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Sex, Sonnets, and Sermons: The Erotic Theology of John Donne

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by

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For Debby

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Introduction:

On the Marriage of Individuals in Weddings and of Ideas in Wit

"And according to this Rule too, *Salomon*, whose disposition was amorous, and excessive in the love of women, when he turn'd to God, he departed not utterly from his old phrase and language, but having put a new, and a spiritual tincture, and form and habit into all his thoughts, and words, he conveyes all his loving approaches and applications to God, and all Gods gracious answers to his amorous soul, into songs, and Epithalamions, and meditations upon contracts, and marriages between God and his Church, and between God and his soul; as we see so evidently in all his other writings, and particularly in this text, [Proverbs 8:17] *I love them, &c.*

In which words is expressed all that belongs to love, all which, is to desire, and to enjoy; for to desire without fruition, is a rage, and to enjoy without desire is a stupidity: In the first alone we think of nothing but that which we then would have; and in the second alone, we are not for that, when we have it; in the first, we are without it; in the second, we are as good as if we were without it, for we have no pleasure in it; nothing then can give us satisfaction, but where those two concur, *amare* and *frui*, to love and to enjoy."

-John Donne, *A Sermon Preached to Queen Anne, at Denmarke-house. December. 14. 1617.*

The noble work of literary analysis demands that we resist the temptation to simply read as autobiographical every comment by a great writer on the topic of writing. Indeed, were the preceding quotation from John Donne's sermon on Proverbs 8.17, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me," interpreted as the poet's self-articulation through the medium "*Salomon*," it might serve to do the work of this thesis for me. But while I argue that the works of the seventeenth-century English divine mirror, in many ways, the sentiment he expresses toward the traditional author of Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, and the Song of Songs, convention and conscience require me to establish an argument beyond a simple regurgitation of

what may seem self-evident in Donne's sermon. Though a comparison with the legendarily wise king of Israel may be too lofty, Donne's brilliant use of English to express complex "amorous" and religious feelings warrants long reflection. The first part of the epigraph handily summarizes the pattern I (and many others) have observed in Donne's work: the poet who, in former times, found himself "excessive in the love of women" turns to God not only with equal vigor but with remarkably similar language. Donne's own analysis of Solomon and the second part of my epigraph help orient this discussion within the larger argument that this thesis makes: specifically, that because the language of human sexuality shapes some of the most fundamentally canonical texts and concepts of the Christian tradition, it therefore warrants a place within our contemporary religious understanding. What follows does not seek to prove that Donne wrote the words above with himself in mind, but only to prove that the same words might be written just as truly about Donne; all with serious implications for current modes of Christian thought and expression.

Much continues to be written about the sensuality and sexuality of Donne's language and imagery in his secular poetry. Even the sexualized spirituality of his *Holy Sonnets* and other religious poems enjoys a degree of popular awareness. But Donne's complex interaction with the divine poses many questions that still call for careful analysis. His varied roles in the religious poetry (seducer of the Church and seduced by God, masculine beloved and feminine lover) require re-analysis of some of the tropes of his love poetry. Though an attempt to establish a temporal progression from the secular works to the sacred promises to mire any investigation in dead-end searches and a frustratingly limited historical record, a successfully articulated conceptual link based on the language of sexuality offers the possibility of a more nuanced understanding of Donne's complete body of work, and especially his religious poetry.

I intend to use the epithalamia or marriage songs, enhanced by analysis of Donne's sermons, as conceptual bridges to understand the persistence of sexual and physical language from Donne's secular love poetry to his religious poetry. The concept of marriage encapsulated in the epithalamia and some of the sermons (particularly the sermon preached at the marriage of Mistress Margaret Washington in 1621) can help us navigate the conceptual transition within Donne's corpus from the strong, confident speaker willing to yoke spiritual themes and language to the physical task of seduction to the boldly passive, demurely aggressive, frequently androgynous voice in the *Holy Sonnets*. Before proceeding, I will briefly sketch the argument as it unfolds in the three chapters.

In the first chapter, I uncover and explicate Donne's theological conditions for a valid marriage through a close reading of the Washington sermon. In this singularly eloquent and poetic oration, Donne delineates the three primary benefits marriage brings to the persons involved: freedom from burning (in lust or wickedness), the joy of children, and the hope of mutual help. This sermon also supplies a measure of structure for the larger argument of the thesis, opening as it does with a discussion of "secular mariage," or marriage between two human beings, and then proceeding into concepts of spiritual and eternal marriages. Near the conclusion of that close reading I strive to demonstrate the essentially sexual nature of marriages and even wedding celebrations within the seventeenth century.

Having armed my readers with a functional understanding of Donne's marital theology, I lead them into the second chapter to encounter the boldly erotic sexuality of the secular love poems. This chapter includes a more careful definition of sexuality as we encounter it in the poetry, and gives a taste for Donne's witty willingness to rope physical and spiritual themes together in complex, highly intellectual love poetry. The chapter builds in intensity, and Donne

climbs to incredible heights of sexual hubris as he leaves almost no Christian metaphor un-exploited in his quest for physical love.[1] The chapter concludes with a discussion of Donne's "An Epithalamion Made at Lincolnes Inne," a poem fraught with perverse and often puzzling religious metaphors applied to sexual subjects. This climax uncovers the deep inadequacies of spiritual metaphors used only to achieve physical ends. The epithalamion should represent the perfect culmination of physical and sexual union, but instead only subjugates the wife to her husband in linguistically vivid but conceptually conventional comparisons. Chapter II (the focus of which consistently remains on secular poetry that employs religious language, metaphor, and concepts) closes with the ultimate failure of spirituality subjugated to sexuality in Donne's epithalamion.

For that reason, the third and final chapter opens with the more perfectly realized "An Epithalamion, or Mariage Song, on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine being married on St. Valentines Day." This poem, singing the marriage of an actual (and quite powerful) couple, at last performs that task of secular marriage Donne commends in his sermon: specifically, the union of the Bride and Bridegroom mirrors the union between God and all believers. Chapter III then moves through three of the *Holy Sonnets*, explaining the difficulties associated with their specifically physical articulations of human-divine relationships, as well as explaining how each succeeds in its task. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Sonnet XVII, "Since she whom I lov'd hath payd her last debt," perhaps Donne's own attempt to understand the continuity between sexual love between humans and the Christian promise of satisfaction and union with God.

[1] There is an intentional over-dramatization on this point. Donne's poetry sets out to accomplish some truly audacious things, and the tone of this introduction is meant to reflect and gently satirize the literary lengths his speakers will go to achieve what they desire.

The task of this thesis takes on additional significance in our 21st century religious environment often riven by passionate, emotional debates about the nature of human sexuality and the role religions play in shaping our understanding of human sexuality. In my epilogue, I try to explain what I think can be taken from an understanding of Donne's erotic devotion to begin healing some of the wounds in the church and in individual believers. Donne's persistently sexual spirituality introduces (sometimes shocking) new ideas about the way human beings relate to God, and the many ways in which God continues to say in reply to our doubts, queries, and quandaries, "*I love them.*"

To begin, it seems prudent to establish in this introduction a foundation in two forms of literature of which John Donne made use and about which modern readers seldom hear: the epithalamia, or marriage song, and the sermon. One can safely say that Donne seems more comfortable with the sermon than the song, though our surviving examples of his work in each genre are limited.[2] In many ways these two forms are diametric opposites: the sermon is a carefully (in Donne's case, quite carefully) crafted and revised work of religious prose, designed to be delivered to an assembled congregation; epithalamia are ostentatiously witty, scandalously sexual erotic poems "almost certainly directed towards a male coterie rather than a larger public" (Meakin 141). Yet both forms share a connection which separates them from Donne's secular love poetry and even from some of his *Holy Sonnets*: they deal quite directly with marriage. A deeper understanding of the personal theology exhibited through the marriage sermons and the marriage songs will help us uncover and evaluate the importance of the erotic in Donne's religious discourse.

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[2] Of course, I refer only to his marriage sermons in this instance, of which there are three. The complete sermons take up ten volumes. We have no reason to suspect he wrote more epithalamia than the three that we possess.

Epithalamia offer unique opportunities to grasp more perfectly a society's approach to marriage. Most importantly, the marriage songs of Renaissance and Stuart England represent a specific interpretation of a classical tradition. The "epithalamic convention goes back to Sappho" (Greene 215), and would therefore have been well-known in its original form to a poet as highly educated and literate as Donne. The form enjoyed a revival "in the fifteenth century...by neo-Latin poets" (216), and was common enough to be satirized by Erasmus. In England, the form began in earnest with Spenser; before him, only two known epithalamia are written in the language, while after him "the genre has an intricate history" (217).

Thomas M. Greene, in a useful if somewhat antique article,[3] delineates the characteristics of the English epithalamion as established by Spenser and reinterpreted by many of the great poets of the seventeenth-century. He explains that the persons being married "usually belong to the nobility" (218) and that the epithalamion "must follow classical models" (218). Additionally, and more interestingly for the purposes of this argument, Greene contends that an epithalamion invariably "implies a social context," basing its poetics on "a wedding attended by guests participating in a commonly shared jubilation" (219). The marriage song addresses itself to people involved in a specific communal activity, and who execute unique roles all oriented toward a single purpose. The guests, either real or imagined, are all essential elements of the wedding and enact (sometimes highly scripted) essential parts.

The epithalamion must "refer to a specific day, fictive or real" (219). The specific day of the wedding must be conjured and celebrated, and "poems containing only generalized good wishes for the wedded couple are not epithalamia" (219). Donne masterfully follows this convention in the two epithalamia we will analyze below, and in his third epithalamion goes so

[3] Greene's article comes from 1957. It seems that the English epithalamion does not enjoy the close attention of a great many scholars. The source that has been most useful to me in understanding the Stuart epithalamion for this thesis, Heather Dubrow's *A Happier Eden*, was published in 1990.

far as to title each stanza according to the specific part of the day it addresses. Proper epithalamia sing and celebrate "the religious rites, the banqueting, the bedding of bride and bridegroom (itself a ritual), and the sexual consummation" (219). The specificity of the occasion heightens the stylized nature of the poem, establishing a real couple as poetic descendants of great classical forebears. In Donne's use, it also adds personality and a playful sense of grandeur to the individual elements, and in particular to the potential power of the sexual consummation.

Finally, the speaker of an epithalamion adopts "a certain complex and highly stylized role" (219). The speaker performs throughout the poem. Within the conceit of the epithalamion, the wedding cannot happen without the speaker. Perhaps in a sense similar to the way in which God brings two people together to be joined in Christian marriage, the speaker creates a wedding by calling to the principal players, enjoining them to fulfill their roles. As Greene puts it, "it is the poet-speaker who makes the wedding arrangements and in the act writes his poem" (220). Interestingly, in the act of writing his poem he also creates the wedding. Rather than singing the joyful songs of a wedding already solemnized and consummated, the epithalamist enjoys a fascinating role as "master of ceremonies and chorus leader" (220) within a wedding taking place. Yet his omniscient awareness of the thoughts, fears, hopes, and actions of all parties also grants him a measure of distance to observe and analyze the wedding as it happens.

As Heather Dubrow convincingly and strikingly argues, the generic constraints of epithalamia "are shaped and reshaped by tensions about marriage and the process of celebrating it" (Dubrow 1). Her investigation of seventeenth-century wedding poetry combines sociological research with literary analysis, and contends that "the epithalamium provided a reassuring antithesis to tensions about social roles in general and gender roles in particular" (61). While Dubrow's exploration centers on marriage as a social contract, and therefore as a microcosm of

the conflicts and anxieties seething through Stuart society, her fine introduction to the genre of epithalamia and her insightful readings of John Donne provide many helpful points. For example, while her analysis of the use of the phrase "rites of love" in Stuart epithalamia focuses on the religious conflict and social concerns of the era, her final comment chimes sympathetically with an analysis of sexuality in Donne's religious poetry:

> "For one thing, by describing sex in terms that could be used for a religious ceremony poets yet again channel the sacredness of the event away from the problematical rituals in church and towards its seemingly secular components. Moreover, in so doing they enact linguistically the process that marriage itself performs: legitimizing the sexual drive" (Dubrow, 89)

Assuming now that the reader can claim at least a basic knowledge of the epithalamia as a poetic form, we must do a little to introduce the sermon as it exists in the canon of Donne's work and within the context of his historical period. After practically being pushed into Holy Orders in 1615,[4] Donne's primary focus for writing becomes, naturally, the sermon. As Izaak Walton records in his *The Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, & Mr. George Herbert*, Donne's ordination gave him "a new calling, new thoughts, and a new imployment for his wit and eloquence" (Walton 48). Many of his patrons and supporters, who of course knew that wit and eloquence from Donne's unpublished, privately circulated poetry, rejoiced that his talents would now turn to the service of the Church. Indeed, one might imagine that the transition of a learned, remarkably articulate man from private displays of wit to an important public stage would proceed easily.

[4] King James reportedly told the Earl of Somerset (who was trying to gain for Donne the position "Clark of the Council") that "Mr. *Donne* is a learned man, has the abilities of a learned Divine; and will prove a powerful Preacher, and my desire is to prefer him that way, and in that way I will deny you nothing for him" (Walton 47).

In reality, however, Donne was unfamiliar and apparently uncomfortable with the skill of public speaking. As a student he willingly paid a fine rather than serve as master of the revels at Lincoln's Inn, [5] and "he had kept scrupulously silent in both the Parliaments he attended" (Stubbs 309). As Donne struggled with his theological qualifications before entering the ministry, an interior process recorded in his *Essayes in Divinity,* he acknowledges the difference between written reflections and delivered sermons. In the midst of Book II of his *Essayes*, he boldly moves from introductory materials to his central subject, saying "Upon this confidence, and conscience of purposing good, I proceed in these Sermons; for they are such...Though these lack thus much of Sermons, that they have no Auditory" (Donne, *Essays*, 41:16-18, 26-27). Donne's personal awareness both of the intellectual merits of his reflections (as well as the defects they yet bear as sermons) helps the reader understand the process by which he writes sermons when finally ordained. R.C. Bald claims that the *Essayes* "seem to be typical of the method, before...as well as no doubt after his ordination, by which Donne was accustomed to prepare himself for worship and communion" (Bald, 300). The *Essayes,* apparently Donne's own wrestling match with God before his ordination, bear continual fruit in the form of his sermons. Indeed, on the evidence of his *Essayes* and comments made in his weekly letters[6] to Sir Henry Goodyer,[7] Donne had cultivated a practice of reflection and introspection to the extent that, perhaps, "the preparation of his sermons, when ordained, was essentially a continuation of the spiritual exercises in which he had earlier engaged" (300).

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[5] Donne had not yet at this time renounced his Catholicism, and the fear of being revealed a recusant in such a public situation undoubtedly also entered into his decision to decline the honor of serving as leader of the Christmas celebrations at Lincoln's Inn.

[6] Intriguingly, an (relatively) enormous body of letters exists for the student of Donne's biography and epistolary thought: "more of [Donne's letters] survive than from any other author of the time except Bacon" (Fraser, 20).

[7] Sir Henry Goodyer, about whom we know little, garners the elaborate praise from Edmund Gosse that "[Goodyer] demands so much gratitude from all lovers of Donne" (Gosse, vol. I, 153). Letters to Goodyer crop up often from about the time of 1607, and offer a steady record of important events tempered by a friendliness of correspondence unique to "Donne's most intimate friend" (vol. II, 330).

Careful self-reflection and awareness of the fact that God "*hast given me a desire of knowledg, and some meanes of it, and some possession of it*" (*Essays,* 97), however, did not immediately translate into well-delivered, polished sermons. Indeed, in some ways Donne's nimble and learned mind made his discomfort with public speaking more acute. In Donne's first surviving sermon,[8] "the style...is uneven; parts of it approach the bareness of Andrewes, though in other parts a tendency to more elaborate rhetoric begins to manifest itself" (Bald 312). Donne's first sermon before a company of lawyers proved another tentative mix: after hearing Donne's sermon on Midsummer's Day, "Richard Prythergh, of the Inner Temple, [wrote]...that 'this day Mr donn preached att our temple; he had to much learninge in his sermon for ignoramus" (Stubbs 309). Mr. Prythergh's bitter reference notwithstanding,[9] the comment shows that Donne did not yet "find it easy to pitch his sermon at the right level for such a congregation" (Bald 312). The ecclesiastical and liturgical culture of his time combined with his already extraordinary ability to focus on self-improvement to drive Donne beyond the faults of his early work.

Concurrent with Donne's own ascent was the rise of the sermon itself in the English cultural and literary consciousness. The great controversies of the sixteenth-century produced articulate defenders of the Anglican position, a legacy carried on by the great preachers of the relatively more settled first half of the seventeenth-century. As one critic of English pulpit rhetoric puts it, "The seventeenth century in England was *par excellence* an age of sermons" (Mitchell 3). Indeed, requirements surrounding church attendance and participation also help the

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[8] Preached "at Greenwich, April 30. 1615" (Bald, 312).

[9] John Stubbs records that, around the time Donne went to Cambridge to receive his Doctor of Divinity, a play was produced there before the king. Called *Ignoramus*, it delighted James I with its ruthless mockery of lawyers, and provoked quite a scandal among the legal profession. "The Inns of Court were volatile communities, and the play caused an uproar among them" (308), Stubbs tells his readers, providing context for the reference in Prythergh's letter.

modern reader to understand the potential influence of a seventeenth-century preacher. For the listeners of the period the sermon, "besides its strictly religious function, took in large measure the place of the journalistic press at the preset day, and enjoyed the enormous influence, reinforced by a tremendous sanctity of authority, of a modern broadcasting company" (3). The information needs of a largely illiterate populace could be met, at least in terms of moral instruction and national events, at a weekly sermon.

The burden borne by preachers of the period was enhanced by the sheer size of their audience. Congregations were large by law, and the influence a preacher could reasonably exert extended well beyond that of other forms of "mass communication" or entertainment. The listeners of a single sermon, especially one preached at Paul's Cross in the City of London, well exceeded the "one person who witnessed a play or ten who happened to read it[;] thousands may, without exaggeration, be said to have attended sermons, or afterwards studied them from shorthand notes or in printed copies" (3-4). These practical factors, combined with the fundamental Protestant regard for the study and explication of the written word of God, meant that a preacher climbing his pulpit ascended to no insignificant task.

While the preceding digression into the nature of Donne's sermonizing task emphasizes to a certain degree the newness of the task facing the English priest of the seventeenth-century, the reformed English Church strove in many ways to maintain the popularly reassuring cultural practices that its claim to catholicity demanded. The volumes of Donne's sermons include dozens of titles as simple as "*Preached at a Christening,*" and not a few funerary orations. Of the other major life-event for seventeenth-century Englishmen and women, the wedding, we have only three surviving sermons. In his sixteen years as a clergyman, Donne almost certainly preached at more than three marriages. Indeed, historical demographers record the fact that, of

those people in seventeenth-century England who reached adulthood "more than 80 per cent" (Cressy, 285) eventually married. While most of them certainly could not utilize the services of Dr. Donne, the Dean of Paul's, to perform the ceremony, Donne had friends, former patrons, and potential benefactors enough to honor with his blessing at the marriage of a son or daughter.

Though we cannot draw upon Donne's words at all these marriages, the marriage sermons we do have unite with the dozens of references to marriage in the ten volumes of Donne's collected sermons to help us develop a sense for Donne's theology of marriage.[10] Before we turn to one sermon in particular, it may be beneficial to consider the language of the marriage liturgy used by Donne himself in performing marriages. The Book of Common Prayer, in use (with revisions) since the time of Edward VI, says rather little regarding the marriage service. The entire text encompasses only a few pages, and several of these are simply the complete form of appropriate psalms to be said during the service.

The service strives, however, to emphasize both the temporal and spiritual qualities of marriage. After the Banns have been published and the nuptial couple arrives at the church, the minister reminds the congregation that marriage is something "instituted of GOD in paradise, in the time of man's innocencie" (BCP, 1620).[11] The Prayer Book affirms marriage as something carried out by God, part of the continuing work of creation, just as Donne affirms in a sermon of December 12, 1626: "God made the first Marriage" (VII, 10:1).[12]

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[10] Because I cannot properly express my gratitude on each page of this work, though perhaps I should, I must take this moment to thank Troy Reeves for his two-volume *Annotated Index to the Sermons of John Donne*. Beyond making an assessment of the number of times Donne uses the word "marriage" possible (twenty-five in the ten volumes), this work proved positively invaluable. The speed of a new online database simply could not compare to the powerful experience of immersing myself in the ten-volumes of Donne's sermons with Reeves as a guide, gaining a bit more context and understanding with each foray.

[11] References to the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) come from the 1620 edition, accessible through the extraordinary database, Early English Books Online.

[12] All references to Donne's sermons come from the ten-volume collection, *The Sermons of John Donne*, compiled and edited by George Potter and Evelyn Simpson. My citations adhere to the following format (volume number, sermon number: line reference).

In addition to its important role as a memento of the first sinless union between two human beings and Almighty God, marriage also looks forward to the promised consummation of "the mysticall Union that is betwixt Christ and his Church" (BCP). According to the Prayer Book service then, each marriage mirrors both the prelapsarian union between created men and women and the post-apocalyptic betrothal of redeemed souls and Christ. In this way the liturgy of the marriage calls to mind the whole story of humankind, past, present, and future. Donne himself, in the marriage sermon we now turn to, draws upon "the *tenor* and *purpose*, the *Scope* and *intention*" (VII, 2:518) of the Prayer Book marriage service to construct a message that goes far beyond the bounds of an individual wedding.

A confession must precede our analysis of the sermon preached at "the marriage of Mistress Margaret Washington," a confession that I hope will prove illuminating. In the above discussion touching on Prayer Book theology of marriage, I quote Donne's pronouncement that "God made the first Marriage." The quotation serves, at the time, to affirm the point I wish to make about the significance of marriage as it can be discerned in the liturgy for weddings, and it serves well in that capacity. However I must now acknowledge the fact that at that moment I deliberately take Donne at a literal level while he makes a profound statement. That "God made the first Marriage," as Donne intones at the opening of his sermon, would not have surprised his churchgoing listeners: they heard it expressed at every parish wedding as I have demonstrated from the Prayer Book. If Donne had left his statement there he would be a solidly orthodox, though not particularly remarkable, preacher and might have gone on to produce a tidy little marriage sermon.

But Donne does not end with the platitude that "God made the first Marriage." Further, that quotation does not come from a marriage sermon at all. Donne's topic in the sermon from

which that snippet comes is the resurrection. After reminding his listeners that "God made the first Marriage" he goes on to explain, "and man made the first Divorce" (VII, 10:1-2). Now things are getting interesting. The marriage about which Donne speaks in line one suddenly seems to have very little to do with Adam and Eve. What first marriage of God's has man sundered with the first divorce?

Donne's answer to that question introduces one of the problems that clearly troubles him in his sermons, devotions, and poems. "God married the Body and Soule in the Creation" (VII, 10:3-4), he reminds his congregation, using the metaphor of marriage to explain the glory of the human condition. He uses the same metaphor to introduce the tragedy of humanity: "and man divorced the Body and Soule by death through sinne, in his fall" (VII, 10:4-5). In five lines, Donne uses language "understanded of the people"[13] to communicate an idea that troubles the greatest theologians. He first draws their comprehension by offering a statement to which they mentally accede. He then complicates that statement by revealing its metaphoric capacity. Donne's action at the opening of Sermon No. 10 in Volume VII affirms an orthodox, almost simple-minded truth, then loads it with profundity and sets it rolling. It is no accident that the same wheel ruts run from his early poems, through his sermons, and into his most profound work.

This intellectual turn also places Donne squarely in the tradition of metaphysical preachers. Donne's previous diversions were indeed quite well-suited for preaching in the seventeenth-century because "the taste of the time...permitted the use of bold and vigorous metaphor" (Mitchell 156). A poet who "consciously employ[ed paradoxes] to gain a compression and precision otherwise unobtainable" (Brooks 10) might be expected to

[13] This language comes from Article 24 of the 39 Articles. I thought its intent, to ensure that the liturgy of the reformed Anglican Church would only be offered in the vernacular, chimes well with the efforts of a particularly gifted preacher.

immediately feel at home with the most complex elements of Christian doctrine and particularly able to convey the meaning of those doctrines. Thus while subsequent centuries would turn aggressively against the style of preaching that delighted in wit as "a Sagacity to find out the Nature, Relations, and Consequences of things" (Mitchell 6), Donne's contemporaries reveled in it. Indeed, what critics of the eighteenth-century reacted against energetically was not the discerning subtlety of Donne's metaphors but the vacuous word-play employed by legions of lesser imitators. W. Fraser Mitchell, critic of sermons, puts it most powerfully when he maintains that Donne

> ...is fiercely individualistic, and this, combined with the impression he gives of having exhausted all departments of human enquiry and rung the changes on the whole gamut of human passion, only to find intellectual satisfaction in the *dogmata* of the Christian Faith and emotional satisfaction in the embrace of the Christian God, explains his connection with, but superiority to, all other 'metaphysical' divines of his time. (181)

The clear interpretive bent of Mr. Mitchell's assessment notwithstanding, he makes a fine point about the overall sense Donne achieves in his sermons, and about the features that tie Donne to the other metaphysical preachers even as he stands out on his own.

My discussion of the witty clipping from a single sermon shows one of the common ways in which Donne cleverly manipulates the idea of marriage in his preaching. The analysis which follows seeks to uncover the ways in which Donne uses the metaphor of marriage in a sermon preached at a marriage. I hope the preceding example trains us not to take his surface meaning in this text too readily, and to look for the ways in which this truly witty preacher uses disparate ideas to explain and communicate the complexities of the Christian faith. This paper intends to use the theologically strange and uncommon language of human sexuality to articulate, in

Donnean fashion, a valid, helpful vocabulary for human beings to approach the divine. I intend to address those instances when Donne fails to achieve a satisfying transition from sex to spirituality, and to hold up for imitation and reflection his moments of sublime creative and theological union.

I

On Mistress Margaret and the Marriage-Feast of the Lamb

At the Church of St. Clement Danes in London, on May 30, 1621, John Donne preached the marriage sermon at the wedding of Mistress Margaret Washington.[14] Biographical details of Mistress Margaret are not forthcoming, but the only other two marriage sermons that have survived both come from marriages of the children of old friends and benefactors.[15] Donne probably preached the sermon "at the request of Lord and Lady Doncaster" (*Introduction* to Volume III of *The Sermons of John Donne*, 20), in whose household Margaret Washington was a lady-in-waiting. The Doncasters performed "many acts of kindness to Donne" (20), and Donne strove to repay them appropriately as he was able. This sermon and several others appear to form part of that continued effort.

The sermon truly shows the great preacher at his rhetorical best. A tightly knit structure, based around a text hand-selected for the occasion of a marriage, allows Donne to simultaneously exhort the young couple to their duties as husband and wife and to tackle sophisticated theological questions surrounding the marriage of the soul to God. Simpson and Potter, usually restrained and technical in their analysis of Donne's preaching, lavish praise on this example of "Donne the consummate craftsman, the poet and artist, at work" (22). The intensity and eloquence of the sermon also indicate that the reader here encounters Donne the troubled believer, the overwhelmed sinner, working out his own salvation in fear and trembling.

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[14] Incidentally, Simpson and Potter tell us that "Margaret Washington belonged to the famous family from which George Washington was descended" (*Introduction* to Volume III of *The Sermons of John Donne*, 20).
[15] The sermon preached at the marriage of Sir Francis Nethersole to Lucy Goodyer, the daughter of Donne's friend and confidant Sir Henry Goodyer, is disappointingly dry and impersonal. The sermon preached at the marriage of Lord Herbert Danvers and Lady Mary Egerton, both of families who aided Donne in his days of questing after secular employment, is, according to Simpson and Potter, "one of the few sermons of Donne's which can justly be described as morbid" (*Introduction* to Volume VIII of *The Sermons of John Donne*, 10). The topic is the resurrection, and judged hardly appropriate as a marriage sermon by Donne's editors.

Donne's habit in selecting verses for his sermons (it seems that the grand events which occasion many of Donne's sermons, or perhaps his frequent invitations to preach at Court during specific seasons, afforded him tremendous latitude in choosing his texts) warrants its own lengthy analysis, and has prompted many such analyses. For the occasion of the Washington marriage he settles on a poignantly appropriate verse from Hosea: "And I will marry thee unto me for ever."[16] While his citations usually refer to the Authorized Version of the Bible, which was still quite new at the time of his ordination, in the Washington sermon he elects to use the more Calvinist Geneva Bible. Donne apparently bases this decision around the translation of "the Hebrew word which he transliterates as *Erash*" (*Introduction*, III, 21). The Authorized Version renders this word as "betroth," but as Donne explains at the beginning of his sermon, *Erash* "signifies not onely a betrothing, as our later Translation hath it, but a mariage" (*Sermons*, III, 11:2-3). Thus with the stage duly set and the congregation brought to speed, Donne proceeds to the real work of the sermon.

Donne opens with a faithful recitation of the Prayer Book theology expressed in the marriage service: "The first mariage that was made, God made, and he made it in Paradise" (III, 11:7-8). He does not offer enough specificity to rule out the metaphorical complication he introduces in the sermon cited above, and his comment that "of that mariage [he has] had the occasion as this to speak before, in the presence of many honourable persons in this company" (III, 11:8-10), may be a clue to repeat listeners that he alludes to both concepts of "the first mariage": Adam and Eve, as well as soul and body.

His topic in this marriage sermon, however, does not tend to the divorce which he discusses so freely in the sermon mentioned above. Donne's eyes are set beyond death, to "the

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[16] Hosea 2.19, the full text of which reads "And I will marry thee unto me forever; yea, I will marry thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in mercy and in compassion," records the prophet's promise that God will renew His covenant with all creation, and will furthermore bring peace to the earth.

last mariage which shall be made" (III, 11:10) by God after the Day of Judgment. Using those two marriages, with the marriage alluded to in the text from Hosea, Donne establishes the intricate structure of his sermon. The marriage alluded to by the minor prophet "is it self the spirituall and mysticall mariage of Christ Jesus to the church, and to *every mariageable soule in the Church*" (III, 11:14-15, emphasis added). Not only does it represent the present possibility of union with Christ through the church, but also it possesses "a retrospect, it looks back to the first mariage" (III, 11:16), the source of God's own metaphor in the text. The marriage song that Hosea speaks to the people of Israel introduces for God the possibility of marriage to the individual soul.

Donne then builds on "forever," the last word of the verse, to describe the last marriage to which this verse and the occasion of a wedding alludes: the eventual, eternal consummation of the individual soul's relationship to Christ. These three marriages, then, give Donne his form and structure in the sermon. He begs his listeners,

> Be pleased therefore to give me leaves in this exercise, to shift the scene thrice, and to present to your religious considerations three objects, three subjects: first, a secular mariage in Paradise; secondly, a spirituall mariage in the Church; and thirdly, an eternall mariage in heaven. (III, 11:20-24)

Such an intricate proposition, drawn from elements of the selected text, sets an ambitious task for any preacher. Donne spends a relatively brief first paragraph drawing out each of these three marriages from the initial, rather uncomplicated promise of scripture "And I will marry thee to me forever." He interprets the verse by comparing it to the "spirituall mariage" available in the church, and at the same time interprets the occasion by drawing on the conventions of Prayer Book worship and the practical concept of marriage. This framework goes further to offer a

significant challenge even for one of the most celebrated preachers of his time and in the history of the language.

A good challenge for a preacher may not carry all the weight of interpretation and explication that the preacher wishes to accomplish. Donne, for one, has higher expectations for his Washington sermon than those set out in his intricate structure. "In each of these three" marriages, he proposes, "we shall present three circumstances" (III, 11:24-25), three further considerations to be applied to each of the first three situations. Though with certainly a nod to Trinitarian symbolism, Donne bases this further move within the text, focusing on the "Persons," the "Action" and the "Term." In some ways this grouping extends the initial possibilities. Beyond extension, however, it complicates and enhances them to include an intermingling of their separate concerns.

Donne devotes the first half of the sermon to a discussion of secular marriage. Drawing his terms from the Vulgate translation,[17] he considers in order the persons involved in the marrying, the "*Me* and *Tibi*," (III, 11:25), the action undertaken, "*Sponsabo*" (III, 11:26), and finally the term for which the action is carried out: "*In æternum*" (III, 11:27). These three aspects identified by Donne in his analysis of the text from Hosea invite the reader to consider the varied ways in which the text can be interpreted. It envelopes personal, active, and temporal components, each of which draws the mind to specific marriages or metaphors drawn from marriage, all of which possibilities Donne unites in detail in his long discussion of secular marriage at the start of the sermon.

Because "in the first, the secular marriage in Paradise, the persons were *Adam* and *Eve*" (III, 11:28-29), humankind gains the pattern on which subsequent marriages are structured.

[17] Even a brief dip into Donne's prose writings gives a sense of his fondness for languages. He quotes liberally from the Latin Vulgate, and adds the occasional Hebrew or Greek reference. Mercifully, Donne almost invariably gives his own translation immediately following any of these difficult translations.

"Ever since they are He and She, man and woman" (III, 11:29-30), and this necessarily physical distinction leads Donne to his first hint about God's purpose in instituting marriage. Marriage involves the joining together of men and women, "now without any other limitations, then such as are expressed in the Law of God" (III, 11:31-32). God expresses interest in this institution, establishing rules by which it must be carried out, and laying no further restriction on it than what those rules entail. Indeed, "though there were foure rivers in Paradise, God did not place *Adam* in a Monastery on one side, and *Eve* in a Nunnery on the other, and so a River between them" (III, 11:41-44), but brought man and woman together in wedlock, in contrast to the work of many heretical groups since.

Donne's digression into the many heresies surrounding the union of men and women offers a unique glimpse into the theology he articulates as the foundation of marriage. "They that build wals and cloysters to frustrate Gods institution of mariage, advance the Doctrine of Devils in forbidding mariage" (III, 11:43-44) despite the traditionally positive attitude of Christianity toward committed celibacy. Indeed, for Donne "there is a faire way for a moderate man to walk in" (III, 11:56-57) between the heresies of all those who denigrate women to barely human levels and the faults of those who give "them such souls, as that they may be Priests" (III, 11:55-56). Such excesses and failings raise suspicions about the legitimacy of secular marriages and erect barriers to the divinely-sanctioned entry of men and women therein, but Donne hopes to clear the path in truly Anglican fashion. For "those whom God hath joyned so farre, as to give them leave to joyn in lawfull mariage" (III, 11:65-66), marrying comes equipped with a divine injunction.

The role God plays in cementing the marriage bonds clearly fascinates Donne. As he moves beyond the "Persons," having established all the necessities associated with their union, Donne considers the "Action," which he calls a situation "where the Active is a kinde of

Passive" (III, 11:85-86). This affords him an opportunity to draw a distinction between the church of his birth and upbringing and the church of his adult career: he points out that "they are somewhat hard driven in the Roman Church, when making mariage a Sacrament" (III, 11:87-88) when asked who administers this sacrament. For Donne, the Roman Church errs in making marriage a sacrament because a sacrament requires a celebrant. When asked "who administers it, who is the Priest?" (III, 11:89-90) the Catholics "are fain to answer, the Bridegroom and the Bride, he and she are the Priest in that Sacrament" (III, 11:90-91). This, however, cannot be because a marriage "must be done...in publick" for it involves both "a civill Contract" and "a religious Contract" (III, 11:92, 93). Because "we mary not our selves" (III, 11:87) there must be the public testimony of a community and the "benediction of the Priest" (III, 11:94), but those involved are "persons that God hath brought together" (III, 11:82). The Church acknowledges and blesses a status that God brings into being. Donne does not consider marriage sacramental in the Roman sense of the word because he traces for it a deeper, divinely-ordered heritage. While his digression into the distinction between the Roman sacrament of marriage and the (presumably more correct) Anglican middle way is tantalizingly short, it makes clear Donne's opinion of marriage as a public, civil and ecclesiastical event that acknowledges a deeper spiritual reality.

Before proceeding to the third aspect of marriage, the "Term," Donne devotes space to the physical elements of the (divinely-ordered) secular marriage. His shift is quite deliberate, and reminds the reader that this sermon was actually preached at an historical wedding. The analysis of the practical, physical components of marriage establishes their framework within the sermon so that they might be spiritualized later, and also spiritualizes the physical union of the two

people present that May in 1621.[18] The rhetorical move is striking, and does much to fill out Donne's explanation of marriage in the first half of the sermon.

The three objects of secular marriage that Donne describes are rather standard. Marriage is instituted "for a remedy against burning...for propagation...[and] for mutuall help" (III, 11:102-104). Through each, Donne follows a pattern of analysis centered on God's purposes enacted through marriage. By instituting marriage as a remedy against burning prior to the fall of humankind, "God gave man the remedy, before he had the disease" (III, 11:117). The "second use of marriage...for children" (III, 11:135) entails not the necessary conditions for producing children but the necessary conditions for raising them, "not so much procreation as education" (III, 11:143). There is no divorce, for Donne, between the physical act of procreation and the spiritual condition of the parents. The former either benefits or imperils the latter, for "the salvation of the parents hath so much relation to the childrens goodnesse" (III, 11:161-162). Finally, secular marriage has been instituted "for mutuall help" (III, 11:189). Marriage teaches humankind the importance of living in community, and reminds us that "every body needs the help of others; and every good body does give some kinde of help to others" (III, 11:200-202). It also teaches men and women to rely on God in two separate ways: first, God can be relied on in the same way in which they depend on a spouse. Secondly, they must rely on God in order to gain a dependable spouse. When "we come to...rely upon God primarily for our Help," God responds by promising to "make thee a help like thy self" (III, 11:210, 211). In this way Donne inextricably ties the physical objects of marriage to the spiritual action by which God joins two

[18] Perhaps too much has been made of the fact that this marriage sermon was actually a part of the liturgy binding two people together. However, I hope I do not overstate my case when I stress that this fact re-emphasizes the unique status of sermons within the broader bounds of literary analysis. A poem may be written for a certain occasion and audience, and may even be delivered to that audience on that occasion. A sermon, contrarily, can never be fully separated from its occasion and audience, even in the preacher's highest reveries.

people. To conclude his discussion of secular marriage he turns to the "Term" for which the marriage lasts.

In claiming an eternal heritage for the secular marriage, Donne does not take up an unbiblical stance.[19] Instead, he asks his audience to "consider a kind of eternity, a kind of circle without beginning, without end, even in this secular marriage" (III, 11:243-245). Donne interprets this exhortation by means of a twofold understanding of eternity. Before marriage, there must be "no half-mariage, no lending away of the minde, in conditionall precontracts before, no lending away of the body in unchaste wantonnesse before" (III, 11:246-248). Marriage cannot begin before the Church blesses the union accomplished by God. Donne illustrates the completeness of that union by drawing an analogy to architecture. The marriage must be complete when it happens, and must happen in a complete way:

> The body is the temple of the Holy Ghost; and when too bodies, by mariage are to be made one temple, the wife is not as the Chancell, reserv'd and shut up, and the man as the walks below, indifferent and at liberty for every passenger. God in his Temple looks for first fruits from both. (III, 11:248-252)

Alluding unfavorably to patterns of church construction and worship common throughout the Middle Ages, Donne draws a negative comparison between the married couple and a Church. Their individual bodies, temples of the Holy Ghost, must not be joined like a chancel, a holy place set aside for worship, and the nave of a church where common life and commerce takes place. Rather, the two bodies come together to form one temple, constructed at once and for one unified purpose.

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[19] Indeed, for his sermon at the marriage of Sir Francis Nethersole, Donne actually bases his sermon on the text of Matthew 22:30: "For in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage." Simpson and Potter call it one of the few sermons that can rightly be characterized as "morbid." CITATION

Just as secular marriage reflects eternity in that there is "no beginning of mariage before mariage" (III, 11:254), it also mirrors more common ideas about eternity in that it is, temporally, endless. Uninterrupted "by unjust suspicions and jealousies" (III, 11:256), secular marriage "can have no end in this life" (III, 11:279-280). Donne therefore concludes his disquisition on secular marriage, neatly tying each of his subsidiary discussions of the "objects" of marriage to the present occasion by adding short prayers that the couple may be blessed with a marriage that is mutually helpful, fruitful, and free from "inordinatenesse in the affections of man" (III, 11:119). The preacher might make an easy end of a good marriage sermon at this point, "for all is said that [he] intended of the secular marriage" (III, 11:318).

But the grander frame established by Donne at the outset of the sermon reminds him that two whole forms of marriage demand treatment. The treatment they receive elevates this sermon beyond the status of another nuptial meditation to a sublime reflection on the love of God shown through and promised in marriage. Through the careful structure of his sermon, Donne achieves a seamless transition from the physicality and practical attributes of secular marriage to the parallel forms and understandings of spiritual marriage. He encourages his readers, by focusing on the action of God in bringing together two people "like in minde, like in disposition, like in the love of God, and of one another" (III, 11:213-214), to think of the spiritual aspects of secular marriage, but never loses focus of the fact that this institution always looks back to prelapsarian perfection and forward to the marriage feast of the Lamb. Having faithfully executed his duties as wedding preacher by focusing on the former, Donne allows himself a little poetic license as he enters into a reflection and reverie on the latter.

He does not abandon the interior structure that animates the discussion of secular marriage as he moves to the spiritual. The confines of the sermon require that we first establish

that "in this spiritual mariage we consider first Christ and his Church, for the Persons, but more particularly Christ and my soul" (III, 11:331-333). This consideration prompts a difficult question that Donne easily dispenses with in the secular marriage: "And can these persons meet?" (III, 11:333) he asks regarding the improbable marriage of Christ to his soul. From the introduction of "my soul" in line 333 the sermon takes on an intensely personal tone. Whether Donne intends it to be thus we cannot be sure, but he deliberately uses the personal pronoun instead of speaking in general terms about the marriage of God to "each man" or "every good soul." Donne's language does not offer an answer to this problem, but it makes the problem sufficiently interesting to render it illuminating, if unanswerable. From this point I will refer to "the preacher" or "the speaker," if only to avoid the uncanny feeling that we are trespassing on Donne's intimate spiritual relations.[20]

In the secular marriage, the partners will not always be "like in complexion, nor like in years, nor like in fortune, nor like in birth" (III, 11:211-213) but God admits no impediment to union on these grounds. In the union of the individual soul with God, the preacher can hardly draw his focus from the disparities between the "Persons" concerned. They are set at "such a distance, and in such a disparagement" (III, 11:333-334) that it seems altogether unlikely that a successful match can be made. Christ is "*Germen Jehovæ,* the bud and blossome, the fruit and off-spring of Jehovah, Jehovah himself," (III, 11:336-337), whose tremendous status only serves to accentuate the lowliness of the betrothed soul. That soul, "not a Potters vessell of earth, but that earth of which the Potter might make a vessel if he would" (III, 11:338-339), can claim no beauty or value beyond the hope that God "took [him] in hand" (III, 11:337).

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[20] An additional justification must be that the sermon, from this point on, reads more like an extended poem than a formal oration.

The unlikelihood of their match springs not only from the disparity between the two to be joined. Worse still, the soul actually represents an unrecognizably degraded example of the same stock of Christ. They are like two coins of the same mint: "Christ to have been from before all beginnings, and to be still the Image of the Father, the same stamp upon the same metall" (III, 11:340-342), while the preacher himself is nothing more than "a peece of rusty copper, in which those lines of the Image of God which were imprinted in me in my Creation are defaced and worn" (III, 11:342-344). The masterful comparison to two coins encapsulates, in one tidy metaphor, a way of understanding the dual nature of Christ and the degraded nature of fallen humanity. It differs subtly from the first objection, that the soul of the creature has no business uniting with its creator (the Potter and the vessel), and turns the mind of the listener to theological questions about the nature and purpose of Christ's Incarnation. It is, in its way, a reflection on the spiritual beauty of Christ's physical presence.

Finally, the preacher has no business joining his soul to Christ because the two travel in different circles. The image of "Christ in his Circle, in glory with his Father, before he came into this world, and glorifying that Church with that glory which himself had before, when he went out of this world" (III, 11:346-349) invests the suitor with all the grandeur of divinity. Christ's is not simply the divinity of a creator who, having accomplished the work of creation, departs from the created world. Rather, he exists in glory, and in glory that can even be seen on earth in the church. Indeed, Christ sits far above the speaker in his circle, into which he comes "washed in [his] own tears, and either out of compunction for my self or compassion for others...[he passes] through this world as through a valley of tears" (III, 11:350-352). Sorrow and dishonor begin his days, follow him through his earthly life, and he anticipates a day "when I passe out of this world I leave their eyes whose hands close mine, full of tears too" (III, 11:353-354). The distance

between Christ and the soul of the preacher exceeds all measurement of status, dignity, and character.

The preacher rushes his listeners through each of his reflections on the unworthiness of his own soul. He never pauses to draw the inevitable conclusion, that Christ has no business marrying a soul as tarnished as his own, but piles inadequacy on top of inadequacy, and sin upon sin. The effect simultaneously weighs down the listener's thoughts on his or her own individual unworthiness and exalts the idea of God. The final crescendo piles verb-less names of God and humankind into a litany of personal distress. The speaker wonders whether "this Image of God, this God himself, this glorious God" (III, 11:355) can unite with "this vessell of earth, this earth it self, this inglorious worm of the earth" (III, 11:356). The preacher decisively cleaves earth and God, human and divine, and questions whether any hope for reconciliation can exist.

His answer comes in clear, authoritative prose. Indeed, he sweeps away the accumulated questions of the preceding paragraph in one strong affirmation of the fact that yet "they doe meet and make a mariage" (III, 11:358). The preacher serenely passes over the question whether "this Image of God" and "this vessell of earth" can "meet without disparagement" (III, 11:357) by asserting plainly that the meeting takes place. There are contingencies, of course. It takes place according to a precedent. The quotation of a sermon alluded to earlier in our discussion of the Prayer Book liturgy provides the form. God marries the body and the soul together to produce each complete human being. Into the very dust of the ground God breathes the breath of life, and the two halves of humanity become wedded beyond all possibility of divorce.[21] Therefore,

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[21] Donne defends the idea that death does not really divorce body and soul in another sermon. Indeed, developing a theme found in one of his epithalamia, the Christian hope of the resurrection actually transforms death into a marriage ceremony: *He is crowned in the day of his Marriage*; for though it be a day of *Divorce* of us from him, and of *Divorce* of his body from his soul, yet neither of these Divorces breake the Marriage: His *soule* is married to him that made it, and his body and soul shall meet again, and all we, both then in that Glory where we shall acknowledge, that there is no way to this *Marriage*, but this *Divorce*, nor to *Life*, but by *Death*. (VI, 14:399-405)

"because [he] is not a body onely, but a body and soul" (III, 11:358-359) the preacher can become a suitable match for Christ.

The marriage can take place on account of another precedent, this one gathered from the Law of Moses. According to Deuteronomy, "a man might mary a captive woman in the Warres, if he shaved her head, and pared her nails, and changed her clothes" (III, 11:360-361). The preacher immediately draws a connection between this rather rough treatment and the ministries performed on his soul by Christ, who "fought for [his] soul, fought to blood" (III, 11:362). The spiritual benefits he incurs as a result of Christ's battle correspond to elements of the Mosaic Law. Christ performs the required preliminary steps to marriage. He captures the soul of the preacher (who is always called by the feminine pronoun)[22] and "[shaves] her head in abating her pride, and [pares] her nails in contracting her greedy desires, and [changes] her clothes not to fashion her self after this world" (III, 11:366-369). After this chastisement makes the soul ready, "Christ Jesus hath maried my soul, maried her to the three intendments mentioned in the secular mariage" (III, 11:359-361). The preacher builds to an almost ecstatic climax in the final rhetorical throes of his imagined courtship with Christ.

Christ marries the soul "*In ustionem*, against burning" (III, 11:371), saving the soul not only from the "fires of tentation"[23] (III, 11:372) to which the preacher might expose himself, but also from "the fires of persecution and martyrdome" (III, 11:373-374) into which others might cast him. "The tears of Christ Jesus shall extinguish all fires in my heart"[24] (III, 11:377-378), saving the betrothed soul from the apprehension of eternal hellfire and satisfying the first

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[22] This point causes some controversy in contemporary poetic criticism, a discussion which will be addressed in chapter 3.
[23] Though I retain seventeenth-century spelling in every instance, usually without note, it may be helpful to point out this is, according to the OED, an obsolete spelling of temptation.
[24] This quotation also beautifully combines medieval and modern concepts, applying the very physical benefits of the passion of Christ to the intensely personal, interior "fires in my heart."

component of a marriage: that it be "*In ustionem*, a remedy against burning" (III, 11:378-379). The once wholly physical metaphor, colored early on with a spiritual tincture, now takes on an almost entirely spiritual definition. Yet it does this without jettisoning its original, physical import. Marriage is the metaphor, and marriage with Christ saves the soul from some of the same dangers that marriage with the human spouse saves the body (as well as the soul).

Donne's speaker, faithful to his structure, moves to a more provocative component of marriage, ostensibly to test his union with Christ. Does the marriage feast of the Lamb celebrate a marriage "*In prolificationem*, for children" (III, 11:380), as have the secular and spiritual marriages? The preacher answers this possibility with a litany of woes directed to all those who are somehow barren in Christ. He laments for "that single soul that is not maried to Christ; that is not come into the way of having issue by him" (III, 11:381-382), which includes all those "not incorporated in the Christian Church, and in the true Church" (III, 11:382-383).

This section of the sermon also raises the proverbial stakes associated with a fertile marriage: the preacher cries "woe unto them that are barren after this spirituall mariage, for that is a great curse in the Prophet Jeremy" (III, 11:386-388). Christ's "present fecundity" (III, 11:402) works as the preacher preaches, bringing forth "fruits worthy of that profession" (III, 11:393) in his listeners, warning them of the spiritual danger they face if they "conceive not by Christ" (III, 11:386). While he successfully keeps the product of these imagined conceptions within the decidedly spiritual realm, the preacher does not hesitate to declare that "the purpose of his mariage to us, is to have children by us" (III, 11:401-402). The Christian's relationship to Christ must be fertile, producing "good conceptions, religious dispositions, holy desires to the advancement of Gods truth" (III, 11:398-399), a blend of spiritual outcomes derived from the very physical description of union with God.

The preacher dispenses with the third and final condition for marriage, that the union be "*in adjutorium*, for a helper" (III, 11:406) with a clever metaphor drawn from Christ's words in the 25th Chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel. How can Christ have the individual believer for a helper? Well, in that chapter we find the Christian called "to feed him, and clothe him, and harbour him" (III, 11:406-407), real tangible help directed to other people in need. Donne's listeners were certainly familiar with the verses in question, and would have known that help for Christ was also (actually) help for "the least of these."[25] The preacher makes a very fine distinction in the matter, however. He uses the traditional image of helping others as one way in which the marriage between Christ and believer achieves mutual help. But he also cites the important fact that "each man can help [Christ] to a better place in his own heart, and his own actions, then he hath had there" (III, 11:415-416), adding a spiritual component to the physical work of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and comforting the oppressed. The preacher touches on the final condition for marriage so that he remains faithful to his well-established formula. However, even his cursory glance complicates and enhances the comparison he draws throughout the sermon.

Having completed his reflection on the "spirituall mariage in the Church" (III, 11:23), the preacher moves to the final element of his extended discourse on the spiritual significance of marriage. The spiritual and eternal marriages do not consist of "an eternity considered onely in this life" (III, 11:422) as does the secular marriage. The spiritual marriage has been "from all eternity in the Book of life, in Gods eternall Decree for my election" (III, 11:423-424), and in that "Christ was maried to my soul" (III, 11:424). The sheer scope of this proposal boggles the mind of the preacher, as he reflects that this means that Christ, who "was never in minority, never under years" (III, 11:425) marries, from all eternity, a soul that "was in a strange minority,

[25] Matthew 25:40.

infinite millions of millions of generations" (III, 11:427-428). Even "before my soul was a soul, did Christ mary my soul in his eternall Decree" (III, 11:428-429), and therefore the marriage is "eternall, it had no beginning" (III, 11:429-430). The marriage of the soul to Christ in the "eternall decree" draws the preacher's reflection to the creative power of the love of Christ, and the constancy of that love. It stretches to the time before his soul exists, and therefore marriage enjoys some involvement in calling the speaker's soul into being.

The love is also perfect. The eternal nature of the union of the soul and Christ cannot be interrupted as a result of any "jealousie by the way" (III, 11:431) because Christ loves the soul of the preacher "as though there were no other soul, and would have done and suffered all that he did for me alone" (III, 11:431-433). Therefore, since the marriage between soul and Christ is "*in æternum*, for ever, before all beginnings, and *in æternum*, for ever, without any interruptions" (III, 11:434-435) the beloved soul can have confidence that nothing of his doing can end the marriage. The soul enjoys "not a presumptuous impossibility, but a modest infallibility" (III, 11:437), a quiet confidence that "no sin of mine shall divorce or separate me from him" (III, 11:438). The love continues uninterrupted by death, "that which ends the secular mariage" (III, 11:438-439), and indeed death can only strengthen the bond between lover and beloved.

The soul rejoices, "I doe but goe by death where he is become a King" (III, 11:442), joining a husband exalted above all created things. Because the spiritual marriage is eternal, contracted "before my soul was a soul," the soul enjoys his own "part in that glory, and in those additions" (III, 11:443) which Christ receives in the world to come. As happens often in Donne's sermons (and, as we shall see, in Donne's poetry) death performs a double role, closely tied to the very teachings of Christ himself, as the one who humiliates and the one who exalts. Death ends all those conditions connected to the secular marriage, but recasts them in greater splendor

for the spiritual, which leads the preacher at last to the great consummation of the eternal marriage.

In one incredibly tightly-structured paragraph, the preacher describes the persons involved in the eternal marriage. Freely quoting from Scripture (especially from the Revelation of St. John), the persons of the eternal marriage are

> That Lamb who was *brought to the slaughter and opened not his mouth*, and I who have opened my mouth and poured out imprecations and curses upon men, and execrations and blasphemies against God upon every occasion; That Lamb who *was slain from the beginning,* and I who was slain by him who *was a murderer from the beginning*; That *Lamb which took away the sins of the world,* and I who brought more sins into the world, then any sacrifice but the blood of this Lamb could take away" (III, 11:449-456)

Donne's prose elegantly balances the preacher, who imitates St. Paul's claim to be "chief" among sinners, and the overwhelming goodness of Christ. The preacher's sins specifically match those virtues of Christ described in Scripture and quoted in this section of the sermon. In the first description of the persons at the marriage, Christ's silent submission to his passion redeems the sins that the speaker has committed in "imprecations and curses upon men" as well as "execrations and blasphemies against God." The preacher perfectly matches the redeeming act of Christ to the need of his soul, heightening the personal connection between the two as he moves into the peroration.

Drawing a sharp, resounding rhetorical contrast, the paragraph which goes to such eloquent lengths to describe the two persons brought together in marriage ends with the simple statement, "This Lamb and I (these are the persons) shall meet and mary; there is the Action" (III, 11:457-458). The preacher rakes back over the rest of the sermon, stirring up phrases and

metaphors used in earlier sections to confirm that "this is not a clandestine marriage, not the private seal of Christ in the obsignation of his Spirit" (III, 11:459-460); nor is it "a Parish mariage, as when Christ maried me to himself at my Baptisme" (III, 11:461-462). Those secular and spiritual marriages alluded to here, legitimate in their own ways because they are necessarily public, pale in comparison to the eternal marriage contracted before

> that great and glorious Congregation, where all my sins shall be laid open to the eyes of all the world, where all the blessed Virgins shall see my uncleannesse, and all the Martyrs see all my tergiversations,[26] and all the Confessors see all my double dealings in Gods cause (III, 11:464-468)

This marriage represents the ultimate public, the assemblage of the Church militant and triumphant. The speaker's soul is opened to the "great and glorious Congregation" like a book in which all the virtuous can read the tell-tale marks of those vices diametrically opposed to their holy lives. The preacher goes on to describe how Abraham shall see "my faithlessnesse in Gods promise," while Job will find "impatience in Gods corrections" (III, 11:468-470). Lazarus, who suffered at the gate the rich man until departing for eternity in heaven, shall see the preacher's "hardness of heart in distributing Gods blessings to the poore" (III, 11:470-471), calling to mind once again Christ's teachings that tie the physical, earthly actions of human beings to spiritual well-being.

This whole glorious throng will see the speaker guilty of every sin, unworthy of the slightest notice, or even of any presence, among that group. And then they "shall look upon the Lamb and upon me, and upon one another, as though they would all forbid those banes,[27] and say

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[26] This word, for those readers who approached it in perplexity as I did, comes from the Latin for "to turn ones back." It therefore calls to mind apostasy and equivocation, both denial and silent betrayal, all equally shameful in the presence of the bold, faithful martyrs.

[27] According to the OED, "banes" is an historically accurate alternative spelling of "banns."

to one another, Will this Lamb have any thing to doe with this soule?" (III, 11:473-475). Having heightened the disparity between his soul and Christ, the speaker adds to the tension by calling to mind the early requirement that a marriage be public. The eternal marriage must necessarily take place in the presence of the great congregation of all the faithful at the General Resurrection. This marriage, therefore, allows the speaker to implicitly describe the theological complexities of redemption and justification in a widely understood metaphor. While most people "were drawn to partners of comparable wealth and temperament" (Cressy, 256), many in the congregation at which this sermon was preached could certainly think of "bad matches" they had seen. Whether the problem was "social endogamy" (255) or simply poorly-matched personalities, the amount of marriage advice coming from the period implies that, as now, Donne's first hearers had probably witnessed (perhaps were witnessing) marriages that seemed doomed from the outset. The preacher ingeniously imparts those same sentiments to the prophets, apostles, and martyrs looking on at the marriage feast of the Lamb.

After all that, in spite of disapproving looks beaming from radiant faces and the clucking of immortal tongues, "yet there and then this Lamb shall mary me, and mary me *In æternum*, for ever, which is our last circumstance" (III, 11:475-477). The last fifty lines of the sermon ascend to a reverie on that circumstance, though "it is not well done to call it a circumstance, for the eternity is a great part of the essence of that mariage" (III, 11:478-479). Indeed, the eternal character of the marriage between the soul and the Lamb makes the riches of the world seem "how poore and needy," the pleasures of the world "how flat and tastelesse," and the honors of the world "how pallid, and faint and dilute" (III, 11:479-482), because even "the very Treasure, and Joy, and glory of heaven it self were unperfect, if it were not eternall" (III, 11:482-484). The

preacher need not fret over this point, because "my mariage shall be soe, *In æternum*, for ever" (III, 11:484).

The preacher's soul moves closer to the perfect consummation of his marriage to the Lamb, surpassing the angels who "were not maried so" (III, 11:485). Indeed, they have only "an irreparable Divorce from God, and are separated for ever" (III, 11:485-486), while the speaker "shall be maried to him, *in æternum,* for ever" (III, 11:486-487). From his perch above the angels, the preacher's soul "shall see all the beauty, and all the glory of all the Saints of God, and love them all, and know that the Lamb loves them too, without jealousie on his part, or theirs or mine" (III, 11:490-493). This vision of heavenly free love encapsulates an element of eternity important to Donne and stressed throughout the sermon: that an eternal love not only knows no beginning or end, but also no "interruption, or diminution, or change of affections" (III, 11:494). The love of the Lamb for the preacher's soul is constant, unchanged by contact with all the splendors of heaven.

As the speaker speeds to his climax he enters upon long lists, veritable litanies of pleasure, drawn from the Scriptures and from his own allusions, which heighten the ecstatic joy of his consummated union. He "shall see the Sunne black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon become as blood, and the Starres fall as a Figge-tree casts her untimely Figges, and the heavens roll'd up as a Scroll" (III, 11:495-497) but these signs of ending represent fulfillment for his soul. The image of the fig tree, in particular, calls to mind the speaker's earlier discussion of fertility in Christ, and the importance for each individual Christian to bear fruit as a result of their marriage to the lamb. The stars will fall from the sky as "untimely Figges" from a tree, hearkening back to those who are "*væ prægnanti* too, wo unto them that are with child, and are never delivered" (III, 11:397-398). In the consummation of the love between the preacher's soul

and the Lamb, there is no fear of such a deadly pregnancy: the promise of a fertile marriage finds itself continually renewed in the creative power of the union. This same marriage between the Lamb and the soul calls the soul into being even as it produces new things through the soul. Their love is generative, regenerative, and highly productive.

The soul also looks forward to witnessing "a divorce between Princes and their Prerogatives, between nature and all her elements, between the spheres, and all their intelligences, between matter it self, and all her forms" (III, 11:597-500), the very unraveling of the created world. This passage speaks not only to the forms of order, civil, natural, and fundamental, passing away, but to their forceful separation. What the preacher's soul sees is the forcible destruction and interruption of increasingly close unions. Prerogatives go a long way to defining princes, as do elements and intelligences for nature and spheres, respectively. But the human mind can hardly fathom the fundamental breakdown present in the divorce "between matter it self, and all her forms."[28] The preacher highlights these cataclysmic annulments for one purpose: to emphasize that "my mariage shall be, *in æternum,* for ever" (III, 11:500-501). As the most intimate, most specifically physical unions break apart and fall away, the marriage between his soul and Christ remains unshaken and, perhaps, strengthened. The essentially physical relationship of marriage between the soul and God survives even the breakdown of "matter and its forms."

There will come "an end of faith, nothing to be beleeved that I doe not know; and an end of hope, nothing to be wisht that I doe not enjoy" (III, 11:501-503), a definite conclusion to two of the three theological virtues. Allusions criss-cross this densely packed little sentence. If faith is "the substance of things hoped for, the assurance of things not seen" according to the Epistle to

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[28] This passage would undoubtedly lend itself most fruitfully to an analysis of the orders Donne describes relative to a late Renaissance alchemical understanding of the world. My concern, however, is with the use of the word "divorce" which crops up in the sermons often, always through a clever metaphor drawn from marriage.

the Hebrews, the perfect knowledge enjoyed by the beloved soul in its union with Christ supersedes faith altogether. Everything can be seen, and all things have been given a new and greater substance. Hope, a word often associated in the New Testament with work and labor ("he that ploweth should plow in hope; and he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope" says St. Paul in 1 Corinthians), passes away because the beloved now enjoys everything for which he might want or work.

As these waves of brilliantly structured rhetoric rolled over the congregation of Donne's first listeners, they undoubtedly listened with anticipation for the fate of the third theological virtue. Even many today, in a notably less biblically-literate world, are familiar with the famous Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians in which faith, hope, and love, "abideth...these three." What will the preacher do with "the greatest of these"? Can love pass away with faith and hope, perfectly realized and therefore superfluous? Could the greatest virtue in Christian thought become redundant at its moment of supreme intensity?

Of course not! The preacher's soul sees the end of faith and hope, "but no end of that love in which I am maried to the Lamb for ever" (III, 11:503-504). Faith and hope come to a clear end in the perfect knowledge and perfect enjoyment of the consummation of the Lamb and the soul, but "*that* love in which" (emphasis added) the soul is married to Christ will not end. St. Paul is vindicated: "charity never faileth." Specificity (knowledge and enjoyment) vanquishes hope and faith, but love remains precisely because it is specific. It is "that love" which unites the soul to the Lamb in matrimonial bliss. It cannot end, but can only continue to grow as Christ carries out the process by which the bride is made perfect.

Some of the roles of Christ undertaken for the perfecting of the bride will also pass away. "Christ himself shall be no longer a Mediator, an Intercessor, or an Advocate" (III, 11:505-506)

because the soul has been redeemed and cleansed, and exists in perfect union beyond the dangers that require those "offices of the Lamb" (III, 11:505). But even once perfection has been attained, Christ "shall continue a Husband to my soul for ever" (III, 11:506). In this role, the Lamb surpasses any earthly husband. The bride shall be "rich enough without Joynture, for my Husband cannot die" (III, 11:597-598), fully free from the anxieties associated with the end of the secular marriage. When the preacher looks forward to being "wise enough without experience" and "healthy enough without Physick" (III, 11:598, 599), we begin to understand the extent to which real exchange and interaction between the Lamb and the soul occurs. The Lamb successfully imparts wisdom, health, and safety to his bride. These lines heighten the benefits of the union and also bring the sermon to a measure of physicality. The focus shifts from simply a long list of the qualities that set this marriage apart from other elements of the natural and the spiritual world, and from the personalities of the two persons involved, to the physical, almost material benefits of the marriage for the soul. The preacher's soul enjoys wisdom, health and safety, all given by the perfect husband, the Lamb.

The speaker at last reaches his climax. Once more he reminds his listeners of the spiritual heights to which his soul has climbed by emphasizing his position in relation to the angels:

> There, where the Angels, which cannot die, could not live, *this very body* which cannot choose but die, shall live, and live as long as that God of life that made it. Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, ô Lord, that in thy light we may see light: Illustrate our understandings, kindle our affections, pour oyle to our zeale, that we may come to the mariage of this Lamb, and that this Lamb may come quickly to this mariage. (III, 11:512-518, emphasis added)

The sermon builds to this point, titillating and tempting the listener as it draws closer to the final scene of the marriage feast: the consummation of the love between the bridegroom and the bride. Donne's rhythmic phrases and language draw the listener into a trance in which one feels embarrassed to be overhearing such a personal reflection and yet excited to know the conclusion all at the same time. The thrust of the argument, the cadence of the long lists, the rhetorical style, and the very subject matter work the speaker into a frenzy until he reaches a singularly remarkable moment. After a long, carefully-crafted peroration describing in metaphorical and symbolic detail the spiritual advantages that the soul of the preacher can expect to enjoy at the mystical marriage feast of the Lamb, the body explodes onto the scene: "this very body...shall live." Suddenly physicality, even if it be in the theological form of a resurrected, glorified body, reasserts itself at the very highest moment of spiritual pleasure and satisfaction. From the time of the secular marriage, the preacher speaks only of the benefits his soul can expect to enjoy in the spiritual and eternal marriages until, with this dramatic turn, he reflects that "this very body," which he identifies as mortal and fallible, "shall live" in glory superior to that of the angels.[29] This moment, characterized by exceptional eloquence and linguistic beauty, represents the logical and oratorical climax of the sermon. The body rejoins the soul in one sentence of extraordinary metaphorical and emotive power. The preacher reaches a rhetorical orgasm, the perfect synchronization of his ideas, his language, his physical self, and the belief system that inspires and supports them all, within and without his text.

That may seem a grossly, even perversely irreverent interpretation of a beautiful moment of spiritual reflection. But Donne's language and topic come seamlessly to that point. The style, scope, and focus of the sermon, and the theological significance of the joining of spirit and body,

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[29] One can easily imagine the rhetorical flourishes available in such a phrase. Donne might very legitimately have placed his hand upon his breast to emphasize each word, an action that would also serve to emphasize the sudden physicality of the joy he expects.

all direct their separate strengths to that one sentence of exquisite unity. Donne deftly manipulates the metaphor of marriage in other sermons to represent both the union of the body and soul in human beings, the union of humanity and divinity in Christ, and the unity of the three persons of the Trinity. His playfully construed warnings for those who are either unmarried to Christ, sterile in their marriage to him, or incapable of delivering the good things begotten in their soul by Christ requires, as an inferred subtext, some metaphorical image of sexual union between the believer and the Lamb. That is the closeness hinted at in the metaphor of marriage and deeply implied in the image of pregnancy. The Christian tradition expects the bride and bridegroom to be "no more twain, but one flesh," as St. Matthew records the words of Christ.

The preacher's prayer at the end of his peroration breaks in to remind readers of the sermon that this was preached at the marriage of an actual couple.[30] Indeed, in Stuart England the marriage ceremony completely changed an individual's sexual identity. "Single people were supposed to remain continent, but married couples were supposed to make love" (Cressy, 290), both out of cultural expectation and the legal demands for a legitimate marriage. "No marriage was complete without consummation" and David Cressy finds much evidence that "weddings could be sexually charged occasions" (374). While custom and propriety demand any mention of sexual union between the individual soul and Christ to be highly euphemized, Donne's extended sermon on just such a marriage cannot be separated from attendant cultural understandings of what weddings and marriages entail. Those present at the wedding of Margaret Washington "knew that the time was rapidly approaching for the completion of 'the act'" (374), and undoubtedly could recognize a similar progression in the sermon preached at the ceremony.

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[30] In fact, the sermon ends with a second prayer, this one directed at Margaret Washington and her groom, which actually opens with "And in the mean time bless these thy servants" (III, 11:518). This rather careless placement and opening does little to tie the literal marriage of the day to the sermon, and in fact strengthens the image of Donne lost in a reverie in his pulpit, almost forgetting the place and time in which he speaks, thinking only of the joyful marriage feast of the Lamb.

Therefore the full weight of the unique sexual status conferred in marriage enters into a proper understanding of Donne's marriage sermon. That he accomplishes his task without any graphic descriptions is necessary according to the conventions of his time but also expected according to his skill as a "witty" preacher. Secular marriage mirrors the spiritual, and the spiritual marriage prefigures the eternal. All expect consummation and fertility, and all therefore expect the Christian to understand his or her connection to the divine as sexual, even if only in highly metaphorical terms.

I will not say there lurks beneath the surface a visceral, rude sexuality. The sexual energy which animates the more sensual poetry and the more "spirituall and mysticall" (III, 11:14) sermons has little to do with raw lust, even though the language sometimes tends in a surprisingly graphic direction. Donne finds himself continually drawn into contemplation of the great literary themes of life and death. As a result, the sexuality that permeates the sermons and poems springs from this contemplation and spurs it on. Following the pattern established in the Prayer Book marriage service and developed by Donne in the Washington marriage sermon, this sexuality looks backward to the source of the human problem and forward to the hope of a divine solution. For Donne, sexuality happens at the very point where the soul unites with the body; therefore all questions of life, death, and resurrection pulse with sexual energy. As we descend from the rarified air of sermons and secondary scholarly sources into the linguistically rich and exotic domain of Donne's love poetry and epithalamia, the reader absolutely must understand that distinction, and strive to understand the consequent purpose of Donne's sexual imagery.

II

On Souls, Sexual Metaphors, and Sacrifice

In spite of his prolific work as a writer of devotional reflections and a preacher, Donne's reputation rests fundamentally on the twin piers of his secular and sacred verse. The unique character each of these broad categories reveals has led commentators, starting with Walton and perhaps Donne himself, to the traditional distinction between "Jack Donne the Rake" and "Doctor Donne the Divine." One critic points out that the persistent but inaccurate image "is a picture of Jack Donne, the fickle and cynical rogué seeking 'soul' and finding only 'body,' and of John Donne, the loving and faithful husband, and eminent divine" (Shawcross, 54). Contemporary biographical accounts of Donne continue to complicate and question this distinction, and while it may be a helpful division for initially categorizing and tackling Donne's poetry,[31] bibliographical evidence implies that some of the "priestly" works may have been written well before his ordination. Beyond any shadow of a doubt, Donne's reading in divinity and his careful consideration of religious issues stretches into his early days as a student.[32] No Damascus road experience, no thunderstorm conversion separates the writer of witty love poems from the writer of witty sermons.

That said, the structure of this thesis works to manipulate and appropriate some of the insights available through those traditional divisions. Donne himself, in an abortive effort to publish his poetry almost immediately before his ordination, seems to acknowledge the great sense that his life would be divided into two parts. In a letter to his trusted friend Sir Henry

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[31] Perhaps one could pair a poem from the "first" period with a poem from the "second; that might illuminate some intriguing parallels.

[32] The death of Donne's brother Henry in prison, where he languished as punishment for harboring a Catholic priest, encouraged Donne's interest in theological questions. John Stubbs writes that "he was researching the sectarian question personally, and had procured many books on the subject" (Stubbs, 19).

Goodyer, Donne relates something secret enough that he can only tell it "so softly that I am loth to hear myself" (Gosse, II, 68). He tells Goodyer that he has been "brought to the necessity of printing my poems" (68), though not simply for the joy of putting them in the public eye. Donne viewed this projected printing of his secular poems "as a valediction to the world, before I take orders" (68).

While the move into the church "did not seem an abrupt one to those who knew him well" (Stubbs, 302-303) his ordination represented, for the poet at least, a shift in the way he encountered and was perceived by the world. Taking orders was part of the process of Donne's life, requiring an appropriate action on his part, a proper valediction to the world, as he became something more than "the erotic poet and satirist who had made a scandalous marriage" (303). While the proposed edition of poetry still inspires archivists and editors of Donne to scour "remotest corners of old libraries...in the vain hope of its discovery" (Gosse, II, 69), the fact that Donne never carried his plan to completion does not degrade the shape this plot gives to an understanding of his interior life. Donne did not seek to burn the works of his youth but to publish them, to own and acknowledge them almost at the moment that he assumes a heavier mantle.[33] This thesis adopts that model of inclusive progression as an approach to the study of Donne's poetry.

The preceding snippet of biographical evidence encourages exploration of the linguistic continuity evident to many readers of Donne's secular and sacred poetry. However, an appropriate conceptual tool will be necessary to understand the progression central to the argument. Donne comfortably uses much of the same frankly sexual imagery to achieve and

[33] Of course, theories abound describing the situation which prompted Donne's proposal and the circumstances surrounding its abandonment. Whatever his actual motivations, the justification and explanation he gives to Sir Henry Goodyer encourages an understanding of Donne's life and thought consistent with but decidedly more complex than the traditional division.

describe both human and divine love. But a legitimate meeting place of the two must be found before a purposeful comparison can take place. The form of the epithalamia, described in the introduction, provides an ideal conceptual bridge between the spiritualized sex of Donne's early love poetry and the sexualized spirituality of his sermons and sacred poetry.

The epithalamia are strikingly sexual poems about marriage, an institution endlessly exploited by Donne for its metaphorical and literal connotations. Often addressed to actual couples, and in this way similar to Donne's marriage sermons, the epithalamia celebrate concepts central to traditional understandings of the union between two people and God. Within a marriage, Donne contends that "these two [being married], thus made one, between themselves, are also made one with Christ himself" (*Sermons,* VIII, 3, 343-345). Therefore the individual marriage cannot be separated from the theological concepts surrounding the institution of marriage, all of which forms a rich and complicated background to the epithalamia, the songs celebrating marriage. They are, already, poetry in which Donne's sexuality and spirituality can meet and freely mingle by merit of the exceptional union which they celebrate.

This chapter, therefore, explores the spirituality lurking within Donne's secular love poetry, and culminates with a discussion of one of his finest epithalamia. C.S. Lewis affirms the appropriateness of this turn, writing that in Donne's time love poetry was achieving "the final transmutation of the medieval courtly love or romance of adultery into an equally romantic love that looked to marriage as its natural conclusion" (Lewis 90).[34] Marriage celebrates the moment when sex becomes not only licit but, according to Donne, a representation of the Trinity and the

[34] I use this quotation fully aware that the thrust of Lewis's article centers on Donne's failure to provide satisfying "poetic food" (Lewis 99). In my opinion, however, it is best to show that failure as it plays out in the epithalamia, the marital culmination of this chapter on the love poetry rather than, as Lewis does, to labor to show that in the love poetry Donne "is perpetually excited and therefore perpetually cut off from the deeper and more permanent springs of his own excitement" (95-96). "An Epithalamia made at Lincolnes Inne" makes this point more dramatically than many of the love poems precisely because it shows this flawed love within what should be a perfected context.

union between God and man. In the beautiful prayer that introduces one of his marriage sermons, Donne celebrates God's willingness to provide mirrors of the Divine personality,

> Of which Glasses wherein we may see thee, Thee in thine *Unity*, as thou art *One God*; Thee in thy *Plurality*, as thou art *More Persons,* we receive this thy Institution of *Mariage* to be one (VIII, 3: pg. 95)

Marriage limits, focuses, and specifies human sexuality, while at the same time clothing it with honor as a reflection of the very nature of God. In the same way, an analysis of an epithalamion crowns this chapter as the moment when sexuality should become limited, specific, and infinitely more powerful. We shall see, however, that the epithalamion with which this chapter closes does not exactly live up that ideal, while the epithalamion with which chapter III opens beautifully acquits itself. Equipped with the insights available through this contrast, the next chapter analyzes Donne's use of similarly sexual language in his *Holy Sonnets*. The epithalamia, in their contrasting presentations of divine and human love, bridge the two chapters of secular and sacred verse. This progression, informed and enhanced by quotations from Donne's sermons, helps us to consider the importance of sexuality, encountered through literature, in engaging the divine.

One more significant point remains before the poems themselves can be tackled. What exactly do we mean when we say sexuality? A clear distillation of the multifarious uses and implications of that term into a few inclusive and traceable concepts will guide the literary discussion. To help answer that question, therefore, let us turn to Donne himself. As he writes in the sermon from which the epigraph of this thesis is one small selection, "all that belongs to love...is to desire, and to enjoy" (I, 5:52). Donne explicates the differences between these two, and the necessity that both should be present:

> for to desire without fruition, is a rage, and to enjoy without desire is a stupidity: In the first alone we think of nothing but that which we then would have; and in the second alone, we are not for that, when we have it; in the first, we are without it; in the second, we are as good as if we were without it, for we have no pleasure in it; (I, 5:53-58)

Love, therefore, includes both a reasonable desire and the consummation of that desire. This definition not only mirrors the arc of some of the most sensual love poems (desire leads to reflection, which permits consummation), it leads Donne, within the sermon, to draw a comparison and distinction between "sensual love" (I, 5:60) and the love of "the same Father who confesseth more of himself" (I, 5:63-64) in spiritual love. Because "nothing then can give us satisfaction, but where those two concur, *amare* and *frui*, to love and to enjoy" (I, 5:58-59), let the marriage of those concepts represent the aim and focus of love.

That aim and focus, not accidentally, leads to a sexual understanding of love. The sexual act itself entails, physiologically, desire and enjoyment. To desire without enjoyment may be, in some sense, a rage. To enjoy without desire is, in other senses, impossible. This understanding of sexuality joins forces with tropes that continually arise in Donne's love poetry. Sexuality is a physical expression of a spiritual, otherworldly concept. Sexuality is fecund, productive: an immediately obvious metaphor that Donne expands beyond the confines of human reproduction to include the re-creation of the universe. Sexuality represents the culmination of inter-personal union that begins on a spiritual plane.

The parallels between these efforts (to develop a working definition of sexuality) and some of the central tenets of the Christian religion are not accidental. They are designed to further the argument of this thesis. They do not, however, stray from a reasonable reading of Donne's own terms and language, while lending a helpful direction to this discussion. With that

lightly-sketched definition in mind, let us at last turn to several particularly vivid examples drawn from the Donne's *Songs and Sonets*.[35] This chapter explicates "all that belongs to love" as we find it in three poems of the *Songs and Sonets*. The emphasis remains on both Donne's persistently sexual language and on his willingness to yoke spiritual themes and concepts to his ultimate purpose: enjoying sexual union. However, the epithalamion which concludes this chapter proves wanting both in its sexualized spiritual metaphors and in the way these metaphors impact its interpretation of human sexual love. This lack belies a shallow dissatisfaction in the human unions of the secular love poetry. It also impels our discussion into the realm of sacred eroticisms, opening with the equitable, spiritual love of another epithalamion and moving on to a love that transcends and reinterprets human affection.

Donne's brazen manipulation of religious or spiritual imagery in the cause of seduction presents itself plainly in the poem "Aire and Angels."[36] The speaker informs his beloved that "Twice or thrice had I loved thee, / Before I knew thy face or name" (1-2), raising confusion about the relationship between knowledge and love. The love here expressed for a woman mirrors the love for (and from) an unseen God, an idea that extends into the following lines. Just as the speaker cherishes his beloved in a way completely divorced from the physical and the sensual, "So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame, / *Angells* affect us oft, and worship'd bee" (3-4). This comparison ascends new heights of irreverence. The speaker implies that he loves, even that he worships his beloved in the same way that humans revere angels. John Carey, who yet considers this poem more reverent than many of Donne's other theologically informed secular works, points to this moment when Donne "uses [angels'] divine mysteriousness to adumbrate

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[35] The poems discussed in this chapter have been chosen to reflect different meters and styles, while still possessing a lyrical quality that will ease a conceptual leap into the Holy Sonnets of the next chapter. Each poem undergoes a reading which seeks to explicate certain specific qualities of sexual language present in each.

[36] The full text of each poem analyzed in this chapter can be found, in the same order in which they are encountered here, in Appendix A.

mysteries in human love which are common and baffling" (Carey 42). The speaker's interaction with his lover relates to the ethereal, intangible connection between divine messengers and humankind. He regards his beloved, as he would an angel, "with transfiguring wonder" (190).

The speaker of "Aire and Angels" does not stop at mystical knowledge, however. His soul, like the Spirit of God in Genesis, hovers over the abyss, the "lovely glorious nothing" (6) until his devotion produces the beloved. That devilishly ambiguous line puns on the female genitalia, and therefore appropriately precedes the conception of Love in the lines that follow. Love, begotten of his soul (7), cannot persist in realms only of spiritual abstraction:

> But since my soule, whose child love is,
> Takes limmes of flesh, and else could nothing doe,
> More subtile than the parent is,
> Love must not be, but take a body too, (7-10)

The speaker's soul begets love spiritually, but love then feels compelled to follow its parent's lead. So as the soul "takes limmes of flesh," love must "take a body too." Donne hides the identity of that other body until the final lines of this stanza, but the speaker's meaning is not imperceptible. The object of his love becomes clear in the first line: he loves "thee" (1), the immaterial addressee of the poem, though he remains ignorant of "thy face or name" (2). Yet because his soul is embodied, his love must follow suit, and so we find that love does not hesitate to "assume thy body" (13).

The soul begets love, and love does "fixe it selfe in thy lip, eye, and brow" (14). Donne's speaker assumes a God-like power to create the physical, the cherished features of the beloved, out of the spiritual sphere. His love breaks the bounds of purely mystical intimacy and comes to rest in another physical body comparable to his own. Indeed, love assumes a specific physical

form: "*thy* lip, eye, and brow" (14, emphasis added). The speaker builds, over the first stanza, from a time before he knows the beloved's "face or name" (2) until he may finally claim a divine power to invest his love within a physical object.

But the speaker oversteps his proper limits with that assertion. When, "to ballast love" (15), he settles down to think, he realizes the mistake he makes. The glory of the physical body, "Ev'ry thy hair for love to worke upon" (19) pushes the limits of what human affection can or ought to achieve. It "Is much too much" (20) to attempt to contemplate the physical form of the beloved, especially in a way that mimics the divine act of creation. The speaker understands that in attempting to do so he has "loves pinnace overfraught" (18) and is dangerously close to swamping the boat.[37]

So Donne's speaker pulls back. From the height of physical presumption and enjoyment, therefore, the speaker turns to spiritual metaphor and articulation to keep from overwhelming love. Neither "in nothing, nor in things / Extreme, and scatt'ring bright, can love inhere" (21-22), so the object of love must fix itself on something real, but less complex or grand than the human body. At the outset of the poem the speaker "seems to assert the reality and primacy of transcendent experience" (Baumlin 215), but now seems to trip along the edge of incarnating his love, unwilling to commit.

There must be some mistake in this turn. Surely the lover must love the body of his beloved or love someone or something else. That deliberately convoluted sentence twists and turns around itself in a dizzying imitation of the way that Donne's carefully constructed poem spins to its witty conclusion. The first stanza consists almost exclusively of end-stopped lines,

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[37] According to the OED, a "pinnace" is "a small sailing vessel," which prompts my translation at the end of the line. Pinnace can also mean a woman and, again according to the OED, "especially (in early use) a mistress, a prostitute." One critic goes so far as to suggest that "the word 'pinnace' invites the obvious exchange with 'penis'" (Docherty 196), though I feel this stretches Donne's fondness for punning a little too far.

with a standard rhyme scheme. Though not perfectly iambic, each line begins with the same comfortable, familiar lilt until Donne suddenly brings us to "*Angells*" (4, italics original). From the introduction of this spiritual complication, the structure holds but the poem becomes faster and more daring. The rhyme scheme is complicated and lines are fraught with internal rhymes that draw them into relief against their neighbors. This shift accompanies the shift in content as the speaker moves from spiritual abstractions to physical reality, confused and disordered though it may be.

Finally, just as the stop-ended lines give way to the first example of enjambment in lines 12 and 13, the speaker gives his "Love" (12) complete physicality. At the beginning of the next stanza, lines once again end with their punctuation. Perhaps this deliberately accompanies the poet's wish "more steddily to have gone" (16), but before long physicality spills lines into one another once again. To combat it and its destabilizing tendency, the speaker reintroduces spiritual metaphor which, once established, draws the poem to an orderly, rhyming close.

If the effort to love the beloved's physical being overtaxes the love of the speaker, he must find another object. To understand the conclusion to which he delightedly comes, the speaker re-engages angels, though this time for their metaphorical value. Just as an angel, an imperfectly pure being, puts on "face, and wings / Of aire, not pure as it" (23) This impossibly fine distinction between nothingness and "pure" somethingness allows the speaker to settle his love on a worthy object: "thy love may be my loves spheare" (25). Donne's speaker therefore arrives at the love of his beloved. Physical adoration and spiritual knowledge grant him access to this uniquely concrete abstraction.

The speaker acknowledges the impossibly fine nature of his distinction, commenting at the end that "just such disparitie" (26) separates the love of men and women "As is twixt Aire

and Angells puritie" (27). The poem's ordered conclusion reflects the satisfaction of the lover who has passed from metaphysical un-knowing, to physical knowledge (indeed, carnal knowledge), to spiritual satisfaction. His love finds a proper place in the mirror of his beloved's affections, and arrives at that point only after passing through her body. Some critics read in this not the traditionally assumed denigration of female love in favor of male love but "the difference between spiritual and fleshly love" (Baumlin 215). In the enigmatic ending of the poem the "spiritual love remains hidden—in and by flesh" (215).

The captivating arrogance and hubristic egoism of Donne's seductive speaker shines through defiantly in "The Good-Morrow." The poem opens casually enough, with perhaps a tone of mild, affectionate amazement in the speaker's voice. "I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I / Did, till we lov'd?" (1-2) he queries, perhaps gazing serenely down at his beloved (an idea affirmed in the final stanza). Those first lines scan easily enough (simple iambic pentameter)[38] though punctuation actually works against the enjambment at the end of the first line, emphasizing the "I" and changing the shape of the question. Because a comma separates "what thou," and, "and I / Did," love brings together two halves that exist in isolation before it commences. "Thou" and "I" do not interact platonically or cordially before love: love creates the "we" of line two.

Immaturity characterizes those days before love. The speaker asks whether he and his beloved "were…not wean'd till then?" (2), and also whether they "But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly?" (3). Real life, or at least life worth living, cannot begin until the speaker and his beloved come together. Line four consigns their lives before meeting to the legendary

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[38] There seems to be some debate about whether this line is in fact iambic or "implicitly iambic." Ben Saunders engages Arnold Stein on that point, maintaining that "there is a fairly strong case for seeing it as a regularly iambic line...rather than as merely implicitly iambic" (Saunders 104). Instead, Saunders claims that the appearance of irregularity (which I cite) simply comes for "a retroactive effect created by [the first line's] sharp enjambment and the strong stress on the first syllable of the *second* line" (104).

"seaven sleepers den," a reference to a story wherein Roman Christians escape persecution by sleeping for two centuries.[39] Time and maturity begin when the speaker and his addressee begin to love. Before then, the speaker maintains that even "any beauty which I did see, / Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dreame of thee" (6-7). Before our lovers come together, even the pleasures of the physical world they inhabit only dimly reflect the future reality of their meeting. Our speaker and his beloved share a creative love.

Critics point out that this creative love includes the possibility of previous love affairs. While "the poem is another of those texts set at a 'revolutionary moment' of awakening, enlightenment or regeneration" (Docherty 41), it tries in vain to dispense entirely with the past. The speaker openly wonders "what thou, and I / Did" in those days of youthful foolishness and, perhaps, experimentation. The syntactical order of the sentence implies that the prior actions of the beloved prompt the question. By the end of the first stanza Donne's speaker "seems to forget his interest in the beloved's previous experiences" (Corthell 103), reflecting only on his own conquests in the dubious compliment that any beauty "Which I desir'd, *and got*" (emphasis added) simply prefigured the beloved. The past carries with it the potential for concern, and jealousy. How might the speaker cope with these possibilities?

Simply put, he adopts spiritual metaphors and dispenses with all anxiety (at least as far as he is concerned). A distant echo of the first verses of Genesis attends the opening of the second stanza. Donne's speaker mimic's God's words "Let there be light" when he boldly pronounces "And now good morrow to our waking soules" ("The Good-Morrow" 8). The love that, in the last stanza, brings meaning to their separate existences now actually enlivens their souls. Indeed,

[39] According to Robert H. Ray, the "Seven Sleepers of Ephesus [were] seven Christian youths who suffered from the persecution of the Emperor Decius [and who] were sealed in a cavern and slept for 187 years. Upon awaking, they found astonishing changes, including well-established Christianity" (Ray 299). John Stubbs call it the tale "a Roman Catholic commonplace" (Stubbs 11), and it seems safe to assume that Donne heard it as a boy.

the speaker does not limit the power this amorous connection possesses to shape lives to individual souls. This love "all love of other sights controules, / And makes one little roome, an every where" (10-11), deeply impacting perception and even space itself.

The creative love of the speaker and his beloved controls and determines their surroundings, and our speaker can therefore, with haughty disdain, abandon interest in pursuits limited to the wide physical world. "Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone, / Let Maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne" (12-13); for the speaker of "The Good-Morrow," the worlds beyond the sea hold little allure. Rather than search abroad, he suggests to his beloved, "Let us possesse one world, each have one, and is one" (14). Their love not only creates "an every where" (11) but exalts them over the other everywheres they might encounter.

"Where can we finde two better hemispheares / Without sharpe North, without declining West?" (17-18) the speaker asks, further developing his understanding that no better world exists beyond the one he possesses in his beloved. The simple act of gazing at the beloved, of considering the wonder that "My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares" (15), pushes the speaker's rhetoric to call those two faces the two halves of the globe. Surely this represents the very pinnacle of prideful poeticization? Ronald Corthell points out that this line represents a shift from the male gaze of the first stanza ("if ever any beauty I did see") to an imagining of "reciprocal gazes" (Corthell 104). This line also calls to mind a line from "The Extasie" (discussed below) in which the reciprocal gazes of the lovers are productive and beget images in each other's eyes. However, in line 15 of "The Good-Morrow," as Corthell excellently notes, what the speaker sees "in the face of the other is his own desire" (104). While I do not think that is evidence enough to contend that "The Good-Morrow" is "what Donne thinks the other desires" (104), it does complicate the ending. Are the "better hemispheares" ("The Good-

Morrow" 17) the lovers find in each other simply a reflection in the other of each individual's desire?

The final lines, though puzzling, seem to indicate that this is not in fact the case. The speaker jumps from his reflection on geography to the comment that "What ever dyes, was not mixt equally" (19). Perhaps this statement reflects contemporary medical thought about humors or alchemical thought regarding elements.[40] Whether those specific details enter Donne's mind,[41] a perfect balance seems to be postulated here as the key to immortality. "If our two loves be one, or, thou and I / Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die" (20-21) promises the speaker, and the final hubris of the poem becomes clear. The speaker promises his beloved immortality in her faithful loving. Time does not begin, space does not matter, before their love is born. Now that it exists, if each work to maintain it then they have conquered death. Mutuality, not self-reflected attraction, is the key. This poem, exalting a physical human love, a love in which eyes and faces and beauties hold sway, also attributes to that same love the power to achieve immortality, a spiritual concept. Donne readily bends the latter to his purpose: physical unity with the beloved.

Both "Aire and Angels" and "The Good-Morrow" readily exploit spiritual and theological language to achieve intensely physical ends. The speakers of each poem claim for themselves, and for their loves, uniquely divine powers to create and sustain worlds, lives, and love itself. Each speaker seems quite willing to bounce from the worldly realm to the heavenly when he exhausts the viability of the course he has been following. For example, when the

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[40] "Scholastic doctrine held that death follows from the imbalance of constituent elements. Alchemic doctrine held that by changing the elements or a composition of a given thing the color of that thing would also change or be 'dyed'" (Rumrich 23).

[41] Common references throughout Donne's poetic works (such as the poem "Love's Alchemy") imply that he had a fascination with alchemy and a working knowledge of its concepts. That said, "in Donne's time, alchemy and alchemists were recognized as being fraudulent and as making claims that could not be supported by results" (Ray 29).

speaker of "The Good-Morrow" gets dangerously close to revealing too much of "what...I / Did, till we lov'd" by thinking back over "any beauty I did see, / Which I desir'd, and got," he deftly transitions to "our waking soules." The physical becomes dangerous, and therefore prompts a transition to the spiritual. Donne's facility with such transitions shines through, in the opposite direction, in "Aire and Angels." There the speaker starts with angelic metaphors, but must transition to "limmes of flesh," letting his love "assume thy body.../ And fixe it selfe in thy lip, eye, and brow." Sexuality in these poems blurs the distinction between physical and spiritual, but with an eye ever focused on physical ends.

"The Extasie" offers a stunningly vivid example of love's fecundity. From the very first words, Donne crafts a poem that nudges and suggests, drawing the reader into an understanding of love as sexual, vigorous, and dynamic. Indeed, the poem opens on a bed. Technically it opens in a place "Where, like a pillow on a bed, / A Pregnant banke swel'd up," (1-2), but the speaker's diction immediately brings to mind sex and sex's ultimate function and power. The speaker sits with his beloved "one anothers best" (4), in a landscape shaped by sexual energy and desire. That opening demands a forthright recognition of sexual tension and purposes. The poem certainly does not retreat from the unabated force of sexuality as it progresses.

The lovers' "hands were firmely cimented / With a fast balme, which thence did spring" (5-6), a line which one edition rather prudishly scans as simply "sweat" (Rumrich 37). While the speaker admits a few lines down that handholding "as yet, / Was all the meanes to make us one" (9-10), one does not need an over-sexed imagination to understand that "fast balme" as other bodily fluids more closely linked to all those neighboring lines erupting with sexual puns. Semen is pre-figured in the balm just as plainly as hand-holding looks ahead to intercourse.

Enjoying the romantic implications of a certain Renaissance understanding of vision, the lovers are also joined through the invisible mechanics of sight. Just as their fingers intertwine, their "eye-beames twisted, and did thred / Our eyes, upon one double-string" (7-8). Intriguingly, this perfectly intangible union produced by gazing into each other's eyes actually brings more to fruition than simple handholding. The speaker notes that "pictures in our eyes to get / Was all our propagation" (11-12). The image each person holds of the other springs from the intensity with which they look at each other. The power of their gaze underscores the strength of their love and, however weakly, imitates that love by producing something beyond itself.

Conflict enters the poem in the lines that follow, as does the spiritual nature of insistently physical sexuality. The very souls of the lovers hang between them "As 'twixt two equall Armies, Fate / Suspends uncertaine victorie" (13-14). Souls have separated from bodies "to advance their state" (15), implying that the souls stand in opposition, each vying with the other, trying to gain advantage.[42] The sense of strong opposition carries over into the next line which describes how "our soules negotiate there" (17) while the two lovers "like sepulchrall statues lay" (18). The metaphor works particularly well with the description of spiritual striving that precedes it: the speaker and his beloved are parted from their souls and therefore lay like statues on a tomb.

The battling souls inversely mirror the bodies of the lovers. "All day, the same our postures were" (19), gazing at one another without movement or change. Even more interestingly, while the souls vigorously negotiate, the two bodies "said nothing, all the day" (20). That quietly end-stopped line brings the introduction of the state of the lovers to an ironically peaceful close. The souls continue to argue in a way that does not break the silence of

[42] This interplay between body and soul exhibits a "movement from incarnationism to transcendence [that] is common in the *Songs and Sonets*" (Baumlin 202).

the "Pregnant banke" (2), though one presumes the ultimate goal that each soul seeks to advance involves shattering the silence rather passionately.

The focus of the poem now shifts from the entranced lovers to a hypothetical other who "Within convenient distance stood" (24). The imagined observer is no casual peeping Tom, but someone "so by love refin'd, / That he soules language understood" (21-22). Indeed, the potential sexual threat another person poses to the two lovers in deepest intimacy is mitigated entirely by the fact that this phantom interloper "by good love were growen all minde" (23). He has no interest in the physical coupling toward which the lovers inch. Instead, this observer who speaks the language of souls, "though he knew not which soul spake, / Because both meant, both spake the same" (25-26), finds himself improved by the experience. It does not matter that both souls speak with a united purpose and voice. The observer "Might thence a new concoction take, / And part farre purer than he came" (27-28). Love has already refined this person to the degree that he can speak the language of souls. The spiritual interaction between the soul of the speaker and that of his beloved, however, further purifies this remarkable individual. Love's impact extends well beyond the interaction of the lovers, and includes an almost divine power to cleanse those who overhear the speech of lovers' souls.

The ecstasy of lying in perfect stillness together while souls commune more perfectly "doth unperplex" (29) the lovers regarding "what we love" (30). "Wee see by this, it was not sexe" (31) that brings together the speaker and his beloved. The OED does not include our modern usage of "sex" for attraction and sexuality as contemporary with Donne, but the idea of sex as the difference between male and female has a long linguistic history. This line seems to imply that curiosity and desire for the other is not what brings together the two lovers to their private spot. Their experience of ecstasy makes clear to the pair that until now "we saw not what

did move" (32) and that through this new situation they enjoy a greater degree of clarity regarding their love.

Ecstasy allows the lovers to understand the complex interaction and composition of souls. Souls "containe / Mixture of things, they know not what" (33-34) and these mixtures, this blended composition, furnishes love with foundational ingredients. Ever active, "Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe againe, / And makes both one, each this and that" (35-36). Love wastes no time blending the two souls, which themselves are mixtures, into a new soul. The new soul cannot be any less legitimate for having been blended because, as the speaker labors to point, "they know not what" mixtures are to be found in each individual soul, only that the soul is a mixture. Indeed, the new soul that involves the blending of the lovers is like unto

> A single violet transplant,
>
> The strength, the colour, and the size,
>
> (All which before was poore, and scant,)
>
> Redoubles still, and multiplies. (37-40)

This elegantly simple metaphor reveals the rhetorical skill of the speaker. Violets are mentioned in the third line of the poem, almost in passing, as the speaker describes the "Pregnant banke" against which he and his beloved recline. Indeed, for the sake of "The violets reclining head" (3) does the bank swell up to provide a comfortable spot. In the four lines quoted above, the speaker brings that tangible example back into his subtle argument. The reader, eavesdropping just like the unnoticed observer mentioned early on, can imagine the speaker using the very flowers on which he and his beloved lay as part of his silent argument. Spirituality never gets too far from the tangible world, and from physicality.

Just as the transplanted violet grows stronger, and "Redoubles still, and multiplies," when love "interinanimates two soules" (42), dramatic changes occur. From the two separate entities, one "abler soul" (43) flows and immediately the "Defects of lonelinesse controules" (44). Spiritual union overflows with such fertility that two souls who join produce a new soul altogether, and one stronger than either of the old. This union also offers assurance because, unlike for the individual soul, the ingredients of this mixture are well known. "Wee then, who are this new soule, know, / Of what we are compos'd, and made" (45-46), a desirable state because the elements of the new soul "Are soules, whom no change can invade" (48). The new soul enjoys a stability and a permanence so long as the lovers remain mixed, and this fecund permanence not only banishes loneliness but purifies those who come into contact with the new soul. The argument is strikingly simple and elegant. One can hardly help but accept the union of souls, pure and natural as thriving flower beds and beneficial to the lovers and the world.

But O alas, so long, so farre
Our bodies why do wee forebeare?
They are ours, though they are not wee, Wee are
The intelligences, they the spheares.[43] (49-52)

Only now does the full force of Donne's short iambic lines present itself. The speaker builds a careful, easily-lilting argument to this very point. He avoids an overly contentious or combative style, using abstract rhetorical examples and esoteric concepts regarding chaste physical unions and passionately intimate spiritual couplings. By establishing his argument in the spiritual realm, beyond sight and understanding, he presents an ecstatic vision of pure (in every sense) pleasure. Now, he deftly shifts to his real goal: physical consummation and realization of

[43] This distinction brings, once again, a fascinating traditional cosmology into the text. Donne very comfortably enters into dialogue with medieval and classical thoughts about the movement of the planets and stars (Rumrich 39).

that spiritual pleasure. Even this he does not introduce with an aggressive request or demand but with an elaborately wistful rhetorical question.

To this point, the poem has been essentially mere suggestion and implication. Now the speaker's spiritual musings have real physical meaning. The sexualized metaphors and the extended imagination of "soul-sex" suddenly expresses itself in terms of the bodies that "Did us, to us, at first convay" (54). The eminently desirable union of souls just described should not occur without a union of bodies who, though apparently of baser matter, "Nor are drosse to us, but allay" (56). The body acts as an alloy, strengthening the soul and helping it in its quest for a more perfect union. Indeed, "soule into the soule may flow, / Though it to body first repaire" (59-60) in a way comparable to the astrological belief that the power of the stars is mediated by the air (Rumrich 39). "On man heavens influence workes not so, / But that it first imprints the ayre" (57-58) and so too will the soul work upon another soul if it enjoys the tempering of the body.

As the poem draws to a close, the speaker's argument becomes more insistent. Not simply will a soul that passes through two bodies to another soul benefit, but "So must pure lovers soules descend / T'affections, and to faculties" (65-66), things within the grasp of human understanding. "Else a great Prince in prison lies" (68) because love finds no expression that the mind or body can begin to comprehend. Love, though it may persist in the union of soul to soul imagined at the outset of the poem, would enjoy no articulation. Therefore "To'our bodies turne wee then, that so / Weake men on love reveal'd may looke" (69-70), and the ethereal coupling of souls can find a physical, tangible expression. Indeed, how charitable that the speaker wishes to extend the purifying influence that mingled souls exert on pure men to the "Weake men" who must hope for love's physical revelation because they do not "soules language" understand.

The speaker closes the poem with a delightfully concise explanation of his argument and progression. We find that "Loves mysteries in soules doe grow, / But yet the body is his booke" (71-72). This brilliantly literary metaphor (a faint echo of which can be heard in Donne's famous Meditation XVII)[44] compares the way in which pure spiritual union must find physical expression to be understood. If an author, or poet, or thesis-writer has perfectly brilliant ideas but fails to translate them to the page, it profits nothing. Donne's seductive speaker argues quite convincingly that, though souls might mingle and mix perfectly, and create one new, unified soul better than the two were apart, yet a physical union between the bodies to which those souls are attached must attest to and confirm that coupling. In other words, if "human nature is mixed, so writing...claims that mixed status, providing a material substance (that is, the written text) that embodies and conveys spirit" (Baumlin 205). Physical sex flows from spiritual union as readily as the written word flows from thought and speech.

The speaker even ends by promising that an observer "shall see / Small change, when we'are to bodies gone" (75-76), seeking to convince the beloved (presumably the intended audience for the poem) that no great transition will occur between their physical and spiritual loves, so pure *both* will be. Donne's speaker carefully draws his beloved through deeply romantic spiritual reflections, eventually settling on his ultimate goal of physical union between their two bodies. The powerfully creative force of sexuality flows through "The Extasie," slowly solidifying from spiritual vapors to physical consummation, and utilizing the argument from the former to get at the latter.

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[44] Specifically, I think of the section in which Donne reminds his reader that "all mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated; God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another" (Donne, *Devotions*, 102). On a personal note, this was one of the first text of Donne's I read, inspiring wonderment at and affection for that author, wider reading in whom subsequently inspired this thesis.

This willingness to combine secular and sacred themes around the locus of human sexuality comes out ever more prominently in the epithalamia. As discussed above, epithalamia already treat certain social, religious, and sexual themes as a function of their very form. The language of Donne's "Epithalamions, or Marriage Songs" helps guide us through the conceptual transition from secular, physical love in the secular lyrics to the sacred, spiritual love of the *Holy Sonnets*. The epithalamia represent a more perfect union of eroticized, sexualized language and celestial affection through Donne's diction, but also through their occasion and very genre. Marriage, as institution, sacrament (though not in the Roman sense), and theological concept, reflects the love God has for the church and for individual believers. Social and ecclesiastical norms also make marriage the meeting place of spiritual commitment and sexual desire. Therefore, Donne's epithalamia are an ideal resource for exploring the complex spiritual and sexual imagery that pervades his poetry both sacred and secular.

However, Donne's "An Epithalamion Made at Lincolnes Inne," "his first attempt at the genre" (Dubrow 156) of epithalamia, most appropriately concludes this discussion of secular love poetry precisely because it fails to achieve the transcendent human love that models and approximates divine love. In this epithalamion, sexual activity leads to complete dominance for one partner and utter passivity for the other. This cannot pass Donne's own test for marriage, established in the sermon wherein, speaking to God, he calls marriage one of those "Glasses wherein we may see thee, Thee in thine *Unity*, as thou art *One God*; Thee in thy *Plurality*, as thou art *More Persons*" (VIII, 3: pg. 95). Marriage requires the sort of dynamism and mutual activity that characterizes the Trinity. While the poem uses many brilliant and subtle spiritual metaphors to understand marriage, many of the sexual and secular *Songs and Sonets* (into which

marriage does not enter) more accurately embody those shared characteristics that deeply bind human sexuality and divine activity.

"An Epithalamion Made at Lincolnes Inne" opens in an image that can easily be interpreted as a grand pun. The speaker cries, "The Sun-beames in the East are spread, / Leave, leave, faire Bride, your solitary bed" (1-2), and though this poem plainly directs itself to a mortal marriage between two human beings, it requires very little poetic imagination to interpret those first two lines as a metaphor for the Church. Medieval churches and graves were oriented towards the east in "sure and certain hope of the resurrection,"[45] guaranteeing their occupants first glimpse of the return of Jesus Christ. Any mention of a "faire Bride" in Scripture, especially in the otherwise embarrassingly sexual *Song of Songs*, was interpreted away as a reference to the church waiting expectantly for the consummation of her love with her Bridegroom, Christ. Even early Christian iconography and language of the grave (and Donne's own characterization, in Sonnet X, of Death's "short sleepe" (12)) as merely a resting place where the patient believer waits expectantly for the dawning of a new, unending day find an echo in the "bed" which the "faire Bride" leaves.

Donne's evocatively ambiguous language resolves itself as the first stanza proceeds, but the themes of union, death and life, spiritual sacrifice, and new creation continually reverberate and intensify the spiritual possibilities present in the poem. As we trace the development of each of these tropes through the eight stanzas, one begins to wonder whether Donne writes with spiritual metaphors to describe a physical marriage or whether Donne draws certain ideas out of marriage to communicate spiritual truths. The disturbing conclusion emphasizes the extent to which this poem belongs with the secular love poetry.

[45] This phrase comes from the burial service of the Book of Common Prayer, but does not break with medieval theological understandings of the resurrection.

Having left her bed on this new day, our "faire Bride" cannot "returne to it alone" (3). The night which ends in the first words of the poem marks the last occasion on which the Bride's bed will be "solitary" (2); she learns that, from this night, it must hold both "You and your other you" (6). This line introduces the idea of marriage as something more than a simple joining of two people. The bride will meet a mirror image of herself, an "other you." There is, in this, a sense of purposeful coupling and an idea that two halves will come together in this marriage to produce a whole. This concept finds repetition in the final line of each stanza, where the speaker encourages the Bride to "*To day put on perfection, and a womans name*" (12). This union fundamentally changes the Bride. Not only does it perfect her, it actually invests her with "a womans name," somehow making her more perfectly female (and therefore more perfectly human?) than she was before the marriage.

Before our analysis spins off into metaphysical ramblings (a precipice on which we are ever teetering) we must once more make quite clear that while the marriage rites make possible the perfection to which our Bride aspires, yet the realization of that perfection comes at night in her bed. Every spiritual turn that can be applied to the marriage here imagined must also allow for sex. Indeed, some lines almost completely abolish the spiritual. The Bride must "Put forth, put forth that warme balme-breathing thigh" (7) which, when she next returns to her bed, "must meet another" (9) thigh. The Bride must accept this lot joyfully, as the speaker calls her to "Come glad from thence, goe gladder than you came" (11). This potential for sexual union animates the action of the poem and saturates each stanza.

The virgins answer the call to "Conceitedly dresse her, and be assign'd, / By you, fit place for every flower and jewell" (19-20). These "Daughters of London" (13) have not yet gone to these rites on their own, but they must be wary for the marriage festivities "also unto you grow

due" (18). The juxtaposition between the first people the Bride meets in the morning, a community of virgin women, and the last person she must see on this her wedding night when her thigh "must meet another," is vivid. The women, themselves described as "Our Golden Mines, and furnish'd Treasurie" (14), rally around the Bride to beautify her before the ceremony. Indeed, their task is to "Make her for love fit fewell" (21), preparing her like an offering to be consumed upon the altar of love. This image blossoms near the end of the text into a full-fledged extended metaphor between sexual intercourse and religious sacrifice.

Before any such sacrifice can be enacted, however, we must find a priest. The speaker calls on all manner of men, from "frolique Patricians" (25) to "painted courtiers" (27) so that they might "This Bridegroom to the Temple bring" (31). Interestingly, the Bridegroom's company is described as men "Of study and play made strange Hermaphrodits" (30). The status of womankind seems to be the focus of the epithalamion as a whole: the Bride is the one who must "*put on perfection, and a woman's name*." However, some transformation must also overtake the Bridegroom, who moves from a world of idle, boyish pleasures to manhood: from hermaphroditic activities to the role of husband. In the end, that strange, passing reference is all that takes the poem off of its original focus, the sexual identity of the Bride.

That identity, and the anxiety surrounding its rapidly approaching change, even permeates the stanza devoted to the rousing of the Bridegroom. As his company arrives at "the Temple" (31) they notice "in yon patch which store of straw'd flowers graceth, / The sober virgin paceth" (32-33). The speaker, as mentioned above in the introduction to epithalamia, is keen to make sure that everything goes smoothly as the ultimate union of these two approaches. Therefore, he rushes to convince her that she should "Weep not nor blush, here is no griefe nor shame" (35), but that this day will bring "*perfection, and a woman's name*" (36). The pre-marital

anxieties are, apparently, sufficiently assuaged by that simple affirmation. In any case our couple moves next to the church.

Even as the couple enters the church, the sense of coming sexual consummation colors the situation. The speaker commands the door to open and encourages the "Temple" (37) to receive "these two in thy sacred bosome" (38). As a result of what occurs inside, the couple become "mystically joyn'd, but one they bee" (39). Donne then masterfully shifts the speaker's focus to the church itself, and a strangely morbid marriage blessing. Wishing on behalf of the newly married Bride and Bridegroom, the speaker tells the Temple, "may thy leane and hunger-starved wombe / Long time expect their bodies and their tombe, / Long after their owne parents fatten thee" (40-42). This bizarre blend of sex and death, fullness and hunger, introduces a troubling element to the poem. The situation only becomes more dire as we draw closer to the event wherein the bride will "*put on perfection, and a woman's name.*" Echoes of Christian imagery regarding death and new life begin to surface, and enjoy elaboration as the moment draws near.

The speaker also hopes that the Bride and Bridegroom may be free from "All elder claimes, and all cold barrennesse, / All yeelding to new loves" (43-44) that might prematurely end their union. In some sense, the blessing that wishes for them long life also prefigures a societally acceptable image of their deaths: together in the same community, even in the same physical structure, where their parents lived faithfully together, died, and were buried. That is the desire expressed for them in the wish that "All wayes all th'other may each one possesse" (46), that the couple will enjoy complete ownership one of the other. Traditional teachings regarding

marriage certainly affirm this principle, though in many practical ways women did not enjoy rights over their husbands in any way close to the power husbands possessed over their wives.[46]

While euphemism and punning characterizes this poem from the very outset, the final four stanzas of the eight-stanza epithalamion all focus almost exclusively on the sexual union of the Bride and Bridegroom. The ceremony of the church leaves them "mystically joyn'd" but takes up barely a line. More telling are the descriptions of the church itself. The term used to refer to the doors of the church fit perversely with the image of church as both tomb and womb: the speaker commands the Temple to unfold "Thy two-leav'd gates" (37). This phrase, with some other bi-valve terms in seventeenth-century parlance, were "euphemisms for 'whore' or 'vagina'" (Meakin 190). While the speaker does not dwell on the marriage ceremony, his language describing the church pushes the matter forward to the inevitable conclusion of that ceremony.

The speaker's reflections turn readily to the fact that "winter days bring much delight, / Not for themselves, but for they soon bring night" (49-50). Indeed, each line includes a winking comparison between the food, dancing, and flirting of the wedding banquet to the "Other sweets" (51), "Other disports" (52), and "Other love tricks" (53) that await the Bride when she "*To night puts on a perfection, and a womans name*" (60), as the closing couplet changes in this stanza. The shift from day to night mirrors the progression of the sun recorded in this stanza. He now gallops "lively downe the Westerne hill" (58), and so the final line of each stanza prepares more explicitly for night.

Once the "amorous evening starre is rose" (61) the speaker practically begins to clamber for an end to the festivities. Since night has officially arrived, "Why then should not our amorous

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[46] That said, at least in the choice of a partner, English women of the early modern period enjoyed certain advantages over their continental counterparts. See Cressy, especially pages 256ff. In any case, love "seems to have been fundamental" (Cressy 261) in courtship and marriage.

starre inclose / Her selfe in her wish'd bed?" (62-63). The musicians, he insists, deserve a rest, for "all toyl'd beasts / Rest duly; at night all their toyles are dispensed" (67-68). Then again, that depends on what one means by toil. It seems that "in their beds commenced / Are other labours, and more dainty feasts" (69-70). The speakers suggestions refer continually now to night-time activities and even include what can be read as a passing reference to oral sex. The "more dainty feasts," however, certainly include the physical, sensual enjoyment of the husband and wife, which, as each stanza reminds us, fundamentally changes the female partner.

The epithalamion trips along the border of voyeurism in stanza seven. The speaker commands the Bride, "Thy virgins girdle now untie" (73). She settles into her "nuptiall bed" (74) which, however, has another name and a different meaning: a parenthetical in the text labels it "loves altar" (74). The poem now becomes a deeply eroticized religious metaphor. The Bride on the bed is "A pleasing sacrifice" (75) and must "disposesse / Thee of these chaines and robes which were put on / T'adorne the day, not thee" (75-77). The work of the virgins in the second stanza is simply to honor the institution of marriage and solemnize the proceedings of the day by beautifying the Bride. The speaker now affirms that she, "Like vertue'and truth, art best in nakednesse" (78). This language objectifies and starkly presents the naked Bride in ways dramatically different from the mere hint of a "balme-breathing thigh" in the first stanza.

The idea of sexual intercourse as death, and as a kind of sacrificial death, looms ever larger as the seventh stanza draws to a close and the eighth opens. The marriage "bed is onely to virginitie / A grave, but, to a better state, a cradle" (80). This metaphor continually crops up in Donne's sermons, but in reference not to the end of virginity and the marriage of two people, but to the end of mortal life and the marriage between Christ and the soul of the believer. As he so elegantly expresses it in a passage which focuses on "the Consolation of the Holy Ghost" (VI:16,

178), the love of God "makes my death-bed, a mariage-bed, And my passing-Bell, an Epithalamion" (VI:16, 185-186).[47] This remarkable confluence of sexual imagery and sacred understanding includes even the heavy religious overtones surrounding questions of potentiality and being. The Bride in Donne's Epithalamion, as she approaches the loss of her virginity, can now say not "*I may bee*, but, *I am*" (83). She passes from maidenhood to wifedom "like a faithfull man content, / That this life for a better should be spent" (85-86). She boldly embraces her fate, preferring "a mothers rich stile" (87) to her former status.

Content in that desire, the Bride "doth lye, / Like an appointed lambe, when tenderly / The priest comes on his knees t'embowell her" (88-90). The extraordinary combination of religious and sexual imagery, including the implied phallus as a sacred knife or instrument used in the slaughter, raises some troubling questions about the human sexual relationship. If the metaphor will hold, the woman must be entirely passive. The lamb does not contribute anything to the sacrifice beyond its blood and flesh, and those violently taken from it. Heather Dubrow notes that in this line the priest comes "'t'embowell,' rather than 'to disembowell,' characteristically casting sexual intercourse as yet another instance of intrusion" (Dubrow 163). The wife waits patiently, about to "*put on perfection, and a womans name*," but she apparently has only a passive role to play in that process. The multiple allusions to death and dying in a poem about sex also force the question of whether, in this perfectly licit union that celebrates religious and societal ideas about marriage, there is any sexual pleasure for the appointed sacrifice. Does she *die* as her husband "labours" "t'embowell her"? What does that imply for their relationship? This rather perverse synthesis of human sexuality and religious imagery

[47] In another passage he writes, "our *mariage,* in the passage of this world, is a *Sacrament* of this union; and that which seems to be our dissolution, (our *death*) is the strongest *band* of this union, when we are so united, as nothing can disunite us more" (V:8, 40-44).

leaves the reader troubled and perplexed. What hope can there be for religious understanding expressed through the language of human sexual love?

While this chapter brings us at last to marriage, an institution wherein the transformative and creative powers of sexuality are constrained according to societal demands, the overwhelming sense of religious imagery subjugated to sexual ends sullies even the epithalamion. The gender politics of the poem are too lop-sided, which is probably in part a reflection of the environment in which Donne wrote. "An Epithalamion Made at Lincolnes Inne" is the work of a male student writing to impress and excite other male students with witty, brazenly sexual language. Thus the woman too often becomes nothing more than a passive sacrificial lamb and her husband a powerful priest of love.

Many fine critics explain the social implications behind such a depiction. They point out that the epithalamion "does not seem to have been written for an actual wedding, and is...almost certainly directed towards a male coterie rather than a larger public" (Meakin 141). This allows Donne to invest it with more sexually explicit content than would be acceptable in an epithalamion that celebrates (and narrates) the wedding night of a real couple. Perhaps some of the shocking religious imagery and sexual politics can be traced to this reality. The context that Lincoln's Inn establishes must also enter into consideration. Most of Donne's fellow students, like Donne himself, could have to seek out "a woman of the urban bourgeoisie" (Marotti 52) when their time came to marry. This institutional admission that many of these men did not come from noble families and could not expect to inherit any money may have spurred them to write anti-feminist poetry imagining the sexual conquests of passive women. Donne's mock-epithalamion written for this group of "young gentleman [who] felt vulnerable and inadequate" (53) might then be expected to denigrate and dominate women.

And yet the sometimes disturbing image crafted in "An Epithalamion Made at Lincolnes Inne" is not fundamentally inconsistent with the theology of sexuality that wends its way through Donne's sermons and sacred poetry. Amorous violence parallels and symbolizes the way some profess to know divine grace. Interestingly, as will be seen below, Donne cries out in "Batter my heart, three-person'd God" for God to be amorously violent with him in a way that emphasizes a certain anxiety regarding his own salvation hinted at in other poems and works. Donne's conversion occurs gently, progressively, and largely intellectually. For this reason, imagining a divine rape may actually appeal to the poet because it emphasizes God's will in bringing about salvation over and perhaps in spite of his own will and reason. Sexuality carries with it some strange, shocking, but powerfully communicative implications when considered in relation to the difficult question of agency in religious experience and conversion.

III

On Sexualized Spirituality and the Hope of Satisfaction

Having therefore come through the desert of beautiful, convincing, seductive, but altogether misdirected love poetry in the preceding chapter, we will now trace Donne's progress in adapting that same sexual language to a new calling and a perfect end. This chapter will briefly explore the arc of sexual language through a more tenderly realized epithalamion crafted for an actual wedding, "An Epithalamion, or Marriage Song, on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine being married on St. Valentines Day."[48] A real secular marriage is the most proper meeting place for physical, spiritual, and sexual energies, and this opening pushes our discussion into the *Holy Sonnets*.

But while an idealized marriage establishes a felicitous pattern, it does not immediately transform the language of sexuality into balanced, elegant theological discourse. The sonnets which are considered in this chapter are themselves representative of several unique forms and interpretations of human-divine love. All of them surprise the reader with sexualized understandings of God's love and of the speaker's love for God. But even these spiritual expressions of sexuality show a clear conceptual progression. The first, the oft-cited and amazingly over-analyzed Sonnet XIV, "Batter my heart, three person'd God," imagines the relationship between the individual believer and his God as essentially violent. Critics all tend to recognize the overt sexual tension inherent in the poem but tend to disagree about the implications of that tension. While I ultimately disagree with many of the conclusions drawn by

[48] From this point, the poem will be referred to more simply as "An Epithalamion on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine." The complete text of this and all other poems cited in this chapter can be found in Appendix B.

Richard Rambuss, his highly original and intensely provocative argument emphasizes and expands the theological capacity of Donne's sexual language.

If "Batter my heart" establishes the human relationship with God on frightfully violent sexual imagery, Sonnet XVIII, "Show me deare Christ, thy Spouse," shifts it to the realm of courtly love. The sonnet reintroduces marriage, briefly but conspicuously absent from this chapter in "Batter my heart." The persons, however, are now reversed. The first *Holy Sonnet* we analyze records the prayer of a largely passive lover crying out for his active, even aggressive God. Sonnet XVIII imagines a vigorous mortal gone to court God's own bride, the church. This astounding role reversal introduces the concept of marriage into the human-divine relationship, but in a way generally at odds with traditional understandings. The sonnet encourages and sustains a discussion on the comparison between sexual fidelity and spiritual faithfulness.

This chapter, and this thesis, culminates then in a careful look at the remarkably tender Sonnet XVII, "Since she whom I lov'd hath payd her last debt." This poem at last approximates the proper interaction between human and divine love. It chimes beautifully with the marriage sermon analyzed in chapter I, and elegantly conquers the imperfect forms of love encountered in each preceding poem. At last free from the endlessly clever but essentially wicked conceits of secular love poetry, from the imbalanced unions of eminently mortal epithalamia, and even from the all too human early attempts to understand human relationships with God, Sonnet XVII sublimely imagines the true progression from human love to divine.

Significantly, however, even this delightful sonnet does not imagine satisfaction and consummation for the speaker. The final impression that Donne's poetry leaves of the ability of sexual language to articulate and describe the interaction between God and humankind is one of incompletion and fear. Anthony Low offers reasons to understand the strange end of the poem as

Donne's inability to submit to the will of God and to accept "this new love relationship" (Low 75). This difficulty, Low maintains, could allow Donne to "speak strongly to the troubled and disillusioned religious sensibilities of later ages" (86). While I agree on the latter point, I remain unconvinced by the primary thrust of Low's argument and will attempt to explain my reading in light of his more negative approach. Whatever feeling and questions prompt the final lines of this poem, the implications of Donne's conclusion, and the theological reasoning lurking behind it, help us to consider the ways in which a new appropriation of sexual language in religious experience might benefit the church today.

The marriage between the Princess Elizabeth and the Elector Palatine on February 14, 1613 gave Donne a chance to exercise some skill celebrating an actual marriage that, at the time, was indeed cause for considerable joy. The princess's "brother, the beloved Prince Henry, had himself died shortly before her marriage" (Dubrow 4), and the event "was widely viewed as an antidote to the grief occasioned" (165) by that death. Elizabeth was marrying a Protestant, cementing King James I's "position with the Protestant German princes" (165). Thus for matters personal and political, the wedding represented a national celebration of life and the power of regeneration over the inevitability of death. Donne weaves these themes into the epithalamion, of which the primary focus is "sexual and marital politics, not courtly politics" (165), in spite of the broad undertones.

The poem opens by playfully introducing religious and sexual language centered on the church. The first four lines bring the church year into focus, as well as the feasts of saints, ecclesiastical polity, and local religious life:

Haile Bishop Valentine, whose day this is,

All the Air is thy Diocis,

And all the chirping Choristers

And other birds are thy Parishioners, (1-4)

The speaker begins his task of crafting a wedding by invoking the Bishop Valentine, immediately placing the action which follows within the purview and sanction of the church. For the speaker, the selection of February 14 as wedding day is no coincidence, and no accident.[49] Indeed, the day's marital associations have a goodly literary heritage. Chaucer alludes to the romantic associations forged in the natural world on St. Valentine's Day in his "Parlament of Foules." Chaucer, describing a large company of birds as they assemble, explains that, "For this was on seynt Valentines day, / Whan euery bryd comyth there to chese his make"[50] (Chaucer, line 309-310). The notes to one edition of Chaucer's poem point out that "The method by which the peculiar observance of St. Valentine's Day came to be connected is unknown: but there was a widespread popular belief, that, on that day, the birds came together to choose their mates" (91). Donne's speaker opens with this reference so that he might exploit established literary and cultural connections between St. Valentine's Day, romantic attachments, and natural cycles.

But the focus on the saint offers more than an apparently well-known and celebrated allusion. It also allows Donne to craft a highly original epithalamion. His speaker addresses his poem not to the Bride and Bridegroom, as was the case in "An Epithalamion Made at Lincolnes Inn," and is conventional in epithalamic form.[51] Each line ends with a rhyming couplet that includes the name "Valentine," and each stanza addresses the saint most closely associated with love and romance. The opening words, "Haile Bishop Valentine," all place a strong stress on the first syllable (of course the first word is monosyllabic), cementing the poem in Valentine's

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[49] Incidentally, this poem is often cited in explanations for the modern associations and significance of St. Valentine's Day as an example of early modern or Renaissance belief and folklore, along with the Chaucer text here cited.

[50] The word "make" comes from the Anglo-Saxon "maca," and means "companion" or "mate." (Chaucer 106).

[51] On this point, please see the Introduction above.

invoked identity and hurrying the action along to Valentine's first action mentioned in the text: "Thou marryest every yeare" (5). Before we arrive at line five, we know the focus of this poem. True, the title gives some indication, but the reference to Valentine lets us know that coupling and marriage are on the horizon. The brilliance of the reference rests in its ability to immediately ground the sexuality inherent to an epithalamion within an ecclesiastical context, a "diocis," "choristers" and "Parishioners." The yearly mating practices of the natural world find sanction and legitimacy in a divinely established order.

The weddings Valentine carries out are between parishioners as faithful as "The Lirique Larke, and the grave whispering Dove" (6). Delightfully illustrating Donne's musical command of English, this line contrasts the appropriately alliterative "Lirique Larke" with the low, more guttural sounds of the "grave whispering Dove." "The Sparrow that neglects his life for love" (7) embodies some of the more careless actions love might prompt, but the "black bird" (9), "the Goldfinch, or the Halcyon" (10) simply "speed as soone" (9) as they can to their mates. Even more sober, mundane fowls cannot avoid Valentine's influence, as "The husband cocke lookes out, and straight is sped, / And meets his wife" (11-12). The image of different species of birds, all apt metaphors for varied human ages and dispositions, speeding left and right to find their respective mates proves a remarkably clever way to describe giddy romance on St. Valentine's Day.

These innocent images of happy couples come with deep sexual overtones. The hen who rushes to meet her "husband cocke" "brings her feather-bed" (12). This clever little pun on a bird who carries her feather bed with her also reminds the reader of just what these birds (and the human beings who engage in amorous pursuits on Valentine's Day) are getting themselves into. Indeed, the overflowing attractions of the day "might enflame thy self, Old Valentine" (14). That

the (presumably celibate)[52] cleric might be "enflamed" or tempted to incontinence by the merry work of his feathered flock conveys the power of sexuality in the natural world to influence human actions and decisions. More importantly, the human actions undertaken on the day when birds find their mates prompts the speaker to command "This day more cheerfully than ever shine" (13). This command brings to focus St. Valentine's true task on this particular Valentine's Day.

"Till now," the speaker intones, "Thou warmd'st with multiplying loves / Two larkes, two sparrowes, or two Doves" (15-16). The usual task of the saint, uniting common birds, "is nothing unto this, / For thou this day couplest two Phœnixes" (17-18). The speaker's elaborate praise for the Bride and Bridegroom is founded not only on the actual couple celebrated in the wedding, a daughter of James I and a powerful German Prince, but on the sexual purpose of marriage. Weddings promise regeneration and rebirth, of which the phoenix is a long-standing symbol.

There are, however, difficult implications in this metaphor that must be overcome. One of the central elements of the phoenix legend is that the bird need not bother mating: after living out his days, the phoenix bursts into flame and a new fowl miraculously rises from the ashes. Further, because there is no need for phoenixes to mate, the bird is traditionally considered neuter, even incapable of mating. The speaker acknowledges the wonder of this event by pointing out that Valentine "mak'st a Taper see / What the Sunne never saw, and what the Arke /.../ Did not containe" (19-20, 22). The legendary qualities of the bird only serve to heighten the extraordinary significance of this union.

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[52] Very little is known about the life of the actual St. Valentine, including his identity. There are saints by that name across Europe; the patron of February 14 is probably a fourth-century Roman priest.

Donne's language also brilliantly keeps sexual themes running quietly but insistently under the poem. St. Valentine deserves commendation because he "mak'st a Taper see" that "one bed containes, through Thee, / Two Phœnixes" (22-23). The reference to the taper prepares the reader for nocturnal activities three lines before the speaker spells out just what will go on by candlelight. The sexual undertones heighten as the second stanza progresses, and the speaker discusses how "Two Phœnixes, whose joyned breasts / Are unto one another mutuall nests" (23-24) will produce offspring in ways quite uncommon for phoenixes. The next line almost entirely abandons subtlety as it explains that "motion kindles such fires, as shall give / Yong Phœnixes, and yet the old shall live" (25-26). The allusion to starting a fire with friction brings the poem plainly to sexual intercourse, especially when this friction is cited as the way to produce young phoenixes without the deaths of the old.

This potential for sexual love imbues the phoenixes with power. The "faire Phœnix Bride" (29) hardly resembles the demure sacrificial lamb of "An Epithalamion Made at Lincolnes Inne." This speaker calls this Bride to rise and "frustrate the Sunne, / Thy selfe from thine affection / Takest warmth enough" (29-31). The call to sexual union produces a vigorous, affirming response in the *Bride*, blazing as she is in affection, and an inspiration to "All lesser birds" (32) who "from thine eye /...will take their Jollitie" (31-32). Most certainly will the "lesser birds" be dazzled by the "Rubies, Pearles, and Diamonds" (35) with which the Bride is commanded to "make / Thy selfe a constellation, of them All" (35-36). Sexual union gains a certain hubristically grand status in the possibility that a new constellation of stars should, "by their blazing, signify" (37) the celebration of a marriage.

When the speaker warns that the celebration means "That a Great Princess falls, but doth not die"[53] (38), the reader may fret another descent into the strange sexual metaphors of "Lincolnes Inne." However, on this occasion the Bride "doth not die" but becomes a "new starre, that to us portends / Ends of much wonder" (39-40). The union between the Princess Elizabeth and Count Frederick will so change the shape of human experience that soon will "all men date Records, from this thy Valentine" (42). Sexual union between the Bride and Bridegroom has the power to shift the very measurement of time.[54]

There is a power to match that force of sexuality, but not to surpass it. In the fourth stanza the speaker hurries his two phoenixes along to church, encouraging his Bride to "meet thy Fredericke, and so / To an unseparable union growe" (45-46). The description of the liturgy again receives short shrift compared to the long build-up preceding consummation, but this poem addressed to a clergyman spends a bit more time on the details and significance of the wedding itself. Valentine's work in joining the two will be permanent,

> Since separation
> Falls not on such things as are infinite,
> Nor things which are but one, can disunite,
> You'are twice inseparable, great, and one (47-50)

The essential unity of the couple, magnified by their greatness, prevents them from being separated. Valentine can pronounce his liturgical blessing over the couple with confidence that separation "Falls not on such things" as their union.

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[53] In this case, the problem associated with this pun is reversed. While in "Lincolnes Inne" we are concerned that the woman dies or experiences sexual pleasure at too great a cost, this line might make a veiled reference to a lack of pleasure for the woman. In light of the ending I think, however, that at least in this instance no pun is intended here.

[54] Indeed, the political implications of the marriage also make the match one for remembering. While Frederick's reign was not particularly auspicious (he assumed the title King of Bohemia, sparking a war), the daughter that Elizabeth bore him was Sophia of the Palatinate, later Electress of Hanover. Her descendants, the Hanoverian kings, came to the throne of England after the extinction of the Stuart line with Queen Anne. To this day, the Act of Settlement of 1701 requires that the heir to the British throne be a direct descendant of Sophia, and a Protestant.

But the Bishop Valentine does only enough "To make you one, his way, which divers waies / Must be effected" (52-53). The church wedding is only one of many procedures which the Bride and Bridegroom must undertake to make them one. After the ceremony, "when all is past / And that you'are one, by hearts and hands made fast, / You two have one way left, your selves to'entwine" (53-55). Intriguingly, just as marriage and sexual union often serve as metaphors for the union between individual believers and God, now the ceremony of the marriage becomes a metaphor for sex. The couple's "hearts and hands" have been made fast, indeed their hands are quite literally joined as a part of the marriage liturgy, and now they must "entwine" themselves. To crudely spell out the plain implications of what Donne's speaker foreshadows here would be to destroy the beauty and subtlety of the line. Suffice it to say that the brazenly physical sexuality with which each line pulses adds an enormous depth to the already highly symbolic liturgy of marriage.

Stanza five encourages the sun to set and the revelers to part in typical style for an epithalamion. The speaker coyly asks, after describing the way "The masquers come too late, and'I thinke, will stay" (67), "Alas, did not Antiquity assigne / A night, as well as day, to thee, O Valentine?" (69-70). The playful impatience the speaker adopts rather significantly curtails the most public part of a wedding, the feast and revelry, so that what we know to be the most important part may take place: the consummation. Antiquity *did* assign a night to Valentine indeed, and stanza six opens with the information that "night is come" (71). The speaker must yet chase away a few well-meaning ladies who "goe / So nicely about the Bride" (74-75). He carries us into the final, most important part of the day and the most important part of the poem with the reflection that

A Bride, before a good night could be said,

Should vanish from her cloathes, into her bed,

As Soules from bodies steale, and are not spy'd. (76-78)

Metaphors of death in this poem have largely been overcome by the overwhelming hope of new life, and it is amusing that now death makes its most prominent appearance only to speed the Bride out of her clothes. The delightful image of the Bride slipping away from her own wedding-feast as quickly and silently as "Soules from bodies steale" gives an excited, eager element to this Bride's sexuality that is not present in the Bride of "Lincolnes Inne."

After some slight distress about the location of the Bridegroom ("For, where is he?" (80) asks both speaker and, most certainly, Bride), at last "He comes" (81). His entrance into the bed and into perfect union with his Bride is told with delightful ambiguity, but also with language that invokes the image of a heavenly messenger. When the Bridegroom comes he "passes through Spheare after Spheare" (81), drawing closer and closer to his Bride as an angel might fly to a mortal from highest heaven. Lest that interpretation be seen as a denigration of the Bride and an exaltation of the Bridegroom, we must remember that the Angel Gabriel passed "through Spheare after Spheare" to honor and exalt the Virgin Mary.

These spheres are, however, quite different from those. The Bridegroom passes through "First her sheetes, then her Armes, then any where" (82). With this alarming and potentially quite bawdy ambiguity, the Bride and Bridegroom achieve unity. This moment was only prefigured in "An Epithalamion Made at Lincolnes Inne," and the difference in tone here is striking. The Bridegroom remains the active partner, but the fact that he passes through "*her* sheetes, then *her* Armes" (emphasis added) implies reception by the Bride. She does not timidly wait for the priest to come and "enbowell" her, but welcomes her husband into perfect unity. Indeed, if the priestly metaphor be carried over from the previous chapter, this time the Bride is

not the sacrifice waiting to be manipulated and employed by the presbyter, but is in fact the deity, inhabiting the *sanctum sanctorum* which the priest can only enter in purest devotion.

The seventh and eight stanzas bear out an intensely positive reading of the union between Bride and Bridegroom. After the moment of penetration rather euphemistically referred to line 82, the couple is shown in bed together:

Here lyes a shee Sunne, and a hee Moone here,

She gives the best light to his Spheare,

Or each is both, and all, and so

They unto one another nothing owe (85-88)

If these lines include any implication of imbalance, it is of the female overpowering the male as the sun dominates the moon. Donne reverses the traditional personifications of sun and moon to show the Bridegroom's utter dependence, for his "best light," on the Bride. But the possibility that there is any inequality or indeed that one is dependent on the other is swept away with the assurance that "each is both, and all." Their sexual union is ordered and equitable; both are free from debts.

The speaker, presumably familiar with the New Testament instructions that wives and husbands should not fail to engage in sexual intercourse,[55] quickly draws back from the debt-free conclusion he comes to in line 88. "And yet they doe" (89) owe something, but the illusion of perfect equity springs from the fact that both "are / So just and rich in that coyne which they pay,

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[55] I Corinthians 7:1-6 teaches that "...concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency. But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment."

/ That niether would, nor needs forebeare nor stay" (89-91). This is, apparently, a powerfully libidinous couple. Owing something to each other (namely, their own bodies as husband and wife),

> Neither desires to be spar'd, nor to spare,
>
> They quickly pay their debt, and then
>
> Take no acquittances, but pay again;
>
> They pay, they give, they lend, and so let fall
>
> No such occasion to be liberall. (92-96)

Frankly, their perfect union means they also cannot get enough sex. By casting the sexual union in terms of a debt to be paid for which "Neither desires to be spar'd, nor to spare" the speaker cleverly alludes to the flirtatious play of a couple eager to enjoy one another. The linguistic pun of line 95 even imitates the frantic eagerness with which the Bride and Bridegroom copulate. "They pay, they give, they lend," builds in perfect iambic pentameter until finally the delightful enjambment and the three stressed syllables at the end of the line emphasizes exhaustion. The words "and so let fall" imply that the exhaustion may only extend to the male. The speaker finds virtue in this eager sexuality, indeed declaring in the final couplet that "More truth, more courage in these two do shine, / Than all thy turtles have, and sparrows, Valentine" (97-98). This active physical union surpasses the instinctual mating of birds. Here are wills joined together, and from that joining flows sexual vigor and joy.

But more than this. From that sexual joy and union, rebirth comes to the entire world. The speaker affirms, "And by *this act* of thy two Phenixes / Nature againe restored is" (99-100, emphasis added). The power of their marriage, expressed in all of its indulgent unity in the last stanza, is that nature has been revived, and indeed unity is restored even to literature: "For since

these two are two no more, / Ther's but one Phenix still, as was before" (101-102). Their sexual union renews continuity between the epithalamion and its sources by eliminating that early problem of two "Phœnixes." The epithalamion ends with the wedding revelers, among whom our speaker at last places himself, who "will stay / Waiting" (104-105). This final turn locates the marriage within a community who will

> ...wagers lay, at which side day will breake,
>
> And win by'observing, then, whose hand it is
>
> That opens first a curtaine, hers or his. (108-110)

This clever reference to the ribald, raucous, and apparently interminable celebrations surrounding a wedding strengthen in earthy, tangible ways the claim that by the sexual union of the Bride and Bridegroom "Nature againe restored is." The wedding takes place within a community, however little their solemnizations have to do with it. Intriguingly, while the feasting does not make a wedding, the wedding and the sex which follows does bind people together and keep them happy. This insight that Donne injects into his "An Epithalamion on the Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine" applies not only to the high hopes for the actual marriage it celebrates, but broadly to the Christian hope for marriage and sexual unions generally.

That hope provides the tradition and the justification for some of Donne's most shockingly erotic poetry, which finally transcend secular marriage altogether. Intriguingly, in "Batter my heart, three-person'd God," the poet leaves the realm of *any* marriage. Donne's speaker cries out to God for amorous violence. As some critics have rather coarsely put it, by the end of the poem the speaker "is now asking for it" (Fish, 241). Even the first line, which asks the Trinity to "Batter my heart" (1) carries with it some of the associations of an aggressive lover. God assaults the speaker's heart, mounting a merciless campaign to "knocke, breathe, shine, and

seeke to mend" (2). Donne's speaker pairs the three positive imperative verbs, "breathe, shine, and seeke to mend," with "knocke," calling God to bring destruction that He might create anew. This essential paradox undergirds the entire sonnet and calls to mind some of the paradoxes Donne identifies in his secular love poetry between the affections of men and women. Here, however, Donne does not envision a husband slaying a sacrificial wife but a faithful devotee being slain by a loving God.

The speaker pleads with God, "That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow mee,' and bend / Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new" (3-4). The direct paradox in this line, being toppled that one may stand, joins forces with another list of imperative verbs. Their alliterative strength emphasizes the violence of the poem's request, still tied to the hope of renewal by the internal rhyme between "break" and "make me new." The speaker pleads for extreme spiritual passivity, that he may become a new creature. Interestingly, his passivity does not originate in his plea to God, but he confesses that "I, like an usurpt towne, to'another due, / Labour to'admit you, but Oh, to no end!" (5-6). He does not beg divine force to overcome his own will, but that of "your enemy" (10), the usurper. Donne's speaker simultaneously elevates and degrades himself: the speaker is the prize in a great cosmic battle between good and evil, but his own contributions to the battle are insignificant.

We do learn that what limited power he actually possesses to help him "admit" God to his captured city "proves weake or untrue" (8). "Reason, your viceroy in mee, mee should defend" (7), but fails to. In one sense the speaker cries out for a champion, a hero to come and break his bonds asunder. In spite of the sense of helpless victimization which lines such as "Yet dearely'I love you,' and would be loved faine, / But am betroth'd unto your enemie" (9-10), our speaker asks more than simply to be rescued. The rescue itself must be violent enough; to disestablish

that betrothal he calls on God to "Divorce mee,' untie, or breake that knot againe" (11). He demands bold action, and also demands that God company His bold action of dissolution with very physical actions of communion and intimacy.

Once God frees the soul of the speaker from God's "enemy," the speaker expects rather something more than the pleasure of freedom. Instead, he wants to trade one captivity for another, and this new version is more graphic than the first. "Take mee to you, imprison mee" (12) he pleads. The speaker desires God to once more overpower the false governor reason, because through such an usurpation lies true freedom. He surmises that "I, / Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free" (12-13), reintroducing paradox into a poem that, through its middle lines, becomes something of a political allegory.

The paradox of the final line, however, shows Donne's power for mixing words and concepts. The speaker declares, he will never be free unless God enthralls him, "Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee" (14). The shocking call for sexual violence this last line contains nearly blasts from the reader's mind any memory of the metaphorical conceit of the poem. The speaker opens with a direct address to God, and his words throughout speak to abstract concepts and spiritual things.

But the concept of chastity itself straddles the gap between the physical and the spiritual. The freedom the speaker desires in line thirteen has only limited application to the physical self. He wishes to be free from sin, from the devil, from the powers of the world that separate him from God. In some sense the chastity he calls for in the final line shares this meaning. Spiritual chastity implies the ideal devotional relationship between the believer's soul and God. Spiritual chastity encapsulates the obligations of the First Commandment, indeed of the first five of the Ten Commandments, all of which explicate the duties each faithful person owes to the one God.

The second half of Donne's paradox destroys this purely spiritual interpretation. The speaker begs God to "ravish mee" so that he may be chaste. He abandons all agency, all desire, all will and asks God to grant him chastity by overpowering him. Even read spiritually, that word "ravish" blurs the line between body and soul, especially as experienced in the lives of mystic saints and others who promulgate a sexualized spirituality. Donne's speaker asks God, in frighteningly physical terms, to subdue and chasten his soul. In a brilliant paradox, Donne uses the physical to explain and articulate the spiritual.

Richard Rambuss puts forth a strikingly different interpretation with a rather sympathetic conclusion. The shocking quality of the poem comes, in large part, from the imagined sexual union between God and the speaker, a union which Rambuss insists is even more shocking precisely because the speaker is a man. He points to the fact that while "feminizing the soul is often the practice in Renaissance devotional materials...it isn't always so" (50). While Rambuss cites two examples from another Donne sonnet in which the speaker's "unregenerate soul is nominated as 'he' and 'himself'" (50), the fact that Donne does use the feminine pronoun for his soul in other of his works,[56] and refers at length in the marriage sermon of Margaret Washington of his soul's marriage to Christ seems to deflate Rambuss's argument. Refusing to deny or neglect the "masculine subject position" (Rambuss 53) of the poet, Rambuss points out that while Donne's speaker laments being "betrothed to the devil, he never asks God to intervene and make a proper 'bride' out of him" (52-53).

Compared to the exquisite unity of the human couple at the end of "An Epithalamion on Lady Elizabeth, and Count Palatine," the request of "Batter my heart" is violent, brutal, and strikingly inequitable. The love here called for barely resembles the tenderness expressed in the marriage song. The reason behind this, however, becomes clear within the context of Christian

[56] Donne adopts the feminine pronoun for the soul in several sermons, including that discussed above in chapter I.

experience. The poem places the speaker in a posture of utter self-contempt and frustration. He practically lashes out at a God who seems to do very little to redeem his soul. The speaker wants absolute self-abnegation and perfect assurance. He wants his will to be overcome by an omnipotent, vigorous God. The speaker's attitude seems to spring from the same lack of confidence which causes Donne, in other poems, to doubt his salvation and election.[57] It is true that the speaker seeks only ravishment, only the aggressive conquest of his will by God expressed in viciously sexual terms.

Donne's own sermons, however, sharply counter these fears. Indeed, in one charming passage he even gently satirizes the idea that God will ever abandon the soul of one whom God loves, apparently the concern of the speaker in "Batter my heart." Donne the preacher calls on his listeners not to fret over individual passages of Scripture that seem to threaten them with condemnation. He reassures them that

> That which must try thee is the whole Booke, the *tenor* and *purpose*, the *Scope* and *intention* of God in his *Scriptures*...and would that God that would *dye for thee, Divorce thee?* His *Booke* is *Euangelium, Gospell;* and *Gospell* is *good tydings*, a *gracious Messadge;* And would God pretend to send thee a *gracious Messadge*, and send thee a *Divorce?* (VII, 2:518-524)

This passage answers the anxieties behind "Batter my heart." Though the speaker's reason remains "captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue," the speaker's soul can trust that he will be tried by "the whole Booke, the *tenor* and *purpose*" of God in Scripture. While Donne, through the speaker of the poem, laments to God that he is "betroth'd unto your enemie," Donne the preacher answers back with the question "would that God that would *dye for thee, Divorce thee?*" "Batter

[57] In particular, "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward" and "A Hmyne to Christ, at the Authors Last Going into Germany." The powerfully reflective, self-punning "A Hymne to God the Father" also concerns itself deeply with the assurance of salvation.

my heart," though in many ways a beautiful expression of submission of the soul to God, represents the fears against which Donne's erotic theology works. What overwhelms the soul is God's "*gracious Messadge*" of marriage, making the sort of amorous violence presented in the sonnet quite unnecessary.

Rambuss argues most provocatively that "Satan is the one who has made a 'woman' of [the speaker], a rectifiable situation if only God would himself 'rise'...and finally take [the speaker] as his own, ravish him, make more of a man of him"[58] (Rambuss 54). But the speaker's plea does not spring from horror at being made the passive partner of unholy sex. To God's enemy he is only "betrothed."[59] The speaker hopes against hope that time remains to break off this engagement to the devil. His request, indeed his demand for a holy rape springs from an unwillingness to wait until he arrives at the altar to see his soul's eternal spouse. What the speaker asks for in his imagined "trinitarian gang bang" (50) is a present admittance to what must be future bliss. As a result the sex is necessarily illicit, and perhaps is best understood as a rape.[60] He cannot know the state of his soul, cannot know whether he is among the elect, until he dies and approaches Judgment. But he fears now that he is "betrothed unto your enemie" and therefore wishes to be freed. Donne's speaker must take the advice of Donne the preacher, and accept the Scriptures as a loving missive directed to his soul. Rambuss's rightly acknowledges

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[58] This is a particularly bawdy allusion on Rambuss's part to a gay pornographic movie, with a description of which he begins his first chapter. *More of a Man* is the title of the movie, which traces redemption for a conflicted Catholic, largely through gay sex. The reference is certainly deliberate, and so deserves brief notice here. For the reference and its place in his argument, see Rambuss, 11ff.

[59] For an interesting discussion on whether this precludes sexual activity in seventeenth-century England, see Cressy, especially Chapter IV. While "analysis of parish registers shows some 20 to 30 per cent of all brides bearing children within the first eight months of marriage" (Cressy 277), for the purposes of this argument betrothal will be taken to mean only the legal, supposedly chaste binding that precedes the lawful carnal knowledge of marriage.

[60] The seventeenth-century sculpture of "The Ecstasy of St. Theresa" comes to mind as an example of this foreshadowing of heavenly bliss that borders on rape. Also, medieval mystical writers, such as Mechthild of Magdeburg, describe the pain that accompanies the joy they experience in the love of God. Even the contemporary Pentecostal experience of being "seized in the Spirit" parallels this image of aggressive divine love.

the shock factor of Donne's request, but orients it too far from the spiritual insight of Donne's other writings.

The snippet of Donne's sermons from which the passage above is drawn ends with the sublime reflection,

> God is *Love,* and the *Holy Ghost* is amorous in his *Metaphors*; everie where his *Scriptures* abound with the notions of *Love,* of *Spouse*, and *Husband*, and *Marriadge Songs*, and *Marriadge Supper*, and *Marriadge-Bedde.* (VII, 2:524-527)

This passage affirms the understanding of the essentially sexual relationship marriage within the Christian vocabulary. Donne does not keep love abstract and distant but insists that the New Testament assertion that "God is *Love*" applies to notions of "of *Spouse*, and *Husband*, and *Marriadge Songs*, and *Marriadge Supper*, and *Marriadge-Bedde.*"

Interestingly, not all of his *Holy Sonnets* present this marital understanding in a predictable way. Sonnet XVIII, "Show me deare Christ, thy Souse," actually subverts this understanding with a bizarre reversal of traditional roles. As Anthony Low effectively puts it, "Donne has crossed the wires between the two traditional version of the biblical marriage trope: the marriage between Christ and his Church, and the marriage between God and the soul" (Low 77). The speaker begs Christ, in the first lines of the poem, to reveal the church, "so bright and clear" ("Show me deare Christ" 1). He considers the possible candidates for the title of Bride of Christ, pondering whether it is "She, which on the other shore / Goes richly painted?" (2-3). Perhaps instead it is she "which rob'd and tore / Laments and mournes in Germany and here?" (3-4). The speaker distills the Protestant Reformation into four simple lines, faintly suggesting that while the Roman Church "on the other shore" adorns herself like a prostitute, "richly painted," a worse fate may have befallen the Lutheran and Anglican Churches, who sit "rob'd

and tore" like a woman assaulted. The glancing introduction of sexuality to the poem through the charged description of the Catholic Church certainly leaves open the possibility that the Reformed Church "Laments and mournes" because she has been raped.

The Bride of Christ is flirtatiously hard to pin down in the following lines. The speaker wonders whether she flits about like a human woman, asking "Sleepes she a thousand, then peepes up one yeare?" (5). Perhaps the church oscillates between fancies as a human mistress might, sometimes choosing infallibility ("selfe truth" (6)) and other times not ("and errs" (6)). It certainly seems that the church exhibits a feminine tendency to become easily bored: she is "now new, now outwore" (6). Donne's own language imitates the frustrating speech of a lover who, because he has not asked his question properly, cannot get a clear answer. Therefore, to cover all the bases, the speaker exasperatedly asks "Doth she, and did she, and shall she evermore / On one, on seaven, or on no hill appeare?" (7-8). One can imagine Christian authority, personified now in the church, breezily fleeing from Rome, to Geneva, to Canterbury with little regard for the distress this causes her faithful pursuers.

Donne's poem betokens very serious personal and social concerns. The truth of the Gospel and the authority of governments rested on an answer to the question of which church was the true "Spouse" of Christ. Yet Donne's ability to make the question playful, and almost flippant, becomes strangely perverse after the turn. The speaker alludes to chivalric romances when he asks "Dwells she with us, or like adventuring knights / First travaile we to seeke and then make Love?" (9-10). Two troubling implications leap from these lines. First, the idea that the believer might be abandoned by the Bride of Christ, spurned by the church that should nurse and defend the souls of all the faithful. Donne's conversion to the Anglican Church was founded, in large part, on the catholicity of that Church. While the Roman Church in England sank to a

status barely above a persecuted, secretive cult whose sacraments were available only to those wealthy or fervent enough to squirrel away priests in attics and cellars, the Established Church offered grace to all (unfortunately by law, even forcing compliance on those who did not want it). Thus, the idea that folk might have to "travaile" like "adventuring knights" before finding the true church contradicts one of the reasons Donne even came to his celebrated profession. The Bride of Christ cannot, like some cruel beloved (or even some imprisoned maiden), send her suitor on endless quests to find her and win her love.

The second disturbing suggestion in those two lines, however, is that the individual Christian might be a suitor to the church. What on earth could it mean for the travailing knight to find the church "and then make Love"? Donne inverts the relationship discussed in his marriage sermon and praised in his "Epithalamion on Lady Elizabeth." The church is the Bride of Christ, prepared to meet Him on the Day of Judgment and through whom all individuals must encounter God. The idea of a human being courting the church, seeking to "make Love" to her, perverts and distorts this relationship. Through the church, Christ courts the soul. Why would Donne turn this understanding on its head?

The answer comes in the final lines, even as the poem trudges deeper into troubling, highly-sexualized metaphor. The speaker asks quite politely,

> Betray kind husband thy spouse to our sights,
> And let myne amorous soule court thy mild Dove,
> Who is most trew, and pleasing to thee, then
> When she'is embrac'd and open to most men. (11-14)

His discourse on the Reformation ends, then, with the assurance that he has made the right choice. Abandoning the church of a small faction, Donne becomes a minister in the Anglican

Church which, at the time and place of his writing, was "open to most men," save those who risked punishment and removed themselves from it for conscience's sake. But the path by which Donne arrives at this assurance turns the usual metaphors surrounding sex and love between God and humankind on their head. Christ, the "kind husband" to the church, is called on to "Betray" his wife to the lurid gaze of potential suitors. Indeed, the speaker pleads that his "amorous soule" be allowed to "court thy mild Dove."

Peculiarly, the poem correctly interprets marriage and sexuality as central metaphors of the Christian experience, but scandalously confuses the roles of those involved. Donne successfully makes a point about the virtues of openness in religion, but in the process turns the church into a whore, even as he turns himself into her client. In this poem the potent forces of sexual attraction and satisfaction subvert marriage. The church is always ever Christ's "Spouse" and "mild Dove." But she proves "most trew, and pleasing to" Christ by cuckolding Him. Donne's poetic skill makes an interesting point in this paradox, but fails to accurately cast the role sexuality plays in the lives of husbands and wives and in the spiritual vocabulary of the church. This marriage is strangely inequitable, resembling the violent dominance of "An Epithalamion Made at Lincolnes Inne" and the willingness of some of the secular love poems to confuse spiritual and physical ends.

To properly understand the way that human sexuality informs and encourages religious devotion, we must finally look to Holy Sonnet XVII, "Since she whom I lov'd hath payd her last debt." Within the context of this study, the enjambment of that first line makes a sorrowful allusion to "An Epithalamion on Lady Elizabeth." The joyful debts paid back and forth between the newlywed husband and wife in that poem have apparently come to an end in this one. The speaker's beloved has in fact "payd her last debt / To Nature" (1-2). Strangely, he believes this is

"to hers, and my good" (2). Why should any lover, let alone a husband (we read autobiographically here), come to the conclusion that the death of his beloved is a good thing? Donne answers the question in two simple lines that summarize a great many of the pages of this thesis. Now is "her Soule early into heaven ravished" (3), and she enjoys that spiritual, eternal union with Christ.[61] Additionally, and most remarkably, the speaker finds himself free from all distractions and can declare that "Wholly on heavenly things my mind is sett" (4). With his beloved gone, the speaker might naturally resolve to spend time in prayer and meditation, reflecting on his loss and his sorrow.

But that is not why this speaker's mind is set "Wholly on heavenly things." He arrives at that conclusion not as a result of his wife's death but as a result of her life: "Here the admyring her my mind did whett / To seeke thee God" (5-6). His love for his wife, his time spent "admyring her," has taught him "To seeke thee God." Indeed, the speaker goes so far to make an affirming comparison between his love for his wife and his love for God, commenting that "so streames do shew their head" (6). The way in which he loved his wife, his sexual union with her, leads him now to God, just as one can find the source of a river by tracing it upstream. The

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[61] Though Anne Donne died four years before the wedding of Mistress Margaret Washington, the marriage ceremony was performed in St. Clement Danes, the same church in which Donne's wife and several of his children were buried. Forgive me if it seems too great a stretch to suggest that he spoke with an image not just of his own future union with Christ but his hope for his wife's present state. Her epitaph, "erected 'in the Chancel, on the North side, at the upper end'" (Bald 325) read, in Latin,

Fifteen years in union completed,
Seven days after the twelfth parturition (of whom seven survive)
By a ravishing fever hurriedly-seized
(Wherefore this stone to speak he commanded
Himself, by grief made speechless [infant])
Her husband (most miserable) once
dear to the dear
His own ashes to these ashes pledges [weds]
[in a] New marriage (may God assent) in this place joining together,
JOHN DONNE (Hester 517)

This rather literal translation still conveys an epitaph worthy of its own thesis, and intriguing for the writer of this one.

comparison indicates the speaker's belief that the love he has shared with his wife flows from God as streams flow from "their head," and also introduces the peculiar question of thirst.

While Donne's speaker discovers God, his requests and his desires do not end. "But though I have found thee" (7), he begins tentatively, and then hastens to add, "and thou my thirst hast fed" (7), that "But" portends a great caveat on the horizon. The state of the speaker implied by this line is that of the secular marriage discussed in Donne's marriage sermon. The bereaved speaker enjoys connection to God, and his thirst is "fed," presumably through the church. Interestingly, and necessarily for the following lines, the speaker says that his thirst is "fed" rather than quenched or satisfied. Beyond the fact that these words would not scan, "fed" allows a certain double meaning. It suggests that finding God both satisfies the speaker's desire and inflames it. This conclusion, tied so closely to the speaker's remembrances of his wife's death and ravishment into heaven imbues his desire for God, and his hope that God will quench his thirst, with an almost sexual urge.

The caveat is that "A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett" (8), even after finding God. The speaker traces the stream to it source, and yet cannot satisfy his longing for...what? I disagree here with Anthony Low, who maintains that this conclusion "represents...a retreat from or a severe qualification of [Donne's] argument for simple continuity" (Low 75) between divine and human love. However, I argue that it should be no wonder that "Donne implies the absence, not the presence, of the divine object of his love" (75) because that absence makes the death of his wife particularly acute. For Donne, it seems that sexuality itself passes out of the world with his wife's death. John Stubbs notes this when he writes that "there were times, [Donne's] sermons suggest, when he felt the loss as a profound relief: an opportunity to renounce once and for all his enslavement to flesh" (Stubbs 328). This sense confirms the validity of Donne's feeling of

divine absence. The speaker in this sonnet must now wait for the satisfaction of his love for God, pursued by a God who "as lover actively 'wooe[s]' Donne's feminine soul" (Low 75).

Low points out that "these positive affirmations [of human love leading to divine] are somewhat blunted by the admission that he still thirsts, under a kind of love that rather increases his desire than satisfies it" (74). According to the OED, a dropsy means both an insatiable thirst or craving and also a surfeit of water. Donne's speaker is, therefore, filled even as he craves. Low concedes that this increasing thirst "may be read simply as a metaphor of the infinite gulf between man and God" (74), but I contend that this does not represent a break in continuity from human to divine love. Donne now experiences for God the same oscillations and anxieties associated with human love. His new lover is infinitely far removed, and those glimpses the speaker has of this perfect lover, glimpses that come through the medium of human love, simultaneously satisfy and increase his thirst. Now that human love has been removed, he thirsts only for the pure source but struggles to encounter it in its pure form.

The second half of the poem reveals the speaker's anxieties with this desiring, and his hope that God will assuage them:

> But why should I begg more Love, when as thou
>
> Dost wooe my soule for hers; offring all thine:
>
> And dost not only feare least I allow
>
> My Love to Saints and Angels things divine,
>
> But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
>
> Least the World, Fleshe, yea Devill putt thee out. (9-14)

The speaker is ultimately unsatisfied with his present communion with God. In effect, he longs for consummation. God "dost wooe my soule for hers," removing the sexual love he shares with

his wife and "offring all thine," God's own being, in return. Donne's God here suspects the soul of the human beloved to exhibit the wandering tendencies that human lovers fear. God is possessed by a "tender jealousy" that, the speaker believes, leads the almighty to remove certain temptations from his path, even his wife. That secular marriage has served its purpose by pointing the speaker toward his ultimate aim. Now he must prepare himself for the spiritual marriage, giving himself over completely to Christ in the church, that he may enjoy the eternal.

The union cannot be perfectly equitable on earth. The speaker's persistent physicality insists that he will be unfaithful, at least at times. Therefore his earthly union with God must remain unsatisfactory. While the speaker has been able to trace his love for his wife back to the source, he cannot yet love the source in the same way. His striving for this continues, in spite of the constant threat presented by holy things, "Saints and Angels," and the weaknesses of his natural desires for "World, Fleshe, yea Devill." The speaker is caught, waiting for the consummation of a courtship that frustrates and confuses him.

The ultimate conclusion of the poem leaves puzzling but not troubling questions. It stands on the threshold of the almost experiential reverie that Donne indulges in his sermon at the marriage of Margaret Washington. Secular marriage points the way to God, and spiritual marriage offers satisfaction, but the eternal marriage is ultimately something to be experienced, something to give oneself over to, rather than something to be expressed. The speaker at the end of Sonnet XVII pulls back from the satisfaction that a marital understanding of his relationship with God might offer, because he is not yet united to God. The final line, which actually quotes from the Great Litany in the Book of Common Prayer, subtly hints that a close approximation of this union can be found in the work and worship of the church. But in his sermons Donne continually emphasizes that Christ "makes my death-bed, a mariage-bed" (VI, 16:186). In the

end, the language of religious devotion can only approximate and prepare the believer for physical death, which promises rebirth into a new life and, in Christianity, a new physicality. When each relationship, and especially the intimate relationship between a wife and husband, reflects the hope of that experience, sexual language employed for religious devotion has accomplished its purpose.

Epilogue:

On the Modern Implications of an Erotic Theology

Why this effort? What can we hope to gain by encouraging an understanding of the erotic theology of John Donne? The possibility that Christians will readopt the devotional language of their seventeenth-century forebears, language that happily understood God as lover as well as creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, seems quite small. Even smaller is the hope that such a re-articulation would do anything to eliminate the depth of bitterness, fear, and pain that people feel on either side of the great theological divides sparked by human sexuality. Indeed, I think very little opportunity exists for a new institutional understanding of religious experience in sexual terms. The church catholic strives to enshrine and encourage those things absolutely central to the faith, and must leave peripheral practices and concepts to progress quietly for those who find them beneficial or helpful.

However, this project convinces me of two important facts in relation to that understanding. Because one begets the other, I should first say that an institutional disavowal (or at best, silent approval) of this particularly sexualized expression of Christian faithfulness is in many ways desirable. Individual congregations, depending on their form of governance, are torn apart by efforts to redecorate the sanctuary or introduce contemporary music into the worship of the church. Christ's prayer for Christian unity seems, sadly, almost ironic in light of the current state of the universal church, and it would be a grave sin to arrogantly and self-righteously demand liturgical or devotional reforms that might exacerbate that woeful irony.

This disappointing condition does not mean that individual believers should compromise their principles and their comprehension of grace to preserve peace at all costs. The old joke runs

that Episcopalians will endure any amount of heresy to avoid schism, while Baptists will endure any amount of schism to avoid heresy. Apart from the kernel of truth at the foundation of that joke, the humor comes largely from the fact that both approaches are flawed. Easily the greatest challenge to living in community with a diverse group of people (and the church tends to exhibit a certain diversity) is navigating the tricky territory between establishing standards so fine that none may reasonably belong, and allowing such unbridled variety that there is no genuinely binding communal identity.

Religious expression that utilizes the very human and very physical language of sexuality promises to drive a wedge between those who find such an understanding helpful and those who find it heretical. Whether one blames the entertainment industry, Victorian prudery, commercial advertising, or human sinfulness, sexuality causes a lot of confusion and a lot of conflict. Therefore, my hope for a renewed understanding of the role and purpose of sexuality in religious life and in spiritual perception must begin with individuals. Donne's *Holy Sonnets* exhibit nothing if not an intensely introspective and personal bent. While many may take umbrage with an eroticized articulation of the meeting place between humans and the divine, others are yearning for a manifestation of God that draws upon, elucidates, and perfects the innumerable complexities of physical love. For these individuals, a deeper understanding of the long tradition of Christians using sexualized language to comprehend one element of their interaction with God will offer a new, more profoundly theological understanding of their personal and sexual lives. Knowledge of and familiarity with literature from the Song of Solomon, the works of medieval mystics such as Bernard of Clairvaux and Mechthild of Magdeburg, to seventeenth-century devotional poets, including (of course) John Donne, will awaken some people to a new understanding of God and of the people they love.

I do not consign this understanding to the periphery because it is illicit, or because it inaccurately understands the Christian faith. The metaphor of Christ as Bridegroom to the perfect Church, and of human relationships as prefiguring a divine order, date from the earliest works of the New Testament. But a renewed understanding must be developed personally and individually. While I vigorously challenge many of Richard Rambuss's central readings and conclusions in *Closet Devotions*, his understanding of the way "seventeenth-century devotional literature establishes...a metafigurally incorporated condition of inwardness within the individual Christian" (Rambuss 8) reminds us that these intensely sexualized devotional poems were not read in the liturgy but amidst the quiet of personal meditation and reflection. If the institution of the church, in centuries past, could accommodate a more explicitly sexual concept of the interaction between human beings and God, it could only be because individuals cultivated such an understanding in their own "closets," in their private prayers.

The poems of John Donne analyzed in this thesis reveal the difficulties associated with getting an erotic theology right. Sex is frightening, especially in a society that gives people few helpful tools to encounter and comprehend it. Questions of gender, gender roles, dominance, tenderness, will, submission, and pleasure, along with a few thousand others, must come into play. The ultimate difficulty of using eminently physical language to encounter an incarnate yet spiritual God often befuddles even a poet renowned for his ability to bring disparate ideas together. Donne's failures reveal the difficulties associated with an erotic theology. His successes, particularly the sublime conclusion to the Washington marriage sermon, reveal the unique benefits available through an erotic theology.

These challenges and triumphs also legitimize and encourage erotic theology. Donne's devotion is necessarily erotic because of the peculiar demands of Christianity. God possesses a

spiritual and a physical nature: at the Ascension, Christ dignifies and deifies human nature. Because there is no repudiation of the physical, the Christian finds himself constantly drawn to the place where the physical and the spiritual meet. This state, while impossible to precisely pin down, might legitimately be interpreted as marriage. Indeed, the institution of human marriage in its ideal form, a civil and religious contract with deep spiritual and physical implications, perfectly approximates the delicate balance Christian theology strives to express as it describes the nature of Jesus Christ. Marriage is an estate both fully human, consummated by the human action of sexual intercourse, but also fully divine, sanctioned by God even as the joining of the two people involved, within sight of their families and communities, has been established by God. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,"[62] but Christianity maintains that God became man, redeemed human nature, and reigns in a glorified body, a source of reasonable hope for all Christians.

This brings me to the second important fact that this project convinces me of: that an expression of Christian faith that utilizes sexuality and sexual terms must not remain on the periphery. It must begin there with, as I argue above, individuals who reclaim an historic and legitimate concept. And while the transition will undoubtedly be slow and painful, the wider church must benefit from that reclamation. The rich metaphorical and conceptual power of human sexuality, and more broadly of human love and friendship, must be harnessed to overcome some of the greatest challenges facing the church in her ultimate mission. Sexual language is but one way to communicate the message of redemption, renewal, and sanctification properly at the heart of Christianity. It is a way, however, that can uniquely encapsulate the spiritual and physical implications of the faith. Human love and sex properly demand degrees of openness difficult (or in some cases ridiculous) to convey in other physical experiences.

[62] John 4:24.

Most importantly, the vast multitude of feelings pleasant, shameful, biological, and emotional, called up by any discourse centering on sexuality would help create spiritual concepts of greater depth and potential than other, frankly less-interesting methods. Sexual language intrigues, implicates, and communicates on profoundly, almost ineffably human levels. John Donne exploits that understanding in many of his sermons. While the average congregant may not be ready to hear a "rhetorical orgasm" (as I call it in the first chapter) in the pulpit, he or she must strive to understand the real spiritual implications of his or her most intimate physical relationships, as well as what the church expects when proclaiming that "He will come again in glory."[63] An erotic theology can help on both counts, and can help in ways fundamentally comprehensible to all people.

I do not expect my hoped-for renewal of one entire branch of religious expression, if it were to happen, to eliminate the great ethical dilemmas the church faces in all her branches. Indeed, using sexual metaphors to understand our interaction with God can only make sex more significant, and perhaps more contentious. However, a revitalization of erotic language within the context of religious experience will force Christians to grapple, theologically, with the tremendously powerful force of sexual love. While all need not agree, all must struggle to grasp the implications of the fact that, as Donne says, "God is *Love,* and the *Holy Ghost* is amorous in his *Metaphors*" (VII, 2:526). Comprehension of that fact, I hope, will produce human beings who do not struggle to divorce their sexual lives from their spiritual, who understand the beautiful metaphorical sympathies between their personal and religious lives, and who are opened more profoundly to the strange, amorous power of grace.

[63] From the Nicene Creed.

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Appendix A:

The Poems of Chapter II
(In order of appearance)

AIRE AND ANGELS

Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
Before I knew thy face of name;
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame,
Angells affect us oft, and worship'd bee,
Still when, to where thou wert, I came,
Some lovely glorious nothing I did see.
But since my soule, whose child love is,
Takes limmes of flesh, and else could nothing doe,
More subtile than the parent is,
Love must not be, but take a body too,
And therefore what thou wert, and who,
I bid Love aske, and now
That it assume thy body, I allow,
And fixe it selfe in thy lip, eye, and brow.

Whilst thus to ballast love, I thought,
And so more steddily to have gone,
With wares which would sinke admiration,
I saw, I had loves pinnace overfraught,
Ev'ry thy haire for love to worke upon
Is much too much, some fitter must be sought;
For, nor in nothing, nor in things
Extreme, and scatt'ring bright, can love inhere;
Then as an Angell, face, and wings
Of aire, not pure as it, yet pure doth weare,
So thy love may be my loves spheare;
Just such disparitie
As is twixt Aire and Angells puritie,
'Twixt womens love, and mens will ever bee.

THE GOOD-MORROW

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the seaven sleepers den?
T'was so; But this, all pleasures fancies bee.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dreame of thee.

And now good morrow to our waking soules,
Which watch not one another out of feare;
For love, all love of other sights controules,
And makes one little roome, an every where.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let Maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne,
Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares,
And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest,
Where can we finde two better hemispheares
Without sharpe North, without declining West?
What ever dyes, was not mixt equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die.

THE EXTASIE

WHERE, like a pillow on a bed,
  A Pregnant banke swel'd up, to rest
The violets reclining head,
  Sat we two, one anothers best.
Our hands were firmely cimented
  With a fast balme, which thence did spring,
Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred
  Our eyes, upon one double string;
So to'entergraft our hands, as yet
  Was all the meanes to make us one,
And pictures in our eyes to get
  Was all our propagation.
As 'twixt two equall Armies, Fate
  Suspends uncertaine victorie,
Our soules, (which to advance their state,
  Were gone out,) hung 'twixt her, and mee.
And whil'st our soules negotiate there,
  Wee like sepulchrall statues lay;
All day, the same our postures were,
  And wee said nothing, all the day.
If any, so by love refin'd,
  That he soules language understood,
And by good love were growen all minde,
  Within convenient distance stood,
He (though he knew not which soule spake,
  Because both meant, both spake the same)
Might thence a new concoction take,
  And part farre purer then he came.
This Extasie doth unperplex
  (We said) and tell us what we love,
Wee see by this, it was not sexe,
  Wee see, we saw not what did move:
But as all severall soules containe
  Mixture of things, they know not what,
Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe againe,
  And makes both one, each this and that.
A single violet transplant,
  The strength, the colour, and the size,
(All which before was poore, and scant,)
  Redoubles still, and multiplies.
When love, with one another so
  Interinanimates two soules,
That abler soule, which thence doth flow,
  Defects of lonelinesse controules.
Wee then, who are this new soule, know,
  Of what we are compos'd, and made,
For, th'Atomies of which we grow,
  Are soules, whom no change can invade.
But O alas, so long, so farre
  Our bodies why doe wee forbeare?
They are ours, though they are not wee, Wee are
  The intelligences, they the spheare.
We owe them thankes, because they thus,
  Did us, to us, at first convay,
Yeelded their forces, sense, to us,
  Nor are drosse to us, but allay.
On man heavens influence workes not so,
  But that it first imprints the ayre,
Soe soule into the soule may flow,
  Though it to body first repaire.
As our blood labours to beget
  Spirits, as like soules as it can,
Because such fingers need to knit
  That subtile knot, which makes us man:
So must pure lovers soules descend
  T'affections, and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend,
  Else a great Prince in prison lies.
To'our bodies turne wee then, that so
  Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
  But yet the body is his booke.
And if some lover, such as wee,
  Have heard this dialogue of one,
Let him still marke us, he shall see
  Small change, when we'are to bodies gone.

EPITHALAMION MADE AT LINCOLNES INNE

The Sun-beames in the East are spred,
Leave, leave, faire Bride, your solitary bed,
No more shall you returne to it alone,
It nourseth sadnesse, and your bodies print,
Like to a grave, the yielding downe doth dint ;
You and your other you meet there anon;
Put forth, put forth, that warm balme-breathing thigh,
Which when next time you in these sheets wil smother,
There it must meet another,
Which never was, but must be, oft, more nigh.
Come glad from thence, goe gladder than you came ;
To day put on perfection, and a womans name.

Daughters of London, you which bee
Our Golden Mines, and furnish'd Treasurie,
You which are Angels, yet still bring with you
Thousands of Angels on your mariage daies,
Help with your presence and devise to praise
These rites, which also unto you grow due;
Conceitedly dresse her, and be assign'd,
By you, fit place for every flower and jewell
Make her for love fit fewell
As gay as Flora, and as rich as Inde
So may shee faire, rich, glad, and in nothing lame,
To day put on perfection, and a womans name.

And you frolique Patricians,
Sonnes of these Senators, wealths deep oceans,
Ye painted courtiers, barrels of other's wits,
Yee country men, who but your beasts love none,
Yee of those fellowships, whereof hee's one,
Of study and play made strange Hermaphrodits,
Here shine; This Bridegroom to the Temple bring.
Lo, in yon path which store of straw'd flowers graceth,
The sober virgin paceth;
Except my sight faile, 'tis no other thing;
Weep not nor blush, here is no griefe nor shame,
To day put on perfection, and a womans name.

Thy two-leav'd gates, fair Temple, unfold,
And these two in thy sacred bosome hold,
Till mystically joyn'd but one they bee;
Then may thy leane and hunger-starved wombe
Long time expect their bodies and their tomb,
Long after their owne parents fatten thee.
All elder claimes, and all cold barrennesse,
All yeelding to new loves bee far for ever,
Which might these two dissever,
All wayes all th'other may each one possesse;
For the best Bride, best worthy of praise and fame,
To day puts on perfection, and a womans name.

Oh winter dayes bring much delight,
Not for themselves, but for they soon bring night;
Other sweets wait thee than these diverse meats,
Other disports than dancing jollities,
Other love tricks than glancing with the eyes,
But that the Sun still in our halfe Spheare sweates;
Hee flies in winter, but he now stands still.
Yet shadowes turne; Noone point he hath

attain'd,
His steeds nill bee restrain'd,
But gallop lively downe the Westerne hill;
Thou shalt, when he hath run the worlds half frame,
To night put on perfection, and a womans name.

The amorous evening starre is rose,
Why then should not our amorous starre inclose
Her selfe in her wish'd bed? Release your strings
Musicians, and dancers take some truce
With these your pleasing labours, for great use
As much wearinesse as perfection brings;
You, and not only you, but all toyl'd beasts
Rest duly; at night all their toyles are dispensed;
But in their beds commenced
Are other labours, and more dainty feasts;
She goes a maid, who, lest she turne the same,
To night puts on perfection, and a womans name.

Thy virgins girdle now untie,
And in thy nuptiall bed (loves altar) lye
A pleasing sacrifice; now dispossesse
Thee of these chaines and robes, which were put on
T'adorne the day, not thee; for thou, alone,
Like vertue'and truth, art best in nakednesse;
This bed is onely to virginitie
A grave, but, to a better state, a cradle;
Till now thou wast but able
To be what now thou art; then that by thee
No more be said, *I may be*, but, *I am*,
To night put on perfection, and a womans name.

Even like a faithfull man content,
That this life for a better should be spent,
So, shee a mothers rich stile doth preferre,
And at the Bridegroomes wish'd approach doth lye,
Like an appointed lambe, when tenderly
The priest comes on his knees t'embowell her;
Now sleep or watch with more joy; and O light
Of heaven, to morrow rise thou hot, and early;
This Sun will love so dearely
Her rest, that long, long we shall want her sight;
Wonders are wrought, for shee which had no maime,
To night puts on perfection, and a womans name.

Appendix B:

The Poems of Chapter III
(In order of appearance)

AN EPITHALAMION, OR MARIAGE SONG
ON THE LADY ELIZABETH, AND COUNT PALATINE BEING MARRIED ON ST. VALENTINES DAY

I

Haile Bishop Valentine, whose day this is,
All the Aire is thy Diocis,
And all the chirping Choristers
And other birds are thy Parishioners,
Thou marryest every yeare
The Lirique Larke, and the grave whispering Dove,
The Sparrow that neglects his life for love,
The household Bird, with the red stomacher,
Thou mak'st the black bird speed as soone,
As doth the Goldfinch, or the Halcyon;
The husband cocke lookes out, and straight is sped,
And meets his wife, which brings her feather-bed.
This day more cheerfully than ever shine,
This day, which might enflame thy self, old Valentine.

II

Till now, Thou warmd'st with multiplying loves
Two larkes, two sparrowes, or two Doves,
All that is nothing unto this,
For thou this day couplest two Phœnixes;
Thou mak'st a Taper see
What the sunne never saw, and what the Arke
(Which was of foules, and beasts, the cage, and park,)
Did not containe, one bed containes, through Thee,
Two Phœnixes, whose joyned breasts
Are unto one another mutuall nests,
Where motion kindles such fires, as shall give
Yong Phœnixes, and yet the old shall live.
Whose love and courage never shall decline,
But make the whole year through, thy day, O Valentine.

III

Up then faire Phœnixes Bride, frustrate the Sunne,
Thy selfe from thine affection
Takest warmth enough, and from thine eye
All lesser birds will take their Jollitie.
Up, up, faire Bride, and call,
Thy starres from out their severall boxes, take
Thy Rubies, Pearls, and Diamonds forth, and make
Thy selfe a constellation, of them All,
And by their blazing, signifie,
That a Great Princess falls, but doth not die;
Bee thou a new starre, that to us portends
Ends of much wonder; And be Thou those ends.
Since thou dost this day in new glory shine,
May all men date Records, from this thy Valentine.

IV

Come forth, come forth, and as one glorious flame
Meeting Another, growes the same,
So meet thy Fredericke, and so
To an unseparable union growe.
Since separation
Falls not on such things as are infinite,

Nor things which are but one can disunite.
You'are twice inseparable, great, and one;
Goe then to where the Bishop staies,
To make you one, his way, which divers waies
Must be effected; and when all is past,
And that you'are one, by hearts and hands made fast,
You two have one way left, yourselves to'entwine,
Besides this Bishop's knot, or Bishop Valentine.

V

But O, what ailes the Sunne, that here he staies,
Longer to day, than other daies?
Staies he new light from these to get?
And finding here such store, is loth to set?
And why doe you two walk,
So slowly pac'd in this procession?
Is all your care but to be look'd upon,
And be to others spectacle, and talke?
The feast, with gluttonous delaies,
Is eaten, and too long their meat they praise,
The masquers come late, and I'thinke, will stay,
Like Fairies, till the Cock crow them away.
Alas, did not Antiquity assigne
A night, as well as day, to thee, O Valentine?

VI

They did, and night is come; and yet wee see
Formalities retarding thee.
What mean these Ladies, which (as though
They were to take a clock in peeces,) goe
So nicely about the Bride;
A Bride, before a good night could be said,
Should vanish from her cloathes, into her bed,
As Soules from bodies steale, and are not spy'd.
But now she is laid; What though shee bee?
Yet there are more delayes, For, where is he?
He comes, and passes through Spheare after Spheare,
First her sheetes, then her Armes, then any where.
Let not this day, then, but this night be thine,
Thy day was but the eve to this, O Valentine.

VII

Here lyes a shee Sunne, and a hee Moone here,
She gives the best light to his Spheare,
Or each is both, and all, and so
They unto one another nothing owe
And yet they doe, but are
So just and rich in that coyne which they pay,
That neither would, nor needs forbeare, nor stay;
Neither desires to be spar'd nor to spare,
They quickly pay their debt, and then
Take no acquittances, but pay again;
They pay, they give, they lend, and so let fall
No such occasion to be liberall.
More truth, more courage in these two do shine,
Than all thy turtles have, and sparrows, Valentine.

VIII

And by this act these two Phenixes
Nature againe restored is,
For since these two are two no more,
Ther's but one Phenix still, as was before.
Rest now at last, and wee
As Satyres watch the Sunnes uprise, will stay

Waiting, when your eyes opened, let out day,
Onely desir'd because your face wee see;
Others neare you shall whispering speake,
And wagers lay, at which side day will breake,
And win by'observing, then, whose hand it is
That opens first a curtaine, hers or his;
This will be tried to morrow after nine,
Till which houre, wee thy day enlarge, O Valentine.

SONNET XIV

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee,'and bend
Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.
I, like an usurpt towne, to'another due,
Labour to'admit you, but Oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.
Yet dearely'I love you,'and would be loved faine,
But am betroth'd unto your enemie:
Divorce mee,'untie, or breake that knot againe;
Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee.

SONNET XVIII

Show me deare Christ, thy spouse, so bright and clear.
What! is it She, which on the other shore
Goes richly painted? or which rob'd and tore
Laments and mournes in Germany and here?
Sleepes she a thousand, then peepes up one yeare?
Is she selfe truth and errs? now new, now outwore?
Doth she, and did she, and shall she evermore
On one, on seaven, or on no hill appeare?
Dwells she with us, or like adventuring knights
First travaile we to seeke and then make Love?
Betray kind husband thy spouse to our sights
And let myne amorous soule court thy mild Dove,
Who is most trew, and pleasing to thee, then
When she'is embrac'd and open to most men.

SONNET XVII

Since she whom I lov'd hath payd her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her Soule early into heaven ravished,
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is sett.
Here the admyring her my mind did whett
To seeke thee God; so streames do shew their head;
But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yet.
But why should I begg more Love, when as thou
Dost wooe my soule for hers; offring all thine:
And dost not only feare least I allow
My Love to Saints and Angels things divine,
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Least in the World. Fleshe, yea Devill put thee out.