(RE)PLACING JOHN DONNE IN THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY

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In 1937, after three novels recounting episodes from "[n]early six years" of Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Vane's courtship, Dorothy Sayers published *Busman's Honeymoon*, in which she shows us Lord Peter and Harriet married and on the threshold of sexual engagement.[1] Both Lord Peter and Harriet love, and love by means of, John Donne's poetry. In a diary entry in *Busman's*' first chapter, Peter's mother, the marvellous Honoria Lucasta, Dowager Duchess of Denver, writes "Peter has always been queer about Donne."[2] Late in the novel, Harriet reveals to Peter that before their marriage, she spent all the money she had made in a career writing mystery novels on her trousseau, and she was, therefore, reduced to writing "[t]hree five-thousand-word" short stories "at forty guineas each for the *Thrill Magazine*" in order to afford to buy Peter his premarital gift: "a very beautiful" autograph "letter from D. to a parisioner—Lady Somebody—about Divine and human love."[3] When he receives this gift from bride to groom, Peter tells his Mother that having tried to buy the letter himself and learning that "it had been sold," he had been "ridiculously angry" because he "wanted [it] for Harriet."[4] Sayers writes of Harriet's and Peter's love of Donne, and she also writes their love through Donne's poetry. When Harriet and Peter fall silent, sitting on a wooden seat in a chuchyard, *Busman's*' narrator wonders "[w]hether, left to themselves, [Harriet and Peter] would have succeeded in emerging from this speechless trance, and might not, in the manner of Donne's ecstatic couple, have remained like sepulchral statues in the same posture and saying nothing until nightfall."[5] This reference to Donne's poem "The Extasie" is only one of the many specific Donne references with which Sayers salts the Peter Wimsey-Harriet Vane relationship.

On their wedding night, Harriet and Peter kiss deeply and "at some point during the next five minutes" of foreplay, Harriet hears Peter "murmur, 'Not faint Canaries but ambrosial.'" Peter's Donne quotation, which the distracted Harriet tracks down "only . . . some

ten days later," comes from a Donne elegy, "Loves Progress," a poem explicitly about the act of intercourse between a man and a woman.[6] Nevertheless, "[n]ot faint Canaries but ambrosial" is a particularly queer reference for Sayers to insert into the Vane-Wimsey story. The line appears in "Loves Progress" as a description of the lips a man might kiss on his way to what the poem, in a coy and simultaneously brutal moment, calls "the Centrique part," the woman's vagina, the "part" that the poem's speaker believes is the only reason for a man to pursue a woman, the part apart from which a woman is worth nothing.[7] "Loves Progress" describes the routes a man might take to that "Centrique part," a place that the poem compares to the "pits and holes" in which men laid "their sacrificing coales" when they worshipped such gods as "Pluto" and "Cupid" (*E*, 28–36). "Loves Progress" may call the lips "Ambrosiall," but the poem also states, clearly, that though the lips "seem all" they are the origin of "Syrens songs" and the home of "The Remora" (*E*, 52–58), "The sucking-fish (*Echeneis remora*), believed by the ancients to have the power of staying the course of any ship to which it attached itself."[8] The poem's speaker advises men to pursue the vagina from the feet up rather than by way of the lips. After all, the poem states, women are useful and worthy of pursuit only because they have the one thing men do not have—the vagina—"that by which they," women, "are not they," men (*E*, 20). According to the speaker, men are deeply mistaken if they chase women because they have "Vertue," for they do not: "Makes virtue woman? Must I cool my blood / Till I both bee, and find one, wise and good? / May barren Angels love so" (*E*, 21–23). Men who are not "barren Angels" would do well to go directly after what they come to women for. To pursue a woman's vagina by means of her head and lips, the poem concludes, is to err as much as a man "who by the Clyster [an enema] gave the stomach meate" (*E*, 96). Any modern or postmodern reader's stomach turning yet?

We might productively wonder how Sayers could have used a line from this misogynistic screed dressed in glorious poetry during the lovemaking of her dream heterosexual couple—Peter Wimsey, the sensitive, intelligent, aristocratic detective, and Harriet Vane, the (almost) equally intelligent, scholarly, courageous writer. Through what deep misreading of Donne in the history of sexuality has this early-seventeenth-century poet become the apostle of modern heterosexuality? For Dorothy Sayers is by no means alone in seeing Donne this way. Although twentieth-century literary scholars have argued strenuously about Donne's poetry and his life, those scholars

are virtually united in seeing him as a lover of women, implicitly (since for most of the twentieth century this has gone without saying) a heterosexual; and in the late twentieth century a tenuous consensus seems to have formed about the relationship of Donne's poetry and life to sexuality. That consensus extends across a range of critical approaches. Simply put, John Donne, according to his critics, was a heterosexual man. One of the most astute of Donne's critics, Janel Mueller, writes about "the adult male sexuality" promoted in Donne's love poetry; and what she means by "adult male sexuality" is clear throughout her fine analysis of Donne's poetry within the context of the metaphysical poetic tradition.[9] She notes the "intense, nuanced subjectivities ascribed to [Donne's] male speakers and the sturdiness of their characterization as active heterosexuals."[10] Given her feminist perspective, Mueller celebrates Donne's orientation toward what she reads as sexual equality between men and women while, at the same time, she notes the drive in much of Donne's poetry to celebrate what she calls "male prerogative."[11] Sometime in the early 1990s, when the purport of Michel Foucault's work on the history of sexuality became clear within literary scholarship, critics grew leery of straight (the pun is intended) pronouncements about a transhistorically available heterosexual identity. Nevertheless, two more fine critics, Catherine Belsey and Richard Halpern, agree with Mueller's assessment of Donne's sexuality.[12] Both assert that, if Donne was not a subscribing heterosexual himself, at least he helped to found that identity. Belsey suggests that "desire . . . has its own political history, and Donne's poems in particular belong on the threshold of its modernity."[13] Halpern goes further, declaring that "it is from the ashes of [Ann and John Donne's] social death that the phoenix known as sexuality is born."[14] More recently, Benjamin Saunders writes slightly more cautiously than these other critics. He asserts that Donne's poetry "was written on the historical cusp of a transformation" from a medieval to a more modern "paradigm" of sexuality.[15] Still, in Saunders's theoretically informed analysis of a prefatory poem to the 1633 edition of Donne's poetry, it seems clear on which side of the divide Donne's explicitly sexual poetry belongs. If Donne did not initiate sexuality, his poetry reveals him as a heterosexual *avant la lettre*.

In this reading of Donne's oeuvre, I will take issue with this consensus. Not only will I suggest that Donne was not a heterosexual, I will also argue that, *pace* Belsey, Halpern, and Saunders, heterosexuality was not emergent in 1609 when Donne was writing his

poetry, or at least that it was not, at that point in time, any more emergent than it had been for the previous few hundred years and more. I will also contend that in order to make Donne a figure for heterosexuality or emergent heterosexuality these critics have had to argue against Donne's poetry and prose to an unjustifiable extent; in fact, their arguments might reveal the implicit New Critical standpoints of critics practicing long after the New Criticism is assumed to have died and been buried.[16] These critics are all sophisticated and learned scholars, as was Sayers. But unlike Sayers, these late-twentieth-century critics were trained and are practicing after the heyday of the New Criticism: among other theoretical paradigms in each case, Saunders's criticism is informed by deconstruction and new historicism, Halpern's by Marxism and psychoanalysis, Belsey's by feminism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction, and Mueller's by feminism. Despite their disparate trainings and orientations, all of these critics refuse to take Donne's own writing about his experiences with sex seriously. In addition, none of these critics is comfortable dealing with the virulent sexual misogyny that pervades Donne's oeuvre—Mueller is really the only one of these critics who acknowledges that aspect of Donne's poetry and prose, and she acknowledges it only to discount it as not Donne's reality. Most of these critics also refuse to take Donne's religious life seriously, or at least refuse to believe that his religious life conditioned his poetic portrayals of sex and women.[17]

The telling exception to the general neglect of Donne's sexual misogyny is Christopher Ricks, who in 1988 writes eloquently and despairingly about the misogyny in Donne's love poems, misogyny he calls Donne's "Postcoital sadness and revulsion." Significantly, Ricks sees that revulsion towards women as self-destructive on Donne's part. In Ricks's terms, the revelations in the poetry that sex is degrading and women are degraded are antithetical to the poems' "integrity." Ricks claims that Donne "is corrosively unfaithful to his poems."[18] Ricks is a brilliant reader of Donne, and unlike many of Donne's readers, Ricks does not shy from the hatred of women that he sees in the poetry. While most critics avoid the blatant disgust with women and lust that pervades the oeuvre, Ricks is willing to write about that disgust and to hate it. However, the way that Ricks frames Donne's misogyny reveals more about Ricks's own place in the history of sexuality than it does about Donne's. As we will see, the conviction that sexual desire is at the center of the self is a feature of modernity. Donne's disgust with sex can only be a denial of his true self if his true self is formed in sexual desire.

Rather than revealing him as an active heterosexual man, as a heterosexual *avant la lettre*, or as a proponent of a new system that would become heterosexuality, Donne's poetry and prose reveal him as a man living within an ideological system opposed to all the major tenets of what would become heterosexuality—a system wedded to the principles that women are naturally inferior to men and, therefore, naturally more sexually desirous (and unfaithful); that a man's relationship with God is primary, that his relationships with men are secondary, and that any sexual engagement with women runs a distant third; and that sexual desire is sinful, a worldly result of the original sin of our first parents. On the face of it, the claim that Donne was not a heterosexual may seem patently ridiculous. Donne obviously loved having sex with women. In some of his poems, his speakers sound like stereotypically sex-obsessed fraternity brothers, in others like the sensitive men of *Cosmopolitan* magazine dreams, and in others like Larry Flynt of *Hustler* fame.[19] Donne sacrificed his career to elope with a woman he loved. How could such a man not be a heterosexual? The answer to that question is clear for many generations of Donne critics—he looks like one, so he is. This implicit understanding of his sexuality has been unquestioned since his revival as a major love poet in the early twentieth century. The explicit answer more recently has been, as I have shown, the same: he looks like a heterosexual, so he either is one or he anticipates or even produces modern heterosexuality. My answer will be very different because it takes into account the history of sexuality in a way that is only flirted with by the astute critics I have already mentioned. These critics might nod to the idea that sexuality and sexual identity have histories, but they do so only to suggest, finally, that because Donne looks so much like a modern heterosexual, he must be part of the foundation of heterosexuality. I would argue that, despite the fact that Donne's sexual practices and the way he represents sex resemble modern sexual practices and the way sex might be represented today, his ways of understanding and representing sexual practices differentiate him utterly from modern heterosexuality.

II. "SEXUALITY" HAS A HISTORY

In his seminal book on the history of sexuality, David Halperin offers, against the notion of a transhistorical and transcultural notion of sexual identity, the example of "the New Guinea tribesman and warrior who from the ages of eight to fifteen has been orally

inseminated on a daily basis by older youths, and who, after years of orally inseminating his juniors, will be married to an adult woman and have children of his own." Citing this example among others, Halperin asks if this warrior "share[s] *the same sexuality* with the modern homosexual."[20] We can recast Halperin's question, as his own work might lead us to do, in relation to Donne as a heterosexual.[21] Donne, according to himself, wasted his youth in the very pleasurable pursuit of sex with women. At the same time, he was involved in deep love relationships with male friends until a profligate pursuit of one woman—Ann More, who became his wife—exiled him, for a time, from the circles of male friendship that constituted his life. He consoled himself with his marital partner, but he deemed that consolation inadequate on all counts. Readmitted to the circle of men, he repented his earlier sinful nature and repudiated his wasted youth. Throughout his life, he saw women as over-sexed and naturally unfaithful. Did John Donne "share *the same sexuality* with the modern" heterosexual? When we align him with heterosexuality we make a mistake of category. Arnold Davidson suggests that

> [c]hastity and virginity are moral categories denoting a relation between the will and the flesh; they are not categories of sexuality. Although we tend to read back our own categories of sexuality into older moral categories, partly because it is so difficult to distinguish them precisely, it is crucial . . . that we separate the two. Blurring the two kinds of categories leads to epistemological and conceptual lack of differentiation, and results in the historiographical infection that the great French historian of science Georges Canguilhem has called the "virus of the precursor." We perpetually look for precursors to our categories of sexuality in essentially different domains, producing anachronisms at best and unintelligibility at worst.[22]

According to Davidson, the modern system of sexuality partakes of what he calls "the psychiatric style of reasoning," under the reign of which people understand themselves as sexual subjects. Heterosexuality (and its cohort homosexuality) posit "sexuality as a constituitive principle of the self."[23] Depicting Donne's experiences with sex, which he understands in terms of moral categories, according to our conception of heterosexuality, which we understand in terms of psychology, has a number of destructive consequences when we assess Donne's poetry, prose, and life.

To begin with, we mistake as constitutive of the self the very experiences that Donne categorizes as corrosive to the soul. We also

discount everything Donne says about his own life and experiences and everything that his contemporaries said was true about his life and experiences as somehow inadequate or untrue to the self we have created for him under the influence of our "psychiatric style of reasoning." In other words, since we, as moderns, believe that sexuality is constitutive of the self, we feel justified in dismissing Donne's own categorization of his experience of sex as corrosive to the soul.[24] We either completely dismiss Donne's own words as denying the truth of Donne's self, or we consider only the evidence that can be persuasively read for the case that Donne constitutes his self in (hetero)sex. At best this is circular reasoning. More importantly, this way of reading Donne, in Davidson's words, produces "unintelligibility." Recent work on religion in Donne's England reminds us forcefully that divines such as Donne were immersed in both "ancient culture" and the quarrels and consensuses that made up "European Christianity."[25] How are we justified in writing about Donne as if he were instead studying Freud? Donne's writings show him as understanding the relationships between men and between men and women in ways that are quite foreign to a Freudian or Lacanian or psychiatric world. As Debora Shuger suggests, "In Renaissance texts the movement of eros is inward and down, so that sexuality becomes an inflection of erotic longing, not its origin or essence, whereas in modern thought, which privileges genital sexuality, movement takes place outward and up via cathexis and sublimation."[26] However, none of this scholarship is pertinent if we see the self constituted in sexuality, in which case everything that might trouble this account of the self is detritus or a simple denial of what we know to be the truth of the self.[27] In Donne's case, under the (covert in some cases) influence of the "psychiatric style of reasoning," "the virus of the precursor" has replicated into a full-blown and deadly disease.

"Wait!" I can hear Donne critics and lovers shouting, "How can you ignore (deny) Donne's frank admission of his (hetero)sexual pleasure, his speakers' attempts to separate sex from the religious context, his rewriting of religious categories as sexual categories, his life?!" Davidson warns of the difficulty of distinguishing "older moral categories" from "our own categories of sexuality." Donne's oeuvre is a wonderful case in point for that caution. Donne's admission of his own sexual pleasure with women is easily confused with modern heterosexuality. However, that admission is only evidence that Donne is heterosexual if we forget that from time immemorial people have

connected sex with pleasure. Thomas Aquinas, classifying lust as a contrary vice to temperance, explains that "lust applies chiefly to venereal pleasures, which more than anything else work the greatest havoc in a man's mind."[28] Well aware that lust is pleasurable, Aquinas classifies sexual lust as the most disturbing and powerful of the pleasures. Nevertheless, Aquinas's classificatory system is far from modern: he categorizes what he calls "venereal pleasures" as only one of the types of lust; and his concern is the difficulties it, among the other sorts of lust, causes for men's minds, minds that should be directed to God. Donne, who uses Aquinas's classifications, is much closer to Aquinas's "moral" understanding of lust than he is to a modern understanding, in which lust overwhelmingly means sexual desire and in which lust, now renamed sexual satisfaction, is integral to a good life. In order to distinguish between earlier depictions of sexual pleasure and modern depictions of sexual pleasure, we must move beyond pointing to pleasure as some indication of modernity.

III. SEX AND SIN

Most of Donne's critics are embedded in a twentieth-century approach to Donne that assumes that the self is constituted in sexual desire and that separates, as he could not have, the "sacred" from the "secular."[29] While Ricks, Belsey, and Halpern simply ignore Donne's spirituality as (implicitly) irrelevant to the question of sex and desire in Donne's poetry, Saunders, to his credit, at least addresses the possibility that the two realms might not be separate for Donne. In his reading of one evocative line in Thomas Browne's commendatory poem, Saunders, unlike these other critics, acknowledges that "sexual desire cannot be conceived apart from the forms of its inscription," which in Donne's case were spiritual.[30] He argues that Browne's poem claims that despite the presence of "looser" poems in the 1633 edition of Donne's poetry, "Donne really is a model of Christian virtue after all. It is only because of Donne's evident imperfections that Browne can represent Donne as even potentially perfectible. In short, Donne might be a saint precisely and only because he makes no attempt to disguise his essentially sinful nature."[31] However, if Browne intended to promote Donne's poetry this way in 1633, Donne himself, on the evidence of his poetry and prose, was not nearly so sure that his sinful sexual nature might ensure his election as a Calvinist saint.

Izaak Walton, Donne's seventeenth-century biographer, compares him to Augustine: "for, I think, none was so like him before his

Conversion: none so like St. *Ambrose* after it: and if his youth had the infirmitie of the one, his age had the excellencies of the other, the learning and holiness of both."[32] St. Ambrose, Augustine's teacher and confessor, was renowned for his sermons and also for his promotion of virginity. Walton sees Donne's life as modeled after Augustine's, and it seems evident from Donne's own poetry and prose that he saw Augustine's youthful experiences with sex and his subsequent renunciation of desire as analagous to his own. In book 2 of the *Confessions*, Augustine writes:

> I collect my self out of that broken state in which my very being was torn asunder because I was turned away from Thee, the One, and wasted myself upon the many. Arrived now at adolescence I burned for all the satisfactions of hell, and I ran to the animal in a succession of dark lusts: *my beauty consumed away*, and I stank in Thine eyes, yet was pleasing in my own and anxious to please the eyes of men.[33]

Perhaps consciously modeling his own persona after Augustine's, in *Essays in Divinity* Donne thanks God for delivering him "from the Egypt of lust, by confining [his] affections."[34] In his funerary poem for Lord Harrington, the Countess of Bedford's brother, Donne admires Harrington for fighting "with [his] owne affections, with the heate of youths desires" and for providing an example from his own life against the "lust and ignorance of youth."[35] Throughout his writings later in life, Donne rails against man's sinful nature and excoriates his own forays into sin. He prays that by confessing his earlier sinful relations with women he will save his soul.

The "psychiatric style of reasoning" finds this spiritual self-production so alien that it ignores or dismisses Donne's spirituality altogether. Therefore, pronouncements about Donne's essential devotion to sexual pleasure must—in order not to founder on what looks too odd or upsetting—confine themselves to the handful of frequently anthologized songs and sonnets: "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," "The Exstasie," "The Relique," "The Flea," "The Sunne Rising," and "The Good-morrow." This reading of a very limited canon is, of course, an entirely suspect critical move, since these are only six poems from a copious oeuvre of poetry and prose.[36] Meanwhile, even if we do confine our analysis of how sex/love is represented to the songs and sonnets—the location of these "love poems"—we find a very distinct, religiously motivated ambivalence about sex with women, an ambivalence that pervades Donne's literary endeavors. We find, in

addition, sex described using the vocabulary that Davidson would term moral.[37] For instance, in "The Flea" (the poem that opens the 1635 *Songs and Sonnets*), the speaker begs a woman not to consider the act of intercourse "A sinne, or shame, or losse of maidenhead" because a flea bite, which, like sex, would mingle the two lovers' blood, could not be classified as sinful (*E*, 6). We may, and do, enjoy this conceit today as a clever pseudo-argument that might work to convince a woman to have intercourse, but we can only classify "The Flea" as about modern heterosexuality if we ignore its vocabulary, or, rather, if we pretend that its vocabulary is ours. Donne's speaker urges the woman to see their potential sex act as not sinful, but his attempt to persuade her only functions if "sinne," "shame," and "maidenhead" are the terms through which sex is understood.

Michael Warner argues forcefully that we live today with what he calls "straight culture's politics of shame." Although Warner suggests that we have inherited our "politics of shame" from the Middle Ages, the shame attached to sexuality in our culture is not identical to the shame associated with sex in the English Renaissance.[38] Donne and his culture subscribed to Augustinian shame, in which "[c]arnal concupiscence is seen as a violation of the order of nature, and the shame of sexuality is a consequence of the soul's shame at the fact that the body, which by its nature is inferior and subject to it, resists its authority."[39] This is Donne's world, as his poetry and prose attest. For example, in the Holy Sonnet "Since she whome I lovd," Donne recognizes God's rightful "doubt / Least the World, fleshe, yea Devill putt [Him] out.[40] The "fleshe," in this poem, is the antithesis of God's will. A 1618 sermon finds Donne speculating on the moment in which God visits Adam and Eve's sin upon all babies, "conceived in sin": "the union of this soul and body is so accompanied with God's malediction for our first transgression, that in the instant of that union in life, as certainly as that body must die, so certainly the whole man must be guilty of original sin."[41] The body represents death and man's sinful nature, born with him. Since we moderns generally conceive of the body as expressing or violating our personality (conscious and unconscious) rather than as inherently inferior to the soul, we conceive of shame and sexuality very differently from how Donne does.[42] If we have retained shame as a way to deal with sex, much of modern culture—or at least the culture of the academy—has discarded the categories of "sin," "maidenhead," and "the soul" as the categories through which sex can be thought.

IV. SEX AND BLOOD

Like all serious ideological shifts, the move to a modern world that thinks sex through personality was a massively uneven process. Certainly many twenty-first-century Americans think about sex through "sin" and "maidenhead" (see the sex education programs that teach only abstinence, for example).[43] However, we can see in "The Flea" that for Donne 1) there are no alternative ways of conceiving of sex, as there are, clearly, in modern America—for example, repression, good sex, bad sex, enough sex, not enough sex; and 2) the poem's invocation of "sinne," "shame," and "maidenhead" resides in a context of blood that is thoroughly foreign to a post-Victorian secular or religious context. Michel Foucault sums up the argument of the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* by suggesting that the premodern Western world was "A society of blood . . . where power spoke *through* blood . . . blood was *a reality with a symbolic function*. We, on the other hand, are in a society of 'sex,' or rather a society 'with a sexuality': the mechanisms of power are addressed to the body, to life, to what causes it to proliferate, to what reinforces the species, its stamina, its ability to dominate, or its capacity for being used." According to Foucault the premodern world believed in "the honor of war" and "the triumph of death" rather than in the intrinsic value of human life—this latter value is the mark of a modern culture which has "sexuality" as an identity category.[44] Donne's writings are devoted to the triumph of God over death or, alternatively, to a vision of life devoted to sin, life that will lead to death's triumph. If we still live, as Warner suggests, in a society with the "politics of shame," we no longer live in a society where power speaks through blood, where a man founds his identity in his bloodline, and where sex has grave consequences for bloodlines and for the soul. In addition, and perhaps in consequence, shame over sexuality in our culture is connected to two aspects of modernity: the public/private division and the strict and structuring division between homosexuality and heterosexuality. Neither of these divisions existed in Donne's England.[45]

"The Flea," of course, is a poem about blood, about how the act of sex can be troped, with perhaps desirous results for the speaker, as an act of blood-letting. The speaker compares his beloved's killing of the flea, whose insect body contains the lovers' mingled blood, to a Christian martyrdom. Donne's is a premodern vocabulary of blood and of death, not a modern sexual vocabulary of life.[46] In "The Flea,"

Donne's speaker insists that his potential act of intercourse is a little death: "use make thee apt to kill mee" (*E*, 16). This is only one of Donne's allusions throughout his poetry to a cosmology in which male sexual expenditure is equivalent to death, in which each ejaculation moves a man closer to death. Donne refers directly to this medical doctrine in a poem called "Farewell to Love": "since each such Act, they say, / Diminisheth the length of life a day" (*E*, 24–25). Donne's satirical unfinished poem "The Progresse of the Soule" also alludes to this small death: "Man all at once was there by woman slaine, / And one by one we'are here slaine o'er againe / By them."[47] In "An Anatomy of the World," the first of the anniversary poems Donne wrote commemorating Elizabeth Drury's death, the speaker returns to the theme that men's approach to death by means of sexual expenditure is connected with Eve's death-dealing embrace of Satan:

> One woman at one blow, then kill'd us all,
> And singly, one by one, they kill us now.
> We doe delightfully our selves allow
> To that consumption; and profusely blinde,
> Wee kill our selves to propogate our kinde.[48]

These references cross the genres of Donne's oeuvre: his satire, his longer patronage poetry, his love poems, all of which belong to Foucault's earlier world of blood.[49] In "The Flea," killing the flea is like a martyrdom, and sex is a bloody business.

Like "The Flea," "The Good-morrow" (which opens the 1633 *Songs and Sonnets*) focuses on sex and death. In the poem's third stanza, Donne's speaker claims, conditionally, that he and his addressee—his beloved—love one another "equally" and, therefore, cannot die: "What ever dyes," he argues, "was not mixt equally; / If our two loves be one, or, thou and I / Love so alike, that none doe slaken, none can die" (*E*, 19–21). This description of mixture depends on alchemical doctrine, a doctrine born in a culture obsessed with death, decay, and the transcendence of death: the equality of elements in an alchemical mixture was proved when the resulting potion did not decay. But in Donne's world alchemy was a running joke, practiced and simultaneously known as a figment of the desiring imagination.[50] Alchemy was an at-times laughable fiction practiced in a culture preoccupied with death. And like so many of Donne's other poems, "The Good-morrow" plays on the die/orgasm pun. Donne embeds the sexual joke in the line "Love so alike, that none doe slaken, none can die." Of course, as Donne's speaker hints, in the act,

a man's penis and desire do "slaken"; that slakening comes with orgasm, in which the man "dies." In the poem's exalted register, the speaker claims a potential transcendance of death, although he figures that transcendence in terms of alchemy, a laughable doctrine for deluded dreamers; in the poem's embedded humor, he acknowledges the inevitability of the little death.

As Sayers's use of the "The Extasie" to imagine Harriet and Peter's love reverie suggests, that poem is another favorite for proponents of Donne's sexual modernity despite its vocabulary of blood and death. "The Extasie" begins with a picture of the lovers on a riverbank of violets lying "like sepulchrall statues" (*E*, 18). The poem imagines perfect love as the image of death—the monument to dead bodies; the lovers are still, as if they are no longer animate. In that same poem, when the speaker tries to imagine what it might mean for the perfect soul of lovers, made one in their love, to engage physically, he reaches for humoral medicine—a theory of blood:

> 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.
> (*E*, 59–64)

In this medical simile, what links the soul to the body is a production of the blood—"[s]pirits." Donne understands the body and its relationship to sex not as the nineteenth century would—as a container of the personality formed in sexuality, a container that might inadvertently manifest the pressures of that sexual nature—but rather as a material thing linked to the immaterial soul by the blood's vapors. That body matters in a way quite different from the way that it would come to matter in a world of psychology and biology. It matters as the case of the soul, "the booke" by means of which the soul might be read (*E*, 72).

"The Flea," "The Good-morrow," "The Extasie," and Donne's other love poems use a religious vocabulary to speak of sex. In "The Flea," along with the references to "sinne" and "shame," the lovers' bloods are "cloysterd" in the flea's body, and the beloved's killing of the flea resembles the martyrdom of the innocent (*E*, 5, 20). The speaker of "The Good-morrow" imagines that until the lovers "lov'd"

they "snorted . . . in the "seaven sleepers den" (*E*, 2, 4); thus they awoke to the shock of their exalted love just as the persecuted Ephesians who slept for two centuries awoke to the shock of a fully Christian world. The good morning of "The Good-morrow" is addressed by the speaker to "our waking soules" (*E*, 8). "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" speaks of "Our two soules therefore, which are one" (*E*, 21). In "The Extasie" the speaker depicts two lovers whose souls speak as one. In much of Donne's poetry, sex is unimaginable in other than religious terms. As Claire McEachern suggests, religion "*was* culture in early modern England."[51] Michael Schoenfeldt argues that Donne "finds male erotic desire and devotional longing to exist in perpetual and excruciating tension."[52] What I am suggesting, in contrast, is that in Donne's world there were no separate realms of desire and devotion that could exist in tension with one another. Rather, as Saunders says, desire was "ultimately derivative of and secondary to spiritual experiences and vocabulary."[53] Donne is not jettisoning religion to form a new realm of sexuality; rather he is imagining his speakers' sexual experiences in his culture's religious terms.

Rather than seeing Donne's poetry as beginning to divorce itself from what Saunders sees as "an earlier discursive moment" in the history of sexuality, if we take into account the vocabulary Donne uses to write about sex in even the poems that seem most congenial to a modern understanding of sex, we can see how deeply embedded Donne's poetry is in what Foucault identifies as the "society of blood."[54] That vocabulary appears in the conditional last lines of "The Good-morrow." The speaker says "*If* our two loves be one, *or*, thou and I / Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die" (*E*, 20–21, my emphasis). The conditional conjunctions in these lines mark this vision of equal love as fantasy. That fantasy governs the poem, but even though it is beautiful (perhaps especially to modern critics), for Donne's speaker it is always a fantasy. The pun on "die" undercuts that vision of equal love, and the "If" and "or [if]" expose it as fantasy even while they sustain the fantasy. Neither lover will die, and their love for one another will not "slacken," grow weaker, only "if" their loves are one—together and equal—"or [if]" they love each other "alike"—with like measure, in compatible ways. Of course, as the poem suggests, any of these conditions is impossible.

That fantasy of equal love between a man and woman is intensely congenial to modern critics. That fantasy permits Sayers to believe that Donne's poetry actually describes what her Peter Wimsey feels for her Harriet Vane, even though that relationship partakes of a modern universe of love and heterosexuality that Donne could never have imagined.[55] That fantasy of equal love undergirds the modern fantasy of the heterosexual Donne, perhaps because critics intuit, even if they do not think about the issue consciously, that if Donne did not believe in equal love, then the picture that his poems create of sexual relations between men and women could not be modern—could not be the love between men and women that critics themselves fantasize about. But although Donne entertains male-female equality explicitly as a fantasy in some instances, his oeuvre as a whole points in quite another direction, toward the world conceived against the sinful body, the world conceived only as a pale reflection of God, the world conceived in hierarchy and inequality; even poems such as "the Good-morrow" entertain the fantasy of equal love between men and women conditionally, as if Donne is determined that it not be taken seriously. Women, Donne's speakers insist, cannot love equally with men. Women are categorically inconstant. They are the picture of inconstancy, the earthly manifestation of the sin of venereal lust, a sin, by definition, prodigious and restless.[56]

Unlike Donnean pronouncements on the perfection and equality of women, which seldom occur (and are frequently qualified), pronouncements about women's treasonous nature and their inabilities pervade the poetry.[57] In the poem "Womans Constancy," Donne's speaker wonders how the woman who has loved him "one whole day" will justify her inevitable inconstancy, since inconstancy is natural to all women (*E*, 1). Men's desires, the speaker of "Loves Alchymie" claims, often deceive them into thinking that women have intelligence:

> That loving wretch that sweares,
> 'Tis not the bodies marry, but the mindes,
> Which he in her Angelique findes,
> Would sweare as justly, that he heares,
> In that dayes rude hoarse minstralsey, the spheares.
> Hope not for minde in women; at their best
> Sweetnesse and wit, they'are but *Mummy*, possest.
> (*E*, 18–24)

Women, this speaker insists, are all bodies and, therefore, all death, despite the desires of men who would see angels when they see women. Preserved dead bodies, perhaps animated by "Sweetnesse and wit," women lack the "mindes" that might make them immortal. Love for women, this poem claims, is a "vaine Bubles shadow," hardly worth paying for with men's "ease," "thrift," "honor," and "day[s]" (*E*, 13–14). This is a poem from Foucault's premodern world with its obsession with death, its concern with honor as the essence of male identity, and its status hierarchies.[58] The speaker of "Loves Alchymie" scorns male love for women because that sort of love is made ridiculous when his "man / Can be as happy'as [he] can" (*E*, 15–16). The modern world tells men that (hetero)sexual satisfaction will prove their manhood. In addition to disdaining women because they lack minds, Donne's speaker disdains men's desire for women precisely because such desire lowers the speaker to a state of equality with his "man," his servant, who should be, by definition, his inferior.

In "The Blossome," Donne creates a Petrarchan speaker with a heart reluctant to leave his disdainful beloved; the speaker permits his heart to stay only if it understands the condition of women:

> A naked thinking heart, that makes no show,
> Is to a woman, but a kinde of Ghost;
> . . . . . .
> Practice may make her know some other part,
> But take my word, shee doth not know a Heart.
> (*E*, 27–32)

Women can learn to know and love the penis, but they will never know men's hearts. In this poem, the man's heart is unprotected, naked, and exposed. At the same time, it "makes no show" in the world; it offers nothing worldly, no gain that might attract the presumably grasping woman. Thus the woman, if she sees the man's heart, sees it only as a dead thing, with no effectiveness and no effect on her.

Another of the songs states the case against women bluntly: the speaker of "The Primrose" concedes women's character: "Since there must reside / Falshood in woman, I could more abide, / She were by art, then Nature falsify'd" (*E*, 18–20). Women are naturally false—a woman created true in nature would be monstrous, although one could countenance a woman made perfect by art (makeup). Women's falsehood and inferiority are thematically central throughout the poetry, in poems which have discernable characters as speakers—

such as the Petrarchan lover of "The Blossome"—and in poems where we can only with difficulty separate the speaker's voice from Donne's own voice.

"A Valediction: of my Name in the Window" conceivably addresses the woman who would become Ann Donne: Ann More; and it, like these other poems, manifests a deep distrust of women's constancy. The poem seems to play on the coincidence of John Donne's and Ann More's family names.[59] John, like Ann, was a More—his mother was the grandaughter of Sir Thomas More's sister, Elizabeth Rastell. In the second stanza of "A Valediction: of my Name in the Window," the speaker reflects on the properties of a window upon which he has carved his name:

> 'Tis much that Glasse should bee
> As all confessing, and through-shine as I,
> 'Tis more, that it shewes thee to thee,
> And cleare reflects thee to thine eye.
> But all such rules, loves magique can undoe,
> Here you see mee, and I am you.
>
> (*E*, 7–12)

The window, like love, has magical properties. Like the lover, it confesses "all," and it is "through-shine": one can see through it. The poem implies that lovers are transparent by "rule"—their love obvious to all. The glass, however, is "more" than "all confessing" and "through-shine." The name that the speaker has engraved upon it "shewes thee to thee." If that name is "More" and if Ann More looks at the window, then the window acts doubly like a mirror, reflecting Ann's face and showing her name (and Donne's name) to her. Their love is magical because it transcends glass's everyday reflective quality, glass's ability to reflect a person's face back to herself. This glass, engraved with the evidence of Donne/More's love, lets Ann see Donne when she sees herself. "Loves magique" will also transform Ann More into Ann Donne, once again making their names identical. But if "A Valediction: of my Name in the Window" is a love poem to Donne's future spouse, it is also yet another meditation on women's sexual dishonesty. Donne/More has carved his/her name upon the glass in an impossible effort to ensure his beloved's "firmnesse" (*E*, 2). But she, a woman, cannot be firm. In the poem's tenth stanza, the speaker postulates "an overt act" of "treason" by his beloved (*E*, 55–56); she will, inevitably, write to another lover. The speaker begs that in the act of "superscribing" her name on the letter she writes to her

lover, she would see Donne's name, and though she intends to write to his rival, she will unconsciously write to Donne (*E*, 57–60). Even in this poem, which seems so intimately about Donne and his chosen wife, the speaker assumes that his beloved will stray; such is the condition of women.

Donne uses the adjective "through-shine" again in a verse epistle addressed explicitly to his important patron Lucy, Countess of Bedford. Donne depended on the Countess for his court fortunes; and his poetic praise of her, as well as his praise of Elizabeth Stanley, Countess of Huntingdon, demonstrates that Donne's (commonplace) low opinion of women's sexual virtue extends well beyond that opinion's inscription in love poetry that assumes women's sexual escapades. In the verse epistle, "Madam, Reason is our Soules left hand," Donne calls Lucy "The first good Angell, since the worlds frame stood, / That ever did in womans shape appeare" (*S*, 31–32). The Countess's perfection stands out since Angelic nature never appeared before in a woman's body. Another epistle addressed to the Countess ("T'Have written then") claims that her virtue redeems her sex from its hell as it redeems the court that she frequents: "Your (or you) vertue two vast uses serves, / It ransomes one sex, and one Court preserves" (*S*, 25–26). Women, then, should thank the Countess for redeeming their entire sex, otherwise condemned because of its essential depravity. Another poem, written for the Countess of Huntingdon ("Man to Gods image"), praises her to the sky, despite her condition as a woman. Donne pretends in the poem to worry about the fate of virtue because it has sunk so low as to show itself in a woman:

> If the worlds age, and death be argu'd well
> By the Sunnes fall, which now towards earth doth bend,
> Then we might feare that vertue, since she fell
> So low as woman, should be neare her end.
>
> (*S*, 17–20)

The sun setting might presage the world's end; so virtue, found on earth in the Countess, and therefore sunk to the level of woman, may be near its death. Of course these abuses of women as a group are conventional in the English Renaissance; what is so interesting is that Donne chooses to put these conventional slurs on women's virtue into his praise poetry directed toward women. We can glean from his choice that Donne and his contemporaries took women's lack of virtue for granted.

Critics may know this fact about sexual misogyny in Donne's England, but because of Donne's twentieth-century reputation as a love poet and, therefore, a heterosexual man, critics feel that they must deny it as Donne's truth, the truth of Donne's "self." Although I could adduce many, many more examples of Donne's (speakers') sexual misogyny from the poetry, an example of how that poetry has been dealt with by one of Donne's more famous readers will serve to illustrate this dynamic in Donne criticism. The New Critics and the English critics associated with them adored Donne's poetry for its ambiguity and its paradoxes, two staples of New Critical analyses.[60] In his monumental *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (originally published in 1930), William Empson writes at length about the Donne poem "A Valediction: of weeping," which, as Empson suggests, "is shot through with a suspicion" that the woman to whom he writes "will be unfaithful to him" when he leaves her. Following this comment on the poem, Empson argues that "[t]hose critics who say the poem is sincere, by the way, and therefore must have been written to poor Anne, know not what they do."[61] Empson is distressed that critics could believe that Donne addresses the poem to Ann and simultaneously take the sexual suspicion in the poem seriously. To Empson, such critics sully Donne's love for his wife. Years after Empson published his comment, Helen Gardner reprinted the essay with a note to Empson's comment: "Professor Empson asks me to add here that he now thinks that 'the poem may have been written to Donne's wife, because the ironies are not against the woman addressed but against his own previous uses of the fantastic argument.'"[62] In 1947, Empson added a note to a further interpretation of the poem that reads, "I doubt now whether Donne would have minded leaving these conceivable implications lying about, even if the poem were in fact written for his wife. He might well have feared that she would throw up her reckless marriage."[63] Clearly seeing that "A Valediction: of weeping" entertains the possibility of the beloved's unfaithfulness, Empson at first dismisses the possibility that it might be addressed to Ann More—this despite the poem's insistent wordplay on the word "more." Later, Empson turns Donne's distrust of women around, reading it as Donne's reflection on his own poetic conceits rather than on women's wavering nature. Finally, Empson deflects the possibility that Donne might seriously distrust all women, by speculating that Donne had a particular reason to fear that Ann might regret leaving her family comforts for Donne. Empson and most of the critics who follow him refuse to admit that Donne is absolutely

uncritical of a social system that rests on women's fundamental inequality. As Donne asserts in a 1617 sermon at Paul's Cross, "The sphere of [men's] loves is sublunary, upon things [women] naturally inferior to ourselves."[64]

VI. MEN'S WORLDS: "PLEASURE AND BUSINESS"

In the poem "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward," Donne's speaker regrets that his soul tends to move away from its "Saviour" and towards "Pleasure or businesse."[65] Likewise, in a 1608 letter to Sir Henry Goodyer, Donne contends that he would be a sinner even were he "able to husband all [his] time so thriftily, as not only not to wound [his] soul in any minute by actual sin, but not to rob and cozen her by giving any part to pleasure or business."[66] Unlike the (now separate) realms of religion and sex which were not separate for Donne, the realms of business and pleasure were separable—indeed they were antithetical, as the "or"s in Donne's phrase in both the poem and the letter indicate.[67] Halpern wants to claim that Donne helps to create modern heterosexuality because the erotic space he creates in his love poetry is "a social sphere or domain to which the subject tries to repair in a paradoxical and ultimately self-frustrating attempt to escape the effects of social differentiation."[68] In other words, Halpern claims that Donne's love poems laud and so help to validate the "private" love between a man and a woman over against the public world from which Donne, by marrying Ann More, forcibly exiled himself. However, the separation of "business" (the public world of men) and "pleasure" (the private world of male-female sex) is not original to Donne, nor is it a feature of some transcendental, transhistorical heterosexuality, unless we ignore the history of sexuality so much as to make the ancients share our sexual system. Aeneas must leave his idyll with Dido to pursue his political destiny. In the classical world, and throughout Renaissance representation, men are distracted from the business of the world by their sexual trysts and must reject sex and women in order to attend to what really matters—the world of men and men's affairs.[69]

Donne's speaker in "The Sunne Rising" dismisses the business half of the couple "business or pleasure," relegating business to the world apart from the world of sexual pleasure created in his bed. Critics invested in Donne as a modern lover of women point fondly to "The Sunne Rising" because it appears to value sexual pleasure above all.[70] The speaker asks the sun to leave the lovers alone since nothing in

the world, including its "honor," "wealth," and king's affairs, matters more than their time in bed with one another (*E*, 24). If "The Sunne Rising" seems unusual in that it presents the choice of pleasure over business in positive terms, it is only unusual if we read the poem as expressing not the views of a possibly deeply mistaken speaker but the views of Donne himself. We may either believe, with the American New Critics and their English cohorts, that these poems are fictions spoken by fictional speakers—in C. S. Lewis's words that "[i]t is, in fact, quite impossible that the character represented in the poem should be identically the same with that of the poet"—or we may believe that the poems express Donne's "real" views on sex.[71] We cannot, however, have it both ways. If "The Sunne Rising" expresses the views of a character who rejects the world for sex, that character was created by many other Renaissance poets—albeit frequently as a fool or a clown.[72] If we want to believe that this is an expression of Donne's heart in the matter of sex, then we also must, if we are to be even marginally intellectually honest, take equally seriously the other things that Donne's poetic speakers and Donne in his letters and sermons say about sex. Besides the sentiment's congeniality to modernity's investment in sex as the center of the self, what exactly makes the claims of the speaker of "The Sunne Rising" more true to Donne's self than the words of the speaker in "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward" or Donne's words in his letter to Goodyer?

In a 1608 letter to Goodyer, Donne says, "To be no part of anybody is to be nothing," and in another letter to Goodyer that same year, Donne writes that his fortune has made him "rather a sickness and disease of the world than any part of it."[73] Far from touting his exile with Ann as a haven from the world, Donne laments his life apart from the homosocial world to which he as a Renaissance man belonged. Away from the world of men, Donne is "no part of anybody." The sentiments of these letters are consistent with so much of Donne's writing that to dismiss them in favor of our own vision of the heterosexual Donne is as deadly a result of the "virus of the precursor" as is Sayers's use of Donne's virulent misogyny to celebrate Lord Peter Wimsey and Harriet Wimsey's married love. The world of men, of patronage and male friendship, was central to Donne throughout his life.

Donne customarily signs his letters to Goodyer with phrases such as "Your very affectionate lover and servant."[74] Donne's amorous discourse of male friendship is not in the least remarkable in his period, but it is, I think, the final stumbling block for the anachronis-

tic picture of Donne the heterosexual. For, *pace* so many Donne critics' fantasies of a heterosexual Donne, it is men with whom Donne can most easily image equality and love. His poem, "The Storme," addressed to his friend and roommate at the Inns of Court, Christopher Brooke, opens, "Thou which art I" (*S*, 1).[75] He writes to his patron Sir Henry Wotton, "Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle Soules; / For, thus friends absent speake" (*S*, 1–2).[76] Throughout the letters, poems to men, and poems about love affairs with women, Donne writes friendship as the primary relation. In "The Blossome," Donne's speaker addresses his own rejected heart. Since his heart refuses to leave its fruitless pursuit of a cold woman, he will leave it behind as he travels to the city. He says to his heart,

> Meet mee at London, then,
> Twenty dayes hence, and thou shalt see
> Mee fresher, and more fat, by being with men,
> Than if I had staid still with her and thee.
> For Gods sake, if you can, be you so too:
> I would give you
> There, to another friend, whom wee shall find
> As glad to have my body, as my minde.
>
> (*E*, 33–40)

"[B]eing with men" will feed Donne's speaker's body and mind. The pursuit of women, in contrast, wastes the body—this is one of the premises of Petrarchan poetry. As significantly, the next woman this Petrarchan lover will pursue will love his body and his mind. She, unlike the cold woman, is a "friend."

We easily overlook, I think, how poets and writers in the English Renaissance trope what we, under the auspices of modern heterosexuality, would call romantic love as friendship. This trope is so active because of the two relations—male-female sexual engagement and male-male friendship—male-male friendship is more significant. Renaissance poets trope "romantic love" as friendship to give "romantic love" more value, value it did not intrinsically have in their world. Their tropes, let me hasten to add, are not meant to change that hierarchy of relation; they speak to and within it. As Laurie Shannon argues, "[I]t is heterosexual association that period discourses treat as a deviation of sorts in its variance from kind. What the lines [from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*] presuppose is a law of nature operating according to either a like-seeking-like or a like-seeking-to-remain-itelf principle."[77] In "The Relique," Donne's speaker

writes about a male-female couple whose love transcends the ordinary. Their love is a miracle because they are a "like-seeking-like" couple: "Difference of sex no more wee knew, / Then our Guardian Angells doe" (*E*, 25–26). Although this poem celebrates a man and woman's love for one another, it celebrates that love because it conforms to the principle of male friendship—the lack of difference of sex. The woman is a miracle of faithfulness, since, as "The Relique" attests, were she a usual woman, she could not be faithful: "For graves have learn'd that woman-head / To be to more than one a Bed" (*E*, 3–4). The essence of women is to bed-hop. Donne, at times, loved women and sex with women, but resemblance to male friendship was the pinnacle that the love relationship between a man and a woman could barely hope to attain. A sermon Donne preached at the wedding of Sir Francis Nethersole asks, "[H]ow much more conveniently might two friends live together, then a man and a woman?"[78] Perhaps Donne is paraphrasing here from his reading of Augustine, who argued, "How much more agreeably could two male friends, rather than a man and a woman, enjoy companionship and conversation in a life shared together."[79]

Donne conceives of sex in Augustinian terms. The long, uneven emergence of heterosexuality would require the rejection of those terms; it would require a validation of the world and worldly things; it would require reconceptualizations of femininity and masculinity; it would require a belief in the relative equality of (white) men; it would require a belief that identity was founded in the direction of one's sexual desire.[80] Heterosexuality as we know it, an ideological structure that is opposed to homosexuality as we know it, emerged over the course of the long eighteenth century.[81] During the years of its emergence, Donne was out of favor.[82] John Dryden argues, in 1693, that Donne is a failed lover of women: "[I]n his Amorous Verses, where Nature only shou'd reign [he] perplexes the Minds of the Fair Sex with nice Speculations of Philosophy, when he shou'd ingage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of Love."[83] In 1728, John Oldmixon anticipated Samuel Johnson's critique of Donne, when he suggested that "Dr. *Donne* . . . confounded Metaphysicks and Love."[84] *The Barbados Gazette* in 1733 published a poem "composed by a young lady" called "On Reading Dr. Donne's Poems." The speaker despairs of finding love truly expressed in the poetry of Donne and his contemporaries: "Were my Passion to appear, / What Description would it bear? / All Conceits my Flame would wrong, / If it wou'd adorn my Song."[85] This kind of commen-

tary on Donne's love poetry had a long life. In 1800, the bitterly critical Nathan Drake comments that "even" Donne's "amatory pieces exhibit little else than cold conceits and metaphysical subtleties."[86] The poet and essayist Walter Savage Landor published in 1826 a conversation he invented between Donne's biographer, Walton, and two other mid-seventeenth-century men. In that unlikely conversation, Walton comments on Donne's rejection of his "amatory" verse, "[I]f the kindest and most generous affection comes across us, we supress every sign of it, and hide ourselves in nooks and coverts."[87] During the earlier formative years of heterosexuality, when male selfhood was becoming identified with male love of women, Donne was not read as a proponent of that love. By the early nineteenth century, Landor imagines that Walton, who read Donne in Donne's own Augustinian terms, sees Donne instead reading sin as the "kindest and most generous affection." Donne's sexual escapades become the self—"ourselves"—that "we . . . hide . . . in nooks and coverts." Landor's "we" is the "we" of a male identity defined, not in terms of rank (blood and birth), nor in relationships between men, but in terms of collective sexual desire for women.

Donne's commentary on the love of boys, another sexual desire available to men in his period, shows that he would not have recognized this "we." In "Satyre IV," Donne writes of a hanger-about-court who tells tales about other men: this sycophant reveals "who loves Whores, who boyes, and who goats" (*S*, 128). The pursuit of faithless women ("Whores") was only one option for "youths fires" at court or in the city.[88] If we are to take the speaker of the epigram "The Jughler" as a mouthpiece for Donne, boys were not to his taste at the time when he enjoyed sex with women. That epigram reads, "Thou call'st me effeminat, for I love womens joyes; / I call not thee manly, though thou follow boyes."[89] This epigram could be paraphrased, "If I am to be called effeminate because I am sexually interested in women, does that imply that you should be called manly because you, instead, are sexually interested in boys?" The epigram inserts us into the sexual world to which Donne belonged. This was not a world in which sexual object choice constituted either a homosexual or heterosexual identity. Instead it was a world in which a man's sexual pursuit of women left him open to the charge of effeminacy—a world in which having inordinate sexual desire made one like a woman, since women were assumed to have inordinate sexual desire.[90] The speaker of "the Jughler" countercharges that following boys is not a manly pursuit. Many of Donne's contemporar-

ies appear to have disagreed.[91] But neither followers of boys nor followers of women were men who could be defined by the modern sexual categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality. Instead, in Donne's world, they were all sinners.

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NOTES

[1] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Busman's Honeymoon* (New York Harper and Row, 1986), 244.

[2] Sayers, 22.

[3] Sayers, 243, 22.

[4] Sayers, 22.

[5] Sayers, 244.

[6] Sayers, 57.

[7] John Donne, "Loves Progress," in *The Elegies* and *The Songs and Sonnets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), line 36. All subsequent quotations from the *Elegies* and the *Songs and Sonnets* will be quoted by line numbers from this edition, hereafter denoted *E*.

[8] *OED*, "remora," definition 1.

[9] Janel Mueller, "Women among the Metaphysicals: A Case, Mostly, of Being Donne For," *Modern Philology* 87 (1989): 155.

[10] Mueller, 148. As I will throughout this essay, Mueller writes of Donne's speakers here. However, throughout her analysis, and really throughout Donne criticism as I will show, the separation between Donne's speakers and Donne's self breaks down continually. See Richard Strier, "John Donne Awry and Squint: The 'Holy Sonnets,' 1608–1610," *Modern Philology* 86 (1989): 357–84, on the question of Donne's self and his speakers.

[11] Mueller, 147. We should note, however, that Mueller dismisses the poems that celebrate male power as spoken by "cynical and libertine speakers" who often "finally undercut themselves in what they say" (147).

[12] See also Anthony Low, *The Reinvention of Love: Poetry, Politics and Culture from Sidney to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), who declares, "Donne was a chief actor and influence in what may be called the 'reinvention of love,' from something essentially social and feudal to something essentially private and modern" (33).

[13] Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 134.

[14] Richard Halpern, "The Lyric in the Field of Information: Autopoiesis and History in Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 6 (1993): 200.

[15] Benjamin Saunders, "Circumcising Donne: The 1633 *Poems* and Readerly Desire," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30 (2000): 388. Unfortunately Saunders relies on scholars who too easily assume modern models of sexuality. So for his reading of the circumcision metaphor in Thomas Browne's elegy for Donne, Saunders looks at James Shapiro's comment on how diatribes against Jews can simultaneously assert that Jews are womanly and overly sexual (382). While Shapiro, and Saunders following him, see an unacknowledged contradiction here, Renaissance discourses about sex conventionally associate sexual desire with women

and the ability to remain chaste with dominant masculinity. Browne's metaphor may be an attempt to assure readers of Donne's chastity—what differentiates him from the Jews—rather than his virility in a modern sense. The history of the word "virility" as recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is another window into the difference between Donne's sexual world and our own.

[16] Annabel Patterson calls Donne "perhaps *the* author in whom the critical enterprise was invested at the stage when its antihistorical procedures became both a doctrine and a discipline" ("All Donne," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetrry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katherine Eisaman Maus [Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1990], 39). The canonization of Donne by the New Critics may well account for its residual effects on Donne criticism.

[17] In my attempt to do otherwise then, I join what could be called the revival of the acknowledgment of religion in English Renaissance or Early Modern studies. On the conservative tendencies and dangers of this revival, see Dympna Callaghan, "Shakespeare and Religion," *Textual Practice* 15 (2001): 1–3. Of course some critics have never dismissed religion from their work on Donne. See Strier, for example.

[18] Christopher Ricks, "Donne After Love," in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988), 33, 41 n. 18.

[19] The examples of heterosexual men in this sentence point to the often unacknowledged complexity of the ideology of heterosexuality. My focus on Donne's misogyny in this essay is not meant to suggest that misogyny is not a feature of modern heterosexuality. On the contrary, much heterosexual discourse rests on misogyny. However, the modern misogyny that undergirds heterosexuality is quite different from the Renaissance misogyny that undergirds a system that is not founded in sex. For example, the *Hustler* mentality may objectify women as sexual objects in much the same way as "Loves Progress" does, but the twentieth-century objectification of women is based in an uncomplicated celebration of male sexual pleasure, whereas Renaissance sexual misogyny is based in a vilification of sexual pleasure. In addition, the misogyny that Donne subscribed to asserts strongly that women are more sexually interested than men; this assertion is not a feature of most modern misogynies.

[20] David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 46.

[21] On the need to investigate heterosexuality along with homosexuality, see Halperin, 44–45.

[22] Arnold I. Davidson, "Sex and the Emergence of Sexuality," *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1987): 37.

[23] Halperin, 24.

[24] See for example Ricks's assessment of the poetry as described above. See also Mueller's characterization of Donne as pulled away from his true self by his culture's strictures (147–48).

[25] Claire McEachern, intro. to *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England*, ed. McEachern and Debora Shuger (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 9; William J. Bouwsma, "Hooker in the Context of European Cultural History," in *Religion and Culture*, 144. For a specific look at Donne's position on the disputes in English Christianity, see David Norbrook, "The Monarchy of Wit and the Republic of Letters: Donne's Politics," in *Soliciting Interpretation*, 3–36. Joshua Scodel, in

Excess and the Mean in Early Modern Literature (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002), explores the implications of Donne's readings of the classical authors.

[26] Shuger, "Excerpts from a Panel Discussion," in *Renaissance Discourses of Desire*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 272.

[27] See, for example, Achsah Guibbory's claim that "Donne's distrust of sexuality and male sexual desire conflicts with his sense of the goodness of the body, with his sense that erotic love between two human beings is the fullest expression of a human nature made in the image of God, the experience which enables us to be our best, most authentic and integrated selves" ("'The Relique,' *The Song of Songs*, and Donne's *Songs and Sonets*," *John Donne Journal* 15 [1996]: 38).

[28] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (Benziger Brothers, 1948), 4:1804.

[29] A significant exception here is Richard Rambuss, who, in his discussion of Donne's (and the other metaphysical poets') religious poetry, is fully aware that "a notion of sexuality as one's essential identity was not operative when these poets wrote" (*Closet Devotions* [Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1998], 56).

[30] Saunders, 387.

[31] Saunders, 386.

[32] Izaak Walton, *The Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert* (1670) (Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1969), 37. Walton is relatively consistently reviled in the criticism as a pious apologist, but it seems ridiculous to dismiss everything Donne's first biographer says, particularly when Donne's own work might confirm some of Walton's assessments. See R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), for a balanced assessment of Walton's work.

[33] Augustine, *Confessions: Books I–XIII*, trans. F. J. Sheed (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993), 2:1.

[34] Donne, *Selected Prose*, chosen by Evelyn Simpson, ed. Gardner and Timothy Healy (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 79.

[35] John Donne, "Obsequies to the Lord Harrington, brother to the Countesse of Bedford," in *The Epithalamions, Anniversaries, and Epicedes*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), lines 194–95, 128.

[36] See Patterson, 40, on this problem generally in Donne criticism.

[37] The religious vocabulary that pervades the oeuvre should disallow categorizations of the poetry like this one from Guibbory: "Whether he is (as in the *Satires* and *Anniversaries*) anatomizing the corruption in his world, or (in the *Elegies* and *Songs and Sonets*) exploring the varieties and complexities of love, or (in the *Divine Poems*) meditating on sin, grace, and the anxious question of salvation, Donne is searching for a truth that will emerge from and fit his experience." Yet this quotation is from Guibbory's contribution to the standard scholarly companion to the poetry: "John Donne," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry: Donne to Marvell*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993), 129. And this sort of characterization of the poetry is the rule rather than the exception.

[38] Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 74, 6.

[39] Michael Goodich, "Sexuality, Family, and the Supernatural in the Fourteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4 (1994): 495.

[40] Donne, "Since she whome I lovd," in *The Divine Poems*, ed. Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), line 14.

[41] Donne, *John Donne: A Critical Edition of The Major Works*, ed. John Carey (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 273.

[42] Even in "The Exstasie," the poem in which Donne famously depicts the body as the "booke" of the soul, he terms the soul "a great Prince" to which the body is ultimately subject (*Elegies*, 73, 68).

[43] See Gene Edward Veith, Jr.'s comment that "the born-again student in the back row is probably closer to the worldview and experiences of John Donne than are most secularist scholars." "Teaching about the Religion of the Metaphysical Poets," in *Approaches to Teaching the Metaphysical Poets*, ed. Sidney Gottlieb (New York: MLA, 1990), 60.

[44] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980), 147.

[45] On the lack of the public/private distinction in Donne's England, see Michael Neill, *Putting History to the Question: Power, Politics, and Society in English Renaissance Drama* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2000), 28. On the lack of the homo/hetero distinction in the Renaissance, see Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997); Mario DiGangi, *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997); and Jonathan Goldberg, *Sodometries: Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1992).

[46] Elaine Scarry notes, "Physical disease, plague, fever, accident, the risk of childbearing—these loom large in the background of all [of Donne's] poetry and prose" ("Donne: 'But yet the body is his booke,'" in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. Scarry [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988], 72). The AIDS epidemic has led to another, distinctly different, vocabulary of blood and death as related to sex.

[47] Donne, "The Progresse of the Soule," in *The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters*, ed. Milgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), lines 91–93. Hereafter abbreviated *S* and cited by line number.

[48] Donne, *Epithalamions*, lines 106–10.

[49] Donne also, famously, uses the pun on "to die" in "The Canonization": "Wee can dye by it, if not live by love" (*E*, 28). That same pun appears in two less well-known poems: "The Prohibition," in which the speaker says to his love object, "Love mee, that I may die the gentler way," (*E*, 19) and "The Dampe," in which he says, "Kill mee as Woman, let mee die" (*E*, 21).

[50] See Donne's own use of "alchimie" in "The Sunne Rising" (*E*, 24) and in "Problem VIII: 'Why are the fayrest falsest?'" in *Paradoxes and Problems*, ed. Helen Peters (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). See also Donne's friend Ben Jonson's satirical play *The Alchemist*.

[51] McEachern, intro. to *Religion and Culture*, 11.

[52] Michael Schoenfeldt, "The Gender of Religious Devotion: Amelia Lanyer and John Donne," in *Religion and Culture*, 228.

[53] Saunders, 386.

[54] Saunders, 388.

[55] Gardner calls Donne "the poet of equity and reciprocity" (quoted in Scarry, 94). Writing about the elegy "To his Mistress Going to Bed," Low claims that "it is

possible, by leaving out one part of the elegy or another, to argue either that Donne is a sexist or a pioneer of mutual loving. He is both" (39). It is a testament to the power of this fantasy about Donne that it can extend itself to the elegies.

[56] Phyllis Rackin rightly warns against generalizations about misogyny and women's place in Renaissance England in "Misogyny is Everywhere," in *A Feminist Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Dympna Callaghan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). However, comments about women's essentially sexual nature are ubiquitous in the period. Donne's persistent mouthing of such commentary should not be taken as standard, but neither is it terrifically exceptional.

[57] My analysis of Donne's misogyny below has a lot in common with C. S. Lewis's dismissive analysis of the love poetry in "Donne and Love Poetry in the Seventeenth Century," in *John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Gardner (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1962), 109–22. Lewis attributes the misogyny to Donne's Roman Catholicism. The distinction Lewis makes between Roman Catholic and Protestant attitudes toward sex seems too simplistic to me. It is important to remember how significant a Protestant preacher John Donne was. His sermons are even more critical of male-female sex than is the poetry. Modern heterosexuality was not born in the Reformation, although some Reformation thinking contributed to its birth. For more on the origins of modern heterosexuality, see my forthcoming *Early Modern England without Heterosexuality*.

[58] In his introduction to *Donne: Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933; reprint, 1977), Sir Herbert Grierson comments on the poetry Donne wrote for patrons: "To some of us the early excesses in wit and indecency of his poems are more easily condoned than some of the compliances of his later life—his fulsome flattery of noble ladies, his protestations of devotion to the service of James's abominable favorites, Somerset and Buckingham, his pluralities and eager touting for preferment" (xxxix). Grierson can countenance the sexual misogyny in the early poems, since he interprets it as natural heterosexual excess and men will be (heterosexual) men, but Donne's patronage poetry disgusts him, since men after all are just men, not inherently superior to one another because of their blood and therefore not to be obsequiously flattered. He is also disgusted by Donne's holding more than one church living at a time ("his pluralities") and by his hunts for worldly and church advancement. And is there perhaps some homophobia in Grierson's comments about James's favorites? It is unlikely that Donne or any of his contemporaries shared Grierson's tastes—Donne's status culture took everything that disgusts Grierson for granted.

[59] Rayna Kalas drew my attention to the insistent wordplay in the poem. A conversation with Pat Parker helped me to think through its meaning in relation to the poem's misogyny.

[60] Cleanth Brooks uses "The Canonization" as the "concrete case" that will illustrate the preminence of paradox in poetry (*The Well Wrought Urn* [New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1947], 10). He takes the title of this New Critical manifesto from the poem.

[61] William Empson, "A Valediction: Of Weeping," in *John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 52. The British Empson himself was not a New Critic, but he was "a part of their common orthodoxy" (Christopher Norris, *Willliam Empson and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism* [London: The Athlone Press, 1978], 3). For the relationships between Empson's criticism and the New Criticism see Norris.

[62] Gardner, 52 n*, in Empson. See Empson's comment in "Donne the Space Man," *The Kenyon Review* 19 (1957): 337–99, 373.

[63] Empson, "A Valediction," 53 n. 2.

[64] Donne, *John Donne: A Critical Edition*, 268.

[65] Donne, "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward," in *Divine Poems*, lines 36, 7.

[66] Donne, *The Life and Letters of John Donne*, ed. Edmund Gosse, 2 vols. (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), 1:190.

[67] See also the discussion of the relative claims of love and business in "Breake of Day." If the speaker of this poem is a woman, as critics generally believe, than her dismissal of "businesse" fits the stereotype of women's devotion to sexual pleasure.

[68] Halpern, 204.

[69] Men might also be distracted from the world of business by sexual trysts with men. See, for example, Christopher Marlowe's play *Edward II*. One of the many aspects of the Renaissance social world that differentiates it from our own, however, is how often Renaissance texts posit that male-male love relations can easily coexist with business relations, while male-female love relations are intensely destructive.

[70] See for example Belsey, who sees this poem and "The Good-morrow" as constituting "the privileged, intimate world" that is "in the process of becoming the foundation of conjugal partnership" (147). See also Andrew Mousley, who takes this poem to mean that "[l]ove is what makes the world go round, and the bed is at its fixed centre" (*John Donne*, ed. Mousley [New York: St. Martin's, 1999], 2). John Cary, in *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), is rightly suspicious of the poem's claim that the speaker is happy to banish the world (108–10).

[71] Lewis and E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939; reprint 1965), 9.

[72] See, for two examples, Shakespeare's Touchstone (*As You Like It*) and the young man lolling in Edmund Spenser's Bower of Bliss in book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*.

[73] Donne, *Life and Letters*, 1:191, 194.

[74] See, for one example, Donne, *Life and Letters*, 1:217.

[75] On male identity and male friendship in the English Renaissance, see Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 2003); Laurens Mills, *One Soul in Bodies Twain: Friendship in Tudor and Stuart Literature* (Bloomington: The Principia Press, 1937); Masten; Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 2002).

[76] See Shannon for a brilliant commentary on this letter (*Sovereign Amity*, 44–45). Donne uses the same metaphor in a 1607 letter to Sir T. Lucy: "Sir,—I make account that the writing of letters, when it is with any seriousness, is a kind of ecstacy, and a departure and secession and suspension of the soul, which doth then communicate itself to two bodies" (*Life and Letters*, 1:173).

[77] Shannon, "Nature's Bias: Renaissance Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness," *Modern Philology* 98 (2000): 210.

[78] Donne, quoted in Mary Beth Rose, *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988), 102. Rose discusses Donne's negative sermons on marriage as the exception to the Protestant celebration of marriage. I do not read Renaissance Protestant discourse as celebrating marriage in any way that resembles the celebration of marriage once heterosexuality is established. Renaissance Protestant discourse always sees marriage as the secondary relation for men, well subordinate to a man's relation to God.

[79] Augustine, quoted in Erin Sawyer, "Celibate Pleasures: Masculinity, Desire, and Asceticism in Augustine," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6 (1995): 3 n. 6.

[80] For the place of masculinity in Donne's world, see my "Manliness before Individualism: Masculinity, Effeminacy, and Homoeroticism in Shakespeare's History Plays," in *The Blackwell Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean Howard (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), 220–45.

[81] See Eve Kosofosky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1990), for all of the possible sexual orientations this dominant but seriously impoverished classificatory system ignores (22–27).

[82] The critical reception of Donne over these centuries (collected in A. J. Smith, *John Donne: The Critical Heritage* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975]) makes nonsense of Low's claim that "Donne discovered a new kind of love poetry, which generations of readers have found fresh, startling, and—even when they have been at odds with it, as John Dryden, Johnson, and Lewis have been—still have found it too significant to ignore" (Low, 48). In fact, Donne was largely ignored for the bulk of the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries.

[83] Dryden, quoted in Smith, 151.

[84] John Oldmixon, quoted in Smith, 190.

[85] Quoted in Smith, 197–98.

[86] Nathan Drake, quoted in Smith, 258.

[87] Walter Savage Landor, quoted in Smith, 335–36.

[88] "[Y]ouths fires" is a phrase from Donne's poem "A Litanie," in which the speaker claims that he is the "temple" of the Holy Ghost, a temple which he has "sacrilegiously / Halfe wasted with youths fires, of pride and lust" (*Divine Poems*, 19–22).

[89] Milgate uses the title "Manliness" for this epigram. That title comes from a 1942 edition of the poems. Milgate's choice of R. E. Bennett's 1942 title shows that he, with Bennett, reads this epigram as embedded in heterosexuality.

[90] See Rackin, "Foreign Country: The Place of Sexuality in Shakespeare's Historical World," in *Enclosure Acts*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), 69–70.

[91] See Mary Bly, *Queer Virgins and Virgin Queans on the Early Modern Stage* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000).