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"Why should they not alike in all parts touch?": Donne and the Elegiac Tradition

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quicquid eris, mea semper eris
(Ovid, *Amores* 3.11b.49)

the likeness being such,
Why should they not alike in all parts touch?
(Donne, "Sapho to Philaenis" 48)[1]

In her essay on the elegy "Sapho to Philaenis," Elizabeth D. Harvey argues that Donne "appears to challenge the erotic subjugation perpetrated by Ovid [in *Heroides* 15], acting out his rivalry with his predecessor in the art of love poetry upon the body." But this is hopeful, even wishful thinking. A poem written by a man in which a woman masturbates in front of a mirror (a lowbrow pornographic cliché, a highbrow literary first) hardly emblematizes a rivalry with Ovid. Actually, as male fantasy and wish-fulfillment, the monologue endorses the "erotic subjugation" that the master perpetrates. And, to recast Harvey, just as Sapho "discover[s] the body's bilateral symmetry, the perfect equivalence between its right and left halves,"[2] Donne's erotic poetics make a similar narcissistic twinning with Ovid's. Why indeed should they not alike in all parts touch?

This strange poem, until recently excluded from the canon of the *Elegies*, provides an indirect gloss for this very canon. For example, Sapho's pleading tribute to Philaenis includes some humorous jibes at young men and their inadequacies. Although at first such jocularity

may seem to be Donne's heterocentric way of stereotyping the lesbian psyche, it serves a larger intertextual purpose:

> if we justly call each silly *man*
> *A litle world*, What should we call thee than? (SP 19-20)

Both Donne and his Sapho know that men are silly creatures indeed. Perhaps if it is just to refer to every man as "a little world made cunningly" (*Holy Sonnets* 5.1), it is also just to think of "some soft boy" (SP 31) as the world of men in microcosm:

> His chinne, a thorny hairy unevennesse
> Doth threaten, and some daily change possesse. (SP 33-34)

This archetypal male serves as surrogate for the man who speaks in the *Elegies*. Here, physical description mirrors the mind of that persona: uneven, threatening, changeable, bristly. So too the grotesque physical description of male lovemaking:

> why shouldst thou than
> Admit the tillage of a harsh rough man?
> Men leave behinde them that which their sin showes,
> And are, as theeves trac'd, which rob when it snows. (37-40)

That fluid left "behinde" is the most appropriate emblem imaginable for the speaker of the *Elegies*: unmistakable in color and odor and curiously ephemeral. In condemning men, Donne's Sapho condemns the persona of *Elegies* 1-20 who, like the Ovidian *desultor amoris*[3] from which he is derived, is a failure with women. And Donne performs this Ovidian trick in the *Elegies* themselves. Careful to distance himself from his reanimation of the *desultor*, the author allows his young lover to demolish himself with his own words.

I

Although there is some consensus that Donne knew and imitated Roman elegy, critics disagree as to which poet he owes the most, Ovid or Propertius (usually championing one at the expense of the other).

Nor do they agree whether he was incompetently Anglicizing elegiac conventions, or brilliantly satirizing them in an extended fit of anti-Petrarchism as he began developing his unique style in the 1590's.[4] The first great modern defender of the *Elegies*, J. B. Leishman, claims that Donne "seems to have been the first to perceive what novel, surprising, and shocking effects" could be created by forging neo-Ovidian English verse in pentameter couplets. Anthony La Branche expands Leishman's thesis by arguing that Donne engages in "close scrutiny" of the *auctores* (i.e. authoritative models from antiquity), and that their legacy to him is an "awareness of self-deception." To Louis Martz, the *Elegies* portray "a much more ruthless and raging world of passion than the bland and sophisticated Ovid would ever represent."[5] But there is nothing bland about Ovid, which Donne shows us by imitating and reanimating the master. Furthermore, Donne is far from the first poet to foment his poetics in the Ovidian-erotic tradition, one at least as old as Maximianus (550 AD).

Two articles written in the last twenty years concerning Donne's Ovidian legacy are of particular importance to my discussion. The first is an engagingly radical claim by Alan Armstrong that Donne actually eliminates the distinction between artist and speaker, creates "the Ovidian self-conscious persona," and "speaks with simultaneous and complete awareness of himself and his audience." I will argue instead that what appears to be the elimination of the chasm between creator and creation is nothing of the sort. Donne actually broadens the distinction between himself and his persona.[6] (This term, no odious modern word but current in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, was one that Julius Caesar Scaliger traced to the Greek *peri sôma*, "around the body.")[7]

The second study is Lois E. Bueler's analysis of Elegy 7, "Natures lay Ideot," as "an instrument of self-revelation in which the speaker displays . . . just those errors and pretensions that have led to his failure."[8] However, she sees this trick as an innovation because she does not think that Ovid's *Amores* use a self-revelatory persona. On the contrary, these early poems of Ovid's are indeed revelatory of the speaker who narrates them; there is an ironic distance between the poet

and the speaker or student I call *desultor amoris*; and Donne's broadening of the distinction between voice and poet is his most pronounced Ovidian inheritance, *prosopographia*.[9] Although Leishman considers Donne's Ovidianism an innovation, it is actually quite traditional, even medieval. Although Martz decries Ovid's "blandness," the *auctor* provides the spice for his English imitator. Although Gill criticizes Donne's performances as poorly-realized imitations of *neoterica*, she has simply misunderstood the Baroque reincarnation of Ovid's Protean narrator.

Since the Elegies are not governed by a narrative sequence and are subject to so much tonal modulation, it is probably unwise to view them as a unified work of art in the manner of the *Amores*. However, from the time that they circulated in manuscript they were read as a group, inviting us not to read them as "separate compositions" but as a polyglot collection with a single speaker.[10] In each elegy, Donne imitates, reanimates, and Mannerizes[11] the Ovidian *desultor*, who creates and destroys himself over the course of fifty poems in the semisequential framework of the *Amores*. Both poets make their personae into men whom women instinctively do not like.

II

It has been posited that "Ovid's *persona* appears to be a caricature of the elegiac lover generally."[12] This judicious assessment can also apply to Renaissance reanimations of the classical *auctor*: the wayward youth in Christopher Marlowe's underrated translation of the *Amores*, *All Ovids Elegies* (c. 1595-1600), and Donne's *amator* in the *Elegies*, sons of the *desultor amoris* who both stand confirmed in full stupidity. Just as Ovid imitates and ridicules Propertius and Gallus, Donne gives Ovid (and maybe Marlowe) the same treatment.

Yet Donne's admiration for Ovid (like Ovid's for Propertius) is total, and his borrowings are approximate. He uses the Ovidian speaker in the manner of Scaliger's *figura*, *typos*, or *modellum*, or what Puttenham would conceptualize as *paradigma*.[13] Therefore, in spite of obvious echoes such as "burthens well born are light" (*Elegies* 12.84) from "leue fit, quod bene fertur, onus" (*Am.* 1.2.10), A. J.

Peacock properly counsels us to avoid the arithmetical argument for or against direct borrowing (i.e., tabulating allusions and echoes in the manner of a nineteenth-century German philologist).[14] It is better to look at the Ovidian *desultor* as *typos* for Donne.

As with many narrators, the Ovidian *desultor* deconstructs himself into unreliability. Although he appears to give in to love (1.2), and to pledge himself as one who "will love with spotlesse truth" (*AOE* 1.3.6),[15] his predilection for falsehood undoes him very quickly. Even his boast that he is an expert in adultery, one who can communicate with nods, winks, and words written in wine on the table (1.4.15-20), is quickly undercut by his own insecurity:

> I have been wanton, therefore am perplext,
> And with mistrust of the like measure vext. (45-46)

Such insecurity proves prophetic; in the third book of the *Amores*, his bored married lady, Corinna, now practices the same delusive tricks under his nose with another man, the very "privy signes" and "dissembling truths" the *desultor* had used to delude her husband (*Am.* 3.11b.2; *AOE* 3.10.23-24). One can easily trace such ironic echoes; riddled with contradictions, the narrator's overblown sense of himself hardly needs a pin to be exploded.

Yet one need not jump between books to find this deflation. *Amores* 1.5 recounts either a siesta, tryst, or both, and, like the poem that it is said to have engendered, Donne's Elegy 19 ("Come, Madam, come"), there seems to be a suspicious discrepancy between what occurs and what the lover wishes would occur.[16] The following poem, 1.6, is addressed to the *ianitor* or *gardador* who keeps the *desultor* at a distance from his mistress, which seems curious after the intimacies recounted in the previous elegy. Yet this begins to make sense in 1.7, in which the young man berates himself for beating Corinna. *Amores* 1.8 begins with a series of curses directed at the speaker of an interior monologue, Dipsas, Corinna's nurse, who advises her mistress how to deceive a man just like the *desultor*. This irony cannot of course occur to him, nor perhaps that he has been reduced to eavesdropping after the

apparently successful coitus of 1.5, nor that the symbolic "me mea prodidit umbra," or "my shadow me betraide" (*Am./AOE* 1.8.109), emphasizes that he is truly substanceless, dark, a betrayer of self; and that we can see his moves just as clearly as Dipsas and Corinna can. As he will explain later, "si qua uolet regnare diu, deludat amantem"; "Her lover let her mocke, that long will raigne" (*Am./AOE* 2.19.33). Our narrator sometimes fails to cushion his backside when he experiences his many pratfalls.

This is particularly true as the *Amores* progress into their last two books. In an attempt to depict himself as a sophisticated gigolo, "Non ego mendosos ausim defendere mores" (*Am.* 2.4) "I meane not to defend the scapes of any, / Or justifie my vices being many" (*AOE* 2.4.1-2), he reveals himself even more completely as an insecure bumbler. "I cannot rule my selfe" (7) becomes his emblem.

This is why *Amores* 2.7 and 2.8, companion poems addressed to Corinna and her hairdresser Cypassis (with whom the *desultor* has been fornicating), are hardly a surprise, but an affirmation of the dubiety that the speaker has been demonstrating since 1.1. Hence the irony of the tag "decepta est opera nulla puella mea," (2.10.26), "no woman is deceived by my technique," is something we already know. The *desultor* means to say that he disappoints no one, but his diction implies that he fools no one. In one of Ovid's many little jibes at his speaker's expense, for all the low esteem in which he holds women, they always outsmart him. The cruellest joke that the author perpetrates against his character is in the cluster 2.12, 2.13, 2.14. The first poem celebrates the successful *concubitus* implied in 1.5; the following pair decries the abortion that results. Even 3.7 and 3.8, the speaker's fit of impotence followed by the revelation that a new man has taken his place in bed, cannot match his sense of repudiation in the previous triad. Yet these experiences do not change him. Nothing can penetrate that skull. This is why "non ego sum stultus, ut ante fui" (*Am.* 3.11a.32), "I am not as I was before, unwise" (*AOE* 3.10.32) is perhaps Ovid's biggest joke. We can see much more about the *desultor* than he can see himself, a lesson of the master not lost upon the pupil Donne.

III

"Julia" (13) has been much maligned and sometimes even excluded from the canon. Yet it comments on the speaker of the *Elegies* just as "Sapho to Philaenis" does.[17] Such a claim may at first seem fantastic, considering that "Julia" is far less subtle and intricate than "Sapho," and far more polemical, even antifeminist. Actually, its bitter laughter seems aimed at savaging Propertian élan and Ovidian good humor:

> But oh her minde, that *Orcus*, which includes
> Legions of mischiefs, countlesse multitudes
> Of formlesse curses, projects unmade up,
> Abuses yet unfashion'd, thoughts corrupt,
> Mishapen Cavils, palpable untroths,
> Inevitable errours, self-accusing loathes:
> These, like those Atoms swarming in the Sunne,
> Throng in her bosome for creation. (13.23-31)

The subject matter and tone are juvenile as well as Juvenilian, but the ironic intertextuality is certainly Ovidian. Just as Sapho vivisects men, and just as the *Amores-desultor* has a spectacular ability to anatomize his own faults unknowingly as he criticizes others, so Donne's narrator oddly describes himself in his critique of the unfortunate Julia. So the poem is crucial to apprehending the speaker of the *Elegies*. "*Orcus*" is hell, a useful term to describe the mind of the speaker, who anticipates Satan's anguish a half-century later: "my self am Hell" (*PL* 4.75). Therefore, the "legions of mischiefs" and "formless curses" he attributes to Julia would be better affixed to himself. The much-maligned Flavia in "The Anagram" whom "Dildoes, Bedstaves, and her Velvet Glasse / Would be as loath to touch as Joseph was" (2.53-54) could attest to such curses and mischief, as could the man who has been cuckolding him in "The Expostulation": "May Wolves teare out his heart, Vultures his eyes" (15.47). There is also the (imagined) thief of "The Bracelet," at whom Donne's narrator spits: "Lust-bred diseases rot thee; and dwell with thee / Itching desire, and no abilitie" (11.103-04).

Donne's narrator is also the master of "Abuses yet unfashion'd, thoughts corrupt," particularly regarding women, which is most clearly manifested in the antifeminist elegies "Change" (3) and "The Comparison" (8). "Women are made for men, not him, not mee" (3.10), which is to say that women are insatiable and changeable, and good for even less: "They'are our clogges, not their owne" (15). All women are like this, the narrator intimates, and he clarifies his revulsion from biological femaleness in appropriately physical terms: "Ranke sweaty froth thy Mistresse's brow defiles, / Like spermatique issue of ripe menstruous boiles" (8.7-8). The mistress's imagined physical excrescence symbolizes the speaker's very real verbal excrescence; the latter is much more disgusting than the former. Hence "I am no Libeller" (14.7) seems a strange claim. He, not Donne, hates women.[18]

That Donne's speaker should accuse Julia of untruths, "Cavils" (petty verbal harassment), errors, and self-hatred is particularly ironic and amusing. Although he decries Julia's fickleness, he informs us on one occasion,

> Change'is the nursery
> Of musicke, joy, life, and eternity, (3.35-36)

and asks us on another,

> why should I
> Abjure my so much lov'd variety? (17.1-2)

Similarly, he carps, "I hate extreames" (9.45), then praises what he hates: "The last [woman] I saw in all extreames is faire" (17.25). Though he longs for immutability in the women he professes to love, he feels obligated to provide no stability himself, full of cavils, "My hate shall outgrow thine" (6.43), and confessions of his own unworthiness: "I thy seavenfold chaine have lost" (11.7), "The falt was mine" (12.21), and "I found my misse" (14.68). And, in a sartorial-hygenic error that some might call unforgivable, he even wears too much cologne: "I brought with mee / That, which betray'd me to my enemie" (4.39-40).

Therefore, the speaker's claims such as "My Deeds shall still be what my words are now" (12.96) are true in a way that he could not possibly understand. Also, a question that he asks in "The Expostulation," "must we reade you quite from what you speake, / And finde the truth out the wrong way?" (15.20-21), invites us to find truth out in precisely this "wrong way."

The Ovidian unreliability of Donne's narrator is established from the first word of the opening poem, "Fond" (1.1), to the last word of the final one, "men" (20.46). Adjective and noun make a nice twinning for the twenty *Elegies* (and "Sapho") as a whole, and enunciate a kind of theme that Donne develops throughout. Most men are foolish, and the speaker is more foolish than most men.

In "Jealousie" (1) Donne's persona castigates the married woman with whom he has been disporting himself for her lack of discretion. Yet he has also demonstrated a similar absence of this quality, as "His parting from her" suggests:

> ambush'd round with household spies,
> And over all thy husbands towring eyes
> That flam'd with oylie sweat of jealousie. (12.40-42)

Since the two of them have been carrying on in the cuckold's house (and bed), it is not surprising that they have been discovered, and the responsibility lies with the lover as well as with the faithless wife. In contrast, the Ovidian *desultor* is not discovered until *Amores* 2.19, and then by his own accord. When Donne's speaker professes, "Now I see many dangers" (1.25), one wonders why he has not seen them before. The aforementioned overdose of cologne in "The Perfume" (4) suggests that he is so unsubtle that his enemies, such as a dropsical or "Hydroptique father" (6), can literally smell his presence.

That we can "smell out" this speaker becomes part of Donne's poetics in creating him, especially in the speaker's habit of reversing himself. In "Change" (3), and "The heavens rejoyce in motion" (17), the speaker begins by decrying faithlessness in the woman he allegedly loves, and then ends by confirming his own, a studied, demonic

reversal. Similarly, the lover in "His Picture" (5), boarding a warship, offers a miniature of himself in valediction to his mistress in the event of his death. As the double meaning in the title implies, what a self-portrait (however unintentional) it is! Most of the poem decries the lady's shallowness without revealing the reason for doing so, and unconsciously delineates the lover's own lack of depth, revealing his "judging minde" (5.15), a "mind [whetted] to scorne" (6.36-37), as "The Anagram" (2) and "The Comparison" (8), would seem to make explicit. A more implicit illustration of this scornful consciousness is that dilapidated exercise in courtly comparison, "The Autumnall" (9). Donne's speaker, spavined by the conflicting responsibilities of flattery and truth-telling, blunders into describing the old woman's wrinkles, attempts to right himself by calling them "*Loves graves*" (9.13-16), and, the preposterousness of the comparison lost upon him, commences digging his own rhetorical grave: "may still / My love descend, and journey downe the hill" (47-48). And down it goes.

IV

It is perhaps most useful to read Elegies 18, 19, and 20 with those that precede and, to some extent, foretell the failures encoded within. Even "A Tale of a Citizen and his Wife" (14), often decried as apocryphal,[19] demonstrates the same speaker's personality, albeit in neo-Chaucerian narrative. He spends most of the poem conversing with the "Cuckold"-to-be (2) in order to gull him into staying at a "weltry'd Inne" (60) where his wife, "a pretty peate" who is "well fitting for the feate" (13-14) might be "Well us'd and often" (62). But as oafish as the once-and-future cuckold may be, he is still able to sniff out the speaker's plot and escape from him. The narrator's admission, "I found my misse" (68), indicates that he has discovered his own mistake of pressing his prey with too much vigor. Like many other short verbal bursts in the *Elegies*, the phrase is a type of clue to understanding their speaker, the same man who unconsciously reveals his own inner darkness and lack of perception in the middle of the *aubade* "His parting from her":

> Should *Cinthia* quit thee, *Venus*, and each starre,
> It would not forme one thought dark as mine are . . .
> . . . . . .
> Such is already my felt want of sight,
> Did not the fires within me force a light. (12.7-8; 11-12)

But the reader need not share this "want of sight" in the last three *Elegies*, 18, 19, and 20, in which the speaker is always boasting, entreating, and pursuing, but never enjoying consummation. Like *Ovidius magister amoris*, Donne undercuts his speaker. For all the low esteem in which he holds women, they always outsmart him, and refuse him. "Loves Progress" (18), that infamous bit of eroticism that counsels one to begin foreplay at the foot because it has "Some Symetry . . . with that part / Which thou dost seek," one of those "Two purses" that "Rich nature hath in women wisely made" (74-75, 91-92), is ironically titled, because no "progress" is made. In "To his Mistress Going to Bed" (19), the alleged striptease may be entirely imaginary, because there is little evidence that Mistress is anywhere near a bed. "Loves Warre" (20) makes clear that love is a war that this speaker loses. He cannot have sex; he can only beg for it. He does not find his miss, but misses his find.

Elegies 18, 19, and 20, then, form an Ovidian tripartite cluster, a neo-classical triptych. Each poem can be read separately; each can be read as a commentary on the other two. And, just as *Amores* 8, for example, illuminates and distorts *Amores* 5, 6, and 7, Donne's elegy "The Dreame" (10) elucidates and foretells 18, 19, and 20:

> Image of her whom I love, more then she,
> Whose faire impression in my faithfull heart,
> Makes me her *Medall*, and makes her love mee,
> As Kings do coynes, to which their stamps impart
> The value: goe, and take my heart from hence,
> Which now is growne too great and good for me: (10.1-6)

Donne, in the manner of the neoteric elegists who serve as his models, uses seemingly direct and simple diction that is fiendish in its

ambiguity. In "more then she," the first line cuts at least two ways. The speaker declares that the image of his mistress is more real to him than her physical presence, but he implies that he loves his image of her more than her actual self, just as the speaker does in Elegy 19:

> Like pictures, or like books gay coverings made
> For lay-men, are all women thus array'd.
> Themselves are mystick books, which only wee . . .
> . . . . . .
> Must see reveal'd. Then since that I may know;
> As liberally, as to a Midwife shew
> Thy self: cast all, yea, this white lynnen hence (39-41; 43-45)

He indeed loves the image of her, a phantasm, a substanceless ornament, "more then she." As in Elegy 19, the speaker in "The Dreame" indulges his tendency to make women more mysterious than they actually are, with all of the angst of a tormented adolescent boy, and with the insight of a dilapidated neoplatonist who would much rather love a chimera than a "real woman." In this, Donne satirizes the same mindset that Ovid parodies.

One could also remark that "faire" and "faithfull" (10.2), which appear to make a nice alliterative linkage between the mistress's impression and the speaker's heart, are suspiciously bland (and hence empty) words. How fair is she? How faithful is he? How "linked" are they? A further complication is the violence of the "*Medall*" figure (3). The mistress loves the speaker as a king loves a coin imprinted with his image. Perhaps she is amorous and intense; perhaps she is greedy and narcissistic. But "makes her love mee" (3) is Donne's masterstroke, because the identity of subject, verb, and object are all in disarray, causing the reader to wonder who loves whom. In this case, "love" could be a verb with either "her" or "mee" as subject; it could also be a noun. So perhaps the "impression" of the mistress either forces or causes ("makes") her to love the speaker. It may also force or cause the speaker to love the mistress, or fashion him into her love. The erotic and emotional consequences are more than he can stand: "goe,"

he commands (5), to be counterpointed by "stay" later in the poem (21). The speaker possesses the manipulative tendency to decry women for abandoning him while simultaneously ordering them to depart and pretending to beg them to stay. He demonstrates this psychopathology again and again in the *Elegies*, not just in 18, 19, and 20.

The central theme of "The Dreame" is the fallibility of perception. What one assumes is real is of course unreal because one wishes for fantasy to be queen, and soul, and all:

> *Honours* oppresse weake spirits, and our sense,
> Strong objects dull, the more, the lesse wee see.
> When you are gone, and *Reason* gone with you,
> Then *Fantasie* is Queene and Soule, and all;
> She can present joyes meaner than you do;
> Convenient, and more proportionall.
> So, if I dreame I have you, I have you,
> For, all our joyes are but fantasticall. (7-14)

"*Fantasie*" is indeed "all." It motivates the speaker in every elegy that Donne fashions. That he prefers "meaner" joyes than those that a real woman could provide is fairly obvious, Ovidian, and male-oriented. (Like the *desultor amoris*, he is a man who wants them all: "noster in has omnis ambitiosus amor" [*Am.* 2.4.48].) The phrase reticulates back to Sapho's dismissive comments about young men and their testosterone-charged natures who "are, as theeves trac'd, which rob when it snows" (SP 39-40). Such verbal carelessness is as typical of them as the seminal stains that their baser emissions produce. So this admission-emission, if you will, also illuminates the poetic consciousness that imagines Sapho addressing Philaenis while masturbating furiously in front of a mirror. It is no act of private eroticism, but a highly public performance for her audience of male poetic voyeurs over three centuries. Hence these "joyes" in "The Dreame" are indeed more "Convenient" for a man such as the speaker, who would probably enjoy watching Sapho's fingers do their work, but hardly "proportionall" in regard to women, except in the most ridiculous sense:

> Perfection is in unitie; preferr
> One woman first, and then one thing in her. (18.9-10)

In "The Dreame" and elsewhere, his perception of women is highly disproportionate. He reduces women to the "unitie" of their sexual organs, "fantasticall" joys indeed. In "if I dreame I have you, I have you" (10.13), the speaker confirms that he can never "have" the mistress, nor does he wish to. She is too useful as an object of imaginary and reversed metaphorical lovemaking (Elegy 18), a reluctant stripper to be cajoled (19), verbal fodder for love's war (20). So Elegy 10 foretells the last three, which constitute an occluded tripartite essay in the fallibility of earthly perception in the pursuit of female flesh:

> But dearest heart, and dearer image stay;
> Alas, true joyes at best are *dreame* enough;
> Though you stay here you passe too fast away:
> For even at first lifes *Taper* is a snuffe.
> Fill'd with her love, may I be rather grown
> Mad with much *heart*, then *ideott* with none. (10.21-26)

Certainly "stay" (21) completes the (now) expected reversal from "goe" (5); similarly, "Mad with much *heart*, then *ideott* with none" (26) makes sense if the reader remembers that when the mistress is gone, "Reason is gone with" her (9). Yet the mistress *is* gone; her "image" is "dearer" to the speaker than she is (whether we read "dearest heart" as a term of address to the mistress or to his own heart); and he is indeed an idiot. Donne's firmness makes the circle of his speaker just so that the reanimation of the Ovidian *desultor* can end where it begins. He fashions the voice of a man begging for sex in the guise of poetry that purports to transcend the idea of, in the words of Mercutio, "a great natural that runs lolling up and down to hide his bauble in a hole" (*Rom.* 2.4.86-87).[20] Oddly, Sapho speaks to this failed dubiety in the question that begins her poem to Philaenis:

> Where is that holy fire, which *Verse* is said
> To have? is that inchanting force decai'd? (SP 1-2)

Although Sapho the poetess may be unsuccessful in her seduction of Philaenis, she knows that poetry itself, whether its fire is holy or unholy, is in no danger of decay as a means of enchantment. She knows that the wizard's competence is all that matters. So Donne's persona, no enchanter he, has doomed himself to the Ovidian fate of *secubitus* (sleeping alone), a comic failure in his quest for the aforementioned "Two purses." Therefore, if we apply Sapho's second question to the speaker in the *Elegies*, the answer is, obviously, yes.

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Notes

[1] All quotations from Ovid are taken from E. J. Kenney's *Amores, Medicamina Faciei Femineae Ars Amatoria Remedia Amoris*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994). A rough translation of Ovid's phrase is: "Whatever you will be, you will always be mine." My edition of Donne is C. A. Patrides's *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* (London: Everyman, 1988); I accept and utilize his numbering and ordering of the *Elegies*, but will use Arabic rather than Roman numerals.

[2] "Ventriloquizing Sappho: Ovid, Donne, and the Erotics of the Feminine Voice," *Criticism* 31 (1989): 123. Other articles on the poem: James Holstun, "'Will You Rent Our Ancient Love Asunder?' Lesbian Elegy in Donne, Marvell, and Milton," *English Literary History* 54 (1987): 835-68; two by Janel Mueller: "Lesbian Erotics: The Utopian Trope of Donne's `Sapho to Philaenis,'" *Homosexuality in Renaissance and Enlightenment England: Literary Representation in Its Historical Context*, ed. Claude J. Summers (New York: Harrington Park, 1992), 103-34; and "Troping Utopia: Donne's Brief for Lesbianism," *Sexuality and Gender in Early Modern Europe: Institutions, Texts, Images*, ed. James Grantham Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 187-207; Stella P. Revard, "The Sapphic Voice in Donne's 'Sapho to Philaenis,'" *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 63-76.

[3] In *Amores* 1.3.15, the speaker assures us, "non mihi mille placent, non sum desultor amoris," or: "a thousand women would not please me, I am no circus-rider of love." However, as I have argued elsewhere, the line is supremely disingenuous. The speaker would like nothing better than to be a circus-rider of love who leaps from mount to mount, and therefore the phrase *desultor amoris* seemed to me an aptly ironic Ovidian name for him. See *Harmful Eloquence: Ovid's "Amores" from Antiquity to Shakespeare* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 1-30.

[4] In "Musa Iocosa Mea: Thoughts on the *Elegies*," *John Donne: Essays in Celebration*, ed. A. J. Smith (London: Methuen, 1972), 47-72, Roma Gill is virtually alone in denying Donne's success as an imitator of Ovid, e.g.: "Such observations [the end of "Loves Progresse"] work like the undercurrent of imagery in poetic drama, leaving a dirty smudge on some of Donne's best-known elegies" (58). Also: "There is an adolescent crudeness about such an attitude which is very different from the suave sophistication of Ovid" (55); the *Elegies* themselves, she posits, demonstrate a "preoccupation with fairly irreverent nastiness" (57) and constitute a "mongrel breed" (70).

Most critics wisely follow Leishman in assuming that Donne takes his cue from Ovid. See *The Monarch of Wit: An Analytical and Comparative Study of the Poetry of John Donne* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), passim. Here are three dissenting voices. Achsah Guibbory opts for Juvenal in "'Oh, Let Mee Not Serve

So': The Politics of Love in Donne's *Elegies*," *English Literary History* 57 (1990): 818. Peter De Sa Wiggins says that Donne inherited from Tibullus the convention of the mistress who is unfaithful to the lover who taught her infidelity. Yet it is the *Amores*-Ovid (2.7, 2.8, 3.4, 3.7, 3.8) who taught this trick to the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and it is by no means assured that Ovid needed Tibullus to teach it to him. See "The Love Quadrangle: Tibullus 1.6 and Donne's 'lay Ideot,'" *Papers on Language and Literature* 16 (1980): 142-50. Stella P. Revard, in "Donne and Propertius: Love and Death in London and Rome," *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, eds. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1986), seems severely mistaken in writing that Ovid and Donne share little in common concerning their personae because Ovid's speaker "considers love, in sum, part of the delightful game of life." She also writes that the *Ars amatoria*, rife with dark and bitter laughter, is "exemplary for its positive view of love" (69).

[5] Respectively: Leishman, 58; La Branche, "'Blanda Elegia': The Background to Donne's 'Elegies,'" *Modern Language Review* 61 (1966): 362, 366; Martz, *The Wit of Love* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 31. Of a piece with Martz's claim is John Carey's implication that Donne's poems are superior: "Ovid's forays into the *demi-monde* of Rome were activated by nothing stronger than urbane indecency. Donne's elegies by contrast are extravagant and fantastic in their language and demeanour. More was going on in their creator's brain than Ovid dreamed of: they are the record of a soul trying to coarsen itself." See *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 41. Robert Ellrodt argues that the *Amores* had the most influence on Donne: "la prédeliction de plus en plus marquée de la génération nouvelle pour les oeuvres les plus cyniques et les plus libertines d'Ovide. On dirait d'une progression: l'influence des *Amours*, douteuse chez Drayton, s'affirme chez Donne et chez Campion à la fin du siècle, s'accentue au début du siècle suivant dans l'oeuvre poétique de Francis Beaumont" (*L'Inspiration personelle et l'esprit du temps chez les poètes métaphysiques Anglais*, 2 vols. [Paris: Corti, 1960], 2: 272-73). A. J. Peacock, complementing his predecessors, labels Donne *praeceptor amoris* (i.e. in the manner of the *Ars amatoria*-Ovid), a speaker with a "new tone of amused disingenousness" for English elegy. "Donne is not cleverly pretending to write like Ovid while in fact doing something much more modern, he is simply writing good love elegy." See "Donne's Elegies and Roman Love Elegy," *Hermathena* 119 (1975): 22, 26. The finest analysis in English on the interpenetration of the two poets is Arthur Marotti's *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 44-63.

[6] Armstrong argues that Ovid and Donne

> expect their audiences to see the logical fallacies of their self-justifying arguments . . . [They] eliminate the Propertian distinction between the consciousness of the artist and the consciousness of the persona, and turn

> their poetic strategies entirely into the rhetorical strategies of their personae, who become, in effect, the sole authors of the elegies, their speeches. . . . [U]nlike the Propertian persona, they are self-conscious, omniscient speakers, who themselves recognize and intend their reflexive irony. . . . [This] actually precludes the audience's apparent (but, in Propertius' case, real) invitation to moral or intellectual judgment of the personae and their arguments; instead, the audience's principle response is pleasure in the speakers' witty arguments.

A number of points are in order. First, it is simply impossible to eliminate the distinction between the persona and the artistic consciousness from which this being emanates. One creates, the other is created. Hence, in the second place, speakers in such poems can never be "sole authors," or truly omniscient, even if they "recognize and intend their reflexive irony," because the artistic consciousness is omnipresently creating him or her, a consciousness necessarily possessed of more knowledge than its projected speaker could possibly have. Third, the idea of the Propertian "real" is fallacious, because as Ovid well knew, rhetorical self-consciousness and the accompanying histrionic bravura that Propertius exhibits are quite suspect—Ovid parodies these tendencies freely and mercilessly. Fourth, an audience simply cannot be "preclude[d]" very well or very easily, which explains the need for rhetorical-oratorical schools in antiquity, Donne's careful construction of his sermons, and the appallingly high salaries of image-makers in contemporary political campaigns. An audience will judge, and decide if something is witty—or not. See "The Apprenticeship of John Donne: Ovid and the *Elegies*," *English Literary History* 44 (1977): 419, 424, 426, 429. R. D. Bedford suggests that Donne's reading of Ovid and Propertius, along with a love of the theater and its soliloquies, taught him the art of "dramatic representation" which "leaves the speaker in the poem . . . in an uncertain or ambivalent position." See "Ovid Metamorphosed: Donne's *Elegy XVI*," *Essays in Criticism* 32 (1982): 220. In a synthesis of such thinking, Thomas Greene distills the persona into "the textual self" who is possessed of "characteristic sophomoric cockiness." See "The Poetics of Discovery: A Reading of Donne's Elegy 19," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 2 (1989): 134. A. D. Cousins notes "an insolent sexual diffidence" in the speaker. See "The Coming of Mannerism: The Later Ralegh and the Early Donne," *English Literary Renaissance* 9 (1979): 102.

[7] See Lee Sonnino, *A Handbook to Sixteenth-Century Rhetoric* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), 100. Scaliger's *Poetices libri septem* (Lyons, 1561) was widely known in the Renaissance. Some valuable writing on the idea of persona: Hans Rheinfelder, "Das Wort `Persona'," *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 77 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1928); George T. Wright, *The Poet in the Poem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); Joan Webber, *The Eloquent 'I': Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century Prose* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968); Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature,*

Deconstruction (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), especially 146; Robert Elliot, *The Literary Persona* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[8] "The Failure of Sophistry in Donne's Elegy VII," *Studies in English Literature* 25 (1985): 83. She misreads (ingeniously, I think) "Natures lay Ideot" as a phrase apposite to the pronoun "I" that follows (7.1). Yet scrutiny of the poem demonstrates that a woman is addressed throughout; the persona is not upbraiding himself.

[9] George Puttenham's definition of *prosopographia* seems particularly apt here:

> And these be things that a poet or maker is wont to describe sometimes as true or naturall, and sometimes to faine as artificiall and not true. *viz.* The visage, speach, and countenance of any person absent or dead: and this kinde of representation is called the Counterfeit countenance: as *Homer* doth in his *Iliades*, diuerse personages: namely *Achilles* and *Thersites*, according to the truth and not by fiction. And as our poet *Chaucer* doth in his Canterbury tales set forth the Sumner, Pardoner, Manciple, and the rest of the pilgrims, most naturally and pleasantly.

Perhaps the bungling rake of the *Elegies* is simply another exercise in Chaucerian caricature, a Pardoner reconstituted twenty times over. See *The Arte of English Poesie* (London: Richard Field, 1589; rpt. Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1968), 99-100.

[10] Helen Gardner argues that the *Elegies* circulated in manuscript and that they were intended as a collection. She also provides the valuable information that Donne owned and annotated a copy of Thomas Campion's *Poemata* (1595), which contained several English elegies, and which may have inspired Donne to compose his own. See her edition of Donne's *The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), xxx-xxxiii. La Branche contends that one persona governs the *Elegies* although he adduces no Ovidian antecedent (357-68). Marotti disagrees with the first contention. He is the leading proponent of the "separate compositions" theory. To him, the tonal shifts are seismic enough to warrant labeling the speaker of a given elegy as an "Ovidian *praeceptor amoris*," a "courtly lover," a "gentleman-volunteer," and an "emotionally sensitive lover" (44) so that virtually every elegy represents a different person. Gill adopts the same attitude. To her, each poem demonstrates a different "created *persona*; and not one of them, in all probability, is the real Donne" (65).

To these arguments I say: Donne's enormous vacillation in tone and mood is entirely characteristic of his persona not just between poems but sometimes within a single poem. Furthermore, it is a strength, not a weakness, an amplification and useful distortion of the Ovidian model. The *desultor Amoris* is also prone to gigantic mood swings and personality changes so that he fulfills Marotti's four exemplary categories as well as several others of lesser distinction such as voyeur (*Am.* 1.5), physical abuser (1.7), self-recriminating victim of impotence (3.7), and

bachelor-cuckold (3.8-3.9). And Donne has no interest in troubling us with his "real" self—it would be most un-Ovidian for him to do so.

[11] For discussions of this term as it applies to poetry, see James V. Mirollo, *Mannerism and Renaissance Poetry: Concept, Mode, Inner Design* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); and David Evett, "Donne's Poems and the Five Styles of Renascence Art," *John Donne Journal* 5 (1986): 101-21.

[12] I. M. Le M. Du Quesnay, "The *Amores*," J. W. Binns, *Ovid* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 7.

[13] Sonnino, 100. Puttenham: "if in matter of counsell or perswasion we will seeme to liken one case to another, such as passe ordinarily in mans affaires, and doe compare the past with the present, gathering probabilitie of like successe to come in the things wee haue presently in hand" (205).

[14] Peacock: "If . . . Ovid's love-poetry were approached with a purely arithmetical eye for conventional themes and motifs, he would appear almost entirely derivative—in a way that would do no justice to the new tone of amused disingenuousness which he brought to the stock material of love-elegy" (28). An example of an allusion-tabulating German philologist is: Wilibald Schrötter, *Ovid und die Troubadours* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1908).

[15] When appropriate, I use Marlowe's translation of the *Amores*, *All Ovids Elegies* (c. 1600). My text is Roma Gill's in *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1: 13-84. My acronym: *AOE*.

[16] Greene argues that Elegy 19 is less graphically descriptive than *Amores* 1.5; I would counter that *Amores* 1.5 is less descriptive still. Greene makes an important point when he suggests that at the close of "Come, Madam, come," Madam is not naked: perhaps "the whole joys will remain imaginary—or verbal" (136). There are other recent essays of note on this most popular elegy. M. Thomas Hester describes the poem as an "Ovidian elegy of Catullean boldness." See "Donne's (Re) Annunication of the Virgin(ia Colony) in *Elegy XIX*," *South Central Review* 4 (1987): 51. R. V. Young suggests that the poem is satirical of Calvinism: "the justification of the elect [i.e., the lover], an inscrutible act of divine power according to the Calvinist formulation, makes God's work of salvation as arbitrary and fickle as a woman's choice of the lover admitted to her bed." See "Donne's Holy Sonnets and the Theology of Grace," "*Bright Shootes of Everlastingnesse*": *The Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 34. Also: Cheryl A. Shell, "The Foe in Sight: Discovering the Enemy in Donne's *Elegie XIX*," *War, Literature, and the Arts*, 4 (1992): 1-18; Sandy Feinstein, "Donne's 'Elegy 19': The Busk between a Pair of Bodies," *Studies in English Literature* 34 (1994): 61-77.

[17] "Julia" is one of the four or five *Elegies* that some regard as spurious. Yet a majority of twentieth-century editors attribute it to Donne. Actually, as Annabel Patterson argues, those who relegate the poem to the appendices of their editions are "motivated by a moral and evolutionary theory of Donne's development" for

which they have little evidence—very much like those gentlemen of the nineteenth century who refused to believe that Shakespeare had written *Titus Andronicus*. See "Quod oportet *versus* quod convenit: *John Donne, Kingsman*?" *Critical Essays on John Donne*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti (New York: G. K. Hall, 1994), 154. Those who credit Donne with this wonderful poem: Herbert J. Grierson in both *The Poems of John Donne*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912) and *John Donne: Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933); John Heyward, *John Donne: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose* (New York: Random House, 1930); Frank J. Warnke, *John Donne: Poetry and Prose* (New York: Modern Library, 1967); A. J. Smith, *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (New York: St. Martin's, 1971); Patrides (1985).

The notable exceptions: John T. Shawcross, *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (New York: Anchor, 1967); and Gardner, who says that "Julia" is "so undistinguished that it is impossible to suggest an author" (xlv). Furthermore, "To write an amorous Elegy on the model of Ovid does not require any great powers of mind" (xliv).

[18] Some critics conflate Donne with his speaker and thereby mistakenly attribute the creation's antifeminism to his creator. Guibbory labels many of the *Elegies* deliberat `y misogynist and criticizes those who treat them as witty fictions and who favor the more "romantic" poems as representations of the "true" Donne; she thus falls prey to the same fallacy in reverse (812-13). Since to her the *Elegies* are poems in which "relations between the sexes [are] a site of conflict" in early modern England, Donne's queen is the unspoken cause of the conflict and a kind of presiding incubus for him. Although Elizabeth was "an anomaly in a . . . patriarchal . . . culture in which women were considered subordinate to men," she "confirmed the role of patriarchy in English society" (813), a paradox of which Donne was surely unaware. Also, Guibbory's contention that Donne represents women as "low, impure, sometimes disgusting creatures" (814) says much more about his skill in creating a persona than about his own opinion of women. If Elegy 18 is full of "stratagems for reasserting male control in love" (819), Donne implies that they are not good ones.

Two recent articles address the sort of accusations that Guibbory makes. Ilona Bell analyzes Donne's steamy missives to his wife in "'Under Y^{e} Rage of a Hott Sonn & Y^{r} Eyes': John Donne's Love Letters to Ann More," *The Eagle and the Dove: Re-Assessing John Donne*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 25-52; Janel Mueller argues against the idea that Donne was misogynist for the simple reason that he could hardly afford to hate women if they were his patronesses. See "Women among the Metaphysicals: A Case, Mostly, of Being Donne for," *Modern Philology* 87 (1989): 142-51.

[19] Patterson argues for the authenticity of this elegy as Donne's. She finds it rife with topical allusions to the political events of 1609-11 and historicizes it as

"a significant exhibit in the cultural afterlife of the Essex rebellion, a tribute to the role played in the event . . . by difficult intellectuals like Donne and his friends" (157).

[20] My edition of Shakespeare: *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, revised ed., ed. Alfred Harbage et al., (New York: Viking, 1969).