of one of the sermons ("we cannot expresse" God). Get it? Sapho uses the word "not," which means that "she is forced to resort to praise by negative comparison." In case you still don't understand the enormous significance of what Sapho is being "forced" to do here, you will find Meakin, in the very next

sentence, citing Irigaray's most famous essay, "When Our Lips Speak Together," and explaining that the "lyrical" Irigaray "has been insisting on negatives in her evocation of love between women," in this way: "And if I have so often insisted on negatives: *not*, *nor*, *without* . . . it has been to remind you, to remind us, that we only touch each other naked" (118, 120-21). From Sapho's entirely conventional "not" to the witty negatives of "Negative Love" to the metaphysical "cannot" of negative theology—and thus to the "not" (meaning "without" clothes) of Irigaray! This goes well beyond Hartleyan associationism . . . Just try to imagine what a graduate-student-with-a-future, trained in this mode of analysis, might do to "My Mistres eyes are nothing like the Sunne"! In any case, this kind of word-surfing allows Donne to emerge, for Meakin at least, relatively not-scathed. Although "Donne's homoerotics . . . are still caught in the mirror of the Same and the Other of the Same . . ., Donne represents homoerotics in a way which Irigaray suggests can be useful in establishing an ethics of sexual difference, regardless of sexual practices. . . ." In fact, it may be that Donne miraculously "comes very close to recognizing" what Irigaray has discovered, that "the 'mystery of relations between lovers is more terrible but infinitely less deadly than the destruction of submitting to sameness'" (137-38). It does seem then that Donne did what he could; at one point—another point—Meakin even observes that Donne "thus seems to pass the 'test' Irigaray imposes" (133). Otherwise, I could discover nothing of moment in this chapter that rises above the superb research and analysis, suitably acknowledged by Meakin, of Janel Mueller (and Stella Revard).

In the third chapter, devoted to "Marriage, Murder, and the Maternal," Donne fares less well when he stands "illuminated" in the glare of Irigaray's dictum "that the 'whole of our western culture is based upon the murder of the mother'"; Meakin "explores Donne's articulations of the maternal feminine" (139-40) in some of the references in the sermons to the creations of man and woman in Genesis and to a "close reading" of the early "Epithalamion made at Lincolnes Inne." The so-called "close reading" is the least interesting part of the chapter, being predictably full of Freud and fury at Donne's figuring forth the Bride as a pleased and "pleasing Sacrifice" (not Freud's Freud, of course, but Lacan's Freud as radically revised by a deeply disaffected Irigaray and absorbed uncritically by a profoundly

affected Meakin). As Meakin puts it, "Woman is thus caught between death and death in the discourse of patriarchy. Irigaray suggests that as patriarchy has constructed her, woman *qua* woman lacks a penis and possesses a 'hole' which threatens man with his own castration. Therefore man confronts 'that fissure (of) woman, against which/whom he can only defend himself by (re-)making her a mother', the place 'where each (male) *one* comes to seek the means to replenish resemblance to self (as) to same'" (185). If this psychoanalytical Irigaraying prompts the "close reading," where does the "close reading" end? Where it, of course, began: "How is woman made in patriarchal society? Through a man's symbolic encounter with the mother in the act of consummation on the wedding night, whereby the original mother who reminds him of death is 'murdered' and replaced with a substitute mother—the wife . . ." (199). As Vonnegut says, And so it goes, . . . though in this instance the "close reading" takes us, as in the other chapters, from square one to square one.

The earlier—weightier, lengthier—part of the chapter invites closer inspection because it's not simply one of those hermeneutical exercises in which a theoretical question moulds a ductile text into the preconceived answer. Here Meakin concerns herself with one—and it is crucial that she virtually ignores the other one—of the two accounts in Genesis of the creation of human beings. In the second chapter God, in the King James Version, has made "every plant of the field" but "there was not a man to till the ground," and so He "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"; shortly thereafter the Lord God acknowledges that it is "not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." The "man" then names the animals, "but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him"; and so "the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam [and] he took one of his ribs [and] made he a woman, and brought her unto the man." This is, of course, the account of creation relied upon by all those crooked-ribbers who want to protest the monstrous regiment of women: unlike the mirror-creation of chapter one, which might be taken to imply the equality of the sexes, this God-as-potter version gives priority to the creation of the male of the species and accords the female—only a piece of him, as it were—subordinate status. Meakin has been attending, however, to Mieke Bal's "brilliant

analysis" of the "original Hebrew text" that builds on "Phyllis Trible's ground-breaking feminist hermeneutics in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*," which provides Bal with the opportunity to show that St. Paul—and, by implication, Donne and Milton, along with Jerome and the translators of the King James Version—"attributes an erroneous priority to maleness." Meakin urges that the "creature which God forms from the dust of the earth is," in Bal's words, "only a species, not an individual," rather an "it" or non-sexual being. Accepting Bal's formulations apparently authorizes Meakin to claim that "we can hold" Donne responsible, even after we acknowledge "that he is following a tradition of over a thousand years," to "standards of accurate (as opposed to selective) translation" (145-46).

The argument may seem at this point to have become a bit tendentious and obscure, and quoting Bal, I can assure you, will not clarify matters in the slightest. Trible's translation, however, in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (78), unfortunately not quoted by Meakin (though we know she believes it to be "accurate" as opposed to Donne's "selective"), may help to bring things into focus (I have left out a few diacritical marks)

> then Yahweh God formed the earth creature [*ha- 'adam*]
> dust from the earth [*ha- 'adama*]
> and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life,
> and *the earth creature* [*ha- 'adam*] became a living *nephesh.*
> (2:7)

That *earth creature* might alarm them in the Bible Belt; but even the conservative E. A. Speiser (Anchor Bible), who uses the traditional "man" in his translation, acknowledges that "earthling" (my favorite) might be a good choice in preserving the etymological pun, in which case it would, however, presumably be a male earthling for Speiser. Trible, nearly always a reliable guide and always ready to re-think even her published conclusions, had started out with the idea, in circulation among a few of the bolder Rabbins and even fewer Renaissance thinkers, of an androgynous Adam, but she had later come to reject this notion in favor of a sexless *earth creature*, a poor "undifferentiated creature," in Meakin's words, "to whom, only later in the story, are gender roles assigned" (145). Given this situation—adumbrated by Trible in 1978, elaborated by Bal in 1986, and accepted without full

understanding by Meakin in 1998 so that "we can hold" Donne responsible for "selective reading"—given this situation, the mind-boggling question, for Meakin, quivers on the horizon: "If Donne's imagination gave rise to a poem like 'Sapho to Philaenis', . . . why did Donne not apply his powers of original thinking and of revision to Genesis" (147) and come to acknowledge that his "use of a term denoting a sexed being is made despite his apparent knowledge that the Hebrew original denotes a sexually undifferentiated creature (at 2:18 [sic: "I will make an help meet for him"]) or an androgynous creature (at 5:2 ["male and female created he them"]), although it is used in other parts of the Hebrew text to indicate the male creature who is eventually named 'Adam'" (145-46). The answer is that Donne did not have the "apparent knowledge" attributed to him by Meakin (and neither did Meakin until she had read Bal) because he could not possibly have believed with Meakin that "*only later* [my emphasis] in the story, are gender roles assigned" (145). For Donne the differentiation into male and female had *already* occurred in the first creation, the mirror-creation of the first chapter of Genesis: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." (Trible also has "male and female created he them," emphasizing that here "*ha- 'adam* is not a single creature who is both male and female but rather two creatures, one male and one female." Meakin, though she does not refer to P and J, knows that there are two creations and presumably knows what Trible knows about this one, but Meakin, straitjacketed in theory, can even assert as incontestable fact, without documentation, that the "two creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2 were 'reconciled' so that the version in Gen. 1:26-7 was considered to be a summary of . . . Gen. 2:7-8; 18-24." But of course Donne and the commentators would not in the ordinary run of things make a "summary" of something that for them had not yet happened, and accordingly Matthew Poole in his *Annotations* glosses the "male and female" creation of 1:27 as "here mentioned by anticipation.") Now if Donne's prophetic soul had only come to apprehend that in the far distant future many scholars would ascribe the patty-cake creation to J (the Yahwist writer), and the "image" creation to P (the Priestly writer) whom Donne read in chapter one but who actually may have been chronologically later than the J of chapter two . . . If only: but Donne, lacking knowledge of the

Documentary Hypothesis, not to mention a reading knowledge of Bal, assumed that chapter one ("one male and one female," in Trible's words) came before chapter two and that in consequence that *earth creature* had already been "sexuated." Donne may have been insufficiently "original" here (certainly he has disappointed Meakin by not rising to the gender heights of "Sapho to Philaenis"), but I think we ought not, under these very particular circumstances, to condemn him in particular of male-chauvinist "selective reading," though certainly no one these days would deny that Donne "participated in the perpetuation of patriarchal culture" (140). In brief, what we wind up with in this chapter, now that the Cold Wars are over, is A Show Trial in which Donne, found guilty of "selective" translation and ignorance of the Documentary Hypothesis, stands convicted of Pauline Christianity.

The fourth and final chapter deals with the Latin epitaph, the Funeral Elegy, and the two Anniversary poems that Donne wrote on Elizabeth Drury. As usual, Meakin has an ambitious number of goals in mind and the expository innocence to pursue them all, though in this instance she confesses at the outset that the amount of material precludes a "close reading." Instead she will "show the potential for a close reading of the poems when we view them as carrying out a textual sexualization of Elizabeth, beginning with her epitaph and ending with *The Second Anniversary*" (200). Subsidiary themes, if indeed they are subsidiary, include the "net Donne casts in constructing his poems," which "lies beyond (if inclusive of) material considerations, in the network [net to network?] of phallocentric discourse's negotiation of the feminine" (201); the claim that "Elizabeth becomes Donne's most complex rendering of the present absence of the feminine," as well as "the means by which Donne illustrates the virtuosity of his own powers of language" (203); the suggestion that "Donne's figuration of the feminine .... masterfully manipulates a Catholic valorization of virginity so as to capitulate to a Protestant ideal of womanhood as wife and mother," "Elizabeth as both *in potentia* as [sic] a Protestant virgin and a Catholic virgin *in perpetua*" (204-05); the question whether "*The Anniversaries* are to be read as preliminary to his career as preacher or as Donne's last attempt to impress his abilities upon a secular imagination in the hope of a patronage appointment, or perhaps both" (208); and so on. Sometimes

the questions, especially when Meakin's "we" seems to vacillate between the editorial and the overly congenial, go nowhere or even have a tee-hee tonality ("Who is this Elizabeth Drury to be so extravagantly launched into immortality and the literary stratosphere, we ask? [201]"), but in any case I can discover no answers in this chapter, nor can I find evidence for the numerous theses. Meakin has taken on too much and has, at best, an imperfect understanding of the poems she seeks to enlist in support of her generalities.

The argument depends for its "evolution" or "carrying out" on Elizabeth's being initially "text-less" and sexless (like the earth creature?) enroute to her "her sexual/textualization" (7), the "textual sexualization of Elizabeth" (200). Sir Robert must been dismayed to discover that his daughter was "'sine sexu', or sexless" (7), and astounded to learn that "her virtuous virginity, her 'sexlessness'—she is 'sine sexu' in the epitaph—and her position on the threshold of womanhood, . . . paradoxically allows Donne poetically to transform her e.g. as the 'Father' who inseminates Donne's 'chast' Muse. . ." (204). This mistranslation, that Elizabeth *is* "sexless," is repeated by Meakin despite her use of Milgate (Irigaray's theories will not allow Meakin to "see" what's in the translation she quotes), who correctly gives that she "lived sexlessly" in order "to restore to God an undefiled body" (229). In other words, if we follow the Latin and Milgate, we find that *sine sexu* has its meaning in relation to one of Donne's conceits: not only had she in her beauty and innocence "vied with the angels" but also she had sought "to excel them" by electing to live *sine sexu*, in this way outdoing them because they cannot *choose* to remain virginal (Donne's angels, unlike Milton's, *are* sexless). The mistranslation produces, as one would expect, misreadings on the way to "her sexual/textualization."

Sir Robert would also have been surprised to learn that at the end of the "Funerall Elegie" Donne "presents her as a blank, no text at all" (208), and Sir Robert would have been appalled or worse (he was a choleric man) to find that Donne's use of pronouns might be taken to insinuate that his daughter was a whore: "Donne refers in line 83 to 'He' who 'come[s] to reade the booke of destiny' and uses a plural pronoun 'their' in line 102 to modify 'blanks', which suggests both 'that booke' (101) and 'her' (102) contain 'blanks' which need to be filled. . . . I am not suggesting that Donne consciously constructs the

reader as male and Elizabeth as a 'blank' text to be 'filled' sexually; this would be to posit ["posit"?] her as a whore . . .; however, I think such a reading is possible" (209). This "possible reading" becomes in a couple of pages the reading, as we are invited to witness (this is, I reckon, The Gaze—but what's the tone?) the "seductive prospect of a young virgin who possesses a slender, see-through body, both a blank space waiting to be filled and a text waiting to be read, with no risk of being engulfed by the castrated mother" (212); and in only a few more pages we learn that the "act of filling these spaces is a kind of rhetorical defloration of Elizabeth which is perpetrated with each act of reading Donne's poem" (218). Read the funeral elegy, get to rape a virgin with a "see-through body." Readers familiar with the "Elegie," however, will instantly appreciate how Meakin has arrived at her misreading: she supposes "their" to refer back nearly twenty lines to the "He" who seeks to "turn the leafe" of Elizabeth's providential book, whereas the "their" of line 102 actually refers to the "They" of the previous line (101), the virtuous "delegates" who, inspired by the "gift of her example," write "vertuous deeds" as her "Legacies" not in *her* "blanks" (makes no grammatical or theological sense) but in "their blanks," thus "filling up" not her "leafes" but "theirs" in imitation of her virtue. (I simply cannot bear to relate in this place what Meakin does to The Anniversaries and such greatly-moving lines as "That one might almost say, her bodie thought.") Although misreading inevitably produces more misreadings (leading to some severe judgments on Donne's naughty habits of "sexual/textualization"), Meakin does manage to close out the chapter, with the help of Irigaray, on an upbeat note, by claiming that "feminist analysis shows that it is possible to meet not in a relation of opposition, but in an embrace so as to form a 'fecund couple'," a "progress of and in love wholly desired by Donne" (240). I got the "relation of opposition" part.

This innumerate reviewer estimates that less than half of the pages in this book contain explicit references to Irigaray; there is even a stretch of thirty-seven pages in the chapter on the verse letters in which Irigaray is seldom if ever mentioned. In the Index Grierson gets four references, Catherine Belsey ten, Margaret Whitford eleven (all to Irigaray), Janel Mueller sixteen, Eve twenty-one, and Irigaray, depending on how one counts, something more or less than sixty (the Bible has around half that many), though her numbers might easily be

doubled by taking into account the many pages where she is paraphrased or quoted without citation; Lacan, quite understandably (he did not do Irigaray proud), does not appear in the Index but Freud does seem to have three references, until one discovers that all three occur in quotations from Irigaray.

Please consider how it adds up. Thirty-seven pages into the first chapter: "What we have in these poems [the verse letters], then, are variations on the scenario [sic] with which, according to Irigaray's strategic reading in *Speculum*, Plato leaves us (and Western culture) in his myth of the cavern: the illusion of male parthenogenesis" (78). And then the conclusion of the chapter relies entirely on Irigaray, quoted but neither named nor cited: not "even Donne's phallic 'phansie'" can "banish entirely the feminine Muse," and the "feminine" proves to be "still indispenable to poetic creativity and the perpetuation of hom(m)osexual culture; 'she' is both there and not there, dead or alive, consigned to [the last words will be Irigaray's] '*internal exile*'" (84). The conclusion of chapter two, which I have quoted earlier, allows that in "Sapho to Philaenis" Donne "comes very close to recognizing" what Irigaray knows about "relations between lovers"(138). The next chapter (marriage, murder, maternal) has for its in conclusion" a paragraph based on two quotations from Irigaray, the second of which runs this way: "Faithless to God, man lays down the law for women, imprisons her in his conception(s).... [Meakin's ellipsis] Woman, who enveloped man before birth, until he could live outside her, finds herself encircled by a language, by places that she cannot conceive of, and from which she cannot escape" (199), followed by a sentence that ends the chapter, so we used to say, in Meakin's own words. Fourth and final chapter, concluding sentence: "Rather, as Irigaray asserts (see 1993a: 148) and Donne's Nethersole sermon and his *Devotions* dedication [sic] illustrate, it is the debt to the mother which is forgotten, and the fecund couples of father and mother, Spirit and Bride, which are still waiting to be recognized" (237). The Coda ends by acknowledging that "Donne might seem a slippery opponent" but that "his work cries out for encounter nonetheless," and we may hope for (the last words in the book) "the 'parousia', the coming of the divine in the 'here and now', 'in and through the body' (Irigaray 1993a: 147ff.), a progress of and in love wholly desired by Donne" (240).

To call Irigaray the presiding spirit of this book would be earthquaking litotes. Perhaps this kind of emphasis may be expected in a book based on "Irigaray's strategy of going 'back through the dominant discourse' to read 'suspiciously'" (22). Meakin on Donne, like Irigaray on Freud, assures us that it is not her "project to naively accuse Donne, 'as if he were a "bastard"' and expect "him to leap outside his cultural milieu and transcend" his times (7), though she finds herself, and the point is important, "reluctant ... to adopt wholeheartedly the new historicist hypothesis that it is impossible for poets to transcend their historical circumstances or literary context" (8): in other words, Meakin finds herself able to praise Donne for his "transcendent" insights into Irigaray in "Sapho to Philaenis" and also to regret—sincerely, or so I think—his inability to ply the empyrean in the other chapters.

Since woman is in this orthodoxy "always defined phallocentrically—that is, against the normative male—as man's opposite" or, in Irigaray's favored terms, "'the Same', and 'the Other of the Same'," women can at best be a "present absence" with no "symbolic order of their own" (13); Irigaray's formula entails relabeling "heterosexuality" as "hom(m)osexuality"—"[a] single [masculine] practice and representation of the sexual" (yes, it's *homme* and *homo* that are parenthetically portentous here [2 n.5], *autre* referring not to the Other Sex but to the Other Of The Same, and so on); and if you haven't been following the mock trinity of Cixous, Kristeva, and Irigaray from the early '70s, you should also note that Irigaray, who broke decisively with Lacan in the mid-'70s and then drifted far from the feminists with whom she used to be loosely associated, has become an original unto herself (powerful, free-wheeling critiques of psychoanalysts and philosophers, casual or non-existent documentation), concerned since the mid-'80s not only with the philosophical tradition and "sexual difference" (for Irigaray, the overwhelming issue of these latter days) but also with social and political reform: she has been talking so directly about "difference" that her apologists, including Meakin, have had to resort, again and again, to the coded locution "strategic essentialism." Meakin confesses early on, and with the odd insensitivity to metaphor (quick or cold) that seems to characterize her thinking, that "If Donne and Irigaray seem unlikely bedfellows [let sleeping proverbs doze], there

are, nevertheless, uncanny similarities of concern in their work, not all of which can be fully explored in this book. For example, both are fascinated by angels in their role as messengers and mediators between the human and divine" (16-17)! This sublimely anachronistic parallel, and those following—both Irigaray and Donne "recognize the shortcomings of Neoplatonic attitudes toward" body and soul and "both explore the symbolism of thresholds"—do not admit of precise resolution, at least in this life. Such "parallels" can exist only in an atemporal realm where abstractions, in the manner of the extreme medieval realists, have a necessary connection with ideas and objects. The book jacket, to take a not entirely unrelated example, sports a fetching reproduction of a portrait of a bare-breasted woman at toilette (School of Fontainebleau, thought by some to be Diane de Poitiers); the implied "parallel"—presumably to Irigaray's *Speculum* and to Sapho's caressing herself in front of her mirror—cannot hold because "Diane" is selecting a ring from her jewelcase and is not looking in the mirror. A woman and a mirror and a woman and a mirror do not in and of themselves constitute a valid parallel.

More than a few distinguished scholars receive gracious thanks in the Acknowledgements: they, and the readers for "The Oxford English Monographs," bear a heavy responsibility for this book, as indeed does the profession as a whole for hundreds of similar books that have appeared with increasing frequency during the past two decades; we have not done well by our students, have not been sufficiently attentive to their arguments and to the words that do their thinking for them. Although Meakin shows herself to be an industrious, well-meaning, and intelligent person (open to "wonder," ready to offer "infinite respect"), she found no truth in her readers and advisors, who failed to help her read Donne (syntax, key words, conceits, antecedents of pronouns) and who apparently lacked the courage to let her know that she was practicing eisegesis rather than exegesis (she knows about "eisegesis" [143-44] but only as somebody else's theoretical problem). They have condoned if not sanctioned a systematic misreading of Donne produced by employing Irigaray's prepotent vocabulary as if it were one of those junkyard machines that turn automobiles into unrecognizable blocks of faux leather, plastic, glass, and steel. This kind of *libido dominandi*, which in Irigaray's terms makes it impossible to recognize the *autre*, has increased exponentially

in scope and force over the last two decades, though doubtless it has been with us forever. Inigo Jones, struck but not struck dumb by the grandeur of Stonehenge, proclaimed in *Stone-Heng Restored* that the monument represented the ruins of a Roman temple, but John Aubrey actually took the requisite measurements and pointed out that, by imposing a Vitruvian pattern (architectural eisegesis) on the "antiquity," Jones "had not dealt fairly: but had made a Lesbians rule [malleable lead ruler; cf. Aristotle's *Ethics* 5.10], which is conformed to the stone: that is, he framed the monument to his own Hypothesis, which is much differing from the Thing itself." As Jones, so Meakin: a John Donne "much differing from the Thing itself."

Columbia University