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Purer Spheres: The Space Systems of Donne's Courtly Epithalamions

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When discussing John Donne's interest in astronomy, scholars often quote the following lines:

> And, were the doctrine new
> That the earth mou'd, this day would make it true
> For every part to dance and revells goes
> They tread the Ayre and fall not where they rose.[1]

This passage is a good example of Donne's ability to exploit his knowledge of modern cosmic debate to rich poetic effect. By applying the vexed motions of the planets to the equally complex movements of human beings, the verse juggles dancers, Ptolemy, and Copernicus with a deceptively light hand. The passage is, in fact, from "*Eclogue*. 1613. *December* 26," also known as the Somerset epithalamion, a poem that, like Donne's other courtly epithalamion, "*Epithalamion Vpon* Frederick *Count Palatine and the Lady* Elizabeth *marryed on S.t Valentines day,*" has received attention as a court-marriage offering with complex social undertones, but, in spite of the hint in the above lines, not as part of Donne's continuing exploration of the cognitive and imaginative

[1]Donne, "*Eclogue*. 1613. *December* 26," in *The Epigrams, Epithalamions, Epitaphs, Inscriptions, and Miscellaneous Poems*, ed. Ted-Larry Pebworth, Gary A. Stringer, and Ernest W. Sullivan II, vol. 8 of *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, ed. Gary A. Stringer et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), lines 186–189. All subsequent quotations from Donne's epithalamions are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically by line number.

significance of spaces and places. My analysis draws attention to an overlooked common element of these two poems—the pervasive use of spatial imagery that mirrors the physical and spiritual transformations attending each marriage—and examines how these celebratory marriage offerings experiment with the capacity of spaces and places to reflect social and psychological realities.[2] I argue that Donne's lifelong intellectual and imaginative preoccupation with what Lisa Gorton calls "the shape of space"[3] informs the formal and thematic structures of Donne's courtly epithalamions to the point where they are not only commemorations of how marriage can anchor universal structures, but meditations on how the structure of space shapes human life and thought.

Written within a year of each other for marriages celebrated within months of each other, the courtly epithalamions share both thematic and formal common ground. Both utilize the natural imagery of birds, bodies, stars, fires, and seasons to map out the boundaries of their worlds;[4] both treat marriage as a union so powerful it can dissolve and reshape those boundaries, and both marriages were conceived and celebrated at the court of King James. James, indeed, is an insistent

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[2]Donne's earliest epithalamion also deals in imaginative ways with the use of physical and imagined spaces as tropes for the social construction and limitations placed upon the body during the marriage ceremony, but without the close dating, court pressure, common themes, and call-and-response imagery shared by the courtly epithalamions. For further discussion, see H. L. Meakin, *John Donne's Articulation of the Feminine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 139–199; Allen Ramsey, "Donne's 'Epithalamion made at Lincolne's Inne': The Religious and Literary Context," in *John Donne's Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of John T. Shawcross*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain and Frances M. Malpezzi (Conway, AR: UCA Press, 1995), pp. 96–112.

[3]Gorton, "John Donne's Use of Space," *Literature and Geography*, spec. issue of *Early Modern Literary Studies: A Journal of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Literature* 4.2 (1998): 27 paragraphs <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/04-2/gortjohn.htm>.

[4]As Heather Dubrow notes, the instinct to "naturalize" marriage is not confined to Donne's treatment of the genre: "anxieties about the workings of marriage made poets especially eager to naturalize wedlock" (*A Happier Eden: The Politics of Marriage in the Stuart Epithalamion* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990], p. 116).

absent presence in both epithalamions, as one celebrated his daughter Elizabeth's marriage to the Elector Palatine, the other his favorite Robert Carr's marriage to Lady Frances Howard three months after her scandalous divorce from Lord Essex.[5] They are clearly poems commissioned for court, with an eye towards impressing potential patrons, but they are not, as they have been sometimes characterized, straightforward exercises in flattery. On the contrary, the poems' attitudes towards the court's influence on these marriages are at best ambivalent: the court is superfluous but inoffensive when, as in the Palatine epithalamion, it is safely subordinated to more important spheres, but becomes dangerously destructive when, as in the Somerset epithalamion, it is granted too central a position in the universal scheme.

I argue that the Palatine epithalamion offers an idealized conception of a courtly marriage that, by affirming the interdependency of natural, political, and spiritual spheres, ensures the harmonious stabilization of its cosmos. By contrast, the Somerset epithalamion depicts its courtly marriage as a locus of such overwhelming power that it throws an entire universe off-balance. Scholarship on the Stuart epithalamion notes it is a form peculiarly suited to aligning different spheres, be they public, private, physical or spiritual,[6] and these poems exemplify how Donne manipulates these generic foundations to explore the intellectual and imaginative assumptions behind the epithalamion form, namely, the mutually influential relationship between humans and the places they inhabit. In these poems, Donne does not simply celebrate marriage as a reaffirmation of universal hierarchies; he invents new universes to figure forth the different marriages that restore and anchor them.

My analysis draws on both the seventeenth-century astronomical theories that so intrigued Donne for their potential as images of spiritual and mental conditions, and on more current theories of how constructions of space and place inform human experience. Space/place theory is a multifaceted and still largely protean field, with roots

[5]For a full account of the Howard-Essex divorce and the Howard-Carr marriage, see G. P. V. Akrigg, *Jacobean Pageant, or The Court of King James I* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), pp. 180–189.

[6]For a full discussion of this aspect of the epithalamion genre, see Dubrow, pp. 107–150; see also Meakin's discussion that the epithalamions are "the middle ground where [Donne's] struggle between private and public [spheres] is most apparent" (p. 143).

stretching back to fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of reality and how the human mind apprehends and experiences that reality. My discussion utilizes space/place theory to help articulate how human beings demarcate and arrange the worlds they inhabit, and the ways such demarcations illuminate our understanding of how far the universe shapes, and is shaped by, human thought. One heuristic device of space/place theory I will employ is the idea that "places" should be distinguished from "spaces" as conceptual models. Although scholars of space/place theory define these terms in a range of ways, a familiar formulation is that "space" is the unbounded, unformed "realm of atemporal physical extension,"[7] unencumbered by any cultural, mental, or emotional constructions, while "place" denotes a particular and bounded arena formed and understood emotionally, intellectually, or culturally.

These terms have nothing to do with size or proximity to humanity, but rather with the extent to which space is mapped and cordoned off by human thought: the crystalline sphere of Ptolemaic astronomy is just as much a "place" as Westminster Abbey, because it is a clearly delineated area, definable in relation to other places that exist around and in it. Space, on the other hand, is at once more fundamental and unstable; because of this it is not always easy to define where place ends and space begins. As Edward S. Casey observes, the common assumption of space as "some empty and innocent spatial spread waiting . . . for cultural configurations to render it placeful," is seriously compromised and complicated by "the phenomenological fact of the matter [that] *space and time come together in place* . . . [and] arise from the experience of place itself."[8] Depending on the context in which one defines it, space surrounds every place and is contained in every place; it can contract or dilate, is infinitely divisible and potentially inexhaustible. It may be a void, or simply an unexplored dimension; like the untraveled world of

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[7]J. E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 23. For further discussion of the history of these terms, see also Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso, eds., *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996); and Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, and Gill Valentine, eds., *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (London: Sage Publications, 2004).

[8]Casey, "How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena," in *Senses of Place*, pp. 14, 36.

Tennyson's Ulysses, its margin fades forever when you move, whether it extends outside of all places or is produced within them.

Reading the courtly epithalamions through the vocabulary of this spatial theory, I argue, sheds new light on the depth of Donne's imaginative preoccupation with space, place, and cosmography in these works. As previous scholarship on Donne's use of astronomy and cosmology in his writings has shown, Donne was quick to capitalize on the exciting instability created by the coexisting and contradictory spatial models of the early seventeenth century, while also articulating the anxiety such rival theories produced.[9] Within Donne's lifetime, there had not yet been time for many to reorient themselves in relation to a suddenly strange universe: "the Sunne is lost, and th'earth, and no mans wit, / Can well direct him where to looke for it."[10] A universe with the sun at its center, or with no center at all, was profoundly disorienting, since a new understanding of the universe inevitably demands a new understanding of humanity as a product and inhabitant of that universe. Donne taps into the disquieting sensation that the contours of the universe were being daily reshaped by the hand of man in *The First Anniuersary* to convey the bleak apprehension of those watching how "in those constellations there arise / New starres, and old do vanish from our eyes: / As though heau'n suffred earth-quakes, peace or war, / When new Townes rise, and olde demolish'd are" (259–262). Donne revisits this same anxiety a few years later in the Somerset epithalamion's dark vision of a universe re-formed and conditioned by the Jacobean court.

A compelling and useful model in studies on Donne's use of cosmological images has been to view them as derivations of either the older Ptolemaic system, or the newer Copernican one. The distinction

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[9]See C. M. Coffin, *John Donne and the New Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937); John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind, and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); Anthony Low, *The Reinvention of Love: Poetry, Politics, and Culture from Sidney to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[10]Donne, *The First Anniuersary*, in *The Anniversaries and the Epicedes and Obsequies*, ed. Ted-Larry Pebworth, John T. Shawcross, Gary A. Stringer, and Ernest W. Sullivan II, vol. 6 of *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, ed. Gary A. Stringer et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), lines 207–208. All subsequent quotations from *The First Anniuersary* are taken from this edition and will be cited parenthetically by line number.

between "old" and "new" astronomy, and the different ways that they define place and space, is vital to understanding Donne's use of space in his texts. Nevertheless, these two cosmologies are not monolithic alternatives in Donne's writings, but artificial constructions, attributes of which Donne appropriates to create his own poetic and spatial effects. Sometimes these juxtapositions are moderately straightforward, creating what Gorton describes as "perspectival irony" arising from the "contradictions within Donne's spatial imagination."[11] The fully realized spatial systems of the courtly epithalamions, however, are not easily identifiable as Ptolemaic or Copernican; they are Donnean systems, with their own nature, coherence, and consequences. Donne's ability to engage in this form of universe-building was due to the coexistence of these two systems during his lifetime, but they are the first word, not the last, in Donne's imaginative exploration of space and place. By examining how Donne utilizes spaces and places through the original space systems of these poems, we arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the generic innovations of Donne's courtly epithalamions, and by tracing out the worlds they contain, we discover new dimensions of the poems themselves.

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In "*Epithalamion Vpon* Frederick *Count Palatine and the Lady* Elizabeth *marryed on S.t Valentines day,*" Donne imagines an almost ideal marriage occurring in what may be an ideal universe. In the tradition of Stuart epithalamions, the lovers, through the process of becoming one, complete a physical and spiritual circuit that incorporates not only them but their community and their world, entering into their proper place in the universe as they enter into their new roles as husband and wife. This conventional foundation, however, is obscured by a litany of nuptial events that resemble a series of volcanic eruptions, continuously breaking up and out of their conventional confines. As Donne's narrator alternately marvels and encourages, Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine transform and are transformed by a series of natural, cultural and sacred places, expanding into ever-newer spaces until the poem resembles Michel de Certeau's city that is like "a universe that is constantly

[11]Gorton, par. 23.

exploding."[12] Even as it seems that the energy of the royal couple's union might really overthrow the structure of the universe, the poem unexpectedly concludes with "Nature agayne restored" (100). Like a volcanic eruption, what appears to be an alarming, even apocalyptic, event eventually resolves into a stabilizing and fertile one. After the raptures of unification and recreation, the married couple settles back into the matrix of normal society in an act of simultaneous assimilation and enrichment. Though full of transforming spaces, the poem thus finds its stasis in a harmonious balance of places, triumphantly mirroring the equal and equalizing balance of the new couple. The poem's spatial system in this way resembles a Neoplatonic universe model of separate but interdependent places dating from the sixth century, wherein, in Casey's formulation, "ultimately, whole bodies, once they are well arranged . . . become inherent parts of the 'whole universe,' and this universe itself will have its *own place*."[13] In the same way, the ultimate effect of the Palatine marriage, the "Ends of much wonder" (40) looked forward to by the poem, is a universe at once stable and dynamic, where different spheres of love, nature, culture, and community exist in interdependent relation, each part contributing to the harmony of the whole, and the whole allowing for the existence and continuation of the parts.

Donne's portrayal of this marriage as simultaneously triumphant and traditional is unsurprising: the carefully orchestrated marriage of the King's daughter would be less likely to inspire ironical reflection than the openly scandalous Somerset marriage. And yet it is not accurate to dismiss Donne's flattering descriptions of the couple in the Palatine epithalamion as merely cynical; such celebratory praise is the necessary consequence of the poem's premise that there is a vital link between the union of two individuals and the concordance of the universe. This distinction is underlined by the fact that, while the poem extravagantly

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[12]de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 2nd ed., trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 91.

[13]Casey, *The Fate of Place*, pp. 99–100. This spatial model was created by one Simplicius, a Neoplatonic commentator on Aristotle active in the sixth century AD, and is, as Casey observes, remarkable for conceiving of a cosmos in which "place/space is both absolute and relative. Not just both in the sense of an indifferent mixture, but both in the sense of *one through the agency of the other*" (p. 100).

praises the Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine, it draws the line at praising the court. In comparison with the other spheres the couple must pass through, the court gets comparatively short shrift; it is treated like a stuffy antechamber that must be hurried through and left behind. Critics of this poem, notably Heather Dubrow, rightly observe that Donne chooses to downplay the marriage's courtly context in order to emphasize the "private aspects of the wedding,"[14] although Dubrow's generalization from the poem's treatment of the court that the epithalamion more generally "constructs the outside world as a source of intrusion and entrapment" requires qualification.[15] There is more than one "outside world" within the Palatine epithalamion, and the court is exceptional in being the only one of those worlds *not* essential to the healthy interdependence of the Palatine universe.

By constricting the role and importance of the courtly sphere, Donne does not, I argue, merely emphasize the couple's private union, but forges a more direct connection between the poem's individual and communal spaces, allowing the bride and groom to be at once more public and more private than is possible at court. It is the forced perspective of this spatial reconstruction that lets Donne extravagantly praise Princess Elizabeth as "a fayre Phœnix-Bride" (29), and in almost the same breath intimately hail the Elector Palatine as "thy Frederick" (45) and teasingly warn them that their friends will invade their bedchamber "to morrow after Nyne" (111). The epithalamion's spatial system of concentric but overlapping circles of material and spiritual space allows the bride and groom to overleap the middle-ground of court and simultaneously inhabit both the personal and the symbolic spheres, so they are at once themselves and (for a certain length of time) the pivots of the universe. Between such infinitudes as the physical universe or the human soul, the court, one might say, is neither here nor there. More consequential are the natural, cultural, and social communities that can and do limit the couples' private sphere; but, far from being hostile intruders, I argue they do so with Donne's entire approval. The Palatine epithalamion, like many of Donne's love poems, show what Dubrow observes is Donne's "customary commitment to the privacy of love,"[16] but it is unusual among them for

[14]Dubrow, p. 171.
[15]Dubrow, p. 173.
[16]Dubrow, p. 173.

its insistence that love needs to be structured and supported by a wider universe. If love wishes to retain its integrity as a private space, it cannot be a world unto itself (or worse, attempt to annex the rest of the universe into its private realm). It is not an accident that the Palatine epithalamion concludes with the ecstatic world of private love being abruptly, but bracingly, put in its place.

The Palatine epithalamion's opening invocation of "Bishop Valentine" (1) signals its interest in framing the Palatine marriage within a variety of cultural spaces. Valentine is Donne's figurehead for several overlapping spheres—most notably the natural world, but also the more diffuse but influential folk and pagan traditions that reappear at the end of the poem. Valentine, although he is a Christian figure, is not primarily a representative of the Christian sphere (the archbishop of Canterbury appears in that capacity later in the poem); when religious references do pop up in relation to him, they are not doctrinal, but traditional: allusions to popular legends such as the birds that mate on his saint's day, or debates about whether the phoenix made it onto Noah's ark. Valentine's diocese comprises both nature and the "natural" (if not pagan) human tradition,[17] which can harmoniously make space for Christianity (as Christianity can make space for it) but exists as a distinct sphere.

Donne's narrator expansively grants Bishop Valentine authority over "All the Ayre" (2) and a religious community full of sonorous, if unruly, "chirping Queristers" (3). In doing so, Donne indicates how the ceremonies attending marriage—including his own poem—necessarily circumscribe space in the process of defining individual relationships within it. "All the Ayre" is contained within a "Diocese," and the diocese itself demarcated by the birds into so many specific emotional locations, most notably marriage beds, as when "The Husband Cock lookes out and soone is spedd / And meetes his wife which brings her feather bedd" (11–12). In this "natural" state of coupling, the birds exchange the freedom of space for the cosy domesticity of marriage beds, and do not forge new territory in doing so: they "marryest every yeare" (5) and turn open space into narrow place with the regularity of long tradition. The opening stanza thus establishes Valentine's diocese as a familiar, fruitful, but predictable world, whose parishioners reject the boundless

[17]As Dubrow points out, Donne's "evocation of Bishop Valentine [displaces] the pagan Hymen" (p. 170).

possibilities of space for the "cheerefull" (13), but limited, comforts of a marriage bed. However, the last lines hint at the imminent arrival of a more momentous union, that threatens to upend this ancient process, and bring about a St. Valentine's day Pentecost: "This day more cheerefully then ever shine / This day which might inflame thy selfe Old Valentine" (13–14).

Donne's introduction of the main marriage event emphasizes the contrast between Valentine's familiar sphere and the breath-taking unearthliness of Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine: "Till now thou warmdst with multiplying loues / Two Larkes, two Sparrows, or two Doues, / All that is nothing vnto this / For thou this day couplest two Phœnixes" (15–18). The arrival of "two Phœnixes" (18) has all the shock of a fireball entering earth's atmosphere as a harbinger of wider worlds. The phoenix is one of Donne's most famous and enduring images of transformative love; one phoenix would be noticeable enough in Valentine's flock, let alone the doubly impossible presence of two. Besides awakening Valentine to a sense of his own inadequacy (something the narrator does with gusto throughout the poem), the phoenixes' invasion expands the spatial horizons of the poem, taking in not only "All the Ayre" of earth but the larger spaces of the celestial spheres, since the phoenix's own nature mediates between the eternity of the heavens and the mutable fecundity of the sublunary world.

With the arrival of the two phoenixes, Valentine's diocese appears by contrast a small world, cut up into small places and ideas. However, instead of declaring the phoenixes too mythic and miraculous for Valentine's diocese, Donne inverts the reader's expectations by insisting that Valentine's marriage bed is the only place in all the universe that can hold them:

> Thou makst a Taper see
> What the Sunne never sawe, and what the Arke
> (Which was of fowles and beasts the cage and parke)
> Did not contayne, one bed contaynes through thee.
> (19–22)

This passage has received little critical commentary, but it is the turning point of the epithalamion's first movement, and introduces the spatial paradox by which Donne will unfold the significance of the Palatine

marriage to the reader: infinite space can only exist within the boundaries of place. The phoenixes are described in wholly spatial terms, defined by the places that do *not* "contayne" them: they are not earth-bound (the sun never saw them) and were never caught in the cultural constructs of ark, cage, or park (themselves listed within a little cage of parentheses). And yet Donne avers that only "through" Valentine—that is, by submitting to the spatial and temporal bounds of marriage on Valentine's day—can the phoenixes be joined together.

It would be easy to interpret Valentine's miraculously constrictive marriage bed as a comment on the often violently circumscriptive power of marriage, particularly courtly marriage, in early modern culture. Here, if anywhere, the poem may afford a glimpse of the court as a place, in Dubrow's terms, of "intrusion and entrapment,"[18] where private lives are ruthlessly pruned to fit pre-determined places. But even as this vision appears, it is plowed down by the realization that the narrator views the bed as not a prison cell, but a doorway to wider worlds. Only by being bound to the marriage bed can the couple enter into their own universe:

> Two Phœnixes whose ioyned brests
> Are vnto one another mutuall nests
> Whose motion kindles such fires as shall giue
> Young Phœnixes and yet the old shall liue
> Where[19] Love and Courage never shall decline,
> But make the whole yeare through thy day ô Valentine.
> (23–28)

In Valentine's bed, the couple's union is imagined as the synthesis of their physical and psychological space. In Valentine's bed (and nowhere else) they can create for themselves a private spiritual sphere within the "mutuall nests" of their "ioyned brests." As a phoenix nest, this place is also where they will die (in a clear sexual pun) and not only be reborn themselves, but produce new phoenixes. Thus the life, birth, death, and

[18]Dubrow, p. 173.

[19]It is worth observing that variant manuscripts exist in which the "Where" has been changed to "Whose" in line 27, and the "Whose" altered to "Where" in line 25. Without pressing too hard on the significance of these variants, they may provide some indication of how interchangeable place and identity are in this passage. See "Textual Introduction," in vol. 8 of *The Variorum*, pp. 111–113.

rebirth of each phoenix—the whole physical and temporal span of their lives—is contained within his or her partner, so that each of them is nearly literally both themselves and the other, occupying the same space and yet enjoying a larger sphere of perception and response than either could achieve alone: "twice vnseperable, Greate, and one" (50). Moreover, in the act of creating the "mutuall nest" of their private world, the couple create new worlds and new spaces that deepen each other's sphere even as they expand beyond them: their "motion" into each other, in all senses, will result in children, who will, like their parents, possess inner spaces and selves that further deepen and expand the universe; and so they will perpetuate an immortal cycle of expansion that will even affect the boundaries of Valentine's diocese: "Where Love and Courage never shall decline / But make the whole yeare through thy day ô Valentine" (27–28). As Donne's narrator warned Valentine, the couple's private space can "inflame" his diocese, pushing its physical and temporal bonds to their farthest limits, filling up the whole cyclical year with St. Valentine's day.[20]

That a small place inhabited by two lovers can possess the power to reshape the universe is, of course, a familiar trope in Donne's writings. Of all the spaces and places in Donne's poetry, the worlds created by lovers are the ones that have received the most critical attention. Scholarship has mostly focused on the *Songs and Sonets*, which, as Anthony Low argues, "mark not just the discovery, but . . . the invention of an inner space, a magic circle of subjective immunity from outward political threat and from culturally induced anxiety."[21] The superiority of love's private space to any place else in many of Donne's love poems makes it possible to assert, as Gorton does, that often his lovers "do not only stake their rooms of love against the outside world. They take over the outside world . . . they are shut out from the world; they shut out the

[20]Gorton's reading of "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" is a useful counterpoint to this passage's spatial-temporal expansion, as she perceptively notes that the lover of "Valediction" "is trying to get beyond the human condition of time by treating it as a space. . . . He ignores the time intervening between his ending and beginning, and the fact that a lover can return where but not when nor as he began" (par. 26). I would suggest that where the lover of "Valediction" fails, the lovers of the Palatine epithalamion succeed—or at least exist in a universe where success is a possibility.

[21]Low, p. 51.

world; they are the world."[22] The phoenix nest in the Palatine epithalamion is undoubtedly one of Donne's most fully realized "rooms of love" in this sense, but in the generic context of the epithalamion, which observes the marriage from an outside perspective as well as an inside one, the lovers' sphere and what Low calls the "universal bondage of the outer world"[23] are not rivals, but interdependent parts of a single harmonious system. In the courtly epithalamions, it is dangerous for two lovers to shut out or attempt to overthrow the bounds of their universe, not only for the universe's sake, but for the continued existence of their private sphere. As I will argue, the Somerset epithalamion portrays the instability and dissolution which follows when a "lover's room" actually becomes the center of the universe. In the triumphantly stable Palatine epithalamion, it is clear that the private world of the lovers is dependent on the outside worlds that encompass and support it; the phoenixes need the natural, cultural, and political boundaries of the marriage bed to create their nesting-place as much as those spheres need a kindled phoenix nest to rejuvenate their worlds. This is why the narrator urges them, first into Valentine's diocese, and then to church, where "The Bishop stayes / To make you one, his way, which diuers wayes / Must bee effected" (52–53). The Bishop's "way," like Valentine's diocese, is in some ways narrower and shallower than the phoenix nest, but only by submitting to the former can the couple enter into the latter.

By locating the phoenix nest in Valentine's bed, Donne establishes the fundamental structure of the Palatine universe, where the expansive space of private love submits to the bounded arenas of local place in order to achieve its full potential as a locus of transformation and growth. This accomplished, every subsequent movement of the epithalamion unfolds another aspect of the interdependency of the Palatine spatial system, as in the rising and arraying of the bride, when Donne again makes a generically conventional move in radically unconventional contexts. He urges Elizabeth "Vp vp" (33) so that she may "frustrate the Sunne" (29) as a self-sufficient solar center ("Thy self from thine Affection / Tak'st warmth enough" [30–31]) and usurp Valentine as the presiding genius of his diocese ("and from thine eye / All lesser birds will take theyr Iollity" [31–32]). But unlike his lovers in "The Sunne Rising," Donne wishes

[22]Gorton, par. 16.
[23]Low, p. 51.

Elizabeth to widen, not contract, the boundaries of her lover's sphere. He urges Elizabeth to rise so that, in locating herself more completely in the wider spaces of the universe, she may glorify that universe through glorifying herself. The poem urges her to fly, not merely up from her bed, but up into the stars:

> Vp vp, fayre bird, and call
> Thy Starrs from out theyr severall boxes, Take
> Thy Rubyes Pearles and Dyamonds forth and make
> Thyselfe a Constellacion of them all
>
> (33–36)

As Dubrow observes, this image "[conflates] the natural and human worlds and in so doing [praises] the princess as a paragon in both spheres";[24] but it also, and more insistently, invests Elizabeth with the power to control and widen the boundaries of those spheres. The image of the bride taking the stars out of "theyr severall boxes" is an enfranchising movement: a controlled explosion of stars and comets that enlarges the universe without destroying it.[25] The enjambment "and make / Thyselfe a Constellacion" (35–36) invites the reader to imagine the bride as one of the Greek heroes whom the gods have set up in the heavens and picked out with stars, except that the bride places herself in the heavens, and so is both god and hero, artist and artwork, embellishing herself and the universe in the same gesture.

Donne's image of the alive and active body participating in the creation of the place it inhabits is strongly echoed in modern space/place theory that insists on the dependency of place upon the perceiving body: in Casey's formulation, "the lived body is the material condition of possibility for the place-world while being itself part of those places," and so "bodies and places [become] connatural terms [and] interanimate each other."[26] In her physical and spiritual participation in the marriage ceremony, the bride's body becomes the cosmos, even as the cosmos is contained in her body. Finally, in the narrator's call for her to "Bee thou a new Starre that to vs pretends / Ends of much wonder, And bee thou

[24]Dubrow, p. 175.

[25]Coffin observes that a major accomplishment of this passage is to disinfect the omen of a new star of "popular fear and superstition" (p. 139).

[26]Casey, "How to Get From Space to Place," p. 24.

those ends" (39–40), she achieves a near divine status as the mistress of her own beginning and ending who controls the limits of her own temporal and spatial existence.

This exalted vision of the lovers extending the power of their private sphere outwards to control space and time itself receives an unexpected check in the following stanza. Opening with the most hyperbolic language of the poem, the narrator praises their "vnseparable vnion" (46) as a perfect world of infinite unity, which defies distance as well as time: "Since separation / Falls not on such things as ar infinite / Nor things which are but one can disunite / You are twice vnseperable, Greate, and one" (47–50). Directly after this vision of the lovers as triumphant conquerors of space and time, however, the stanza turns abruptly with a businesslike injunction to "Goe then Two where the Bishop stayes / To make you one" (51–52). By bringing the reader down from the heights of the lovers' spatial infinitude to the practicalities of the social world, this direction sharply readjusts the reader's—and the poem's—perspective. Just when the couple's private inner world threatens to achieve total dominance over the boundaries of reality, the narrator reasserts the authority of the circumscribing places that buttress and support their ecstatic space. Only by voluntarily passing through the narrow but enlarging worlds of "Bishops knott [and] Bishop Valentine" (56) can the married couple establish their own space as a permanent reality, and physically "entwyne" (55) themselves as the narrator imagined their minds and souls already entwined.

This is not to say that a lovers' sphere cannot exist outside the bonds of marriage, even according to the rules of the Palatine universe. Lovers need only each other to create a microcosm of infinite space, spiritually or physically. However, given the generic, philosophical, and spatial premises established by the Palatine epithalamion, the lovers' space can only endure as a sphere "Where Love and Courage never shall decline" (27) if it is bounded within the concentric worlds of religion, nature, and culture. Achsah Guibbory observes that while in general Donne "is keenly aware of the instability of desire . . . a few of Donne's love poems imagine desire as fulfilled and, miraculously, persisting, as if in defiance of natural laws."[27] The Palatine epithalamion is part of the miraculous

[27]Guibbory, "Erotic Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. Achsah Guibbory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 141.

minority of Donne's poems on successful love, and I argue that the maintenance of the lovers' world "in defiance of all natural laws" is paradoxically due to the buttressing support offered by the "natural laws" of the epithalamion's spatial system, whose coherence depends on the interdependency of all its places. The local places of earth, and church, and marriage bed, which are narrower than love's private world, are nevertheless responsible for its continence. The phoenix nest of infinite space depends on the buttresses of place to give it form and integrity.

In the litany of circumscribing but supporting worlds that create these boundaries, from the natural and traditional spheres of Valentine's diocese to the Bishop's spiritual "way," the court is rather pointedly not mentioned. Indeed, the court is not even gestured at, except possibly in addressing Elizabeth as "a Greate Princesse" (38), until the crucial moment after the couple are "by harts and hands made fast," but before they have consummated their marriage in any other way. The court thus becomes the one truly superfluous place in the universe, the sphere that custom alone dictates the couple must pass through before they can reach their marriage bed. The narrator who elsewhere urged the couple to submit to the boundaries of Valentine's diocese, now spends his time chaffing at the court's pointless strictures, as the couple are delayed by epicurean celebrants, gadfly masquers, and "gluttonous" (65) feasts. The narrator does not want the couple to pay any attention to these places or their role in them, but instead to retire to their "nest" as quickly as possible: "Alas; did not Antiquity assigne / A night as well as day to thee ô Valentine?" (69–70). Besides participating in the time-honored tradition of wedding-night jests, the epithalamion's courtly sojourn also shows how little influence the court wields in the Palatine system. Indeed, by trying to ape the boundaries and limitations imposed by the system's more substantial worlds, the court becomes the butt of a universal joke for attempting to be the glittering center of the universe, when they are, at best, basking in the lovers' reflected glory, and at worst, actively holding up universal renewal.

However, even the foolish delays of the court are not finally exiled from the poem's spatial system, but are drawn up and reshaped into one of the superfluous, but celebratory, boundaries that shape the lovers' experience, of which the epithalamion itself is another example. When the bride's ladies bustle about her like planets about a sun, what the narrator despairingly describes as "Formalitys retarding thee" (72), are by

imperceptible degrees transformed into an erotic delineation of the movements of the bride, then the groom, into their wedding bed:

> But now Shee's layd; What though Shee bee?
> Yet there are more delayes, for, where is hee?
> Hee comes, and passes through Spheare after Spheare
> First her Sheetes, then her Armes, then any where.
> Oh let not this day but this night bee thine.
> Thy day was but the Eue to this ô Valentine.
> (79–84)

Once laid in bed, the bride and groom begin a process of mutual transformation imagined as spatial expansions. The bride's body is transformed into a microcosm: "Spheare after Spheare . . . her Sheetes, then her Armes, then any where" (81–82). Elizabeth, so figured, takes the form of what Gorton suggests is Donne's "master-image" of space:[28] a series of concentric circles that expand infinitely inward, so that the further the groom enters into her universe, the more and more he has to discover. Inside the tiny wedding bed, the lovers discover in each other a whole universe, and each becomes that space for one another: "Heere lyes a Shee-Sunne, and a Hee-moone there / Shee giues the best light to his Spheare / Or each is both, and all, and so / They vnto one another nothing owe" (85–88).

The Palatine marriage sphere, then, is an endlessly expansive one, but significantly, the poem does not end on the lovers' private cosmos of infinite inward spheres; rather, it returns to the prosaic worlds of Valentine's diocese that support the lovers' little universe. As I suggested earlier, this poem treats the Palatine marriage as an event that startles its surrounding worlds like a volcanic explosion, but ultimately a volcano is only one small part of a much vaster system. Thus the poem ends, not with an unstable universe of boundless space flaming with ever-multiplying phoenixes, but with sleeping newlyweds in an insecure sanctuary, who by restoring the different spheres of the universe, have also relegated themselves to their proper place in an interdependent cosmos: "For since these two are two no more / Theres but one Phœnix

[28]Gorton, par. 10. See also Dubrow's observation that Donne structures the Palatine epithalamion's "vision of rebirth through prosodic and semantic allusions to cycles" (p. 177).

still as was before" (101–102). This is not an assertion that the private sphere of love created through the marriage no longer exists; but rather an acknowledgement that the lovers' world has been successfully assimilated into the surrounding universe. This may be why the epithalamion ends on what some readers have thought a slightly discordant and vulgar note, with a large community of watching celebrants (who the readers are suddenly counted among). These celebrants are compared to faintly disreputable satyrs who, in sitting up all night to watch for the sun's rising and the lovers' waking, act like a group of Valentine's "chirping Queristers" and are probably members of the same diocese. Still nearer friends (or, just as likely, servants) snigger and make bets around the marriage-bed, trying to guess "whose hand it is / That opens first a Curtayne, Hers, or His" (109–110). The bed contains a phoenix nest, but is itself contained in a room, in a house, in a country, on a planet, in a universe, and the epithalamion, in celebrating the lovers' sphere, must also celebrate these other worlds that made it possible. Like the Palatine marriage, the Palatine universe is not built upon surrender or conquest, but on mutuality and balance: "They pay, they giue, they lend, and so let fall / No such occasion to bee liberall" (95–96). In celebrating the Palatine marriage as an event of both private and public significance, Donne's first courtly epithalamion strives at every point to strike a fruitful balance between the unique power of the lovers' sphere and the outside worlds that create and depend upon it. The interdependency of the Palatine universal structure not only justifies the cosmic importance of the marriage, but anticipates and checks the fatal tendency of Donne's lovers' spheres to devolve into what G. K. Chesterton has described as "a small and cramped eternity."[29] Instead of love's space negating the lesser places of the world, in the Palatine epithalamion, the lovers' sphere is the counterweight that maintains the equipoise of the universe.

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When Donne revisits his innovative use of spatial imagery in his second courtly epithalamion, "*Eclogue*. 1613. *December* 26," written upon

[29]Chesterton, *Orthodoxy: The Romance of Faith* (1908; repr., New York: Double Day, 1990), p. 20.

the marriage of Lady Frances Howard to Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, the thematic and formal emphasis is once again upon the importance of maintaining structural integrity within and between places and spaces. The crucial difference between the two poems is that, instead of providing a counter-balance to the wider circles of its universe, the Somerset marriage throws the cosmic order of the Somerset epithalamion radically off-balance. Like the Palatine epithalamion, the Somerset epithalamion delineates the effect of a single lovers' sphere upon the universe, but instead of an interdependent equilibrium of concentric spheres, the worlds of the Somerset universe are all dependent upon the stability of a single location: the court. When the Somerset marriage is "mis-placed" at the center of courtly power, the results threaten to warp both a poem and a cosmos.

A telling indication of how the Somerset poem inverts and warps the generic and structural premises of Donne's earlier courtly epithalamion is the longstanding critical discussion surrounding the Somerset epithalamion's extravagant flattery, and whether it should be read as sincere, cynical, or evasive. Although the Palatine epithalamion praises its couple in terms as breathtakingly hyperbolic as anything in the Somerset epithalamion, the Palatine epithalamion's flattery generally fails to inspire the same critical attention or condemnation. This is partly because the open scandal surrounding the Howard-Essex divorce and the Howard-Carr marriage automatically renders any praise offered up to it problematic, but also because the poem dissects the question of poetic dependence and reluctance through an eclogue dialogue between the poet-hermit Idios and the courtly "worldling" (49) Allophanes.[30] I argue that both the historical and formal tensions of the Somerset epithalamion are best understood within the context of the spatial system created by Donne to image forth the political, moral, and aesthetic

[30]See Dubrow, pp. 178–200; Annabel Patterson, "All Donne," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 52; Patricia G. Pinka, "Donne, Idios, and the Somerset Epithalamion," *Studies in Philology* 90.1 (1993): 58–73; Kevin R. Rahimzahdeh, "In Praise of Vice: John Donne and the Somerset Wedding," *Kentucky Philological Review* 13 (1998): 28–32; and Alison V. Scott, "Celebrating the Somerset Wedding: Donne, Patronage, and the Problems of the Gift," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 30.2 (2004): 261–290.

challenges and compromises inherent in commemorating the Somerset marriage.

In contrast to the Palatine universal model of interdependent parts making up a harmonious whole, the spatial model of the Somerset universe can be usefully thought of as deriving from the medieval conceptual models of place *per se* and place *per accidens*. As Casey explains, some medieval philosophers, extrapolating from Aristotle, theorized that the earth, as "the immobile body at the center" of the celestial spheres, was a place *per se*, and provided place and location to the outermost sphere, which by comparison merely possessed "place *per accidens*: place that is parasitic on another, altogether fixed place."[31] It is upon the concept of "parasitic" places that Donne builds the Somerset universe. To do so, Donne re-imagines the social and political structure of the Jacobean court as a Copernican-Ptolemaic hybrid spatial system, uniting the two by the simple expedient of making the sun, not the earth, the immobile center—the place *per se*—of an otherwise traditional Ptolemaic system. Unlike the exquisitely counter-balanced Palatine universe, where every place is dependent on every other place, and each place treated as central and peripheral in its turn, the undisputed "sun" of the Somerset universe is the court, and the court, at least for the length of the poem, revolves around the "mightier fire" (108) of the Howard-Carr union.

Although this might appear a dramatic astronomical innovation, the elision of the Ptolemaic and Copernican universal centers was a familiar psychological reality at the Jacobean court; as Low observes, "within the social universe contemporary with Donne's [poetry], the equivalent of the Ptolemaic or traditional system was to say that the king is both sun and center of all things, the source of social and political life, of patronage, wealth, and personal identity."[32] The Somerset marriage owed its existence to King James's unflinching and unscrupulous support, including his open interference during the shocking divorce trial between

[31]Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p. 104. The two philosophers Casey singles out as responsible for this theory are Averroës and Roger Bacon, the latter of whom coined the terms "place *per se*" and "place *per accidens*" (pp. 103–106).

[32]Low, p. 52.

Frances Howard and her first husband.[33] Considering the scandal and gossip that surrounded (and continues to surround) the Howard-Essex divorce and the Howard-Carr marriage, it is evident that the match was publicly countenanced and celebrated only because of King James's determination that his court (and the artists attached to it) approve a marriage that must have been revolting to the moral and religious sense of many, if not most, of its members. At the court of King James, the king was very truly the center of the universe, the single point around which everything revolved; the royal masque, a genre perfected in the Jacobean court, was visually and thematically structured around the assumption that that James is the perspectival center towards which all lines tend and find their center. The Somerset marriage, which epitomized so much of the most negative and compulsory qualities of the court's Copernican-Ptolemaic social system, provided Donne with both the onus and the opportunity to re-explore how the generic conventions of the courtly epithalamion could be adapted to reflect the social complexities of a courtly marriage in cosmic terms. In the Palatine epithalamion, Donne showed his readers how marriage could rejuvenate the universe; in the Somerset epithalamion, he offers a darker vision of a lovers' sphere made the controlling center of a spatial system that turns into a supernova sun scorching its encircling worlds.

This is not to say that a spatial system founded upon a single, immobile center would have been considered inherently bad in early modern thought. On the contrary, the security of a clearly delineated hierarchical structure is one of the enduring attractions of the Ptolemaic model, and in his writings Donne more than once reflects nostalgically upon the lost stability of the old astronomy. But stability is precisely what is missing from the Somerset universe: instead of a warming center that enlivens and enriches the worlds it supports, in "*Eclogue*. 1613. *December* 26," a disproportionately powerful central place warps its dependent

[33]As Dubrow notes, "the convention of portraying a community happily celebrating the wedding was inappropriate [as] contemporary reports of scandalized gossip suggest that the court hardly responded with uncritical enthusiasm to the celebration" (p. 178). See also Scott's observation that "a certain amount of public distaste for the wedding was to be expected, but however much it was considered to flout conventional decency and morality, it was, as Donne noted, blessed by the King, to whom 'all affections do assent' (76)" (p. 265).

satellites.[34] Instead of submitting to, and thereby revitalizing, its encircling worlds of nature, religion, and society, the Howard-Carr marriage forcibly subdues them, to the detriment of the whole system.

That Donne himself felt the court's gravitational appeal when writing this poem is evident, and how far the eclogue conversation should be read as a direct psychological reflection of his personal uneasiness has been a bone of critical contention. Several critics have suggested that Idios and Allophanes are two halves of Donne's consciousness, split more or less exactly along Donne's vexed relation to the court, so that, in Dubrow's formulation, "Allophanes stands for the attraction to the court . . . whereas Idios bodies forth the reluctance to participate in the world to which Donne's verse letters often testify."[35] This is an attractive reading, but in light of the demonstrable distortions present in the speeches of both characters, I am hesitant to equate the personality and opinions of either Idios or Allophanes with Donne. Instead, I would characterize Idios and Allophanes as highly wrought constructions of the two extremes that might befall a court-aspiring poet such as Donne in the Somerset universe. They are both creatures of a parallel universe; their characters and dilemmas bear some resemblance to those of Donne's world, but they are finally both abstractions of oppositional views in a universe where the Jacobean court is literally the "everlasting East" of all the world (38). The eclogue dialogue is written aslant because the arguments are tilted towards a courtly center that is more powerful than the real court of Donne's world. Because this is done at first so subtly, and with so much appropriation of the hyperbolic language and overheated metaphor common at the real Jacobean court, it is not immediately clear that what superficially appears as what Arthur F. Marotti calls an act of "brazen poetic flattery"[36] has a critical anamorphic dimension.

The framing eclogue begins as a conventional conversation on a well-worn topic, but gradually takes an alien turn, revealing the serious and

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[34]For a further discussion of the Someret epithalamion as a "distorted" work, see Ann Hurley, "The Elided Self: Witty Dis-Locations in Velasquez and Donne," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 44.4 (1986): 357–369.

[35]Dubrow, p. 196.

[36]Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p. 273.

tragic consequences of a world where all courtly flattery has the status of literal truth. The parameters of the Somerset universe are laid out in Allophanes's opening speech to Idios, where he reproaches him for seeking out "Countryes Solitude . . . in this yeares cold and decrepit Time" (2–3). Although the reader might expect this to develop into a debate on the classic duality of court-place and pastoral-place, the pale wilderness where Idios is finally run to ground by his courtly pursuer is granted no such positive existence. It is not a pastoral place existing in opposition to a courtly place, but, as Alison V. Scott observes, only an "abstraction" of such a place.[37] As such, it is almost an anti-place, defined not by its characteristics, but its lack of them: there are no singing birds, no "delicacy" (7) of field or flower, no leaves on tree or hedge, "And all springs by frost / Haue taken cold and theyr sweete murmure lost" (11–12). Though these are the natural effects of winter, Allophanes implies that it is, in fact, the court that is responsible for the blasting of the countryside. Having superseded the seasonal cycles of the natural world, the court has drained nature of its defining characteristics by drawing its qualities and inhabitants into the court's "warmer clime" (4) of the court. By investing the court with the seasons' powers to structure time, Allophanes can reproach Idios's wintry behavior as "Vnseasonable" (1) because in the Somerset universe, "natural" behavior is not what nature does, but what the court is doing: "At Court the Spring already aduanced is / The Sunne stayes longer vp, And yet not his / The Glory is. Far other, other fires" (15–17). The court's "fires," Allophanes explains, are not only superior to the merely natural sun, moon, and stars, but actually predate them, since the "Princes fauour" (23) "did appeere / Before the Sunn and Moone created were" (21–22), and it is from that light "all fortunes names and natures Fall" (24). This is not one of the conventional analogies content to observe that James is to the court as the sun is to the solar system. In the Somerset universe, nature herself takes her cues from King James's court.

After his initial rebuke, Allophanes wastes no time establishing the court's position as the fiery center of the poem's universe. In the first of many echoes of the Palatine epithalamion, Allophanes urges Idios to imitate the birds who "sayle through theyr Sea the Ayre" (6) to find a "warmer clime" (4) at court. The "chirping Queristers" of Valentine's

[37]Scott, pp. 268–269.

diocese who dallied and wooed in the Palatine epithalamion are regimented "fleets" (6) in the Somerset universe, blindly obeying "Natures Instinct" (4) to search out warmth and heat needed for survival. A few lines later, Allophanes again repurposes Palatine imagery when describing Frances Howard as the creative center of the courtly cosmos:

> Then from those wombes of Stars the Brides bright eyes
> At every Glaunce a Constellation flyes
> And sowes the Court with Stars, and doth prevent
> In light and power the all-eyed firmament.
> (25–28)

Like Elizabeth in the Palatine epithalamion, Frances Howard's body throws off stars and constellations, but the image is restructured to reflect the spatial contraction of the Somerset epithalamion: Elizabeth expands the universe, and Frances Howard shuts it up again. Elizabeth moves "Vp vp" from earth and court to "call [her] Starrs from out theyr severall boxes" (33–34), but Howard works to "prevent / in light and power, the all-eyed firmament," by replacing "heauens two great lights" with "Zeale to Prince and State [and] Loues desires" (18–19) and thus negate the need for any outside world. The price of a self-sufficient courtly cosmos, however, is obliquely gestured at when Allophanes suddenly introduces the foil of "other Courts" in the Somerset universe that "alas, ar like to Hell / "Where, in darke plotts, fire without light doth dwell / Or but like stooves (for lust and envy get / Continewall (but artificiall) heate.)" (34–36). Donne's use here of caging parentheses seems to mimic an effect of his playful mention, in the Palatine epithalamion, of the ark as a claustrophobic space for the birds and beasts of Noah's time. In the Somerset epithalamion, the device is turned to more emphatic use as the banked-up "artificiall" heat of courts burns those trapped inside like fuel in a furnace. There is no escape from these hellish courts, until, presumably, they succumb to the nature of fire and "[end] in ashes" (221). Allophanes, after bringing them up, never alludes to these "other courts" again, but their specter hangs over the rest of the poem as a suggestive hint at the real nature of Somerset's "heavenly" court.

Although Idios's self-imposed exile suggests a reluctant or resistant attitude toward the court, his rejoinder to Allophanes reveals an acute understanding of the court's pervasive sway over his universe. Elaborating

on Allophanes's cosmological imagery, Idios describes the court as not merely the pivot of the Somerset spatial system, but synonymous with pervasive space itself. To Allophanes's reproach at his absence from Court, Idios protests:

> No I am there:
> As Heauen to men disposd is every where:
> So are those Courts whose Princes animate
> Not onely all theyr house but all theyr state.
> Let no man thinke because hee's full hee hath all.
> Kings (as theyr patterne God) are liberall
> Not onely in fulnesse but Capacity
> Enlarging narrow men to feele and see
> And comprehend the blessings they bestow:
> So reclus'd Hermits often times doe knowe
> More of heauens Glory then a worldling can.
> (39–49)

As noted earlier, space has been characterized in modern theory, and was beginning to be characterized in early modern theory, as the unformed area that places exist in and derive from, a category of place that contains, pervades, and conditions all other places. When Idios characterizes the court as "everywhere," he is granting it the attributes of originary space, which invades even the bodies and minds of men, by which the king "enlarges" them "to feele and see / And comprehend the blessings [he bestows]." Unfortunately for Idios, his suggestion that he should therefore be able to contemplate the "blessings" of the court from outside of it is untenable in the Somerset universe, since it is literally impossible to be "outside" of the court's influence. In the Somerset universe, people and places do not possess their own absolute reality; they are only granted identity and relevance in their relation to the court. Allophanes's tart query—"Because thou art not frozen, art thou warme?" (59)—sums up the real relationship of the court to its surrounding worlds, as does his later image of gold buried in the bowels of the earth that is merely "Stuff" (62) until "heauen guild it with his eye" (64). Only the court can give meaning, shape, or identity to its dependent orbits, which include not only the countryside, but the bodies and souls of its subjects.

As Idios himself admits, the court pervades even the inner recesses of his own mind, and the anguish "To knowe and feele all this, and not to

haue / Words to expresse it" (93–94) precipitated his departure. His attempted escape proved to be a pointless gesture, however, when he discovered that he could not help but "knowe and feele" the court's "common Ioye" (98) despite being physically removed from it. The bleakness of his defeated admission "and yet I scap't not heere" (97) suggests that, despite the "common Ioye" (98), Idios was troubled to discover that, even in exile, the court still dominated his mind and poetry. When presenting his poem, his language is full of the same consciousness of having failed to escape from the court's pull:

> Reade then this Nuptiall song, which was not made
> Eyther the Court or mens harts to inuade
> But since I am dead and buryed, I could frame
> No Epitaph which might aduance my fame
> So much as this poore song, which testifies
> I did vnto that day some sacrifice.
> (99–104)

It is ironic that Idios feels the need to state that his poem was not made to invade "the Court or mens harts," since it is obvious that, on the contrary, the poem is evidence of the court's successful invasion of him. As Scott points out, "the act of [Idios's] utterance resonates as involuntary and the gift/poem thus appears, at once, a product of duty and of spontaneous creativity."[38] Despite Allophanes's reproaches at his absence, Idios is securely "at court" whether he likes it or not. In fact, some critics argue that Idios is being disingenuous, and does actually yearn for courtly recognition. Patricia G. Pinka suggests that Idios's presentation of a poem that might "aduance [his] fame" shows that "Idios knew the rules of the political game all along. He was only dissembling his naiveté about the ways of the world; for even before Allophanes' lecture, he had written his tribute complete with denial of his motivations for composing it."[39] I argue that, rather than revealing Idios to be a canny manipulator of court politics, Idios's epithalamion is further evidence of the court's successful control of Idios. As he himself states, it was the only thing he was able to compose, even in the physical isolation of his wilderness. If he does not write about the court, he

[38]Scott, p. 266.
[39]Pinka, p. 65.

cannot write about anything; cut off from that life-giving center of the universe, he is "dead and buryed," unable to function as a private writer, even to write his own epitaph. The court alone has the power to call him out of the "graue / Of his owne thoughts" (94–95), and praising that court is his only chance for not merely fame, but survival. In the Somerset universe, not even the grave offers safe haven from the court.

Having offered his readers a view of the Somerset universe as seen from its outermost borders, the epithalamion proper thrusts us into the fiery center of its spatial system, which is even hotter than usual due to the imminent union of "4 enflaming eyes, and of 2 louing harts" (225). Inside "Ioyes bonfire" (223), it is more difficult to observe the damage done to the outside world, hence, as Pinka notes, many readers' impression that the epithalamion, despite "elements of satire," is still most plausibly read as simply a "hyperbolic encomium to the notorious couple."[40] However, I argue that the thematically resonant cosmological motif of the eclogue is mirrored to a degree not fully appreciated in the epithalamion, and in fact that the epithalamion offers the more extreme and unstable version of the Somerset spatial system. In the eclogue, the places and people that circle around the court are dependent and parasitic, but not in danger of imminent destruction, because the court is ruled by and identified with the moderately stable figurehead of King James. In the epithalamion, however, Frances Howard and the Earl of Somerset replace James as the center of the universe, a position that, as the epithalamion makes clear, gives them the power to not merely dominate the universal structure, but immolate it.

The epithalamion is remarkable for its consistency of imagery: the bride and the groom are the suns at the center of the universe, and everything revolves around them, as the opening lines lay out in no uncertain terms:

> Thou are repriu'd Old yeare, thou shalt not dye
> Though thou vpon thy deathbed lye
> And shouldst within fiue dayes expire
> Yet thou art rescewd by a mightier fire
> Then thy old Soule the Sunn
> When hee doth in his largest Circle runn.
> (105–110)

[40]Pinka, p. 72.

This stanza effectively restates the eclogue's assertion that the court has superseded the physical universe, but with the important difference that the "mightier fire" replacing that "old Soule the Sunn" of the natural order is not King James, but the passionate union of Robert Carr and Frances Howard, so that the universe now revolves around a center that has been "re-skewed"[41] in several senses. Not only has the Copernican sun been re-located to the center of a Ptolemaic system; that center has been "re-skewed" towards the married couple and the whole dependent universe similarly twisted along the king's (temporary) bias. It is important to note that this new sun, whose power could melt the poles of the earth "And open wide theyr easy liquid Iaw" (112) is neither Carr nor Howard, understood as individuals, but the sphere of private love that exists between and within them. Separately, the Earl of Somerset "prevent'st the Sunne / And his redd foming horses dost outrunn" (131–132), and the bride risks blinding spectators with her "radiant hayre" (142) unless she powders it with ash, because they are alike engulfed by the private fire that resides in and between them both. The effects of the lovers' sphere upon the worlds revolving around it are manifested in a variety of ways, but just as Elizabeth's body is the dominant figure of the Palatine cosmology of stable expansion, so is Frances Howard the clearest reflection of the riveting instability at the heart of the Somerset system.

Appropriately, it is in the stanza titled "Her Apparrelling," that Donne depicts the bride's effects on her admiring orbits:

> Thus thou discendst to our Infirmity,
> Who can the sunn in water see;
> So dost thou when in Silke, and Gold
> Thou cladst thy selfe; since wee which do behold
> Ar dust and wormes, tis iust

[41]I would like to thank the reviewer of this article for drawing my attention to this implicit pun. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, online ed., defines "skew" as "turned to one side, slanting, squint" (a. and adv., A.1.a.), "distorted, perverted, macaronic" (a. and adv., A.1.b.), and "to take an oblique course of direction, to turn aside, move sideways" (v.[2], 2.a.). "Rescewed" therefore becomes in this context a pun, referring not only to the ironic "rescue" of the dying year by the Howard-Carr fire, but also to the entire "re-skewing" and distortion of the Somerset cosmos around a new center.

> Our obiects bee the fruites of wormes and dust.
> Let every Iewell bee a glorious starre
> Yet Starrs ar not so pure as theyr Spheares ar
> (149–156)

Like other women in Donne's poetry, Howard is figured as part of a cosmographical universe, except that instead of containing universes within herself, Howard is simply the dazzling sun at the center of an admiring, but external, cosmos. Instead of renewing and enlarging the human communities who look to the marriage as a source of rejuvenation, the Countess's presence diminishes and abashes them, making them "dust and wormes" (153). She is as glorious as the sun, but the full force of her power would blind her subjects, so they can only look at her indirectly, otherwise, she "which to all that come to look vpon / Wert ment for Phaebus, wouldst bee Phaeton" (144–145). Significantly, Donne's portrayal here and elsewhere suggests that Howard's blinding brilliancy is not inherently evil, but merely mis-placed: it is only by shifting the sun out of its proper course that Phœbus becomes Phaeton.

The question of mis-placement brings up one of the major differences between the cosmic-generic structures of Donne's courtly epithalamions. In comparing the two poems, it is important to stress that the dangerous combustibility of the Howard-Carr union arises not from the quality of their love, but from the inappropriate positioning of that love at the center of the universe. Howard and Carr's relationship could have been as pure and irreproachable as James insisted everyone treat it; Donne's critique is aimed not primarily at them as individuals but at the way the marriage imposes itself upon its world. The instability of the Somerset universe is not due to the couple's immorality, but to their false position at the center of the universal system. It is making love's private sphere the ruling reality of the universe, and allowing it to ride roughshod over all the boundaries that might have provided it with stability and support, that destabilizes the Somerset system and saps its dependent worlds of their vitality. From this perspective, the poem's account of how their marriage triumphed over the objections of other cultural spheres, including the lay world's "vniust opinion" (123), "chance or enuyes Art" (124), and the church's capitulation to "striue no more" (167) against it, acquires a tragic dimension. A center that cannot grant any autonomy or authority to its orbits, but must continually break the boundaries of its

concentric worlds, cannot hope to be as enduring as the buttressed Palatine marriage, which enlivened its supportive spheres even as it transcended them.

The stanza that best encapsulates the instability brought about by the Somerset marriage is titled "Feasts and Revells":

> But you are overblest, plenty this day
> Iniures; It causes time to stay.
> The Tables grone, as though this feast
> Would, as the floud, destroy all fowle and beast
> And, were the doctrine new
> That the earth mou'd, this day would make it true
> For every part to dance and revells goes
> They tread the Ayre and fall not where they rose.
> Though sixe howers since the Sun to bedd did part
> The Masques and Banquets will not yet impart
> A Sun-set to those weary eyes, a Center to this hart.
> (182–192)

In keeping with the intimations of the eclogue and epithalamion, this stanza makes clear that making the universe revolve around a lovers' sphere does not lead to a more stable (or loving) universe, but a chaotic dissolution of previously stable worlds. The marriage is likened to Noah's flood in its destructive scope, and causes the orbiting spheres of heaven to drunkenly reel like court celebrants. Indeed, the ambiguous "they" that "tread the Ayre and fall not where they rose" may refer to celestial planets, stars, or courtly revelers, since each group has lost their place and identity in the general unwinding of the universe. There is not even stability for the couple themselves, since, as we saw in the Palatine epithalamion, for love's private world to flourish it must lean on a matrix of spheres that exist outside and counter to it. Unlike the Palatine universe, where the boundaries and limitations of place created the space for the private expansion and exultation of the marriage sphere, the Somerset universe contains at its heart a marriage, which, in order to come into being, has destabilized the dependent circles of place surrounding it, and thereby undermined its own power.

Despite the brilliance that blazes forth from the bride and bridegroom, when they are brought together there is no such moment of mutual transformation as the Palatine epithalamion led us to expect:

together, they are so dazzling that spectators are "As men which through a Cypresse see / The rising sunne, do thinke it two" (161–162); but they do not transform themselves or their world in any other way. The private lovers' space that was so complexly delineated in the double-phoenix nest imagery of the Palatine epithalamion is replaced with mere twinned suns, and even more basically, the fire that resides within "4 enflaming eyes, and . . . 2 louing harts" (225). Although there are obvious affinities between the Palatine phoenixes and the Somerset suns, the loss of the balancing and renewing powers of the phoenix (not to mention the salutary limitation that allows only one phoenix to exist at a time) is reinforced in every description of the Somerset couple's hot but destructive love. A phoenix is perilous, but righteous—it controls and contains the fiery medium it lives in. Mere fire, without anything to temper its energy, cannot help but turn into what Scott accurately terms "a destructive fireball."[42] The final end of a universe built only to feed "Ioyes bonfire" (223) is not even the spectacular destruction of "Feasts and Revells," but, as Donne clearly indicates in the final stanza of the epithalamion proper, isolation and silence.

Entitled "The Goodnight," the last stanza hopes that the couple's "loue lamps" (217) might burn as long as one found in "Tullias Tombe" that burnt "Vnchanged for fifteene hundred yeere" (215–216), and goes on to muse,

> Fyre ever doth aspire
> And makes all like it selfe, turnes all to fyre
> But ends in ashes, which these cannot doe
> For none of them is fewell but fyre too.
> (219–222)

Like Allophanes's opening digression on hellish and heavenly courts, Donne here offers a critical assessment of the ultimate tendency of the Somerset universe under the guise of a compliment. It may well be that the fire enclosed in the lamp (the smallest and most bounded image of love's private sphere in either epithalamion) can never burn itself out, but that does not change the fact that this lovers' lamp is "enshryned" (217) in a tomb, and is, therefore, merely the sun to a dead world. In stark

[42]Scott, p. 277.

contrast to the Palatine epithalamion, where by submitting to the boundaries of the universe the couple restored nature and discovered new worlds within each other, the Somerset epithalamion foresees, at best, the lovers continually consuming each other after reducing all the world around them to ash.

In light of this, it is significant that Idios suggests immolation as a fitting end to his composition: "that I may doe / A perfect Sacrifice, Ile burne it too" (226–227). This wish has been characterized as disingenuous,[43] but considering how completely the epithalamion equates the lovers' sphere with spreading wildfire, there is little difference between burning the paper in the wilderness and having it scorched at court by the couple's "inflaming eyes" (115). Alternatively, if we attribute a more sardonic attitude to Idios, a burnt offering is probably the most appropriate method of emulating Howard and Carr. I am inclined, however, to view this destructive wish as Idios's last-ditch effort to escape being drawn back into the courtly sphere, and retain, though only in ashes, some remnant of the universe that is his. But Allophanes is inexorable: "Whatever celebrates this Nuptiall / Is common, since the Ioye thereof is so" (231–232), and so Idios becomes another satellite of the courtly center, as he never really ceased to be, for however long that center holds. In destroying their right relation to the universe, the Somerset couple have destroyed themselves: "the Masques and Banquets will not yet impart / a Sun-set to those weary eyes, a Center to this hart" (192).

As history witnessed, Donne's prediction about the instability of the couple's position at the center of the courtly universe proved accurate. Even without the benefit of historical hindsight, however, the kind of marriage celebrated in the Somerset epithalamion, whether or not it accurately reflected the real Howard-Carr union, could never have flourished, given the parameters of the courtly Stuart epithalamion as Donne reimagines the genre in both the Somerset and the Palatine epithalamions. By imaging forth in spatial terms the generic assumption that the union of two individuals has universal implications and cosmic consequences, Donne's courtly epithalamions submit to and transcend the social and cultural circumstances of their creation, much as the

[43]Pinka argues that by this gesture we see how Idios "has become the perfect courtier replete with self-effacing gestures" (p. 71).

Palatine lovers' sphere submits to the boundaries of pre-existing universal structures in order to enter into new spaces of experience. Donne's creation of new spatial systems to explain and contain these two court marriages reveal not only the different ways marriage can affect the world, but the capacity of the epithalamion genre to delineate the relationship between the structure of reality and human experience of that reality in both literary and spatial terms. In exploring both the good and bad nature of these marriage poems' "little rooms," and the importance of placing love's private sphere in a right relationship to the wider world, Donne's courtly epithalamions become meditations on the many ways small places, be they marriage beds or poems, can shape universes.

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