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"Here you see mee": The Trope of Avoidance in John Donne

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> The matter and occasion leadeth vs many times to describe and set foorth many things, in such sort as it should appeare they were truly before our eyes though they were not present, which to do it requireth cunning: for nothing can be kindly counterfait or represented in his absence, but by great discretion in the doer.[1]

In *The Arte of English Poesie* George Puttenham speaks of a figure called *hypotiposis,* in English "the counterfeit representation,"[2] which is a means of describing an absent thing with such force that it seems to the reader truly to be there. The following essay examines *hypotiposis* as it is used as a "trope of avoidance" in Donne's poetry. My argument is that for Donne *hypotiposis* works as a device by which the poet absents himself from the scene of his poem and disappears from the view of, usually, his mistress behind a simulated image. Donne's trope of avoidance is a variety of *hypotiposis* that achieves its end by presenting something—a collection of letters, the reflection of a face in an eye, a name inscribed on the glass of a window, a dead body—to the scrutiny of a woman who is required to examine and find within it some proof of the poet's fidelity. The trope thus invokes what might be called the epistemological tangibility of objects, the notion that the presence of physical remains can act as evidence of the permanence of metaphysical intangibles. But the way in which the poems "Figure ... love" ("A Jeat Ring sent" 7)[3] is not by adding the substantiality of a material truth to words; rather, they do the opposite, giving words to material objects which hence take on the insubstantiality of metaphors, as it were, by association. The sub-category of *hypotiposis* that such

poems invoke is that of *prosopographia*, a trope in which things come to speak for, and in place of, the poet.[4] The poems in which the trope of avoidance is deployed are verbalizations of metaphors that turn out not to be representations of the fidelity of their author but reflections of the desire of their addressee behind which the poet disappears from view.[5]

In all the poems discussed below what is presented as an avowal of the poet's fidelity turns out to be the issue of his bad faith. This bad faith is the visible trace of an infidelity rooted deep within a psyche that will not expose itself to the threat of disappointment implicit in the concept of mutual trust. In a trenchantly powerful discussion of Donne's poetry, Christopher Ricks takes up the key question of Donne's infidelity to his women and hence to the poems in which they are treated.[6] Ricks finds that Donne's poems are marked by "sadness and revulsion," more concretely, "a dislike of having come," which leads them to repudiate the "act of creative love" from which they derive their initial spur to lyric utterance.[7] The twin odors of sadness and revulsion remain as the sign of a poet desperate to avoid the consequences of his words, who refuses to remain in the place he has been lying, and the misogynist endings of many *Songs and Sonets* signify routes of escape for the poet out of poems in which he feels he has given, or is about to give, too much of himself. It is to Ricks's exemplary polemical response to this aspect of Donne's poetry and to what he sees as the failure of the best contemporary criticism to face up to its connotations that my account of Donne's trope of avoidance is most heavily indebted. However, whereas Ricks sees the poems turning their revulsion on their own bodies,[8] I suggest that the only body to be found in these poems is a female one into which Donne injects a mixture of fear and loathing that is finally to be understood as an index of his own inability to have faith.

My analysis of *hypotiposis* as the means by which Donne makes himself absent from his poems is thus at odds with what Elaine Scarry has identified as Donne's "unequivocal commitment to the body."[9] Scarry finds Donne's writing full of a "volitional materialism"[10] that leads him to make himself available to the addressee of a poem by

importing a variety of material things into it. My reading of Donne suggests, on the contrary, that the notable variety of physical things with which he fills his poems are there not to reveal the poet, but to hide him; not to make him available to his mistress, but to disguise his absence. Scarry's interpretation centers on Donne's discussion of the Shroud of Turin in the sermon preached at St Paul's on Easter Day 1630. She argues that Donne understands the Shroud as an example of "the lifting out of the body onto some surface of display,"[11] so that it becomes for him an answer to the problem of how to "establish some form of representing the body during... temporary absence."[12] This is true, but not quite in the way that Scarry suggests. Donne's sermon dilated upon the words of the angel at the tomb of Christ: "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay" (Matthew 28:6), and it is in keeping with this theme that Donne expounds the Shroud's significance not as an example of how to manifest an *absent* body but rather as the incontrovertible sign of that body's not being there. As Donne explains, the symbolism of the Shroud is that it reveals "the impossibility of comming to Christs body."[13] But it does more than this, for it becomes a mirror of the desire of those who revere it: "[I]t appeares that that sheet stuck so close to his body, as that it did, and does still retaine the dimensions of his body, and the impressions and signatures of every wound."[14] The action of the sheet mimics the devotion of the women who came to Christ's tomb in the hope of coming to His body, as though such devotion were nourished by the radical representation of the bodily signs of the beloved's death on the body of the devotee. Indeed, in later generations such representation will become the pre-eminent insignia of mystic enthusiasm, and while such insignia are unquestionable representations of piety, of the presence of their bearer's devout identification with the suffering of Christ,[15] they are also indubitable evidences of absence. Trying to get *that* close to someone is a project that is at least in this world doomed to failure. It is a project of which Lacan speaks in terms of the analyst's endlessly deferred desire to arrive in the place of the unconscious, as well as it is the moral of Groucho's reply to Margaret Dumont's request to "hold me closer": "If I hold you any closer I'll be in back of you."[16]

There is a correlation between the desire for a more than physical closeness that drives the women to Christ's tomb and the desire of the mistress in the *Songs and Sonets.* What Donne fears from the attentions of his women is that they desire to possess him, to come, as it were, so close to his body that they occupy his own ontological space in an act of union that is also an obliteration. This desire is most commonly represented in the poems by means of the mistress's gaze. What Donne fears from the eyes of his mistress is that his presence to her gaze renders him available to her in a way that is intolerably penetrative. The female gaze in the *Songs and Sonets* is inescapably epistemological: it does not merely see its subject, it threatens to see through him. Hence it is symbolic of a woman's *danger*, her power to harm and to betray.[17] Thus, in "Witchcraft by a picture," Donne links his absence from his mistress, hence the disappearance of his image reflected in the tears that fall from her eyes at parting, with his freedom from her power to hurt him. Keith Thomas has noted the belief that a witch's maleficence could be manifested in the form of "an emanation from her eyes,"[18] which helps to remind us that the preposition in the poem's title describes agency, not place. This fear of being under a woman's gaze for too long is the reason why Donne is so often to be found working to absent himself from the confinement of the "little roome" that is "every where" ("The good-morrow," 11) that is the characteristic setting of the *Songs and Sonets.* Donne likes to be with women, but not for too long, and he likes to be seen by them, but only under his own, very strictly controlled, terms.

One of the lessons of the frequently detailed optical situations in Donne's poetry is that it is possible to look so hard at someone that you fail to see them, or that you see one aspect of them to the detriment of all others. This is the effect of the specular obsessiveness with which the men in the first stanza of "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" attempt to identify the exact moment of their dying friend's passing. The humor of this scene springs from the way that the eagerness of the "sad friends" to identify the exact moment of death seems motivated less by solicitude for their dying friend than by their greed for knowledge. What they observe is not so much a person as an object of a detached

and fundamentally callous scrutiny, and the adjective "sad" (3), which defines their disposition, seems to denote not grief but scientific seriousness.[19] Looking so closely for the physical signs of death, they are blind to the much more significant spiritual departure that is taking place beneath the skin. This crucial distinction between observable physical presence and unobserved spiritual absence becomes the metaphor by which the departure of the speaker is effected. A similar narrowness of vision is observable in "The good-morrow" when the lovers focus so narrowly on the eyes of their beloved that the person upon whom their attention is supposedly fixed disappears from view, replaced by the image of the self reflected in the eye of the other.[20] Love, says the poem "all love of other sights controules" (10) and the specificity of vision that Donne conjures into being in "The good-morrow" means that its speaker becomes invisible in the very act of asking the woman to look at him.[21]

Another example of such carefully organized ocular exclusivity working in the cause of the disappearance of the author occurs in "A Valediction: of the booke." Here Donne's imperious command to his mistress to stay home and read over the dead letters that are the memorial of their past love condemns her to the backward-looking and quintessentially passive role of an historian. While she is thus fixed in, and fixated on, the past, Donne "removes farre off" (56). He presents himself in the dynamic role of a traveler abroad (55), which word bears connotations not only of being in another country but also of being out and about—on the town, as it were—and at the poem's end he disappears from her sight in a cleverly stage-managed and obscurely suggestive "darke eclipse" (63), a disappearance which instead of promising unambiguous fidelity seems rather to imply the negation of his commitment to her. The same ambiguity lurks in the ending of "A Valediction: forbidding mourning." While the poem's famous image of "stiffe twin compasses" (26) appears to be an assurance of togetherness and ultimate reunion, it is also the device that enables Donne to "obliquely runne" (34)—not the most felicitous way of describing how a lover proposes to behave himself while absent from his mistress.

In Donne's poetry absence inevitably involves the threat of promis-

cuity. When he tells a woman not to worry about him while he is away, we find that the worry in question relates precisely to this threat. Thus, in the "Song" ("Sweetest love, I doe not goe") Donne warns another about-to-be-abandoned woman:

> Let not thy divining heart
> Forethinke me any ill,
> Destiny may take thy part,
> And may thy feares fulfill. (33-6)

One way of understanding the nature of the "ill" he is telling her not to worry about is to relate her fears to those of the woman in *Elegie XVI* who cries in the night, "o my love is slaine, I saw him goe / O'r the white Alpes alone" (52-3). But a more pertinent interpretation is to relate them to the kind of fears Donne more habitually ascribes to the women he is about to leave; fears, that is to say, about their lover's fidelity. In this case what the woman in "Sweetest love, I do not goe" is afraid of is not that Donne will be hurt physically but that he will hurt her emotionally. In other poems Donne focuses on a man's paranoia over the way his mistress is likely to disport herself while he is away from her. In "Sweetest love, I do not goe" he appears to be getting his retaliation in first by way of the veiled suggestion that any infidelity on his side will really be her fault, her ironically just reward for thinking ill of him.

A darker aspect of the trope of avoidance is thus its tendency to invoke accusations of infidelity against the women to whom the poems in which it appears are addressed. Looking for reasons to justify his going—both to himself and to his mistress—Donne is habitually drawn to a paranoid rehearsal of the dangers of staying. This happens in "A Valediction: of my name, in the window," a poem which begins with an apparent protestation of fidelity but quickly descends into misogynist nastiness.[22] Donne's claim in the first stanza that he is, like the glass on which he has inscribed his name, "all confessing, and through-shine" (8), that is to say, transparently open to epistemological investigation, is a device not to reveal himself but to fix his mistress's attention upon the surface of the glass.[23] The fact that the name is inscribed *on* the

window advertises the glass's opacity, privileging its ability to reflect an image over its capacity to be seen through. Looking thus on the window, the mistress sees herself, for the glass "shewes thee to thee, / And cleare reflects thee to thine eye" (9-10), and the metaphorical image of Donne's constant firmness is replaced by a reflection of the woman who is the poem's real subject. This is a truth contained in the apparently false grammar of the poem's crucial statement that "Here you see mee, and I am you" (12). His name in the window is the charm by means of which the poet puts his mistress under the spell of "loves magique" (11). Instead of letting her see through him to his central core of faithfulness, the metaphor of the windowpane is what enables Donne to reflect upon her fidelity.[24]

Donne's inscribed name is thus misleading and ultimately insignificant as the cipher of his romantic firmness. It declines radically from its initial substantiality until it is seen "trembling" (44) and finally liquefying in order to "flow / Into thy fancy, from the pane" (57-6) in the poem's penultimate stanza. Still less does its importance derive from its claimed status as a witness to the woman's attempted acts of infidelity. Its foremost significance is as the route through which the poet's fears of betrayal flow into the poem. The acts of infidelity that the poet fantasizes his mistress failing to prosecute are precisely that: fantasies he conjures out of his imagination. If cutting his name into the windowpane, as he finally admits, is "No meanes our firme substantiall love to keepe" (62), that is because it has become the means by which the poet convinces himself that this love is just not worth keeping. In this light, when at the end of the poem Donne represents himself as a "dying man" (66) we must be careful to avoid missing his point by taking his words at anything less than their face value. There is a difference, that is to say, between the lover's familiar lament that "Every time we say good-bye, I dye a little,"[25] or as Donne puts it in "The Legacie," "Deare, I dye / As often as from thee I goe" (1-2)—both of which mean that someone no longer feels alive apart from someone—and what Donne says at the end of "A Valediction: of my name, in the window," which is more on the lines of "I am here now and I am dying." He is dying to his mistress at the end of the poem, imagining a departure from which there can be

no return, because his imagination has killed their love. What we witness as we read the poem is not the poet's witty allaying of his mistress's fears about whether he will come back, but his unrelenting magnification of his own fears about her infidelity until by its end he has convinced himself that he must leave her.

The dead body as metaphor of a now dead love, the "ruinous Anatomie" (24) which is all that is left to the mistress at the end of "A Valediction of my name, in the window," links the poem's fantasy of infidelity to the similar chain of paranoid reasoning charted in "The Legacie." In this poem again, what is initially presented as proof of the poet's constancy turns into a cynical and metaphorically violent assault upon the character of the woman, an inevitably ruinous anatomizing of the real state of their relationship. The poem's dominant image of a body on the dissecting table, apparently offered as a symbol of the lover's availability to scrutiny, of the tangibility of his faithfulness, is again an ocular decoy by means of which a woman's attention is seized and she is made to participate in the publication of her own infidelity.[26] The claim for the identity of self and other contained in his avowal that "my selfe ... is you, not I" (10) performs the same crafty service as does the charm "Here you see mee..." in "A Valediction: of my name, in the window": it blinds the woman to the identity of the real subject of the poem's scrutiny. Donne employs a comparable strategy in "The Dampe" where the perplexity of his doctors and his friends over the poet's death is answered by an autopsy that reveals the presence of his mistress's image in his heart as the cause not only of his demise but also of his corpse's transformation into a conduit of disease:

> When they shall finde your Picture in my heart,
> You thinke a sodaine dampe of love
> Will through all their senses move,
> And worke on them as mee, and so preferre
> Your murder, to the name of Massacre. (4-8)

Invited to look into her lover's body to discover a truth about the durability of his love, she finds instead a reflection of her own cruelty and inconstancy.

In each of these poems what begins as an account of departure and an assurance of fidelity extends into a chronicle of the poet's fears of betrayal and ends in an image of his certainty of his mistress's fickleness. It would be wrong, however, to think of them as investigations at the conclusion of which a truth is discovered that was unavailable to the poet at their beginning. They are less epistemological inquiries than they are (spurious) revelations. Donne knows his mistress is unfaithful even before he begins to speak, his certainty about her character is a state he has thought himself into regardless of her real nature. In this respect, "The Legacie," "The Dampe," and "A Valediction: of my name, in the window" are comparable to "Womans constancy," which betrays a similar fearful certainty about female fickleness.[27] But in "Womans constancy" Donne overcomes his fear by asserting a parallel constant inconstancy in himself. The poem dismantles the sort of protestation of fidelity we encounter elsewhere by representing subjectivity as radically unstable.[28] People can never be, the poet insists, "just those persons, which we were" (5), and so the lover's wish for promises of steadfastness in love is not so much refused as shown to be beside the point. The poem denies the logical possibility of promises altogether, replacing the constant lover's vow of "I do" with the "I may thinke so too" (17) of the cynical seducer. What gives Donne power over the women he fears might betray him is a certain knowledge he possesses not so much of them, as about himself. But if it is true that in the poems we have been investigating Donne deploys his subtle mastery of situations in order to remain unseen by the women he encounters in them, it is also and more significantly the case that the poems work to disguise the poet from himself.

The implication of "The Legacie," "The Dampe," "Womans constancy," "A Valediction: of my name, in the window," and, in a more veiled manner, of a "A Valediction: of the booke" is that what enables Donne to see through his mistress is his own inscrutability, as if not being seen oneself is a necessary prerequisite to seeing others properly, and as if the fate of those who love, in Donne's terms, neither wisely nor well—which means without an essential reservation of self—is always to be caught out. But the careful representation of the nature of love's

gaze in "The good-morrow" and "A Valediction, of my name, in the window" suggests the contrary. If the women in these poems are shown to be hypnotized by the reflected image of their own desire, then it might be thought to follow that the version of female fidelity upon which Donne gazes with all the cool detachment of an amatory Dr. Tulp in "The Legacie" or over which he claims cynical mastery in "Womans constancy" is really the effect of his own false-heartedness. If the women in the poems are made to see what they want in him, then it is also true that he sees only what he wants in them.

The revelation that the trope of avoidance seeks to avoid is self-revelation, recognition of the self by the self. Ricks's observation that what Donne fears in the *Songs and Sonets* is that he might give too much of himself away is therefore best understood as a description of the poet's attempt to avoid acknowledging the solipsism that structures his misogyny.[29] In one way what is most strikingly absent in the poems we have been discussing is any reference to what Donne sees when he looks at the reflection of his image in the other's eye, letters, bedroom window, or heart. Even in "The good-morrow" his assertion that "My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares, / And true plain hearts doe in the faces rest" (15-16) depends on a decidedly shaky parallelism. Donne tells the woman about what she sees, that is, about the fulfillment of her desire for constancy reflected by the image of her in his eye. But it does not follow that he sees a reflection of the same desire in the image of his face in her eye. That men in love see not what women see is the implication of the lines in "Aire and Angels" about the desired woman as "Some lovely glorious nothing" (6), the vehicle of an egotistical masculine desire for temporary amatory possession. The same doctrine is espoused in "The good-morrow" in the account in the first stanza of male wooing as a predatory sequence of seeing, desiring, and getting (6-7).[30] It is this oblique recognition of his own inconstancy from which, more than the women in his poems, Donne flees.

Donne talks incessantly about what he thinks the women in his poems want to see precisely in order not to have to think or talk about what he sees. His women are silent because he fears what they might say. Just as he cheats on them to take away the sting of their cheating

on him, so he talks about himself, about his mistress, about love—about just about anything—to stop their saying anything for themselves, for fear of what they might tell him. Part of what he fears about their talk is revealed in "Breake of day," which is only a poem about ventriloquizing a woman's voice if you believe that Donne believes the woman in it is really real. She is not; she is (again) an effect of Donne's fears and she talks like a man because that is what Donne is afraid of most: that there may not be a difference between the way men talk and act and think in love and the way women do.[31] C. A. Patrides notes that many *Songs and Sonets* are "not only directed outwardly in furious denunciation of their recipient... they are also directed inwardly against the speaker in oblique condemnation of his obsessions."[32] If he uses the surrogate images of himself produced in the words of his poems to hide from his women, he uses the images of female infidelity in them to hide from himself. Showing a woman a visible manifestation of her fickleness in a poem like "The Legacie" or "A Valediction: of my name, in the window," Donne seems to be pressing upon her the question, "How can you bear to look at yourself?" It is the poet's own negative response to the same question regarding himself that both precedes the scenario in each poem in which the trope of avoidance appears and that each in its cunning but nevertheless imperfect fashion tries to avoid facing up to.

The women in Donne's poems are, like the personae presented by their poet, constructions of his imagination. The version of female desire manifested by these women is as far removed from reality as is the poet's habitual refrain that he dies every time he leaves them. Neither do the situations set up in the poems derive their importance from their ever really having happened. Probably they never will, indeed it is one of the purposes of the poems to make sure they do not. In the workings of a bizarre sympathetic magic, the poems allow their poet to remain at least one intellectual step ahead of the threats to his emotional well-being that they simultaneously pre-empt and contain. They originate out of his desire to remain immune from involvement, which means to maintain himself unseen, and this is what gives rise to their complex strategies of avoidance. But, as such, these avoidances are peculiar, for they are really avoidances of nothing at all. They are,

as Donne says in "A Valediction: of my name, in the window" little more than the murmurings of a sleeping man (64).

It is in this light that we find the founding scenario of the trope of avoidance, its primal scene, as it were, depicted not in one of the *Songs and Sonets* but in *Elegie X*, "The Dreame." In this poem, addressed not to a mistress but to the "Image of her whom I love" (1), Donne identifies the presiding genius of his poetry as *"Fantasie"* and praises her working because she is able to convey "joyes meaner" (11) than does the contemplation of his mistress's image.[33] The great advantage of these "meaner joyes," that they are "Convenient, and more proportionall" (12), seems an odd one in the context of a genre that is conventionally hyperbolic in its pursuit of the decidedly inconvenient emotional extremes of pleasure and sadness. However, understood in terms of the poetry of avoidance, a poetry in which the danger of the real is always eschewed in favor of mastery over an imagined situation, Donne's choice is perfectly understandable.

The image of the beloved, pictured in "The Dreame" as being imprinted on the poet's heart like the image of a king on a coin (2-5), depicts a familiar configuration of the gaze of desire in Donne's writing. Again, Donne is saying that when a woman looks at him what she loves is the reflection of her own refining image. It also suggests a representation of the poet in the distinctly unflattering light of one who believes himself intrinsically worthless, like base metal, hence only a fit object of desire when his appearance is replaced by the reflection of another better than he. Such recognition of his unworthiness is what Donne wishes to avoid by banishing the image that is its sign and allowing instead for the accession of *"Fantasie"*:

> 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.
> And so I scape the paine, for paine is true;
> And sleepe which locks up sense, doth lock out all. (9-16)

The pathos of this description of the pleasure of love as always imaginary in contrast to the reality of its pain goes to the heart of the meaning of the *Songs and Sonets*. To imagine joy, to master it within the formal structures of poetry, is exactly to avoid its real pains. But at the same time, and this is the great insight of *Elegie X,* that makes explicit the implication of the other poems discussed above, to imagine avoiding pain is always already to have lost the opportunity for real joy.

Such an opportunity and such a loss are also the subject of "Goe, and catche a falling starre." What is interesting about this poem lies not so much in its misogynist certainty about the fickleness of all attractive women as in the claim it embodies to be able to pre-empt and hence to avoid becoming the subject of such fickleness. "If thou findst," says Donne, a woman who is both true and fair, "let mee know":

> Such a Pilgrimage were sweet;
> Yet doe not, I would not goe,
> Though at next doore wee might meet,
> Though shee were true, when you met her,
> And last, till you write your letter,
> Yet shee
> Will bee
> False, ere I come, to two, or three. (19-27)

There is terrible sadness in the contradictory demands of this final stanza, as if two possible responses to the idea of love, the desire for a true and trusting union and the fear that any attempt at such could only end in disillusion and pain, are in momentary conflict inside the poet's mind.[34] A pilgrimage to the world of true and faithful love would indeed be "sweet," but it would also be against the poet's *"Reason"* (*Elegie X,* 9), which tells him that it would also be fearfully dangerous, for it would require an investment of one's faith too much in the hands of another, a giving-up of the self that Donne characteristically refuses to countenance.

At the end of "Goe, and catche a falling starre" Donne explicitly refuses to see, hence be seen by, a woman. The poem expresses in geographical terms the situation that is at the center of all the poems

discussed in this paper and in so doing offers a secular analogue to Donne's great theological Valediction "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward." The presence of the figure *hypotiposis* in this poem, where much more is at stake than the cynical betrayal of an allegedly fickle mistress, emphasizes its significance as a master trope in Donne's rhetorical vocabulary. The poem is again based on a strategy of avoidance that centers on an imposition of a blindingly tangible image of the other in place of the real physical presence of the poet:

> Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,
> And turne all spheares at once, pierc'd with those holes?
> Could I behold that endlesse height which is
> Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,
> Humbled below us? or that blood which is
> The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,
> Made durt of dust, or that flesh which was worne
> By God, for his apparell, rag'd, and torne? (21-28)

These lines are misleading in the sense that Donne's vision of the crucified Christ, like that of his own carcass in "The Legacie," is so powerfully realized, so tangible, that the reader too easily forgets that the proper subject of the poem's contemplation is not the body of God but the soul of the poet. Moreover, the description of the Crucifixion does not so much avoid as divert attention from the real issue of the poem, which is not that Donne cannot bear to look at Christ—he has His image, as lines 33-34 admit, constantly in his mind—but that he cannot bear the thought of Christ looking at him.

To look upon the memory of Christ crucified, as Louis Marin has suggested, is to gaze upon an absence; although it is an absence that promises—or threatens—a return.[35] This is the origin of Donne's reluctance to turn and, in a clear reminiscence of St. Paul's famous formula, to see "face to face" (I Corinthians 13:12). For implicit in St. Paul's words about apocalyptic seeing is that such a seeing is an epistemological perception: "then I shall know even as also I am known." In "Goodfriday, 1613" it is the fear of coming face to face with the knowing gaze of God that drives the argument of the poem:

O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree;
I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face. (36-42)

If God is absent to Donne, then it is also the case that Donne can be absent to God, unavailable to the scrutinizing gaze of Divinity that threatens to reveal him as he really is. The poet's desire to avoid such a gaze is what structures the prayer in the final lines of the poem as Donne attempts to bring into being a gaze that can see nothing beyond a reflection of itself. His request that God "Restore thine Image" reveals a desire to be able to say to God, as he says to his mistress in "A Valediction: of my name, in the window": "Here you see mee, and I am you" (10). While it expresses the poet's penitential wish that in being brought face to face with God he should appear as a reflection of Divine love, it also reveals his intention that when God sees him he should be unrecognizable to Him. Donne is prepared to turn to face God only under the condition that he remain unseen.[36]

In "Goodfriday, 1613" what Donne wishes to keep hidden is his sinful nature. That Donne sought to establish a division between this worldly self and what he wished to be thought of as his more serious persona is suggested by his remark to Sir Robert Ker that *Biathanatos* was "a Book written by Jack Donne and not by Dr Donne."[37] Carey is correct when he says that this division is an "illusion" and points out that "The more we read the poems and sermons the more we can see them as fabrics of the same mind, controlled by similar needs."[38] Nevertheless, however short of the reality of his personality Donne's attempted division of experience may be, it remains instructive for the way in which it suggests that the sinful Donne who wishes to remain hidden at the end of "Goodfriday, 1613" is to be identified with the treacherous lover of the *Songs and Sonets*. In this case, one conclusion of this discussion is obvious. Not only is the strategy of avoidance discovered in "Goodfriday, 1613" identical to that discovered in the

secular poems, but also the person who remains hidden from view at their end, disguised by the power of an optical illusion that betrays the other into seeing a vision of her/Himself and taking it for the poet, is the same in them all.

Donne's poems of avoidance are figurative halls of mirrors in which an encounter with the object of a simultaneous desire and loathing is constantly put off through devices of misrecognition and transference. Deeper within them than the image of a betrayed and abandoned other lies the presence of the poet's own overmastering mistrustfulness, a condition so endemic to his character that it blinds him to the real presence of a woman and leads him to address instead the creations of his own imagination. The man who is driven to distraction in "A Valediction: of my name, in the window" by thoughts that his mistress might cheat on him, he who in "The Legacie" translates those thoughts into anatomical certainty, and the man in "Goe, and catche a falling starre" whose apprehension of that certainty condemns him to forgo experience and makes him instead an incarnation of the isolated fantasist of *Elegie X*, all these persons derive their knowledge of women from something they know first about themselves. What they see in the women their poems betray is a reflection of their own lack of faith. Donne cannot trust his women—or his God—not because he cannot trust *them*, but just because he cannot *trust*. And he cannot allow himself to be seen by them, not because their gaze threatens to penetrate his epistemological inscrutability, but because, as creations of his imagination, they are in themselves the signs of that penetration having already taking place. An encounter is always being avoided in these poems to be sure, but this should be called an encounter with an other only so long as it is recognized that what is observed in the mirror of otherness is a vision of the self.

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Notes

1. George Puttenham, *The Arte of Englishe Poesie* (London, 1589; facsimile edition, The Kent State University Press, 1933, repr. 1988), p. 245.

2. Puttenham, p. 245, marginal note.

3. Quotations of Donne's poems are from Herbert Grierson's edition, *Poetical Works* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933, repr. 1979).

4. Puttenham distinguishes five categories of things that may be represented by *hypotiposis*: things and persons (*prosopographia* and *prosopopeia*), time (*cronographia*), place (*typographia*), and action (*pragmatographia*): see Puttenham, pp. 246-7. Of these, the first two are of most import to the trope of avoidance. Of *prosopographia*, Puttenham says it is used when a poet wishes to describe "The visage, speach and countenance of any person absent or dead" (p. 246), whereas to use *prosopopeia* is to "attribute any humane quality, as reason or speech to dombe creatures or other insensible things, and do study... to give them a humane person" (p. 246). While it is arguable that in giving voice to insensible objects the trope of avoidance employs the latter device, I locate it in the sub-category of *prosopographia* in deference to that trope's evocation of an absent voice.

5. Which is not to say that the poems are, in Tillotama Rajan's borrowing of Stanley Fish's phrase, "self-consuming artifacts," vacuous utterances of indistinct personae which at their end dissolve into airy nothing, leaving behind them little more than the trace of an absence ("'Nothing Sooner Broke': Donne's *Songs and Sonets* as Self-Consuming Artifacts," *ELH* 49 (1982), 805-28). This post-structuralist position, echoed in Judith Scherer Herz's remark that Donne's poems "speak out of their own rhetorical systems, the putative speaker in each disappearing into his own rhetorical excess" ("'An excellent exercise of wit that speaks so well of ill': Donne and the Poetics of Concealment," *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, ed. Claude J. Summer and Ted-Larry Pebworth [Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1986], p. 5), neglects the way in which they contain (in both the spatial and strategic sense) the woman to whom they are addressed.

6. "Donne After Love," *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 33-69. Against the grain of much recent criticism, Ricks's essay is notable for his insistence on naming the voice of the poems "Donne." This marks his refusal to let responsibility for the poems bypass their author, a failing that Ricks sees marring the criticism of some of the dominant voices in recent Donne studies: "Rajan makes the love poems amenable not only by the abstractions of deconstruction but also by giving their sores to 'personae.' [John] Carey [*John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*, new edition, (London: Faber and Faber, 1990)]... by having them not really be about love at all but about religion.... [Arthur] Marotti [*John Donne, Coterie Poet* (London and Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986)] makes the love poems amenable in two ways, either... by having them be meta-poems...; or by having them be not

just the products, but statements, of worldly ambition's socio-economic frustrations" (p. 54). Ricks's remarks point to a larger pitfall of the approach to Donne that concentrates either on analysis of the "voice" of a poem or on discovery of the identity of its first audience, which is that such approaches often resolve themselves into ways of excusing Donne for whatever a critic finds distasteful in his writing. While not seeking to apportion blame for the positions Donne takes up in the poems discussed below, my own reading is premised on the position so forcefully espoused by Ricks—that "Donne at times wrote more deeply than he meant, or that he could bear" (p. 42), and while the poems are imaginative utterances and not necessarily indicative of the deeply held beliefs of their author, the mental habits that analysis of them exposes are not to be explained away by speculation about the audience(s) for which he wrote them or by reference to the personae through which they find expression.

7. Ricks, p. 33.

8. "The poems, after love, imagine hating their own flesh, and they turn their revulsion upon the body of the poem, their own flesh" (p. 51).

9. "But yet the body is his booke," *Literature and the Body*, p. 73.

10. Scarry, p. 71.

11. Scarry, p. 77.

12. Scarry, p. 80.

13. *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, X vols., (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952-63), 9:199.

14. P. 197.

15. See William E. Addis and Thomas Arnold, eds. *A Catholic Dictionary*, new edition, revised and enlarged (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1983), s.v. "Stigmata."

16. For Lacan's account of the unconscious as always already elsewhere, see *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. vii. Groucho's riposte is from *A Day at the Races,* dir. Sam Wood, (MGM, 1937).

17. On this old meaning of danger, see C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 364.

18. *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 519.

19. The scene calls to mind Rembrandt's *Anatomy Lesson of Dr Nicolaes Tulp* in which the human body, as Roy Porter suggests, is presented "as essentially a mechanical contrivance, made up of discrete parts, thus both developing and exemplifying the mechanistic outlook of the 'new philosophy'" ("The artists with the butchers' knives," a review of Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* [London, Routledge, 1995], *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 26 May 1995, p.23).

20. Cf. Thomas Docherty who observes that the lovers "see only a reflection

of the self, and not another person at all. The Other is entirely reduced and subsumed as a function of the Self's own self-recognition, self-constitution" (*John Donne, Undone* [London and New York: Methuen, 1986], p. 44).

21. "The good-morrow" is perhaps the paradigmatic example of Donne's reluctance to have a woman come too close to himself. Whereas on its surface the poem seems to celebrate union, its metaphors actually insist on separation and distance. Thus in the poem's second half (lines 12 ff.) the lovers, while they occupy the same planet, are seen as the inhabitants of two hemispheres (17), consequently separated by oceans of (ontological) difference.

22. Marotti's response to the poem, that the woman's constancy is "only teasingly put in doubt," and his conclusion that "The emotional message of the lyric is one of confident reaffirmation of love and reassurance that all will be well" (p. 150), can only be entertained through a willful ignoring of the poem's preoccupation with female infidelity. Marotti's reading is based on the assumption that the poem is addressed to Anne Donne, that it is, as his chapter title bespeaks it, one of the "Love Lyrics of the Married Man," and it is this assumption that motivates his dismissal of its misogyny. This is symptomatic of an approach to the *Songs and Sonets* which depends, as Carey notes, on the circular argument that "The features of a particular poem indicate . . . that Donne had this or that coterie in mind when writing it; and this proves that this or that coterie determined the selection of those features" (p. 277). Critics who, like Marotti (and Elaine Scarry, pp. 82-3), need to find a way of explaining the viciousness of a poem that spends so much of its time speaking of the woman's capacity for infidelity. Carey thinks that Donne found his absences from Mitcham a welcome relief from the demands of spouse- and fatherhood, even that Anne was not bright enough to stimulate him intellectually. But even if this were true, which Dennis Flynn offers some convincing reasons for doubting ("John Donne and a *Female* Coterie," *LIT*, 1 (1989): 127-36), surely Donne did not think *that* badly of Anne. We are forced back upon the necessity of letting the poems speak for themselves and of interpreting them according to what they say and not on the basis of conjectures about the person[s] towards whom their words may be directed. Moreover, as Carey, who admits that the association of "A Valediction: of my name, in the window" with Anne is "hard to resist" (p. 277), points out, "Even when Ann's name appears, it need not render the poem 'factual' or autobiographical, of course, since she, like other women, no doubt inhabited Donne's fantasies as well as sharing his life" (p. 277).

23. As Murray Roston observes, Donne's claims about the glass in the opening of the poem are fundamentally perverse, based as they are on a reversal of the proper relation between tenor and vehicle in a metaphor: "To imagine that the glass is less fragile now that the lover's name appears upon it cannot be termed a mere exaggeration. It is a patent absurdity, achieved by treating the metaphorical 'firmness' of love as if it were the physical firmness of unbreakable glass, and hence solemnly converting a whimsical fancy into a supposedly verifiable fact" (*The Soul of Wit: A Study of John Donne* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974], p. 73).

24. Barbara Estrin suggests that "In "A Valediction," Donne formulates an aesthetic ostensibly based on picturing the woman but actually based on analyzing himself" ("Framing and Imagining the 'You': Donne's 'A Valediction of My Name in the Window' and 'Elegy: Change,'" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 30 (1988), 346). As I argue later, this is correct to the extent that Donne's imputations of inconstancy to his women are to be understood as symptoms of his darker apprehension of his own lack of faith. The image of Donne doing anything so suggestive of personal exposure as analyzing himself in such poems is nevertheless out of keeping with his studied elusiveness.

25. Cole Porter (New York: Chappell and Co., 1944).

26. Donne accomplishes this deception through the force of his treatment of the metaphor that lovers die each time they part as reality. This is a technique that Brian Vickers identifies informing Donne's hyperbolic treatment of lovers' tears in "A Valediction of weeping": "Once we have assented to the initial identification, that non-literal impossibility which this trope embodies," Vickers remarks, "we tend to forget that we are moving along inside a trope; we do not stop to translate it back into 'literal' statement, for we do not have time; Donne has made us his prisoners" ("The *Songs and Sonets* and the Rhetoric of Hyperbole," *John Donne: Essays in Celebration,* ed. A.J. Smith [London: Methuen, 1972], p. 152). Similarly, Donald Guss speaks of Donne's technique of "pretending that the petrarchan cliché is true" (*John Donne, Petrarchist: Italianate Conceits and Love Theory in "The Songs and Sonets"* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966], p. 66) and compares it to the style of the "witty Petrarchists" (p. 68), Serafino, Tasso, and Guarino.

27. This is so whatever gender one wishes to ascribe to its speaker. For if, as John Shawcross suggests in his edition (*The Complete Poetry of John Donne* [Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967], p. 92), the poem is to be imagined as spoken by a woman, it remains the case that it represents a (male) fantasy—or nightmare—of how a woman might be heard to talk like a man. Attempts to rescue the poem from its manifest cynicism seem to me to miss this point. Thus Ilona Bell concludes that the poem *compliments* the woman by being "just what the title says: a defence of woman's constancy" ("The Role of the Lady in the *Songs and Sonets*," *Studies in English Literature* 23 [1989]: 118), Dennis Flynn argues that it was written to be spoken by Anne More herself and that it is "an endorsement of women's much maligned ability to be faithful" (p. 128), and Marotti, exemplifying the criticism leveled at his reading by Ricks, argues that the "self-conscious recitation of libertine rationalizations for betrayal" of its female speaker "converts the piece virtually into a metapoetic statement, a lyric about the making of a libertine poem" (p. 74—see note 6 above). Flynn comes nearer to recognizing the real source of the poem's cynicism in his remark that the poem's beginning announces "some unspecified compulsion to separate" (p. 133). It is this compulsion, founded on a fear of mutuality in which one risks being damaged by the less than complete faithfulness of another, that is the subject of my essay and, as I argue below, one of the poems' greatest fears is that

women in love may think and act in exactly the way men do.

28. Carey (p. 174) suggests that the instability of the poetic ego is a central subject in the *Songs and Sonnets*.

29. Wolfgang Müller argues that "what forbids us to speak of solipsism with regard to Donne's verse is the poet's overriding preoccupation with epistemology and his pervasive tendency to scrutinize the self in its relation to a 'you'" ("'My selfe, the hardest object of the sight': The Problem of Personal Identity in John Donne's Poetry," in *Poetry and Epistemology: Turning Points in the History of Poetic Knowledge: Papers from the International Poetry Symposium, Eichstätt, 1983,* ed. Roland Hagenbuchle and Laura Skendera, Eichstätter Beiträge; Band 20: Abteilung Sprache und Literatur [Regensberg: Pustet, 1986], p. 69). But Donne's attitude is characterizable as solipsism because the knowledge he claims of women arises from something he knows about himself. The conclusions to which the poems move are therefore predetermined and not, as Müller suggests, the results of dialectic. Müller's interpretation of "Womans constancy," that it leads Donne to "a discovery concerning himself" (p. 59), ignores the fact that the woman addressed in the poem is precisely nothing, that her words are words imputed to her by Donne in the course of what is unambiguously a "dialogue of one" ("The Extasie" 74). His observation that Donne "stops disputing with the woman" (pp. 59-60) at the end of the poem misses the point that Donne never thinks of what he is doing as disputing in the first place (see lines 14-15), that he explicitly "abstaine[s]" (16) from argument, having completed the process ahead of time in his own (solipsistic) imagination.

30. According to William Shullenberger what Donne sees is the memory of a sort of Donnean *stade du miroir,* "the moment of mirroring otherness when the infant discovers his or her wholeness in the image reflected in the mother's affectionate, totally absorbed, and absorbing gaze" ("Love as a Spectator Sport in John Donne's Poetry," *Renaissance Discourses of Desire,* ed. Claude J. Summer and Ted-Larry Pebworth [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993]), p.53. In a similar vein, but emphasizing the darker implications of this primal moment of seeing oneself seen, Anna Nardo locates the source of the "radical contradiction" in Donne's poetry between the "simultaneous fears of separation from and possession by a beloved object" ("John Donne at Play in Between," *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne,* ed. Claude J. Summer and Ted-Larry Pebworth [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986], p.157) in the psychoanalytic account of the child's encounters with its mother.

31. In *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), Elizabeth Harvey notes the way that "Not only has the critical tradition of assuming that the authorial voice is present and clearly identifiable dominated Donne studies, but the voice that marked the outrageous rhythms and compelling diction of his poetry as his was also, according to the critics, definitely gendered male" (p. 77). But while the gender of the voice of a poem may be put in question it remains the case that underlying such ventriloquism as may

be found in a poem like "Breake of day" are an identifiable set of masculine assumptions about what female discourse would sound like if given the space in which to speak.

32. "'Extreme and scattring bright': The Poetry of John Donne," *The Complete English Poems of John Donne,* ed. C.A. Patrides (London: Dent, 1985), p. 26.

33. That it is this *"Fantasie"* that gives rise to the poetic faculty is suggested by lines seventeen to nineteen in which Donne says that after her incoming he will awake "And shall to love more thankfull Sonnets make" (19)—"thankfull" appears decidedly ironic.

34. Carey notes how the closing stanza's imagery of pilgrimage "catches briefly at hope" (p. 24). Marotti calls the poem "a sportful little exercise" (p. 79), for which he receives the censure of Ricks who finds the poem "more false to itself than any of its convenient women could ever be" (p. 44). This misses what I think is the key to the poem's contradictory sentiments in the poet's fear of putting himself in harm's way. While its ending is flippant (*contra* William Empson who found it "heavy and cross" ["There Is No Penance Due to Innocence," *New York Review of Books,* December 3, 1981, 42-50, quoted by Ricks, p. 43]), its flippancy is earned at the expense of the poet's baring his psyche.

35. Louis Marin suggests that at the foundation of Christian narrative and ritual lies a system of surrogation, a network of substitutions designed to overcome the absence of the object of desire that at the same time functions as the sign of that absence. "The body of stories underwriting the institution of Christianity," he explains, "insists at one and the same time on the Incarnation and the Passion, on the oblation and the withdrawal of the divine body. As result of this gift and this loss, the founding divine body is instituted as an object of desire. The Church, the institutional and instituting site of belief, has always thought and conceived of itself as a body that is at once a real, socio-historical body and a mystical, divine body. Thus the body of the Church proves to be the substitute, the delegate, the representative of the divine body that was given and lost. By representing it, the Church construes the divine body as absent" (*Food For Thought,* trans. Mette Hjort [Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989], p. xix). I would like to record my thanks to my friend, the late Bill Readings, for bringing Marin's enormously provocative book to my notice.

36. Patrick O'Connell sees Donne's explanation of why he is moving away from God as "a cleverly constructed rationalization, springing from passionate self-interest" ("'Restore Thine Image': Structure and Theme in Donne's 'Goodfriday,'" *John Donne Journal* 4 [1985]: 15), which sounds similar to Marotti's assertion that Donne's westward course is a symbol of his unwillingness "to relinquish his aggressive pursuit of secular preferment" (p. 268). O'Connell, however, is interested in the poem's penitential significance as the route through which Donne passes into a union not only with Christ but also with the "community of faith" (p. 26). If we could see in this absorption an example of Donne disappearing from view, then O'Connell's

interpretation might be said to be close to my own. But the stubborn intransigence of the Donnean ego in the poem seems ill-fitted to undergo the kind of self-effacement implied by O'Connell's vision of Donne becoming reconciled to his "participation in the human condition" (p. 14). In spite of its plea for "corrections," the end of the poem seems too much like hard bargaining for the notion of the poet's willing subjugation of the self to be persuasive.

37. Edmund Gosse, *The Life and Letters of John Donne,* 2 vols., (London, 1899), 2:124.

38. Carey, pp. x-xi.