

John Donne

The Sacramentality of Sex

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John Donne, a metaphysical poet of the late 16th and early 17th century, was a man who believed that love required both a physical and a spiritual component; the nature of the emotion consisted of both the secular and the sacred. In Donne's view of love, the physical body (some sort of tangible matter or sign), typically coincides with the spiritual soul, or in the case of sacrament, some underlying value or virtue, typically what the physical symbol was representative of, which often related to a more profound religious interpretation. Donne was quite keen on this body/soul relationship. He also believed that 'true' love must be mutual and reciprocated. If two individuals could attain this status of love, then whatever was expressed between those two was something much greater than a connection between two earthly bodies, and even deeper than an intermingling of two spiritual souls; love takes on a heavenly condition and there, in the hearts of those two lovers, is a reflection of the divine: the love of God for humankind.

My contribution to the scholarship that already exists on Donne and his works, is in taking a closer look at the ways in which he focuses on lovers' relationships as necessarily consisting of both physical and spiritual components; specifically how Donne gives insight into theological, sacramental issues through his use of secular language, while also highlighting how Donne conveys human love as a glimpse into a more spiritual perspective of love and a divine connection with God. To assist in my efforts, I have consulted Theresa DiPasquale's text,

Literature and Sacrament, which offers valuable readings of and background in Donne's poetry. Throughout this paper, I closely align myself with her as well as Catherine Gimelli Martin; utilizing their intriguing, original arguments and elaborating upon or disagreeing with them, I will argue that Donne uses particularly secular language to portray the sacramentality of sex, and through this sacred nature of intercourse, lovers find themselves connected to the divine love of God. In this essay I will analyze works from Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*, including "The Flea," "The Extasie," and "Aire and Angels." I will also be looking at his *Divine Poems*, specifically "Holy Sonnet XIII." These works display Donne's use of predominantly physical language as he explores the heavenly nature of the human condition of love.

In much of Donne's poetry, he utilizes erotic imagery and sexual language as a means to convey a deeper religious experience. One of Donne's most renowned works, "The Flea," exemplifies his tactic of using sacramental language to add to the complexity of an otherwise purely carnal and secular poem. In the first stanza, the speaker says, "Marke but this flea, and marke in this, / How little that which thou deny'st me is" (l. 1-2). Already in the first two lines, the reader can see the speaker's attempt to persuade his lover to give into him. With the repetition of 'marke' the speaker seemingly takes a position of authority, as if he is a professor giving a lesson, telling his students to pay attention to something. The speaker continues, "It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee, / And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee" (l. 3-4). In these lines, the flea bites the speaker and proceeds to bite his beloved. The speaker makes the argument that since this petty insect has combined their blood within itself, why cannot the speaker and his lover do the same? This sort of image, this intermingling and connection of the physical (blood) as depicted in "The Flea," was crucial to Donne's understanding of love as he presents it in so much of his poetry. As Achsah Guibbory writes about another poem of Donne's, "The Extasie," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, she draws specific

attention to line 69 saying, “the lovers must ‘turne’ to their ‘bodies’ (142). She continues, “Only through the material (“ayre,” 58, or “bodies”) can souls ‘flow’ (59) into each other (142).

Guibbory speaks to Donne’s language of love and the notion of love’s physicality is quite blatant. Thus, clearly Donne is calling for more than the meshing of two souls in love; rather he also draws particular attention to the necessity of the presence of the physical, as it serves as vehicle and means through which the spiritual essences are enabled to connect. I will address this issue of body/soul in much greater detail later on in this essay.

Donne’s secular language thus far takes a bit of a turn in the direction of sacramentality, as the lady’s virtue and concern with sin are brought to the forefront. The speaker in “The Flea” goes further to say, “Thou know’st that this cannot be said / A sinne, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead” (l. 5-6). The speaker presents the notion that if his beloved were to give up her virginity, she would not face any shame in doing so, and she need not worry at all about such an action being considered a sin: “a flea bite, which like sex, would mingle the two lovers’ blood, could not be classified as sinful” (Bach 268). No sin was committed, nor honor lost as the woman was bit by the flea and the lovers’ blood was joined; so, similarly, the physical exchange, in sexual intercourse, would not result in sin or dishonor. Donne believes that love is something granted to humans by God, and meant to be explored and consummated with the physical bodies, which were also given to us by God. Sensory perception is a means of understanding; thus this bodily connection in the love-making process, as the speaker contests is not sinful, but necessary.

In the final three lines of the first stanza, “Yet this [the flea] enjoys before it woove, / And pamper’d swells with one blood made of two / And this, alas, is more then wee would doe” (l. 7-9), the speaker hints at the idea of pregnancy, with the phrase ‘pamper’d swells,’ but lets his lover know that she should not worry because they have not done anything yet. Theresa DiPasquale in her text, *Literature as Sacrament*, says, “Donne’s speaker attempts to dispense with at least one of her reasons for resisting his advances: the fear of pregnancy” (DiPasquale

177). Obviously as the two have not engaged in coitus, there is no legitimate concern here for the woman. DiPasquale argues that the flea is representation of a “mock-Christian miracle of virginal conception” (177) and the speaker uses this idea as another attempt to seduce his beloved. In this instance, once again Donne’s language provides vivid imagery with an underlying spiritual meaning, specifically, conceiving a child: Christ by the Virgin Mary. The speaker’s beloved refuses to fall victim to the argument that in the past, through a connection strong enough and divine grace, a woman was made pregnant; thus, it is not impossible that the same could happen here. The woman’s rejection of the speaker’s reasoning, or lack thereof, does not take away from the fact that Donne’s speaker utilizes language which, seen on the surface as particularly physical, is actually tapping into something much deeper as it alludes to far greater sacred meanings. These techniques continue and become much more obvious as the poem progresses.

In the second stanza, the speaker transitions from an outright argumentative tone and takes on a seemingly more desperate tone, while still being insistent and trying to convince his love to have intercourse with him:

Oh stay three lives in one flea spare,
 Where wee almost, yea more then maryed are.
 This flea is you and I, and this
 Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
 Though parents grudge, and you, w’ are met,
 And cloistered in these living walls of Jet.
 Though use make you apt to kill me,
 Let not to that, selfe murder added bee,
 And sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three. (l. 10-18)

Here, the speaker pleads (‘oh stay’) with his beloved, as she raises her hand to strike the flea,

begging her not to kill it. Donne again uses sacramental language as he alludes to the marriage between the speaker and his lover, as their blood is joined within this insect. The flea serves as an embodiment of these two individuals' lives and they are made one within its dome-like body. The speaker goes one step further with the word 'cloistered,' further suggesting an even more religious experience: nuns or monks who have vowed to live according to certain religious precepts and are attached to the community of the monastery. In addition, these religious affiliates have given their promise to some higher deity to remain chaste; this notion of refraining from sexual intercourse permeates all throughout "The Flea" as the woman constantly refutes the speaker's arguments asking her to give up her sexual purity. In this instance, Donne wittingly uses the flea as representation of a temple to allude to a deeper religious implication. Still further, the speaker informs his beloved that to kill the flea, the sign, the symbol of the sacrament of their "marriage," would be sacrilegious. Not only would the speaker's lover kill the innocent insect, she would also be murdering the speaker, whose blood is within, and she would be committing suicide in a sense as well, as her own blood is also within; thus 'three sinnes in killing three' (l. 18). Again, there is this fairly overt religious ideology as demonstrated through the speaker's arguments against murder and suicide.

The speaker's beloved, however, seems to go on un-phased by the idea of sacrilege as she smites the flea. With the third and final stanza, the lady shoots down the speaker's pleas; she has "purpled [her] naile, in blood of innocence" (l. 20) as she destroys the "temple" (DiPasquale 178). The speaker says, "Yet thou triumph'st, and saist that thou / Find'st not thy selfe, nor mee the weaker now" (l. 23-24); which is to say that the woman feels victorious in killing the flea, and therefore the speaker's argument, and she notes that she feels no loss of strength or virtue. The speaker concludes, "'Tis true, then learn how false, feares bee; / Just so much honor, when thou yeeld'st to mee, / Will wast, as this flea's death tooke life from thee" (l. 25-27). In this final triplet, the speaker argues that his beloved, by giving up her virginity, will lose just as much

honor as she lost in murdering the flea: none. DiPasquale presents an interesting reading of the last segment of “The Flea.” She argues that Donne is juxtaposing the symbol, a merely physical representation of something greater and more meaningful, and the sacrament, a religious ceremony or act representative of divine grace: the flea as marriage, the murder of the flea as a ‘loss of honor,’ and the woman’s reputation with her actual chastity. These earthly, “tangible” signs are all underpinned with some actual worth and value. This comparison between the death of the flea and the loss of maidenhead reveals to the woman that her “sexual abstinence—physical chastity—is but a tangible sign” (*Literature and Sacrament* 179); just as she destroyed the flea, a sign of divine grace, of marriage, and of love, then she will see no harm in destroying the symbol of her purity as a woman: her virginity. For, “the destruction of the sign will not affect the underlying truth...the sacrament is one thing, the virtue is another” (179). When the poem is interpreted this way, that is when sacraments are perceived as material representations of some greater essential verity; readers align themselves with the woman, they most likely succumb to and enjoy the speaker’s pursuit of pleasure, giving in to Donne’s skillful ability to improvise and persuade. But any reader of Donne knows a typical work of his asks one to find a greater significance by looking at more than just the surface of the text, seeking a more profound religious insight.

“The Flea” is more than just a lover’s chase and petition to his beloved to sleep with him; instead, “The Flea” is a poem that uses sexual language to allude to a connection with the divine. This poem is more than just the yearning for carnal fulfillment, rather it is a piece of writing which delves into the theological; it goes further than just the sacrament of marriage and beyond physical love. “The Flea” addresses God’s love for humanity through the Incarnation and a hinting at the crucifixion with the language, “blood of innocence” and “wherein could this flea guilty be” (l. 20-21). This represents not only a physical connection in love, but a necessary divine intervention. Donne uses this work to show the similarities of secular sexual union to a

sacred spiritual union. Theresa DiPasquale writes, “The flea is set up as the incarnate union of the lover and his lady even as Jesus is the incarnate union of God and Man” (*Literature and Sacrament* 180). This language of blood is prevalent throughout the poem, “two bloods mingled be” and “one blood made of two” (l. 5, 8). Another example of Donne’s bloody imagery comes with the phrase, “blood of innocence” (l. 20). In line twenty, not only is the speaker simply referring to the woman’s murdering of the flea, but there is an even deeper and more profound inference to be made. With this line, the ‘blood of innocence’ alludes to the blood that Christ shed for humanity. DiPasquale draws attention to Christ’s death, as he surrendered his life for the redemption of humankind: an act which people remember to this day. The crucifixion of Jesus, God incarnate, this perfect man and untainted soul “was the only means to reconcile God and man...When the innocent victim in which they ‘are met’ (14) is slain, the guilt of the speaker and his lady is cancelled once and for all. Thus, her yielding to him will be no sacrifice...but a sinless *communion*, a mutual partaking” (180).

Donne uses this erotic imagery of blood combined in the insect to represent the Eucharist. Just as the flea was murdered, Christ shed his blood for the redemption of humankind, so that no individual is burdened with guilt or the loss of honor, but instead partakes in a union both physically and spiritually. With communion, participants commemorate Christ’s death and through the partaking of the wine his blood enters that individual’s system. The lovers are interconnected in both body and soul, in union with one another, but also in union with God, as love and joy are gifts from Him. Theresa DiPasquale highlights the relationship between the two lovers in the poem, as she also makes evident the lovers’ relationship with God as she says:

The lady of the poem...may insist that he receive her Eucharistic virginity—and the honor it signifies—with the reverence and faithfulness of a devout communicant who receives ‘with the hand of the heart.’ If she does so, she will be committing herself to him. For in conveying himself through the Eucharist, Christ confirms that he will never

abandon the faithful believer (182).

Just as Christ promises that he will not desert his followers, so too will the woman in the poem remain true to the speaker, her lover, and will forever be associated with him. However, these cognitions—devotion, marriage, losing no honor in giving up chastity—all come from the speaker. Surely, as the lady in “The Flea” is not saying or thinking any of this, these mental fabrications on behalf of the speaker are merely hopeful delusions. However, I still believe Donne is trying to draw attention to the sort of commitment and truth that a couple in love should aspire to and share. Even though the physical and spiritual connection established here between the two lovers in the poem is almost entirely imaginative, Donne uses the relationship to signify that human love is more than just a physical bond between two bodies, and even more than the intertwining of two souls. Their love is a representation of God’s love for Man as was embodied by Christ and is remembered through the partaking of his body and blood with the sacrament of communion.

Gary Kuchar in his *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* draws attention to a spiritual connection with God through the Eucharist as accessed by the physical body. He notes “Donne’s capacity to compellingly articulate the experience of coming to know Christ in and through the linguistic and conceptual resources of the early modern body” (Kuchar 152). In other words, in “The Flea” Donne forms a divine relationship with Christ through a physical means, specifically through his secular language which alludes to the Eucharist. The eating of the bread and drinking the wine is symbolic of Christ as life, as nourishment and sustenance, as he enters the communicant’s body, uniting physical and spiritual.

Donne’s implicit arguments in “The Flea” are penetrated with underlying religious connotations: communion, conception of Christ, the Incarnation, etc. and some are even overt: “marriage temple” (l. 13) and “sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three” (l. 18). This poem is

riddled with spiritual messages, thus showing Donne's skillfulness in using secular language to establish more theological allusions, and convince readers of the sacramentality of sex.

Although, in regards to the speaker of the poem, as opposed to Donne himself, there is some uncertainty as to what course of action the speaker and his beloved are going to take upon the conclusion of the poem. The speaker's arguments are improvised on slippery slopes, constantly adapting to the situation at hand: the couple being bitten by the flea, the lady's hand rising to kill the flea, and the murder of the insect. Thus, one could argue that the woman in the poem, just as she has shot down all of the man's previous arguments, will also deny him her virginity and nothing will happen between the two of them. Contrarily, and I choose this side, giving the speaker the benefit of the doubt, the woman surrenders her chastity to the wit and reason that permeate "The Flea." She realizes that her maidenhead is merely a physical symbol for her honor and the destruction of such does not take away from the underlying sacrament, the virtue and honor, associated with it. Thus, the lover probably yields to her man, rewarding his persistence and quick-footed, humorous pleas.

Following closely along the lines of the lady's virginity as the physical representation of a more serious issue of integrity and chastity, is this notion of the Eucharist as representative of spiritual deliverance. Donne's repetition of the word "this" in the first stanza, which is reminiscent of the scriptural "This is my body, which is given for you...this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood," which are used in the language of the liturgy of the Eucharist, is smart and opens the door to this idea of the flea acting as a parallel to the sacrament of communion (NRSV, Luke 22.19-20). Just as the flea's body was broken and its blood was shed, so too was Christ's body broken on the cross as he was speared in the side and his blood was shed for the redemption of humanity. Also, Donne enables the speaker to try and persuade the woman to believe that her virginity is merely a sign, a symbol, of her honor; it does not truly reflect her honor and virtue themselves which underlie the sacrament, if you will, of her

maidenhead. Thus, potentially the lovers see no harm in engaging in the carnal pleasures, which God gave humans the wisdom to explore. As DiPasquale quotes Calvin, “a sacrament is like a rhetorical persuasion...and the operation of the Holy Spirit ensures that its rhetoric cannot fail. It guarantees that the signs presented to the faithful *will* take effect, for it prepares their hearts to receive them” (186). Just as people are persuaded and convinced in their hearts to receive the body and blood of Christ as a representation of salvation, so too in this poem the speaker persuades his beloved and there is an accepted “spirit of mutual desire” (*Literature and Sacrament* 186).

The lovers in this poem take on a heavenly love. Just as the sacrament of communion represents Christ entering into one’s body, so too the speaker enters into his beloved as they engage in the most intimate physical connection of coitus. Catherine Gimelli Martin in her “Erotology of Donne’s “Extasie” and the Secret History of Voluptuous Rationalism” quotes Edmund Spenser as he says, “love is of heavenly nature, but its consummation is earthly ... Christ’s redeeming love has not only justified sinners; it justifies human love” (128).

The ‘marriage’ in “The Flea” is to be consummated, thus representing not only a physical union between these lovers, but also a spiritual bonding between the two as their souls unite and resemble the love of God for man. Here again, one is able to see that Donne’s notion of love consists of not only a spiritual component, but a necessary physical link as well.

In “The Flea,” Donne asserts his belief in the underlying theme: a sacrament acts merely as a corporeal symbol and representation of some more sacred truth; thus, the beliefs behind the sacrament matter more than the tangible sign of sacrament itself. For instance, Christ’s body and his blood, which he shed with his death on the cross for our salvation, matter more than the physical piece of bread and cup of wine or juice. In much the same way, the woman in the poem is concerned with giving up her maidenhead, for she believes in doing so she will be devoid of honor. However, as Martin mentions, “‘true’ virginity consists in true maturity” (129); she goes

on to quote an excerpt from page 86 of Donne's *Ivvenilia: or Certain Paradoxes and Problems*, in which Donne posits that "the name of *Virgin* shal be exchanged for a farre more honorable name, *A Wife*" (129-30). Thus, with the loss of her sexual innocence, the lady is actually made purer, more honorable, and mature. In joining together with her lover, she creates new life, not necessarily in terms of pregnancy, although the potential is certainly there, but rather in terms of a new association with this man, as she is now, in a sense, one with him. However, these notions are idealistic in the sense that the speaker may not be offering literal marriage to his beloved, but he merely refers to copulation as marital simply in attempts to convey a false conception of honor to his lady in order to convince her to sleep with him. This communion of both body and soul between the two lovers in the poem is a reflection of God's will, in that he encourages sexual relations for reproductive purposes to enable further generations to inhabit the earth, his creation. Thus, the speaker of the poem could argue that God calls upon us to perform sexual acts with one another, as love is a reflection of the divine.

Catherine Gimelli Martin, in her "Erotology of Donne's 'Extasie'" supports the idea that inhabitants of earth who are in love should rightly engage in sexual activity as she says:

God's children unite both heaven and earth...our bodies glorified shall be capable of spiritual joys, so our souls demerged into those bodies are allowed to take earthly pleasure. Our soul is not sent hither, only to go back again: we have some errand to do here; nor is it sent into prison because it comes innocent, and he which sent it is just (130).

From this perspective it is fair to say, that corporeal bodies with purified souls worthy of praise are enabled to experience heavenly happiness, while also partaking in 'earthly pleasure.' Donne uses sexual engagement, the physical acts between man and woman, to represent a religious expression of our God-given right; one could go so far as to call it an obligation, "some errand to do," to explore these worldly desires of love, which God has created and put into our hearts,

minds, and souls. Donne strongly believes the human body is a necessary vessel to share in joy and to understand the emotion of love on a spiritual level, as this earthly love is only a morsel in comparison to God's love for humanity. Much of Donne's secular poetry is permeated with sexual language which alludes to more religious contexts; similarly, the *Divine Poems* also focus on love and fostering a relationship with the divine through particularly religious language, while also incorporating some of the types of erotic, materialistic language used in his more secular works.

In "Holy Sonnet XIII," just as with the Eucharist and the sacramental nature of sex in "The Flea," Donne depicts God's compassion for mankind. The speaker mentions a hypothetical situation, "What if this present were the worlds last night?" (l. 1). If today were the Last Judgment, the speaker says, "Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou does dwell, / The picture of Christ crucified" (l. 2-3). The sacrifice of this innocent being, God in the form of man, represents the divine love of God for man that humans are able to embrace and experience, if they choose to believe it and accept it: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). There is again this duality of the physical and the spiritual with the 'heart' and the 'soul,' which represents Donne's belief that there is a necessary physical component to love, in this case loving Christ: the heart, the secular, physical life source in which the sacred soul resides. Here in this pumping organ the soul is harbored and gives life to man, and in the heart and soul, the image of Christ, God incarnate, the ultimate life-giver, is present. Similarly to "The Flea" and the sacrament of the Eucharist in which Christ, figuratively through faith, enters one body, the sacred and divine residing in the earthly, physical being, "Holy Sonnet XIII" involves a spiritual force entering into the corporal, in that Christ's presence is already within the speaker's heart. Thus, this depicts the body/soul dualism necessary for love. Again with this sonnet, the image of blood, which was so prevalent in "The Flea" is present here, "Blood fills his frownes, which

from his pierc'd head fell / And can that tongue adjudge thee unto hell, / Which pray'd forgiveness for his foes fierce spight" (l. 6-8). With these lines, the speaker depicts God's love for man, as he does not condemn those who have nailed him to the cross, but instead sheds his blood to cleanse them and offers forgiveness to all.

It is interesting to look at the ways in which Donne's divine poetry includes interjections of predominantly physical imagery. Indeed the death of Jesus Christ on the cross was a physical death as is captured thus far throughout the poem by Donne's illustration: "marke in my heart" (2), "The picture of Christ crucified" (3), "his countenance" (4), "Teares in his eyes" (5), "Blood fills his frownes" (6), "pierc'd head fell" (6), and "tongue adjudge" (7). This earthly depiction is used to describe the largely religious event of Christ's death and the compassion that this man was still able to show even as the end drew nigh. Donne's sacred sonnet offers a rather vivid description of this morbid scene with physical language, representing the earthliness of Christ's Incarnation, existence, and death; whereas it seems as though he would not have been able to capture the reality and gravity of the situation with more sacred, divine language. Donne highlights the significance of the bodily illustration of Christ to represent the fact that Jesus was made man to die for the forgiveness of sins. Thus, once again, through the use of physical language, Donne forms a more religious message.

With the final six lines of the poem, Donne continues to use his style of secular language to depict Christ's divine love for humanity as the speaker says:

No, no; but as in my idolatrie
 I said to all my profane mistresses,
 Beauty, of pittie, foulnesse onely is
 A signe of rigour: so I say to thee,
 To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd,
 This beauteous forme assumes a pitious minde (l. 9-14).

The speaker refers to his negative emotions and irreverence through idolatrous behavior, as he placed his former lovers on pedestals (9-10). He recalls how he would say to them that beauty is a reflection of the beautiful ones' pity and sympathy for their lovers (11). He would also tell them that 'foulness' or ugliness translates to 'rigour' or strictness: a certain rigidity or lack of mercy (11-12). In the last line of the third quatrain the speaker says, "so I say to thee" (12), which in this instance 'thee,' more specifically, refers to the speaker's soul (2) mentioned earlier on in the sonnet. Donne addresses this part of his being, "To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd, / This beauteous forme assumes a piteous minde" (l. 13-14). In other words, the speaker iterates his belief that Satan and other demonic spirits are perceived as 'horrid shapes,' vile forms. But most significantly, the last line of the poem draws attention to 'this beauteous forme' that is Christ as he hangs from the cross.

Donne uses secular language as he provides a vivid physical description of Christ's sacrifice. Tears well up in his eyes and blood drips down his face as a result of the thorns which had pierced his head (l. 5-6). The reader is given a very sensual depiction of this torturous act and underserved punishment which to some may be on the verge of the grotesque; however, Donne (the speaker) if that distinction is necessary here, calls this beautiful. Rather than finding this murder enjoyable from a physical standpoint, the tears, the bloodshed, the look on his face, and the faint words spoken from a weakened, almost lifeless body, in which case Donne might be deemed as psychologically unstable, I believe Donne finds beauty in the act of surrender itself. Christ's martyrdom and submission for the salvation of humankind is where the real virtue lies. By depicting this scene, Donne portrays his reverence for the Lord and honors the pain and suffering that Jesus felt as a human being. This act of giving up one's life is beautiful because beauty is pity (l. 14); God takes pity on humanity, offering forgiveness and granting the men and women of earth the keys to paradise through the death of his Son. This language grants the reader a sense of intimacy with Christ, his purity and his innocence.

That sort of intimacy is what Donne tries to create with the relationship between the lovers in “The Flea,” not just the fulfillment of a carnal desire, but a marriage of two souls, two lovers made one, who can then gain sight of the redeeming quality found in God’s love. It is humbling to see that this practically lifeless figure as he hangs helplessly from that wood, dripping blood, sweat, and tears, is deemed beautiful and thus, “assumes a pitious minde” (l. 14). But it is something beautiful: the splendor of this selflessness and surrender are symbolic of God’s love for humankind. Christ shows compassion, mercy, and sympathy for all of humanity. In “The Flea,” the speaker attempts to allude to the sacramental nature of intercourse, telling his beloved that human love is a reflection of divine grace and the love of God. Both in the death of the flea and with the crucifixion of Christ, “the blood of innocence” is shed and no honor is lost, rather it is gained and made more apparent. The lady in the flea devotes herself to the man, through “marriage” and in this Holy Sonnet man is made aware of sin and attempts to stray from it. In both cases, people are drawn closer to God and see a reflection of his love for humanity. “Holy Sonnet XIII” is an example of the way in which Donne implements his secular language and style of writing into his *Divine Poems* in order to give the reader a physical representation for something as intangible as love, specifically God’s love for mankind.

Closely knit to the notion of both a physical and spiritual component in love as depicted in “Holy Sonnet XIII” as well as with the notion of beauty as depicted in the crucifixion, is Donne’s “The Extasie.” This poem describes the events that transpire between two lovers. They engage in love that is both bodily and spiritual, love that transcends secular representations of beauty, love unrestricted by sensory perception; it is a more significant, sacred, divine love of the souls. A brief synopsis of Donne’s ‘Extasie’ is as follows: two lovers lie together along a river, holding hands and looking into one another’s eyes, as any smitten couple might do. Their souls then depart from their physical bodies and mingle with one another just up above. They speak,

and are no longer confined to distinct genders, as they become one soul in mutual harmony. The soul then infiltrates their bodies, the necessary physical component of love, which drew the two together in the first place. With this newfound connection of souls, the two will only further continue to grow together in love.

There is more to love than physical beauty, rather it is what lies within; it is who the person actually is. It is beyond the body, and involves the soul. As with the speaker of “Holy Sonnet XIII” who presented the image of Christ as something beautiful representing a more divine connection of heart and soul, similarly is the case between the lovers in “The Extasie.” Catherine Gimelli Martin writes “beauty as a necessary intermediary between earthly and heavenly love had a well-known appeal to English poets” (“Erotology” 127). Martin further suggests that the root of love is not merely physical beauty, rather it is something much more important: a meshing of the souls (128). Further, she speaks of the lover in the poem as being able to look beyond just the outward appearance and beauty by “abstract[ing] the image of the beloved;” then one must create some ideal conception “in his own soul...and admire the synthesis as a reflection of the ideal.” This fabricated manifestation is “fairer than the actual beloved, but not fairer than the “idea” of her soul” (128). It is something greater and even more beautiful, and spiritual. This new ‘idea’ that the speaker has created is far more beautiful than the woman herself, yes, but still not even as beautiful as her soul. Thus, love is something of both a physical nature, but a heavenly nature as well.

The argument that reciprocated love must involve both the earthly body and the heavenly soul is also advanced by Ramie Targoff in *John Donne: Body and Soul*. Targoff writes that in order “for love to flourish, two sets of relations need to be in place: both the bodies and souls of each lover need to be conjoined in the act of loving each other” (51). This belief is essential in Donne’s definition of love in that both the physical and spiritual components must be in union for true love to exist. The poem begins with two lovers as they lie together on the bank of a

river. The speaker says:

Our hands were firmly 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 (5-12).

Already from the beginning, the reader envisions this couple and their togetherness not only through the repetition of the word “our,” but also through the physical language that the speaker utilizes. This earthly connection of holding hands “firmly cemented” (5) and gazing into each other’s eyes, “the windows of their souls,” so intently, with “eye-beames twisted” (7) that they can see one’s own reflection in the other’s eyes (Martin 139). Already they are becoming part of the other. One sees the way in which the poem slowly progresses, joining these two separate entities, uniting them into one form. However, “the bodies alone cannot achieve the union of love” (Targoff 54); the essential spiritual component necessary for love in Donne’s understanding of it is not yet present.

In the following lines, Donne introduces the immaterial essence necessary for true love.

The speaker continues:

As 'twixt two equall Armies, Fate
 Suspends uncertain 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 sepulchral status lay,
 All day, the same our postures were,
 And wee said nothing, all the day (13-20).

Here, the speaker and his beloved's souls are released from their corporeal frame. Donne cleverly uses the parentheses to signify the souls leaving the bodies. As the spiritual essence of life has departed from the two lovers, to 'suspend,' 'hang,' mingle, and 'negotiate' above their former physical shells, the lovers' bodies lie motionless on the ground like hollow, empty tombs. Their physical forms say nothing for the entire day. They were left in a blissful silence with one another as their souls were too busy doing the talking. The poem goes on:

If any, so by love refin'd,
 That he soules language understood,
 And by good love were grown all minde,
 Within convenient distance stood,
 He (though he knows not which soul spake,
 Because both meant, both spake the same)
 Might thence a new concoction take,
 And part farre purer then he came (21-28).

With these lines, the speaker suggests that if anyone is standing near enough to witness these events, and has undergone this heavenly experience of love in which souls converse, he or she would understand what exactly the souls are saying. Then, even if one has already undergone such a transcendent occurrence, after perceiving this one, the individual will leave with an even purer understanding of what love is than when he first arrived. Donne assigns an entirely different language to the souls: not simply the crude sounds that humans call words, but rather the souls engage in the language of love, a more heavenly dialect.

Reciprocal feeling cannot be established by being merely physical, nor is mutual love

formed by the exclusively spiritual. A certain connection between both the material and immaterial must be cultivated in order for true love to have real meaning. The poem goes on:

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 loneliness controules (29-44).

In this segment, the reader sees the souls unite. This mixture and re-mixture of these souls, like elements in a centrifuge, creates a fusion of the two forms into one. Ramie Targoff writes, “Donne invented the term ‘inanimation’ to describe the process by which spirit gets infused into a person...a forward thrusting of soul into body...Interinanimation, then, doubles the pleasure of inanimation...transforming the act of animation from something individual to something mutual. ‘Interinanimation’ means both parties are giving life to each other” (55). As Donne coins this new term one discovers a reciprocated vivaciousness and equal love. One also sees the

importance of the soul's incorporation into the body. With the lovers' souls now interconnected one wonders where the other piece to Donne's definition of love lies, the physical body frozen on the river bank must be injected with this newfound spirit.

Targoff also mentions Donne's use of the term "sex" to distinguish between man and woman (55). Donne's new singular shape transcends sex; it is neither male nor female, not restricted, but genderless. The lovers take on a higher level of love. Their souls are superior and they almost seem to take on characteristics of gods who are not constrained by gender, that is, feminine and masculine attributes. With this sort of superior love that the souls now attain, they are "actively linked both to God and to each other" (Martin 135). However, it is a bit ironic that Donne seems to be creating this unified shape, two lovers' souls meshed into one, while also creating a seemingly phallic image with the violet transplant whose 'strength' and 'size' 'redoubles still and multiplies.' For some reason, Donne takes away from the heavenly, sacred, work of the union of the souls by penetrating it with this physical image. Donne realizes that the souls have had their time alone outside of the earthly body and they have accomplished their task to join together in love; now, the lovers' soul must return to the physical world:

But O alas, so long, so farre
 Our bodies why doe we forbear?
 They are ours, though not wee, Wee are
 The intelligences, they the spheares.
 We owe them thanks, because they thus,
 Did us, to us, at first convay,
 Yelled their senses force to us,
 Nor are drosse to us, but allay.
 On man heavens influence works not so,
 But that it first imprints the ayre,

For soule into the soule may flow,

Though it to body first repaire (49-60).

The speaker is saying that the bodies are theirs as they represent their life here on earth, but they are not their identity. Here, these lovers seem to not be having sex, for the lovers are the “intelligences,” the mind, the soul which is merely harbored inside the body and it is their only means of physically expressing the soul (Targoff 55). The speaker believes it necessary to thank the earthly bodies because they are what first brought the two together and allowed them to find and see one another. Their souls are in spiritual union. In line 60, after a lengthy absence, the body is again mentioned, thus suggesting the essential physical element of human love. The body is given by God and serves as a means to engage in earthly pleasure, particularly, intercourse. Sexual relations serve as analogous to the religious sacrament of communion as aforementioned in the analysis of Donne’s “Flea.” Achsah Guibbory in her article “Fear of ‘loving more’: Death and the Loss of Sacramental Love” states:

Donne’s argument in “The Extasie” that in the experience of sexual love “soule into soule may flow” by “repaire[ing] to the “body” (ll. 59-60) presents sexual intercourse as analogous to the Sacrament as he echoes the Catholic understanding that Christ mingles with the individual human soul when the bread and wine are taken into the body of the communicant (205).

Here, Donne uses erotic language to express the notion of physical and spiritual components of each lover entering into the other. Donne is associating this physical human act of copulation with the religious act of participating in the Eucharist. Guibbory, in her essay “Erotic Poetry,” brings one back to the Sacrament of the Eucharist in “The Flea.” Just as love between a man and woman is something earthly and spiritual, and just as Christ, God incarnate was someone earthly and spiritual, so too is the sacrament of communion: the bread as representation of Christ’s body broken, and the cup as Christ’s blood shed—these material symbols serve also as a spiritual

message to demonstrate a “taste of the divine” (143-44). Just as man and woman become a part of one another with the act of sexual union, Christ enters the body and soul of the communicant and is in spiritual union with that individual. Donne suggests that in order to truly understand and feel love, this “abler soul” (43) must go into each of their bodies first, to fulfill both the physical and spiritual components.

True love in Donne’s eyes consists of both body and soul in perfect harmony. The speaker describes this experience:

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 (61-68).

This is Donne’s definition of not only love but of our existence as a human race: “that subtile knot” (64) is the connection between the sacred soul and the secular body, ‘blood’ and ‘spirit.’ Thus, “pure lovers” (65) are those whose souls are intertwined with the material body, which acts through sensory perception. If one does not have both essential pieces to the puzzle, then it is not love, and it is not human. With the last line of this section, “Else a great Prince in prison lies” (68), Ramie Targoff notes Donne “reversing the Platonic commonplace that the body is the prison house for the soul, what obstructs the love between these souls is their disembodiment” (*Songs and Sonnets* 56). Normally, the ‘Prince’ is the soul, while the body the ‘prison;’ however, for Donne the body is not a prison, it is a necessity. In order for these lovers to achieve the ultimate satisfaction, and deepest and truest love for one another, their souls must come back

to inhabit their physical form. Otherwise—as pure spirit—they are “in prison.”

The speaker of the poem recognizes the significance of the corporeal shape and concludes by saying:

To'our bodies turne wee then, that so
 Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
 Loves mysteries in soules do 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 (69-76).

The lovers must go to their bodies once more in order to gain the complete experience of love.

The ‘weake men’ which the speaker refers to are those who have perhaps not quite attained love at such an intellectual and spiritual level as these two; while it also refers to those who cannot feel the pleasure of love simply by knowing one is in it, but rather these ‘weake men’ need some sort of physical representation of love to truly believe it. As Donne posits, the body is the vehicle through which the soul acts, thus it is the ‘booke.’ David Naugle in his essay “John Donne’s Poetic Philosophy of Love” puts it nicely, “the mystery of love is cultivated primarily in the soul; however this could not be seen, observed or read without the body” (29). In much the same way, God’s love for humanity was made visible through “the Incarnation of the divine Christ” (Guibbory 143). God in the form of man—this physical embodiment of divine grace further supports and gives weight to Donne’s belief that love is something both sacred and secular, requiring both the material body and the spiritual soul.

The poem concludes with the notion that if any other human being has experienced love even remotely close to the manner in which these lovers have, then that individual will

understand the vital nature of returning to the physical body; for only through its connection with the soul is true love enjoyed. Not completely in contrast to “The Flea” in which the speaker attempts to persuade and seduce his lover into engaging in sexual relations to make their love complete, “‘The Extasie’ leans toward a consummation of the couple’s love through more than hand-holding” (Targoff 57). Both poems represent both a physical and spiritual union: joining together, becoming one both in body and in soul.

Another one of John Donne’s *Songs and Sonnets* entitled “Aire and Angels” uses the language of physical, secular love, while also speaking to the notion that love is achieved and felt because of a deeper, more intimate connection of flesh and spirit. Much of what has been discussed in this paper thus far pertains to Donne’s belief that love is meant to be experienced in its fullest form; that is, through the communion of two bodies, but more significantly, two souls. Once this happens, one’s eyes are opened to the divine beauty of love, as it is something far greater than earthly feelings; rather it is a reflection of the love of God for humanity, something so amazing one only receives a glimpse of it through corporeal relationships. “Aire and Angels” is yet another example of the sacramental nature of love.

The poem opens with the speaker addressing an ambiguous, seemingly immaterial form, with a tone of spiritual praise, whilst also seemingly trying to excuse prior behavior with former “profane mistresses” (“Holy Sonnet XII):

Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
 Before I knew thy face or 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 (1. 1-6).

As Theresa DiPasquale interprets in *Literature and Sacrament*, the speaker “before he came to

love any one lady in particular...was in love with his own lyricality, his own poetic “voice” (3); ... he “worship’d” (4) the “shapeless flame” (3) of poetic inspiration itself” (DiPasquale 147).

The speaker gives glory to the poem itself, starting as something formless and perhaps even uninspired, but with every line grows in substance and meaning as it begins to take on an identity. Just as with love, the shapeless soul requires a bodily presence. The speaker refers to his former relations with other women, and “cleverly excuses his escapades with other women by arguing that he saw images of his new love in them” (Greteman, “All this seed pearl” 28). These previous sexual encounters and ‘love’ should be acceptable as the speaker claims that these women all provided a reflection and insight into true love with this ‘thee’ or the speaker’s present woman. The poem which began with a rather overt spiritual ambiance, with a theoretical and unidentified ‘thee,’ takes a drastic physical turn as one imagines past sexual experiences with earlier women, and as the speaker refers to his muse saying, “Some lovely glorious nothing I did see” (l. 6) which “comes into focus not as a lambent spiritual presence, but as a pun on the vagina (Greteman 28). Here the speaker enters into the company of this woman, and he attempts to form an identity for her, while also perhaps believing that she is no more than a fabrication of his imagination. The poem works to introduce a physical component into the presence of the soul.

The introduction of the corporeal frame is built upon with the ensuing lines of the poem, as the ‘shapeless flame’ is given a material, tangible nature:

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 did Love aske, and now

That it assume thy body, I allow,
 And fixe it selfe in thy lip, eye, and brow (l. 7-14).

Here the body/soul dualism that Donne was so fond of is made quite clear. The flesh controls sensory perception, but the soul is interconnected with the flesh and is the driving force which is “empowering the body” (Greteman 29). Love is no longer this intangible notion associated only with the soul, but is given substance as it is demonstrated through a physical means. Yes, the soul is an essential component, but in order to engage in and experience true mutual love, it must be a part of the body. Love and the soul now “assume thy body” (13) and are in sacred communion with, and inside of, the body. However, love in this instance seems to take on a particularly idolatrous physical connotation as it is manifested and “fixe[d]...in thy lip, eye, and brow” (14). This image of beauty is unfulfilling in that it is harbored in simple physical attributes which are “unresponsive” and the speaker is negatively “fixating on such distractions” (DiPasquale 149). Theresa DiPasquale continues saying, “It is of no use to love if love inhabits the lady’s features, for such an incarnation is mere surface penetration, and it leaves the lady herself emotionally untouched” (149); which is to say that love goes further than the physical attraction and representation as is suggested in line fourteen. These characteristics although contributing to love, are not all that love consists of; Donne believes love is met at a deeper level and comes with the union of souls.

The lover in the first half of this poem fails to look beyond what his eyes can see; he is confined by the senses and “failed to receive the erotic and emotional grace that the lady might bestow” (DiPasquale 149). Unlike the lovers in “The Extasie” whose souls are enabled to exit their corporeal shells and intermingle, dance, communicate, and mesh, the speaker in “Aire and Angels” lacks that more significant level of love as he is obsessed with the mere physicality of the woman; “her enchanting beauty, thus reified and idolized, is a sacrament empty of meaning, an outward sign that corresponds to no inward grace” (149). In continuation of the Eucharist as

aforementioned in this paper, this speaker's physical attachment to the woman could be equivalent to not believing in Christ and still partaking in communion. With this, one does not receive the body and blood at a level of spiritual representation, but rather an unfulfilling, dissatisfying consumption of bread and wine from a merely nutritional stance.

In the second half of "Aire and Angels" the speaker recognizes and understands that reciprocal love involves more than sheer physical appeal:

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 scattrig bright, can love inhere (l. 18-22).

Love is more than just devoting all time, effort, and attention to simple strands of hair; obviously some greater part is more worthy of love's devotion, as the speaker says "some fitter must be sought" (l. 20). Donne wittingly plays with eroticism and sexual language through the pun on the word 'pinnace.' This word carried through this section ties in with the common seventeenth century pun, 'nothing,' which often stood to represent a woman's vagina. The speaker, however, is arguing that "in nothing, nor in things extreme ... can love inhere" (l. 21-22). With this, the speaker makes the claim that a passion for the physical is not all that love entails and it cannot eternally exist without some stronger spiritual force playing its part as well.

Theresa DiPasquale first draws attention to an observation made by Achsah Guibbory in which she argues that the first stanza was written in the present tense with the use of the word "now" (l. 12), while the second stanza utilizes the word "saw" (l. 18) thus representing a passage of time. As DiPasquale also mentions, Guibbory believes that through the use of language such as "take a body" (10) and "assume thy body" (13), she argues that through this physical language, which serves as double-entendre, the lovers in the poem have engaged in sexual

intercourse. Guibbory a well-versed scholar of Donne perceives this language as a sort of sexual “innuendo,” however, I agree with DiPasquale as she refutes Guibbory saying “this seems to me too hasty a conclusion” (Literature and Sacrament 150). The conceit of the poem is the speaker’s “erotic frustration and despair” and “the fact that he has as yet gained no access to...” a more intimate connection with his lady (150). At this point in the poem, it seems as though the speaker still feels a disappointed and incomplete love as the speaker’s thoughts still focus mainly on the earthly body, specifically the woman’s “lip, eye, and brow” (14) and “hair” (19).

If the individuals in this poem are to experience the sacramental nature of love and a mutual union, physical representations of beauty will not cut it. The speaker needs to connect to his beloved on a spiritual level in which their souls are bound together and she responds willingly with a reciprocated love for him. Only in this way is their love made sacramental, given meaning and thus, grants these two people insight into the love and wisdom of God. David Naugle in his “Philosophy of Love” creates a three tier approach to love in that there is “the union of human bodies sexually, the union of souls emotionally, and the union of souls with God spiritually” (23). He goes on to say that “physical beauty in the body would reflect spiritual beauty in the soul, and spiritual beauty in the soul would reflect the very beauty of God” (23). As Donne would attest, only through the fulfillment of all three of these levels is true love experienced, and through the interweaving of body and soul does one perceive the love of God for man. Naugle says, “It is in the love of God, which is the highest of all love, that human love itself finds meaning” (30).

The poem concludes:

Then as an Angell, face, and wings
Of aire, not pure as it, yet pure doth weare,
So thy love may be my loves spehare;
Just such disparitie

As is twixt Aire and Angells puritie,

T'wixt womens love, and mens will ever bee (23-28).

Donne is prone to turning a poem on its head. DiPasquale makes the argument that in these last six lines “the speaker of ‘Aire and Angels’ proposes a new model of love, in which Angells” (27) are male, not female, and “womens love” (28) is the “spheare” (25)...in which the even purer angelic spirit of “mens” love (28) “incarnates itself” (151). Here the roles are reversed and the Angel is no longer a representation of the feminine, rather the speaker embodies this angel, thus making it male. The angel, this spiritual essence takes a physical form as it wears air, and in doing so calls to his beloved that her love may be his world. In a sense, this “lack of clear differentiation between lover and beloved” contributes to Donne’s idea of bodily and spiritual union (DiPasquale 152). Gender disappears in a way, or seems to become a bit more abstract, leading one to believe that the two individuals in the poem are becoming more enlightened, discovering the ways of love and entering into it as one. In the last line, Donne posits the notion that the Angel must inhabit a physical form ‘aire’ in order to experience love, thus losing a sense of its purity; however whilst the angel takes on this new form, it actually becomes purer in the sense that it is engaging in true reciprocal love, which requires both body and soul. The angel is less pure, but simultaneously purer than ever, because it is given a glimpse of a divine love. Just as this angel, men and women are stuck with the emotion of love, granted to men by God, only as it can be experienced here on earth through sensory perception and psychology. Through an earthly union of bodies, and a spiritual union of souls, two individuals coming together, one is enabled to understand just a piece of the capacity of God’s love for humanity.

In stark contrast to DiPasquale’s arguments towards Donne’s gender reversal of the Angel in this poem, Catherine Gimelli Martin in her article “The Erotology of Donne’s Extasie and the Secret History of Voluptuous Rationalism” looks at Peter De Sa Wiggins’ analysis of the “Aire and Angels,” who claims that:

the lady as [the speakers] angel remain consistent. Less sympathetic critics who accuse the speaker of changing his argument midstream are thus themselves inconsistent in failing to see how his complimentary purposes require the referent of the word “love” in line 25 to be transferred from his passion to hers, its only proper object (Martin 124-25).

As the speaker says the angel takes on “aire” as its ‘body,’ “So thy love may be my loves spheare” (l. 25). Martin quotes De Sa Wiggins from his article “‘Aire and Angles’: Incarnations of Love,” saying, “But rather than reading ‘thy love’ as *you* who must become *my* outer sphere, a “plain paraphrase of the lines should be read. ‘So *I* may [then] be *your* [airy] sphere,’” the “translated” body of your angelic essence (125). The man is not the angel speaking to his beloved female; instead the female is the angelic spirit and the speaker is the sphere calling for his lady’s mutual blessing in love. In these final lines of the poem as Martin argues, Donne suggests that “woman now belongs not below but above man, who had traditionally been associated with the ‘higher’ elements of air and fire. No longer linked to the ‘lower’ elements of earth and water but to the ‘womb’ of elements sublimed in angelic quintessence” (Martin 126). The woman in the poem will lift the speaker on her wings, leading him to a fulfilled, divine love, united in body and soul, and also with God.

The whole purpose of these final lines is to shatter the constraints of gender. Notions of masculine and feminine are the only form of perception and understanding that humans have with an earthly lens, and often pose as barriers to the experience of love. Donne’s “Aire and Angels” recognizes that love is something greater than just male and female, body and soul, it is a connection with God and seeking a level of love in which gender is fused, becoming genderless, in which male and female characteristics disappear, leaving lovers with a mutual union and fulfillment of a divine love. I find myself in agreement with Peter De Sa Wiggins as opposed to DiPasquale’s perspective, for Wiggins’ depiction of love in “Aire and Angels”

suggests the man's submission to woman as angel, a representation of spirit and sign of the divine, thus representing man's acceptance and eagerness to engage in a more profound spiritual love, which God shows for humans. Donne's language of love conveys his belief that both body and soul are necessary ingredients for a successful recipe of love. He also alludes to the notion that once two lovers realize this and attain communion of both the physical and spiritual, then they are made one in love and are left only to witness and participate in the divine love of God.

Donne's skillful techniques in using language that is primarily physical in order to express deeper religious meanings are evident in much of his poetry. In "The Flea," Donne depicts a lover's plea to a lady to engage in sexual relations with him. However, through the use of secular language Donne does so much more in terms of highlighting some rather profound spiritual allusions, such as marriage, the Eucharist, the crucifixion of Christ, and the loss of maidenhead as an increase in virtue as opposed to a loss of honor. "The Flea" represents a predominantly carnal aspect of love, whilst simultaneously hinting at a deeper, more spiritual union in earthly love. "The Extasie" and "Aire and Angels" truly bring to light the soulful component of earthly love. The lovers in those poems mesh on a more heavenly level, looking past physical beauty and participating in a love in which two souls become one. With this mutual bonding, lovers are connected on a level of divinity, bestowed with an insight into the love of God. Lastly, as is evident with "Holy Sonnet XIII," Donne uses secular language in his *Divine Poems* to convey a necessary duality of both body and soul, as the image of Christ, the spirit of God, is emblazoned into the speaker's heart, representing both a physical and spiritual tie.

In summation, Donne uses secular symbolism to allude to more profound sacramental issues. The physical nature of the language Donne incorporates into his writing represents his understanding of love and specifically he feels that sex is of a sacramental nature. Through

writing on all of these tangible signs, more profound concepts such as honor, Christ entering into the communicants body, and Christ taking on a fleshly existence to die for the forgiveness of sins, Donne grants his audience insight into the wisdom and love of God. Donne believed, as is emphasized in both his *Songs and Sonnets* and *Divine Poems*, that love consists of an

intertwining of both the body and the soul, and through both sexual physical union as well as spiritual union, two lovers embark together on a journey in love connected with the divine, and accompanied all along the way with God's love.

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