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"Soules Language": Reading Donne's "The Extasie"

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"To understand a metaphor," writes Stanley Cavell, "you must be able to interpret it; to understand an utterance religiously, you have to be able to share its perspective."[1] This distinction, derived from Wittgenstein, speaks directly to understanding "The Extasie," given that the poem's meaning inheres in the reader's grasp of its epistemological bearing. The role of the reader in constituting meaning is not surprising when we recognize that the lovers' stated mission in the world is to reveal to "weake men"[2] their exemplary love. I am proposing that Donne effects their revelation of love by making the verbal substance of their love, "this dialogue of one" (74), the content not only of the poem's discursive subject, but of its conceptual form as well.

This conception of reading illustrates the view inherent in generic distinctions, that we know things in relation to their modes of knowledge. That is, when we read a literary text, our understanding is conditioned by the modal form in which the text inheres.[3] But the act of reading "The Extasie" should be distinguished from the conception of reading best described by Georges Poulet as the surrender of the self to the thoughts of the speaker: "I am on loan to another, and this other thinks, feels, suffers, and acts within me."[4] Instead, "The Extasie" engages the reader in a constitutive relationship with the text by way of the silent, but implicitly responsive interlocutor. Because the interlocutor does not directly voice her thoughts, but whose presence nevertheless is implied by the single speaker's words, the reader is enlisted as the completing—and thus actualizing—agent of the two lovers' "dialogue of one."

This way of reading comes closer (though it is not identical) to Wolfgang Iser's conception of the dynamics of reading. Literary texts, according to Iser, are full of places of indeterminacy, of "gaps," and thus "whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected

directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections—for filling in the gaps left by the text itself."[5] Iser regards the gaps in a literary text as that which draws the reader into a specific relation with the text, and by supplying "what is meant from what is not said," the reader "grasp[s] the pattern underlying the connections."[6] In supplying the other side of the "dialogue of one," the reader of Donne's "Extasie" not only becomes essential to meaning, but occupies a plane of reality contiguous to the two lovers themselves.[7] This vantage point, made possible by the silent interlocutor, grants Donne's readers immanent knowledge of the interrelationship between the speaker and the silent interlocutor. So that like the two lovers, how we know and what we know as readers become one through the mediation of the language of love.

In its epistemology and affirmation of the body-soul union, "The Extasie" bears striking parallels with Aristotle's theory of cognition as described in the *Metaphysica* and *De Anima*, and, in particular, with Aristotle's view that understanding and the object of understanding are not different. Readings of "The Extasie" which turn on a Platonic orientation or on a seductive speaker urging his beloved to a purely sexual relationship overlook not only the two lovers' mission to "body" forth the spiritually laden words of their "dialogue of one," but also the formal conditions by which Donne makes their verbal consummation of love the substance of the reader's cognitive relationship to the poem. I will therefore focus on two related topics: the way Donne meets the challenge of revealing such love, and significant parallels between the poem's epistemology of love and Aristotle's theory of cognition.

The key to the way Donne effects the revelation of love is lodged in the linguistic medium of the two lovers' symbiotic relationship, namely, "soules language" (22), which "tells" them what they love: "This Extasie doth unperplex / (We said) and tell us what we love" (29-30). Soul's language is common to both lovers because "good love" (23) has transformed their two souls into a single "abler soule" (43) possessing knowledge of its own essence: "Wee, then, who are this new soule, know, / Of what we are compos'd, and made" (45-46).[8] In other words, the two lovers have become what they know, namely, a single abler soul formed out of an "interinanimating" love (41-44), the essence of which is language.

The knowledge gained, however, carries with it the necessity to share that knowledge with "weake men" in its embodied form: "To'our bodies turne wee then that so / Weake men on love reveal'd may looke"

(69-70). The lovers' descent "T'affections, and to faculties, / Which sense may reach and apprehend" (66-67) does not state that it is their sense which is to apprehend their love; they have already acquired an understanding of what they love, derived, in part, from the "sense" conveyed to them initially by their bodies:

> We owe them thankes, because they thus,
> Did us, to us, at first convay,
> Yielded their forces, sense, to us,
> Nor are drosse to us, but allay. (52-55)

Their descent, like God's descent into the world, is necessary so that "weake men," for whom divine love requires a visible presence, "on love reveal'd may looke."

The form in which their love is to be revealed is the subject of the poem's closing lines: "Loves mysteries in soules doe grow, / But yet the body is his booke" (71-72). Here Donne's speakers seem to say that as *embodied* lovers they will preserve, with only "small change" (76), the linguistic nature of their relationship by serving as Love's text. In effect, their verbal ecstasy—"this dialogue of one"—is destined to become the visible text of a corresponding ecstasy, namely, "The Extasie" we have before us as Donne's poem. On one level, then, the poem appears to speak to the process of writing itself, that is, to the process of converting the intellection of love as a "dialogue of one" into "love reveal'd." The desired effect, we can assume, is a corresponding metaphysical structure of response.

Donne meets the challenge of revealing a love that coheres in "soules language" by means of three formal conditions basic to the dramatic monologue: a single speaker, a silent interlocutor, and a dramatic situation.[9] Unlike the lyric, which is the expression of the individual speaker's state of mind, the dramatic monologue dramatizes the subtle "contact of minds"[10] between the speaker and the silent interlocutor. Because the interlocutor does not voice his or her thoughts, the speaker's words alone must bear the impress of the interlocutor as they impinge on the reader's consciousness, a condition of the dramatic monologue that clearly distinguishes it from the form of the lyric. As A. Dwight Culler explains in his study of the dramatic monologue, the responsive reader "participates in the creation of meaning by tacitly supplying the other side of the dialogue, the antecedent and concluding actions."[11] Thus, once "The Extasie" is read as a dramatic monologue rather than as a lyric

poem, the reader assumes a different cognitive relationship to the speaker's words.

Alan Sinfield captures the essence of the dramatic monologue's operative strategy:

> to comprehend even the simplest factors of time and place [the reader] must look through the speaker's eyes and enter his mind, and this requires an *exercise of sympathy* which influences [the reader's] attitude [toward the speaker]. "Look at it this way," we say when trying to persuade someone, and that is the strategy of dramatic monologue.[12]

Robert Langbaum offers a similar conception of the dramatic monologue. He states that the single speaker serves as "a pole for sympathy—the means by which writer and reader project themselves into the poem, the one to communicate, the other to apprehend it as an experience."[13] I am suggesting that because the dramatic monologue's unique "*way* of meaning"[14] rests on enlisting the reader's dramatic sympathy with the single speaker's words, the dramatic monologue, itself a "dialogue of one," provides the ideal poetic form for communicating a reciprocal love that is likewise sympathetic in its orientation.

Sympathy, however, is not to be understood as a purely neutral frame of mind. Rather, it is an intentional, or responsive, disposition that functions as an aspect of meaning. Langbaum briefly describes it as a "humanitarian attitude."[15] "The Extasie" alludes to a similar state of mind:

> If any, so by love refin'd,
> That he soules language understood,
> And by good love were growen all minde,
> Within convenient distance stood,
>
> He (though he knew not which soule spake,
> Because both meant, both spake the same)
> Might thence a new concoction take,
> And part farre purer then he came. (21-28)

For the reader, as for the hypothetical witness and the two lovers, the condition of understanding a dialogue of one is to adopt a "convenient

distance" from Love's text so as not to impose one's own desires and values on the life of the cognitive event.[16] The reader is to "negotiate" (17) meaning in the same way that the two lovers have arrived at their joint understanding of love.[17] The implication is that meaning is neither the exclusive property of the text nor of the reader. Rather, it is co-extensive with each.

Most readings of "The Extasie" designate as dramatic monologue only those lines beginning with "This Extasie doth unperplex" (29) to the end of the poem. According to this view, the first twenty-eight lines are spoken by a speaker recounting a past experience, with the balance of the poem voiced by the same speaker seeking to re-present the original ecstasy. It is true that the first twenty-eight lines focus on events that led up to the original ecstasy. But the introductory lines are complicated by the fact that the lovers tell us at the end of the poem that they are destined to "return" to their worldly existence as the embodiment of their exemplary love. This destiny implies that the reader encounters the two lovers *from the beginning of the poem* in their sacramental role. And given the fact that the end of the poem does not return to the narrative voice, but instead ends with the enlightened lovers' "turning" (69) into the incarnation of virtuous love, we are obligated, it seems, to read the opening lines as signifying more than the recounting of an ecstatic experience which exists only as a memory. The uninterrupted transition from the end of the poem to the beginning invites us to read the poem throughout as a dramatic monologue, and in so doing, to enact the dialogue of one at the center of their immutable love.

An apparent break at line 29 between the narrative of the first twenty-eight lines and the speaker's re-presentation of the ecstasy in the balance of the poem does not stand up to closer scrutiny. Nothing that is uttered in the first twenty-eight lines indicates that the two lovers have not retained their spiritual union, and hence their "dialogue of one," other than perhaps our initial response to the words "her, and Mee" in the fourth stanza: "Our soules, (which to advance their state, / Were gone out,) hung 'twixt her, and mee" (15-16). These lines, which point to a distinction between the two lovers, do not preclude a spiritual union now that they have rejoined their bodies. Contrary to Platonism, the Aristotelian orientation of the poem toward a body-soul union allows for individuation in the midst of spiritual—and physical—union. Furthermore, because their ecstasy reveals to them "it was not sexe" (31), or impulses arising out of differences in gender, that give birth to their love, the return to bodies, we are told, will bring about only "small change."[18]

Nothing makes this clearer than the speaker's consistent use (with the one exception mentioned above) of the first person plural even though the referent changes during the course of the poem. The subject of "wee" in the first twenty-eight lines is the lovers' separate bodies. From line 29 to the end of the poem, "wee" refers to their newly joined souls. But the parenthetical "(We said)" in line 30 consummates, verbally, the lovers' dialogic union. Even though the parenthetical phrase points to the lovers at the time of the original ecstasy, the phrase simultaneously signifies the "we" of the original ecstasy and the "we" who have "returned" to reveal their love, thus keeping their body-soul union intact. The text clearly resists attempts to identify the "we" of "(We said)" with either the bodies or the souls, attributable primarily to the fact that the poem as dramatic monologue is uttered throughout by the same speaker. Consequently, the conceptual energy necessary to binding the "wee" that signifies the lovers' bodies with the "wee" that signifies their "abler soule" within the "We" of "(We said)" unifies the poem through the reader's vital and epistemological relationship with the speaker's words. It also is noteworthy that the speaker tells us earlier that the bodies were silent during the ecstasy (20). Hence, the parenthetical "(We said)" can only be read as a verbal link between the "wee" who are bodies and the "wee" who are the "abler soule." This combined reference is further evident in line 32: "Wee [as souls] see, we [as bodies] saw not what did move." From the beginning, then, the single speaker's words bear the imprint of the two lovers' dialogic union.

Another of Donne's strategies in "The Extasie" to enlist the reader's sympathy with the speaker's words can be seen in the way the speaker uses personal pronouns to signify the presence of the silent interlocutor, who is essential to the operative strategy of the dramatic monologue. Only if we supply a scene prior to and therefore outside the context of the opening of the poem can we read "we two" (4) as if the speaker were referring to the two of them when they were together at the scene of their ecstasy. "We two," unlike "we," signals her presence there with him as he speaks "The Extasie." Together the two words function demonstratively. Otherwise, "we two" has no referent.

Other signs of the lovers' verbal union include the phrase "one another's best," adjacent to the words "we two" (4), which signifies the lovers' reciprocal, selfless love, not only explicitly, but also structurally, by the use of reciprocal pronouns. The words "one double string" (8) elicit the same mental posture; that is, the mind, in order to embrace the image, is forced to hover between the double eyebeams. The phrase

"love . . . makes both one, each this and that" (35-36) similarly joins the words with their significance. The demonstrative "this" (36), expressing pure referentiality, joins the two lovers in the word, both in their ecstasy and in their signification. The word "that" points to their individuated selves of which the spiritually joined lovers simultaneously must remain conscious as a condition of their human nature. Love, then, as the reciprocally sympathetic relationship between the two lovers, vitalized by a similar relationship between the reader and the text, indeed "makes both one."

Thus the locus of meaning and the sole empowering agent of love is language and its capacity for processing self-understanding. Moreover, with the phrase "this dialogue of one," the most telling reference to their reciprocal love, the lovers indicate that their love emanates from a verbal ecstasy, and that the knowledge gained from their ecstasy makes them one in their language: "Because both meant, both spake the same" (26). As verbal signifiers, they both mean the same because they have become one in their common object of knowledge. But the word "meant" suggests two related meanings: "intended" and "signified." In the first sense, "meant" implies that because the two lovers hold a mutual intentional feeling toward each other, they speak—as dialogue—the same words. In the second, and related, sense, and this reading conforms more nearly to the lovers' mission in the world, "meant" implies that because they have been "made" by their mutual love into that which they have perceived—"this dialogue of one"—as the linguistic embodiment of love, they will signify to those who are like-minded their "dialogue of one." As verbal signifiers, the lovers necessarily will mean the same to each other and to the appropriately dispositioned reader. It follows, then, that the viewpoint from the beginning of the poem is conditioned by and destined to reveal their exemplary love, as the end of the poem promises and in the way stipulated.

Therefore in this instance of the dramatic monologue, in which both lovers speak the same, the dialogue of one is concerned primarily with communicating the continuing union of their souls, having returned to their bodies so that "weake [which I take to mean "fallen"] men on love reveal'd may looke." In dramatic monologues such as Donne's "The Flea," however, where there is considerable disparity between the views of the speaker and the interlocutor, the responsive reader, in supplying the other side of the dialogue, remains aware of their disjunctive relationship. Dramatic monologues of this kind resemble closely those written by Robert Browning, and which most often serve as models of the form. To my knowledge, Donne's conception of the dramatic mono-

The epistemology of Love underlying "The Extasie," then, is fundamentally Aristotelian, and therefore the poem articulates not a transcendent reality, but rather an inner reality grasped in its concrete form as *logos*. The lovers' ecstasy, grounded in their souls' mutual object of love, transubstantiates their souls into that which they love, so that at love's apex their existence and essence become one: "Wee then, who are this new soule, know, / Of what we are compos'd, and made" (45-46). In other words, their understanding makes them one, because what they know and love is the same object of consciousness in one another, or, "soules language" as *logos*.[30]

In this context, it is interesting to see the link Donne establishes between language and existence, a link more recently the subject of theoretical approaches to the act of reading. Iser's thoughts on the reading process are pertinent:

> For someone else's thoughts can only take a form in our consciousness if, in the process, our unformulated faculty for deciphering those thoughts is brought into play—a faculty which, in the act of deciphering, also formulates itself. Now since this formulation is carried out on terms set by someone else, whose thoughts are the theme of our reading, it follows that the formulation of our faculty for deciphering cannot be along our own lines of orientation. Herein lies the dialectical structure of reading. The need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity—i.e., we bring to the fore an element of our being of which we are not directly conscious.[31]

The effect, then, can be very much like what Donne's lovers experience in their verbal consummation of love: "Wee see by this, it was not sexe, / Wee see, we saw not what did move" (31-32). The intellective soul, fulfilled by its proper object of love, now stands present to itself (45-46). It seems clear, then, that for Donne quintessential love consists in understanding, and in Aristotelian terms, understanding is likewise "a mode of possessing and becoming."[32] Donne acknowledges a similar epistemology of love when, in a sermon, he declares that "noble" and "soveraign" Love is "a Possessory Affection, it delivers over him that loves into the possession of that that he loves; it is a transmutatory Affection, it changes him that loves, into the very nature of that that he

loves, and he is nothing else."[33] The process rests squarely on Aristotelian terms, in short, that the mode of cognition and that perceived are qualitatively the same.

Thus when one reads literary texts, the formulation of meaning, as Iser points out, "does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated, which can then be taken over by the active imagination of the reader; it also entails the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness."[34] "The Extasie," in fact, makes such a claim: having become "some lover, such as [Donne's lovers]," a witness (or reader) "Might thence a new concoction take, / And part farre purer then he came" (27-28).

Iser describes this kind of relationship between the reader and text as the "virtual dimension of the text," which "is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader; it is the coming together of text and imagination."[35] The convergence of text and reader brings into existence the literary work. "The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader—though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text."[36] Iser elaborates on the text's modifying effect:

> [The reader] is given a role to which he must then adapt and so "modify himself" if the meaning he assembles is to be conditioned by the text and not by his own disposition. Ultimately, the whole purpose of the text is to assert a modifying influence upon that disposition, and so, clearly, the text cannot and will not merely reproduce it.[37]

It also seems to be the case that, in the act of constituting meaning, the responsive reader grants his or her own temporality to the life of the subject itself. The effect is to historicize not only the dramatic relationship, but the act of reading (and producing meaning) as well.[38] In other words, reading can actualize—and thus bring into existence—both the testimony of Donne's two lovers and the subjectivity of the sympathetic reader. For the lovers, and potentially for the reader, the experience is one of radical self-understanding.

Given the purifying, and linguistic, nature of the love celebrated in "The Extasie," it can be argued that what the poem invokes is a sympathetic disposition remarkably similar to charitable love, or *caritas*. The

reason for a charitable disposition becomes clear if we see the two lovers' relationship as a reciprocally selfless love:

> When love, with one another so
> Interinanimates two soules,
> That abler soule, which thence doth flow,
> Defects of lonelinesse controules. (41-44)

In light of the lovers' union of souls within the single "abler soule," it seems plausible that what they love in each other is the image of God in which each is created and the true end of human love. In *De Civitate Dei,* Augustine specifically treats *caritas* as an existential and epistemological mode of consciousness:

> Nothing has been said to make clear whether the love by which our existence and the knowledge of it are loved *is itself the object of love.* The answer is yes; and the proof is this, that what is really loved, in men who deserve to be loved, is love itself. For, we do not call a man good because he knows what is good, but because he loves it. Why, then, do we not see that what we love in ourselves is the very love by which we love whatever is good? . . . [And] by increasing in himself the love of what is right, decrease his love of what is evil until his whole life has been transformed to good and brought to perfection.[39]

Augustine continues by attributing the human capacity for this kind of love to our creation in the image of God:

> When, therefore, we contemplate His image in our very selves, let us . . . return to ourselves, rise and seek Him from whom we have departed by sin. In Him our existence will know no death, our knowledge embrace no error, our love meet no resistance.[40]

The only explicit statement in "The Extasie" about the source of their love occurs near the end of the poem with the reference to "a great Prince" (68). Here we are led to understand that the union of the lovers' mode of knowledge with their common object of knowledge has

revealed a great Prince at the immutable center of their love. The association of the Prince with the *imago Dei* seems inescapable, since their purifying love reveals the Prince as the source of the soul's being and of its ultimate perfection.

An early Greek work, *Encomium of Helen*, by Gorgias, provides an interesting link with "The Extasie" by casting light on the identity of the "great Prince." In the *Encomium*, Gorgias, a rhetorician, makes specific reference to speech as "a powerful ruler," or lord, "superhuman" in its rhetorical power.[41] Transliterated, the sentence "Speech is a powerful ruler" reads *logos dunastés megas estin*, with *dunastés* signifying "lord" or "master," a word used of Zeus and chief men in a state.[42]

In view of Donne's considerable knowledge of the art of rhetoric, the reference in Gorgias' work reinforces the association of "the great Prince" with language, and even more specifically with the Word. And if we accept the Prince as signifying the Love that rules the "abler soule," then the association of the Prince with the *imago Dei*, and beyond that with the perfection of their souls, becomes defensible.

Donne thus sets the stage for Love by transmuting the dramatic sympathy necessary to reading a dialogue of one into a charitable disposition analogous to that shared by the "pure lovers soules" (65). They claim, in fact, that the "great Prince" at the profound center of their love must be made incarnate. Were they not to embody and thus share their purifying love, the great Prince, we are told, would remain imprisoned within the undifferentiated soul of the two lovers. This reading thus produces an identification between love and its verbal expression at every point. And by virtue of this alliance, Donne's enlightened readers discover in what spirit such purifying love should be faced.[43]

It is of course true that much of what I have stated implies knowledge gained from at least a second reading of "The Extasie." Given the occasion of the poem, however, we can understand why this is so. Unlike the conventional narration of temporal events, a narrative of *ekstasis*, like a conversion narrative, is by necessity tautological, that is, its beginning is in its end, shaped by the final insight. And by not reverting in the closing lines of "The Extasie" to the narrative voice, the words continually "turn" (69), for those lovers who soul's language understand (22; 73), into the verbal embodiment of Love.

Having cast the lovers' "dialogue of one" in the form of the dramatic monologue, and thereby forging a creative link between the reader and text, Donne effects the promised revelation. From its beginning to its end, and back again, conjoining body and spirit, Donne's "Extasie"

moves in an unbroken circle that, like divine love, has no end. And in cognitive sympathy with the poem's language of Love, readers for all time can share and continue in the knowledge of Love's sacramental expression.

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Notes

[1] Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Scribner's, 1969), p. 172.

[2] *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (New York: Doubleday-Anchor Books, 1967), l. 70. All quotations from "The Extasie" are taken from this edition.

[3] Rosalie L. Colie (*The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973]) indicates that generic forms were not very clearly defined in the Renaissance, but she does find "the connection of the literary *kinds* with kinds of knowledge and experience" (p. 29).

[4] "Criticism and the Experience of Interiority," in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*,, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1980), p. 45. Reprinted from *The Structuralist Controversy: The Language of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*, ed. Richard A. Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 56-72.

[5] *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose From Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1974), p. 280. See also Roman Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, trans. Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olson (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1973).

[6] *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 168-69, 198. Although Iser writes about the act of reading in general, his (and Ingarden's) observations about "places of indeterminancy" within the text help to explain how poems such as Donne's dramatic monologues engage the reader in the constitution of meaning. But in the case of Donne's poems, the content of the silences, for the most part, is indirectly supplied by what the single speaker's words signify. Meaning, then, occupies circumscribed boundaries. Iser's theory of reading takes a similar position, that in reading we formulate that which is unformulated in the text (*The Implied Reader*, p. 287).

[7] See Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Methuen, 1977), p. 24. Viewing the dramatic monologue as neither pure fiction nor direct address by the poet, Sinfield claims that specimens of the genre "feign," in that they constitute a "claim for the real-life existence of the speaker on the readers' plane of actuality," while at the same time making a claim for a "created reality, a realm of fiction," because the characters are "within the framework of a narrative" mediated by a writer who has arranged the events (p. 24). The dramatic monologue may lean toward either pole—fiction or autobiography—so long as the feint is maintained. "The issue," Sinfield emphasizes, "is the relationship between the reader and those events and words" (p. 24).

[8] Given the poem's attention to language, the word "compos'd" (46) assumes a meaning beyond a more narrow reference to the material and spiritual elements that constitute the two lovers. "Compos'd" can be read as an allusion to their "composition" by an author-creator. And as verbal signifiers knowing (in the sense of possessing) their essence (45-46), or composition, they have become one with their signification.

[9] All studies of the dramatic monologue that I consulted point to these three formal conditions. For the most formalized approach see Ina Beth Sessions, "The Dramatic Monologue," *PMLA* 62 (1947), 503-16. See also, A. Dwight Culler, "Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue," *PMLA* 90 (1975), 366-85; Samuel S. Curry, *Browning and the Dramatic Monologue* (Boston: Expression, 1908); Robert Huntington Fletcher, "Browning's Dramatic Monologs," *Modern Language Notes* 23 (1908), 108-11; Benjamin Willis Fuson, *Browning and His English Predecessors in the Dramatic Monolog*, State University of Iowa Studies, Vol. VIII (Iowa City: State Univ. of Iowa Press, 1948); Claud Howard, "The Dramatic Monologue: Its Origin and Development," *Studies in Philology* 4 (1910), 31-88; Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957); Patricia Parker, "Dante and the Dramatic Monologue," *Stanford Literature Review* 2 (1985), 165-83; Ralph W. Rader, "The Dramatic

Monologue and Related Lyric Forms," *Critical Inquiry* 3 (1976), 131-51; Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue*. Sinfield states that "the silent auditor is the most artificial and peculiar feature of dramatic monologue" (p. 26). Discussing the growing tendency toward "dramaticality" in the Baroque lyric, Lowry Nelson, Jr., sees the complete rhetorical situation as being composed of speaker, audience and reader (*Baroque Lyric Poetry* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961], p. 88). Although Robert Langbaum does not disqualify as dramatic monologues those poems in which reference is made to past action, he insists that "the utterance about the past must have a strategic significance within a present-tense situation" (p. 148).

[10] Howard, p. 38.

[11] Culler, p. 368. See also Arthur F. Marotti, "Donne and 'The Extasie'" in *The Rhetoric of Renaissance Poetry: From Wyatt to Milton*, ed. Thomas O. Sloan and Raymond B. Waddington (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1974), pp. 140-73, and in particular his views on the role of the reader in "The Extasie" (pp. 168-73).

[12] Sinfield, p. 6. Italics mine.

[13] Langbaum, p. 52. Langbaum sees "sympathy" as a means to the end in the dramatic monologue, "the end being to establish the reader's sympathetic relation to the poem, to give him 'facts from within'" (p. 78). Furthermore, because Langbaum's model for the dramatic monologue derives primarily from those written by Robert Browning (obscuring Donne's contributions to the form), he emphasizes dramatic irony and the consequent disequilibrium between what the speaker says and what he reveals. Given that Browning's most successful dramatic monologues feature "reprehensible" speakers, the effect created in the reader, according to Langbaum, is a "tension between sympathy and moral judgment" (p. 85). In my view, Donne achieves in "The Extasie" a virtual coalescence of sympathy and memorialized perspective.

[14] Langbaum, p. 77.

[15] Langbaum, p. 168; see also pp. 78-79.

[16] "Convenient" (24) has been defined as "agreeing with or consonant to the nature or character of; in accordance with; in keeping with; befitting, becoming to or for a thing or person" (*OED*, s.v. "convenient). Lines 21-28 indicate that if the witness stands in the same psychological relationship to the two lovers as they stand in to each other (made one by their "dialogue of one"), then he too will depart refined and enlightened, the two effects occurring simultaneously. Gale Carrithers, in his study of Donne's sermons, finds a similar relationship between the preacher and congregation:

> the insistence on the Holy Ghost in the Creed and the following dialogue, and in the earlier Absolution made it possible for a man such as Donne, in the primitive party of the church, to conceive of the Anglican dual ministry of word and sacrament as two in one. Proper preaching and the proper reception, or "application" of it he took to be working toward a right relationship to the *logos*, to be hearing "in the words of the preacher the Word of God."

(*Donne at Sermons: A Christian Existential World* [Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1972], pp. 15-16.) Carrithers cites one of Donne's sermons in which he comments on the efficaciousness of words in the Sacrament and in preaching:

> ". . . we *make* the naturall body of Christ Jesus appliable to our soules, by the words of Consecration in the Sacrament, and our soules apprehensive, and capable of that body, by the word Preached. (3.S12.137-139, my italics)" (*Donne at Sermons*, p. 16)

[17] "Negotiate" implies holding "communication or conference (with another) for the purpose of arranging some matter by mutual agreement" (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "negotiate").

[18] It should be noted that although the single speaker utters the poem throughout, the words beginning with line 29 to the end of the poem are a re-presentation of the words uttered by the newly joined souls. This fact contradicts the view that the speaker at the end of the poem is a male speaker attempting to seduce his mistress.

[19] *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1973), XII.9. Thomas Aquinas reinforces Aristotle's conception of understanding:

> Wherefore a separate substance, although it is by itself actually intelligible, is nevertheless not understood in itself except by an intellect with which it is one. And it is thus that a separate substance understands itself by its essence: so that according to this *the intellect, the thing understood, and the act of understanding are the same thing.*

(*The Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. The English Dominican Fathers from The Latest Leonine Edition [London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1923], II.XCVIII).

[20] *De Anima*, trans. J. A. Smith in *Introduction to Aristotle*, III.4.

[21] *De Anima*, III.4.

[22] *De Anima*, III.6.

[23] *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.XCVIII.

[24] *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.XCVIII.

[25] *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.XCVIII. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics* in *Introduction to Aristotle*, XIII.9.

[26] *The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne: A History of the Plain and Eloquent Styles* (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1967), p. 313. See also A.J. Smith, "The Metaphysic of Love," *Review of English Studies* 9 (1958), 362-375.

[27] *De Anima*, II.1. In a letter to Sir Henry Goodyere, quoted in Herbert J. C. Grierson's edition of Donne's poetry, Donne writes: "I make account that this writing of letters, when it is with any seriousness, is a kind of extasie, and a departure and secession and suspension of the soul, which doth then communicate itself to two bodies" (*The Poems of John Donne*, 2 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1912], II, 42).

[28] *De Anima*, II.1.

[29] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.3. See also Michael McCanles, "Distinguish in Order to Unite: Donne's 'The Extasie,'" *Studies in English Literature* 6 (1966), 59-75. McCanles ascribes a "unity-amid-separation" to the two lovers, but whereas he sees this dialectic constituted by what he describes as a "proportional" relationship, I find the two lovers inter-related by their contiguous sympathetic dispositions, that is, by their cognitive union in the *imago Dei* in which both are created. Helen Gardner, who argues for the necessary union of the lovers' bodies and souls, regards Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* (publ. 1535) as a major influence on Donne's thinking. Of particular significance for my reading of "The Extasie" is a passage Gardner cites from Ebreo in which Philo tells his mistress, Sophia:

> "For knowing you to possess virtue, intelligence and beauty, no less admirable than wondrously attractive, my will desired your person, which reason rightly judged in every way noble, excellent and worthy of love. And this, my affection and love, has transformed me into you, begetting in me a desire that you may be fused with me, in order that I, your lover, may form but a single person with you, my beloved, and equal love may make of our two souls one, which may likewise vivify and inform our two bodies. The sensual element in this desire excites a longing for physical union, that the union of bodies may correspond to the unity of spirits wholly compenetrating each other (pp. 56-57)."

(Cited in Helen Gardner, ed., "'The Ecstasy,'" in *John Donne: The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1965], pp. 259-65 [p. 263]). Gardner's essay on "'The Ecstasy'" excerpts from her longer and more detailed article "The Argument about 'The Ecstasy,'" in *Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies Presented to Frank Percy Wilson* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 279-306.

[30] The commentary by Shawcross on the word "interinanimates" (42), which, like "entergraft" (9), is a Donne coinage, captures the word's reference to the absolute state of a perfectly reciprocal love: "both 'mutually breathes life into' and 'mutually removes the consciousness of.' The latter stresses the oneness of the abler soul which results when the individual souls are 'inanimated'" (*The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, p. 131, n. 42).

[31] *The Implied Reader*, p. 294.

[32] Peterson, *The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne*, p. 315. Peterson's explanation of Donne's "predominantly Aristotelian position" clarifies further the correspondence between Artistotle's theory of cognition and love's mode of understanding:

> One is said to possess and in a sense to become an object, according to the Aristotelian view, insofar as he understands it. The intellect is both "passive" and "active": actively, it abstracts the intelligible from sensation; passively it is *informed* by what it has actively made *intelligible* (p. 315).

[33] *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1953-1962), 184-85.

[34] *The Implied Reader*, p. 294.

[35] *The Implied Reader*, p. 279.

[36] *The Implied Reader*, pp. 274-75.

[37] *The Act of Reading*, p. 153. On the conflict that may arise between the norm of the text and the norms the reader holds, Iser states:

> The more committed the reader is to an ideological position, the less inclined he will be to accept the basic theme-and-horizon structure of comprehension which regulates the text-reader interaction. He will not allow his norms to become a theme, because as such they are automatically open to the critical view inherent in the virtualized positions that form the background. And if he is induced to participate in the events of the text . . . the result will often be open rejection of the book and its author. (*The Act of Reading*, p. 202)

[38] See also Thomas Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* (London: Methuen, 1986), esp. pp. 88-104. Docherty's essentially Saussurean approach leads him to conclude that in much of Donne's poetry, even though it often strives to project an enduring present, "the progress of historical time becomes . . . a series of more or less perfectly repeated (or 're-presented') instants, with no necessary or continuous connection linking them" (p. 96). Docherty adds, however, that "this need not imply a rejection of the historical significance of the texts. Indeed, on the contrary, it opens the possibility of regarding the texts as potential events, rather than as mere fetishized self-present objects. As signifiers, they demand to be enacted, to be made to signify in the event of interpretation" (p. 97).

[39] *City of God*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh, S.J., Demetrius B. Zema, S.J., Grace Monahan, O.S.U., and Daniel J. Honan, ed. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: Image Books, 1958), ch. 28, p. 238. Italics mine.

[40] *City of God*, ch. 28, p. 239. On Donne's conception of the soul as having "imprinted" on it the image of God, see *The Sermons of John Donne*, II, 72-73.

[41] *Encomium of Helen*, trans. D. M. MacDowell (Bristol Classical Press, 1982), pp. 22-25. The passage reads:

> But if it was speech that persuaded and deceived [Helen's] mind, it is also not difficult to make a defence for that and to dispel the accusation thus. Speech is a powerful ruler. Its substance is minute and invisible, but its achievements are superhuman; for it is able to stop fear and to remove sorrow and to create joy and to augment pity.

There are at least three other allusions in "The Extasie" to the lovers' "abler soule" as the principality of "a great Prince": the advancement of the lovers' "state" (15); the way the "abler soule" "controules" (44) the loneliness of separation by uniting the two lovers' souls in a symbiotic relationship; and the lovers' consequent immunity to the "invasion" of change (48).

[42] I am indebted to Professor Mark W. Edwards, Classics Department, Stanford University, for his assistance with translation. On the power of rhetoric to enlist the audience's "sympathy," see Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, III.6-7. See also Jane P. Tompkins, "The Reader in History: The Changing Shape of Literary Response" in *Reader-Response Criticism*, pp. 201-32.

[43] See 1 John 4:7-12 on God as love, and thus to love perfectly is to know God, Who is the Source of love. T. S. Eliot finds the metaphysical poets ". . . at best, engaged in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling. And this means both that they are more mature, and that they wear better, than later Poets," in *Selected Essays: 1917-1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), p. 248.