

Body and Soul in Four Poems by John Donne

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Body and Soul in Four Poems by John Donne

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Introduction

As one of the greatest English poets of all times, John Donne continues to be both intriguing and challenging at the same time. Even though his love poetry was written more than four hundred years ago, readers still find it highly fascinating and significant. One might therefore ask the question of what it is about his poems that speaks to the readers in such a powerful way. The poems are filled with mysteries, paradoxes and intricate imagery and this has led to countless discussions among critics. When discussing the love poetry, the main issue has been the paradox of how the lovers can be both two and one at the same time, and scholars have also debated the relation between body and soul in the love poems. Donne's love poetry plays on and stands in contrast to Neoplatonic and Petrarchan dualism where it was believed that the soul wanted nothing to do with the body (Isabel Rivers, 1994, 34). Donne, on the other hand, typically maintains that the soul depends on the body in order to fully express itself and that the spirit can only be reached through the body (Achsah Guibbory, 1995/2015, 110). The idea of erotic love as a transcendent, spiritual experience was revolutionary at the time as it contradicted the Christian tradition associating the body and sexuality with sin (Guibbory, 2006, 144). Although Donne insists on bodily involvement in many of his love poems, the poems that I have chosen to analyze in my thesis present contrasting views on what ideal love should look like regarding the role of the body and this is what the ongoing scholarly debate is concerned with. The poems I have selected are titled "A Valediction: forbidding Mourning", "The Good Morrow", "The Ecstasy" and "The Relic".

Most critics view Donne's love poetry as "anti-Petrarchan", meaning that his poems are considered to be hostile to or playfully opposed to the long tradition of Neoplatonism represented by Francesco Petrarch (1304-1374) (Literature online) and the Italian humanists. Petrarchan love sonnets written in imitation of Petrarch are characterized by "their platonic love for an impossibly idealized and ethereal mistress" (Paul N. Siegel, 1945, 164). The focus is on the mistress' beauty, her cruelty, the lover's sufferings and a passion that goes beyond reason (165). According to the Petrarchan tradition physical love is considered to be the lowest stage and the ideal is instead a disembodied or immaterial love (Ben Saunders, 2007, 141). Moreover, the tradition asserts that one should love a woman for her soul and not her body (142). Going against the Petrarchan tradition, Donne's poems have been regarded as

controversial in that they complicate the hierarchical differentiations between body and soul that dictate the Petrarchan and Neoplatonic traditions (143). However, what is contradictory in Donne's love poems is that he expresses a position where the lovers possess the body and transcend it at the same time. Physicality is embraced, but the ultimate goal of achieving an ideal love appears to lie in transcending the limitations that are enforced by biology (145). Michael Schoenfeldt (2009) agrees with the conclusion that Donne's love poetry resists a Neoplatonic partition of body and soul, "emphasizing instead the full participation of body, mind and soul in the flush experience of erotic intimacy" (156).

Another important critic, Ramie Targoff (2008) concedes that Donne likes to convey the interrelation between body and soul as one of mutual necessity, her claim being that the relation between the two was the defining bond of his life and the great subject of his writing (1). According to Donne "The body is not the man, nor the soul is not the man, but the union of these two makes up the man" (Sermon No 12, vol. 2, 358) (1). Despite the preaching of these words where Donne insists on a union between body and soul, Targoff asserts that what complicates Donne's definition of love is that he is concerned with both the union and the separation of the two at the same time and that "Donne's expression of his belief in the mutual necessity of body and soul, and his obsessive imagining of their parting, is the most continuous and abiding feature of his collected works" (5). Moreover, the relation between body and soul is linked to the connection between the physical and spiritual in love and this connection between the physical and spiritual aspect of love is what the four poems I have chosen are concerned with.

Donne's love poems raise the question of whether or not there has to exist any physical desire in order for the lovers to reach the stage of spiritual love where their souls become one and are joined to each other in a love union. In addition, one can ask whether or not these two types of love, physical and spiritual, can exist separately without depending on each other. This is the main question my thesis will be concerned with, as I believe this is at the core of Donne's love poetry. Based on a selection of key contributions in Donne criticism, the thesis will explore the way in which Donne portrays and explains love, also considering the extent to which one might argue that the poems express some fundamental ideal of love. The thesis concentrates on four of his most famous love poems arguing that Donne attempts to define what love is. The reason why I have selected these specific poems is that I take them to reveal different aspects and sides of love as well as demonstrating various attitudes towards the role of the body and soul in love. Guibbory asserts that "In presenting the experience of love as the most interesting, important part of life, the *Songs and Sonets* voice ideas that have

become so powerful in our modern world that we must remind ourselves how bold and revolutionary they were in Donne's time (2006, 140) and that his "boldest invention was representing erotic love as a spiritual experience that provides fulfillment the public world, and even religious institutions, cannot" (142). Furthermore, what is also important is that Donne is considered the inventor of so-called metaphysical poetry, which incorporates ideas and metaphors from philosophy, theology, medicine and astronomy (Targoff, 3). Such poetry is characterized by ingenuity, obscurity and intellectuality in addition to conceits, irony and paradoxes (Frank J. Warnke, *Metaphysical Poetry*, 1993).

In my thesis, I mainly depend on the following critics: Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 2008, Ben Saunders, *Desiring Donne*, 2006, Achsah Guibbory, *Returning to John Donne*, 2015 and *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, 2006. The reason why I have chosen these critics is that they all mainly concern themselves with the issue of the body/ soul relation in Donne's love poems. Additionally, they are among the most insightful and influential Donne scholars and critics. Based on my selection of secondary literature, the paper will compare and contrast the four poems in order to look at differences and similarities between the ideas of love that are expressed. Critics such as Targoff and Guibbory focus on the interrelation between body and soul in Donne's love poetry and the union between the two, while at the same time claiming that he is concerned with the separation of them as well. My argument is that Donne seeks to define what love is. Related to this, the paper will investigate whether or not Donne's poems suggest that the body is necessary in order to link together and create a connection of the souls or if one type of love can exist without the other.

The main edition I have used for my thesis is *John Donne, The Major Works*, edited by John Carey (Oxford World's Classics, 1990). In addition I have consulted C.A. Patrides' edition of *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* (J.M. Dent & Sons, 1985). The four poems I have chosen to concentrate on are from the *Songs and Sonnets*, first collected in the 1635 edition of Donne's poems (John Carey, 88). As a group, the poems portray a diverse range of attitudes towards the experience of love (Guibbory, 2006, 136). There have been some disagreements among critics when it comes to when the poems were written and there is almost no clear evidence for dating any of the poems in the collection (Carey, 88). However, they were most likely composed from the 1590s and into the first decade of the 17th century (Guibbory, 136) and were first published posthumously in 1633 (Carey, 88). One should not take for granted that the views and opinions voiced in the poems agree with those of Donne the author, but rather that he plays out different attitudes, arguing from various positions and points of view depending on the voice or persona created in each poem.

The reason why I chose to write this thesis is because I find the poems highly fascinating and capturing and I believe there are always new things to look for and discover. Even though they were written such a long time ago, they are still of interest for readers today and the way they express and meditate on love is contemporary, timeless and continues to be a mystery. Moreover, what I find particularly interesting is the way the poems express different ideas about the role of body and soul in love, related to the connection between the physical and spiritual. Additionally, the question of whether or not the poems express a union or separation between body and soul seems to inspire an endless ongoing debate among critics and new views on the topic are continuously being presented. Moreover, I believe what makes Donne's love poems so unique is, as asserted by Guibbory, that they connect "sexual, consummated love with spiritual matters" (142).

Theory

Isabel River's *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry* (1994) is an important source, as I believe this work covers the main ideas and thoughts relating to perceptions of the world and love at the time, including fundamental ideas that are central to Donne's love poetry such as the belief in an original state of human perfection (9) and Plato's two worlds, where the first world is earthly and subject to change and decay. The second world, on the other hand, is the ideal world, stable, eternal and perfect. This world is where the soul comes from and to which everything else is inferior. This relates directly to the body/soul dualism where the soul comes from the first world and is trapped in the body in the second world always seeking to escape (33). In addition, it was believed that the soul wanted nothing to do with the body, as it was inferior and unstable belonging to the material imperfect world (34). In the Christianized Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology there is an opposition between the earthly and the heavenly. The earthly is inconsistent and mortal while the heavenly is constant, orderly and eternal (69). Body and soul relate to this opposition in the way that man's bodily structure mirrors the terrestrial or earthly sphere.

In addition, I have also consulted Achsah Guibbory's recent collection *Returning to John Donne* (Ashgate, 2015), a volume of reprinted articles and chapters dating from the period between 1986 - 2011. The volume contains essays that are concerned with "the early modern preoccupation with history and the movement of time", in addition to the main

subject of *the Songs and Sonnets*, Erotic desire. Additionally, it discusses the poems treatment of religion. As a result, Guibbory has become interested in “the ways that politics, love and religion are interconnected in Donne’s writing” (3). What makes his writing feel “present” is according to Guibbory that it is “so energetic, so alive” and the fact that “he writes about what continues to matter: our yearning for love and intimacy, our desire to believe in- and feel connected with- something greater and better than ourselves” (4). Moreover, Guibbory holds that the poems in the *Songs and Sonnets* reflect and express different ideas about love. Furthermore they explore the varieties and complexities of love where “Donne is searching for a truth that will emerge from and fit his experience” (71). One can detect a certain skepticism in his poems towards existing social conventions as well as a belief that the individual must seek the truth for himself (71). Reading the poems, one gets a sense that Donne was interested in new discoveries of the period, scientific and geographical, for example in “The Good Morrow” where “sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone” (l.12) (71).

The issue of solving the body/ soul relation was also something that engaged the period in general and not just Donne and other love poets. The debate was concerned with whether the body was simply an instrument for the soul, held by Platonists or whether the soul was united with the body, as maintained by Aristotelians (Kimberly Anne Coles, 2015, 901). Furthermore, it was believed that “The impressions of the mind have their inflection in the body as well” and that melancholy of the mind affected the spleen (916). Robert Burton explains it this way: “As the Body works vpon the Mind, by his bad humors, disturbing the Spirits, sending grosse fumes into the Braine; and so per consequens disturbing the Soule, and all the faculties of it... so on the other side, the Minde most effectually works vpon the Body, producing by his passions and perturbations, miraculous alterations” (Robert Burton, 2001, cited by Coles, 916).

Method

The main method in this thesis is close reading of the four selected poems, paying close attention to individual words and lines. Additionally, in order to interpret the words and lines, I have used OED Online as well as consulted previous interpretations of what they might signify. In addition I have compared and contrasted the poems looking at differences and similarities between lines and words that I find relevant for my thesis in terms of how love is

expressed or defined. There is an extensive use of OED in my analysis of “The Ecstasy” and “The Relic” as I find such close attention to meaning of single words especially important in these two poems. This is because as a Norwegian student of Donne’s poems, I find that in the two poems, and particularly in “The Ecstasy”, the poems contain more complex words than “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning” and “The Good Morrow”. For this reason, I make extensive use of OED in this part of my thesis. Another reason for my extensive use of OED in these two poems is to vary the method of analysis slightly, depending mainly on interpreting previous criticisms in “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning” and in “The Good Morrow”. Subsequently, the purpose of my extensive OED use in the analysis of “The Ecstasy” and “The Relic” is to provide a somewhat different perspective, focusing even more on individual words.

Overview of thesis

The first part of my thesis discusses the body soul/ relation in Donne’s love poems and provides an analysis of “A valediction: forbidding Mourning”, a poem I argue that illustrates the distinction between the lovers who only experience physical desire as opposed to the lovers who are connected by the souls, where the main issue the poem is concerned with, is the role of the body in the spiritual lovers’ relationship. The next part discusses Donne’s treatment of love in “The Good Morrow”, focusing on the separation between the lovers’ experience of physical desire in the past as opposed to the spiritual love that they now share with each other. Additionally, there are Platonic elements in the poem that I believe are important in terms of the idea of love that is expressed. The thesis then moves on to discuss the expression of love in “The Ecstasy”, being especially concerned with the importance of the body in love. The last section of my thesis is concerned with Donne’s treatment of the way love is conveyed in “The Relic”, where my argument is that the poem expresses a contrast between the physical and spiritual. Lastly, there is a conclusion comparing the way love is expressed in the four poems.

Body and Soul

According to Plato, physical and spiritual love are dependent on each other: “Love is of soul and body, and the operations of the soul depend on the body” (A.J. Smith, 1985, 203). This idea is important to my thesis, where the main question is how one is to understand the relation between the spiritual and physical in Donne’s love poems. In terms of the body/ soul relation, the four poems I have selected represent contrasting views, which complicates and makes it difficult to understand what constitutes Donne’s ideal love. There might not be any well-defined and coherent ideal at all and Donne may have been uncertain of what perfect love should look like. Or maybe he did not try to figure out a fixed ideal, but only expressed different aspects of love or different sides of being in love and experiencing love. According to Targoff (2008) the *Songs and Sonnets* contain both skepticism and idealism “about the possibilities for loving another person in body and soul” (52), and I think this contrast is well reflected in the four poems as they convey different perceptions of what it means to be in love. These different ideas of what love is, are related to the role of the physical and spiritual. When reading Donne’s poems one is faced with the question of whether they voice a separation or interdependence between body and soul. Is the desirable goal a spiritual love that only relies on the connection of the souls or is it rather a spiritual connection that depends on the body?

It is important to observe that in the early modern period thoughts and feelings were considered as bodily experiences, which meant that the body influenced the mind and that the two were closely related (Schoenfeldt, 2009, 146). Donne argues in Paradox 6 (*John Donne, The Major Works*, 1990) that “The Gifts of the Body are Better than those of the Mind, or of Fortune” (15) and claims that it is the body that makes the mind. Moreover, Donne asserts that virtue is as much a result of humoral or bodily fluids as of ethical effort and divine guidance (Schoenfeldt, 147). In a letter of 1608, Donne underlines the role of the body when he states that human beings consist of three parts, soul, body and mind, further observing that thoughts, affections and passions are products of the intercommunication between body and soul (148). These examples may serve to illustrate Donne’s general obsession with the body/ soul dualism. Although it can be argued that he generally insists on the role of the body and that he often portrays the body and soul as interdependent, this does not seem to be entirely

the case in “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning” and “The Good-Morrow”. In these two poems I believe there is a distinction between the physical and spiritual, as if the body and soul are mutually exclusive. My argument is that these two poems convey an idea of spiritual love that does not necessarily involve the body. Although the physical is a part of the lovers’ union, the speaker of the poems seems to favor a spiritual type of love as superior to and independent of the body. Consequently, it appears in these two poems that the position expressed values the body and the union of body and soul, but values a spiritual connection even higher.

Kimberly Anne Coles’ article (2015) offers a valuable discussion of the view on the soul. She asserts that “No early modern poet was more concerned with ‘That subtle knot which makes us man,’ (The Ecstasy, l.64) with the matter of the mind, the status of the spirit or the nature of the soul than Donne” (901). Donne holds that “The soul cannot be matter because, in that case, proof of immortality of the soul cannot be derived from its nature. But it also cannot be decoupled from the body; rather, the soul, by its nature, must be joined with a body” (902-903). Moreover, Donne argues that “All that the soul does, it does in, and with, and by the body.” (Sermon No 14, vol. 4, 358, cited in Coles, 903). Additionally he explains the relation between the body and soul holding that “We consists of three parts, a Soul, and Body, and Minde: which I call those thoughts and affections and passions, which neither soul nor body hath alone, but have been begotten by their communication, as Musique results out of our breath and a Cornet.” As a result, “Cognition is produced by the concert of body and soul” (907). Here, one can see the way Donne is unable to draw a separation between body and soul, rather insisting that the soul requires a body for its expression: “the perfect natural state of the soul..... is..... to be united to the body, and when body and soul are separated, the soul is rendered unperfect” (911-912). This view demonstrates that Donne regarded the body as something inseparable from the soul.

The idea of transcendence was a major concern in the Renaissance period and it is also at the core of Donne’s love poetry. In Ficino’s love theory there were two basic kinds of love, simple and mutual or reciprocal love and accordingly two types of love-death. In the mutual type of love, the lovers “melt into each other” in a way that makes them exchange identities. The result is a new life where the two become one, assuming a new entity containing both body and soul in a higher spiritual form (A.R Cirillo, 1969, 83). According to this Renaissance love theory, bodily union is necessary, but not the final end of love. In the same way that lust did not lead to virtuous love, physical union did not lead to spiritual love. In order to reach a higher spiritual union the love had to be constant and true (84). “A

Valediction: forbidding Mourning” and “The Good-Morrow” revolve around this mysterious union that makes two become one, the concern being with love’s unique power to cancel out the separateness of the individual lovers. This power is dependent on the merging identities of two lovers in one soul (93). The souls unite and become one single, complete soul and even though the bodies are weak compared to the spiritual, they are necessary as indicators of the mystical union (86).

In ancient love theory as held by Plato and Ficino, man was originally one, containing both male and female, but later separated (87). As a result, lovers seek to reunite the two halves and become whole again and this pursuit where they melt into one another is called love (87). The only way to become whole or one again is through a love that transcends the realm of the body while at the same time depending on it (89). Such description of a spiritual love that transcends the physical, while at the same time depending on the body, seems to agree with Donne’s expression of love in “The Ecstasy”, where the speaker of the poem claims that “Love’s mysteries in souls do grow,/ But yet the body is his book.” (ll.71-72). The lovers are purified or cleansed of the materiality of the flesh so that their souls fuse in the same way as they do in “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” (91). However, what distinguishes the two poems from each other is that “The Ecstasy” portrays a spiritual love that depends on the body in order to be complete, whereas “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning” presents a spiritual love that does not revolve around the physical so as to be fulfilled. This means that even though the physical is a part of the love, the spiritual is what distinguishes the ideal lovers’ described in the poem from ordinary lovers. Furthermore, it has been argued that in the lovers’ moment of transcendence, they also transcend place and time (Catherine Gimelli Martin, 2014, 84). This implies that the transformation process where the lovers go from two to one is a phenomenon that one cannot fully grasp as it happens outside time and place and is therefore intangible and impossible to define. Furthermore, Gimelli suggests that true lovers are not creatures only of earth and heaven, but also of a place beyond and this is the new place that their love creates (112).

According to Cirillo, there have been disagreements regarding the role of body in love. Some hold that true love must completely transcend the body while others maintain that even though spiritual union is the final end of love, bodily union is necessary because of the lovers’ humanity. Despite these divergences in opinion, they all seem to agree that the final moment in true love is the moment of transcendence, a mystical union where the lovers become one (94-95). This viewpoint agrees with Donne’s portrayal of love in “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning”, “The Good-Morrow” and “The Ecstasy” where the ideal

love is based on a spiritual connection that transcends the bodies. In “The Ecstasy”, Donne’s lovers are only said to touch physically when they join hands, which suggests that their union is only carried out by their souls (91). However, “The Ecstasy” differs from the two other poems in the way that the poem conveys a spiritual love that needs bodily involvement in order to be complete. In “The Good-Morrow”, on the other hand, there is a contrast between the physical passion that the lovers encountered in their past and the spiritual love that they now share. In “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning”, there is a contrast between “Dull sublunary lovers’ love” (l.13) who rely on the senses and the “refined” (l.17) lovers who have a spiritual connection. Even though there is no explicit reference to any physical contact between the two lovers, there are metaphorical allusions to sex in the compass image and words such as “erect” (l.32), “firmness” (l.35) and stiff (l.26) do clearly have sexual indications. At the same time, I would argue that this poem values the spiritual connection that they have even more strongly. The reason is that although the “refined” (l.17) lovers look forward to be reunited with each other, they have a spiritual connection that makes them able to endure absence (l.17).

Blaine Greteman (2010) has argued that Donne insists on bodily presence in his works (26), holding that the dependence of the soul upon the body is unconventional because flesh is more important than spirit and because the soul might die with the body since it depends on it and is therefore not heavenly and immortal (27). Even though Donne came to the conclusion that the soul and body separate at death, to be reunited at the Resurrection he still insisted that the soul depends on the body in order to be complete (27). Donne moves toward the traditional Petrarchan idealization of soul over body only to simultaneously complicate it, concentrating not on the distinction, but the attachment of the two. Greteman asserts that although Donne emphasized the soul’s reliance on the body, this never became a consistent position (32). I think this is the reason why his poems vary so much in terms of what the body/ soul relationship should look like in love.

“A Valediction: forbidding Mourning”

Neoplatonists believed that love involved the exchange of hearts or souls (Targoff, 61). As a consequence, the parting of lovers meant that only their bodies disconnected, while still being joined together by their souls. The word soul refers to “an entity distinct from the body; the essential, immaterial, or spiritual part of a person or animal, as opposed to the physical” (OED, 2a). As a result of the soul being regarded as a separate entity from the body, Neoplatonists such as Ficino did not imagine that physical contact was necessary in order for the exchange of souls to happen, implying that the process was only spiritual (Targoff, 61). One can clearly see the way the lovers in “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning” stay attached and connected by their souls. “Our two souls therefore, which are one” (l. 21): This line demonstrates how love has made their two individual souls into one single soul that they share. Consequently, when they part, they will always remain connected because their souls are conjoined: “Though I must go, endure not yet/ A breach, but an expansion,” (ll.22, 23). These lines can be interpreted as if their souls expand or stretch out to fill the distance that occurs between them so as to make them stay attached.

According to Greteman, the poem argues that the soul is superior to and independent of the physical and claims that love can continue despite physical separation (32). Therefore, the poem illustrates that there is a difference between those who only experience a physical desire that depends on the senses and each other’s presence and those who experience eternal love. The physical yearning is shallow, mortal and earthly and stands in opposition to the divine, heavenly love that is expressed as the ideal in the poem: “But we by a love, so much refined,/ Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss” (ll.17, 20). Refined is used to describe a person who is “characterized by refinement, or the possession or affectation of refinement; elegant and cultured in appearance, manner, or taste” (OED, 2b). A refined person is also “pure, cleansed; morally or spiritually purified or elevated” (†OED, 4). OED Online’s definition of the word corresponds well with the way the spiritual lovers’ love is expressed, as it seems to be “spiritually purified or elevated”. This stands in opposition to the physical or earthly love that is dominated by fear because it relies on the body and the senses and is thus unstable and subject to decay: “Moving of th’ earth brings harms and fears,” (l. 9). Physical features are what “elemented” (l. 16) their love and when they are away from each other that

is removed, so that there is nothing left to preserve their love. “Elemented” refers to things that are “composed of or produced by any or all of the four elements” (†OED, 1a). This must signify that the “sublunary lovers’ love” (l.13) is created by earthly substances like earth, water, air and fire. Based on this, I believe the contrast between the physical and the spiritual in the poem indicates that there are two types of love that are detached from each other and that in the moment where the lovers are spiritually united, the need for physical presence is not that strong.

The word “Valediction” can be translated as “the act of bidding or saying farewell” (OED, 1) and Donne was really fascinated with the act of parting in all his works (Targoff,1). Targoff argues that the poem conveys “a love that needs no substantial embodiment, a love that can survive on a purely spiritual plane” (71). This relates to the lovers’ parting, where their bodies are separated, but they still remain connected by their souls. What is particularly interesting about the poem is that the parting of the lovers is compared to the death of virtuous men: “As virtuous men pass mildly away,” (l.1). In other words, there is a connection between love and death in the poem even though the poet speaker maintains that spiritual love remains constant and unthreatened by the lover’s departure, as this will only involve an expansion of their souls. Targoff raises the question as to why Donne makes this unusual comparison between the ideal parting of the lovers and the separation of soul from body at the moment of death. Targoff’s answer is that “like the good death, he wants the lovers’ parting to be quiet, imperceptible, free of struggle”. Moreover, the separation of the lovers is analogous to the separation of body and soul (71). As a result of this image of separation, I hold that the poem expresses a love where the physical and spiritual can be interdependent because the lovers are able to stay attached to each other without any physical connection. Targoff points out that although Donne makes this comparison to the death of virtuous men, that does not mean that their parting is synonymous to death or that death will make their separation permanent by any means. Instead, the poem is concerned with the problem “of securing future continuity in the face of present rupture” (72). This means that the poem seeks to find a way to maintain their love when it is threatened by separation. Just like the body and soul of the virtuous men part from each other at death, so do the lovers’ bodies and souls.

However, meanwhile the souls of the honorable men go to heaven, the souls of the lovers stretch or expand into eternity, so that they will always remain connected, in the same way that the virtuous men will live on in heaven where their souls now have gone. The lovers

will continue to stay connected because they share one common soul: “Our two souls therefore, which are one,” (l.21). They have transcended the physical, and their love therefore does not rely merely on physical contact and can endure no matter what happens because it is eternal in the same way that the souls of the virtuous men have eternal life. The word “mildly” (l.1) is used to describe the way the virtuous men pass away. The reason why they pass mildly away is because they do not need to fear death, feeling secure that their souls will have eternal life. In the same way, the love described in Donne’s poem is described as eternal and therefore the lovers do not have to fear being away from each other. This is the reason why they can say good-bye to each other without making any “noise” (l.5) or “tear-floods” or “sigh-tempests move,” (l.6). Virtuous men pass mildly away because they have done the right or virtuous thing in life and can die with a clear conscience. Death to them is like a soft transition from earth to heaven in the same way that the lovers’ separation is a soft transition apart from each other because they are connected to each other by their souls which means that not even death can truly ever separate them. Additionally, the lovers do not need to fear leaving each other because they have a deeper, spiritual connection, which suggests that the physical is irrelevant in terms of how strong their love is. To the virtuous men, death is something mild and almost pleasant. This stands in opposition to the way most people fear death in the same way that they fear separation from the person they love because they are afraid that being apart will weaken their love and disconnect what they share just like death usually means the end of time and of life.

The term melt is used to describe the separation between the lovers: “So let us melt, and make no noise,” (l.5). The verb “to melt” may have several different meanings. One of them is “to vanish or disappear or to depart unobtrusively” (OED, 1e). “To depart unobtrusively” means to depart unremarkably and I think this reference corresponds well with the message of the poem as the lovers leave each other silently, almost like they are flying. The act of leaving each other silently is underlined by other images in the poem as well: “Like gold to airy thinness beat” (l. 24) and without any “tear-floods” or “sigh-tempests” (l.6). “Melt” may also signify “to merge” (OED, 5b) as in the merging of souls when they melt together and become one in the moment of transcendence. Another meaning of the term is “to be overwhelmed with grief” (OED, 3a), which would be a natural reaction when two lovers are going to be separated from each other for a long period of time, however this is not the case with these lovers. According to John Freccero (1963), in the field of alchemy, the word melt refers to the extraction of spirit from body where the spirit is driven away uniformly and quietly because it is so perfectly devoted to the body (367). Anyhow, the soul “has to be

reunited to the glorified body” (368). In my opinion, this explanation of the term gives meaning to the whole process of the lovers’ separation and reunion, where they part from each other only to be reunited again later. What complicates this interpretation of the poem’s imagery is that it implies that the body is involved in the spiritual love and that the soul strives to be reunited with the body. Consequently, this explanation suggests that even though the lovers have a spiritual connection as they have transcended the physical, they are still longing for each other’s physical presence.

The title of the poem: “forbidding Mourning” suggests that these two lovers are not allowed to grieve and reading the rest of the poem one can understand that there is no need for them to be sad, as they trust each other because they have this unique spiritual connection that stands in contrast to the “Dull sublunary lovers’ love” (l.13). According to OED Online, “sublunary” means “existing or situated beneath the moon” (OED, 1a) and refers to the “earthly” or “terrestrial” (OED, 2) Another meaning of the word is “inferior” or “subordinate” (OED, 1b), implying that the earthly lovers are inferior to the refined lovers. Targoff suggests that what will prevent the beloved from grieving is her possession of his metaphors of their union and that these metaphors are indestructible to division, as they consist of “the power of his poetic making” causing them to imagine their love differently (72). This explanation offers another solution to the meaning of the poem where most critics think that there will not be any “tear-floods” (l.6), as the lovers will always stay connected through their souls, even when they are apart from each other (73). Their love is so refined that no one is able to fully understand it, not even themselves: “That ourselves know not what it is,” (l.18). The fact that not even the lovers themselves are able to understand the love they share suggests that it belongs to something higher taking place beyond human control. Furthermore, their love is a mystery that is kept secret from the “laity” (l.8) (Guibbory, 1996/2015, 79). Guibbory holds that “Donne confers on his lovers a sacred quality that distinguishes them from the profane multitude or “laity” (l.8) (Guibbory, 1995/2015, 111). “Laity” may refer to “The body of the people not in orders as opposed to the clergy” (OED, 2), suggesting that the spiritual lovers are above the “sublunary” (l.13) or earthly lovers.

In Renaissance love philosophy it was believed that: “Through mutual love, two lovers achieve that perfect fusion of souls that make them one- neither he nor she, but both he and she in one spiritual union” (Cirillo, 81). This suggests that when the lovers fuse or “melt” together (l.5), in a spiritual union at departure they transcend all earthly and mortal life. Their parting might therefore be compared to the moment of transcendence where their separateness is canceled out and they become truly one: “Our two souls therefore, which are

one,” (l.21). The lovers experience a special, celestial connection when they find the right person to love and this is where the spiritual love differs from the physical or “sublunary” (l.13) love. Moreover, the fact that there is a contrast between those who only experience physical desire and those who experience spiritual love illustrates that not everyone is able to reach the moment of transcendence and blend their souls together.

Donne uses many conceits in his poems. A conceit is “An unusually far-fetched or elaborate metaphor or simile presenting a surprisingly apt parallel between two apparently dissimilar things or feelings” (Oxford Dictionary of Literary terms). In “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning”, the compass conceit is used to illustrate both spiritual and erotic love in the poem: “If they be two, they are two so/ As stiff twin compasses are two,” (ll. 25, 26). According to Freccero, the circle of the compass represents temporal and spatial perfection and perfect circles transcend the human just as heaven transcends earth (335). Additionally, along with the gold image, “Like gold to airy thinness beat” (l.24), the compass is used to illustrate the lover’s journey. Freccero asserts that the passing of the virtuous men portrays how the soul will return to the body on judgment day in the same way that the husband will return to his wife and “end” where he “began” (l. 36) at the end of his journey (338). The compass is a symbol of how the lovers are linked together in the same way that the body is linked to the soul. In other words, this shows the way the lovers also are united through the body and not only through their souls. Freccero’s interpretation of the compass image shows a spiritual love that somewhat relies on the body as the image illustrates how the soul parts from body only to be reunited with it again in the end. Donne states that death is the divorce of body and soul (337) and the image of death is therefore used to illustrate the parting of the lovers. Just like the virtuous men, the lovers’ bodies die a physical death when they part while their souls continue to live on, but the soul will however end where it “began” (l.36), reconciled to the flesh (338). Freccero holds that virtuous men pass mildly away because they are convinced that their death is no final separation, but rather a pause in the life of body and soul (358). This may also be the case with the lovers, just like the virtuous men, they know that their separation is not final, but only a period of absence from each other.

According to Freccero, human love “pulsates between the eternal perfection of circularity and the linear extension of space and time” (336). Therefore, the compass describes the expansion of the lovers’ spirit and the husband’s return to his wife perfects the circle and makes it complete. The compass illustrates how the lovers will always remain connected even when they are apart from each other. The reason is that they are both connected to a point of eternity in the same way as they are connected to each other’s souls.

The souls of the lover and the beloved together make up the soul of love and the center of the circle is their common possession (351). A circle with a dot in the center formed by the “fixed foot” (l.27) that is the beloved’s soul symbolizes gold, the only indestructible and purest element. The circle does also symbolize God, time, perfection and eternity (Rudnytsky, 1982, 193). As a result, one can see the way all the images in the poem are there to enforce the expression of a love that is superior and eternal just like gold is indestructible and the circle represents eternal perfection.

Besides, the compass image illustrates the expansion of the lovers’ souls in the same way that the gold image represents not a breach in their relationship, but an expansion in to a purer substance. When one of the lovers goes away, the other lover leans after: “Yet when the other far doth roam, / It leans and hearkens after it”(ll. 30-31). The legs of the compass close when the lover comes home and they are united: “And grows erect, as that comes home” (l.32). The wife thus represents the “fixed foot”(l.27) of the circle and the husband represents the circling foot that moves. The middle of the circle is the eternal point where their souls are united and to which the husband will return. Just as the circle is complete when the lover returns, their body and soul are reunited and the love is a perfect union. Freccero holds that for such lovers “there is no breach between macrocosm of space and time and microcosm of love because all of reality is circumscribed by the point upon which their love is centered”. Their love is compared to the movement of the compass that “With its whirling motion, Love’s compass describes the expansion of the lover’s spirit from eternity to time and back again” (337). Gold as an image of love is strong, pure and everlasting. These two images combined illustrate the spiritual love that is perfect and immortal and is a symbol of how perfect love transcends earthly limitations.

Critics such as Targoff, Saunders, Freccero and Rudnytsky hold that Donne expresses a love that transcends the body while depending on it at the same time. Nonetheless, in “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning”, I believe there is a contrast between body and soul and that the love expressed as the ideal does not depend on the body as Donne presents this ideal love from a viewpoint that stands in contrast to the physical love of the “sublunary lovers” (l.13). The refined lovers are inter- assured of the mind, their two souls are one and because they have this connection, they do not care about physical features like “eyes, lips and hands” (l.20). Rudnytsky claims that the love Donne describes does not abandon the body entirely, but that its distinguishing feature is the transcendence of the physical realm (189) and that the difference between the “refined” (l.17) and the “sublunary lover’s love” (l.13) is analogous to the difference between body and soul (190). Freccero, on the other hand, holds that the soul

cannot be perfect while it remains disembodied and is thus not perfect until the lover comes home (339). I think this somewhat contradicts the meaning of the poem of conveying a spiritual love that does not depend on physical contact as it is eternal and what makes the spiritual love perfect is the fact that it does not rely on the body and stands in contrast to the physical lovers' mortal love that is only based on desire and lust.

”The Good Morrow”

In “The Good Morrow”, there is a contrast between the lovers’ past and present where they in the past only experienced physical desire as they “sucked on country pleasures, childishly” (l.3). According to the editor “country” is “An Indecent pun” (Carey, 438). Pun is “The use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect; a play on words” (OED, 1). According to OED Online, the word “country” may refer to something that is “rural, countrified, unsophisticated” (OED, 14b). This meaning of the word implies that before the lovers met, their relationships were unsophisticated in the sense of being simple and unrefined, as they were only about bodily desire and physical lust. Their past filled with “country pleasures” (l.3) stands in opposition to the love that they have now woken up to: “And now good morrow to our waking souls,” (l.8) where “love, all love of other sights controls,” (l.10). In this new world both souls and bodies seem awake “as if called by love from the sleep of ordinary life and mere lust” (Guibbory, 2006, 141). The fact that both bodies and souls are involved suggests that even though the lovers have moved from the physical to the spiritual, the bodies are still part of their relationship. In the poem, two worlds are being contrasted, the sensual restless world of “sea-discoverers” (l.12) and the world of spiritual love where the lovers are. The contrast between the physical and spiritual indicates that those who live solely in the sensual world are lost to the experience of true love (Harold Bloom, 1999, 16).

The speaker of the poem starts by asking himself what they did before they fell in love with each other: “I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I/ Did, till we loved? were we not weaned till then,” (ll.1,2). “Troth” is a noun that means “Faithfulness, good faith, loyalty; honesty” (OED, 1a). The speaker thus wonders by his good faith what they did before they met each other and experienced love. The phrase “till we loved” (l.1) indicates that they have not been in love or experienced love before they met each other. Additionally, it also implies that they did not know what love was in their past or that their past sexual experiences were not actually love, but only “pleasures” (l.3) and objects of physical desires: “which I desired, and got” (l.7). The verb “wean” means “To accustom (a child or young animal) to the loss of its mother’s milk; to cause to cease to be suckled” (OED,1a). This meaning of the word

indicates that they were children in the past, or acted like children in terms of relationships and that they now have grown up to the real experience of what true love means. “Wean” may also mean “To detach or alienate (a person, his desires or affections) *from* some accustomed object of pursuit or enjoyment” (OED, 2a). This definition of the verb gives meaning to the way physical and spiritual love is portrayed in the poem, as the lovers are said to have become “detached” from the “enjoyment” of childish “pleasures” (ll.3,5) and are “waking” (l.8) up to real love. “Childish” may refer to “a person who is no longer a child: not befitting maturity; puerile, foolish, silly” (OED, 2). This definition of the word indicates that even though they were adults they still acted immaturely in their past seeing that they only pursued “pleasures” (ll.3,5) and what they “desired” (l.7).

In the poem, there is an opposition between the words that are used to describe the past and the present. In order to describe the past, the speaker uses words such as “pleasures” (ll.3,5), “sucked” (l.3) and “desired” (l.7). When describing the love that they now share, words such as “souls” (l.8) “love” (ll.10, 20,21) and “hearts” (l.16) are used. The distinction the poem makes between the past and the present illustrates the contrast between physical desire and spiritual love. True love is conveyed as something without “fear” (l.9) that “controls” (l.10) everything “And makes one little room, an everywhere” (l.11). In this line, Donne uses the inner and the outer reality as a basis for comparison between the physical and the spiritual world. In metaphysical terms, this image represents a contrast between the macrocosm and microcosm, with the macrocosm representing the universe and the microcosm man (Rivers, 68). Accordingly, there is a contrast between the room the lovers are in and the outside world. Line 11 illustrates the way their love is made into “an everywhere” (l.11), which means that it is eternal and immortal. Besides, it seems as if their love has made them a part of the universe through what can be described as a spiritual awakening because their souls have become a part of the relationship. The image of the contrast between the physical and spiritual in the poem applies well to the Christianized Aristotelian- Ptolemaic cosmology where there is an opposition between the earthly, which is unstable, and the heavenly, which is constant and eternal (Rivers, 69). I believe the poem illustrates the way Donne uses these opposing cosmological theories to explain the relationship and the contrast between the physical and the spiritual world.

In the second stanza of the poem, their souls are “waking” (l.8) up to a love that transcends the physical. The fact that the souls are now involved, suggests that they have found a spiritual connection with each other and that the physical desires and pleasures fade in comparison. What the lover experienced in the past was only a “dream” (l.7) of his

beloved: “Which I desired, and got, ‘twas but a dream of thee.” (l.7) and “All pleasures” (l.5) that he experienced were only “fancies” (l.5), meaning a “fantasy” (†OED, 1) of what he now is experiencing. “Fancy” may also refer to “the process, and the faculty, of forming mental representations of things not present to the senses; chiefly applied to the so-called creative or productive imagination, which frames images of objects, events, or conditions that have not occurred in actual experience” (OED, 4a). This meaning of the word applies well to the poem’s distinction between past and present, where what the speaker experienced in the past was not real or true, but only something that he imagined that had not actually occurred yet. Moreover, the “waking souls” (l.8) stand in contrast to the past when they were asleep: “Or snorted we in the seven sleepers’ den?” (l.4). Based on this contrast between the physical and spiritual, R. E. Pritchard (1985) asserts that the first stanza suggests previous experience of ordinary sexual activity (214), not involving the soul. Furthermore, according to Pritchard there is a version of Platonic love here where the lovers surpass their infant-sleep-like condition and become fully human, adult and aware, progressing towards a spiritual love that leads them to the ultimate reality (214). This contrast between physical “pleasures” (ll.3, 5) behaving like or belonging to immature children is compared to a relationship of “true plain hearts” (l.16). Pritchard describes the transition like this: “As the lovers awaken spiritually, they abandon the ordinary world, to enter a new spiritual world “(215) and states that “Obviously the speaker is concerned not merely with the sexual act but with this new, ideal and transforming relationship - a relationship, however, that does not leave behind but includes, centers upon, the physical relationship that is its spirit made flesh, its embodiment and manifestation” (220). This argument suggests that even though Donne’s lovers can be seen to have “entered” into a spiritual world, the physical or bodily aspect of their relationship is not completely excluded, but the love described is about something much deeper and more valuable than only physical pleasures and desires.

The image of “the seven sleepers” (l.4) is used to explain the physical side of love that belongs to the lovers’ past and is applied as a way of illustrating that physical love is not reality or real. The reason why the physical love is not to be considered as real love lies in the way Donne uses the image to compare the physical love to being asleep or only dreaming, as if the lovers back then had not woken up to the real world yet. Furthermore, the image of the seven sleepers is used as a symbol of the physical love where the body is disconnected from the soul, which can be interpreted as if the spirit were asleep and unable to experience true love. The image of “The seven sleepers” (l.4) refers to an ancient myth of seven young Christians who were walled up alive in a cave in the persecution of Decius in the year 249.

Miraculously, they did not die but slept for 187 years (Carey, 438). The cave in the poem also alludes to Plato's cave allegory (Nassaar, Christopher S., 2003, 20). In the Christian myth, the children in the cave are asleep, while in Plato's allegory; the prisoners mistake the shadows they see on the walls for reality. A central belief to Plato and his followers is that of the two worlds. The first world is the world of ideas or forms. In this world, everything is stable, eternal, immutable and perfect. The second world is the material world, where everything is inferior to the world of ideas. This world is apprehended by the senses and is a copy of the real world of forms. It is also subject to change. The human soul comes from the perfect world of ideas and is trapped in the body in the second, material world, seeking to escape. The cave allegory illustrates how these two worlds operate, where prisoners in a cave represent life in the second world. The fire behind them cast shadows on the wall, but they are chained so they cannot move their heads. Nevertheless, one of them is released and dragged out of the cave and into the sunlight where he is able to differentiate objects. He then returns to the cave and tries to learn the other prisoners about the truth, but they refuse to listen (Rivers, 33).

The line with the image of the seven sleepers is followed up by another Platonic reference to the lady as the idea of beauty: "If ever any beauty I did see, /Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee" (ll.6,7). These lines refer to the Platonic World of Ideas where "the lady is presented as the Idea of Beauty, of which all earthly beauty is but an imperfect reflection" (Nassaar, 20). In the same way that Plato distinguishes between shadows and reality, the poem makes a distinction between the lovers' past that was only a dream of the reality that they now live in. This means that the material world is only a dream of the real or perfect world of ideas. The lovers move from the second, inferior world of the senses to the first world where everything is eternal. Here, one can see how the physical is connected to the earthly, while the soul and spiritual are connected to God and the heavenly. In Plato's Symposium, the two worlds are united by Eros or Love (Rivers, 33). There seems to be this same connection in "The Good Morrow", where love connects the physical and the spiritual. Based on this, the cave allegory relates to Donne's poem in the way that the lovers are experiencing only a dream or a fantasy of reality in the first world, in the same way that the prisoners are perceiving objects that are not real as real in the cave. The lovers then wake up to the perfect, immortal world of ideas in the same way that one of the prisoners goes out and realizes that the shadows in the cave only were reflections of what is real. The speaker of the poem discovered the same thing when he met his beloved and realized that the women he encountered in the past only were "fancies" (l.5) of reality and a "dream" (l.7) of his lady as

opposed to the forms in the intelligible world that are unchanging and eternal, so that “none can die” (l.21).

The reference to the cave gives meaning to the poem where the lovers have awakened from the physical dream they lived in and now experience a more real and true love involving their souls: “And now good morrow to our waking souls” (l.8). While the prisoners in Plato’s cave discover God, the lovers discover each other (Nassaar, 20-21). Furthermore, they form a perfect love relationship and as a result become part of the world of ideas constituting a complete and perfect world (21). As in Plato’s love theory, one can see the idea of how Donne and his lady are two halves that complete each other (20). The lines “Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one” (l.14), “Where can we find two better hemispheres” (l.17) and “If our two loves be one,” (l.20) display this idea of how two become one in a love union and the way the lovers make up one complete unity combined. Additionally, the spiritual love that they now have discovered makes them free from fear: “Which watch not one another out of fear” (l.9). Subsequently, they do no longer have the urge to seek new adventures: “Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone, /Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown” (ll.12,13) because they have found what they have been looking for: “Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one” (l.14). Guibbory (2006) holds that the speaker has just made a discovery that makes the discovery of “new worlds” (l.12) pale in comparison (140). The reason is that the love for his woman has changed him and means everything.

The reality which the lovers have woken up to match the description of the Platonic world of Ideas, which is “stable, eternal, immutable and perfect” (Rivers, 33). However, this is a paradox as the lovers’ reality is the ideal world of ideas, which is supposed to be very far from reality. This is a fascinating and interesting observation that previous critics not actually seem to have commented on. The lovers’ perfect, immortal love is illustrated in the last lines of the poem where their “two loves” have become “one” (l.20). The preceding line “Whatever dies, was not mixed equally” (l.19) refers to the physician Galen, who held that death resulted from an imbalance of elements within the body (Nassaar, 21). Only simple substances, which are single and unmixed, or compounds whose elements contain no inequalities or contraries, as in the fusion of two loves which are exactly “alike” (l.21), can be indestructible (Pritchard, 213). The lines “If our two loves be one, or, thou and I/ Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die” (ll.20, 21) therefore mean that if the lovers match each other’s perfection, they will become immortal and eternal (Nassaar, 21). This idea of a perfect, eternal love is illustrated in line 18: “Without sharp north, without declining west?”

In the Renaissance north and west were associated with erotic cooling and declining, indicating that this line may have sexual connotations as well. Additionally the two cardinal directions were identified with darkness, sin and death (Pritchard, 215). Pritchard suggests that not only will Donne's lovers themselves not die, but their unique love will be a miracle that cancels the effect of the Fall, so that "none can die" (l.21). As a result, their love has created a new Paradise of immortal love (220). I believe Donne here, wants to illustrate the extreme power of spiritual love to cause miracles such as immortality.

Moreover, in order to portray a perfect love relationship, the idea of transcendence where two become one is central in the poem. However, the portrayal of this idea creates a conflict between unity and duality. The first time this idea occurs is in the poem's last line of the second stanza: "Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one" (l.14). Cirillo maintains that in "The Good-Morrow", each is one and has one world because each exists as part of the other (93). This means that their souls have melted into each other, so that they now share one common soul and this is what distinguishes the present spiritual love from their past experiences of physical pleasure. Furthermore, the poem argues that true love must transcend physical lust. The reason is that the lovers were unable to find true love in the past because they were seeking "pleasures" (ll.3,5) and following their desires. As a result, when reading the poem one can see how it moves from the physical to the spiritual. The spiritual love that is presented in the last part of the poem describes a spiritual rather than a physical contact between the lovers where they can see each other's souls: "My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,/ And true plain hearts do in the faces rest," (ll.15,16). According to G. R. Wilson (1969), the mirrors are the lovers' eyes, where each person is reflecting the image of the other (109). Wilson asserts that Platonism here is suggested with reflections, as each lover has two manifestations: himself and the reflected self in the other lover's eye and as a result each has both a physical and an ideal self (109).

Moreover, Wilson claims that line 14 in the poem presents a problem in terms of unity/duality: "Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one" (l.14). The reason is that "in its first half Donne seems to be talking about one world and in its second half about two" (110). Wilson goes on to suggest that the mirror-eye imagery offers a solution to the problem of understanding this line: "If the eyes of the lovers are hemispheres, then, by extension, the lovers are individually only the two halves of a complete whole- their love- just as the halves of a sphere combine to make a complete sphere or "one world" (l.14) (110). In physical appearance as opposed to spiritual reality, the hemispheres are still separate which means that each lover is independent and only half of a world or hemisphere can possibly be seen at any

one time. However, each eye or hemisphere is a complete world because it contains both lovers, the one who is reflected and the one who reflects. According to Wilson, a possible solution to the problem of line 14 (“Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one”) may be that Donne is only talking about one world, but that the love of this world is so great that it can be possessed by each of the lovers individually and by both of them together at the same time (110). Besides, the love is so strong that it transcends the physical world and can therefore not “slacken” or “die” (l.20). I believe Wilson’s solution of the unity/duality problem corresponds well with the message of the poem that is to convey the idea of a love that is so powerful that it cancels out the lovers’ individualities so that they only share one world at all times. “Each hath one, and is one” (l.14) must therefore mean the common world that they share at all times as each of them is and has this common world together. However, I think that since their souls have melted together and become only one soul, the lovers have lost their individuality, as this is the true power of love- to cancel out the separateness of the lovers and create a mysterious union. The world in question in the poem, is therefore, in my opinion, only the one world that the lovers have in common. I therefore disagree with the fact that the world also can be possessed by each of the lovers individually and together at the same time. “Each hath one, and is one” (l.14) must therefore only refer to one world, the same common world that “each hath and is”.

The idea of “Two better hemispheres” (l.17) is linked the concept of how human beings originally were two halves of a loving sphere, and then separated, seeking to reunite. Pritchard suggests that “Two separate individuals, microcosms in themselves, fuse to make a perfect androgynous microcosmic sphere, in itself an image of the perfection and eternity to be regained by these lovers” (215). “The lovers are “two hemispheres” (l.17), equal, neither sufficient without the other” (Guibbory, 2006,141). According to Robert L. Sharp (1954), the two hemispheres refer to the heart shaped or cordiform maps created by 16th century cartographers (493). Sharp holds that “Though the reader may easily think of half a heart as a hemisphere, it is difficult to see how two hearts could represent only two hemispheres”. Therefore, “Donne is saying that each heart is a hemisphere: the two hearts together make one world”. The hemispheres in the poem must, Sharp therefore argues, refer to the double cordiform or heart-shaped maps of Finé and Mercator as they depict two hearts (495). Julia M. Walker (1986) claims that Sharp with this explanation fails to consider the precise words of the poem because if it is the double heart-shaped maps that are projected then the speaker would go on to describe two visions of his face mirrored in his lover’s eyes. The two hemispheres the lovers see must therefore be united hemispheres, a single projection of

cordiform maps and not the divided world of the double projection as held by Sharp (62). This image of “two hemispheres” (l.17) is related to the problem of the lovers’ unity and duality in the poem. In my opinion this image illustrates the way the lovers become one, sharing one world together. Therefore, the image must, like Walker argues, refer to the single projection of cordiform maps where the lovers together form one world that they share.

In “The Good Morrow”, Donne defines love as a spiritual connection between two lovers that have transcended the world of physical lust and pleasures. Since they are connected by the souls, their love will remain immortal: “Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.” (l.21). Even though the spiritual love is portrayed as the ideal kind of love, this realization comes after the lovers have spent the night together, implying that the physical is still a part of their love and that the spiritual love is something that has developed from the lovers’ initial physical relationship. Consequently, the physical and the spiritual love are linked together in the same way that body and soul are linked together and this idea agrees with Plato’s definition of love: “Love is of soul and body, and the operations of the soul depend of the body” (Smith, 1985, 203). Although the bodies still play an important part in the lovers relationship, what makes it different from the physical “pleasures” (ll.3,5) that they experienced in the past, is that the soul now is involved in the experience.

Line 19: “Whatever dies, was not mixed equally” indicates that not everyone is able to find a spiritual connection and this may also explain why the lovers were never able to move from physical desires in the past as they had not met the person that matched with their soul yet. Guibbory (2006) here explains that “The particular, singular woman is essential for the man’s fulfillment” (138). When the lovers wake up in bed after having spent the night with each other, the physical does no longer seem all-important. Consequently, the poem presents a love where a spiritual connection is more important than a physical connection, although the body still is a part of their love. Just as in “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” Donne appears to be conducting a double argument: insisting on the Platonic concept of love, while also supplying a sexual undertext through his puns. Suggested by the puns, the poem indicates that there should be an element of sexual desire in an ideal love relationship. There is however a difference between the physical experiences of the lovers’ past, and the relationship that they now have. The physical desires of the past is only a dream or a fantasy of what real, spiritual love is: “ ‘Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be. / If ever any beauty I did see, /Which I desired, and got, ‘twas but a dream of thee.” (ll.5,6, 7). The awakening of the soul is where the lovers have found what they have been seeking, their other half which is at the core of Platonic love theory where the goal is the ascent of the soul

to a mystical union with the One (Rivers, 34). “The Good Morrow” ends with the hope that their love will resist the ordinary processes of time and depicts an immortal love as the truest and best kind of love. In the poem, Donne once again makes a distinction between the kind of love relationship that is only based on physical desire and lust, as opposed to being, first and foremost, united in the mind and spirit. As a result, the ideal love relationship seems to be one that transcends the physical and favors a spiritual connection, while at the same time, to a certain extent, involving the bodies as well.

”The Ecstasy”

Targoff argues that Donne believes in the mutual necessity of body and soul and that he is concerned with both their union and their separation (5). In “The Ecstasy”, one can see the way this mutual necessity is expressed in love. As opposed to “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning” and “The Good Morrow”, two poems that can be argued to value a spiritual connection higher than a physical one, “The Ecstasy” portrays a love where body and soul play an equally important part. This becomes clear from looking at Donne’s choice of words and their meaning when describing the role of the body and sex in love. Rather than using words that debase the body, Donne instead describes the physical contact of the lovers as something that is essential and necessary in order to make their love complete and achieve a spiritual connection. Even though the lovers have experienced an “ecstasy” (l.29) and their souls have “gone out” (l.16) of their bodies, they still find themselves turning (l.69) to the bodies at the end of the poem. One can see how Donne’s choice of words are crucial in the way the speaker of the poem argues that the bodies are not “dross”, but “alloy” (l.56).

According to OED Online, “Dross” may refer to “Refuse; rubbish; worthless, impure matter” (OED, 4) and also to “The scum, recrement, or extraneous matter thrown off from metals in the process of melting” (OED, 1a). These meanings of the word imply that the body is regarded as something tainted when it comes to sexual love. However, in the poem, the bodies are instead “alloy”, which means “The comparative purity or prescribed degree of fineness of gold or silver” (†OED, 1a). According to OED Online “alloy” refers to a “Less valuable metal added to a metal of greater value; *esp.* less valuable metal added to gold and silver coinage” (OED, 3a). Additionally, it can refer to “the element that, though inferior, strengthens a metal and makes it more durable” (Guibbory, 1990/2015, 79). Considering the meaning of the words, it illustrates that bodies make spiritual love more lasting. This can be interpreted as if one includes the body, the substance that is less valuable and inferior, to the soul or the spiritual, it will make the love stronger in the same way that an inferior metal strengthens a metal of greater value. Hence, by including the body as a part of the spiritual love, it will not debase it, as suggested by Neoplatonic beliefs, but instead make it stronger.

One can find support for such a view in Achsah Guibbory’s (1990/2015) reading of the poem. According to Guibbory the speaker maintains that the bodies are not “drosse” but

“allay” (that is, alloy, l.56). Therefore, bodies make spiritual love more lasting and are also the only way to make two souls fully unite (79). Moreover, Guibbory argues that in the first half of the poem, the focus is on the spiritual nature of love as it describes the moment of transcendence and the way the lovers’ souls have left their bodies and experienced an “ecstasy” (l.29) where the purpose is to make them one: “Was all the means to make us one,” (l.10) (79). However, Guibbory suggests that this spiritual love is not enough because a love that leaves behind the bodies turns out to be incomplete and therefore the second half of the poem argues for the need to return to the body: “Our bodies why do we forbear” (l.50) (79). According to Guibbory’s chapter on Donne’s Erotic Poetry in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne* (“Erotic Poetry”), the poem depicts how “body and soul are interdependent” (143) and the way “love engages bodies and souls” (142). Guibbory here suggests that the body and sex are the medium for union of the souls (142) and that “The experience of intense, reciprocal, committed erotic love offers spiritual fulfillment (144). In another context, Guibbory (1995/2015) has argued that in “The Relic” Donne rejects the Neoplatonic and Petrarchan body/ soul dualism, rather insisting that the soul is dependent on the body to fully express itself and that the only way to reach the spirit is through the body (110). In contrast to Neoplatonism where the only way to achieve spiritual love is by leaving the impure body, the lovers in “The Ecstasy” transcend the physical world and mortality through bodily fulfillment. The poem holds that spiritual love also is sexual and that the lovers transcend the physical by embracing the body (Guibbory, 1990/2015, 79). As a result, in “The Ecstasy”, “Sexual, bodily love becomes the way to touch the spirit” (Guibbory, 82). Here, Donne argues that the lovers must turn to their bodies because souls can only flow through them (2006, 142): “So soul into the soul may flow,/Though it to body first repair” (ll.60,61). The fact that transcendence of the physical world and mortality is accomplished through bodily fulfillment rather than by turning away from or minimizing the role of the physical in love, makes the love that is portrayed in the poem unique.

The poem argues that pure, spiritual love can exist only when the body and soul are united as they are both equally important: “Love’s mysteries in souls do grow, /But yet the body is his book” (ll.71, 72). These lines can be interpreted as if love is a result of a spiritual connection that “in souls do grow” (l.71) and that love first develops in souls. Nonetheless, the next line “But yet the body is his book” (l. 72) indicates that the body is the foundation of this spiritual love and that the body is necessary in order to make the spiritual love happen as love first begins in the bodies: “Did us, to us, at first convey” (l.54). Although the focus in the beginning of the poem is on the spiritual nature of love, one can see the way the speaker

maintains the importance of the union of bodies as essential in order to achieve a spiritual connection where the two become one. The reason is that the exchange of souls happens through physical contact: “Our hands were firmly cemented” (l.5). According to OED Online “cemented” may refer to “Any uniting medium or substance” (OED, 2b), “A principle of union” (OED, 2c) or “Any substance applied in a soft or glutinous state to the surfaces of solid bodies to make them cohere firmly” (OED, 2a). Here, the speaker of the poem shows how the spiritual love begins with a physical connection and the way the bodies are united in order to make the lovers’ souls connect: “So to’ intergraft our hands, as yet/Was all the means to make us one,” (ll.9, 10). “Intergraft” means “to unite by grafting” (Collins Dictionary online). “Graft” is the process where “A shoot or scion inserted in a groove or slit made in another stock, so as to allow the sap of the latter to circulate through the former” (OED, 1). This suggests that the lovers are joined together in order to make them improve. This “intergrafting of hands” most likely refers to sexual intercourse. The image of how their hands are joined demonstrates how their separateness is removed when they are made “one”. Therefore, sexual contact becomes a way of uniting the lovers’ souls, suggesting that in order to become one and share one soul, physical contact is essential. Furthermore, it demonstrates that spiritual love begins with physical contact by suggesting that “the means” (l.10) or the purpose of the body or physical contact is to make them one. The body is what makes the spiritual connection possible as it is the medium for the exchange of souls, “So soul into the soul may flow, / Though it to body first repair” (ll.59, 60) as the connection first goes through the body. “Repair” may refer to “The action of going or travelling to a place or person” (OED, 4b), which implies that the love connection first starts in the bodies. The significance of the physical in love is underlined by the way the poem starts off by making what must be a sexual reference with the use of words like “pillow”, “bed” and “pregnant”. The emphasis is from the very beginning on the role of the physical in love.

Uniting body and soul, the poem illustrates the process of transcendence where the lovers’ “souls negotiate” (l.17) as a result of the physical contact they have made by the “intergrafting of hands” (l.9). When the souls mix, a new “concoction” is made: “Might thence a new concoction take/ And part far purer than he came” (ll.27, 28). According to John Carey, the editor, “concoction” refers to the “refinement (of metals or minerals by heat)” (444). This definition gives meaning to the line where the new mixture of souls is said to refine or improve the original two that are being mixed. “Concoction” may also refer to “Ripening, maturing, or bringing to a state of perfection; also, the state of perfection so produced: maturation of what is coarse, impure, or crude; alteration of matter by moist heat”

(†OED, 2a). This signifies that when the two souls are blended they reach a state of perfection. “And part far purer than he came” (l.28) illustrates that something impure or imperfect becomes perfect by being mixed together and transformed into a new substance. This relates to the achievement of spiritual love, where the lovers’ souls unite through physical contact in order for them to unite and reach a state of perfection. When love “interanimates two souls” (l.42), the result is “that abler soul” (l.43). “Interanimate” means “To animate mutually” (OED, 1). “Animate means “Endowed with life, living, alive; (esp. in later use) alive and having the power of movement, like an animal” (OED, 1), suggesting that their two souls move into each other and the result is an “abler soul” (l.43).

The title of the poem describes the moment of transcendence that happens through physical contact. “Ecstasy” may refer to “The state of being beside oneself, thrown into a frenzy or a stupor, with anxiety, astonishment, fear, or passion” (OED, 1). I believe this “Ecstasy” (l.29) refers to the moment when the lovers’ souls mix and they become one through physical contact. The fact that “Ecstasy” refers to “The state of being “beside oneself” corresponds well with the love illustrated in the poem where the lovers’ souls have left the bodies and “gone out” (l.16) in order to “advance their state” (l.15). As a result of this “new concoction” (l.27), the lovers are not themselves anymore after they have experienced the “ecstasy” (l.29), as they have become part of something higher by transcending the physical. “Ecstasy” is also “Used by mystical writers as the technical name for the state of rapture in which the body was supposed to become incapable of sensation, while the soul was engaged in the contemplation of divine things” (OED, 3a). This definition corresponds well with the way the poem describes the process where the souls have gone out of their bodies so that they can improve by reaching a spiritual contact with something higher: “Our souls, (which to advance their state, /Were gone out), hung ‘twixt her, and me” (ll.15,16). While this blending of the souls happen, the bodies remain still like “sepulchral statues” (l.18).

In order for the lovers to become one, there is a negotiation between the souls. “And whilst our souls negotiate there,” (l.17) describes the process where their souls make contact in order to blend together. The fact that the mixture of their souls makes a “purer” (l.28) soul, redoubled and multiplied (l.40) in strength illustrates the way love has the power to make everything better than it initially was. This means that when their two souls mix into one soul, this soul is “abler” (l.43), meaning “Capable of, having sufficient strength or power for; ready for, fit to cope with” (OED, 1a). As a result, love is what makes their two souls mix into one, stronger, better soul. The speaker of the poem uses the image of a violet to describe what happens as “The strength, the colour, and the size,”/ (All which before was poor, and

scant,)/Redoubles still, and multiplies” (ll.39, 40,41). Gimelli (2014) suggests that the transformation symbolizes “the physical effects of an originally spiritual intercourse” (86). This seems a bit difficult to grasp, as the lovers’ love develops from initial physical contact and what must logically be a sexual intercourse. Even though the purpose of the physical connection is to unite their souls, the contact is initially physical. After the lovers have connected physically, their two souls “interanimates” (l.42), which means that they move together. The poem goes on to portray “this new soul” (l.45) as indestructible because “no change can invade” (l.48). Moreover, the poem holds that “souls contain” (l.33) a “Mixture of things, they know not what,” (l.34) and that love mixes these already mixed souls again: “Love, these mixed souls doth mix again,/ And makes both one, each this and that” (ll.35,36). According to the editor’s note on line 36, what is implied is that “The two souls joined are one soul, but each united soul also contains two souls (his and hers) (Carey, 444). Here, the reader faces the problem of the lovers’ unity and duality, of how the lovers are both two and one at the same time. I agree with the editor’s note suggesting that “the two souls joined are one soul”. However, I am not certain that “each united soul also contains two souls” as this would mean that each lover separately contains both his/ her own soul in addition to the soul of the other lover. The reason is that when their two souls merge and become one single soul, this cancels out their separateness. Consequently, the lovers will only share one common soul. The meaning of the line “And makes both one, each this and that” (l.36) must therefore be that both lovers are made into one, meaning that “each this and that” soul is made into one soul, not that each united soul also contains two souls.

After the “ecstasy” (l.29) has happened and the lovers have become “We” in “this new soul” (l.45), they look back and reflect on what has occurred: “We see by this, it was not sex,” (l.31), proposing that what took place was something more or different than just sex. The poem starts by describing a spiritual process in the first part, although this spiritual connection happens as a result of physical contact. However, in the second half, the emphasis is on the body: “Our bodies why do we forbear?” (l.50). “They are ours, though they are not we” (l.51). This could mean that the bodies are ours or part of us, but they are not who we are, meaning only a small part of the whole human being. The process of love starts in the bodies first as the bodies are the medium for the interaction between the souls and where the contact between the two lovers first takes place: “Did us, to us, at first convey,” (l.54). As a result “We owe them thanks,” (l.53) because the bodies are what makes the spiritual love possible. Greteman (2010) asserts that the poem demonstrates the way bodily union is the only way to make love whole and human beings complete (30). What unites the spiritual and

material substances is the “subtle knot” (l.64) and Donne argues that the soul would be useless and incapacitated without the body, because love without sexual intercourse uniting two bodies would be imprisoned (31). This is why “pure lovers’ souls” must descend to “affections” and to “faculties” (ll.65, 66). The poem argues that the consequence of a spiritual love without bodily involvement would be like “a great prince in prison” (l.68).

According to Targoff, “The Ecstasy” depicts the most extensive treatment of how love moves from the soul to the body (53). She asserts the poem “traces the movement from a harmonious love between two souls from their extracorporeal union to their resumption of the flesh” (53). One can see the way the lovers’ souls connect in the beginning of the poem. However, I think the poem makes clear the way this spiritual connection happens as a result of bodily interaction where the lovers’ hands are “firmly cemented” (l.5) in order to “make us one,” (l.10). Therefore, I argue that the spiritual connection happens as a result of the physical contact. Consequently, there is a movement from the physical to the spiritual where the love begins as something physical and develops into a spiritual connection. Targoff goes on to argue that the poem “begins by staging the inability of the lovers to consummate their love through purely bodily mechanics” (53). I believe that Targoff here suggests that in order to achieve true love, a spiritual connection of the souls is necessary and arguably the most important part of a love relationship. There needs to be a connection between body and soul and as stated by Targoff “What connects body and soul are spirits” (56). The spirits are produced by the blood with the purpose of knitting together “That subtle knot, which makes us man” (l.64) (56). The soul needs spirits in order to connect it to the flesh in the same way that love needs “affections” and “faculties” (l.66) of the body to connect it to the agency of sense (56). “Affections” are according to OED Online “senses relating to the mind” meaning “The action or result of affecting the mind in some way; a mental state brought about by any influence; an emotion, feeling” (OED, 1a). “Faculties” may refer to “An inherent power or property of the body or of one of its organs; a physical capability or function” (OED, 3) or “One of the several powers of the mind, variously enumerated by psychologists: *e.g.* the will, the reason, memory, etc.” (OED, 4).

The spirits connect body and soul in the same way that love depends on the “faculties” (l.66) of the body in order to connect it to the senses. Therefore, the only way love can be liberated is through the senses. This conception of love goes against the platonic idea where the soul coming from the first world was regarded as the prison of the body in the second world, from which it seeks to escape (Rivers, 33). In “The Ecstasy”, on the contrary, what obstructs love is disembodiment of the souls (Targoff, 56). The expression of the relationship

between body and soul in the poem is therefore in correspondence with the Aristotelian idea that the soul is inseparable from the body (57). Moreover, the poem questions whether or not the spiritual love held by Platonism is in fact the desirable goal (53). Donne holds that love originates in the soul and perhaps could have remained in the spiritual realm if the soul itself not had descended to the flesh (52). From my viewpoint, this way of understanding love suggests that the soul itself seeks to reunite with the body, so in order for the love to be complete the soul depends on the body just as much as the body depends on the soul in order to express itself. T.S Eliot and Grierson hold that the end of the poem posits a distinction between body and soul (Targoff, 56). Targoff, on the other hand, maintains that the final lines of the poem “celebrate the ultimate indistinguishability of spirit from flesh once the soul is reincarnated” and that Donne suggests that we turn to our bodies because we cannot live without them (57). The poem concludes with the souls returning to their bodies on earth (57). As a result of the “pure lovers’ souls” (l.65) descending to the “faculties” (l. 66) or bodies in order to be reunited, I argue that the end of the poem seems to express a union rather than a distinction between body and soul. The ideal or best kind of love as voiced in the poem does therefore seem to be one where there is a spiritual connection between the lovers that expresses itself through physical union.

A third critic worth considering in this context is Saunders (2006), who holds that what produces the central paradox in the poem is that “the poet wants to affirm *and* deny the body” (143). Additionally, the poem is an example of Donne’s anti-platonic expression of love stating the importance of the body and the physical (143), rather than emphasizing the spiritual as the most important part of a love relationship. In my opinion, what makes the poem so complex is Donne’s way of including the physical as a part of the spiritual process as the lovers return to their bodies at the end of the poem, even though they have transcended the physical by the mixing of souls. Moreover, Saunders suggests that the attraction in “The Ecstasy” is not based on gendered difference, but on something that is not approachable to the senses, something that “moves” (l. 32) the lovers that they cannot see. The knot that is “unperplexed” (l.29), which means unweave, by the highest experience of love, is the knot of sexual difference (143). According to OED Online, “unweave” means “to take out of a woven, intertwined, or entangled state or condition; esp. to unravel or undo (a woven fabric)” (OED, 1a) or “to untwine (the fingers)” (OED, 1b). Taking the meaning of the word into consideration, this may signify that when the lovers’ souls melt into one common soul, their sexual differences also disappear because it becomes less important giving that they now have a spiritual connection that is not based on the senses and physical desire. The body is

only a way of making this spiritual connection of the minds possible. This may imply that in a spiritual love that completely transcends the physical, sex does not matter anymore, as the lovers have moved up to a higher stage or level of the universe where the only thing that matters is the soul in which they are one. The emphasis on the physical at the end of the poem therefore complicates the expression of what ideal love should look like. Saunders argues that “The Ecstasy” portrays a love of Neoplatonic idealism where one completely transcends the body and consequently also the gendered hierarchy that had its root in the sexed body. In this type of spiritual love, men and women might be regarded equal (143). This viewpoint stands in contrast to the one held by Guibbory and Targoff, who argue that “The Ecstasy” expresses a love where body and soul are mutually dependent on each other and that the body is just as important as the soul in love. However, Saunders also asserts that the poem expresses conflicting impulses “to transcend gender and yet also to hold on to the body” (144).

Another critic worth introducing, as an example of an earlier reading is Charles Mitchell (1968). The reason is that Mitchell’s reading of the poem illustrates the way body and soul is directly linked to the love between man and woman as he argues that Donne attempts to demonstrate that “the union of man and woman in love creates the fusion of male and female elements – soul and body – within man” (93). According to Charles Mitchell, “The Ecstasy” “endeavors not only to define man as a dualistic being, but also to demonstrate how the terms of his duality are to be unified” (91). He holds that the poem is most concerned with revealing how love ties “That subtle knot, which makes us man” (l.64). Moreover, he argues that the poem displays “how the outward union of man and woman effects the union of body and soul within man” (92). Mitchell indicates that the inner union: “As our blood labours to beget/Spirits, as like souls as it can,/Because such fingers need to knit/That subtle knot, which makes us man” (ll.61-64) is matched with the outer union: “Our hands were firmly cemented/With a fast balm, which thence did spring,” (ll.5,6). I think this is an interesting observation by Mitchell that originates in “the assumption that man is truly man only when he loves” (92). Until he loves with his soul he does not know what he is: “But as all several souls contain/Mixture of things, they know not what,” (ll.33,34) (96). In the same way that the body cannot know itself until it acts, so the soul cannot know itself until it loves and in order for the soul to know itself it must know another self (96). Therefore love is the only way to unite body and soul (97).

This conception is built on the Platonic view holding that humans were separated into two halves that they longed to reunite in order to become the original human whole again.

Moreover, it implies that the outward union of male and female in love reflects the restoration of the inward union of body and soul (92). Mitchell argues that in order for body and soul to unite, the soul must first separate itself from the body. The knot must first be untied in order to be tied: “This ecstasy doth unperplex” (l. 29), means that the soul must be untied from the body in order to be tied to another soul. In the same way that the violet can grow when transplanted from poor soil to rich soil, the soul can “grow” (l.47) when it is separated from the body and joined to another soul (97). As a result the love portrayed in the poem does not only show a union, but also, and at the same time, a separation of soul from body when the soul leaves the body to “negotiate” (l.17) with another soul. This view might serve as a backdrop for Saunders’ more recent claim that Donne wants to both affirm *and* deny the body (Saunders, 143), as the body is essential in order for the lovers’ souls to blend. At the same time, it is by transcending the body and the physical that the lovers achieve a spiritual connection, which is why it is somewhat hard to grasp their return to the body at the end of the poem. Therefore, in order for an ideal, spiritual love to last, there seems to be a need for the body to be a part of the lovers’ union. In the poem, one can therefore see the way the union of the souls reflected in the union of the bodies relate to the platonic idea of the two worlds where the body was valued as the outer manifestation of the mind.

”The Relic”

The speaker of the poem wonders about what will happen to him when his grave is dug up: “When my grave is broke up again” (l.1). The following line, “Some second guest to entertain,” (l.2) is an interesting way of expressing that his grave might be dug up in order to bury a new dead body. According to OED Online, “Entertain” may refer to “The reception of a guest; also, the treatment of a person as a guest” (OED, 3a). A “guest” is “One who is entertained at the house or table of another” (OED, 1a) and also “A stranger” (†OED, 2a). In this case, it most likely means that the grave is “broke up” (l.1) to receive a new guest, a dead person. The fact that the speaker uses the word “guest” may imply that lying in the grave only is temporary and not the person’s permanent resting place. If one considers the meaning of the word “guest”, it corresponds well with the message of the poem where the souls of the lover and his beloved are destined to live on for eternity, as they will “Meet” (l.11) again “at the last busy day” (l.10). The grave is therefore only a temporary resting place for them to wait until judgment day. Moreover, it may also imply that the second corpse that is buried in the grave is to be regarded merely as a “guest”, meaning a “stranger” because the grave belongs to the lover and his beloved.

The title of the poem, “Relic” may refer to “the physical remains (as the body or a part of it) of a saint, martyr, or other deceased holy person or a thing believed to be sanctified by contact with him or her” (OED, 1a). The meaning of the title is directly linked to what is revealed later in the poem as the speaker imagines that “he that digs” (l.5) will see these physical remains in the grave, which is “A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,” (l.6). When the gravedigger discovers the body parts he will “think that there a loving couple lies,” (l.8). Then the lovers will be brought to “the Bishop, and the King,” (l.15) who will make them “relics” (l.16) of what is left of them in the grave, namely “A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,” (l.6). Here, one can see the way the speaker envisions and hopes that their remains will be made an object of worship that will be adored by “All women” “and some men” (l.19). If this happens, it is the “miracles” that “are sought” (l.20), which suggests that the speaker is hoping for a miracle “at such time” (l.20), possibly meaning on judgment day. “Relic” could also mean “A precious or valuable object or thing, esp. a sacred ornament (cf. reliquary *n.*); (*fig.*) a precious or beloved person” (†OED, 1c). “A precious or beloved

person” relates well to what is depicted in the poem, as the poem could be regarded a memoir of the lovers’ life together and also as a tribute from the lover to his beloved who to him was “a miracle” (l.33). “Should I tell what a miracle she was” (l.33) and the fact that the description of their love is in the past tense, indicate that his beloved may be dead and that he is memorizing his life with her, hoping to be united with her again in heaven.

The speaker explains that the “bracelet of bright hair about the bone” (l.6) is a “device” (l.9) “To make their souls, at the last busy day,”/ Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?” (ll.10, 11). “Device” may refer to “Purpose, intention” (†OED, 2). Here, one can see the way the speaker hopes that their souls will be united on judgment day by the help of this “device”. The purpose of the “bright hair about the bone” is hence something the lover has planned out with the intention of making their souls find each other on judgment day. The united body parts of the lover and his beloved are used as a medium or tool in order for this spiritual connection of their souls to happen. As a result, the poem seems to argue that a physical or bodily connection is necessary in order for spiritual love to happen. The reason is that “the bracelet of bright hair about the bone” (l.6) is what will make the spiritual union possible, functioning as a “device” (l.9) where the plan is to unite the lovers’ souls. On judgment day, when body parts are scattered everywhere, “The bracelet of bright hair about the bone” (l.6), will make the two souls find their bodies. Consequently, this suggests that the physical contact is necessary to facilitate the lovers’ spiritual union. The physical body parts are also what will make them relics and thereby eternal, further suggesting that a physical union is the foundation or what will lead to a spiritual union.

The last stanza depicts their relationship and seems to favor a spiritual love where “Difference of sex no more we knew,” (l.25). This leads one to believe that in their love relationship, gender difference is not that important, implying that the physical differences between them neither are important. The reason is that they are connected by the souls and this spiritual connection that they have is also what will reunite the lovers on judgment day because their souls belong together. Even though the spiritual love is what seems to be the most important part in the lovers’ relationship, a physical union is nonetheless necessary to achieve spiritual, eternal love. Eternal life and love seem to be the miracle the speaker is looking for: “And since at such time, miracles are sought,” (l.20). The miracle is here that the gravedigger will bring them to the Bishop and King in order to make them relics. Although the image of “A bracelet of bright hair about the bone” (l.6) is horrific, it is the foundation of something divine, their spiritual love and joining of souls “at the last busy day” (l.10). Moreover, it is the “ device” (l.9) that will make it possible for the lover to meet his beloved

again. What is particularly interesting is that even though they are dead, the connection of the physical still serves a function of uniting their souls.

The speaker describes their love in the following way: “Coming and going, we/
Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals;/ Our hands ne’er touched the
seals,”(ll.27, 28,29). “Perchance” is a way of expressing “a hypothetical, contingent, or
uncertain possibility: maybe, perhaps, possibly” (OED, 1a). Considering the meaning of the
word “perchance”, it may indicate, on the one hand, that it was uncertain whether the lovers
kissed or not, or if there was any physical contact between them at all. On the other hand, it
may also mean that “maybe” or “possibly” they kissed. I believe this line questions whether
or not the lover and his beloved actually had a relationship or if it was only a woman he was
secretly in love with and wished to be united with in heaven, which is why he plans to tie a
piece of her hair around his wrist. The question of whether or not he only imagines being
with her or if he really was with her is underlined by the last line in the poem, where he
wonders if he should “tell what a miracle she was” (l. 33), indicating that he may not have
declared his love for her.

The fact that the speaker refers to them as “harmless lovers” (l.22) implies that they
were not actually married to each other. Maybe she only was his mistress or maybe she was
married to somebody else and that this is the reason why they were unable to be with each
other. Enforcing the assumption that they were not married is the use of words in line 27,
where “Coming and going”, indicates that they were not in an exclusive relationship.
Furthermore, line 29 “Our hands ne’er touched the seals,” may indicate that they never had
sex, as “the seals” can refer to “anything that tightly or completely closes or secures a thing”
(Roget’s 21 Century,6), meaning that the “seals” of their bodies are closed. If the lovers
never had physical contact or were together with each other, one gets the association to
Platonic love that was spiritual rather than sexual. Lines 25 and 26 enforce the idea that their
love was spiritual: ”Difference of sex no more we knew,/ Than our Guardian Angels do”. A
“guardian-angel *n.* is “an angel conceived as watching over or protecting a particular person
or place” (OED, C3). Their love is spiritual, just like the love of the Guardian Angels.
Guibbory (1996/2015) suggests that the reader gets the idea that their relationship is secret by
the fact that “Even the nature of the relation between these lovers (like the identity of the
beloved woman) remains veiled from the reader as from the imagined people in the future
who might think the woman “a Mary Magdalen, and I/ A something else thereby;” (ll.17, 18)
(126).

The speaker imagines what they will be when they are made relics: “Thou shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I/ A something else thereby;” (ll.17,18). According to John Carey (2008), the saint Mary Magdalen was always depicted with long golden hair (445). This is probably the reason why the lover imagines that his beloved will be Mary Magdalen, because she has “bright hair” (l.6), meaning golden hair. “Bright” means “Shining; emitting, reflecting, or pervaded by much light” (OED, 1a), almost the exact description of the color of gold: “The colour of the metal: a bright golden yellow” (OED, 5). According to Saunders (2006), “Donne explicitly identifies his beloved with Mary Magdalene and thereby implicitly equates himself with Christ” (48). The speaker himself will be turned into a relic of “A something else thereby;” (l.18). Agreeing with Saunders, John Carey also proposes that this “something else thereby” probably refers to “A Jesus Christ” and that “There was a blasphemous tradition linking him and Mary Magdalen as lovers”(445). “Magdalene” refers to “a follower of Jesus to whom he appeared after his resurrection” (OED, 1a). She is also referred to as “a reformed prostitute elevated to holiness by repentance and faith” (OED, 1a). This meaning of “Mary Magdalene” underlines the view that the couple were just lovers and not married. Line 30 also contributes to this idea: “Which nature, injured by late law, sets free;” and refers, according to John Carey to “Love, naturally free, is restricted by laws (of marriage)” (445). This suggests that the lovers “ne’er touched the seals,” (l.29), meaning sex because they were not married and sex outside marriage was forbidden. The next line implies that the fact that they did not have sex, was one of the miracles they accomplished: “These miracles we did” (l. 31). This may signify that their love is a miracle because it is spiritual and not physical.

Guibbory (2006) suggests that one of the other miracles they performed was in loving “well and faithfully” (l.23) and that love, just like birth, is something miraculous (143). “Miracle” refers to “A marvelous event not ascribable to human power or the operation of any natural force and therefore attributed to supernatural, esp. divine, agency; *esp.* an act (e.g. of healing) demonstrating control over nature and serving as evidence that the agent is either divine or divinely favored” (OED, 1a) or “A remarkable, wonderful, or (in weakened sense) very surprising phenomenon or event; an achievement or occurrence seemingly beyond human power; an outstanding achievement” (OED, 4). Taking these meanings of the word into consideration, it indicates that the love they experience is something divine, not comprehensible to humans. Moreover, line 24: “Yet we knew not what we loved, nor why” implies that their love was a mystery as they themselves not even knew what it was. According to Guibbory, in Donne’s time, “mystery” was “not only something “secret” but

also something known only through divine revelation, or a rite of the Christian church” (2006, 143). A “mystery” can be defined as “A hidden or secret thing; something inexplicable or beyond human comprehension; a person or thing evoking awe or wonder but not well known or understood; an enigma” (OED, 5a). It may also refer to “A religious truth known or understood only by divine revelation; *esp.* a doctrine of faith involving difficulties which human reason is incapable of solving” (OED, 2a). The poem expresses the way their love is a mystery as what they seek are miracles and the beloved herself is also described as a miracle: “what a miracle she was” (l.33). Additionally, if the lovers are made “relics” (l.17), this will also be a miracle. Similarly, the relic is in itself a “miracle” as it according to OED Online may refer to: “A relic or concrete result of a miracle or legendary event” (†OED, 3) or “A wonderful object, a marvel; a person or thing of more than natural excellence; a surpassing specimen or example *of* some quality” (OED, 5).

The poem contains references to Catholicism by its inclusion of relics as this was a common tradition in the Christian Church, *esp.* the Roman Catholic (OED, 1a). This suggests that Donne’s sense of sacramental love, sacramental, meaning “the nature of, a sacrament of the Church” (OED, 1a), a ritual, “draws on a Roman Catholic understanding of the sacraments as not only mysteriously connecting the body and spirit, but actually effecting grace” (Guibbory, 1995/2015, 110). “Grace” means “something received from God by the individual: benevolent divine influence acting upon humanity to impart spiritual enrichment or purity, to inspire virtue, or to give strength to endure trial and resist temptation” (OED, 1b). This could be interpreted as if God will give the lovers eternal life when they are made relics and immortal, blessing them with eternal, spiritual love. In addition, the spiritual love they share is something divine and this divine influence may be what prevents them from having sex and live in sin because they have received God’s grace. Donne imagines an afterlife for his lovers where love has “the power to affect life after death” (Guibbory, 2006,142). Life after death is exactly the kind of miracle the speaker hopes for as he envisions himself in his grave, waiting for his beloved’s return at the resurrection. The resurrection is “The rising of Christ from the dead. Also: the miraculous restoration to life of a dead person by Jesus, as narrated in the New Testament” (OED, 1b). As a result, this suggests that the speaker imagines himself and his beloved rising from death just like Christ, by a miracle, which is probably why he imagines himself being turned into a relic of Jesus Christ.

Guibbory asks the question of whether or not the poem is deeply spiritual and even Platonic as the lovers did not know “Difference of sex” (l.25) and whose “hands ne’er

touched the seals,” (l.29) or if it is distinctly sexual, fixated in the body with its sexually suggestive image of “A bracelet of bright hair about the bone” (l.6) (1996/2015, 126). I believe that the love expressed in the poem is a spiritual one as the lovers’ relationship is not based on sex or even sexual at all. Additionally, what the speaker hopes for, is a reunion of their souls in which physical desire is irrelevant. However, what complicates the idea of their relationship being strictly spiritual is the “bracelet of bright hair about the bone” (l.6). This image is very physical implying that the lovers have a physical connection and union as well and that the physical is in fact of importance.

Moreover, the idea that the bodily union is what will help their souls find each other and unite, may indicate that their material bodies are necessary in order to achieve spiritual love. I therefore hold that the poem expresses a spiritual love where the lovers’ goal is to be united through their souls on judgment day. Despite the emphasis on the spiritual aspect of love, what seems to make this immortal, lasting love possible are the physical body parts, indicating that bodily union is necessary to achieve spiritual love. The poem starts off with a physical union and then moves on to a spiritual one. Consequently, the poem represents a contrast between the physical and spiritual. Guibbory remarks that the poem’s last stanza stands in contrast to the rest of the poem’s body-spirit integration (1996/2015, 132). According to Guibbory this stanza has lead readers to think that the poem portrays a miraculously, spiritual and asexual love with a miraculously pure woman, free from the grossness of sexuality (132). Furthermore, the contrast and complexity between the physical and the spiritual in the poem are underlined by its inclusion of the biblical figure Mary Magdalen who was associated both with purity and sexuality (132- 133). Nevertheless, what seems to be valued the most is the spiritual connection the lovers have, as this is what will secure eternal love.

Moreover, Guibbory observes that the “bracelet of bright hair about the bone” (l.6) is the “seal” the speaker’s mistress has given him and asked him to wear as a sign of her claim on his heart” (127). Here, one can see the way the physical union represents the lovers’ spiritual union. As a consequence, “The bracelet or seal on his arm is not only an image of desired sexual connection, but a sign of the power of love in the face of death” (127). This power of love must be extremely strong since their dead body parts are able to unite the lovers spiritually and “make their souls” (l.10) “Meet” (l.11). In this regard, Targoff makes an interesting point asserting that what is striking about the reunion at his grave is “its extreme brevity” (76). Likewise it is uncertain whether or not they will actually meet again and Targoff remarks that hopefully “the reward for the couple’s horribly reduced form of loving

as ‘a bracelet of bright hair around the bone’ will be their reunion for all eternity”. Besides she also argues: “Instead Donne tells us the purpose of this device- of their long wait as a “loving couple” (l.8) made up of hair and bone- is for their souls to ‘make a little stay,’ (l.11) to share a moment of coming together before parting once again” (76). Nonetheless, when they part again, the hope is that they will be made relics and thus as Guibbory points out “triumph over death” (128) and live forever.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate what type of love Donne expresses as the truest and best kind in four of his most famous love poems. The first poem in my thesis, "A Valediction: forbidding Mourning" expresses a love that does not first and foremost rely on the physical. The reason is that the lovers separate from each other physically when the lover leaves. Even though they are apart from each other, they are still able to preserve their love and endure absence from each other because they have a spiritual connection where their two souls have become one. As a result, they are not dependent on physical presence in order to preserve a strong love relationship. Consequently, the poem expresses a love that endures even though body and soul are separated from each other. In the next poem, "The Good-Morrow", there is an opposition between the lovers' relationships of the past that were only about physical desires and the spiritual connection that they now have found with each other. The poem illustrates the way those who only experience physical lust and desire misses out on the experience of true love. Although the physical still is a part of the spiritual lovers' love, they are connected by the souls as well and this is what distinguishes them from ordinary lovers who only are concerned with the physical. As a result, the poem expresses a love that regards the spiritual connection as the most important and the only way to experience true love is through a connection of the souls. "The Ecstasy" differs from "A Valediction: forbidding Mourning" and "The Good Morrow" in the way that it portrays a love where the relationship between body and soul is one of mutual necessity. Consequently, the physical and the spiritual play an equally important part in the lovers' relationship, as the soul is dependent on the body in order to express itself. In this poem one can see the way the physical or bodily connection between the lovers is valued just as high as the spiritual relation. The idea of love in "The Relic" seems to be an immortal love where the lovers' souls connect on judgment day and the poem thus values a spiritual connection as the best type of love as this is what will lead the lovers to eternal life. Nonetheless, what makes the spiritual union possible seems to be the union of the lovers' physical body parts.

"A Valediction: forbidding Mourning" and "The Good Morrow" demonstrate that not everyone is able to achieve spiritual love and reach the moment of transcendence where their souls blend. In "A Valediction: forbidding Mourning" the "sublunary lovers" (l.13) seem

unable to do this because they only have a physical connection. The lovers in “The Good Morrow” were unable to experience spiritual love in the past because the relationships that they had only were based on physical lust and desire. This demonstrates that in order to find true, immortal love, it needs to be founded on something deeper than just physical desire. Based on this, I argue that “A Valediction: forbidding: Mourning” and the “The Good Morrow” value a spiritual love higher than physical desire. Additionally, in an ideal love relationship, such as the ones portrayed in the poems, the spiritual connection that the lovers have seems to be what matters the most. “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning” begins by describing the spiritual connection that the lovers have and then moves on to portray the physical longing they have for each other at the end of the lover’s journey. The love expressed in “The Good Morrow” and “The Relic”, on the other hand, begins with a physical connection and then moves to a spiritual attachment between the lovers. Moreover, the miracles that love causes are something that the two poems have in common. These miracles are love in itself and love’s ability to be immortal and triumph over death. As a result, the love portrayed in these two poems seem to be based on an initial physical relationship, whereas the love expressed in “A Valediction: forbidding Mourning” seems to be based on a spiritual connection of the souls between the lovers. “The Ecstasy” first depicts the lovers’ spiritual union, even though this union is a result of initial physical contact, and then their return to the bodies at the end of the poem. The love that is portrayed in “The Good Morrow”, “The Ecstasy” and “The Relic” begins with physical contact and then develops into a spiritual connection, suggesting that the physical is necessary in order to experience true love. Based on my analyses and interpretations of the poems, the love Donne expresses in the poems seems to value a spiritual connection as the best and truest kind of love. However, in all four poems, the physical is still a part of the love relationship, suggesting that the body still needs to be a part of an ideal love. What distinguishes the poems from each other is the degree of physical desire and bodily involvement that is necessary in order to achieve a spiritual love and transcendence of the physical world.

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