particulars, not general patterns (a point those who would reduce Donne's poetry—and that of others—to generalities that fit or support ideological and theoretical perspectives would do well to note). He gives two examples: "Careless Phrygius," who "doth abhor / All, because all cannot be good, as one / Knowing some women whores, dares marry none,"[30] and "Gracchus," who "loves all as one, and thinks that so / As women do in divers countries goe / In divers habits, yet are all still one kind."[31] Phrygius mistakenly thinks all women bad, while Gracchus mistakenly believes all women good. But reason demands that we throw off such indiscriminate "blindness"[32] and choose/value the particular, the individual, while leaving behind the generalizing patterns of ideology and ignorance: "and forced but one allow."[33] Far from there being any "persistent misogyny" in his poetry, Donne's verse often shows us women *and* men who choose each other under circumstances of extreme duress, neither one using the other in any kind of power play, but facing the consequences of their mutual choice together. Donne's shortest poems, his epigrams, show us "clandestine lovers whose daring and devotion triumph over the death they incur."[34] This can easily be seen in "Hero and Leander":

> Both robbed of air, we both lie in one ground,
> Both whom one fire had burnt, one water drowned.[35]

And in "Pyramus and Thisbe":

> Two, by themselves, each other, love and fear
> Slain, cruel friends, by parting have joined here.[36]

Another of the epigrams, "Disinherited," paints a rather stark portrait of the economic consequences that could ensue to such "clandestine lovers" in Donne's own day:

> Thy father all from thee, by his last will,
> Gave to the poor; thou hast good title still.[37]

This latter situation is exactly what John Donne experienced when he became just such a clandestine lover as Leander or Pyramus. No longer content to be a "great visiter of Ladies," Donne fell in love with Anne More, the daughter of Sir George More (the chancellor of the garter), and the niece by marriage to Sir Thomas Egerton (the lord keeper of the great seal, and Donne's own employer). Socially, Anne More was well out of Donne's league, and any

[30] ll.62-64, Donne, 162.
[31] ll.65-67, Donne, 162.
[32] l.68, Donne, 162.
[33] l.70, Donne, 162.
[34] Bell, 204.
[35] ll.1-2, Donne, 149.
[36] ll.1-2, Donne, 149.
[37] ll.1-2, Donne, 151.

officially-sanctioned match between the pair was impossible. The growing love between the mismatched pair (also mismatched in age, as Donne was in his late twenties, while More was in her mid-to-late teens when their relationship began), and the difficult situation that love put the lovers in, is reflected in Donne's poetry. As David Edwards contends, "Donne wrote poetry inspired by two situations which he had never experienced before and which changed the course of his life: courting a young woman whom he desperately wanted to marry despite the obvious difficulties, and being married in defiance of society's code of conduct and at the cost of his career."[38] The marriage to Anne More cost him everything: money, career, and future prospects. But like the lovers of his epigrams, John and Anne were joined in spite of the worst the rule-bound world of fathers and monarchs could throw at them.

In late 1601, "about three weeks before Christmas,"[39] John Donne and Anne More were married in a secret ceremony. As Donne's most recent biographer describes it, the panic that ensued "about the trouble that he and [Anne] had now brought on themselves" resulted in the circulation of "a joke about the furtive couple's situation":

> Doctor Donne after he was married to a Maid, whose name was *Anne*, in a frolick (on his Wedding day) chalkt this on the back-side of his Kitchin-door, *John Donne, Anne Donne, Undone*.[40]

The consequences were as severe as they were immediate when George More found out about the clandestine marriage, from John Donne's own letter to him of February 2, 1602. After informing More of the marriage, Donne tries to explain why he and Anne had deceived him by marrying secretly, and asks More not to be *too* angry with either Anne or himself:

> I knew my present estate lesse than fitte for her, I knew (though I knew not why) that I stood not right in yowr opinion. I knew that to have given any intimacion of yt had been to impossibilitate the whole matter. [...] But for her whom I tender much more than my fortunes of lyfe (els woould I might neyther joy in this lyfe, nor enjoy the next), I humbly beg of yow that she may not to her danger feele the terror of yowr sudden anger. [...] If yow incense my Lord [Thomas Egerton] yow destroy her and me; that yt is easye to give us happines, and that my endevors and industrie, if it please yow to prosper them, may sonne make me somewhat worthyer of her.[41]

But if anything, the letter simply further enraged George More, and set him on to do exactly that which Donne had hoped he would not do: incense Thomas Egerton against Donne, who was immediately fired from his position as Lord

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[38] David Edwards. *John Donne: Man of Flesh and Spirit.* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 282.
[39] John Stubbs. *John Donne: The Reformed Soul.* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 154.
[40] Ibid., 154.
[41] Ibid., 161-62.

Egerton's secretary, imprisoned for several weeks, and on his release, left without any practical prospects for employment.

A poem like "The Canonization" seems to reflect this experience of forbidden love, punished by all the forces a society determined to control the marriages of its (adult) children can bring to bear. Its first stanza captures the sense of frustration and helplessness at being punished for following one's own heart:

> For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
> Or chide my palsy, or my gout,
> My five grey hairs, or ruined fortune flout,
> With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,
> Take you a course, get you a place,
> Observe his Honour, or his Grace,
> Or the King's real, or his stampèd face
> Contemplate; what you will, approve,
> So you will let me love.[42]

A critic like Nancy Andreasen reduces this poem to a mere rehearsal of conventional elements, claiming that "Donne is dramatizing the stock comic situation of an extramarital love affair between an aging man of the world and a youthful mistress, an affair which further injures the debilitated rake's already-ruined fortune."[43] But this *shrinking* of the poem from a howl of protest against an unjust world (in which daughters are the property of fathers, marriages are economic arrangements made by and for those fathers, and lives can be ruined by the simple, yet radical, act of *choosing for oneself)* to a rather tired exercise in comic convention is of a piece with the kinds of readings we have already encountered. It is a perfect example of how critics often *rewrite* poems in their own images. But the "five grey hairs" of the third line are not those of an aging man of the world—whose worldliness and age would have gifted him with many more than five—nor is the "ruined fortune" that of a rake who has simply spent too much of his estate on keeping up with the young girls he likes to entertain and be entertained by. All of this can be seen in the references to official positions, the kind Donne depended on, and has now lost: "get you a place," but "let me love"; "Observe his Honour, or his Grace," but "let me love." It can also be seen in the mention of approval, a kind of social currency a "rake"[44] actively

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[42] ll.1-9, Donne, 47.

[43] Nancy Jo Coover Andreasen. *John Donne: Conservative Revolutionary*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967). Quoted in Deborah Larson. *John Donne and Twentieth-Century Criticism*. (London: Associated University Presses, 1989), 164).

[44] For example, the infamous John Wilmott of the 1660s, the 2nd Earl of Rochester, whose life and poetry was a scandal in the court of Charles II. As Samuel Johnson describes his life and death:

> [I]n a course of drunken gaiety, and gross sensuality, with intervals of study, perhaps, yet more criminal, with an avowed contempt of all decency and order, a total disregard of every moral, and a resolute denial of every religious obligation, he lived worthless and useless, and blazed out his youth and his health in lavish voluptuousness, till, at the age

disdains, but on whose continuance Donne had absolutely relied: "what you will, approve," but "let me love."

The poem's second stanza raises another howl of protest. Whom have we injured with our love? The answer, of course, in an economy in which daughters are valuable property, is George More:

> Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?
> What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?
> Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?
> When did my colds a forward spring remove?
> When did the heats which my veins fill
> Add one more to the plaguy bill?
> Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
> Litigious men, which quarrels move,
> Though she and I do love.[45]

As John Stubbs recounts the situation, lawyers and litigious men got involved trying to move quarrels right away: "Sir George [was] determined to extricate his daughter from Donne if it was humanly and legally possible. He had instigated proceedings, and a hearing was due at the High Commission to assess the legality of the marriage. The procedure was common enough with 'clandestine' (or even seemingly orthodox) weddings where an interested party disapproved of the match."[46] But just as had once been the case between Margery Paston and Richard Calle, both Anne and John Donne insisted that they had not only plighted troth (a standard of commitment often held to be as binding as a public marriage ceremony), but were legally married. Some weeks later, "the Archbishop of Canterbury himself finally ruled that the marriage was valid in the eyes of the established Church."[47] But for the Donnes, the economic struggles had only just begun, as John Donne would be turned down, again and again, for every position to which he applied, with the exception of a temporary job as the traveling secretary to Sir Robert Drury in 1611-12, until he took orders in the church in 1615. For fourteen years, the Donnes struggled, as the society of their time and place *punished* them for choosing each other, rather than allowing a father (or fathers) to choose instead. And so such verses as found in the fourth stanza of "The Canonization" take on a meaning wholly alien to Andreasen's scenario of a ruined rake with a young mistress:

> We can die by it, if not live by love,
> And if unfit for tombs and hearse

> of one-and-thirty, he had exhausted the fund of life, and reduced himself to a state of weakness and decay [and] died July 26, 1680, before he had completed his thirty-fourth year. (Samuel Johnson. *The Lives of the Most Eminent English poets, with Critical Observations on Their Works,* Volume 1. [London: J. Fergusson, 1819], 150-51)

[45] ll.10-18, Donne, 47.

[46] Stubbs, 170.

[47] Ibid., 174.

> Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
> And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
> We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;
> As well a well-wrought urn becomes
> The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,
> And by these hymns, all shall approve
> Us canonized for love.[48]

The "pretty rooms" are the refuges against the bruising demands of a world that sneers at the foolishness of lovers, and if the world will afford no place for love, at least "a well-wrought urn" will give the lovers a final unified resting place, much after the fashion and feeling of those resting places afforded to the lovers in the epigrams. As the poem ends, the idea of it being reducible to a stock comic situation becomes simply absurd. The grave of the now-dead lovers has become a kind of pilgrimage destination to future lovers, still presumably struggling with the Egeuses, Capulets, Brabantios, and George Mores of their day, and these new lovers pray that the authorities of their own times and places will learn from love's example, and grow mild: "Countries, towns, courts: beg from above / A pattern of your love!"[49]

But as powerfully evocative as "The Canonization" is, we do not have a precise date for its composition, which opens the door to those critics who wish to separate the poet from the poem. As Achsah Guibbory argues:

> Readers have long identified the "mutual love" poems with Donne's secret courtship and marriage to Anne More. [...] Certain lyrics that privilege the sacred space of clandestine love and describe the world's opposition fit with what we know of Donne's situation at the time. Yet so long as we lack evidence for the dates and occasions of Donne's lyrics, poems like "The Relique" or "The good-morrow" [or "The Canonization"] must frustrate the autobiographical readings they invite.[50]

Must? Note the language of compulsion and authoritative limitation. The poems may "fit with what we know of Donne's situation at the time," yet we are told, *ex cathedra*, that "we lack evidence" (or what the critic calls evidence, a dated manuscript), and we *must* continue to hold off identifying the life of a poet who lived *fin'amor*, from the poetry which seems very much to describe *fin'amor*, love as a one-to-one chosenness between individuals who face all the consequences the world can throw at them for making their choice. Just as some current scholarship on the troubadours would deny readers the ability to see love poems as anything other than documentary evidence of misogyny and performative narcissism, so it would seem that some of our specialists in John Donne are determined to tell us to reject the evidence of the words in the poems themselves,

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[48] ll.28-36, Donne, 47-48.

[49] ll.44-45, Donne, 48.

[50] Achsah Guibbory. "Erotic Poetry." In *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*. Edited by Achsah Guibbory. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 138.

and reject what we know about the correlation between those words and the known facts of the love and life of John and Anne Donne. We *must* keep in mind, after all, that correlation is not causation—an argument made familiar by Tobacco companies and climate-change deniers, but one that still sounds jarring coming from literary critics.

This idea that Donne (or any author) *must* be read in a certain way that minimizes (or allegorizes as performance or *personae*) the connection between the author, the author's emotions, thoughts, and lived experience, and the text produced by that author is one that has been with us since the advent of the so-called New Criticism (1920s-1950s). Here such critics as Wimsatt and Beardsley first argued that the author's intentions are both undiscoverable and irrelevant. For Wimsatt and Beardsley:

> [a] poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it). The poem belongs to the public. It is embodied in language, the peculiar possession of the public, and it is about the human being, an object of public knowledge.[51]

From a poem being "embodied in language" and "detached from the author," it is but a short step to the kinds of criticism that insist the poem is solely about language, and communicates no other meaning of any kind. At the time Wimsatt and Beardsley were writing this article, such steps were already being contemplated across the Atlantic (in the work of Blanchot and others discussed in Chapter One). The irony of the authors' final statement—"Critical inquiries are not settled by consulting the oracle"[52]—is that too much criticism of the last several decades has been written by those who have bypassed *consulting* the oracle by *becoming* the oracle. This idea can be seen in more highly developed form in the notion promulgated by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault that the author does not exist for readers in any traditional sense—what exists or is perceived to exist is an *author function*. For Barthes, "we know, that in order to give writing its future, the myth must be reversed: the birth of the reader must be paid for by the death of the author."[53] In Foucault's formulation, writing refers primarily to two things—language, and the death of any concept of an author:

> We can say first that today's writing has freed itself of the theme of expression: it refers only to itself, and yet it is not caught in the form of interiority; it identifies with its own unfolded externality. [...] Writing unfolds like a game [...] where the writing subject constantly disappears. The second theme is more familiar; it is the relationship of writing to death. [...] The theme of the story or

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[51] W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and M. C. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 54, No. 3 [Jul. - Sep., 1946], 470).

[52] Ibid., 487.

[53] "nous savons que, pour rendre à l'écriture son avenir, il faut en renverser le mythe: la naissance du lecteur doit se payer de la mort de l'Auteur" (Roland Barthes. "La mort de l'auteur." In *Le Bruissement de la Langue. Essais Critiques IV*. [Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1984], 67).

> the writing created to stave off death, has been transformed in our culture; writing is now linked to the sacrifice, even the sacrifice of life; it is a voluntary erasure which need not be represented in books, as it is brought to fruition in the very existence of the writer. The work that had a duty to bring immortality has now received the right to kill, to be the murderer of its author. [...] The writing subject destroys all the signs of his particular individuality; the writer's hallmark is nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must take the role of death in the game of writing. All of this is well known; and in its own good time, criticism and philosophy has taken note of this disappearance or this death of the author.[54]

In turn, the entire concept owes a debt to the nineteenth-century French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, who in "Crise de Vers" argued for a pure form of poetry from which the author would be eliminated:

> The pure work implies the disappearance of the speaker of poetry, who yields the initiative to words, mobilized by the clash of their own inequality; they illuminate each other's reflections, passing like a virtual trail of fire on precious stones, replacing the breathing perceptible in the old lyrical verse or the enthusiastic personality that directed the phrase. The structure of a book of verse must be everywhere its own, innate, eliminating chance; still, the author must be omitted.[55]

This decades-long trend has marked a struggle in which critics and academics have kidnapped poetry and other forms of literature, subordinating it to their own critical imperatives, while there has been a simultaneous movement to reduce imaginative literature to the status of just one more cultural "text"—object of analysis—for the critic to demonstrate his or her acumen upon.

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[54] "On peut dire d'abord que l'écriture d'aujourd'hui s'est affranchie du thème de l'expression: elle n'est référée qu'à elle-même, et pourtant, elle n'est pas prise dans la forme de l'intériorité; elle s'identifie à sa propre extériorité déployée. [...] l'écriture se déploie comme un jeu [...] où le sujet écrivant ne cesse de disparaître. Le second thème est encore plus familier; c'est la parenté de l'écriture à la mort. [...] Ce thème du récit ou de l'écriture faits pour conjurer la mort, notre culture l'a métamorphosé; l'écriture est maintenant liée au sacrifice, au sacrifice même de la vie; effacement volontaire qui n'a pas à être représenté dans les livres, puisqu'il est accompli dans l'existence même de l'écrivain. L'oeuvre qui avait le devoir d'apporter l'immortalité a reçu maintenant le droit de tuer, d'être meurtrière de son auteur.[...] le sujet écrivant déroute tous les signes de son individualité particulière; la marque de l'écrivain n'est plus que la singularité de son absence; il lui faut tenir le rôle du mort dans le jeu de l'écriture. Tout cela est connu; et il y a beau temps que la critique et la philosophie ont pris acte de cette disparition ou de cette mort de l'auteur" (Michel Foucault. "Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?" *Dits et écrits*, 1954-1988. vol. I. 1954-1975. [Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1994], 792-93).

[55] "L'œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poëte, qui cède l'initiative aux mots, par le heurt de leur inégalité mobilisés; ils s'allument de reflets réciproques comme une virtuelle traînée de feux sur des pierreries, remplaçant la respiration perceptible en l'ancien souffle lyrique ou la direction personnelle enthousiaste de la phrase. Une ordonnance du livre de vers poind innée ou partout, élimine le hasard; encore la faut-il, pour omettre l'auteur" (Stéphane Mallarmé. "Crise de Vers." In *Divagations*. [Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1897], 246-47).

Geoffrey Hartman speaks of this as a kind of criticism which "liberates the critical activity from its positive or reviewing function, from its subordination to the thing commented on." [56] In his discussion of this newly-empowered criticism, he argues for an infinite freedom for the critic, since "there is no absolute knowledge but rather a textual infinite, an interminable web of texts or interpretations," which needn't be subordinate to something called "literature" because, as Hartman puts is, "literary commentary is literature."[57]

With each new "reading" of a poem, or play, or novel, etc., the critics displace the original authors, making themselves supreme as both *author* and *interpreter*. This phenomenon reflects both the mentality that Kiernan Ryan calls "diagnostic," and the style of reading and interpretation that Paul Ricoeur refers to as the "hermeneutics of suspicion," in which each text is merely a kind of surface lie whose real depths and concealed truths are left to the master interpreters to unlock and reveal. But even more than either of the above-mentioned factors, it reflects good old-fashioned groupthink: "All think what other people think," as Yeats' line in "The Scholars" expresses it. But not *quite* all. What seems to upset a *bien pensant* critic like Deborah Larson is that some readers, and even a few critics, continue to refuse to see the light:

> [No modern critic] would say of the *Elegies*, as Andrew Lang did in 1912, that they "do not win admiration for Donne's taste and temper, not to mention his morals." Literary criticism has changed too much [...] for this kind of statement to be made [*and is that, no matter what one thinks of Lang's statement, supposed to be a good thing, the fact that a statement <u>can't</u> be made?*]. Neither would a contemporary critic attempt to explain the early love lyrics and elegies by creating a love story about Donne's involvement with a married woman [as Edmund Gosse once did]. However, even granted the expected and predictable changes in Donne criticism and scholarship [...] none of these factors explains satisfactorily the continuing interpretations of Donne's poetry through his life and of his life through his poetry.[58]

Larson argues that such meetings of Donne's poetry and life are wholly inappropriate, insisting that "Donne's poems should be recognized as a group of mainly unrelated monologues, spoken by several varying and contradictory *personae* playing a number of roles."[59] Again, note the language of compulsion, even duty—Donne's poems *should* be read as unrelated, not only to the life of the poet, but to each other. And the problem, according to Larson, is that *too many readers and critics are breaking the rules*: "But apparently they are not [being read the right way]; otherwise, scholars would not have been arguing for the last hundred years over Donne's rakish youth and his conversion to 'sincere' love,

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[56] Geoffrey Hartman. *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 191.
[57] Ibid., 202.
[58] Larson, 15.
[59] Ibid., 14.

nor would any one of his poses become the dominant one, as has often happened."[60]

That, in a nutshell, is what a great deal of literary criticism has become over the last several decades—an explicit argument that art should be held at a wide remove from life, that art has little or nothing to do with the artist except as a locus of socio-historical, economic, and political forces, a set of techniques and conventions through which nothing can be expressed except that which is always already dead. This attitude of the superiority of the critic to the poet, and the distancing of life from poetry, is rather oddly expressed by the poet-critic T.S. Eliot: "If Donne in youth was a rake, then I suspect he was a conventional rake; if Donne in age was devout, then I suspect he was conventionally devout."[61] The obvious gesture here is one of reduction—Donne's lived experience is described as "conventional," and therefore of small importance, scant account, and slight claim on the attention of the critic whose task is to tell readers "move along, nothing to see here," regarding Donne *himself*. But, as Larson complains, "[b]iographical interpretation [...] is difficult to escape from, even with a conscious effort."[62] But why should it be escaped from? Why may it not be one tool among many? *Because to the extent that the poet is allowed to exist, the free reign of the critic is threatened.*[63]

But despite the critics, Donne's passions will not be contained—even Plato and the long tradition of regarding human love as the lowest rung on a ladder leading to the divine are made to serve the purposes of a poet who will not be reduced into quiet submission and conformity. In *The Extasie*, Donne writes of a love between two who are also one, a passion which is at once reflective and active, spiritual and embodied. Beginning with a description of "A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest"[64] where the lovers "Sat we two, one another's best,"[65] the poem portrays the two-who-are-one as being both in and out of their bodies as they silently gaze, each upon the other. Their hands and eyes are joined:

> Our hands were firmly cemented
> With a fast balm, which thence did spring,
> Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
> Our eyes upon one double string;
> So to' intergraft our hands, as yet
> Was all our means to make us one,
> And pictures in our eyes to get

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[60] Ibid.

[61] T.S. Eliot. "Donne in Our Time." *A Garland for John Donne, 1631-1931*. Edited by Theodore Spencer. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), 10.

[62] Larson, 71.

[63] Many critics, it seems, would sign on to *half* of Barthes formula: "la critique [...] soit aujourd'hui ébranlée en même temps que l'Auteur" (66)—"criticism […] should on this day be shaken off at the same time as the Author," but only the half that leaves their own profession intact.

[64] l.2, Donne, 53.

[65] l.4, Donne, 53.