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**My Condolences; Mourning, Decay and Intimacy  
in John Donne's *Songs and Sonnets***

By

**Sarah Nuñez-Lafontaine**

**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

**Professor Prakas**

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One of the most discussed aspects of John Donne's poetry is how it explores the importance of the body. Whether he is describing sickness or sex, Donne takes the body and bodily functions and plays with how the physical relates to larger concepts like intimacy, love, or religion. His language surrounding the human form can sometimes be vulgar or disturbing, but that is what makes it significant. In particular, some of Donne's work viscerally describes death, with several pieces in *Songs and Sonnets* centering on mortality and decay. Some of Donne's work reflects his attempts to come to terms with such a grim fate as death, while contemplating his grief at the thought of his own mortality, or the loss of loved ones. These poems feature speakers who lament on the impermanence of life and acknowledge the tragedy of death, while working through and attempting to find comfort in this morbidity. Donne's mourning poems offer a strikingly more complex alternative to others of this genre. For example, in Ben Jonson's poem "On My First Daughter", the speaker writes that the death of the infant daughter actually protects her innocence. While the piece acknowledges how awful grief is, it tries to alleviate the pain by viewing the grave as a place where virginity or innocence is maintained. In another poem, "On My First Son", Jonson actually goes so far as to say that mourning is not the sentiment we should be burdened with, but that those in the grave should actually be envied, as they have escaped the cruelty of the world and the misery of aging. Mourning poems have been used to find comfort in demise, to find a silver lining to death and seek solace through the grieving process. However, Donne is interested in doing this in a different way that involves idealizing the grave and finding ways in which death and decay can be fulfilling. In doing this, Donne is also changing his understanding of the grieving process and its importance to both the living, and the dead.

Donne's own relationship with death is complex and leads to a broad range of work centered on the theme. He is clearly preoccupied with death as it relates to his legacy, and fears being forgotten; several of his pieces grapple with this anxiety. In these poems, the speakers are often scared of the consequences of death and their own impermanence, and struggle to face the idea of no longer existing or of being forgotten. In "A Valediction of My Name in the Window", the speaker attempts to outlast his inevitable death. The man carefully etches his name into a window, hoping to preserve his legacy and life, afraid of being forgotten by his lover and the world. The speaker faces the threat of death with uncertainty and fear, and attempts to assuage all this anxiety by attempting to keep his legacy alive. He says all this to a lover, fearing that once he is gone, she will cease to remember him, or that she will begin to write letters to another man;

And if this treason go  
 To an overt act and that thou write again,  
 In superscribing, this name flow  
 Into thy fancy from the pane  
 So, in forgetting thou rememb'rest right  
 And unaware to me shalt write (60-66).

To this lover, even though he is dead, and she is living, the act of writing to another after his passing is treasonous. So, he etches his name in the window to serve as a tool that will influence her mind to inadvertently address her letter to the speaker rather than this other man. The lover is so scared of being replaced that he haunts this woman, not caring that she has moved on and wants to write letters to another man. This fear stems from a belief that being forgotten will create solitude, and that the corpse will be lonely in the grave, with an awareness that the rest of the world moves on from him. Death is another form of divorce, in that the speaker, even after death, will witness the other party moving forward. The tragedy of death is compounded by this suffering of knowing that the dead are capable of being replaced.

Alongside these fears of his own potential death, Donne's poetry also features himself working through loss and grief. He writes about the potential for his own death, as well as poetry that mourns the death of others, where the speaker is in the midst of the mourning process. In these poems the speakers are forced to face death, and rarely turn to God or the church. In fact, poems like "The Dissolution", show that comfort is not found in the words of God, or in God's attempts to replace the lover. Rather, Donne has found a new way to comfort himself that he expresses in his poetry; those lovers who either encounter death themselves or mourn the loss of their partners use the verses to cope with loss and their own mortality. Donne attempts to find a means of comforting oneself, but in a way that layers sexuality, religion, romance, vulgarity and morbidity all together.

One poem in particular demonstrates how the traditional mourning process is questioned. The poem "Since she whome I lovd" is generally assumed to have been written about the passing of Donne's wife in 1617. In his article "*remembrest right*": *Remembering the Dead in John Donne's "Songs and Sonets"*, Abram Steen examines how Donne's writing on mourning and death coincide with the continuing debate on death and remembering the departed that was taking place in the Catholic community during this time. The debate seemed to focus on whether the ritual aspect of mourning was something the church thought was appropriate to promote.

At the heart of almost all Protestant reform in this area was the oft-quoted principle from Augustine that words and rituals used to observe death 'are rather comforts to the living than helps the dead. While the Church of England officially adopted this belief, Puritans worried that older rituals that were retained in the liturgy, or simply allowed to continue, kept alive the belief in the dead's need for intercession (Steen 96).

In this poem, Donne is unfulfilled by the mourning process, telling God that His love is not enough to make him forget his lover; "To seeke thee God; so streames do shew the head/But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed/A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yet" (6-8).

Donne is telling God that there will never be a replacement to sooth the pain of the loss of his wife. Donne is not consoled by the presence of God and requires more to overcome this grief. In this last line the speaker has admitted that he continues to experience a sense of both spiritual and physical loss, by feeling a thirst that cannot be fulfilled by God. Donne expresses that to mourn death requires something other than the comfort of the Lord's words. Already, Donne begins to explore new modes of grieving. He needs more than what religious practice or words can offer; he needs a more personal mourning experience in order to fully get over the loss of his wife. The personal nature of overcoming loss is established in this piece, which is important when considering that this is, perhaps, the most personal poem for Donne, given its biographical subject matter.

Donne's poetry on death portrays his own mourning experience as he attempts to find comfort in mortality. He does this in several of his poems by describing how romance and sensuality can take place in the grave. Often he has his speakers take the position of a corpse in the grave, describing the rather grotesque state of bodily decomposition, with the grave oftentimes being a shared place. Decay is romanticized as the bodies of two lovers become one, with sexual undertones conveying the romanticization of this state. In this way, death is not the end of love or the end of a couple, but rather it serves as a secluded place where two bodies can melt into one another, reaffirming their love for each other. Donne has transformed the grave into not a haunting or morbid setting, but rather the location or state for a renewal or continuation of lovers' intimacy. His poetry is not romanticizing death but is rather a method of comforting or alleviating this fear that is tied to mortality. Donne's speakers are either coping with loss themselves or grieving their loved ones. His speakers believe that their love is immune to disruption from death, and this serves as a way to cope with the inevitability of dying. These

poems are not simply attempting to capture the bliss in unity, but demonstrate Donne's obsession with the difficulty of sustaining this union of lovers. Part of what distinguishes his poetry from other love sonnets is the urgency and force with which he writes, as well as the way he articulates the bodies' decay with such intimacy. What distinguishes Donne as a love poet is not his joyful assurance that his love will endure, but the knowledge that love is perpetually in peril of coming to an end. His work is an attempt to prolong that moment, that relationship, for as long as he can. And he does this knowing that the end of that union may come sooner than one would hope. So, to comfort this, Donne extends the imagined end of the relationship by pushing intimacy into the grave and believing that death is not another form of divorce, but rather that the grave is a second marriage bed.

However, this theory brings forth an entirely new set of fears. If one looks at death as a reemergence of intimacy and privacy, then what happens when the body's process of decay is interrupted or made public. These fears inform a criticism of the mourning process, which Donne sees as a corruption of this intimacy. The poetry demonstrates his understanding of both the idealized mourning process, but also the ideal postmortem experience. And by setting up what he believes the ideal death to be, Donne offers his understanding of how death should be viewed or celebrated by the living. Each of these pieces involve Donne moving through grief and relaying his ideas of mourning and death through the voice or the story of each poem's speakers. He is presenting both the ideal and the corrupted forms of remembrance and mourning. And by reading these poems in conversation with one another provides a certain structure that allows for a more full or complex understanding of how Donne comforts these fears and moves past his grief.

“The Dissolution” is a poem where the speaker initially is fearful of death, having suffered the loss of his lover. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker is distraught, longing for his lover and announcing her death simply; “Shee is dead” (1). But through the rest of the poem, the speaker, in order to process her death, imagines lying beside her in the coffin. He finds solace in imagining his own death, romanticizing the grave and longing for the reunion of him and his beloved. The poem looks into intimacy, viewing it from a microscopic lens, describing the connection between the lovers that seems to be evolving in the grave. He specifically cites the “elements” that they were made of; “To their first elements resolve/And we were mutual elements to us” (2-3). Any morbidity of the bodies decaying, or disintegrating is romanticized by a portrayal of dissolution as these lovers returning to their original elements. Donne’s poetry features this idea of a circuitous life; where death and birth are one in the same. This premise is brought into this poem, where the coffin is not the final resting place but rather a chance for a new beginning, addressing the anxiety of the finality of death.

Part of the poem’s process is to equate the grave and decay to marriage itself. The poem begins with the speaker describing and imagining how the elements of these two people are becoming one. He takes the time to detail how in every way, these two lovers are mingling. The speaker starts at the anatomical level, describing their ‘elements’ mixing into one another’s. He suggests that they were made of the same elements before death or decomposition; “And we were mutual elements to us/And made of one another” (3-4). The speaker is claiming that in life, these two people were made of the same material, mutual and indistinguishable. If they are made of one another, then individuality is sacrificed in decay as these elements intertwine and return to each other. Decomposition involves the lover’s losing individuality, with this language of the male taking over the female being brought forth; “My body then doth hers involve/And those



things whereof I consist hereby/In me abundant grow” (4-6). The grave is akin to marriage itself, with this idea of the man absorbing the woman’s identity echoing certain principles of marriage, where wealth and even name become shared. Death is then continuing this sharing, but to a much more extreme level. Donne’s piece implies that identity, in death, is stripped of meaning as the bodies become one. The reference to the physical material being shared is continued in the latter half of the poem. Further along he compares her to treasure and him to a king, collecting her “Now, as those active kings/Whose foreign conquest treasure brings” (15-16). The speaker likens her decaying body to priceless treasure, something he is conquering by having her decay into him. Everything that once was hers, is now his. This echoes concepts in the institution of marriage, where the woman gives up everything to her husband, from her name to her dowry. Suddenly her entire being belongs to him. Perhaps Donne finds comfort in decay mimicking marriage; The process of combining in decay is playing with the process of lives combining in marriage. This is an example of how Donne is romanticizing decay, with the bodies dissolution being idealized as a second marital experience.

The marital themes continue and blend into religious imagery and motifs as well. This idea of the bodies intermingling is portrayed as a natural occurrence; a sort of existential fate for the married couple. But the poem goes a step further by saying, “To their first elements resolve” (2). The man notes that all things dead dissolve into these ‘first elements’, like earth, air, fire, water. Since the couple was once united and were once “elements of each other” their bodies were, at one point, the same. When the woman’s body begins to decay into its elements, her lover's body receives them. This has religious connotations, bringing forth the idea of Adam and Eve, where Eve literally came from the body of Adam, when God created her from one of Adam’s ribs. Perhaps Donne is asserting that when a woman dies, she does not simply

decompose back to the earth, but is absorbed back into the body of man. The poem suggests that this is the natural occurrence for women in general. Jay Arnold Levine points to the Biblical reference of flesh and divorce, citing “That this is the corporeal unity of a man and a woman in love or, perhaps, marriage. The Biblical source of this notion occurs in the account of the creation of Eve: ‘There shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh’. In Mark and in Matthew, Christ interprets that text as a commandment against divorce” (Levine 305). With this reading in mind, the combination of the decaying flesh opposes the idea that death is indistinguishable from divorce. Marriage is capable of enduring postmortem, meaning that any fears of leaving behind a lover by dying are assuaged by the knowledge that death is not divorce.

However, in these ideas that the speaker is bringing to light, the gendered imagery and story form a complicated idea that death and decay are gendered experiences, with a woman’s corpse undergoing a different transformation than her partner’s. Even if decay strips the body of any distinguishing markers of gender, the difference between man and woman still exists in the grave, with Donne distinguishing the woman’s experience from the man’s. The piece describes the man’s experience of the woman decaying into him, and hints that this is not a mutual experience. He specifically states, “My body then doth hers involve” (4), meaning that gender affects who will enfold into whom. If gender is still a factor that affects the experience of decay, it begs the question of whether death is equally fulfilling for women. Should a woman have the same romantic lens through which to look at death? Or for a woman, is death and decay simply another landscape in which she is subversive and made into the property of the man. The poem does not provide an answer to this, as the lover is not heard from, with her experience only being relayed by the man. His announcement in the very first line of “she is dead” (1) is the only

moment where the woman is individual, from then on, she is only described in the context of the speaker imagining himself as with her. If Donne's description of death and decay is not as fulfilling a scenario for women, then how do they comfort themselves? It's not a question Donne addresses, but rather the female perspective complicates his idealization and romanticization of life postmortem.

But marriage is not the only aspect of the grave that the speaker seems to look forward to. He also finds comfort in sexualizing the grave and the corpse. There is an argument that the beginning of the poem "directs us to the notion of the perfect union of two complete halves" (Levine 305). It's quite a sexual poem in this way. The combination of the bodies is very erotic, bringing forth a sexualized image of the couple in the grave plot. The references of the man and the woman being one, is not only biblical, but also references intercourse. This is furthered by the provocative language Donne uses to describe the actual decay. It begins with language of her entering, or penetrating, him; "My body then doth hers involve" (4). According to the speaker, she is penetrating him, entering his body and growing inside of him. The speaker then mentions something growing, saying "But that my fire doth with my fuel grow" (15). After this description of something 'growing', the speaker ends the poem by describing a release, with the last lines of the poem portraying a bullet being discharged. Donne is playing sex, the creation of life, against the theme of demise. This poem is unique because sex is not taking place in a bedroom on the wedding day; it's not even taking place between two living people. The poem's sexuality is important because of its juxtaposition to the theme of death.

There is some literary criticism that argues that the sexual tones of the poem are more pronounced or obvious, arguing that Donne is making reference to semen throughout the poem. Some argue that the "release" that the speaker is talking about is explicitly about sperm, and that

the feeling of being ‘smothered’ comes from the man’s ejaculation; “...the woman's dissolution flooded their sexual experiment, but by his own heightened excitement and frustration, the man has served to ‘smother’ himself by adding to his unreleased store of sperm” (Levine 310). This offers a different reading of the line “and all which die/To their first Elements resolve” (1-2), stating that this is not only a reference to the physical decaying of the body, but also a reference to this Hippocratic theory of sexual generation, “where semen (in both male and female) is a solution produced from all parts of the body and contains the primary elements in separation, until they recombine to form an embryo” (Levine 311). In this reading, the two bodies are supposed to intermingle, destined to resolve to these first elements. Donne is potentially playing with the fact that sex creates us, making it a final resolution after death. Once again, this Donnean cycle is brought to light in this poem, with a fixation on the first element coming from sexual intercourse. I agree that the poem explores sexuality, and that the language Donne chooses to use is obviously erotic. However, I don’t believe that the poem is primarily concerned with explicitly exploring ejaculation or orgasm. This poem’s sexuality is not intended to be vulgar or satirical, in ways that some of Donne’s other poetry may often be read. Rather, the sexuality of the grave is meant to be read as a continuation of the sexual experience in life. Donne is suggesting that the grave allows for sexuality, that death does not stand in the way of intimacy or pleasure.

However, I would argue that postmortem sexual intimacy is not the primary focus for Donne, because, as the latter half of the poem demonstrates, the imagined sexual climax in the grave is unfulfilling. The poem continues “And those things whereof I consist hereby/In me abundant grow, and burdensome/And nourish not, but smother” (5-6). The speaker is imagining this enfolding, but even hypothetically, the combining of these two beings is actually smothering

the man, with the imagined taking in of the woman being rather burdensome. The sexual gratification isn't actually nourishing, and this is doubled in that any sex act that occurs postmortem will lack meaning or achievement. It's somewhat meaningless in that there will be no child, no procreation. The speaker feels smothered and overwhelmed by her growing inside of him, bursting into tears not simply from grief, but from taking on his lover. The 'treasure' that he has collected is overwhelming, and much like the war or violence that a foreign conquest must endure, there is a cost to such a prize. The speaker, even though he still lives, is decaying and deteriorating in his own way by imagining taking his lover's life within himself. This is demonstrated in Donne's use of the word 'break' towards the end of the poem. Decay is not only something that affects the dead, but something that can ail the living who mourn them.

The speaker is aware of the pain he is enduring by taking his lover's life within himself, remarking that there is a breaking point; "Receive more, and spend more, and soonest break" (18). There is something very painful or overwhelming in enveloping or absorbing a loved one, as that signifies the completed end to that person, or body, existing. What was her becomes both of them, making him larger, but also fully nullifying her existence. Donne is taking the figurative statement of them being "made of one another" (4) and playing with it, creating a physical space where he grows, taking the lover within him. Towards the end of the poem, his 'passion' has increased along with everything else, since he now has an extra measure of her grief and desire. In a sense, he is two people all at once, impregnated with her life and being. He is overwhelmed by all this added emotion and grief that he has taken on, and he is so exhausted by this that by the end of the poem, he is sure he will die from the sheer force of his own emotions. The poem's speaker may feel overwhelmed by the sudden growth or addition, or perhaps the loss of identity is then compounded by the loss of the loved one. By imagining the combining of the corpses, the

speaker becomes overwhelmed; “My fire of passion, sighs of air/Water of tears, and earthly sad despair/Which my materials be/But near worn out by love's security” (8-10). The speaker is worn out, and the breaking down of his body reveals these things that he is made of: the grief and the passion, the tears and the anger. The act of dissolution shows the most intimate parts of this person, which may include bringing forth despair and these ‘earthly’ emotions.

But, regardless of the imagined risks of dissolution, the speaker believes that living without the woman is worse than this swelling of emotions. No matter how ‘burdensome’ the process of dissolution may seem, the speaker still wants this future. Donne has demonstrated that decay and this imagined dissolution will be romantic and mimic marriage, but that the dissolution will be complicated and perhaps, as the speaker imagines it, painful. However, the pain that the speaker feels in his grief is larger than any burden he imagines in the grave. He ends the poem wanting to die alongside this woman, to join her in death rather than live without her; “And so my soul, more earnestly released/Will outstrip hers; as bullets flown before/A latter bullet may o'ertake, the powder being more” (22-24). He will earnestly hope for death. His soul is the latter bullet, and he is hoping that all this grief and the swollen emotions within him will help his ‘bullet’ reach the lover’s. And in fact, the swelling of the emotions that he described earlier on will actually help his ‘bullet’ to catch up to hers. This powder that he references could be all these emotions that he is burdened with, and this will ultimately help his soul reach hers. The speaker is aware of the emotional risks of such union but would rather suffer through those than live with this grief. And actually, this taking on of emotions will help in the reunion come faster.

The reunion of the lovers is wanted by the speaker, not only because it will end his loneliness and grief, but because the speaker views the reunion as ‘pure’. The poem references

to alchemy demonstrate this idea that the reunion of the lovers in the grave is the ultimate desire; “The theory of correspondences-and especially this emphasis upon the necessity of reuniting male and female complements on all the analogical planes (divine, human, and metallurgical) in order to achieve harmony and purity-explains the language of the technological offshoot of occultism, alchemy...” (Levine 310). This is another reason that the speaker fears being left behind by his lover; her dying before him would create inequality and disrupt the harmony which he desires. In his mind, the pain comes from him joining his lover too late, as well as his pain of living without her. He laments “She, to my loss, doth by her death repair/And I might live long wretched so” (14-15). The speaker does not fear death, and would, in fact, rather die than have a ‘wretched’ life without his love. In imagining lying next to his dead lover, the speaker concludes that he would have rather died before her, or at least died at the exact same time as her. The bullet imagery is him imagining a race, in which his soul is attempting to catch up to her with the speed and ferocity of a bullet being discharged from a gun; “And so my soul, more earnestly released/Will outstrip hers; as bullets flown before/A latter bullet may o'ertake, the powder being more” (22-24). The powder and the power of the bullet are fueled by a desperation to be with the mistress. The speaker has comforted himself so well, that his final wish is to no longer suffer from separation from the mistress, as this suffering stands in the way of this purity he so looks forward to. The inequality of one partner living and the other dead is in direct opposition to the purity or beauty the speaker has imagined will take place in the grave. He no longer fears death, but rather views it as a solution to the despair he initially felt. When the lover dies, the bed is partially empty, and the union is disrupted. But the lover, knowing all of this, is preparing himself for death to take him, to reunite him with the woman. Death is then not morbid, but is meant to be longed for, as death is necessary for the union to be restored.

This need or desire for restoration is part of how Donne approaches understanding and facing death. Donne finds a more complex comfort than Ben Jonson, for example, layering all these ideas and images together to create a poem that plays with the speaker's need for comfort after the loss of the woman he loves. Jonson's mourning poems seem quick to accept death, almost jumping to the point of acceptance. In "On My First Son", the speaker has already declared that we should envy the dead by line four. In these mourning poems, peace with loss is found rather quickly and easily. The speakers do not demonstrate the same complex suffering that Donne has written. "The Dissolution" works through the grief, with the speaker's pain evolving and being explored through the poem. He sees both the potential for an overwhelming of emotions through the body breaking down, and comfort in imagining this reunion with his lover. There are so many layers that play with alternating and sometimes opposing thought processes in death. Even the speaker's final wish to die is riddled with meaning and references to chemistry and alchemy, and imagery of violence and sex. The speaker's grief feels real precisely because the comfort is not simply found. Donne's conclusion that he reaches by the end of the poem is not that we should simply envy the dead and pity the living. The message of the grave as a place for sexual exploration and a renewed unity is quite different from the approach Ben Jonson takes, as it opens up an entirely new set of fears. Suddenly, there are new threats to such unity, making death not the fear, but a disruption or corruption of the reunification of lovers postmortem the real enemy.

In "The Funerall", that union is corrupted. The speaker is clearly viewing the destiny of him and his lover in a different light than that of "The Dissolution". It's a far less romantic poem, in that the connection between the lovers is viewed as stifling, rather than a way to cope with grief. In "The Funerall", the connection isn't even between two lovers, as the speaker has been



rejected by the woman he loved. Instead, the speaker is enveloped in a bracelet of hair, a gift, he claims, from the woman who rejected him. The bracelet doesn't allow him to decay, and thereby, he is made a relic and a martyr. In this poem, the anxiety is not limited to separation, meaning that this poem is dealing with another set of fears related to death and decay. And this is set up from the very beginning of the poem, where the conflict begins with the body being on display, and the speaker telling those funeral attendees how he wants them to address the body. Already, this is different from "The Dissolution", as the poem's conflict stems from a source other than death itself. In this poem, the speaker is not fearing mortality or mourning any sort of loss himself. He's not lamenting on his loss of life or berating the mortality of man. He focuses on a bracelet.

The poem's speaker is telling those who will attend his funeral not to touch the "wreath of hair" (3) on his arm, warning them that this bracelet is his "outward soul" (5). The bracelet's importance is that it connects the speaker to his lover, and yet this is distinctly less romanticized than the connection in "The Dissolution". The speaker's body is described as "her [the lover's] provinces" (8), and the bracelet will in fact prevent his limbs from decaying. The bracelet is described as a thread, keeping him whole or together. The thread "Can tie those parts, and make me one of all" (11). Donne encourages us to see the bracelet and its complexity;

For all that Donne warns us away from the wreath, the puzzles he presents invite us to 'question' it—as he does himself. It is a 'subtle wreath,' one not easily understood, for the modifier 'subtle' in contemporary usage opens up nonexclusive interpretations of the wreath as physically fragile, esoteric, elusive, cleverly designed, sophisticated, and insidious (Smith, 358).

The bracelet's power is neither in the hands of the lover, or the poem's speaker. He wants the reader, and those who will bury him, to question the bracelet and its power over him. The poem's real beauty lies in the fact the Donne does not expressly give us the meaning of what the bracelet actually serves as.

One idea is that the bracelet can be read as a biblical allusion, acting as a second serpent, reminiscent of the seducer in Genesis; “The word’s biblical echo also relates the lock of hair to Genesis’s serpent, which imports its own subtleties. Associating hair with snake, Donne opens the object to a reading in a naturalist as well as a theological register, drawing on the imagined potential for the spontaneous generation of snakes from horsehair” (Smith 358). The bracelet is then akin to the snake, a temptress that denies the speaker from the ‘paradise’ of dissolution; “...except she meant that/By this should know my pain/As prisoners then are manacled, when they're condemn'd to die” (14-16). The bracelet serves as a constant reminder of the speaker’s pain, and keeps the lover manacled, like a prisoner to their cell. Moreover, the manacle is a reminder to the prisoner of his status, and of his future. The bracelet serves a similar purpose, as it is a constant reminder of both the woman who gave the bracelet to him, and the speaker’s inability to dissolve. Perhaps, he is manacled then to an uncanny sort of vitality, an inability to actually die. The lover, tempted, is unable to untie those parts that the bracelet is holding together. The bracelet being akin to the serpent creates a tension between supposed vitality, and the peace of dissolution and freedom in death. If the bracelet is a seducer, it is tempting him with the promise of being held together, of being whole rather than succumbing to decay. The poem is not promoting the bracelet, in fact, the bracelet and its power are seen as imprisoning.

The poem cites that the speaker, by having this bracelet, is like a prisoner, still locked up even when he is about to die; “As prisoners then are manacled, when they're condemn'd to die” (16). In this moment, the symbolic power of the bracelet is coming to a head; “The wreath now functions symbolically rather than marvelously. Donne knows his pain by the wreath, as do condemned prisoners by their manacles. Signs instruct the unfortunate lover rather than physically act upon him” (Smith 238). The bracelet is a tool in a pseudo-psychological warfare;

while the bracelet does not enact any physical pain, it serves as a constant reminder of the emotional tragedy of the lover's rejection. The bracelet's physical importance is holding the head and the body together; "For if the sinewy thread my brain lets fall/Through every part/Can tie those parts, and make me one of all" (9-11). This physical power of the bracelet is contrasted with the symbolic power of the bracelet. This underscores a point Donne makes in another poem, where these relics that we put so much power into are actually just objects. It is the meaning that is infused into the objects that carry weight, not the objects themselves. The speaker is putting meaning into something that could potentially just be a bracelet. This is clear because the speaker himself lacks understanding of the object; "That subtle wreath of hair, which crowns my arm/The mystery, the sign, you must not touch" (3-4). By referring to the bracelet in these vague terms, calling it a mysterious or subtle sign, the speaker is demonstrating his own lack of knowledge and understanding of the bracelet. He even admits that he does not quite know why she put it on him in the first place; "Whate'er she meant by'it, bury it with me" (17). But in spite of knowing so little about the bracelet, the speaker puts so much power and meaning into it, assuming that it "might breed idolatry" (19). This bracelet may not itself be powerful, but the speaker's interpretation of the object is.

The speaker infuses his own beliefs about the woman and this relationship into the meaning of the bracelet as well. He believes, that since she rejected him, that this must be some cruel sort of torture she is subjecting him to. This is especially relevant in a reading of the bracelet being made of literally the hair of the mistress; "His mistress's hair becomes the temporary guardian of his corpse, a make-shift solution for warding off the inevitable decay of the flesh. Donne does not carry this conceit through in the rest of the poem—her lock of hair, it turns out, was given in a spirit of cruelty 'she meant that I / By this should know my pain'"

(Targoff 49). According to the speaker, the lover's motive in this poem is bitter and cruel, with the intention of preventing his dissolution. It is not a romantic gesture from a lover wanting to reunite after death, but rather a cruel joke meant to hurt the speaker; "This time, however, the purpose of the hair is not romantic—it is meant only to keep his bones intact during the dreaded interlude between death and resurrection, and not to ensure a reunion" (Targoff 49). The speaker believes that the woman has subjected him to the cruel fate of not allowing the flesh to fall off the bone. So, the bracelet is a gift bestowed out of spite with rather maniacal intentions. She does not leave this bracelet as a symbol of her mourning or ever-lasting devotion, but rather as a cruel trick.

The speaker is so upset, that he decides to enact his own form of revenge upon this woman. This is made clear in his final line, where the speaker explains why he is keeping this bracelet of her hair upon him; "That since you would have none of me, I bury some of you" (24). The poem's speaker is returning the favor and ensuring that his lover is in fact buried with him. In response to rejection, the speaker is taking part of the woman, the hair, and staying with her, keeping part of her in the earth with him. This is unfulfilling though, as he is not decaying into her, and nor will the hair decay into him. His decision sprouts from a twisted vengeance; Sophie Read writes "If it refuses to mean one kind of little death, it can mean another; and he ends on a vengefully performative locution: 'since you would save none of mee, I bury some of you'" (Read 101). The speaker's decision to bury himself alongside this part of the woman is the exact opposite of what is happening in "The Dissolution", where the sexual gratification of decay is being imagined, or in some readings, actually occurring. In "The Funerall", neither party wins. There is a reciprocity in sexual denial, as she would have none of him when he was alive and denies him the sexual gratification of decay that was described in "The Dissolution". The hair

will never dissolve nor will the flesh of the body. Instead of a scene of two lovers, reuniting and turning into one another, the decay is prevented, and therefore so is intimacy. The speaker is also buried alongside a reminder of the woman he loves, meaning that he is reminded of the intimacy he was so close to having, but can never achieve due to the prevention of decay.

This intimacy being thwarted echoes the rejection in life onto which the speaker still holds. The last line of the poem hints at this; “That since you would have none of me, I bury some of you” (24). The bracelet in this reading is the manifestation of his own unfulfilled desire, which existed both in life and death. The bracelet doesn’t allow for the sexual release of decay that Donne described in “The Dissolution”. Her rejection of him could also be read as the reason for his death, playing off of a trope of the woman as a prudish killjoy; “The other version of the story draws on a Petrarchan tradition of male entrapment. Donne’s death could result from his consuming desire for a woman who withholds her favors.” (Smith 135). The poem’s speaker sees himself as the victim of this desire and subsequent rejection and wants to be buried with the bracelet not only out of spite, but as a symbol of his martyrdom from this unfulfilled love; “...bury it with me/For since I am/Love's martyr, it might breed idolatry” (17-19). The bracelet is a symbol of rejection, and the speaker, a martyr, or in his mind, an idol, for any man who has been rejected by a lover. His warning to those who may wish to free him of the bracelet is then a wish to stay the martyr, a wish to continue suffering so that he might be celebrated as a wronged man.

He is love’s martyr then, but the speaker also asserts that he is brave for carrying such an object with him to the grave, claiming that this is an act of humility and an act of bravery. If the bracelet were to fall into other hands, it would be idolized and worshiped; “For since I am/Love's martyr, it might breed idolatry/If into other hands these relics came” (18-19). So the speaker

believes he ends the poem as a hero, who bravely buried himself with this reminder of rejection that could have potentially been objectified and turned into a relic of some sort. The speaker imposes so much power and meaning into both the bracelet and himself as a symbol or martyr of love. He has assigned himself this position of martyrdom, and tells an entire group of funeral celebrants about the bracelet, presumably while both it and himself are on display. He draws attention to the very object he claims should not be made into a relic. In reality, with the speaker's assertion of martyrdom, it seems more likely that he does want him and his wreath to be idolized, to be admired and marveled at during his funeral; "Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm/Nor question much/That subtle wreath of hair, which crowns my arm" (1-3). Yet, he spends the rest of the piece remarking on the very bracelet he tells them not to wonder about. The poem indicates that the speaker wants to be recognized by the living as this martyr and that he wants them to recognize the power of this bracelet.

The speaker has taken that rejection from his lover, and then turned to a new goal; one of martyrdom and a false immortality. He takes intimacy and corrupts it, turning the corpse into a relic itself. This corpse will stay together, the limbs will keep their flesh, and the body will remain, allowing itself to continue being this 'relic'. The corpse of the martyr can always be celebrated if it never dissolves or decays. It will remain viable for celebration no matter how long it stays buried beneath the earth. And in fact, by having a funeral at all, the speaker is inviting those around him to marvel and pay respects to this duo. By losing the ability to reunite with the lover, the speaker has chosen to stay alive through idolatry and martyrdom. This is unnatural to a certain extent, as the speaker is either doing this out of revenge, or for a desire for immortality and fame. He is then self-destructive, corrupting himself and his body post-mortem

by attempting to gain this lasting power. The goal, Donne argues, is not immortality or vitality at all, because this is unnatural and not actually fulfilling.

Not only is this not fulfilling, but it's also bound to fail. The speaker may not be remembered as love's martyr; he may not even be remembered at all. The bracelet itself will be buried alongside the speaker, because, after all, the funeral has to end at some point, and that ending means that both the body and the bracelet will be buried. This means that nothing will actually be displayed as the speaker seems to want. So, there is a chance that this man is only a 'martyr' in his head, meaning that all his energy is being put into being remembered by people who may not even care about the bracelet or the body once they are buried. The speaker, once in the grave, still might be so focused on being remembered, that he won't allow himself to dissolve at all. If this is the case, then the bracelet does not symbolize the lover, but is rather a device and manifestation of the speaker's need to be remembered posthumously. This desire prevents him from decay, meaning that the tragedy is self-made rather than inflicted by the lover. Maybe the speaker is in the wrong here, because even after death he is still caring about the living world and what they, and specifically this lover, remember him by. The speaker is so focused on the funeral, that he prevents himself from really enjoying decay and death.

Remembrance is also being played with because the bracelet invokes the idea of the funeral gift, where close friends and family of the deceased received small gifts that were tokens of the departed. Typically, these would be rings and other customized pieces of jewelry and these objects were typically engraved with a "death's head" and were meant to serve as a reminder of the dead; "The occasional nature of such gift-giving meant that these objects were more than just instructive tokens; they were also meant to mark the passing of a specific individual and provide survivors with a tangible sense of connection with the deceased" (Steen 107). The bracelet in

“The Funerall” could be playing with that idea, except this gift serves as a reminder for the man postmortem of what he has left behind by dying. It’s forcing upon him a reminder of his own death and separation from her, and perhaps adding to the agony of facing death alone. Donne himself gave friends rings engraved with the image of the “body of Christ extended upon an anchor”, with the anchor reportedly being a “symbol of hope”. According to Izaak Walton's *Life of Dr. John Donne* (1640), Donne had this set of rings custom made for his "dearest friends". Walton goes on to report that Donne’s gifted the rings in order to provide his friends with something to remember him, serving as “memorials of him, and his affection to them” (Walton 41). Perhaps Donne is a fan of reminders of the deceased in life, but believes that for the dead to have a reminder of those left behind is cruel. Donne may believe that the dead can be remembered by the living. But according to the speaker in “The Funerall”, signs of the living in the coffin are cruel reminders for the dead. In “The Dissolution”, there is no indicator that the dead lover should be or is thinking about the speaker in the same way he is remembering her. The dead may not want a reminder of their lives until the reunion of the lovers. In “The Funerall”, the bracelet is a reminder of both death, and of the lover who rejected the speaker. In this way, this is less of a funeral gift, and more of a tortuous cross that the speaker must bear. Alternatively, Donne could be playing with the bracelet as a funeral token, referring to the imagery of the ceremony of “mourners placing a penny in the mouth of the deceased to be used as payment to St. Peter, or putting crucifixes inside the coffin” (Steen 108). But once again, this ceremony is not done with love of a desire to protect the body, but with a cruel intention. Donne doesn’t like this idea of either the funeral attendees or the lover corrupting the corpse. He doesn’t like this precisely because these two modes of mourning disrupt the intimacy that once



comforted him. Perhaps Donne is fine with his friends wearing the silver rings, but would prefer that his body remain intact and unscathed, saving it for the reunion between him and his lover.

“The Funerall” is not a poem of mourning then and strikes a much different tone than “The Dissolution.” Because, in “The Funerall,” death is not the enemy or the preoccupation. Rather, the poem serves to point to the complexity of remembrance. This is not a poem about a lover dying and the speaker longing for them or vice versa. This poem suggests that death is not the final enemy or that mortality is the worst ending for man. In this poem, there is a far more sinister ending. The speaker has resigned himself, out of a desire for revenge against the woman who scorned him, to being buried with this bracelet. And he does this knowing full well that the bracelet serves as a constant reminder of both this unreciprocated love, and the fact that the woman is alive and he is dead. In this poem, remembrance is corrupted and forced upon the dead. Donne creates a world where the speaker experiences loneliness and rejection, a need to seek vengeance and to be immortalized as love’s martyr. And the worst part of this all comes in the fact that the speaker will never decay, that their soul has been intertwined with this bracelet, and that they can never escape these sentiments or this life. In reading this as opposed to the idealization in “The Dissolution”, this poem presents itself as the worst-case scenario, one of the cruelest ends a person can experience. And all of this pain is brought on not by death, but by a corruption of the corpse.

Intimacy is once again interrupted in “The Relique”, where the speaker is once again telling those who may dig him up not to touch the bracelet of hair. Only in this poem, the hair is thought to be the way for the two lovers to reunite, a far more romantic and decidedly less sinister plot for the bracelet. The speaker believes that the bracelet is the “device”, which will ultimately be what guides him and his lover, who is still alive, back together;

And think that there a loving couple lies  
 Who thought that this device might be some way  
 To make their souls, at the last busy day  
 Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

The bracelet, unlike in “The Funerall”, is not the corrupting or corrosive factor. Instead, the bracelet is thought to be the mechanism through which a couple, at the end of their lives, will come back together and find one another. This is the “device” that is used to alleviate the fear of separation post-mortem, as this poem indicates that it is the bracelet that will allow their souls to meet at the grave. This immediately sets the threat of “The Relique” as different from what we see in “The Funerall.” In the latter poem, the bracelet is described as being what prevents decay and is on display because of the speakers’ desire for martyrdom, being the very thing that the speaker calls attention to at the beginning of his funeral. In this piece, the bracelet is at threat of being made a relic in spite of the speaker’s protests. This creates a new threat, that of being made a relic of without permission. In “The Relique,” the body and the bracelet are forced on display, intruded upon, and made into relics, a fate that Donne mocks and is clearly upset by. In this poem, once again we see a scenario in which death is not the enemy, but rather there is an entirely new set of threats to the body post-mortem that the speaker dreads. In a way, the threat is quite similar to that in “The Dissolution”; the threat of no longer being united with the beloved. But the reason that that would happen is not because of death itself, but what comes after.

Donne begins the poem by lamenting the interruption of his burial plot, saying “When my grave is broke up again/Some second guest to entertain...And he that digs it, spies/A bracelet of bright hair about the bone/Will he not let us alone” (1-7). The speaker is frustrated by this interruption, with the grave being “broken” by an intruder who violently enters the grave and refuses to leave the couple (the bracelet and the speaker) alone. The corruption and interruption continue, as the bracelet and the speaker’s body are then brought to the “bishop and the king”

(15), which the speaker contributes to this being a land where “mis-devotion doth command” (16). The body and the bracelet are made relics without consent, being forced into the eyes of the bishop and the king, and made into a spectacle for followers. The speaker complains that the body and the bracelet are being made into such spectacles or idols, saying “Thou shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I/A something else thereby” (17). In this poem, the interruption by the gravedigger is compounded by this body and the bracelet being made into relics, forced on display and made into symbols, all of which Donne believes is fueled by such ‘mis-devotion’.

The speaker falters when thinking about the type of devotion that these relics might generate, criticizing those hordes of women who are so desperate for some relic to adore; “All women shall adore us, and some men” (19). The speaker mocks this entire culture where such mis-devotion has run rampant, describing how only mindless women are tricked into such mis-devotion. Abram Steen rightly makes the point that this is partially why the speaker is so angry at the idea of re-entering this world;

Donne is clearly unwilling or unable to imagine a painless reentry into what he now sees as a culture of "mis-devotion," and he mocks the throngs of mostly female worshippers whose literal mindedness and hunger for "miracles" lead them to equate his lovers hair with Mary Magdalen and his own bones (that "something else thereby") with Christ (Steen 113).

The speaker is not only upset at the interruption of the intimacy of the grave, but at being reintroduced to such a culture of relic-worship that he finds so ridiculous. He desires for his body (and eventually his lover) to be left alone in their own space. The gravedigger is an uninvited intruder, a ‘second-guest’ who has interrupted the seclusion of the ‘bed’. And not only that, but the gravedigger has insisted upon bringing this body out into the open, forcing them into an idolatrous world where this body and this bracelet are mistaken for these religious figures. To Donne, the body is only important to him and the lover, and should carry little to no meaning for

anyone else. And the speaker mocks those who are so desperate for an idol that they would make a relic out of nothing.

The corpse may have a lot of meaning for the lover, this is certainly true in “The Dissolution,” but in this poem, Donne finds that the body, when used as a relic is quite useless. The speaker realizes that these followers are desperately seeking a miracle, and that these bones will never truly be able to provide that. In fact, he needs to literally write out verses on a piece of paper, revealing that interpretation or attempting to find meaning in the corpse will never really work. The meaning of the miracle literally needs to be spelled out in order to properly be ‘taught’. This is perhaps further mockery of how insipid these miracle-seekers are. The fact that they cannot infer and must be ‘taught’ could be further satire of the group’s idiocy. The corpse is then essentially meaningless to outside parties. The bishop, the king, and these admirers will never find the meaning they seek in this pile of bones. And the tragedy is that, at least according to “The Dissolution,” the body is integral to the reunion in the grave. Donne wants the true and full bodily-decaying experience, this is what helps him cope with death. And the corpse for others lacks the same importance. The desecration of the grave is for nothing than, and ultimately adds to this critique of relic-making.

And yet, Donne moves past mockery and attempts to teach these worshipers nonetheless. The speaker will include this ‘paper’ as a tool to teach them about these ‘miracles’ that these lovers experienced, attempting to “teach and correct their misperceptions” (Steen 113). In this way, the speaker is taking advantage of this ‘mis-devotion’ and using it to critique the mourning process that he is so against. Since these followers are so hungry for a miracle, the speaker will provide them with an account of him and his lover and all the “miracles we harmless lovers wrought” (20). And yet, there is a sense of irony here as the ‘miracles’ that this speaker shares

are quite banal or hapless. It's not water into wine or virginal births that the speaker is sharing, but rather details of this romance that seem quite natural. The speaker understands this as well, admitting:

First, we lov'd well and faithfully  
 Yet knew not what we lov'd, nor why  
 Difference of sex no more we knew  
 Than our guardian angels do (21-24).

This love is described as rather mundane, as even the physical showings of their relationship are described as harmless or rather dull. The speaker is not recounting a story of heroic great love that spans decades and continents or involves an Odyssey-like tale of sorrow and love and sex. The speaker merely tells those followers that this love was itself a miracle, finding it difficult to really describe why such a love existed; in fact, according to the speaker the love came from them simply belonging to different genders. His beginning miracle is simply that they "loved well and faithfully" (21). They were also hardly physical, as it seems they only stole kisses, and never went further than that. It's the mundanity or simplicity of such a love that is quite interesting, along with the speaker's apparent inability to really find why such a relationship was in fact so miraculous. These followers are pushing a need for romance and meaning to be found in whatever relics are presented to them.

By writing down the miracles, the speaker is also attempting to perpetuate his and his lover's life and story, essentially immortalizing them in these words that teach their 'miracles'. Steen makes the argument that this invokes a preexisting tradition of text inscribed in objects of devotion;

The speaker's act of giving his future hosts the 'miraculous' account of his mistress resembles a standard late medieval practice in which members of the laity would textually inscribe their name in primers, devotional tracts, candles, chalices or other sacred items and give these gifts to the parish. This was a way to "contribute to the dignity and beauty of parochial worship," and the individual also 'expected to be held in

perpetual memory within the parish' in return for his or her gift (Steen 114).

Once again, this is attempting to address the fear of being forgotten. Although, in essence, Donne is doing this by writing poetry at all. In writing the 'miracles' of the lover, the speaker is allowing them to live one, Donne is enacting a similar fate through his work. And yet, once again, we know that there are certain limits to such 'immortality' and perpetual memory. This is after all what happens in "The Funerall", as even though the speaker lived on as 'love's martyr,' it came at the price of decay, an era that Donne is clearly interested in and desires. And while Donne does seem to want to be remembered (through his work, through funeral gifts) he does seem aware that there are limitations to what the world will remember and how the dead will be celebrated. And these complications exist even through verse and text, as demonstrated by "The Relique".

In the end, the paper relic itself fails, as the speaker laments "These miracles we did, but now alas/All measure, and all language, I should pass/Should I tell what a miracle she was". He lacks the ability to truly articulate the miracle that was this woman. This means that the relic is in fact quite useless, as it lacks the capability to actually convey or symbolize miracles. This furthers the frustration of the speaker, as it means that this disruption, this relic-making, was in vain. The corruption of the body is useless, not actually capable of providing insight into the miracles that are sought by such needy hordes of women. The body is desecrated and the intimacy disrupted all so that the paper can fail to actually capture the miracle of a woman. In this way, not only is relic-making counter to Donne's understanding of death and decay, but also unfulfilling. It's the wrong way to either mourn or pray, it's the wrong way to idolize or remember the dead, as it will never truly capture or reveal the intended meaning. For Donne, this must be particularly painful, as this same inability to express may exist in his own work.

Posthumously, Donne is not able to defend or explain his work, nor able to continue writing or tuning modes of expression. And so, the dead must take a chance on their work and hope that it will be read the way they intended. In a sense, the dead must put their faith in the living's ability to understand their work. But ultimately, we assume that this does not work in "The Relique", as by the end, the speaker admits that he will never be able to capture the miracle of his love or their relationship.

The relic is then not the correct way to mourn, and it harms the dead and doesn't help the living. The poem demonstrates that neither party is fulfilled by relic-making. For Donne, the best way to mourn is in remembrance of the dead by the living, but in doing so in a way that does not affect the dead themselves. This goes back to the idea of the funeral gift, as this is a mode for the dead to be remembered and mourned, but in such a way that the dead are left to themselves. In both pieces, "The Funerall" and "The Relique", the pain comes from the outside world intruding upon the burial site. For one, it is caused by a bracelet, placed out of vengeance and spite, upon the body. In another, the grave is 'broke up' and the bodies put on display. In both, the speaker's express discontent and pain, clearly aggravated by their inability to find the very peace and intimacy that Donne so clearly looked forward to in "The Dissolution". In this way, Donne's larger point can be layered into a critique of how we mourn, and how we express our grief, as the 'mis-devotion that commands' has clearly affected Donne's anxieties about death, serving as the catalyst for this fear of interruption and misuse of the body.

Donne is not arguing that grief should simply exist internally, nor is he against mourning as a mode of healing. "The Dissolution" demonstrates that much, as the speaker is clearly using this method of imagining himself in the grave to comfort his loneliness and grief. Donne does

believe that the expression of sorrow is a necessary means to healing. Once again, this is echoed in both his poetry and his sermons. Steen finds this most notable in “Sinc she whome I love”.

The speaker's grief suggests the need for a more formal process of mourning and remembrance that Donne was later to defend in a sermon on mourning. Donne's text in the sermon is John 11: 35, ‘Jesus wept,’ and he uses this passage to justify mourning as a ‘natural’ and charitable gesture. An ‘outward’ or formal act of grief is necessary, according to Donne, for ‘without outward declarations, who can conclude an inward love?’ (Steen 104).

Donne is once again inserting his notions on grief and the grieving process into his work, partially as a means to work through his own loss, but also as a critique or larger point about the act itself. In particular, it seems as though the ‘normal’ grieving practices at the time stood in direct opposition to what Donne viewed as either necessary or healthy. If we view “The Dissolution” as Donne's ideal posthumous era, then we can infer that “The Relique” and “The Funerall” oppose this, preventing such an ideal intimacy from existing. As such, these two poems work to inform us on the correct way to grieve by pointing to the flaws that exist within the poem's context.

Donne and his speakers have this longing to maintain some sense of communion or connection with the dead, this much is made clear when the poem is from the perspective of the living talking about their deceased lovers. Considering the longing in “The Dissolution”, or Donne's clear longing and aching for his wife in “Sinc she whom I love”. The living, when faced with the death of their partners, desire a rekindling of connection, and cannot bear to simply move on or forget the departed. And yet, this desire for communion with the dead toes a fine line, as with “The Relique” or “The Funerall”, such imposing of a relationship upon the dead is not healthy. As these poems suggests, this type of mourning is actually detrimental, as it prevents the dead from fully entering or existing in the grave; it's an attempt for remembrance that is actually detrimental for the dead. In both these pieces, the living are forced to reckon their own



need to grieve alongside what the dead actually want. Grief must be expressed in such a way that does not impede or interrupt the intimacy that Donne so passionately argues for in “The Dissolution”. Funeral gifts are all well and good, as long as they are saved for the living and are not forced upon the dead. And the funeral is necessary for the living, and is a healthy way to grieve, as long as by the end of the affair, the coffin lid is shut, and the bones buried. Donne is imposing his own ideas of life after death upon the grieving process. If in these poems Donne is offering us an example of such ‘mis devotion’, then it is possible to infer what Donne views as proper devotion from his work.

Part of this is a criticism of being a martyr or of being made into a relic, because according to Donne, the dead do not need to be so aggressively celebrated by the living, as it is not good for them and ultimately is disturbing their time in the grave. According to his work, the dead are only interested in this renewal of intimacy in the grave, meaning that they no longer want or need to be recognized by the living. This logic may carry itself over as a lesson for the living, as it addresses the fear of being forgotten that Donne, along with many other writers, seem to constantly reference. According to Donne, this fear of being forgotten need not exist, because as soon as the grave is covered, the focus is no longer on the outside world. These are not poems about the dead missing the living or the world above, these are poems focused on the dead reuniting in the grave. Being forgotten should not matter to the living, because it clearly doesn't really matter to the dead. And really, Donne looks down or critiques those dead that still wish to be acknowledged by the living, as ultimately those who are still so fervently remembered by the living are unable to fully experience the death that Donne so clearly wants and celebrates.

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