Shakespeare and Donne
Seminar Leaders: Judith H. Anderson and Jennifer C. Vaught

ABSTRACTS

James P. Bednarz
Incorporate Selves: Metaphysical Wit from Shakespeare to Donne

In 1921, Herbert Grierson refused to include even a single poem by Shakespeare in his groundbreaking anthology of *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems*, convinced that Shakespeare did not lend himself to this genealogy. But in 1954, Helen Gardner disregarded his advice and added "The Phoenix and the Turtle" to *The Metaphysical Poets* because, she explained, in this peculiar poem Shakespeare had written a proto-metaphysical verse that approximated, although imperfectly, key features of Donne's style and thought. So that even though Gardner acknowledged affinities in their poetics that were strong enough to number Shakespeare among the metaphysical poets, she believed that he had never achieved Donne's level of sophistication in the new style. If Donne's lyric poetry combines strong lines, arcane conceits, and dramatic immediacy, she observes, the condensed "riddles" of "The Phoenix and the Turtle" only "anticipate the metaphysical manner." But what does it mean to say that Shakespeare became a "metaphysical poet" by "anticipating" Donne? Is it possible to read his poem as something other than an imperfectly realized version of Donne's more radical experiments in verse?

In this essay, I propose a new approach to this issue based on two main assumptions. First, I consider "The Phoenix and Turtle" to be a short masterpiece, one of Shakespeare's most powerful and mysterious poems, a work that can best be appreciated on its own terms--as a fully realized "metaphysical" poem--rather than an underdeveloped "anticipation" of Donne. And second, I assume that there is a greater likelihood that Donne read "The Phoenix and Turtle" before he invented his own version of "the phoenix riddle" in "The Canonization" than that Shakespeare read Donne's poems on mutual love by 1601, when "The Phoenix and Turtle" first appeared in the *Poetical Essays* of *Love's Martyr*. What this analysis reveals is a line of metaphysical wit--centered on the paradigm of ideal love as a union of incorporate selves--which links Shakespeare's poetry to Donne's as part of a late Elizabethan struggle to create a new sense of lyric wonder, through a visionary poetics centered on "the truth of love."

Elizabeth Bobo
Tonson English Classics and the Early Eighteenth-Century Reputation of John Donne

In the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the identity and value of John Donne's persona as a poet were still open to interpretation. This study examines what effect *Poems on Several Occasions…by John Donne* (1719) might have had on the reputation of

the author and his works. Further research into the print culture context of this edition, including comparing it to other works in the Tonson vernacular classics series, demonstrates how publishing shapes reader reception. Reading its prefatory "life of the author" in contrast to others, especially that of Shakespeare, reveals that although there are many reasons why Donne's work may have been neglected in this period – especially taste in genre and prosody – an integral part in the equation was the judgment of one publishing house. Even though Tonson included Donne in this formative series, he and his competitors did not do as much to promote this author as they did others. The decision of Tonson not to build an interpretive framework in which to place Donne's poems was an integral part of the well-known story of a sixty-year publication break until 1779 and two centuries of comparative critical disinterest. This work contributes to the history of Donne's early reception and, more generally, to larger disciplinary questions about the formation of the English canon.

Ellen M. Caldwell
Interiority and the "illness that must attend it" in John Donne's *Devotions* and Lady Macbeth's Madness

Donne's *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (1624) is a personal account of several weeks of illness (probably typhoid fever) chronicled in chapters that include a meditation, expostulation, and prayer. While Donne's physicians work on finding a cure, Donne labors to be cured by the Divine Physician. The "altered state" of illness is the means for an exploration of identity, an anatomizing of the self through the practice of confession. Shakespeare's account of disease, Lady Macbeth's madness, offers a similarly tortured examination. When the potential for colloquy with her husband is cut off, Lady Macbeth lapses into disease and isolation. The cure, confession, denied her, she goes to her death bearing the burden of her guilt, since the one who could hear and understand is lost to her.

Donne reveals characteristic ambivalence about illness—as both a threat and an opportunity. Just as the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall suggests that only through sin may the possibility for salvation or healing enter the world, disease or illness creates the possibility for Donne to reassert a relationship with the Divine—not through his strength, but his weakness, his disease. The madness of Lady Macbeth is, similarly, a fortuitous release from the diseased spirits "tend[ing] on mortal thoughts" who manipulate her. The cure requires the "expression" of the wound, and this "purging" is performed through language: through the speech and writing of the patients. Donne finds this cure in reasserting his familiar colloquy with God. Lady Macbeth, "divorced" from her husband, fantasizes that colloquy in 5.1 to reassert, in her madness, a return to humanity, if not health.

Barbara Correll
Out of Compass: Shakespeare, Donne, and General Economy

My interest is with the play, in Shakespeare and in Donne's poetry, with figures of circumscription and the threat, the thrill, and the significance, for both writers, of being out of compass. The other side of circumscription—that is, its all too possible and uncontainable failure—points to disorderly relationships both sexual and political, a kind of radical loss, an excess; in other words, a kind of limitlessness that being in compass tacitly answers to or attempts to suppress as the threat of general economy. The Falstaff that haunts Shakespeare's *1HenryIV* threatens political order and the legitimacy that so preoccupies Henry and notions of early modern of monarchy by counterfeiting—both falsifying and representing—Henry's sovereignty and by picking apart notions of honor and singular, consecrated sovereignty. But Falstaff haunts this history play precisely because he echoes and exposes what is already, like Falstaff's girth, out of compass.

Donne's "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," often read as affirming reciprocal love, represented in the figure of the compass, is also haunted by its own emblem. Imaging the couple as the legs of a compass, and invoking the iconography of the compass and its significations (e.g., perfection, labor, constancy), Donne presents a roaming male lover and a home-bound female addressee. The compass figure contains and constrains the lovers in a restricted economy; it makes the woman the keeper of the male speaker's just circle, the insurer of symmetry and perfection. But it also exposes the speaker's fearfulness about absence and domestic order, a fearfulness exploited in Adrienne Rich's adaptation of the poem.

Sarah Dawson
Poetic and Bodily Futures in Shakespeare and Donne

This paper considers the relations between images of the body in death, burial, dissolution, and resurrection and the imagined future of the poetic text in the Donne's "The Relique" and Shakespeare's Sonnet 81. Both poets, I will argue, are deeply concerned with the question of whether and how their work will survive and find a readership among posterity, and for both this problem is entangled with that of the text's relation to the decaying body, whether they envision their verse as an enduring monument outlasting the rotting and ephemeral body, as a material and fragmented corpus that like the body partakes in a deferred promise of resurrected wholeness, as a template for performative re-embodiment through reading, or as a stopgap measure for coping until such time as the body shall be raised incorruptible. In this paper I sketch out some of the ways Donne and Shakespeare work through these possibilities in their lyrics, investigating what "The Relique" suggests about the relationship between the body, the manuscript and the future audience and how Sonnet 81 claims, albeit ambivalently, to enact the beloved's "being" through the bodies of its future readers. "The Relique" creates a parallel between "this paper," the fragmentary physical manuscript on which the poem is written, and the bodily "relics" of the lovers: both are subject to disturbance,

miscontextualization, and misreading, neither will remain forever obscure: as the poems' lovers scheme to make use of the Judgment, Donne harnesses his poem's materially contingent survival to the promise of resurrection. As we read Shakespeare's Sonnet 81, we "rehearse" the "being" of the speaker's beloved (in contrast to the decaying body of the poet), granting him life through our speaking breath yet at the same time calling attention to his body's inaccessibility and absence and the deferment of resurrection.

Marshall Grossman
Inserting *Me*: Some Instances of Predication and the Privation of the Private Self in Shakespeare and Donne

Donne and Shakespeare share a profoundly linguistic discovery: the realization that the self can only be possessed and confirmed through and as acts of predication in which the immediacy of the self is sacrificed to the hegemony of its signifiers. Key to this discovery is the tension that inheres in nouns that may be used properly—that is, as what Saul Kripke calls rigid designators and—and commonly—that is, as floating signifiers designating objects in a class. If I may begin with a very familiar example: the emotional charge implicit in this tension may be felt, for example, in this famous exchange on the threshold of Gertrude's closet: "Gertrude: Hamlet, thou hast *thy* father much offended. / Hamlet: Mother, thou hast *my* father much offended." Gertrude refers, of course, to Claudius, while Hamlet emphatically resists the sliding of the common noun "father" from one referent to another. For him, "father" is a proper noun, a name, rigidly designating the dead King Hamlet. The name itself thus supplies the absence of Hamlet's father, preventing Claudius from linguistically slipping into his dead father's place. That Claudius has already slipped into King Hamlet's bed, and may, for all Hamlet knows, have done so even before the king was dead, sets up Hamlet's verbal conservativism, his effort to stabilize the linguistic order as it was in the old regime creates a dissonance between his language and that of the Danish court. His strategic linguistic resistance is an act at once personal and political. It is political in the same way that his black clothing is political, by setting up a resistance in the symbolic to the paradigmatic realignment Claudius tries to establish as a reasonable continuity with his first speech in the play, with the announcement that "Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death / The memory be green /…/ Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature / That we with wisest sorrow think on him / Together with remembrance of ourselves" (1,2,1-7). Claudius's first words remove King Hamlet from the public role of "the Dane," to the private role of "our dear brother" and move Claudius into that public role through his assertion of the "royal we," transforming his previously private role as the brother to assert the public will, embodied in "ourselves." Claudius's second move is to absorb Gertrude into this realignment: "our sometime, now our queen" (1,2,8). Hamlet's black cloths and refusal to accept the pronominal shifts Claudius proposes disrupt the picture of continuity Claudius has carefully constructed: "nor have we herein barr'd / Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone / With this affair along" (1,2,14-16). Claudius, as he moves to control the public sphere, recognizes the public dimension of linguistic arrangements, reminding his auditors that they have agreed, for whatever political or personal reasons,

this language with him. Hamlet, however, defines himself—as loyal son and as thwarted heir—by asserting his idiolects as a brake on the revised public language. The resistance becomes explicit, when Claudius solicits his participation with the implicit promise that his status as next in line will be preserved: “But now my cousin Hamlet, and my son,” only to be rebuked with Hamlet’s peculiar use of words that make a friction against Claudius’s sliding paradigms while call attention to their own plasticity: “A little more than kin, and less than kind….Not so, my lord, I am too much in the sun” (1,2,64-67).

A focused laboratory in which the struggle between common and rigid designation may be observed is the sonnets in which the poet discovers, through his endeavors to join words methodically together that Will and will can neither be separated from each other or from the common welter of inchoate desires. The struggle to retain and signify the self in Shakespeare’s sonnets is paralleled by a more specific anxiety in Donne’s Holy Sonnets over the need to surrender the self to the Holy Spirit, without also surrendering one’s agency. Curiously both poets turn to an unsettlingly sexual, actually, a sodomitical language, to express the irresolution of desire. I plan (tentatively) to look, in particular at a few grammatical and prosodic wrinkles in Donne’s “As due by many titles I resigne” and “Batter my heart three-person’d God” and Shakespeare’s sonnets punning on Will / will in an attempt to make more concrete and less gnomic what Fineman might have meant when he said that Shakespeare’s sonnets express the desire of the man to be sodomized by the woman.

Michael Hall
Reconstructing Love

Petrarch cast a long shadow on the late sixteenth century, both directly and through the developing tradition of Petrarchan poetry. The actual Petrarch saw himself as purifying the twelfth-century courtly love tradition in which unsatisfied sexual desire is the fuel that enables a lover to make himself more noble, in recognition of which his lady, always someone else’s wife, will eventually end his frustration with a sexual reward. For Petrarch (and Dante just before him and Ficino after), love true love is not based on physical desire, but rather on the soul’s desire to reunite with God. The face and body of a virtuous woman are the closest in creation to God’s own beauty, so true love is actually an attraction of the lover’s soul to God through the reflection of God in his lady; sexual desire is appropriate for a wife or mistress, but it isn’t love. By the end of the sixteenth century “Petrarchan” poetry frequently put in conflict this divine love and what was for Petrarch its carnal opposite. Shakespeare and Donne appropriated these two traditions in related but different ways. In some of his poems Donne extended and subverted Petrarch’s logic by portraying sex acts and the sexual parts of a woman’s body in Petrarchan terms; for him, if love is connected to the divine, then the most godly part of love must be sex and the sexual parts of the body. Shakespeare’s sonnets to the young man, on the other hand, are often traditionally Petrarchan in structure, but the gender substitution radically undercuts the central Petrarchan idea that female beauty mirrors God’s in somewhat the same way that male intelligence and action is a dim reflection of

the same qualities in God. In contrast, the dark lady sonnets move outside Petrarchism altogether and toward the modern understanding of love as having its basis neither in sex or the divine, but rather on friendship and equality within the relationship.

Julian Lamb,
Thy Will be Done: Punning on Proper Names

This paper analyses puns in Shakespeare and Donne, and (merely for the sake of producing more direct comparisons) it focuses on puns on proper names. I suggest that semantic ambiguity, instability, and multiplicity do not fully account for the operation of puns. I aim to show that puns also have non-semantic effects which exist quite independently of the meanings they produce. These poetic effects produce the impression not of ambiguity, but of what I variously call coherence, profundity, and meaningfulness. I look specifically at Shakespeare's sonnet 135 and Donne's "A Valediction of Weeping." Although I resist using it to make a general statement about the difference between Shakespeare and Donne, the distinction between meaning and meaningfulness has wider implications for the study of poetry, especially that of the early modern period.

Catherine Gimelli Martin
"Nothing Like the Sun": Transcending Time and Change in Donne's Love Lyrics and Shakespeare's Plays

This paper develops a twofold argument: 1) Donne's love lyrics and elegies are often too simplistically described as celebrations of mutability when many reveal the lovers' or speaker's longing for perfect self-containment or constancy; 2) several of Shakespeare's most notable male characters reveal similar longings only to be shown their tragic or comic limitations. To make this case, it looks closely at both Donne's libertine elegies and the telling prediction made in the last (or first, if Robert Ellrodt is right) that he will eventually escape the tyranny of mutability or "Variety" (the subtitle of Elegy XVII) to live a life of faithfulness to a single woman. Since Donne actually did this, a good case can be made for the seriousness of this reversal, especially since the vast majority of his serious love lyrics envision ideal love as a state of rest, or at least of stasis-in-motion. The famous compass conceit of "A Valediction forbidding mourning" provides the most pronounced example of this, but Donne's preference for a "closed" geocentric lovers' cosmos appears even in the expansionist imagery of "Loves Growth." Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 shows that he fully understood Donne's desire for unchanging love in an all-too-mutable world, but two of his greatest plays show that he more firmly grasped the dangers involved in demanding perfectly closed circles or absolute certitude. Although this dramatic critique recurs throughout his later works, this paper focuses on two of the most notable examples: *Othello* and *Much Ado about Nothing,* where, with more than a little help from Beatrice, Benedick comically reverses Othello's tragic insistence on a

form of “ocular proof” ironically like the kind achieved by the intertwined eyes or self-mirroring sun, moon, and hemispheres of Donne’s poetic lovers.

Harry Newman

Unsealing Patriarchy: Wax Sealing as a Sexualised Trope in Shakespeare’s and Donne’s Texts

By the time Shakespeare and Donne were writing, the language and imagery of the ancient imprinting technology of wax sealing were well-established resources for expressing sexual activities such as kissing, deflowering and impregnating. The sexual sealing metaphor was at least as old as Ovid, and it had survived well into the early modern period despite the emergence of the newer imprinting technology of the printing press. The deployment of the sexualised sealing metaphor in the Renaissance was strongly influenced by the fact that since antiquity signet-wax mechanics had also been invoked to describe non-sexual activities related to the mind and the soul (e.g. sense perception and remembering).

Although the various sexual sealing tropes are interrelated, I focus on the analogy between sealing and impregnation. This analogy often served as a vehicle for patriarchal reproductive fantasies because its most common form was the representation of a man parthenogenetically reproducing himself through a woman as a signet reproduces its figure on wax. It is apparent from Renaissance obstetrical texts that the trope was compatible with contemporary embryological theories, which were usually based on the assumption that the father’s role in procreation was more active and significant than that of the mother.

Shakespeare and Donne are comparable in that they both engage with the sealing/impregnation analogy in order to subvert rather than perpetuate its patriarchal bias. Shakespeare uses dramatic context to show the cultural and political forces that contribute to the employment of the trope, and illustrates that sealing’s materiality and terminology can be appropriated to destabilize phallocentric rhetoric. Donne calls attention in his lyrical poetry to the jealous and possessive male angst that haunts the man-seals-woman metaphor. Furthermore, in his sermons he exposes the theological origins of the sealing/reproduction analogy by sexualising his representations of God sealing man’s soul with his image.

Anita Gilman Sherman

Fantasies of Private Language: Staging the Chaste Sublime In “The Extasie” and “The Phoenix and Turtle”

My problem in thinking about Donne and Shakespeare together is that Donne strikes me as a poster boy for Stanley Cavell’s notion of the Shakespearean skeptic caught off guard

by the new philosophy and struggling to make sense of it. This unequal ontology—Donne as a Shakespearean character illustrating modes of recovery in a skeptical poetics—seems unfortunate given Donne's mastery of his craft. My aim here is to attempt a comparison that restores Donne to his rightful place as a philosopher-poet rather than as a character in a skeptical drama. I adopt two strategies with this goal in mind, having leveled the generic playing field by selecting two philosophical lyrics. The first involves a hypothesis that "The Extasie is written in response to "The Phoenix and Turtle" and hence can be understood as a study in antithesis. The representation of the exemplary lovers and the treatment of the 'embedded' audience could not be more contrary. The second strategy takes up Cavell's commentary on Wittgenstein's fantasy of a private language and argues that both poems paradoxically voice versions of this fantasy. "The Extasie" allows us to eavesdrop on the lovers speaking in "soules language" (22), a rarefied and elite tongue uttered in an ecstatic state of sublime mutuality. "The Phoenix and Turtle," by contrast, repels intimacy and offers a communal ritual of mourning and consolation full of conventional meanings. Yet, it verges on the unintelligible, offering us the conundrum of a private language on a social scale. I resist the turn to allegory as a way of accounting for the poem's opacity and conclude that Shakespeare is swept up in the drama of what Cavell might call the closeted voice, trammeled by competing fears of inexpressiveness and exposure, while Donne is engaged in a fiction of transparency and interanimate legibility.

Rebecca Wiseman
Re-Organizing the Soul: Art and Private Experience in Shakespeare and Donne

In the paper, which focuses on Shakespeare's Sonnets and Donne's *First Anniversary,* I discuss the ways in which both works approach a problem which was fast emerging as a central point of philosophical debate in the early decades of the seventeenth century: the question of how to define and order the soul, and how to conceptualize the soul's relationship with the body. Late-sixteenth-century accounts of poetic experience had focused on the unique power of an individual's sense-experiences both to enrich the pleasure of an aesthetic encounter and to help to convey the moral lessons embedded in a work of art. But by the mid-seventeenth century, the responses of the body were, by contrast, often cast as impediments to readerly judgment, and thus at odds with fruitful literary engagement. Though the *First Anniversary* and the Sonnets appear at virtually the same historical moment, and both are deeply invested in exploring the mechanisms of poetic creation, their views lie on opposite sides of this emergent conceptual divide. For Donne, the soul functions as an active force, filtering, regulating, and organizing the subject's experience, and making art possible through evaluation and formal discipline. By contrast, Shakespeare's speaker, lacking the active force of a controlling soul, is helplessly *dis*ordered in the face of a compelling image – inspired to poetic creation not by the surpassing power of a victorious soul committed to virtue, but instead by the overwhelming beauty of the beloved, whose image overtakes him. Yet it is Donne's view which gains momentum as the seventeenth century proceeds: for Donne as for many of his successors, poetic creation stems from the subject's active engagement with the

world, a process characterized by moral judgment and the forceful assertion of a controlling creative intelligence.