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Some Rereadings of John Donne's Poems

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The study of names, particularly in literature, has often been either allusive or etymological, but the use of a name in a poem, for instance, may imply both and more at the same time. A name may throw us into the arena of a speech act involving reference and it may specifically define the speech act as a specific meaning (or two) emerges, but that name may call up further references or ideas or relationships beyond its specific use in a specific locus. Linguistic theorists may imply such further significations beyond the more confined single speech act, but it would seem that readers do not necessarily allow themselves such extension. If I use the geographic word "China," a number of possible meanings appear that would be applicable to various time frames, including today the nature of the government of that nation and the auditor's (or reader's) attitudes toward it. But if I use the word "Cathay" instead, I have both directed the auditor toward the geographic location and a rather romantic, perhaps older concept of the place and its people, and I have also delimited meaning not to include the more recent political, sociological, and economic life.

Here I look at a two "names" in some of John Donne's poems and consider a female readership of other poems, leading to rereadings that project a somewhat different creative artist from our "standard" view. A well-known and oft-repeated pun in Donne's poetry illustrates the point concerning names. In "A Hymne to God the Father" the author writes: "When thou hast done, thou hast not done," directing the reader with the first "done" to read "completed those things just mentioned" (such as "forgiven me some of my sins") and with the second "done" to read both not finished in forgiving me because I have

more sins" and "not acquired the person John Donne" since he has not yet died and since he has more to confess. Yet there is further punning here in the first stanza of the poem because the writer has not finished writing his poem but rather continues on for two more stanzas. And still there is further punning (if the text of the 1633 edition is meaningful), for once the author is assured that God's "Sunne / Shall shine as it shines now, and heretofore," he can say, "Thou haste done." There is the pun on Sun / Son, and the line connotes the mercy that God the Son will shed over him for his sins at his death. God is now finished and the author is now God's. But the switch in orthography from "hast done" to "haste done" (beyond saying that God has finished all forgiveness that He will be requested to grant) tells us that the author "Donne" will hasten toward his death when he is reassured of his salvation.

Just as "China" directs us into numerous understandings and "Cathay" into others, only some of which are congruent with the former, "done" in John Donne's poem directs us into various meanings, dividing basically into the meanings of the past participle of "do" and the meaning of the person John Donne. The word, we might say, is a *parole,* offering a number of signs through which we determine meanings. One should not stop there, however, for such signs set up an internal structure, or linguistic system, which we might call the poem's *langue.* What, then, of the second line of the poem, "Which is my sin, though it were done before?" where a meaning of the sin being committed before this point in time refers to the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, which Donne accepts as his own sin. The embodiment of that original sin is Donne the person, providing us with a concept of original sin as involving sexuality as well as disobedience. This reading of the first stanza directs us further to understand that what the author is doing in the poem is presenting a first stanza involved in the sinfulness of simply being a human being, a second stanza involved in that human being's commission of sin and influence upon others to sinfulness in this his life, and a third stanza involved in the Last Judgment, so that all three general times of life—its beginning, its passing, and its

completion, or the past, the present, and the future—constitute a kind of *langue* for the poem.

But as the Poem says, having seen all this, we have not seen all, for there is more. That is, there is "More." Several readers have suggested this pun on Donne's wife's name Ann More.[1] We may be susceptible to a bit too much intricacy of punning and meaning, we may be being overly ingenious, but whether the poet himself intended this further meaning, we as readers can entertain an onomastic value in the use of the word since it is the last word in each of the three stanzas. So seen, it suggests for the first stanza his execution of the Augustinian sense of Original Sin through his marriage; for the second stanza his execution of this "sin" a score of times, though there were remissions of a year or two; for the third stanza his fear of not finding salvation and thus hoped-for reunion with Ann in heaven. Whether written in 1623 or 1631 or some other time,[2] the poem may etch Donne's feeling of loss of his wife, for he has "no more" and thus he will "haste" toward his own death once assured that "thy Sunne / Shall shine as it shines now, and heretofore."

Perhaps the most striking perspective that these remarks argue for is a reading of Donne's poetry without some of the preconceptions of the past, preconceptions that have too much wallowed in the Jack Donne / Dr. Donne dichotomy. But also preconceptions that have too much obliterated Ann from his life except as housekeeper and child-bearer, with Lucy, Countess of Bedford, for example, supplying the need for female companionship in other than sexual circumstances; such assumptions have arisen out of the male-oriented readings of the literature of the 1580s through 1620s.

Ilona Bell has presented cogent argument for viewing some early letters in the Burley MS as Donne's, written to Ann prior to their marriage, and opening up the possibility that certain poems which had not previously been looked at in that context may reflect the relationship.[3] Dennis Flynn has examined the importance of recognizing that women, not only men, read Donne's poems, creating one or more coteries of women readers, including Ann.[4] Such awarenesses do not delimit the poetry to some kind of biographical context only: instead

they point to additional meanings within pertinent poems and they supply a sometimes different reading of such poems from what has until now been from a male point of view only. The text is thus potentially changed and the reader's text is potentially different. By "text" I mean the words of a poem and their signification; by "reader's text" I mean the text that a reader derives from reading the text; and I might add, there is a "writer's text" which is the text that the author thought he wrote (or intended). While too involved for discussion here, we should note that these three texts may all be the same or they may all be different in at least little ways. "A Hymne to God the Father," we might propose, offers a text—one that is far from certain, as an essay by Ted-Larry Pebworth has made clear[5]—which may supply a reader's text viewing it as a hymn, with all the connotations of that subgenre, and suggestive of the author's reactions to a period of illness or of particularly imminent death, or it may supply some other reader's text, one that coincides with what can be argued as the writer's text involving his now dead wife Ann and his contemplation of the afterlife for him in relationship to her. The *langue* of the poem, the author's text in this case, is different from that of the poem read simply as a hymn. The text, if the *parole* "done" does connote additionally "Donne" himself and if the *parole* "more" does connote additionally Ann More, is quite different from the text one might have first thought it to be. (A clarion call, however, must keep reminding us that not every "done" and not every "more" have such potential connotations.)

Biographical substrata involving Ann have been seen in such poems as "A Valediction forbidding mourning," "A Valediction of my name, in the window," "A Valediction of weeping," "The Canonization," "Lecture upon the Shadow," "Song: 'Sweetest love, I do not goe'," "A nocturnall upon S. *Lucies* day," and the holy sonnet, "Since she whome I lov'd."[6] I would like to glance at two others, but first we might remark the epitaph which Donne wrote for his wife and Walton's report of a sermon delivered on her death. The epitaph had been engraved on her monument by Nicholas Stone "in the Chancel, on the North side, at the upper end" of the church of St. Clement Danes (London) but disappeared when the church was rebuilt (there is now

a marker in the outside flooring, however). It will be found in John Stow's *A Survey of London* and six manuscripts, including the Loseley MSS in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Donne's holograph. As it tells us, Ann died from a fever on 15 August 1617, the seventh day after the birth of her twelfth child, at thirty-three years of age, the same age as Jesus at his crucifixion. We should note also that 15 August is the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven. These facts seem to have bearing on the epitaph and "A nocturnall."

Walton, most unreliable about many things, reported that the first time Donne left his house after the funeral of his wife was to preach a sermon at the church of St. Clement Danes, and the sermon was on the text of Lamentations iii:1, "I am the man, that hath seen affliction, by the rod of his wrath." But that sermon was preached at St. Dunstan's, according to *Fifty Sermons* (1649), and is undated. Evelyn Simpson tells us that there is nothing here to suggest that it was "intended to commemorate a special anniversary" and that he "was in the habit of preaching at St. Dunstan's as often as he had the time and energy to do so."[7] If it was preached at St. Dunstan's, it would seem to date after 25 April 1624. The possibilities are that Walton was correct and the assignment by a compositor or editor to St. Dunstan's is wrong, or that Walton was incorrect and simply sought out a text that would seem to offer an appropriate subject for a sermon connected in Donne's mind with his wife's death, that is, if indeed Donne did preach a sermon that harked back to her recent death, even if not directly. However, the sermon has nothing, I think all would agree, to link it with Ann's death. Further corroboration of incorrectness has been that Walton did not give this statement in the first edition of the Life in *LXXX Sermons* (1640), and the assignment to St. Dunstan's is questionable further in that another undated sermon accompanies this one in the 1649 edition, with an intervening sermon delivered on New Year's Day 1625 from St. Dunstan's.

Two poems grouped under the Songs and Sonets which have not, to my knowledge, generally been associated with Ann are "The Dissolution" and "A Feaver." Neither of these is even mentioned by Robert C. Bald in his biography of Donne, and the first is not cited by

John Carey in his somewhat psychologically oriented study of *John Donne: Life, Mind & Art.*[8] "The Dissolution" appears in only a few manuscripts of the so-called Groups II and III MSS, its omission from Group I MSS therefore being suggestive of dating after 1614, since that is the date of the latest datable poem in that group. I have previously questioned whether it might be associated with Ann's death.[9] Some of its imagery is similar to that in "A nocturnall," which, however, not all critics have accepted as relating to his wife's death. The title evokes a remembrance of 2 Peter iii:12: "the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat." The alchemical relationships indicate that dissolution was necessary to transform the base material of the poet into a penitent, resurrected being, now to be indestructible. The fusion of body, death, the fire of passion, and the transformed soul of the poetic voice unites the poem with "A nocturnall," and as Raman Selden wrote, these two poems particularly "explore the spiritual effects of bereavement in highly corporeal terms."[10] Looking at "The Dissolution" through such a *langue* as I have been citing, leads to further, more explicit interpretation. If indeed it is Ann's death that lies beneath this somewhat unusual poem for Donne, the four very provocative uses of the word "more" in it (the *parole*) may not only be clues to such a reading but lead to a further observance.

"Now as those Active Kings . . . Receive more, and spend more, and soonest breake," he writes, "This death, hath with my store / My use encreas'd." That is, kings acquire treasure which they spend at such a rate that they become bankrupt; but he has his "store" increased because of this death. The "treasure" which he receives "more" by this death involves sexual desire as the word "use" implies, but his is a "store," an accumulation of such fire and indeed of "bullets" (which offers a pun on semen). This increased store of bullets may overtake all the other bullets that had been sent before because now the "pouder" is "more." Her death has repaired his elements (the primary elements of fire, air, water, earth in lines 10-11) from creating a long and wretched life by making his "fire" grow with his "fuell." The seeming onomastic use of the word "more" as the last word in the poem

punctuates its biographical stratum and makes clear that only with his soul "more" earnestly released will the Hippocratic concept of the recombination of elements be effected. Hippocrates, it will be remembered, theorized that the primary elements were present in male and female seed in separation, combined only through sexual intercourse. Thus with her death, the "first Elements" have been resolved, and though their bodies may be involved, it will only be with his "soule more earnestly releas'd" that recombination will occur. Since she has died, her "pouder" has been held in stasis, but his store has increased: his is "more." Perhaps it has been the squeamishness of critics that has made them avoid this poem which Jay Levine has placed with a tradition of "forbidden poems."[11]

We have been looking at one form of female readership, the woman in the poem. The second "new" poem to be remarked here as possible of reference to Ann, "A Feaver," offers not only that possibility but the importance of looking at a female readership in order to counter egregious masculinist readings. In amazingly sexist language Carey talks about the "girl" in "A Feaver," the only poem in which Donne shows "the girl suffering" (97). Although Robert Ellrodt "singles out" the poem "as being, for Donne, unusually selfless,"[12] Carey stresses what he calls "the consuming force of Donne's egotism" (99). "The girl's dying will damage Donne's memory of her, and it is on those grounds that he dissuades her from it.... How insufferable to be told not to die because your lover will not 'celebrate' you if you do! . . . The command—'Oh doe not die'—is itself illogical, though natural—for it is hardly to be supposed that the girl is doing it deliberately" (99-100). I cannot be reading the same text as Carey, surely, but my readers and I are reading the same horrendous text that Carey wrote when he erroneously included us as "We are careful to talk, nowadays, as if we believed that the male ought to respect the female's individuality. Donne is above such hypocrisies, and states, with measured resonance, his lethal hunger" (100). I recite this misguided attitude to indicate that one of the problems in reading a poem like "A Feaver" lies in the critic's prejudgment both of the author in general (like C. S. Lewis's finding it one of two tolerable poems, as Carey tells us[13]) and

of the poem in particular. After the first line, Carey sees it dissolving into abstruse speculations, supposedly equating the "thoughtful component in Donne," which "sentimental critics dislike" (191). In this poem our attention to its *langue,* although the specific *paroles* we have been looking at do not appear, will indicate how wrong and impertinent such remarks are.

"A Feaver" is included in all the usual manuscript groups except the Westmoreland MS (which has only one song or sonnet entered at a later and separate time from all the others), thus indicating that it was written prior to 1615. The woman of the poem clearly is in a fevered condition, which in those days might easily lead one to suspect an imminent death. The I of the first stanza is not egotistical; "Oh doe not die" is an anguished plea, not a "command." The poetic voice is so beset with grief at the thought of the loved one's potential death that he turns his back on all women, and the reason for such a statement must lie in the reason for the fever: something related to women and not to men. (He writes, "for I shall hate / All women so, when thou art gone, / That thee I shall not celebrate, / When I remember, thou wast one.") Very possibly, thus, the fever is related to childbearing, and we remember that Ann died some years later in a fever seven days after giving birth. Of course, this does not make the woman Ann, but she had had nine births prior to 1615, one (the eighth) while Donne was on the Continent in 1612 with the Drurys, a probable stillbirth, and one, Nicholas, the ninth, in August 1613, who died within the year. Three stanzas are addressed to the woman, whose breath going will take the whole world's vapors with it, or whose breath remaining will make the fairest woman but a ghostly shadow of her, the worthiest men but corrupt worms inhabiting the dead carcass of the world. (Lines in the Anniversaries of 1611 and 1612 may echo in one's mind.) The next two stanzas address the wrangling schools that disputed the nature of the great fire that would destroy the world, again 2 Peter iii:10-12. They do not understand that her fever might be that holocaust; yet it cannot be, the poet says, for such a fire needs fuelling and only corruption would furnish such fuel. In the final two stanzas he again addresses the woman, consoling himself that her fever will be shortlived and she

herself will be unchanged by such an otherwise destructive force. The tone, like that of the first line, indicates a plea, a plea that he cannot be certain will come to pass but which he hopes will be granted. The fever seized the woman though it knew it could not persevere in her because like the poet it "had rather owner bee / Of thee one houre, then all else ever." Carey's strange reading is dominated by his inability to understand the strategy of changed addressees.

Some years ago I suggested that this poem may have reference to Ann (413): there is nothing in it to deny that possibility; but there is only the possibility of a biographical experience as the origin of the poetic subject to embolden the suggestion. Less probable are circumstances that it would have been some other woman so depicted by Donne or that the poem was totally nonexperiential. But the tone, the assumedly sincere avowal of the poetic voice's love for the woman, the hyperbole of "all women" and his denial of them and of "all else ever" makes one think the poem may be about Ann and definitely not some "girl suffering." The *langue* for this poem is only the present, but implied in it is a loving past and a renewed happy future. (Here we might remember the reading of "A Hymne" with its play of past / present / future.) No *parole* saying "Ann" or "More" is here, but they may exist implicitly through the connotations evoked by the emotions expressed, which emotions delineate a *langue* closer to the writer's text than other readers have allowed. The curious shift of address from the woman ("thou") in stanzas 1-3 to (in truth) himself in stanzas 4-5 and back to the woman in stanzas 6-7 implies something different within its context from that of Donne's other lyrics. Those two stanzas, 4 and 5, present a poetic voice that is arguing with itself over the meaning of this fever, its potential microcosmic being for the wrangling philosophers but its essential difference from macrocosmic burning. The woman's burning may lead to her death and, since she is his world, will destroy his personal world. But her "beauty,'and all parts, which are [she], / Are unchangeable firmament": he "had rather owner bee / Of [her] one houre, then all else ever." Once an identification of the woman of "A Feaver" and Ann is suggested the reader can appreciate the *langue* which seems to inform the poem and recognize the psychological being

that is represented through such loss, her potential "dissolution," and him a "nothing" "by loves limbecke" made (as Donne wrote in "A nocturnall").[14]

As we look back on literary criticism ten or more years ago we are struck that so little attention was paid to what a woman reading might decode, for either it was generally assumed that a woman and a man would read the same piece of literature in the same way or that important writing was produced basically for men readers, women simply tagging along. Today we would probably say that a poem by John Donne may be read very differently by a man and by a woman, that another poem by him may be read pretty much the same way by a man and by a woman, that a different poem may have been written with expressly a specific gendered audience in mind. That audience sometimes may have been primarily male and sometimes may have been a specific person either male or female, but that in turn should suggest that a poem may have been written for a primarily female audience. If we acknowledge these possibilities, we are acknowledging an intentionality on the author's part, but if we want to run scared by the specter of the *Verbal Icon,* we can alter that to acknowledging an intentionality within the piece of writing rather than from its author. From what we can discern of Donne's life some poems were written for a male coterie, in a kind of humorous schoolboy competition. An aim would be to take a common theme and play a variation upon it; if you could also demonstrate a wittiness in addition to a poetic flair, all the better; if you could tuck in a few innuendoes or puns or dirty jokes, even better still. Such writing implies a less biographical and less "serious" backdrop, although I think we should also recognize possible psychological underpinnings in anything that one says or does. What our awareness of a female readership leads us to is that such poems, written presumably for those male wags, can be read and understood quite well and fully by women though there may be different evaluations by them from men's. Perhaps there is an emphasis here or there, or a point here or there that one gender will valorize more strongly, and such valorization interpretively should be a consequence of examining Donne's female readers.[15]

A poem offering example is one that almost always is ignored—in the past, I imagine, because of moral attitudes, in the present because it doesn't get into anthologies. I am referring to "Farewell to Love," a poem that ostensibly has a male point of view for a male audience. The poetic voice speaks of "Our desires" for "things not yet knowne . . . coveted by men," which as they wax less, fall, and as they swell, grow. We understand the phallic description in those words, and we're ready for his remarking the curse of climax's being short ("onely for a minute made to be / Eager"), even as one "raises [his] posterity" in sexual penetration. Such brevity leads to the sour grapes attitude that he'll "shun the heat" of "moving beauties" therefore. And that's only like "applying worme-seed to the Taile" (that is, applying an anaphrodisiac to the penis). All the men guffaw over this witty excursion into bidding farewell to love[making], a popular subject for other poets, for example, Sir John Suckling in poems like "Against Fruition." But the female reader may be less taken by the puerile wit, may be less than sympathetic to the self-centered lament about "sorrowing dulnesse," and may wonder whether such a male for all his submerged boastfulness of sexual ability ever observed what happens bodily to a woman during intercourse. As the woman of "Womans Constancy" says (except that some have called the poetic voice male), "For by to morrow, I may thinke so too," thus appropriating the male's rejection because of alleged demands of business.

We need, first, to encode poems that do not play ostensibly upon a male coterie, discussing poems that appear to have a biographical dimension (such as those discussed before) despite the nonbiographical import we can take from them, and, second, to recode Donne's poems that have been incompletely read by both female and male readers because those readers have looked only at male-oriented poems, the songs and sonnets or the elegies, and found a male coterie audience engaged in presenting a male-dominated love situation or attitude or because those readers have generally ignored other poems as not offering some kind of female / male vantage. The verse letters—particularly those possibly earlier ones to male friends—have been among the works often unread, and even when the poetic voice is a

woman's as in "Breake of day" the poem is looked at from a male point of view.

The holy sonnet "If poysonous mineralls" has frequently been read in psychologically biographical terms, which depict the anxiety of many people, and has not been treated from male- or female-oriented perspectives. But the 'I' may be any person and the resume of the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms in lines 1-3 directs us to read the 'I' of line 4 to be any representative of humankind. The story of the Fall of Adam and Eve is not written here from the commonplace male point of view that Eve (woman) was the cause as Donne does refer to in "The Indifferent" (among other meanings): "Must I, who came to travaile thorow you, / Grow your fixt subject." The "us" of line 2 connotes humankind, but in the context of the Fall implies the archetypal man and woman, Adam and Eve, who both succumb to "lecherous goats" in the interpretation of the Fall that looks at Original Sin as sexual intercourse. The envious serpent is thus not construed as tempting only Eve, and the phallic symbol of the tree (and the serpent) and the yonic symbol of the fruit do not arise. Line 5, however, does encode Adam and Eve separately and as one: "Why should intent or reason, borne in mee." Adam's "intention," not specifically tempted by the serpent, is to follow Eve, who has been "reasoned" into sin. But these sins in humankind are "more heinous" than in other creatures, and though God holds out mercy to the sinful, He also "threatens" dire consequences for sinning. The sestet becomes a prayer addressed to God (the change from God in the third person to the second person is most significant) to ease humankind's pain of memory of sinning and to be merciful through remission of those sins. The words of the psalmist, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord" (Psalms xxxv:7), should echo in our minds.

Removing the poem from one that depicts only a personal, biographical author, undergoing the anxiety it delineates, allows the reader to understand much more about the poem, to read it more deeply actually, to recognize that it is really not necessarily any more involved in personal generation than many poems are and thus that its

subject is a more universal (if I may still use that word) one concerned with humankind, male and female, not one concerned with a specific person whose experience may trigger sympathetic reactions for its reader, male or female.

On the other hand, it is the clearly male-voiced poem that should be looked at again for its female-reader reaction. In "The Dreame," for instance, the poetic voice, sounding a little soupy in his attempt to proceed to actual intercourse in his dream, chalks up the commonplace breaking of a dream before tactile action occurs to his loved one's mixture of "Feare, Shame, Honor." She has awakened him wisely, he says, for "Excesse of joy would wake [him]" anyway when he "cam'st." Well, he'll "dreame that hope againe" although he'd rather "die," not dreaming all his dream but "act[ing] the rest." Witty, slightly subtle, with all the buzz words like "Comming" and the lighting of his "torch" and "die"—both males and females can be amused and marvel at the poetic ability to put such earthy matter into such lovely words. And maybe the male would say, "Right on!" but the female "dear love" might say instead, "I don't care what your fantasies are; I'm me, and it's your love that's weak, since *you* obviously have a sense of fear and shame. If you want an angel, okay, but let's do it, buster."

A problem for a Donne text, however, is often the reliability of text. A sonnet like "Since she whome I lov'd" has only one known text, that in the Westmoreland MS written down by Donne's friend Rowland Woodward, but, as noted before, Ted-Larry Pebworth has argued for at least two texts of "A Hymne to God the Father" as meaningful and for the need to consider both as there are some radically variant readings between them.[16] The texts may represent an earlier and a later version: we just do not know. And even if we talk of corruption of text by copyists, there is no evidence to give precedence of one text over another. Much in the hymn depends upon its last line: is it "I have no more" or "I feare no more," this latter reading creating a closed stanza, since it starts "I have a sinne of feare"? Does "feare no more" perhaps suggest a different psychological attitude toward the superscription? And if "more" puns on Ann's maiden name, there is significance in "I have no more" but none of that nature and in any case a very different

significance in "I feare no more." If we see both the sonnet and this hymn as involving Ann More Donne, do we, male and female, decode them one way, and then on the basis of which text we employ for the hymn, decode it another way? But if we see both as involving a female reader and that female reader as potentially identifiable with the woman of the sonnet (rather than Ann or Ann only), do we (or at least female readers) decode it also a different way? The woman of the sonnet has died; the 'I,' unsatisfied with his finding God as surrogate thereby, which thus makes him ripe for temptation, reconciles himself that God's "tender jealosy" is such as to disallow his loving "Saints and Angels" and falling into temptation of "the World, fleshe, yea Devill." The male reader identifying with 'I' reads a need to give all his love to what is surrogate in order to avoid life's temptations; the female reader identifying with "she" reads hope for continued devotion in her widowed partner.

If we credit Donne with being a competent creator of poetry, we should not keep reducing his achievements by limiting our reading to only one way of reading—whether as biography, or as limited to a male coterie, or as directed to a specific person only. An apt comparison may be made with William Butler Yeats's "A Deep-Sworn Vow" or "A Bronze Head," where the source of inspiration was Yeats's thwarted love for Maud Gonne, but not knowing that does not falsify our reading of these poems which say something not confined by time or place or circumstance, anymore than "Easter 1916" is. For Donne we might think of "A Hymne to Christ at the Authors last going into Germany" or the verse letter to the Countess of Bedford beginning "Reason is our Soules left hand, Faith her right" or "Valediction: of weeping." All have (or seem to have) time, place, and occasion behind their inspiration but they have much more than that to say. And one way of getting at such fuller meaning is to see the woman *in* the poem (as in the last two) but also the woman reader outside the poem. That woman reader outside the poem may not read differently from the man reader outside the poem, or she may.

The female reader *in* the poem should not blank out the female and male reader outside the poem, for example, as some readings of

"The Legacie" do: in the first case (the female reader in the poem) we understand the dialogue going on and recognize the poetic voice's superscribed Other; but in the second case (the male and female reader outside the poem) we stress the achievement in writing, the intricacy of structure and language, and the reason for Thomas Carew's drawing upon it in "Secrecy Protested." If there is a biographical construct here (with Ann or some other woman in the poem and Donne as poetic voice), it should not obliterate either of these readings. The possibilities of biographical underpinnings for some of the poems will lead to rereadings of poems like "The Dissolution," but we should not become extreme and demand that "The Expiration" or "The Apparition" (which have a high degree of similar language and metaphor even though opposed in tone and effect) are also biographical. On the other hand, looking at the intended recipient of the poem as the reader of the poem—whether Lucy, Countess of Bedford, or E. G. (Everard Guilpin?)—may lead to revitalized comprehension of both Donne the person and Donne the poet.

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Notes

[1] See especially: David Novarr, "*Amor Vincit Omnia*: Donne and the Limits of Ambiguity," *MLR* 82 (April 1987): 286-92. Harry Morris ("John Donne's Terrifying Pun," *Papers on Language and Literature* 9 [1973]: 128-33) examines the pun on more / More in Donne's poetry and relates Ann to "The Canonization," "A Valediction: of weeping," "Since she whom I lov'd," "A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last Going into Germany," as well as this " Hymne. " See also David J. Leigh, "Donne's 'A Hymne to God the Father': New Dimensions," *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 84-92. William N. West reads "done" and "more" in "Sappho to Philaenis" tellingly in his examination of the articulation of patriarchal authority within experience by looking at the poem both literally and metaphorically; see "Thinking with the Body: Sappho's 'Sappho to Philaenis,' Donne's 'Sappho to Philaenis'," *Renaissance Papers* 1994, pp. 67-83, especially 78, 79, 82. See also M. Thomas Hester's very important essay "'*miserrimum dictu* ': Donne's Epitaph for His Wife," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 94 (1995): 513-29. Hester shows that the naming in the epitaph has special significance and that Donne "proposes . . . to read not *more* but the *most* that can be made of God's enigmatic handwriting in her (and figuratively their) life and death" (524).

[2] 1t was associated by Izaak Walton with Donne's grave illness in1623, recorded in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624): "Yea even on his former sick bed, he wrote this heavenly Hymne, expressing the great joy he then had in the assurance of Gods mercy to him." See his "Life of Dr. John Donne" in Donne's LXXX *Sermons* (1640), [B4r]. Donne, of course, died in 1631.

We might note that because the poem appears in Group II manuscripts, it probably dates before the mid–1620s; still there is nothing in the poem to attach it to the winter of 1623, and the reading we have just considered suggests rather that its occasion may have been the sense of loss that his wife's death in 1617 caused, dating the poem thereafter and perhaps linking it with "A nocturnall upon S. *Lucies* day" written apparently in 1617 and in its imagery and tone with "A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last Going into Germany," dated 1619.

[3] Ilona Bell, "'Under ye Rage of a Hott Sonn & yr Eyes': John Donne's Love Letters to Ann More," *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne,* ed. Claude Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 25-52.

[4] Dennis Flynn, "Donne and a *Female* Coterie," *LIT* 1 (1989): 127-36.

[5] Ted-Larry Pebworth, "The Editor, the Critic, and the Multiple Texts of Donne's 'A Hymne to God the Father'," *South Central Review4 (1987)*: 16-34.

[6] See discussions in items noted in n. 1 and in John T. Shawcross, "Donne's 'A Lecture upon the Shadow'," *English Language Notes* 1 (1964): 187-88; Shawcross, "Donne's 'A Nocturnal Upon S. Lucies Day," *Explicator* 23 (1965), Item 56; Marta L. Moffet, ed., *Love Poems of John Donne* (New York: World, 1971), "Sweetest

love, I do not goe"; Derek Parker, *John Donne and His World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), "The Canonization"; D. M. Thomas, *Poetry in Crosslight* (London: Longman, 1975), "The Canonization." Walton related "A Valediction forbidding mourning," "Valediction of weeping," and "Sweetest love, I do not goe" to Ann.

[7] Evelyn Simpson, *The Sermons of John Donne* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), X, 28.

[8] Robert C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind & Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

[9] John T. Shawcross, ed., *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1967), 415.

[10] Raman Selden, "John Donne's 'Incarnational Conviction,'" *Critical Quarterly* 17 (1975): 68.

[11] Jay A. Levine, "'The Dissolution': Donne's Twofold Elegy," *ELH* 28 (1961): 303. Working through its hermetic reference, Levine casts the poem as both a funereal and an Ovidian elegy, the latter allegedly dealing with sexual impotence. My disagreement with his reading should be obvious.

[12] These words are Carey's; see Robert Ellrodt, *L'Inspiration personelle et l'esprit de temps chez les Poetes metaphysiques anglais* (Paris: Jose Corti, 1960), I, i, 107.

[13] Carey, 191; C. S. Lewis, "Donne and Love Poetry in the Seventeenth Century," *Seventeenth-Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert Grierson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), 64-84.

[14] Hester's discussion of "Immani febre correptae" in the Epitaph is most apt for this apparently earlier poem, which would seem to record one of Anne's prior illnesses associated with childbirth: "These three words manage to erase the harmonies of Anne from the poem, leaving the husband-poet-father alone to meditate the effects of this *immense/savage/ravishing* (and *manly?)* fever on him" (523).

[15] See the important discussion by Dennis Flynn noted in n4.

[16] See n5.