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Marking the "darke eclipses": Taking Longitude from "Valediction of the Booke" and "Valediction to his booke"

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> . . . what other way have wee,
> But to marke when, & where the darke eclipses bee.[1]

The oldest accurate means of taking longitude requires viewing a lunar eclipse from two different places simultaneously, troublesome if for no other reason than the infrequency of lunar eclipses.[2] John Donne ends his directives in "Valediction of the/to his Booke"[3] with references to the taking of both latitude and longitude, but

[1]The text quoted throughout, except where otherwise noted, is the text of "Valediction to his booke" as it appears in *Poems, by J. D. VVith elegies on the authors death* (London: Printed by M[iles] F[lesher] for Iohn Marriot, and are to be sold at his shop in St Dunstans Church-yard in Fleet-street, 1633), pp. 219–221.

[2]See William J. H. Andrewes, *The Quest for Longitude: The Proceedings of the Longitude Symposium, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, November 4–6, 1993* (Cambridge, MA: Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments, 1996).

[3]I have chosen to use the titles from both the Cambridge University Library Additional MS 5778 (c), referred to by Helen Gardner as C57, and also known as the Balam MS, and from the 1633 *Poems* because it is impossible even to get past the variant titles of this poem without feeling a compulsion to comment on the manuscript arena that encouraged such disparate readings. "Valediction to his booke," suggests that the speaker addresses and takes leave of the book, while "Valediction of the Booke" suggests that the book speaks the farewell. As these variant perspectives—not the only ones possible—suggest, who is speaking, to

alludes to this particular method of longitudinal measurement to contrast the brightness of the lady's thoughts with the obscuring cipher in which she will have written. Following his example she is charged to "vent" her thoughts, while he studies her "height," because though "Sun and starres are fitliest view'd / At their brightest" (60), her thoughts are best assessed when eclipsed by "cypher . . . , or new made Idiome" (21) and he and she stand apart to view them simultaneously. Before there is anything to view, before anything has shone brightly to be obscured, Donne's speaker instructs her in their new methodology and its consequences.

In the rhetorical intimacy of the first stanza we can almost see the speaker—and I think we do imagine it is Donne—lean in to whisper, "I'll tell thee now (deare Love) what thou shalt doe / To anger destiny" (1–2). In the second stanza the speaker does just that; he begins with a command to "Study our manuscripts" (10), which he then carefully defines as "those Myriads / Of letters, which have past twixt thee and mee" (10–11). Once having synthesized those exchanges, she is to "write our Annals," thus providing others with "Rule and example" from the combined evidence or "grounds" of their love. If we read across the texts of the Cambridge University Library Additional MS 5778 (c) "Valediction of the Booke" (pp. 61–61v)[4] and the 1633 *Poems, by J.D. VVith elegies on the authors death* "Valediction to his booke" (pp. 219–221) that basic narrative structure remains intact. In either version, a male reader might well imagine eavesdropping on a master,[5] while a female reader tends to assume a more active role, drawn in as the "deare Love" being addressed.

My own gendered subject position matters here because one of these two variants invites me in while the other dynamically excludes me from an active role and, therefore, bars my entrance. In both versions, the

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whom, and about what matter enormously as we attempt to "mark when and where the dark eclipses be."

[4]As H. J. L. Robbie describes this manuscript, "Of its 133 folios, ff. 2–77b are a MS. collection of John Donne's poems; the remaining folios contain sundry seventeenth-century medicinal and theological observations, and inaccurate texts of a few popular seventeenth-century poems" ("An Undescribed MS. of Donne's Poems," *The Review of English Studies* 3.12 [1927]: 415).

[5]If we assume a heterosexual speaker, and with Donne there is ample evidence that we should, then male readers assume a voyeuristic role in this tableau.

reader gains (or is denied) entry to the world of the poem through the initial ideological filter posited in the first stanza. Based upon their divergent constructions of female value in the framing worldviews of these texts, "Valediction of the Booke" (Add. MS 5778 [c]) relegates the female to passive subjectivity while "Valediction to his booke" (1633 *Poems*) relinquishes patriarchal authority and promotes mutuality, equality, and a kind of divine mystery to the power that their intellectual communion affords.[6] To assess the dark eclipses in these variant texts we must stand in both those places at once.

The philosophical divergence observable in these two versions may be distinct revisions by John Donne. If that is what we have here, my fondest hope is that the 1633 revisions are John Donne's final thoughts on the subject. The distinctions between these variants may, however, evince the sort of dialectical play that is at once common in manuscript culture and, because of the absence of holographs, problematic in determining that any particular version of a poem is conclusively Donne's. If Donne initially wrote one or the other versions under consideration here (or yet a third), and then sent it to a friend who then dispersed it further among other friends, it is probable that one or more of them responded to it—or revised it, copied it, or "corrected" it, to suit him or herself. Textual indeterminacy is but one of many characteristics that makes reading across variants of Donne's texts so compelling; however, in this instance the presence or absence of an active female subject serves as the very source of obscurity, mystery, and dark eclipses in this verse. If, as the manuscript variant insists, his "deare Love" is nothing more than a Muse, then this verse does little more than a thousand other hyperbolic panegyrics to patrons; it promises a woman

[6]The speaker's emphasis on the intellectual communion evinced by their collected manuscripts, "those Myriad of letters which have past twixt thee and mee," while far from ignoring the sexual relationship between himself and the woman he addresses, does distinguish their *written* exchange as the stuff of which their "Annals" are made and their posterity assured. As Margaret Maurer argues, there was a similarity between Donne's poetic negotiations with Lucy Harington Russell, the Countess of Bedford, and hers with powerful members of the court that appears to have included a mutual respect for the other's delicate required dance ("The Real Presence of Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, and the Terms of John Donne's 'Honour is So Sublime Perfection,'" *ELH* 47.2 [Summer 1980]: 205–234).

immortality through masculine, poetic finesse. If instead the woman addressed is the active, female subject found in the 1633 *Poems*, we may with some assurance identify her.

Considering a few verbal variants in the first stanza of this poem, we can see that a verse's solitary splendor gains from the vitality of conflicting textual witnesses. My choice of variants is to some extent arbitrary, though they represent the text of the first edition (a "Group II" text), and an editorially designated "Group I" manuscript—those closest in text to the first edition.[7] The substantive verbal variation in the initial stanzas makes their replication here essential. First considering "Valediction to his booke," from the 1633 *Poems*, we see that the speaker offers his dear Love a glory that will "out-endure" all precursors:

> Ill tell thee now (deare Love) what thou shalt doe
> To anger destiny, as she doth us,
> How I shall stay, though she Esloygne me thus
> And how posterity shall know it too;
> How thine may out-endure
> Sybills glory, and obscure
> Her who from Pindar could allure,

[7]These are not the only extant versions of this poem; however, the variants offered here should be considered as examples of the extent of intentional verbal variation available in some early modern manuscript texts. Although we would hardly expect to find any of these scribal offspring in peaceful textual co-existence, we might discover a great deal about early modern arguments among and between interest groups by comparison of their "readings." These manuscript "witnesses" attest to the existence of independent circles that incorporated individual wits into their own negotiational praxis. When, therefore, disagreement is perceived among manuscript "witnesses" we have ascribed to a particular author, we should not be so quick to resolve that argumentation. Groups that served simultaneously to critique and to collaborate are themselves worthy of investigation. Through simultaneous investigation of these artifacts we may find what Harold Love has observed of the Osborn b. 105 Manuscript, that, "Poetry, along with sceptical philosophy and practical debauchery, was the bonding agent of . . . group[s] whose ultimate rationale was political" (*Scribal Publication in Seventeenth Century England* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1995], p. 225).

> And her, through whose help *Lucan* is not lame,
> And her, whose booke (they say) Homer did finde, and name.
> (p. 219)

In this version of the first stanza, the speaker instructs his "deare Love" in the act of writing, describing it as the best method of "anger[ing] destiny" (1–2). Although this first stanza has often been represented as one in which women inspire the masculine activity of composition, in this version the speaker claims that this woman will "out-endure" and "obscure" other female writers: the sybils, whose divinely inspired orations were "translated" by male priests; Corinna the Boetian, who taught Pindar to write and who defeated him five times in poetic contests; Polla Argentaria, who helped her husband, Lucan, write *Pharsalia*; and Phantasia of Memphis, legendary author of an epic poem that Homer "found" and "named" *The Iliad*.

These women are all authors, variously obscured themselves by the men who eventually command their texts. The Sibylline Books were translated by fifteen men; Corinna's instruction and conquest of Pindar are remembered, but it is his verse that survives; and Lucan is credited with the "corrected" text. However, Homer's "debt" to Phantasia—her work of *The Iliad* claimed by him—is recognized as his work in its totality. These women writers appear to be offered as a challenge and a threat to the speaker's "deare Love" as they display the progress of masculine aggression toward female writing. Before the speaker commands her to "write," he has provided a lengthy preamble with examples of women who wrote and whose words were then obscured by male authors. And yet the speaker insists that he will "stay," remain or endure even as "destiny" or Fate removes him, not within the monument of *his* verse but through *her* synthesis of *theirs*.

Significantly, her pre-writing assignment, the method by which she will "obscure" and "out-endure" her precursors, is to "Study *our* manuscripts, those Myriades / Of letters, which past twixted thee and mee" (10–11) and "Thence write our Annals" (12). Not simply a challenge and a threat to eventually subsume her work, however, his schooling of her here should ultimately produce a lasting legacy to mutuality—joint, collective artistry made possible through their love, by the evidence of their love (their verse letters), and once their exchange is synthesized and their "annals" written, a teaching tool for love: "To

make, to keep, to use, to be these [Love's] Records" (18). This version of the writing process provides a forum for obscurity in which it becomes increasingly difficult to determine the source of literary creativity and authority beyond its dialogic collectivity. This monolith to mutuality is a radical departure from typical masculine offers to erect a monument to feminine virtue.

My reading of the 1633 text as considerably more than a progressive threat to female writing and as an assertion of communal authority is dependent upon the reading made available in Additional MS 5778 (c). In this manuscript, women are purely inspirational figures; the women alluded to are not authors, and there is, therefore, no masculine threat toward the work of those women because there is no work, and no ambiguity about the locus of composition or authority.

> Ile tell thee now, (deare love) what thou shalt doe,
> To anger destinye, as shee doth us,
> How I shall stay, though shee Eloyne Mee thus,
> And how posteritye shall know it two[8]
> How thyne may out-endure
> Sybills Glorye[9], and obscure

[8]While I am reluctant to make much of bizarre spelling in early modern manuscripts, use of this particular spelling of "two" rather than "to" or "too" is interesting since the line reads "they shall know it two," perhaps further evidence that even in this variant both lovers matter.

[9]The legends and narratives of Greece and Rome that surround collective or individual sibyls, the prophetic leaves and the Sibylline Books, especially as the Cumean Sibyl (and others) were transferred and transformed by Christianity, are so confused as to confound an attempt to interpret with any certainty Donne's allusion. Perhaps he refers to the collective sibyls. If so, it may simply be a generic classical reference to prophetesses who predicted the birth of a savior and which Christians took up as pagan foreknowledge of the birth of Jesus. However, other internal textual evidence of obfuscation and cipher indicates that Donne refers to the Cumean Sibyl. The level of obscurity to which his lover's writing must aspire, the cipher in which she is to write, point to the figure of the Cumean Sibyl.

Like the Sibyl's prophetic leaves, written and scattered, and therefore lost, the speaker's lover is charged to create an uninterpretable text. As we place the idea of their "annals" and "his book" against this allusion it is difficult not to also consider the burning of six of the Sibyl's nine prophetic books when Tarquinio

Her who from olld allure,
And through whose helpe Lucyan[10] ys not lame,
And her whose looke (they say) honor did find and name;
(p. 61)

The individual variations are few here, but their force is enormous. This version identifies "Her who from olld allure"—the classic example of allure, Helen of Troy—for whose description Lucan is so famous, perhaps because it was included in the catalogues of medieval encyclopedists such as Matthew of Vendôme as a tropical description of beautiful woman, whose "looke" is given the blame for launching a thousand ships, and prompting the narrative of *The Iliad*. Although Lucan may still be present in this version, Homer, Corinna, Polla Argentaria, and Phantasia are instead a series of allusions to Helen of Troy. When the speaker "stays" in this variant, it is his masculine authority that remains in residence. The sources of authority and inspiration are much clearer in this version. The woman, even the most beautiful woman, is nothing more than a muse for masculine creativity. This scribal source steals her "book" and leaves her with a "look," the female gaze that inspires masculine action. She no longer writes and he no longer steals; rather he writes and her feminine allure instigates the conflagration.

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refused her demand for payment. The irrevocable loss of six of her nine books hangs in the air around this allusion. Written in verse, and obscured by their prophetic nature, what was lost as the Sibyl systematically fed her prophetic verses into the fire—and what have we missed by not examining his book, her act, and this valediction across the extant variations?

[10]The suggestive, though inconclusive, evidence that this variant alludes to Greek rhetorician Lucian rather than the poet Lucan may indicate a reference to Lucian's "The Book Collector," in which he criticizes the book collectors who have no understanding of the contents of the books they wrap with calfskin and purple velvet. While there appear to be some faint echoes of that work, it is far more likely a generic response to the collecting of Donne's poetry by those beyond his inner circle of intimates. In many letters Donne expressed discomfort with his lack of control over who might attempt to interpret or simply who would misunderstand his work should be considered as well. Like Lucian, Donne critiques the fraudulent posers: lawyers and statesmen "(or of them, they which can read)."

The distinctions need not be enormous for us to begin to see that the conflicting textual witnesses do not always agree upon a particular idea within the poem—women writers and authority, for example—and that scribal error and memory lapses do not account for their substantive variation. In these examples, historical and legendary figures appear or disappear, adjusting the focus of the poetic argument, not only within that particular reading, but also between variants when they are read together. There is no doubt that the 1633 version of this poem came from a transmissional environment that also created Additional MS 5778 (c)*;* that both have the same authorial source I question.[11]

That the foundation of the lovers' collective authority is their love seems most significant to the argument of the 1633 version. As in so many other instances, Donne expresses his desire for and recognition of intimacy through the exchange of manuscripts.[12] Those letters, and most especially those verse letters,[13] that passed between friends and lovers,

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[11]As Love has suggested of other manuscripts, there is considerable evidence that these versions represent different ideological groups, and that these groups refigured verse to suit their own "sense" of what the poem and women should or should not do. As this and other manuscript examples indicate, women were involved in this textual discourse in manuscript culture. Women were active participants in this argumentative converse in manuscript; if for no other reason, these versions should not be conflated into a single edited text, or their variations relegated to a textual end note. In "Old Renaissance Canons, New Women's Texts: Some Jacobean Examples," Barbara Keifer Lewalski argues that "While these Jacobean women [Aemilia Lanyer, Rachel Speght, and Lady Mary Wroth] did not of course float free of their society with its repressive ideology and institutions, they did manage to claim an authorial identity and write their resistance while embedded within that society, indicating that inner resistance and critical consciousness can develop even when ideological conformity is rigorously enforced" (*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 138.3 [1994]: 406).

[12]The unique characteristic here is the gender of the addressee. Whereas Donne's letters to male friends inscribe an intimacy through this intellectual exchange in manuscript, the typical stance of Donne's male speakers when addressing female lovers, however witty, lack the mutuality we so frequently see when he speaks man-to-man.

[13]In "'Thus Friends Absent Speake': The Exchange of Verse Letters between John Donne and Henry Wotton," Ted-Larry Pebworth and Claude J. Summers argue that Donne's verse letters were "Fundamentally referential and occasional

serve as evidence of their intimacy. One of his more famous remarks on the subject declares, "Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls," and it is that commingling which blurs the distinction between the speaker and his love. In a letter to Henry Goodere, included in *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* (1651), Donne claims that instead of sending a letter to Goodere he has sent one to Lucy Russell, the Countess of Bedford. It would appear that the prose epistle to Goodere enclosed a verse epistle to the Lady, as Donne claims that the one he has sent the Countess is "the last which you shall see *of this kind*."[14] Not only does Donne seem to discount the prose introduction that enclosed the verse letter to the Countess, but he also notes that it is a response to hers which itself was a response to another of his: ". . . instead of a letter to you, I send one to another, to the best Lady, who did me the honour to acknowledge the receipt of *one of mine*, by *one of hers*" (p. 117, emphasis mine). It is within this context that Donne then claims that Lucy Russell "hath power to cast the fetters of verse upon my free meditations" (p. 117). Her verse epistle to Donne has provoked another from him. It is her poetic "power" that forged the "fetters of verse" on Donne. Like the speaker in "Valediction of his booke," Donne claims that their exchange of verses imprisons his meditations. This evidence of their verse exchanges suggests that John Donne and Lucy Russell may well have engaged in just the sort of practice that would create a manuscript book of their communion.

Her book/his book/their book/"This Booke" (19) that inscribes and contains the raw stuff of their annals is at once their "all-graved tome"

. . . necessarily rooted in external reality. Hence, full appreciation of any particular verse letter requires knowledge of the contexts from which it arises" (*Modern Philology* 81.4 [1984]: 361). Non-epistolary verses were sometimes equally topical, occasional and referential and, as in this case, referred to those very verse letters about which Pebworth and Summers require greater contextual information.

[14]Quotation taken from *Letters to severall persons of honour written by John Donne . . . published by John Donne, Dr. of the civill law* (London: Printed by J. Flesher for Richard Marriot, and are to be sold at his shop, 1651), p. 117 (emphasis mine). All further quotations from this letter and other letters in *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* are from this edition.

(20),[15] their grave, their volume, and the engraved monument to them.[16] Like the "grace" (17) that Love—their love, not only the classical god—has afforded them, the tome is "writ" in "cypher" because the outsider can no longer distinguish the he and she. No mere hyperbole, the reader who actually "sees" (17) and understands what she has created from their mutual exchange will comprehend the exceptional connection that simultaneously makes, keeps, uses and is (18) Love's "Records." The strength of this idea relies in part on the masculine speaker's relinquishment of control. Their love has the power to create a haven within which all "Learning were safe" (26) from barbaric invasion. That becomes even more apparent as he goes on to enumerate all those who will benefit from her record of their exchange.

Hidden within this tome, obscure to the uninitiated, the self-important, and the shallow, can be found all that is required in the world. They, through their imagined book, serve as the "instruments" (22) for love's clergy. "Loves Divines . . . may finde all they seeke" (28–29). "Lawyers" may "finde" (37) more than all their legal books can hold. Instead of relying on precedent, law, "titles," "subsidies" and "prerogatives," lawyers may find a record and example that relies on a mutual and equal exchange. Instead of laying claim to "mistresses" by contractual means, if lawyers but look into this mystical book they will

[15]Because of Donne's proclivity for word play, it is impossible not to recognize that "this all-graved tome" is, with a slight adjustment in spacing, "this all-graved to *me*"—a variant found in some manuscripts, but not present in either of these. This book that she will write serves as a monument to him, an inversion of the more traditional poetic stance in which the male poet enshrines the lady with his verse.

[16]We see this construct of the male poet seeking preservation, even immortality, through the higher author-ity of a female patron in John Donne's verse letters to the Countess of Bedford. For example, in "To the Countesse of Bedford, Begun in France but never perfected," Donne begins with, "Though I be dead, and buried, yet I have / (*Living in you*,) Court enough in my grave" (in W. Milgate, *John Donne Satires, Epigrams, and Verse Letters* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967], p. 104, emphasis mine). In a more traditional vein—with male poet preserving the lady's virtue, but deploying the same metaphor—Donne insists that, "Verse embalmes virtue; 'and Tombs, or Thrones of rimes / Preserve fragile transitory fame, as much / As spice doth bodies from corrupt airs touch" ("To the Countesse of Bedford At New-yeares Tide," 13–15, in Milgate, p. 99).

find that legal coercion actually destroys a relationship because a contract can only be formed by a valid offer, acceptance, and consideration.[17] "Transferred from Love himself" supremacy now resides in covenant with "womankinde" (40).

The repetition of "Here" echoes and introduces the middle three stanzas. "Here Loves Divines . . . may find" (28–29); "Here . . . may Lawyers finde" (37); "Here Statesmen . . . May . . . finde the grounds" (46–47). And we are reminded that "here" is also, quite possibly, *here* within the poem we are reading. Although there is no conclusive evidence, one explanation for the insistent repetition of "here" within the poem—with "here" the actual location of discovery—is if this poem was composed to accompany a collection of Donne's verses, even perhaps a collection of verse letters between himself and the female recipient of the "book" to which he writes this valediction.[18] The recipient may have received a manuscript book of their exchanges along with this poem.

Patricia Thompson's enumeration of John Donne's relationship with Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford, begins simply with the observation that they "had much in common," and proceeds to the observations that, "She was a learned lady, with a knowledge of classical antiquities and of painting. Florio praised her skill in French and Italian. Donne, in sending her a volume of French poetry from Paris, and in addressing to her some argumentative, learned and theological epistles, was paying due tribute to what Jonson called her 'manly soul'. She was indeed a fit companion for men."[19] More than simply a "fit companion,"

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[17]I would like to thank Alastair Gamble for providing me with a greater understanding of the subtleties of legal prerogative in contract law.

[18]Coincidentally, the younger Donne mentions in the dedication to *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour* that "it may be some kinde of Prophecy, of the continuance, and lasting of these Letters, that having been scattered, more then Sibyls leaves, I cannot say into parts, but corners of the World, they have recollected and united themselves, meeting at once, as it were, at the same spring, from whence they flowed, but by Succession."

[19]Thompson, "John Donne and the Countess of Bedford," *The Modern Language Review* 44.3 (1949): 329. As Thompson later observes, "It is difficult to discern, through the maze of conventional compliments, to what extent the Countess of Bedford really was an 'inspiration' to Donne, and to what extent she represented to him simply a means to advancement" (p. 330). Subsequent scholarship suggests that, as in all things with Donne, it is not simply one or the

Lucy Russell was sued by Donne in many other instances than "Valediction to his booke" not simply for patronage and profit, but to enshroud him. In his dedicatory to "Epitaph on Himselfe" accompanying his verse letter "My Fortune and my choice this custome break. . ." Donne begins:

> MADAME,
> That I might make your cabinet my tombe,
> And for my fame, which I love next my soule,
> Next to my soule provide the happiest roome,
> Admit to that place this last funeral Scrowle.
> Other by Testament give Legacies, but I
> Dying, of you do beg a Legacie.[20]

Employing the same language we see Donne use elsewhere to describe the place he keeps the manuscripts of his friends, he begs of Lucy Russell that she will "make [her] *cabinet* [his] tombe" (1), and provide "the happiest roome" for "this last funeral Scrowle" (4). The preservation he seeks, the haven he himself offered to the papers of his friends, is "that place" in her cabinet where we must assume she harbored other of his, and perhaps her own, verses and verse letters.

If we remember the letter to Lucy Russell in which Donne requests verses she had shown him in her garden at Twickenham, we will recall that they are verses she had made, and that many scholars have assumed were written as compliment to Donne's writing.[21] We have always drawn

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other; instead, their common interests undoubtedly made Donne's suits for her patronage less loathsome than they might otherwise have been. For the Countess's part, we may assume with Lewalski that "Unlike her male poet-clients, the countess' effort to claim the role of witty amateur poet is hardly a move to advance her career. Evidently she found the activity empowering and pleasant and (in her own circle at least) a means to gain a reputation for the wit and sprezzatura long expected of male courtiers" ("Writing Women and Reading the Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 44.4 [1991]: 800).

[20]In Milgate, p. 103.

[21]Donne's letter is brief and worth replicating here:

> *To the Countesse of Bedford*
> I do not remember that ever I have seen a petition in verse, I would not therefore be singular, nor adde these to your other papers. I have yet adventured so near as to make a petition for

the conclusion that the Countess of Bedford complimented Donne's verse. I would like to suggest that it is equally likely that she complimented the man. He "begs" them of her,

> except you repent your making, and have mended your judgement by thinking worse, that is, better, because juster, of their subject. They must needs be an excellent exercise of your wit, which speake so well of so ill: I humbly beg them of your Ladyship, with two such promises, as to any other of your compositions were threatenings: that I will not shew them, and that I will not believe them; and nothing should be so used that comes from your brain or breast.
>
> (p. 67)

The "subject" about which she may have mended her judgement could as easily have been the man as his verses. Otherwise, Donne's use of "threatenings" is a perplexing choice. How would compliments to his verse pose a threat to the Countess or her judgement? Many of his contemporaries acknowledged Donne's poetic prowess, and did so in verse. But Donne promises not to "shew" these he requests from her; nor, he assures her, will he "beleeve them." His final assurance is that he will

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> verse, it is those your Ladyship did me the honour to see in *Twicknam* garden, except you repent your making, and have mended your judgement by thinking worse, that is, better, because juster, of their subject. They must needs be an excellent exercise of your wit, which speake so well of so ill: I humbly beg them of your Ladyship, with two such promises, as to any other of your compositions were threatenings: that I will not shew them, and that I will not believe them; and nothing should be so used that comes from your brain or breast. If I should confesses a fault in the boldnesse of asking them, or make a fault by doing it in a longer Letter, your Ladyship might use your style and old fashion of the Court towards me, and pay me with a Pardon. Here therefore I humbly kisse your Ladyships fair learned hands, and wish you good wishes and speedy grants.
>
> Your Ladyships servant
> J. Donne
>
> (*Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, p. 67)

not "use" anything that comes from her "brain or breast"—one final, careful distinction between the creatures of her mind and heart.

Extending the protective, even Edenic, walls of a pre-lapsarian garden, Donne creates a haven for her verses and their subject, where learning is safe from the barbarians. Not insignificantly, Donne's "Twickenham Garden"—a post-lapsarian space with its "spider love"—appears on the page preceding "Valediction to his booke" in the 1633 *Poems*, an order reflected in manuscript sources including Additional MS 5778(c), that contains an untitled "Twickenham Garden," simply beginning with the first line, "Blasted wth sighes and surrounded wth Teares" (p. 60v). Retained by John T. Shawcross in his *Complete Poetry of John Donne*,[22] this arrangement in the seventeenth-century sources indicates that these verses traveled together in manuscripts, and their proximity may indicate that they share a common recipient.

The collection of Donne's poetry included in the Cambridge University Library Additional MS 5778 (c) begins with "INFINITATI SACRUM I6° AUGUSTI I601 METEM-PSYCHOSIS POEMA SATYRICON" and ends with the *Obsequies on the Lord Harington*, a poetic frame that encapsulates Donne's poetic production in the years when he was most intimate with the Countess of Bedford. To this we might add Thompson's observation that:

> Donne had generously offered to write no more poetry after the *Obsequies*:
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> > Doe not, faire soule, this sacrifice refuse,
> > That in thy grave I doe interre my Muse,
>
> and this he meant, if we can judge by a letter to Goodere written shortly after, on 20 December 1614:
>
> > I would be just to my written words to my L. Harrington, to write nothing after that.

[22]Shawcross, ed., *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1967), pp. 115–119.

> Perhaps it was not a difficult promise to make, coming as it did less than a month before his ordination. He may well have decided, in any case, to put poetry behind him.[23]

He may have done. He might also have made and kept a promise to someone who had inspired and encouraged but also provoked and corrected some of Donne's finest poetic production.

We know that Donne composed epistles, verse letters,[24] and poetry to honor the Countess, who at times, as evidence indicates, actively intervened in his poetic production. We have long acknowledged her significance during an extended period of Donne's life. Most importantly, as Margaret Maurer notes in "The Real Presence of Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, and the Terms of John Donne's 'Honour is So Sublime Perfection,'" "the number of poems Donne wrote to her suggests that in Lucy Russell Donne found a correspondent who shared his vision to an unusual degree."[25] Like the woman addressed in "Valediction to his Booke," the Countess was a participating poet and correspondent who produced verses Donne sought out. Clusters of poems addressed to the Countess would naturally be found together in manuscripts and early editions. In this instance, I believe that proximity is one of several indicators that this verse was written to her. Internal textual evidence suggests that it accompanied a collection of his and possibly their "manuscripts" he describes as "Myriads / Of letters" (10–11).

In the version found in the 1633 *Poems,* a female writer is the intended audience. She is charged with the task of synthesizing the evidence of their love to construct a monument to them that is so obscure as to be almost indecipherable. This new sibyl—the metaphor reverberates long after the early mention—creates the unreadable book that memorializes their love. We are left to wonder why such obscurity was required; if, however, we view his directives from across the two distinct variants of this poem, our measurement allows us to conclude that evidence found in both indicates manuscript sources are the raw materials with which she must work. As he bids farewell to the

[23]Thompson, p. 331.
[24]See Milgate.
[25]Maurer, p. 214.

manuscript book he sends with this poem, as he relinquishes his, he demands hers. What only the 1633 variant offers us is her equal contribution to the essential fabric of her sibylline book—the leaves of *their* manuscript verse exchanges.[26]

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