

“Intimate Belongings: Tracing Love Tokens and Gifts
in English Renaissance Literature”

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I explore a rich range of English Renaissance courting gifts and love tokens. Looking at an array of Elvetham progress gifts, Shakespearean tokens, and whimsical Donnean love tokens, I argue that these objects become complex, often complicating mediums of self-revelation and expression for those who share or exchange them. Replete with art historical and literary resonance, gifts and love tokens lend a more holistic understanding to a variety of early modern English texts while highlighting interrelated cultural issues increasingly pertinent to the Renaissance such as: self-construction and presentation, personal honor, and a heightened desire for private space, a private love, and a protected, private self.

In Chapter 1, I demonstrate how the multi-layered gifts that the Earl of Hertford presents to Elizabeth throughout the Elvetham entertainments provide monarch and host a platform to artfully perform themselves to one another, while revealing the ideal of reciprocity and the ambiguous communication that contribute tensions to the progress host and Queen relationship. In Chapter 2, I turn to *The Merchant of Venice* and address Portia's miniature, the ring she gives Bassanio, and the letter Antonio writes to Bassanio through the categories of language, the body, and personal honor, arguing that these tokens deeply complicate some of the play's most central interpersonal bonds. In Chapter 3, which centers on *Cymbeline*, once Posthumus' diamond ring, Innogen's bracelet, and Innogen's mole are appropriated by Giacomo, these tokens' original privacy as intimate, shared gifts is threatened, and I argue that the bracelet's and the mole's alignment with visual art and descriptions of Innogen's bedchamber highlights compelling concerns over personal honor and privacy. In Chapter 4, I turn to Donne's love poetry, exploring how he innovatively uses an array of evocative love tokens to illuminate issues of privacy that are essential to understanding his broader commentary on the self and romantic desire in his

poems. Within the scope of the various Renaissance texts I cover in my dissertation, I hope to demonstrate that this literature's fascinating array of gifts and tokens are not only rich in narratives and meaning but also are compelling little objects whose predilection for ambiguity and whose very exteriority at times illuminate a broader, cultural challenge of how best to epitomize and protect love; the true, interior self; and personal privacy.

*This dissertation is lovingly dedicated
to my husband Paul, to my parents, and to my brother,
my loved ones who encourage and inspire me.*

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INTRODUCTION

The political, cultural, and moral ramifications of wooing words in early modern English literature have garnered significant critical attention. Scholars have explored how the predominantly masculine genre of Renaissance love lyric constructs the female beloved, highlights political ambitions and the correlations between courting one's lady and courting Queen Elizabeth, and fuels contemporary anxieties over the potential deceit of love language. Petrarchism's influence on the period's discourses of desire in various genres has been duly noted with contributions ranging from Heather Dubrow's suggestion that Renaissance writers almost by default tend to engage with Petrarchan convention through Petrarchan "counterdiscourses" to Nancy Vickers' focus on Petrarchism's impact on Renaissance constructions and imaginings of the female body.¹ Critics such as Ilona Bell have explored how the rhetoric of Renaissance love poems, specifically those penned by men to woo their ladies, further fueled a host of contemporary anxieties over the potential deceit of love language.²

With much criticism devoted to the forms, influences, and implications of early modern wooing *words*, the presence of wooing *objects* (specifically love tokens) in English Renaissance

¹ In addition to Dubrow and Vickers, for a compelling investigation of the way Petrarchism elevates the individual's creative ability to voice desire and how seventeenth-century verse reworks Petrarchism by introducing the complicating but enabling reality of a mutually enjoyed, consummated love, see Braden, "Beyond Frustration: Petrarchan Laurels in the Seventeenth Century." For a fuller overview of why Petrarch construes his object of desire as he does and how Petrarchan convention is re-imagined throughout the next few centuries, see Braden and Kerrigan, Chapter 9: "Petrarch Refracted: The Evolution of the English Love Lyric."

² See Bell, *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship*, especially Chapter 2 and Chapter 6. In Chapter 2, Bell gives a fine overview of the poetics of courtship, showing how: "Elizabethan poetry is the preferred language of courtship and seduction precisely because both poetry and discussion are, by their very nature, enigmatic and ambiguous." (23). For Bell's cogent analysis of Isabella Whitney's letter instructing young women how to better read courtship rhetoric in order to avoid deceptive men, see Chapter 6, 115-125. Bell returns to Whitney's letter, placing it in dialogue with Donne's lyric in her article "Women in the Lyric Dialogue of Courtship: Whitney's *Admonitio to al yong Gentilwomen* and Donne's 'The Legacie'" Finally, for an exploration of the verbal overlaps between Elizabethan domestic courtship and political courtship (courting Elizabeth I) as detailed in early modern literature, see Bates.

literature has received less interest. This is a significant oversight, because as I will argue, many of the same contemporary Renaissance anxieties over courting words' potential for deception extend to courting objects like tokens. Moreover, the discourses of desire that run throughout various early modern English texts are frequently replete with love gifts and tokens (running the gamut from jeweled miniatures and posy rings to escutcheons and teardrop reflections). The degree to which tokens' ambiguity is actually underscored in early modern English texts illuminates just how strongly these little love gifts highlight cultural and spiritual anxieties over the often divergent meanings they can acquire within romantic relationships.

The lack of sustained critical interest in love tokens as a crucial sub-set of material objects is also surprising given the spate of criticism over the past two decades devoted to Renaissance material culture where everything from real estate holdings to communion wafers has been analyzed within a variety of critical contexts. The landmark collection of essays, *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, investigates Renaissance material culture by addressing previously overlooked objects that feature prominently in early modern literature.³ Focusing on a specific, sartorial sub-set of goods, Peter Stallybrass' and Ann Rosalind Jones' excellent study, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* explores the way an individual's clothing not only shapes his or her subjectivity but can also blur the lines between interiority and outward appearance. Drawing on such critical parallels made between clothing and identity, Will Fisher, in *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*, looks at women's handkerchiefs, men's beards, and beardless women and boys. Given their detachable, removable nature, Fisher suggests such

³ Aside from a mention of rings as memorial pieces in Stallybrass' essay "Worn worlds: clothes and identity on the Renaissance stage" in the book, there is little sustained attention given to jewelry or to love tokens as a specific sub-set of objects.

bodily articles challenge neat, stable gender demarcations, or at least suggest their variability, while at the same time constructing such distinctions.⁴

The economic forces shaping early modern material culture have also been explored, with Lisa Jardine arguing that modern-day consumerism has its roots in the Renaissance era's thriving market forces and desire to acquire various material goods.⁵ Likewise, much recent criticism of early modern drama, in particular the city comedies, has investigated the interrelatedness of London's burgeoning capitalist economy and the plays and theaters such an economy produced.⁶ The goods and the markets driving such commercialism have loomed large in discussions of the city comedies with much deliberation on the commodifying impact of London's consumerism on everything from personal relationships to constructions of the female body. The proliferation of early modern household goods, in particular, is explored in Natasha Korda's recent book, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England*. In showing how women acquire a level of agency as the arbiters and consumers of household commodities, Korda provides readings of several Shakespeare plays to reveal how domestic props and items, in particular, would have been culturally loaded products for early modern playgoers.

Despite the lack of sustained critical attention they have received, love tokens and gift-objects are perhaps the most crucial type of early modern material object for anyone interested in the rich courtship exchanges (both political and domestic) that run throughout English Renaissance literature. Far from being incidental accessories, love tokens are complex, visual complements to

⁴ In addition, see Harris and Korda, *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, a collection of essays that addresses the role of props on the early modern stage, showing how such objects reflect early modern views (and concerns) about materialist culture.

⁵ See Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance*. For an overview of how identity and social hierarchies were shaped through the markets and material culture of an increasingly consumerist London, see Orlin, ed. *Material London, ca. 1600*.

⁶ For an overview of early modern theater's role within the London market, see Bruster. See Knights for more focused attention on Jonson's city comedies. Cantor, Haynes, and Kastan all provide more detailed explorations of commerce within specific city comedies.

the verbal language of loving and courting within many early modern works, and as I will argue, they are essential for a fuller understanding of the discourses of desire (and interrelated cultural issues) present in these texts. Although there has been less literary scholarship on Renaissance tokens and specific progress gifts (and their influence on early modern English literature) than would be expected, some work has been devoted to exploring tokens' literary impact. Pamela Hammons' recent book *Gender, Sexuality, and Material Objects in English Renaissance Verse* does highlight the importance of tokens within English literature, but as her title suggests, she also addresses many other non-gift and non-token material objects in her study.⁷ Devoting particular attention to underrepresented female lyric, Hammons argues that female poets exerted creative agency by redefining themselves through their personal belongings as a means of countering (or adjusting to) the social and legal stipulations of the day, or sexual coercion they might experience from the men in their lives.⁸ Patricia Fumerton's scholarship remains an excellent exploration of the miniature.⁹ In the third chapter of *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament*, Fumerton argues that the protective enclosing of the real self that is manifest within the politically charged atmosphere of the Elizabethan court and within the Elizabethan era in general, found overlapping artistic expression in the highly popular Renaissance miniature jewel and Elizabethan sonnet. By pointing out not only the pervasive role miniatures enjoyed in

⁷ Also see Hammons' article, "Robert Herrick's Gift Trouble," which explores how Herrick's male subject is turned into an object through the love gifts he bestows upon his lady.

⁸ Hammons' recent book turns attention to a variety of objects, including love tokens and gifts, but she addresses many of them more generally as material objects, not necessarily looking at all objects in her study through the lens of the gift or love token exchange. Her scope also reaches beyond material objects that could be easily labeled love tokens or love gifts, encompassing non-token entities like rooms, gardens, land, and real estate holdings.

⁹ Fumerton first offered a rich, insightful look at the way both the sixteenth-century miniature and the sixteenth-century sonnet deliberately obscured the private self beneath layers of visual and verbal ornament in her 1986 article "Secret Arts: Elizabethan Miniatures and Sonnets." She returns to the miniature in the third chapter of her 1991 book *Cultural Aesthetics*, an intelligent, fine book that also covers a host of other material objects (and literary genres) to explore various aspects of aristocratic subjectivity. Art and cultural historians Roy Strong, *The English Renaissance Miniature* and Graham Reynolds also offer particularly cogent overviews of the history and design of the Renaissance miniature, as does Linda Bradley Salamon. For a detailed look at Hilliard's *Young Man Amongst Roses* miniature, see Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*, Chapter 2. For contemporary insights into limning techniques and the mind of a miniaturist see Hilliard's classic treatise: *The Arte of Limning*.

Elizabethan court culture, but also how seamlessly contemporary sonneteers borrowed the technical jargon of miniaturists, Fumerton reveals how the presence of such terminology in English Renaissance lyric highlights the overlap between the miniature's and the sonnet's capacity for quasi self-disclosure that nevertheless suggests an inherent hidden-ness of the private self.

Overall though, the bulk of scholarship on sixteenth and seventeenth-century love tokens is ensconced within the field of cultural history (rather than literary criticism) and often focuses on the Continent or especially on early modern France.¹⁰ Analogously, a great deal of the extant scholarship that would pertain to specific love tokens such as miniatures, posy rings, and bracelets has been relegated to the realm of art history and historical scholarship.¹¹ As I relay in my first chapter, more of a general, historical overview of gift culture has held sway in treatments of Elizabethan progress gifts as well. Thus, in my dissertation, I turn attention to token and love gifts not only as a fascinating category of early modern material objects but also as highly literary objects whose rich presence in Renaissance texts is worthy of close study. Unlike Fumerton and Hammons, who cover not just love tokens but also many other types of material objects, I address only those trinkets, posies, and gifts that could be classified as love tokens or love gifts, whether the love in question is a progress host's political devotion to the monarch or a couple's romantic bond with each other. I explore the miniature, of course, but I also look at rings, bracelets, letters, the Elvetham progress gifts (which include speeches, jewels and an escutcheon complete with its *impresa*), and such whimsical Donnean tokens as teardrop portraits and a name etched in glass. My

¹⁰ For a rich overview of private life during the Renaissance, see *A History of Private Life: Passions of the Renaissance*, Volume III. Although the book's emphasis is on France, England receives some mention, especially in regard to diary keeping. Of particular interest to my project is Orest Ranum's excellent, evocative essay entitled "The Refuges of Intimacy" 207-267. For an interesting look into the world of gift giving in early modern France, see also Zemon Davis, especially 1-18; 23; 67; 90.

¹¹ For an excellent overview of many different types of Renaissance jewelry pieces see Hackenbroch. Also see Cocks, Scarisbrick, and Evans, *A History of Jewellery 1100-1870*. For more specific details on Renaissance rings, see Oman; Bury, *An Introduction to Rings*; and Evans, *English Posies and Posy Rings*. Wardropper is quite interesting on trends in jewelry display, particularly *wunderkammern*.

critical approach is also different. I am not interested in addressing my selected material objects solely as symbols of femininity or masculinity, or as mediators of gender identity; nor am I intent on looking at love tokens as objects whose primary literary interest is their ability to highlight power struggles.¹² Certainly in shedding light on the various discourses of desire within an array of Renaissance texts, love tokens can (and do) call attention to differences in the way men and women relate to their respective love gifts and each other, and to issues of political and social tension, and I address these. But I also think it is crucial to look at these material objects, first and foremost, for what they were: gifts and love tokens that enjoyed a rich, multi-faceted functionality that did not solely center upon concerns over power. With their very design contributing to their nuanced role, tokens routinely illuminate complex tensions between loving couples (or the ever-intricate, politicized relations between Queen and progress host). In doing so, early modern love tokens are most certainly equal opportunity objects. What is at stake here is not always who has control over whom, but rather how *both* men and women share a striking commonality of feeling or frustration elicited through the love tokens they exchange with each other.

In my survey of tokens and gift-objects in this dissertation, a variety of genres act as my central textual base: a contemporary description of Elizabeth's Elvetham progress (with references to other progress entertainments such as Rycote and Cowdray), Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Cymbeline*, and selections from Donne's *Elegies* and *Songs and Sonnets*. Looking at a wide array of Elvetham gift-tokens (blazons, a jewel, a painted shield, and a floral crown), at

¹² One of Hammons' primary critical objectives seems to be showing how relation to possessions highlights female and male tactics for establishing agency. Hammons also theorizes on the different ways male and female poets aligned themselves with real estate holdings, exploring the extent to which male poets exert open possession over land holdings in various country estate poems, a right of possession women are not offered. Although other thematic strands prevail in this intelligent book, an overriding critical focus centers on the way men and women use their belongings to exert greater economic, creative, and personal control. Power has been a popular critical angle with many other critics as well, whose work I reference in my actual dissertation chapters. In particular, the issue of power has dominated much recent criticism of Elizabethan progresses (which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 1) and Donne criticism as well (which I cover extensively in Chapter 4).

traditional Shakespearean love tokens (a miniature, rings, letters, and a bracelet), and at highly untraditional, Donnean love tokens (a window etching, teardrop reflections), I argue that all of these love gifts become complex mediums of self-revelation for those who exchange them, a process almost always complicated by the tokens themselves. In Chapter 1, I suggest that the multi-layered gift presentations that Elizabeth participates in throughout her Elvetham entertainments provide both monarch and her host, the Earl of Hertford, a unique platform to artfully perform themselves to one another while subtly illuminating the ideal of reciprocity that necessarily complicates any gift presentation to a woman as influential as the Queen.¹³ Some attention has been given to the *imprese* and shields that the Queen received at her court tournaments and Accession Day tilts.¹⁴ However, as I explain in more detail in my first chapter, the critical work that has been devoted to Elizabethan gift culture has not fully analyzed the significance of specific gift-objects presented to the Queen during specific progress gift presentations. In Chapter 1, I will demonstrate how the Elvetham gift-objects contribute to the necessary subtlety of communication that Hertford (and any progress host) had to adapt when seeking political favors from Elizabeth. Although political influence and clout become unavoidable topics whenever one addresses a monarch as influential as Elizabeth, I move away from views that oversimplify her progresses to mere confrontations over power and instead propose a critical approach that addresses them as the inherently collective events that they were. The gifts given to the Queen at Elvetham reveal a mutually experienced, collaborative dance of self-

¹³ For an exploration of Elizabethan entertainments and pageants, as well as a study of Elizabethan progresses and some of the Queen's university visits, see *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, eds. Archer, Goldring, and Knight. For an introduction to Elizabethan entertainments, including an overview of several progress entertainments, see Wilson.

¹⁴ For a cogent overview of the Accession Day tilts themselves, Roy Strong and his mentor Frances Yates are classic sources. See Strong *The Cult of Elizabeth* and *Art and Power* and Yates, "Elizabethan Chivalry." For clear information on the history of Tudor *imprese* and Tudor and Jacobean tournaments, Alan Young is indispensable. See Keen for insights into medieval heraldry especially Chapter 7. Barker provides an overview of medieval English tournaments and their accompanying visual fanfare, and Anglo details earlier Tudor tournaments.

performance between host and Queen, while still illuminating tensions over reciprocity within the progress host-Queen relationship.

A certain degree of artful ambiguity within gift presentations is perhaps unavoidable in the politically charged atmosphere of the progress. But love gifts' propensity for generating multiple meanings (and tokens' predilection for being misappropriated by outsiders) becomes a very different matter among courting couples. In moving from the lavishly performed gift displays of Elvetham to the tiny tokens circulating between courting couples in Shakespeare's plays, tokens' propensity for generating problematic consequences only intensifies. In Chapter 2, I explore *The Merchant of Venice*, focusing my analysis upon Portia's miniature, the ring she gives Bassanio, and the letter Antonio pens to Bassanio through the categories of language (written, spoken, and the literary overtones of Petrarchism), the body, and personal honor. I examine Portia's miniature by addressing how the tangible, visual artifice of the token is compounded by the spoken Petrarchan artifice of her suitors during the casket tests. I address the ring Portia gives Bassanio and the letter Antonio writes to Bassanio by unpacking the complex, often fragmenting relationship between love tokens and the body. I explore the impact this has not only on the issue of the exterior self, but also the interior self, particularly the quality of honor: both male honor and female chastity. In doing so, I argue that the miniature's, ring's, and letter's functionality as tokens brokering interpersonal bonds (whether it be a deep friendship bond or betrothal bond) deeply complicates the relationships that run throughout this play.

In Chapter 3, I address *Cymbeline*, looking at three additional love tokens: Posthumus' diamond ring, Innogen's bracelet, and Innogen's mole (a tiny bodily mark that I suggest becomes the third "token" in the play). I return to the theme of honor (particularly chastity), which was somewhat playfully explored through tokens in *The Merchant of Venice* but intensifies in

Cymbeline. The fraught issue of honor is first introduced through the diamond ring. Initially a private gift with romantic meaning significant to Innogen and Posthumus only, the token is violated as soon as it becomes the central bartering object in the deal struck between Giacomo and Posthumus, a deal that hinges upon Innogen's sexual honor. And once the additional tokens of the bracelet and mole are incorporated into Giacomo's narrative, his violation of these tiny objects' meaning coincides with his violation of the private space of Innogen's bedchamber and the prized quality of her chastity. Additionally, I suggest that these token objects in *Cymbeline* are cleverly juxtaposed with visual art to highlight compelling issues of privacy. As tiny show-pieces within Giacomo's various performances, tokens in *Cymbeline* are aligned with objects of decorative art, such as the various pieces adorning Innogen's bedchamber. The more these love tokens are refigured into art-pieces, the more their intimate, private meaning as love gifts is threatened.

In Chapter 4, I look at the way Donne uses an array of evocative love tokens to highlight increasingly pertinent issues of personal and relational privacy, which emerge in particularly fascinating ways in his love poetry. Donne's *Elegies* and *Songs and Sonnets* are strongly defined by public and private distinctions that are essential to understanding his broader commentary on the self and romantic desire in his poems and reflect a burgeoning cultural preoccupation with privacy.¹⁵ As love gifts meant to sustain private love and self in the midst of public pressures (career obligations, times of separation), Donnean tokens almost always end up exacerbating those tensions, further complicating the relationship and the identities of the loving couple. I suggest that Donne compellingly reworks Petrarchan convention and Petrarchan modes of self-construction through the medium of the love token in order to both highlight and complicate the narrator's and

¹⁵ See Stone, especially 149; 183-184 151;169. Stone points out that in the seventeenth century, the concept of marrying for love was slowly gaining some credence, and in alignment with this desire for increased autonomy in one's romantic relationships was an increased emphasis on an individual's right to privacy. Everything from architectural house plans with more private rooms to the increased Puritan interest in exploring the self through diaries and autobiographies indicated a developing interest in personal privacy (Stone 154;169).

his lady's sense of self. These poems are also marked by an ongoing series of token re-imaginings, as Donne's poet tries to reconfigure his and his lady's love gifts in such a way that they regain their rightful intimacy and privacy.

When approaching the rich world of Renaissance tokens and love gifts, it is important to remember that early modern texts certainly were not the first works where love tokens are mentioned with frequency. In Arthurian romances like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, tokens not only push the plot along but also construct images of courtly love set against the broader chivalric ideals of the noble knight. In shorter verse narratives like the *Lais* of Marie de France, tokens take on a staggering number of roles. A knotted shirt and intricately clasped girdle become tangible symbols of fidelity for a separated couple in *Guigemar*. In *Milun*, love letters delivered by swans become secret modes of communication for an older pair of long-separated lovers. Moreover, a gold ring that they tied around their baby's neck when they were young parents who had to relinquish their son becomes a powerful identity marker for their love-child, reuniting the grown boy with this parents years later. In *Laiüstic*, a heartbreaking token of a delicate, small bird lives on as a poignant memorial to an unrealized but emotionally intense love.

Some of these courtly love and chivalric ideals (i.e. fidelity, purity of love, celebratory reunions, devotion that still burns after years apart) which define the function of love tokens in medieval literature are also manifest in literary descriptions and historical accounts of Renaissance love tokens. However, Renaissance tokens deviate from their medieval counterparts in some ways. For one, they often serve a more nuanced and self-conscious political function, indicative of the Tudor court's burgeoning social prominence and power. The English portrait miniature, which rose to prominence in the sixteenth century, is a good example of this. An inherently political object when exchanged by monarchs, the miniature's very design and small, portable size allow it to

simultaneously function as a private, intimate gift equally fitting for exchange between courting couples. Within early modern narrations of Queen Elizabeth's Accession day tilts, court tournaments, and progresses, love tokens presented to the Queen as gifts were ideally suited for blurring the lines between a courtier's public/political duty to Elizabeth the monarch and private/romantic devotion to Elizabeth the Petrarchan mistress nonpareil, a role that Elizabeth played to perfection to further her own mystique.¹⁶ When we move from the lavish gift displays of Elizabethan pageantry to the small tokens exchanged by courting couples in Renaissance texts, we discover that the tokens within these selections of early modern drama or lyric are also quite different from the tokens within medieval romances. The tokens that emerge in a Shakespeare play or a Donne love poem do not merely enjoy an extraordinarily prominent, multi-faceted, narrative or dramatic role. They also elucidate complex issues that were quickly becoming increasingly pronounced in early modern English texts: individually promoted self-construction (and de-construction); a preoccupation with honor (especially women's chastity and its impact on family lineage); an increasing appreciation for and desire for private space and a protected, private self; and deeply engrained, moral unease over love discourses' multiplicity of meanings that were, in large part, generated by tiny material objects like tokens in the first place.

In my explorations of the love gifts that crop up in the contemporary description of Elizabeth's Elvetham progress entertainment and within select works of Shakespeare and Donne, I argue that the tokens within this rich body of literature emerge both as culturally charged material objects *and* as active, emblematic texts rich in 'readable' meanings. Let me be clear though; I am making a distinction between love tokens (and gift-objects given as tokens of remembrance or

¹⁶ For detailed information about the *imprese* in the Accession Day tournaments, see Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*, especially Chapter 5. In Chapter 3 of *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*, Young also provides a rich exploration of English tournament *imprese*, and for a descriptive list of actual English tournament *imprese*, see Young *The English Tournament Imprese*.

loyalty) and other multi-layered signs, such as emblems. Some of the definitions of token provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* include:¹⁷

1. a. Something that serves to indicate a fact, event, object, feeling, etc; a sign, a symbol. *in token of*, as a sign, symbol, or evidence of.
- 7.a. A sign arranged or given to indicate a person; a word or material object employed to authenticate a person, message, or communication; a mark giving security to those who possess it; a password.
9. Something given as an expression of affection, or to be kept as a memorial; a keepsake or present given especially at parting.
10. a. Something given as the symbol and evidence of a right or privilege, upon the presentation of which the right or privilege may be exercised.

As the above definitions indicate, tokens are linked to people, or more specifically the emotions, events, or even privileges that people want to express, remember, or bestow through a material object. Emblems often symbolize abstract qualities, but there is something inherently *interpersonal* about love tokens, which becomes apparent when you stack the definitions of the two terms against one another. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* an emblem can be defined as:¹⁸

- 2.a. A drawing or picture expressing a moral fable or allegory; a fable or allegory such as might be expressed pictorially.
- 3.a. A picture of an object (or the object itself) serving as a symbolical representation of an abstract quality, an action, state of things, class of persons, etc.
4. A figured object used with symbolic meaning, as the distinctive badge of a person, family, nation, etc. Chiefly of heraldic devices, and of the symbolic objects accompanying the images of saints.

Emblems are studied and read, but usually they are not given or received (in and of themselves) as a love gift, although in unique circumstances they could be.¹⁹ To function as a love gift, an emblem most often would have to be transposed upon another object, thus becoming an emblematic token. Emblems, of course, can inspire engagement from a person; take, for example, the enormously

¹⁷ The earliest *OED* dates listed for the referenced definitions are: 1. a. (c.890); 7.a. (1377); 9 (1385); 10.a. (1538).

¹⁸ The earliest *OED* dates listed for the referenced definitions are: 2.a. (c.1430); 3.a. (1616); 4. (1616).

¹⁹ To complicate matters further, emblems differ from *imprese*, although the two terms are often used interchangeably.

popular Renaissance emblem book with its complex images.²⁰ But studying, reading and unraveling the layers of meaning within an emblem was a rather solitary sort of engagement for the culturally cognizant.²¹ Love tokens, however, involve an active, interpersonal exchange or sharing between two individuals on some level (whether it be a literal or a figurative exchange or sharing). Furthermore, tokens' inherent significance comes to light when they are exchanged or shared. It is their very gifting that bestows meaning; a gold band does not fully materialize as a wedding ring until it is given as such.

As objects exchanged or shared between two individuals, tokens are frequently given and received; movement is often an essential part of a token's identity. The cycle of giving and receiving (a man puts a ring on his betrothed's hand, the lady feels the weight of the metal on her finger; a wife puts an oval miniature of remembrance into the palm of her husband's hand, and he thinks of her each time he wears it) revolves around palpability. The gifting of tokens also frequently entails their wearing and their removing, actions reborn every time a bracelet is slipped off and dropped into a jewelry box, or a necklace is refastened round the neck and worn.

Since tokens are exchanged or shared between two people, their fluidity of motion bespeaks a simultaneous fluidity of meaning. Like tokens, emblems too could often take on multiple meanings that were often quite flexible.²² But I suggest that love tokens, especially when they appear within early modern English texts, become shape shifters of the highest order. When tokens are initially given they often possess a mutually understood, intended meaning for the couples exchanging or sharing them. But over the course of a text, tokens frequently take on a changing

²⁰ For an overview of the English emblem tradition and emblems' infiltration into early modern English culture, see Daly.

²¹ For the classic study on English emblem books, their development over the span of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and their impact as a "gentlemanly" pursuit that turned into a cultural craze, see Freeman.

²² For an interesting look into the way Renaissance emblems could enjoy multiple meanings and sometimes even change meaning, see Davidson.

series of denotations, with one meaning dissolving into another. This transformation frequently generates deep consternation for the couples initially exchanging the tokens, as characters try to return their intimate love gifts to their original state as singular, steadfast exemplifications of their love. Furthermore, I suggest that because of their extraordinarily high capacity for changing meaning, love tokens are not only capable of symbolizing something different but of actually *becoming* something different after they are exchanged. Rather than remaining textually rich but static little objects, tokens often transform into evocative extensions of dramatic characters and poetic personas, acquiring a sort of free-wheeling, anthropomorphic autonomy in the process, a transformation that happens after the critical act of exchange. This dynamic act of shifting and becoming not only separates tokens from other material object “cousins” like emblems, icons, and *imprese* but allows tokens to more fully inhabit the myriad forms and personas that these little objects tend to spawn over the course of a literary text.

In *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss suggests that through the critically important exchange of gift-objects, social structure, hierarchy, and kinship bonds were created and strengthened as a result of gift givers (chiefs and clans) linking themselves within an ongoing exchange of resounding totality, encompassing the religious, political, domestic, economic, and individual.²³ As a result, Mauss explains that there is such a synergy between the gift-objects and those who give and receive them that tight boundaries between owning subject and owned object dissolve: “. . . it is first and foremost a pattern of spiritual bonds between things which are to some extent parts of persons, and persons and groups that behave in some measure as if they were things” (11). Of course, this merging between object and subject that Mauss explicates has been investigated by critics within

²³ Also see Rubin for arguments on how Mauss’ theories raise the question of how the gift exchange organizes power around men (givers) rather than women (gifts).

the field of Renaissance literature.²⁴ But even more compellingly for my arguments, Mauss goes on to suggest that gifts such as the Trobrianders' *vaygu'a* can acquire "a name, a personality, a past, and even a legend attached to them . . . so alive with feeling, if not with personality, that they have their part in the contract as well" (22-23). As Mauss explains:

Each of these precious objects and tokens of wealth has, as amongst the Trobrianders, its name, quality, and power. The large abalone shells, the shields covered with them, the decorated blankets with faces, eyes, and animal and human figures embroidered and woven into them, are all personalities. The houses and decorated beams are themselves beings. Everything speaks—roof, fire, carving and paintings . . . (42-43)

Given that Renaissance love tokens' very intent and design makes them already highly sentimental and evocative objects, it is not hard to see with what ease they acquire their own identity as dramatic character surrogates within the literary texts they populate. The very act of giving, receiving, or sharing tokens transforms them into independently-charged objects that at times actually stand in for lyric speakers, beloveds, and dramatic characters, frequently complicating the relationship in question in intriguing ways. Interestingly enough, Mauss suggests that symbolically loaded gift exchanges ultimately strengthened and reiterated social and clanship bonds. With Renaissance love tokens though, I think just the opposite occurs. As tokens take on meanings unintended by those who exchange them, the very love gifts intended to strengthen, validate, or clarify a particular relationship may instead muddy the waters further.

Tokens' and love gifts' prominence in Renaissance texts as varied as Donnean love lyric and Elizabethan progress accounts demand that these objects be addressed more acutely. Over the course of my four chapters, there is a natural progression to the types of tokens I survey. Although the nuances of their presentation make them anything but ordinary, at Elvetham, the gift-objects given to the Queen tend to be more traditional: recited blazons, a piece of jewelry, a brightly painted

²⁴ See de Grazia, Quilligan, and Stallybrass and also Jones and Stallybrass.

pasteboard shield, and a coronet of flowers. Likewise in *The Merchant of Venice* tokens are fairly conventional: letters, rings, and a jeweled miniature. In *Cymbeline* though, the bracelet and Posthumus' ring are joined by a more evocative and unusual token: Innogen's "cinque" marked mole adorning her like a dainty blossom. And in Donne's verse the move towards increasingly imaginative and quite extraordinary tokens really gains momentum. We are introduced to tiny portraits encapsulated within falling tears and miniatures suspended deep within the heart, with Donne delivering my favorite love gift of all—the diamond-etched signature in window glass.

Not only is there a natural progression in token types across the scope of this dissertation, from tangible and traditional to the increasingly unique Donnean love gifts, but as we move from the Elvetham progress to Donne's lyric, there is also escalating uneasiness over love gifts' capacity for holding multiple meanings and over their potential to publicize love. The tokens and love gifts in Elizabeth's Elvetham progress do not generate the same degree of disquiet that love gifts do in Chapter 3 and 4, in particular. But even the Elvetham gift presentations are shadowed with uncertainty for Hertford, given the high degree of ambiguous language used within the progress' gift presentations and entertainments that proves to be both essential and somewhat detrimental to the Earl's hopeful attempts to win the Queen's favor. In *The Merchant of Venice* (a play already rife with tenuous relational bonds), the tokens exchanged to bolster such bonds often test them to the limit. In *Cymbeline*, the ring, bracelet, and mole's ability to generate multiple, seemingly contradictory meanings through Giacomo's narratives undercuts their initial, intimate meaning as love tokens, undermining Posthumus' trust in his wife and Innogen's sense of honor. The privacy issues also introduced through tokens in *Cymbeline* are taken to another level in Donne's love lyric. Discomfort over tokens' propensity for publicizing love reaches its pinnacle in Donne's *Songs and*

Sonnets where issues of privacy, self, and the dilemma of how to sustain an intimate love world through memorializing objects climax.

As I hope to demonstrate in this dissertation, early modern English love gifts and tokens are never neutral, single-faceted entities. They are wonderfully complex, multi-faceted little objects that almost always precipitate tensions. And in the increasingly material world of Renaissance England, these most intimate of material objects illuminate their own struggle to epitomize affections within political and romantic relationships where the assurance of fidelity, reciprocity, and the very fixedness of devotion is of such paramount importance but sometimes remains difficult to secure.

CHAPTER 1

Tokens for a Travelling Queen: Gift-Giving and the Collaborative Presentation of Self at Elvetham

One of our finest sources for seeing how Queen Elizabeth was imaged forth by her subjects and how her subjects, in turn, presented themselves to their monarch are the entertainments performed for the Queen throughout her reign: Accession Day tilts, civic processions, and her almost yearly summer progresses. Elizabeth adored embarking on progress; it gave her a “holiday” space removed from the demands of London court-life and the routines of Whitehall. And, as many critics have noted, travelling from estate to estate allowed Elizabeth to publicize herself by increasing her immediate visibility before her subjects and courtiers.¹ Going on progress was also politically prescient for the Queen, allowing her to postpone executive negotiations and decisions on matters of state she was not yet prepared to settle.² It was the ideal summer arrangement for a monarch who garnered power from procrastination. Mary Hill Cole observes that Elizabeth not only displayed political control through the progress but also more personally exerted her influence (sending messages of favor or disfavor to courtiers) simply by selecting which estates she would visit:

¹ For insights into how Elizabeth used the physical spaces of the progress to her advantage see Sillitoe. Elizabeth’s skill at image-making through her court pageantry, especially the Accession Day tilts, is explored in Yates’ article “Elizabethan Chivalry: the Romance of the Accession Day Tilts” and Yates’ foundational book, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, especially 88-94. Also see Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*. For information on how Elizabeth’s image was shaped through civic processions (as opposed to progresses) see Bergeron, especially Chapter 1. For an overview of the romance-inspired roles Elizabeth often played in progress entertainments see Alex Davis, particularly Chapter 2, which covers the Kenilworth progress. Santini addresses the imagery of romance used in Leicester’s Kenilworth, Lee’s Woodstock and Sidney’s *The Lady of May* and *Four Foster Children of Desire*.

² For information on how Elizabeth used progresses to create space to maneuver politically see Cole, *The Portable Queen*, especially 135-175 and “Monarchy in Motion: An Overview of Elizabethan progresses.” For a contrasting argument that suggests Elizabeth was rather limited on progress, see Leslie.

The progresses made access to the queen a central issue of her reign, and by choosing whom to visit and whom to avoid, the queen exerted her authority on a daily basis . . . As a master of double meanings, paradox, and misdirection, Elizabeth found in her progresses the quintessential way to enact her sovereignty. (*Portable Queen*, 175)

For the progress hosts who were selected, entertaining Elizabeth could be a socially daunting, financially draining, and altogether inconvenient ordeal, given the massive preparations, revelries, food and drink, and sheer space needed for hosting the monarch and her court. As Mary Hazard notes: “To be prepared to receive the monarch was a matter of great moment, greater inconvenience, and greatest expense” (252). But hosting the Queen on progress was also a tremendous opportunity. On their own turf and away from the intrusive atmosphere of the London court, hosts had fuller access to the Queen in their own homes.³ Welcoming Elizabeth into their dwellings also lent an air of hospitality that sometimes (but not always) made the monarch more open to requests for favors. Overall, the progress provided an ideal environment for courtier-hosts to celebrate their Queen and present themselves (and their desires) to her. Nowhere is this dynamic more potently conveyed than in the progress gift presentations. The multi-layered ritual of the gift presentations engage the very heart of the Elizabethan progress, forming the inner core of these entertainments’ conspicuous displays of hospitality, reciprocity, and the deeply intertwined, self-performances of progress host and Queen.

³ For insights into how progresses created opportunity for hosts, see Cole, “Monarchy in Motion: An Overview of Elizabethan progresses” and *The Portable Queen*, especially 1-10. Also see Sillitoe 79-84. For a cogent take on how Leicester’s attempt at Wanstead to shape the Queen’s decisions on the marriage question spectacularly backfired, see Orgel. Edward Berry’s article offers fascinating insights into how *The Lady of May* reveals Sidney’s deep-seated court frustrations.

In this chapter, I explore the rich gift presentations scattered throughout Elizabeth's Elvetham progress.⁴ Elizabeth's visit to Elvetham occurred relatively late in her reign; she sojourned at Edward Seymour, the Earl of Hertford's Hampshire estate from September 20-23, 1591 (Chambers, Vol. IV, 66). Before explaining my particular approach to the Elvetham entertainments and the progress' gift presentations, it will be useful to provide some publication information for this progress.

The publication history for the account of the Elvetham progress is rather convoluted. There is no set consensus on who authored the entertainment, and debate continues as to whether there were two or three distinct editions of the original description published in 1591. Although Elizabeth was given some sort of written account of the first day's entertainments (mentioned in the entertainment narrative as her scroll gift), there is no assurance she received a printed copy of the entire four-day event. As David Norbrook summarizes, editing Elizabethan progress texts, including Elvetham, usually makes for "a frustrating task" as the entertainments tend to "present major difficulties when it comes to details of text and context" (76). Shortly after the September entertainment took place, the first published edition appeared in October of 1591 (Wilson 99). As Curt Bright notes, there are three, original 1591 published copies that survive in quarto: the British Library text, the Cambridge text, and the Lambeth text (25).⁵ The British Library text does not contain a woodcut of the striking artificial lake that Hertford had built for the

⁴ For the Elvetham, Cowdray, and Rycote progress texts that I use throughout this chapter, see the editions compiled and edited by Jean Wilson in *Entertainments for Elizabeth I*. Wilson's edition of the Elvetham entertainment is adapted from John Nichols' tremendous 1823 compendium of Elizabethan entertainments. In addition to Wilson's work, another edition that features these three entertainments is R. Warwick Bond's 1902 compilation in *The Complete Works of John Lyly*. Vol. 1. To the disagreement of most current scholars, Bond attributed many Elizabethan progresses to Lyly, which is why he included them in the compilation.

⁵ I am indebted to Curt Bright's excellent article, "Realpolitik and Elizabethan Ceremony: The Earl of Hertford's Entertainment of Elizabeth at Elvetham, 1591" for making sense of the somewhat thorny textual and publication background of the Elvetham progress. In addition to Bright's fine research, other sources that touch on the publication of Elvetham include Bond, Boyle, and Chambers, Vol. IV. Wilson is also quite useful. However, Norbrook notes in his review of *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* that Wilson's bibliographic notes could be fuller (75).

entertainment on his property; the Cambridge text and the Lambeth text do contain the lake woodcut. Critics disagree as to whether these three texts are actually three separate editions or two separate editions (Bright 25). Bright downplays any significant differences between the three original copies, affirming that: “none has a claim of priority over the other” (26). The edition reprinted by Wilson, which is the edition I refer to and quote from throughout this chapter, is not from any of the three extant texts. As Bright notes, Wilson’s text is actually from John Nichols’ 1823 massive, multi-volume work, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* and includes a much more detailed artificial lake woodcut than the Cambridge or Lambeth texts (25).⁶ Unfortunately, Nichols’ original copy-text has not survived (Bright 25). Nevertheless as Bright surmises, Wilson’s edition remains the “most easily accessible modern edition” of the Elvetham entertainment (26).⁷

A comprehensive picture of the authorship of Elvetham remains, not surprisingly, indeterminate, although some attempts have been made to attribute parts of the entertainment to particular writers.⁸ R.W. Bond and Harry Boyle suggest that the entertainment was the work of several men, maintaining that Thomas Watson and Nicholas Breton wrote some of the songs performed at the entertainments (Boyle 160-162). Harry Boyle stresses Watson’s contributions, in particular, arguing that the Latin speech delivered to the Queen upon her arrival at Elvetham

⁶ For an overview of John Nichols’ impressive compilation of hundreds of state and church manuscripts and early modern printed documents pertaining to Elizabeth’s reign and her entertainments, see Pooley. Nichols’ work, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* was published in four volumes from 1788-1821 and was revised in 1823 (Pooley 268).

⁷ As Bright notes, another key modern version is R.W. Bond’s transcription of the British Library manuscript in Bond’s edition of Lyly’s works (Bright 25-26). See Bond 431-452. Bright deems Wilson’s text his default since it is the most available modern edition, but he mentions doing so carefully. Bright references Bond’s text if a significant difference arises between Wilson’s text and the original extant library copies; see Bright 25-26 for further explanation.

⁸ Although Bond and Boyle make some arguments as to whom the various authors were who contributed to the entertainments, Wilson suggests that the authorship of the entertainment can only be conjectured (96).

was penned by Watson; Boyle goes on to suggest that a third contributor who pulled the entire entertainment together might have been George Buc (162-164).⁹

For the purposes of my chapter, exact authorship and publication details are less important than how Hertford's participation in the entertainment as gift-giver shaped his self-revelation before the Queen and the rhetoric of the entertainment itself. Jean Wilson emphasizes Hertford's heavy involvement in every facet of the Elvetham progress, maintaining that whoever (one person or multiple people) penned the poems and written text of the entertainment did so under the Earl's careful direction and most likely "produced the speeches to order" (96). Breight takes this assertion further, suggesting that Hertford was vigilantly aware of the printed distribution of his progress and thus "was concerned in publication to promote himself and his lineage—not the queen . . . or anyone else" (25). I certainly agree with Breight's claims that Hertford wanted to promote himself through hosting Elizabeth at Elvetham. However, I will argue that Elvetham is not merely a testament to Hertford's self-advocacy but also exhibits an intensely collaborative self-performance of courtier and Queen—most fully enacted through the gift presentations—which signify a marked give-and-take between the host and his royal guest.

Elvetham has been underexplored, not receiving quite as much critical mention as other progresses like the Queen's 1575 stopover at the Earl of Leicester's Kenilworth, her 1578 visit to another of Leicester's estates, Wanstead, where Sidney's *The Lady of May* was probably first performed, and her visits to Sir Henry Lee's Woodstock (1575) and Ditchley (1592).¹⁰ I also

⁹ Bond suggests that a third and primary contributor to Elvetham was Lyly, but other Elvetham scholars have discounted this attribution due to scant evidence (Boyle 146; 160-161; Wilson 96).

¹⁰ See Philippa Berry 95-110 for concise overviews of: Leicester's Kenilworth progress and his Wanstead entertainment and the Queen's progresses at Sir Henry Lee's Woodstock and Ditchley estates and Sidney's *Four Foster Children of Desire*. For more insights on Leicester's Kenilworth, see Alex Davis, Chapter 2, and Goldring. For more on Kenilworth and Ditchley, see Leahy, 1-12 and 116-129. For an exploration of Elizabeth's roles at the Woodstock progress, see Woodcock and Sillitoe. See Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, especially 88-114, for insights into Lee's Woodstock and Ditchley entertainments and his retirement tilt. And finally E.K. Chambers offers a general overview and classic study of Elizabethan progresses: Vol.1, 106-148.

chose Elvetham as my focal progress because the descriptive detail devoted to the gifts given to Elizabeth at Elvetham is particularly rich. The Elvetham progress delivers one of the most interesting, widest assortment of gift objects—everything from a gilt-lettered escutcheon and a daintily woven floral coronet to a gold jewel wrapped in verdant water-rushes. Moreover, Elvetham offers a complex study in how the gift presentations punctuating each day's entertainments provide a platform from which both progress host and Queen present themselves to one another. And lastly, the Elvetham progress ends with an unexpected turn that casts fresh light on the ideal of reciprocity that I suggest drives and complicates any Elizabethan progress gift exchange.

As it is with almost any Renaissance gift exchange, language complements the materiality of the objects given, which becomes apparent in my investigation of the gifts presented to Elizabeth over the course of her stay at Elvetham. With every Elvetham gift token accompanied either by a spoken speech or poem, penned verses, or a motto, these gift objects acquire multiple strands of meaning with ease, actively contributing to the necessary artfulness undergirding communication between Elizabeth and Hertford. Gifting the queen with a thoughtful trinket affords an appropriate platform for progress hosts to hint at their own desire for royal favor, and I suggest that the symbolically loaded medium of the progress gift presentations *to* the Queen divulges the undergirding desire for a progress gift exchange *with* the Queen.

In *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss labels gifts that seem to be voluntary but are actually obligatory *prestations* (1). For those participating in *prestations*, there are three distinct, clearly understood obligations: the obligation to give gifts, the obligation to receive the gifts given, and

the obligation to reciprocate or repay what is received (10).¹¹ The dynamics of Elizabeth's court were a far cry from those of Polynesian and North American Tlingit and Haida societies, so perhaps it is a stretch to declare any of Elvetham's progress gift presentations as *prestations*. But as Mary Hill Cole has emphasized, hosts' motives for gifting the Queen often aimed at achieving "gifts" of their own as due recompense for hosting the monarch and bestowing frequently lavish presents upon her ("Monarchy in Motion" 36). However, hosts were not the only ones who stood to reap benefits via the progress gift presentations; Elizabeth also solidified her royal prerogative through such gift rituals. The Queen was notorious for sometimes "choosing" her own gift on progress, publicly admiring a decorative object at the estate where she was staying (Cole, *Portable Queen*, 74). Any self-respecting host would be expected to graciously offer the piece to her. Conversely, Elizabeth was as adept at refusing gifts as she was at accepting them, always mindful of the "consequences" of gifts given to her. Mary Hazard discusses how the Queen was wary of the political implications that accepting momentous gifts might generate; Elizabeth commonly had courtiers receive gifts from foreign dignitaries on her behalf to avoid making a political statement that might be offensive to other English allies (220-221). And when it came to accepting gifts from her subjects, Elizabeth was not hesitant to refuse gifts from courtiers who had overstepped a crucial line or otherwise shown themselves to be out of favor. Through her decisions to accept, request, or deny a gift, Elizabeth relayed nonverbal messages that would have been instantly decipherable to a culture predisposed to reading the finer nuances of gift exchanges.¹²

¹¹ For more takes on general gift theory, also see Hyde. For information on selective giving, see Weiner. For an overview of how gift exchanges in Shakespeare are often complicated, see Lawrence, especially Chapter 1.

¹² For interesting insights into how well-versed the sixteenth-century public was in "reading" gifts, see Natalie Zemon Davis.

Self-interested motivations, then, were at the heart of the progress for both Queen and host. However, given the uneven playing field between Queen and courtier in terms of political and economic clout, hosts were obviously the ones who had the most to gain (and potentially lose) through welcoming the Queen into their homes. Thus, it makes sense that hosts would be deeply desirous of a truly mutual gift exchange, and the hope for such an interchange lies deep within the core of Elizabethan progress gift rituals, frequently insinuated through the standard format of many progress entertainments. A common feature of progress entertainments was to situate the Queen in a pastoral or romance-inspired otherworld where she not only is entertained by characters dressed up as sea-gods, nymphs, hermits, anglers, or wild woodsmen but where she also becomes an active part of the amusements. In Volume I of his foundational study on Elizabethan pageantry, *The Elizabethan Stage*, E.K. Chambers emphasizes the rich possibilities for role-playing and whimsical escape on progress, stating that:

So that the Tudor kings and queens came and went about their public affairs in a constant atmosphere of make-believe, with a sibyl lurking in every court-yard and gateway, and a satyr in the bosage of every park . . . The fullest scope for such entertainments was afforded by the custom of the progress . . . (107)

Throughout her progress stays, Elizabeth is often called upon to perform the role of mystical benefactor, underscoring how deeply entrenched the gift custom of reciprocity was within progresses. Although the Queen may not be giving physical gifts to her hosts, she is nonetheless situated as a gift-giver through the generous actions she performs as a scripted part of the various entertainments. Routinely in progress entertainments, Elizabeth's presence (no words or actions needed) is enough to precipitate miraculous liberations or unlock beautiful visions. For example, at Leicester's Kenilworth entertainments in 1575, Elizabeth is called upon to rescue a damsel from the unsavory suitor, Sir Bruse. The Queen's mere appearance on the scene becomes more than enough to free the lady imprisoned in the lake waters who had been distraught over the

advances of the lust-ridden knight (Gascoigne 102-104). At her 1591 Cowdray progress, Elizabeth meets a character called Pilgrim who has been barred from viewing a woodland tree of marvels. The two guardians of the tree, the fiery Wild Man and ever-vigilant Peace, instantly surrender when Elizabeth approaches them. The Queen's presence on the scene affords her, the attending Pilgrim, and all watching the entertainments the sight of the marvelous, escutcheon-adorned tree (Wilson 91). These performative acts of generosity that Elizabeth moves in and out of are routine progress theatrics, but they also reflect hosts' desires for real-life gestures of munificence from a monarch who could deliver (if she so wanted) political offices, social mobility, and career advancements.

Despite the prolific number of gift presentations in Elizabethan progresses, there has been relatively little scholarship on the gift dynamics of the progress and the actual, material gifts themselves that play such a crucial role in these entertainments. Some critical attention has been devoted to sixteenth-century gift culture in general, but much less has been produced on specific, Elizabethan progress gift-objects and progress gift presentations.¹³ The work that has touched upon progress gifts has been uninterested in unpacking the significance of particular gifts in specific progresses, instead providing more of a general, historical overview.¹⁴ As for the critics who have studied the progresses from a literary standpoint, addressing them as living texts, they have tended to focus much more on the staged entertainments (songs, speeches, and dramatic performances) and less on the material gifts given. More scholarship still remains to be done on

¹³ In terms of historical overviews of English Renaissance gift culture, Felicity Heal has written on the codes of hospitality in early modern England, noting that hospitably was not a private, individual virtue but more of a public mandate. See *Hospitality in Early Modern England*, especially 1-2; 23-24. Patricia Fumerton discusses the aristocratic Elizabethan propensity for "gifting" children to other noble households to prepare girls or boys for service and opportunity at the Queen's court in "Exchanging Gifts." Klein focuses on needlework gifts given to the Queen and some of the needlework gifts a young princess Elizabeth sewed for her stepmother and Henry VIII, but not on specific progress gifts.

¹⁴ For historical overviews of Elizabethan progress gift culture, see Cole, *The Portable Queen*, especially 66-80; Hazard, Chapters 4 and 7; and Heal "Giving and Receiving on Royal Progress"

tracing the gift presentations in individual progresses as “readable,” *literary* pageantry, as rich in subtexts and as deserving of analysis as the actual entertainments performed.

The wide assortment of gifts given and the dazzling amount of description they merit in contemporary narratives of Elizabeth’s progresses invite our consideration. At the Rycote progress, for example, gifts are so abundant that they actually *become* the entertainments. The Queen’s close friends and hosts, Lord and Lady Norris first present their estate as a humble country house gift for the monarch and then gift Elizabeth with a beautiful gown.¹⁵ The Queen then receives an exquisite sequence of jewels from each of the five adult children in the Norris family, including a diamond encrusted gold dart, a diamond bedecked key, a gold sword set with rubies, a diamond and gold truncheon set, and a delicate, gold daisy bauble set with ruby petals. Away on various court assignments (or in the case of the daughter, accompanying her husband on assignment), the children are not there in person to deliver the trinkets, so pages present their gifts and handwritten, explanatory letters to the Queen. Not only do the jewelry gifts represent the identities of the Norris offspring by highlighting the foreign lands where they are respectively serving, but the jewels’ accompanying, pithy mottos remake the gifts into speaking pieces of adornment. Sir Thomas Norris, serving the Crown in Ireland, gives Elizabeth the diamond encrusted dart announcing itself via the motto: “I flye only for my sovereign”, while Sir Henry (serving in France) gives the ruby embellished sword that declares its valiant purpose through the motto: “Drawen onlie in your defence.” (48-49).

¹⁵ See Wilson 47-52 for an introduction to the Rycote entertainments and for the progress text itself.

As at Rycote, the most memorable part of the entire Elvetham progress is the series of gifts presented.¹⁶ A common concern in criticism centering on Elizabeth's progresses (including Elvetham) has been power dynamics: charting the question of whether progresses are chiefly conservative exercises that entrench monarchical power or subversive events that allow progress hosts to challenge it.¹⁷ I want to move away from views that posit Elizabeth's progresses as confrontations over control and instead propose that we approach progresses as the inherently collective events that they were.¹⁸ However, let me qualify that the collaborative nature of the Elvetham entertainments does not imply that this progress was free of tension. In *The Rites of Knighthood*, Richard McCoy explores the deep-seated conflict Elizabeth's courtiers often felt between openly vaunting themselves through individualized displays that uplifted the private self and submitting themselves to the more communal (and compliant) role of servant to the Crown. Focusing upon Sidney, Leicester, and that loose cannon of a courtier, Essex, McCoy explains that for noblemen, in particular: "... the concept of honour was at the heart of one of the central contradictions of Elizabethan politics: the conflict between aristocratic autonomy and the demands of obedience and duty to the monarch" (13-14). A closer look at the Elvetham gift presentations reveals the extent to which Hertford felt obliged to strike the right balance between exemplifying humble hospitality before Elizabeth and endorsing himself before her. On the one hand, Hertford's progress gifts to Elizabeth represent his public and political duty to serve as an

¹⁶ See Boyle and Bright. Bright's article, a great piece of scholarship on the entertainment, does not touch on the plethora of gifts at Elvetham aside from a brief mention on 24, and Boyle does not delve into the gifts at all really. This is in line with the bulk of general progress criticism, which focuses more on the entertainments but much less on the gift-objects so crucial to those entertainments. Philippa Berry's book doesn't focus solely on Elvetham but covers it briefly on 108-111.

¹⁷ Elizabeth's progresses are often cast as either demonstrations of courtier ambition with hosts exerting their political ambitions or as displays of monarchical power. Bright's article posits the progress as less about the Queen and more about Hertford's aggressive attempt to legitimize his two sons by Catherine Grey and clear his own name. Conversely, Leahy, who looks at several Elizabethan progresses, posits the common folk as underwhelmed and subjugated by displays of the Crown's dominance on progress.

¹⁸ See Heaton, especially 227-232. Although Heaton does not cover gifts, instead focusing on the entertainments as performances and written texts, he shares my view that progress entertainments were intensely collaborative forms.

obedient, hospitable, gift-bearing subject. On the other, they illuminate the more private ambitions of a man whose aspirations for favor are continually and rather uncomfortably dependent upon the decisions of a powerful, female monarch.

In my subsequent close readings of the gift presentations at Elvetham, I organize my analysis around three interlinking underpinnings: gifts as collaborative self-performance, the desire for reciprocal giving, and the resulting conflict between hospitality and the need for favor. It is precisely the Earl's dependence on the Queen for favor that initiates the most persistent conflict in the Elvetham entertainments: true hospitality swiftly becomes at odds with an underlying need for reciprocity. Although Renaissance hospitality among the nobility was certainly linked to largesse, calling attention to one's generous giving as a means of self-elevation ran counter to the ideal of aristocratic munificence as an intuitive, natural, and utterly implicit quality.¹⁹ Thus, early in the Elvetham progress the narrated Proëme, which ostensibly sets out to bolster the Earl's reputation as consummate host, ends up undercutting precisely this very image through too much patent signposting of Hertford's magnanimousness. As the Elvetham entertainments proceed, however, Hertford's gift presentations to the Queen result in progressively more subtle and artful self-performances that actually begin to parallel Elizabeth's own progress role-playing. As Elizabeth's and Hertford's increasingly aligned roles begin to merge into each other through each day's gift presentations (a phenomenon that I suggest peaks on the last day of entertainments), the resulting, symbiotic images of queen and host reflect Hertford's desire for such mutuality to be manifest through that most desirable of gifts: an offer of royal favor.

¹⁹ See Keen 153-155 for insights into the late medieval ideal of aristocratic hospitality as equal to largesse. Also see Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* 6-24 for background on the political advantages of aristocratic hospitality and hospitality's tie-in with male honor in early modern England.

Hertford's house and gold chain gifts: introducing the Earl's quest for favor

Although the Earl eventually leverages his gift presentations to Elizabeth into a potent medium for representing the Queen and even more suggestively himself, at the beginning of the Elvetham progress he struggles to find an innovative way to define himself as a hospitable host (without coming across as a braggart) and effectively voice his need for favor (without coming across as self-interested). These struggles reveal the tentative nature of his status with the Queen. An imprudent, secret, first marriage to Catherine Grey (Elizabeth's cousin, the sister of Lady Jane Grey, and a potential threat to the throne) had landed Seymour and Catherine in the Tower. Catherine gave birth to two babies while imprisoned, no small feat given the couple was to have no contact; the connubial trysts frustrated Elizabeth enough to enforce a more ironclad split, separating the two for good (Breight 22-23). And so when Elizabeth makes progress plans to drop by Hertford's at that time modest Elvetham estate, entertaining the Queen in style becomes a way for the Earl to ensure his reputation with his monarch has been restored. Introduced before the entertainments are even underway, the Elvetham estate house and the gold chains that Hertford and his men sport when riding out to welcome Elizabeth on her arrival are crucial possessions that I suggest act as "pre-gifts." Paving the way for the actual gift presentations, the estate house and the gilt necklaces both foreground and complicate those interwoven frameworks of hospitality, self-performance, and desire for favor so essential to the Elvetham progress.

Upon hearing that the Queen will be visiting Elvetham, Hertford wastes little time rebuilding the smallest of his country homes into an architectural marvel. Somewhat atypically, the Elvetham progress text opens not with descriptions of the first day's entertainments but with a detail-laden Proëme, which underscores Hertford's determination to transform Elvetham into the grandest of estates:

. . . of no great receipt, as beeing none of the Earle's chiefe mansion houses; yet for the desire he had to shew his unfained love, and loyall dutie to her most gracious Highnesse, purposing to visit him in this her late Progresse . . . his honor with all expedition set artificers a work, to the number of three hundred many daies before her Majestie's arrival, to inlarge his house with newe rooms and offices. (99)

The above is just a snippet of the description contained in the narrative's complete Proëme. A detailed catalogue of the renovations made for the Queen's arrival occupies an entire page; everything is itemized: the new rooms, their purposes, the extensive outdoor landscaping. Hertford must have paid an astronomical sum to his band of "artificers" who constructed a wooden palace structure; a large, crescent-shaped artificial lake complete with boats bedecked with pennants and streamers "all painted with diverse colours and sundry devices"; additional spaces for a winery, larder, and "*chaunderie*" (for candle-making); not to mention a great kitchen, pastry kitchen, buttery, entertainment hall, plus an additional assortment of other rooms (100). As Jean Wilson points out, with the exception of Leicester's 1575 Kenilworth extravaganza and the Harefield entertainments, Elvetham was the most spectacular and costly of all Elizabethan progresses (96).

Before the Proëme transitions into the narration of the first day's actual entertainments, we receive a surprisingly transparent reiteration of the behind-the-scenes work on Elvetham:

For proëme these may suffice: nowe to the matter itself: that it may be *ultimum in exectione* (to use the old phrase) *quod primum fuit in intentione*, as is usuall to good carpenters; who intending to build a house, yet first lay their foundation, and square many a post, and fasten manie a rafter, before the house be set up: what they first purposed is last done. And thus much for excuse of a long foundation to a short building. (101)

Feeling no need to convey the spirit of *sprezzatura* when it comes to Hertford's preparations, the Elvetham narrator highlights the host's construction process by rather gauchely informing us (in Latin) that Elvetham has been totally revamped from its foundations to its rafters: "Finally in execution what it was first in conception" (161). Obviously Elvetham is intended as a royal gift

on the largest scale, and it was customary for progress hosts to assure the Queen that their entire estate was hers to enjoy during her stay. At the Rycote progress, before Elizabeth receives her jewelry gifts from the five Norris children, Lord Norris opens the festivities with a speech that offers the Rycote home as a humble gift to the Queen, while acknowledging the reciprocal gift Elizabeth will provide simply through her presence: “And although, nothing be more unfit to lodge your Majestye, then a crowes neste, yet it shall be most happy to us, that it is by your highnesse, made a Phoenix neste” (48).²⁰ Yet what differentiates the Elvetham house-gift is how unashamedly explicit the narrator is in documenting every embellishment Hertford has made. While Elizabeth may not have been cognizant of the Earl’s rather unabashed grandstanding of his extensive renovations during her stay, she and many others would have been informed of such undertones when the printed account, including the *Proëme*, came out in October of 1591. Consequently, before the progress text even broaches the actual entertainments and formal gift presentations to the Queen, the narrator of the opening *Proëme* has already destabilized Hertford’s image as hospitable host. Hertford has run afoul of two principal standards in Renaissance gift-giving etiquette: the need for seeming spontaneity in certain gifts and the country house standard of hospitality.

Mary Hazard suggests that more than any other type of gift, reconciliation gifts requesting forgiveness from the monarch required the most delicate of approaches (220-221). Even though such gifts were obviously planned, it was essential they not appear so, because an overtly orchestrated gift puts indecorous pressure on the monarch to reciprocate. As Hazard explains, for the Queen to formally grant access to a disgraced petitioner “was already to concede,” and such could be the inference when accepting gifts as well (221). A seemingly

²⁰ The Rycote estate was actually in Lady Norris’ family. Lord Norris calls the house a crow’s nest both to humble the house-gift and to pun on the Queen’s nickname for Lady Norris, a nickname Wilson explains in more detail on 149. For more information on the Queen’s relationship with the Norrises, see Wilson 47-48 and 149-150.

spontaneous gift was better because such gifts created the illusion of spur-of-the-moment munificence that expected nothing in return. Consider, for example, Sir Philip Sidney's 1581 New Year's gift to Elizabeth of a diamond studded, gold whip. With one extraordinarily well-chosen reconciliation trinket, Sidney delivered a clever *mea culpa*, admitting that he was submitting to his monarch after he had offended Elizabeth by writing a rather brazen letter urging her not to marry Alençon.²¹ But the golden whip was also suggestive, with just enough lively insinuation to flatter the Queen. It was the perfect reconciliation gesture because it conveyed a light, extemporaneous touch, all the while showing Sidney to be the smoothest of courtiers. The Elvetham narrator's grandstanding over the estate renovations is not only the converse of Sidney's *sprezzatura*; such boastful transparency undermines Hertford's presentation of his estate as a genuine (and effortlessly unforced) reconciliation gift to Elizabeth.

In addition, the post-renovations Elvetham house itself runs counter to the aristocratic country house ideal. As Ben Jonson notes in "To Penshurst," his poem of praise for the Sidney estate, a hospitable country house is not caught up in surface appearances. Its grandeur comes from age and from simply being: "Thou are not, Penshurst, built to envious show / . . . / . . . but stand'st an ancient pile" (1;5). The architectural additions and the three hundred "artificers" that Hertford employs to rebuild Elvetham are notably absent from Penshurst's self-contained, organic hospitality and presence: "And though thy walls be of the country stone, / They are reared with no man's ruin, no man's groan" (45-46). Measured against Jonson's standards, Elvetham would be the antithesis of a great country estate. Elvetham's additions were quickly erected, instead of being generously lived in, like Sidney's family home. And in contrast to the Sidneys, Elvetham's lord emerges, at least at the onset of the entertainments, as a nobleman with

²¹ The original listing for Sidney's New Year's gift describes it as "a juell golden being a whippe, garnished with smale Dyamondes in 400 rows and cordes of smale sede perlle" (Lawson 277). For the backstory on Sidney's evocative gift to the Queen, see Klein 472.

the capacity to build but without the inward grace to truly *dwell*: “Those proud ambitious heaps and nothing else, / May say, their lords have built, but thy lord dwells.” (101-102).

When the Proëme ends and day one of the progress entertainments begins, the Elvetham poet formally presents the estate house as Hertford’s first gift to the Queen: “While shee doth visit Semers fraudlesse house, / As Jupiter did honour with his presence / The poore thatch cottage, where Philaemon dwelt?” (104). Understandably, the Proëme’s earlier emphasis on ostentatious house renovations compromises this humble comparison of Elvetham to a “poore thatch cottage.” Even more telling though is the description of Hertford’s estate as a “fraudlesse house.” Jean Wilson suggests that Hertford is attempting to dissociate himself from deceitful courtiers, which she acknowledges probably fell flat with Elizabeth given Hertford’s marital track record (162). However, I think the label “fraudlesse” could also refer to the house itself. As Jonson illustrates in “To Penshurst,” a hospitable country house reflects a truly hospitable lord. In order to present himself as a paragon of graciousness, Hertford veneers his estate house with the gloss of humility, remaking Elvetham into a seemingly unassuming gift, whose glory comes not from its add-ons but merely from Elizabeth’s presence: “as Jupiter did honour with his presence.” However, for the reader, any semblance of heartfelt modesty has already been somewhat compromised by the narrative’s broadcasting of Hertford’s expensive renovations.²²

²² The Elvetham narrator makes a similarly heavy-handed move towards the end of his descriptions of the first day’s entertainments. Describing the supper served to the Queen, the narrator makes quite a production out of *not* calling attention to the Earl’s hospitality and the bounty of his table, but of course ends up only underscoring Hertford’s need to have his identity as consummate host validated:

Were it not that I would not seem to flatter the honorable minded Earle; or, but that I feare to displease him, who rather desired to express his loyall dutie in his liberall bountie, then to heare of it againe, I could heere willingly particulate the store of his cheare and provision, as likewise the carefull and kind diligence of his servantes, expressed in their quiet service to her Majestie and the Nobility, and by their loving entertainment to all other, frends or strangers. But I leave the bountie of the one, and the industrie of the others, to the just report of such as beheld or tasted the plentiful abundance of that time and place (107).

This initial gifting of the Elvetham estate, where the very gift Hertford offers undermines his elaborate self-performance also punctuates Hertford's and his men's formal welcoming of the Queen to Elvetham. Just prior to the opening of the first day's entertainment, the Elvetham narrator recounts Hertford's words as he readies his servants for the Queen's arrival:

. . . drewe all his serveants into the chiefe thicket of the parke: where in fewe words he put them in minde what quietnes, and what diligence and other duetie, they were to use at that present: that their service might first work her Majestie's content, and thereby his honor; and lastly their own credit; (101)

Instructing his men to charm the Queen through dutiful service, Hertford links the Queen's pleasure to his honor: "that their service might first work her Majestie's content, and thereby his honor." In other words, the Elvetham staff's initial gift of service to the Queen is really more of a self-serving gift to Hertford, bolstering his image by increasing his status before Elizabeth. Thus, Hertford's hospitable welcome for the Queen is a compromised gesture from its inception.

I also want to suggest that the understated duplicity within Hertford's verbal gesture of rousing his servants to the Queen's service is mirrored by the material accessories Hertford and his retainers wear. After his pep talk, Hertford and some two hundred of his "trainee" "wearing chaines of gold about their neckes" ride three miles out on horseback to meet Elizabeth as she leaves Odiham Park for Elvetham (102). Necklaces of heavyweight, linked gold were a common gift for Tudor monarchs to bestow upon their loyal retainers, and Elizabeth regularly presented her statesmen and male courtiers with gold chains, sometimes as New Year's gifts (Cocks 6). In fact, substantial gilt necklaces were probably the most common sartorial sign of aristocratic identity and/or allegiance to the Crown (Cocks 6-9; Scarisbrick 80). As British jewelry historian, Diana Scarisbrick explains:

The gold chain seemed part of the national costume . . . Every schoolboy of rank had his own chain: the future poet, soldier, and statesman, Sidney owned two by the time he was thirteen years old, their value £42.12s. A person of means would

have a collection of at least four . . . to wear across the shoulder like a baldric or round the neck in one or more rows. They were also a mark of royal approval, and Queen Elizabeth threw a gold chain round the neck of Sir Martin Frobisher before he left Greenwich on his third attempt to discover the north-west passage. (80)

On the surface, the gold chain resplendence of his men calls attention to the Earl's wealth and his men's loyalty to him.²³ However, the demonstration also discloses Hertford's desire to substantiate his renewed devotion to Elizabeth in order to receive her reconciliatory graces. Complicating matters even further though—as jewelry that routinely epitomizes faithfulness to the Crown—the gold chains adorning Hertford and his men also somewhat pointedly underline Hertford's *lack* of loyalty to the Crown many years prior when he made his clandestine marriage with Catherine Grey. The gold necklaces thus become a vivid, material stand-in for both the Earl's past misstep with Elizabeth and his current desire to receive the symbolic gold-link gift of favor from her.

Self-Gifts seen and unseen: “Under my person Semer hides himself”

And so both the Elvetham estate house and the gold chains emerge as two precursory gift-objects that complicate Hertford's self-presentation by calling into question the genuineness of his hospitality and his honor as a trustworthy courtier. As the progress develops though, Hertford begins to increasingly present himself through the gifts he offers the Queen, beginning on the first day of entertainments. This collaboration is exactly what allows him to move away from the undermining self-performances that appear in the Proëme and instead cultivate a more flattering image for himself that could ostensibly win Elizabeth's favor. The first day's entertainments at Elvetham center around the speech of a character known simply as “the poet.”

²³ Breight interprets the many retainers accompanying Hertford as the Earl's way of confronting Elizabeth with an assertion of his power (34-35).

Before the poet delves into his speeches honoring the Queen, the Elvetham narrator legitimatizes him as an authentic, trustworthy voice by linking him to Apollo and the vatic ideal:

This poet was clad in greene, to signify the joy of his thoughts at her entrance; a laurel garland on his head, to expresse that Apollo was patrone of his studies; an olive branch in his hand, to declare what continuall peace and plentie he did both wish and aboade her Majestie: and lastly booted, to betoken that hee was *vates cothurnatus*, and not a loose or lowe creeping prophet, as poets are interpreted by some idle or envious ignorants. (102)

Using the word “betoken” to denote how the worn accessories of the laurel leaves, olive branch, and green garb outwardly mark the poet’s inward identity as *vates*, the narrator classifies the lyricist as someone of the highest perceptiveness, reminiscent of Sidney’s lofty label of “diviner, foreseer, or prophet” in *The Defence of Poesy* (214). This introduction is crucial because the poet will quickly become more than just a character in the first day’s entertainments; he will actually function as a thinly cloaked doppelganger for Hertford himself. The poet’s reiteration that he is not “a loose or lowe creeping prophet,” is an analogue to Hertford’s eagerness to show Elizabeth that he is no longer a devious courtier swayed only by personal aspirations.

As the entertainment description moves from the narrator’s introduction to the poet’s actual speech, the links between the poet and Hertford become increasingly apparent through the incorporation of a few Petrarchan sentiments. Temporarily casting Elizabeth as Laura and himself as lovesick Petrarch, the poet requests the gift of a glance from the Queen: “O sweet Elisa, grace me with a looke, / Or from my browes this laurell wreath will fall, / And I, unhappy, die amidst my song” (104). Just as the Elvetham narrative’s earlier mention of gold chains suggests Hertford’s desire for royal validation, in the poet’s speech here, Elizabeth’s gaze of favor is essential if Hertford is to wear the laurel of political and social standing. What happens next in the poet’s speech takes Hertford’s alignment with the poet to another level. Like Petrarch whose lyrical blazoning of Laura’s beauty becomes an introspective channel for his own self-

exploration, Hertford dissolves completely into the poet's persona (becoming his virtual double) through a most creative and rather bizarre rendition of the blazon:

Under my person Semer hides himselfe,
His mouth yeelds prayers, his eie the olive branch;
His praier betoken duety, th'olive peace;
His duety argues love, his peace faire rest;
His love will smooth youre minde, faire rest your body.
This is your Semers heart and quality:
To whom all thing are joys, while thou art present,
To whom nothing is pleasing, in thine absence. (105)

The poet blazons Hertford not into a series of body parts, but a catalogue of gifts or tokens for the Queen. The Earl doesn't just present his gifts to the Queen, he actually *becomes* them, merging into an amalgam of outward and inward expressions of devotion. Hertford's mouth voices prayers, which in turn "betoken" his inward sense of duty that reflects his love for the monarch. Hertford's eyes reflect the prototypical olive branch, a gift of peace. Furthermore, these gifts proffered from Hertford's mouth and eyes are active, connecting Hertford's body with the Queen's body in a bold move: "His love will smooth youre mind, faire rest your body." Contained within the ending lines of the blazon is the idea of the Petrarchan absent presence, in which the presence of Elizabeth is almost too intense to fully enjoy and her absence triggers unabated longing: "To whom all thing are joys, while thou art present, / To whom nothing is pleasing, in thine absence" (105).

This highly unconventional blazon of Hertford translates into a surprisingly intimate gesture to Elizabeth. Hertford's own body metamorphoses into gifts he gives his Queen, but instead of calling attention to his person in the process, Hertford does just the opposite. The Earl deliberately conceals himself behind the personage of the poet: "Under my person Semer *hides* himselfe" – with Semer, of course, referring to Seymour, Hertford's given surname. Discussing what he construes as a political power-play undergirding the Elvetham progress, Curt Bright

reads “Semer” as a pun on “seeming;” elaborating that the label is a “strong hint that the obsequiousness of the host may be a mask . . .” (45). I concur with Bright that “Semer” definitely puns on the general dissembling that runs throughout the Elvetham entertainments, artful role-playing that I think Hertford and later Elizabeth will participate in jointly. For Bright though, Hertford’s self-performances are driven displays of self-promotion. Elizabeth fades into more of a passive presence, overshadowed by what Bright argues is Hertford’s aggressive political agenda to defend his sons with Catherine Grey as legitimate heirs, an attempt that was unsuccessful (35).²⁴ Bright makes some cogent, thought-provoking points, but his interpretation of Hertford as aggressor perhaps downplays the strong undercurrent of collaboration that I argue was present between Hertford and Elizabeth. Furthermore, Hertford sets a precedent for calculated self-effacement not showy self-assertion by hiding himself behind the poet’s persona and then finally subsuming himself into a series of gifts for Elizabeth on this first day of the entertainments. Completely *dissolving* his identity into the gift rituals of the day one entertainments, Hertford reduces himself through the blazon. Even more to the point, becoming synonymous with the material gifts he extends to the Queen is essential to Hertford’s larger purpose of winning Elizabeth’s favor because such a move pivots upon artfully veiled self-presentation, something Elizabeth both understood and appreciated.²⁵ By doubly masking himself: first behind the poet—“under my person Semer hides himself,” and then through the poet’s gift-object blazon, Hertford, the man, fades into the background embodied only by the gifts he gives his Queen, which is precisely the point.

In temporarily affording Hertford an actor’s anonymity, the guise of the gift garners him

²⁴ Bright outlines the years Hertford’s sons and Hertford himself made appeals (initiated by younger son, Thomas) against the ruling that rendered both boys illegitimate (37-41). The appeals were not successful.

²⁵ For insight into how ambiguity was a preferred, political mode for Elizabethan courtiers, see Montrose “Of Gentlemen and Shepherds: The Politics of Elizabethan Pastoral Form”, an intelligent look at the pastoral mode (which was often incorporated into Elizabethan progress entertainments).

greater freedom to script, revise, and remake himself as he sees fit before Elizabeth. However, the medium of the gift also poses the risk of fashioning a fragmented host. By hiding behind the persona of the poet and then metamorphosing into a series of gifts, Hertford generates an array of facets rather than a unified whole. This emerging self-fragmentation actually dovetails with the ending of the poet's speech on day one of the entertainments. The poet invites Elizabeth to "Come, therefore, come under our humble roofe, / And with a becke commaund what it containes: / For all is thine; each part obeys thy will" (105). The references to the various "parts" of the Elvetham estate can just as easily apply to Hertford himself as host. Having been divided into a series of tiny gifts for the Queen through the poet's blazon, Hertford now attempts to put the pieces back together through the large-scale gifting of his home. Not only is Elvetham presented as storehouse of generosity offered to the Queen but it is also deemed an appropriately obedient gift, hinting at the Earl's rectification of his previous marital "disobedience."

Hertford also unites the disjointed gifts of himself depicted in the blazon by making the immaterial offering of the poet's entire, rambling speech (including the blazon) into one cohesive, tangible gift-object. At the close of the poet's speech on day one, the Elvetham narrator reveals that the poet's spoken words have been concretely memorialized as a paper gift for the Queen: "When the Poet's Speach was happily ended, and in a scroule delivered to her Majestie (for such was her gracious acceptance, that she deined to receive it with her owne hande)" (106). By reaching out to take the scroll with her own hand (instead of having a lady-in-waiting accept it for her), the Queen shows that she approves of the speech and those inward gifts of self that Hertford has pledged to her through his own blazoning. Given that Hertford has thoroughly conflated himself with his gifts, Elizabeth's acceptance of the scroll reads as her endorsement of the Earl. On another level, the text's preoccupation with how Elizabeth receives the scroll shows

how contingent Hertford's self-making is upon even the Queen's most understated moments of self-revelation. Hertford introduces himself as both progress gift-giver and gift, and Elizabeth answers with a performance of her own, showing her disgraced courtier that he is in her graces for right now, at least, simply by taking the scroll "with her owne hande." After receiving the scroll, the Queen reciprocates further through a modest gift presentation of her own. As the Countess comes out to welcome Elizabeth to Elvetham, Elizabeth responds by not merely returning the greetings of Hertford's second wife, but adding additional gestures of her own. As the progress narrator informs us:

. . . the Countesse of Hertford, accompanied with divers honourable Ladies and Gentlewomen, moste humbly on hir knees welcomed hir Highnesse to that place: who most graciously imbracing hir, tooke hir up, and kissed hir, using manie comfortable and princely Speeches, as wel to hir, as to the Earl of Hertford standing hard by, to the great rejoysing of manie beholders. (106)

If there are three parts to any Maussian gift exchange—willingness to give, willingness to receive, and willingness to reciprocate the initial gift given—then the Queen proves herself to be as much a giver as recipient in this particular exchange (Mauss 10). Elizabeth's warmth might seem less gift and more simple courtesy, but the excited reactions of those standing around suggest otherwise. Elizabeth's kind reception of Hertford's second wife, Frances Howard, is suggestive because Hertford's marriage to Howard was also a secret union (for almost a decade), and Frances Howard had been one of the Queen's ladies.²⁶ Given Hertford's predilection for clandestine marriages and Elizabeth's territorial tendencies regarding the marriage prospects of her ladies-in-waiting, Elizabeth's affectionate embrace for Frances Howard sends a message of approval to both the Earl and his wife. The incident also suggests that the Queen is as adept as Hertford in using the ritual of the gift exchange to speak herself and her views. Through the

²⁶ For more information about Elizabeth's friendship with Frances Howard and her approval of Hertford's second marriage, see Hopkins 16-17.

simplest of gestures, Elizabeth reciprocates the Countess' welcome by drawing her to her feet and kissing her. Then, mirroring the verbal gifts she received earlier via the poet's speech, Elizabeth counters with speeches of her own directed to the Earl and the Countess: "using manie comfortable and princely speeches, as wel to hir, as to the Earl of Hertford standing hard by, to the great rejoycing of manie beholders" (106).

In contrast to the opening sections of the Elvetham narrative—with its ostentatious display of the Elvetham estate renovations and Hertford's entourage decked out in gold chains—by the end of day one, Hertford has begun, at least, to embrace a more subtle mode of self-presentation. Through a highly symbolic reconfiguration of self into gift, Hertford subjugates his self to his gifts through the poet's blazon in order to humble himself before Elizabeth. And Elizabeth, in return, makes the first overture towards actually reciprocating a gift by embracing the Earl and his wife with welcome speeches of her own. In the second and fourth day's entertainments, the self-performances of Hertford and Elizabeth become even more interdependent. Hertford's second-day gift of the escutcheon, in particular, provides a platform for the Earl to infer his desire for favor, while generating an array of chivalric roles for Elizabeth to inhabit that are sympathetic to his overarching appeal for royal approval.

New World jewel and lettered escutcheon: gifting the Queen to remake the host

The second day's entertainments at Elvetham begin with ocean-themed amusements headlined by sea-god Nereus and sea-goddess Neaera, who offer the typical progress praise to Elizabeth. The sea characters showcase the day's oceanic theme by alluding to England's burgeoning sea power and the defeat of the Armada in 1588, throwing in a few digs at Spain for

good measure. All is performed against the backdrop of manmade lakes and pennant-decked boats, part of Hertford's extensive preparations for the Elvetham progress.²⁷

Four gifts are actually presented to the Queen during the second day's entertainments. She receives an unidentified gift from the Countess, a gold jewel from the New World, a fan-shaped jewel, and a painted shield. Of these, the New World jewel and the escutcheon are the most suggestive. Elizabeth receives the New World jewel, perhaps the most expensive gift of the progress, when Nereus splashes into the crescent-shaped lake (evoking the Queen's identity as Cynthia) to swim the trinket over:

I from the deepes have drawn this winding flud
Whose crescent form figures the rich increase
Of all that sweet Elisa holdeth deare.
And with me came gould breasted India,
Who, daunted at your sight, leapt to the shoare,
Left me this jewell to present to your Grace,
For hym, that under you doth hold this place. (109)

The gold jewel reflects England's burgeoning imperialism and the promise of New World treasure, but it also becomes another gift-medium for Hertford's self-presentation. The gold jewel is not merely handed to the queen but is artfully enclosed in layers of green water-rushes. After Nereus finishes his speech, the Elvetham narrator makes more of the intricate casing hiding the gift than the jewel itself: "This Oration being delivered, and withal the present whereof he spake, which was hidden in a purse of greene rushes, cunningly woaven together" (110). Carefully wrapped like a natural sea-treasure, the jewel is actually highly artifice-laden but painstakingly packaged to appear as if it organically materialized from ocean water lapping the shores.

In much the same way, Hertford mirrors the gold jewel (and its "seeming" naturalness) through his alignment with the personified character of the New World, who hands the jewel to

²⁷ For more information on the structures erected for the water show, see Boyle especially 147-150.

Nereus. As Nereus' speech makes clear, the New World is so overwhelmed by the sight of Elizabeth that he gives the gold jewel to Nereus to give to the Queen: "Who, daunted at your sight, leapt to the shoare / Left me this jewell to present to your Grace, / For hym, that under you doth hold this place" (109). Even though the jewel's source is the New World and Nereus is the one who presents it to Elizabeth, its real giver is Hertford, who is humbly labeled as: "hym, that under you doth hold this place." Jean Wilson notes that Elizabeth was notoriously sensitive about nobles who claimed great houses as their own without acknowledging that the majority of aristocratic estates were technically on Crown-owned land, pointing out that the Queen takes Leicester to task for just that in the 1575 Kenilworth entertainment (163). And so in an artful move of appeasement that is not made openly but through the guise of the New World character, Hertford once again submits himself to the monarch, disclosing that he is aware he holds Elvetham only under Elizabeth's allowance. It is an ingenious move that allows the Earl to present a lavish jewelry gift to Elizabeth, offset his gift by obediently thanking her for *her* "gift" of Elvetham, and covertly infuse himself into both gestures.

After the New World jewel presentation, the progress backdrop switches from the watery world of Nereus and Neaera to the forest realm of romance. The next progress character to appear, the woodsman Sylvanus, emerges from the forest clad in "kiddes skinnies with the haire on; his legges, bodie, and face, naked, but died over with saffron, and his head hooded with a goates skin" (111). In his right hand, Sylvanus carries "an olive tree," an intriguing throwback to the poet's blazon of Hertford during the first day's entertainment, with the twice-mentioned olive branch: "Under my person Semer hides himselfe,/ His mouth yeelds prayers, his eie the olive branch,/ His praiers betoken duety; th'olive peace" (104). In his left hand, Sylvanus carries Elizabeth's gift, a "scutchion, ingraven with goulden characters" (111). In presenting the shield

to Elizabeth, Sylvanus' speech is almost equally divided between praise for Elizabeth's incomparable worth and praise for the gift's pedigreed origin. Elizabeth's gift is a rare token from the gods, a shield that Apollo himself let fall into the grass of a green grove:

Sylvanus comes from out the leavy groaves
To honor her whom all the world adores,
Faire Cinthia, whom no sooner Nature fram'd
And deckt with Fortunes and with Vertues dower,
But straight admiring what her skill had wrought,
She broake the mould; that never sunne might see
The like to Albion's Quene for excellence.
.....
Amongst the wanton dayes of goulden age,
Apollo playing in our pleasant shades,
And printing oracles in every leafe,
Let fall this sacred scutchion from his brest;
Wherein is write, 'Detur dignissimae'
O therefore hold what Heaven hath made thy right,
I but in duety yield desert her due. (111)

With Sylvanus evoking Apollo here on the second day's entertainments, there is an implicit link back to Hertford. On the first day of entertainments, after all, the poet character (a double for Hertford) had linked himself to none other than Apollo through his worn accessories: "a laurel garlande on his head, to expresse that Apollo was patrone of his studies" and through his mode of poetic inspiration: "Under Apollo's lute I sweetly slept." And so with Apollo clearly linked to Hertford, the Earl (once again without directly inserting himself into the gift presentation) obliquely commends himself as the real giver of the escutcheon. Furthermore, by circuitously aligning himself with Apollo, Hertford posits himself as the master artistic orchestrator of the entire entertainment.

But the escutcheon gift does not just evoke suggestive personas for Hertford. I devote quite a bit of space to the nuances of the escutcheon, in large part because this particular gift-object becomes the most multi-functional token of the entire progress. The gold-lettered

shield pushes both Elizabeth and Hertford into a multitude of roles that not only pivot upon chivalric ideals but stretch those ideals in thought provoking ways. In the same year and just over a month prior to her stay at Elvetham, the Queen made a progress stopover at Cowdray, Lord Montague's estate.²⁸ At Cowdray, Elizabeth is shown a tree shimmering with emblazoned shields.²⁹ This chivalric tree-gift provides a fitting foil to the escutcheon gift at Elvetham, so I would like to touch on Cowdray briefly before returning to Elvetham.

As part of the planned revelries at Cowdray, Elizabeth returns from dinner to encounter a velvet-cloaked Pilgrim who tells her about a magnificent oak tree. The tree is heavily ornamented with vividly emblazoned shields hanging from its branches but is guarded by a woodsman and a lady calling herself Peace. Hoping the Queen's presence will subdue the oak's guardians, the Pilgrim leads her to the marvel, offering this description:

I have travelled manie Countries, and in all Countries desire antiquities. In this Iland (but a spanne in respect of the world) and in this Shire (but a finger in regard of your Realme) I have heard great cause of wonder . . . Harde by, and so neere as your Majestie shall almost pass by, I sawe an Oke, whose stateliness nayled mine eyes to the branches, and the ornaments beguiled my thoughtes with astonishment. I thought it free, being in the fielde, but I founde it not so . . . Then did the Pilgrime conduct her Highnes to an Oke not farre off, whereon her Majesties armes, and al the armes of the Noblemen, and Gentlemen of that Shire, were hanged in Escutcheons most beutifull. . . (90-91).

The Wild Man softens upon first sight of the Queen and offers the tree of shields as a gift symbolizing Montague's and all of the Sussex gentlemen's unwavering loyalty to her:

This Oke, from whose bodie so many armes doe spread: and out of whose armes so many fingers spring: resembles in parte your strength and happinesse . . . All heartes of Oke, then which nothing surer: nothing sounder. All woven in one roote, then which nothing more constant, more naturall . . . Here they are all

²⁸ For insights into how Montague's Catholicism played into his various displays of loyalty at Cowdray, see Elizabeth Heale. Also see Leslie.

²⁹ Trees hung with shields were an older, late medieval motif. Anglo notes that trees of chivalry bedecked with participating knights' escutcheons were a recurring sight at Burgundian tournaments throughout the 1400s. See Anglo, especially Chapter III. In explaining the shield-in-tree motif, Jean Wilson references Hilliard's miniature of George Clifford, noting that in the miniature portrait, Clifford has thrown down his gauntlet to challenge anyone who goes against the Queen and is shown in front of a tree where he has hung his shield (158).

differing somewhat in degrees, not in duetie . . . Your majesty, they account the Oke, the tree of Jupiter, whose root is so deeplie fastened, that treacherie, though she undermine to the centre, cannot finde the windings . . . (91)

Wilson notes that the “heartes of Oak” reference might be the first occurrence of that label to refer to both the Sussex men’s loyal hearts and the oak ships symbolizing England’s naval ascendancy (86). The Wild Man’s speech further underscores the collective nature of the tree gift. Not just an individualized offering from Montague, it is from *all* landholding nobles and gentlemen of Sussex.³⁰

Although they both evoke chivalric imagery and ideals of service, Hertford’s Elvetham escutcheon gift is notably different from the Cowdray tree of shields in that Hertford’s gift is emphatically individualized. It is a single escutcheon that the Queen could hold in her hands like a love token, as opposed to a tree holding a hanging collection of noblemen’s shields. The tree of shields underscores that all of Sussex is at the Queen’s disposal, but Hertford’s solitary shield shines the spotlight on him alone as a servant to the Queen. Moreover, the Elvetham text emphasizes that Hertford’s escutcheon is emblazoned with a Latin motto: “*Detur dignissimae*” (“let it be given to the most worthy”) and is accompanied by additional verses. This crucial inclusion of the motto and verses recalls the art of the tournament *imprese*, further reiterating that the escutcheon was intended as a highly personal device from Hertford to his Queen. Elizabeth had long been accustomed to receiving escutcheons from her courtier-knights at court tournaments. At almost every Accession Day tilt, before the actual jousting began, each participating courtier-knight would offer the Queen his pasteboard shield, complete with its particular *impresa* (a verbal motto alongside a visual picture of some sort).³¹ Pages, decked out

³⁰ For arguments on how Cowdray evokes the community spirit of Sussex, see Wilson 86-78.

³¹ See Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth* 117-162 for a rich overview of Accession Day celebrations and Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450-1650*, especially 50-51 for more on the nostalgia embodied in the Accession Day tilts.

in the chosen color scheme of the participating knight, would then narrate complementary, explicatory speeches or songs. As communicative devices, *imprese* convey personal details through crisp, visual symbolism. For instance, one of Sidney's tournament *imprese* succinctly featured the Latin for 'I have hoped' crossed-through: ~~speravi~~. Those in the know would have immediately caught the allusion to the recent birth of the Earl of Leicester's and Lettice Knollys' first son, thus effectively eliminating Sidney as heir to his uncle's fortune (Young, *The English Tournament Imprese* 4).³²

Alan Young makes a crucial distinction between *imprese* and emblems, which were printed in the extraordinarily popular emblem books but also appeared on everything from early modern tapestries to oak paneling. (*The English Tournament Imprese* 1; Daly, 14-27). Emblems typically demonstrate a more general, all-encompassing moral truth, but *imprese* read like vividly painted, personal calling cards (*The English Tournament Imprese* 1; *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* 123).³³ Roy Strong also reiterates the particularity of an *impresa*, defining it as "a single statement expressing the ideals and aspirations of one particular person at a moment in time" (*Cult of Elizabeth*, 77). The escutcheon then becomes the perfect gift for Hertford to offer. Evoking the rich overtures of the tournament *imprese*, Hertford's escutcheon gift situates his very personal self-representation within his current bid for royal favor. Indeed, *imprese* straddled both the private (conveying particular details about a particular person) and the public (they were meant to be read and admired by a larger audience). In fact, *imprese* presented to the Queen at her various Accession Day tournaments and other court jousts were doubly publicized. The escutcheons were publicly presented with much fanfare to the Queen at the actual tourney, and

³² For more information on *imprese* as courtly communication also see Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*, 135-143.

³³ Freeman's foundational work explores the art of the early modern English emblem trend. Also see Daly and Moseley.

by the 1580s, it had become a tradition at the close of tournaments to transport the shields to Whitehall to hang in a custom gallery (Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* 131). The shield gallery, as it came to be known, was a dazzling exhibit given the sheer number of shields displayed, becoming something of a tourist attraction for foreign visitors and dignitaries (Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* 131-134).³⁴ Hertford's escutcheon gift is thus a form of personal self-expression but is also a self-consciously public gift, designed to air his virtues before the Queen.

It is also worth reiterating that the best *imprese* had to be extremely witty. In his monograph on Tudor and Jacobean tournaments, Alan Young notes that a successful, well-devised *impresa* "had to display the personal intentions or aspirations of its bearer, which often involved some matter related to his political status at court and in particular, his relationship to the monarch; and it also had to provide an entertaining exercise in wit" (*Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* 134). This explains why less creative courtier-knights paid good money to have sharper minds devise their *imprese* for them (Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* 129).³⁵ Mark Girouard describes a clever *impresa* that Thomas Coningsby sported in 1571, apparently of Coningsby's own devising (*Robert Smythson* 162). The *impresa* would have probably amused Hertford (given his second marriage). At the time, Coningsby was desperately in love with none other than Frances Howard and chose to publicly air his intimate feelings at a May Day tournament. Thanks to his *impresa*, he did so with admirable aplomb. His shield featured a white lion (playing on the Howard crest) devouring a helpless little coney (obvious pun on his

³⁴ See Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments*, 131-134. Young explains the Kassel list, the single largest surviving piece of information on English tournament *imprese*. An extensive catalogue of some 400 shields hanging in the Whitehall gallery, the Kassel list was compiled by Landgraf Otto of Hessen-Kassel who visited England in 1611. Experts estimate that the actual total of shields hanging in the gallery might have approached 800 since the Kassel list only documents about half.

³⁵ Philip Sidney was a skilled deviser of *imprese*, and as Young notes, both Ben Jonson and Shakespeare wrote *imprese* for money.

surname) alongside the apropos motto: “Call you this love?” (Girouard, *Robert Smythson* 162).

At Elvetham, the Earl’s escutcheon gift may not be as witty as Coningsby’s; nonetheless it functions impressively on multiple levels. Alan Young observes that there was also an interesting tradition of presenting *imprese* to Elizabeth as a silent gesture of apology to atone for past blunders (*Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* 138). In choosing an escutcheon for the Queen’s gift, perhaps Hertford revisits this tradition, referencing his early marital trespass without invoking the misstep outright.

What really makes Hertford’s escutcheon gift such a multi-functional piece though is that it refigures the Queen as vividly as it signifies her host. The narrator notifies us that just under the shield’s Latin motto *detur dignissimae* (let it be given to the most worthy) are additional gilt-limned verses. These two painted Latin couplets each inform the Queen that: “You take precedence over the Muses and the nymphs of Ida, and are more beautiful than the goddesses of the deep sea” (164).³⁶ Elizabeth’s escutcheon gift, filled to the brim with gold lettering, pays two separate but crucial compliments to the Queen. The motto praises her virtue as most worthy, while the couplets praise her beauty, which outshines that of the sea goddesses. On one hand, the mutual intertwining of virtue and beauty recalls the common mythological re-figuring of Elizabeth into a Venus-Diana hybrid (Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth* 47-48).³⁷ As the best of both goddesses, Elizabeth exhibits Venus’ beauty without her problematic sensuality; she upholds the chastity of Diana but with enough feminine charm to encourage the admiration of her male courtiers.

³⁶ The original Latin lines read: *Aōniis prior, et Divis es pulchrior alti / AEquoris, ac Nymphis es prior Idaliis. / Idaliis prior es Nymphis, ac aequoris alti. / Pulchrior et Divis, ac prior Aōniis* (Wilson 112).

³⁷ For insights into how marriage was frequently celebrated in Elizabethan entertainments and plays before 1578 but the idealization of chastity began to appear after 1578, see Doran.

This combination of moral merit matched by beauty also remakes Elizabeth into the quintessential chivalric lady whose goodness and beauty inspire men to her service. Although Elizabeth obviously did not joust in court tournaments as her father was renowned for doing, her decision to perpetuate Henry VIII's chivalric pageantry of tournaments provided her a nostalgic but potent creative space in which to recreate herself.³⁸ As David Loades relays:

Either Elizabeth had to abide by the status quo in 1558 and rely upon the marriage market to provide her with an identity, or she had to seize the initiative, and follow her father as best she could. In choosing the latter course, she eventually created an image in which there were three main ingredients: Protestantism, Englishness, and femininity. (35)

Loades goes on to link these three attributes to the ideals of chivalry, noting that like her father, Elizabeth did not simply embody chivalric fanfare by encouraging it, but by actively *performing* it in her own unique way (36). By gifting the Queen with an escutcheon, Hertford allows Elizabeth to fulfill the archetypal part of fair lady while he assumes the counterpart role of knight-errant.

But the escutcheon presentation goes beyond even a single-faceted, chivalric reconstitution of Elizabeth as lady and Hertford as knight. Whether given by courtier-knights in an Accession Day tilt or by a progress host, the presentation of escutcheons to the Queen actually reverses the original chivalric gift bestowals of late medieval tournaments. In medieval tournaments, the lady was the primary giver, bestowing her favors upon her knight before the tournament and dispensing prizes to the winning knights at the close of the day. The knight was always the recipient, accepting accolades and receiving the rewards earned from his jousting prowess. In accepting the escutcheon gift at Elvetham, Elizabeth is on the receiving end, and such a position affords her more agency, aligning her with the tournament knight. Even though

³⁸ For information on Henry VIII's jousting participation in tournaments see Anglo, especially 108-122; also see Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* 27.

the Queen spends time as a seemingly passive spectator (whether she is being entertained at a tournament or on progress), Elizabeth was never just an onlooker. She is the dominant part of any spectacle at the heart of her pageantry. Thus, she is as eagerly watched as she ritualistically performs the familiar act of receiving her tournament escutcheon at Elvetham as the most skilled knights must have been when they ran the tilt at the tourneys.³⁹

In his fine, comprehensive study on chivalry, medieval historian Maurice Keen discusses the courtly love ideal of a knight's amatory service to his lady, memorably explored in the lyric of the troubadours. Devotion to a noblewoman spelled social and financial promise for a knight, but a pledge of amatory service did not always imply (although it could) a consummated affair.

As Keen explains:

In the poems of such men, the adoration of a great lady, the wife of a count maybe or of a high baron, had more than simply erotic significance. Her acceptance of her admirer's love (which meant her acceptance of his amorous service, not admission to her bed) was the *laissez passer* into the rich, secure world of the court of which she was mistress. The courtly literature of the troubadours encapsulated thus an amorous ethic of service to a lady, which was essentially comparable to the ethic of service to a lord . . . (30)

Returning to Keen's reflections on the overlap between a knight's feudal service to his lord and his chivalric service to his lady—if Hertford acts as knight-valiant proving his worth through his various progress entertainments—then Elizabeth functions as both authoritative lady *and* lord via the escutcheon gift. Her wealth and power indisputable, the Queen is, quite simply, England's definitive feudal lord. Carole Levin has attributed Elizabeth's ability to present herself as a man-woman hybrid at key points throughout her reign (i.e. her famous Tilbury speech) as a secret to her success at tempering the public's desire for a king or at least a male heir (4). Elizabeth clears

³⁹ Keen provides a rich overview of the ideals that undergirded chivalry and the subsequent tournaments and pageantry surrounding it. For more on tournament traditions and historical insights into the lady's role in medieval tournaments and the tradition of wearing the lady's token, also see Barker, especially Chapter 5 "The Tournament as Spectacle" 84-111.

any hurdles her gender poses by simply representing all things to all people. This representative range goes beyond the political imprint of the Queen as the Crown and also influences how she is viewed interpersonally by those closest to her at court. As Louis Montrose elaborates, “To be her own mistress, her own master, the Queen had to be everyone’s mistress and no one’s” (“Shaping Fantasies” 48). The escutcheon gift presented to the Queen on the second day at Elvetham allows Elizabeth to simultaneously play multiple roles relative to Hertford.⁴⁰ She could be both Venus and Diana. She could metamorphose into the chivalric ideal of lady inspiring knightly devotion, while still receiving the knight’s share of accolades. She was the fair one receiving gifts on progress. But she was also the sole woman qualified to play munificent feudal lord, if she so wished, and Hertford must have been mindful of the benefits of this particular part more than any other. After all, his hopes for reward apprehensively rested upon his Queen’s ability to play such a role to perfection.

Reciprocity unveiled: “the beginning, processe, and end of this his entertainment”

With the chivalric undercurrents of the second day’s entertainments concluded, the third day’s entertainments at Elvetham center upon a musicians’ serenade below the Queen’s gallery window, a fireworks display, and a nighttime, torch-lit banquet. The banquet must have been a stunning sight, with the food served “all in glasse and silver . . . everie one carrying so many dishes that the whole number amounted to a thousand: and there were to light them in their way a hundred torch-bearers” (115). Despite the impressive festivities, the third day does not feature any material gift presentations, so I am skipping directly to the Queen’s fourth and last day at

⁴⁰ Progress entertainments could (and did) fall flat with Elizabeth if she felt pressured to play along with a role she had no intention of condoning. For more information on why/how Leicester’s Kenilworth backfired, see Bergeron, especially Chapter 2, and see Leahy 116-118. For insights into Sidney’s *The Lady of May*, see Orgel, Philippa Berry 101-102, and Edward Berry’s rich article.

Elvetham, in which chivalric undertones are briefly reintroduced as the blazon re-emerges. On her last day at Elvetham, a blazon is presented as a gift to the Queen but instead of figuring forth Hertford, it figures forth Elizabeth. By effectively bookending the progress with counterpart blazon gifts: one of the hopeful host (day one's blazon) and one of the hosted queen (day four's blazon), Hertford closes his Elvetham entertainments with apt symmetry. The last day of entertainments also provides the most evocative and surprising performances of host and Queen yet seen. And as Elizabeth leaves Elvetham, she departs from this particular entertainment for the first time not with a gift received, but with a gift requested.

On her last morning at Elvetham, the Queen wakes to a flurry of activity below her window:

there began three Cornets to play certaine fantastike dances, at the measure whereof the Fayery Quene came into the garden, dauncing with her maides about her. Shee brought with her a garland, made in the fourme of an imperiall crowne; within the sight of her Majestie shee fixed upon (sic) a silvered staffe, . . . (115)

Another progress character has surfaced to pay tribute to the monarch, this time in the guise of a Fairy Queen. The Fairy Queen announces to the monarch that she lives deep beneath the earth and nightly writes Elizabeth's name in fluid flower circlets: "That every night in rings of painted flowers/ Turn round, and carrell out Elisaes name" (115). We have a surreal moment of real queen meeting her fictive double, as the Fairy Queen aligns herself with Elizabeth through a series of three gifts.⁴¹ The first, the nightly flower rings spelling Elizabeth's name, are mirrored in the second gift of the crown-shaped, wreathed garland that the Fairy Queen places upon a silver staff: "humbly to salute you with this chaplet, / Given me by Auberon, the Fairy King / . . .

⁴¹ The bulk of critical attention given specifically to Fairy Queen figures in Elizabethan progresses has focused on the Woodstock and Ditchley progresses. For a cogent look at the fairy queen figure in Lee's Woodstock and Ditchley performances, see Woodcock. Also see Frances A. Yates, *Astraea*, especially 94-101 and Yates, "Elizabethan Chivalry: The Romance of the Accession Day Tilts" especially 9-12. Finally, see Leahy 125-130 on Ditchley.

/ . . . vouchsafe t'accept it." (115). Both the coronet and the subterranean flower writing are exercises in naming, and the third gift (the last that Elizabeth receives at Elvetham) also names her, through a blazon sung by the Fairy Queen and her band of fairy maids:

Elisa is the fairest Quene,
That ever trod upon this greene.
Elisaes eyes are blessed stares
Inducing peace, subduing warres.
Elisaes hand is christal bright,
Her words are balme, her looks are light.
Elisaes brest is that faire hill,
Where Vertue dwels, and sacred skill,
O blessed bee each day and houre,
Where sweet Elisa builds her bowre. (116).

With its details of crystalline hands and light-filled looks, the blazon initially reads as somewhat Petrarchan, aestheticizing Elizabeth into an amalgam of highly luxurious goods: bright crystal, shining light, creamy salve.⁴² But even more strongly, the blazon roots Elizabeth to the physical land of the Elvetham estate. In a parallel of her name spelled in flowers beneath the earth's surface, Elizabeth's body is now mapped above ground, part by part, onto the landscape around her. She walks upon "this greene;" her eyes brighten the sky as "blessed stares /Inducing peace," while her breast is "that faire hill." Such earth-rooted descriptions allow Hertford to figuratively imprint his Elvetham estate with Elizabeth's body. And for Elizabeth, so insistent upon aristocratic lands and holdings being attributed to her generosity, to be represented as the literal life-source of Elvetham's land is a potent compliment.

The Fairy Queen's blazon of Elizabeth recalls earlier blazon gifts presented to Elizabeth on the first and second days of the progress, tying the progress' various gift presentations together through intersecting examples of blazons and blazonry. On the first day of the progress, the poet refigures Hertford into a blazon of intangible, inward gifts signifying the Earl's loyalty

⁴² For an insightful look at how Petrarch's lyric aestheticizes Laura into gemstones and precious metals see Freccero.

to Elizabeth. On the second day's entertainments, Hertford (doubly veiled behind Sylvanus and Apollo) gifts Elizabeth with the visual blazonry of the gold-lettered escutcheon.⁴³ And now on the fourth day of her stay, Elizabeth is blazoned by her own doppelganger, the Fairy Queen. Thus, the day one blazon of Hertford echoes the Earl's emblazoned shield gift to Elizabeth on day two, which is paralleled by the Fairy Queen's blazon of Elizabeth on the final day of the entertainments. As a result of the paralleling between these three different examples of blazoning—all gifts for Elizabeth—a triangulation of the projected images of Hertford, Elizabeth, and the Fairy Queen character emerges. The Earl, the Queen, and the Fairy are tied together in Elvetham's final gift scene, reflecting shimmering facets of each other like a three-way mirror.

To complicate matters further, there is the fact that this last character to give Elizabeth a gift is a fictive queen of fairies. In his astute article on the presence of fairy queen figures in Sir Henry Lee's Woodstock (1575) and Ditchley (1592) entertainments, Matthew Woodcock suggests that the very ambiguity of fairies as archetypal and folkloric literary characters (associated with both good and mischievous magical powers) allows them to occupy a sort of liminal space in progress entertainments (110-111). Thus, Woodcock argues that Sir Henry Lee was able to covertly air his personal frustrations with Elizabeth through the gossamer veil of the fairy:

... the doubleness of the fairy queen figure may actually serve as a studied reflection of Lee's own perceptions of the workings of power at the Elizabethan court: of how a single powerful figure operates not only as the donor of wealth and reward, but also as the bearer of seemingly arbitrary censure. (113).

Although the Fairy Queen figure at Elvetham largely seems to be benevolent, and it is my view that Hertford holds no antagonistic feelings towards the Queen, there is still that irksome

⁴³ For information on heraldry and the regularized describing of heraldic devices (blazonry), see Keen 125-130.

question of the Queen's favor and Hertford's hope for a return gift. The appearance of the Fairy Queen as final gift-giver reopens these questions. The Fairy Queen's embodiment of munificence reveals Hertford's own hope that Elizabeth will mirror her double's actions by displaying equivalent generosity towards him once the progress has ended. Instead of mapping his desire for monarchical favor upon Elizabeth directly, Hertford simply displaces his need onto the Queen's whimsical double. The Fairy Queen and her gifts for Elizabeth function as a cleverly veiled gesture that Hertford once again uses to shrewdly hint at his own need for royal support, but beneath the safe cover of a performed part. However, if we view the Elvetham Fairy Queen figure through the light of Woodcock's illuminating insights, which clearly posit fairies as morally ambivalent figures, then matters are complicated further. Hertford's decision to have a fairy character give Elizabeth her final collection of gifts becomes a rather problematic choice. Instead of optimizing Hertford's chances at receiving a reciprocal gift from Elizabeth, the appearance of a fairy as the Queen's double (keeping in mind such a character type's troubling ambiguities) could be read as a premonition of Elizabeth's parallel propensity for disconcerting ambiguity in whom she chooses to honor with her favor.

After receiving her floral crown and hearing the Fairy Queen's blazon, Elizabeth departs from Elvetham in the rain. All of the characters from the four days' entertainments line the road leading from the estate to bid her farewell. There in the downpour, everyone from Nereus to Sylvanus makes an elaborate show of his grief, as the poet delivers a final, farewell speech. Nereus then approaches the Queen's coach and thanks her for her visit while a band of musicians "hidden in a bower" play the tune of the last song sung to Elizabeth, "Come again" (117).

As Elizabeth's party rides up to the last gate of the estate, the narrator shifts from details of the farewell show to the monarch's reaction to it:

(As this Song was sung, hir Majestie, notwithstanding the great raine, staid hir coach, and pulled off hir mask, giving great thanks) . . . Her Majestie was so highly pleased with this and the rest, that she openly said to the Earle of Hertford, that the beginning, processe, and end of this his entertainment, was so honorable, she would not forget the same. (117-118)

Jean Wilson notes that wearing dainty masks while out riding was a common way for noble ladies to protect their faces from the sun (106). Elizabeth departs, however, not on a sunny day but on a stormy one; the narrator calls attention to the rainy weather twice. And so it seems to me that Elizabeth's gesture here, her decision to mask herself in the first place and then her removal of her mask, has symbolic overtones that have little to do with her complexion. At the conclusion of four days of highly theatrical, artful progress diversions that revolved around resourcefully executed gift presentations, fictive doubles, and daily role-playing, Elizabeth delivers the reverse upon her exit. Having been figuratively "masked" throughout the Elvetham progress, as she leaves, she physically and figuratively unveils herself to say thank you.

Not only does the Queen unmask her face, but her words follow suit; as the narrator relates: "Her Majestie was so highly pleased with this and the rest, that she *openly* said to the Earle of Hertford, that the beginning, processe, and end of this his entertainment, was so honorable, she would not forget the same" (118, italics mine). This interesting highlighting of Elizabeth's forthright response (while perhaps due to the flattering rhetoric of the narrator) nonetheless calls attention to the Queen's supposed openness. If nothing else, the inclusion of the word "openly" underscores how such directness deviates from the progress' norm of cunning ambiguity. Interestingly, as Wilson indicates in her footnotes, one of the original editions of the Elvetham entertainments casts this key line differently from her Nichols transcribed edition.⁴⁴ If we follow the other edition's (the British Library manuscript) slightly different transcription,

⁴⁴ As stated earlier, Wilson's version of the Elvetham entertainments is transcribed from John Nichols' compilation. When readings between the other original 1591 texts and Nichols' version differ slightly, Wilson makes note of it in her text.

then the Queen's openness is even further amplified. According to the first edition, instead of "openly said" the Queen "openly *protested* to my Lord of Hertford." And, instead of simply pledging to remember her stay, Elizabeth actually offers her favor outright to Hertford before any request is made for it: ". . . end of this his entertainment, was so honorable, as hereafter hee should finde the rewarde thereof in her especiall favour" (Wilson 166).

Whichever textual version is followed, Elizabeth's unveiled candor in praising Hertford and Elvetham is striking. And the Queen's forthrightness is matched by the last words of the progress narrative, as the narrator closes the Elvetham descriptions with an unapologetic request for favor to indeed be shown toward Hertford: "And manie most happie yeares may her gracious Majestie continue, *to favour and foster him*, and all others which do truly love and honor her" (118 italics mine). With the Queen having at last unmasked herself to display gratitude for her stay, we get a corresponding gesture from Hertford who presents himself baldly just as he is: a hopeful beneficiary requesting the Queen's fostering. Elvetham thus ends with yet another parallel drawn between Hertford and his Queen. As a final farewell gift to each other, they simultaneously drop harmonizing role-playing for an unexpected dose of candid self-revelation.

Reciprocity (in both self-revelation and gift exchanges) has at least been symbolically epitomized at the end of the Elvetham entertainment but only on a minimal level. In many ways, the reciprocal gift ideal stays just that: an ideal. Curt Breight notes that beyond a belated lieutenancy granted in 1602, no grand favors were bestowed upon Hertford despite his seemingly successful hosting of the Queen (46). The Earl's repeated gift presentations to Elizabeth throughout the course of the Elvetham progress (and his concerted efforts to appropriately downplay himself and his longing for favor) never resulted in the larger gifts of opportunity, office, and prestige he desired. For progress gift rituals to emerge as genuine exchanges,

ambiguity must eventually be replaced by the doffing of disguise, which in turn must translate into a true, reciprocal gift from the Queen. Such a chain of events tends to be unpredictable at best. The Elvetham gift presentations provide Hertford an acceptable platform from which to perform himself and his requests. But given the Earl's uneasy dependence on his monarch's approval (and the always tentative standing of her reciprocity), the Elvetham progress ends with its myriad gifts and token objects rather precariously suspended mid-air. The ideal of reciprocity remains something hoped for in the fantastical kingdom of the Elvetham progress but disappointingly unachieved in real life.

In the next chapter, I move from the rarified realm of progress gifts to the intimate territory of domestic love gifts. The dynamics of political love between Queen and progress host are replaced by the ever-complicated world of romantic love, and the ritual of the gift exchange becomes even more knotty. When trying to court the Queen's favor through progress gifts, some degree of veiling becomes a necessity in order to create the potential, at least, for political and social opportunity from a monarch whose own communication style so often reverted to artful ambiguity. But there are limits to such dissembling even on progress. The very subtlety and equivocal open-endedness of the gift presentations, self-performances, and planned entertainments at Elvetham expose the issue of the Queen's favor (or lack thereof) as a notoriously inconclusive entity. When turning to the love tokens exchanged among courting couples, any sort of ambiguity pertaining to couples' gifts and their ultimate meaning proves to be almost universally problematic. For, unlike the Elizabethan progress gift presentations, which ritualistically conclude with the Queen's exit at the end of a few days or weeks regardless of whether royal favor is granted or not, in the domestic dominion of marriages and betrothals, rarely is there the convenience of a prearranged departure.

CHAPTER 2

A Miniature, a Ring, and a Letter: Brokering Bonds through Love Tokens in *The Merchant of Venice*

Like Elizabethan progress gifts with their multiple layers of significance, love tokens enjoyed a wide scope of roles within the domestic sphere, defining the everyday courtships, betrothals, and marriages of Renaissance society. Orest Ranum claims that the great “refuges of intimacy” in early modern culture are located within contemporary society’s accessories, personal belongings, and love tokens:

In old societies intimacy can never be taken for granted. Hidden behind coded behaviors and words, it must be ferreted out, reconstructed from the places and objects in which human emotions and feelings were embodied. To explore the sites where intimacy flourished and understand the significance of the relic-objects found there, we need to take an archaeological approach. (207)

In this chapter, I turn my attention to *The Merchant of Venice* and a few “relic-objects” that I find critical to the play’s larger significance. I will be covering a few other tokens in the play as comparisons, but the bulk of my attention will focus upon Portia’s portrait miniature, the ring Portia gives Bassanio, and the letter Antonio writes to Bassanio. It is precisely within the exchange and receipt of these love tokens that the romantic desires, identities, and relational bonds that define Portia, Bassanio, and Antonio are most fully expressed and most fully complicated.

Several of Shakespeare's plays feature passing mentions of trinkets given as love gifts, but in *The Merchant of Venice*, a plethora of love tokens are on display.¹ In addition to the aforementioned miniature, ring, and letter, there is Shylock's sentimental turquoise ring from Leah and the golden posy ring Nerissa gives to Graziano. Jessica hastily piles money and assorted baubles (including the turquoise ring token) into a small treasure casket before eloping with Lorenzo. And while not a love token *per se*, Portia introduces a second letter (this time, one of good news) in the last scene of the play. Fittingly, given the number of tokens that crop up, a palpable materiality informs *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock is synonymous with his ducats, and Bassanio is equated with a fleece-seeking Jason pursuing Portia, "the lady richly left," who is memorably described by her Moroccan suitor as "an angel in a golden bed" (1.1.161; 2.7.58). Even tragic events are glossed over with the sheen of riches; in imagining what would happen if Antonio's ships wreck against "dangerous rocks," Salerio figures forth an ocean striated with decadent swirls of Orient treasure, spilling out onto the sea-waves: "Which, touching but my gentle vessel's side / Would scatter all her spices on the stream, / Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks" (1.1.32-34).²

Of course, references to valuable trinkets are not surprising in a play set in a city defined by trade and organized around a monetary loan gone bad. But what is surprising is how seldom some of the significant material objects in the play have been studied as explicit love gifts.

¹ In addition to the tokens I discuss in *The Merchant of Venice*, other memorable, Shakespearean love tokens include: the strawberry-sprayed handkerchief in *Othello*, Rosalind's chain in *As You Like It*, Autolycus' brimming pack of love baubles in *The Winter's Tale*, the ring and the portrait jewel in *Twelfth Night*, the miniatures of Hamlet's uncle and father, and the bracelet and the diamond ring in *Cymbeline* that I discuss in Chapter 3. Tokens also crop up in non-Shakespearean English Renaissance drama. In John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, the Duchess gives Antonio a ring to show her commitment, reiterating the symbolism of its circularity. In Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, Ralph adorns a pair of shoes with his Jane's initials, and in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, a slew of cheap "fairings" are advertised as love tokens by hucksters hoping to turn a profit.

² All of my quotations and references to *The Merchant of Venice* are from the following edition: *The Merchant of Venice. The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. et. al. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997. 1090-1144.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, material objects have been addressed as bond securities, destabilizing objects, structures of exchange, and objects of resistance against patriarchal demands.³ However, their particular identity as love gifts (specific betrothal, marriage, friendship and love tokens) and the impact that this has on the many bonds throughout the play deserves more attention.

Bonds and their thematic, semantic, and plot significance have garnered plenty of attention in critical studies of *The Merchant of Venice*.⁴ But the fact that every bond in *The Merchant of Venice* is brokered through not just any object of value, but ones that can be classified as love tokens is a crucial distinction. Antonio's friendship bond with Bassanio is secured through that most intimate of "tokens" (his own body, proffered in his deal with Shylock). Antonio's bodily love token is later invoked by another token: the letter he pens to Bassanio informing him of his sacrifice. Portia's betrothal bond is brokered through her miniature jewel. Her love bond with Bassanio is then secured through the love token ring she warns him never to part with, just as Nerissa's betrothal bond to Graziano is memorialized through the posy ring she asks him to wear. Jessica's marital bond with Lorenzo is made financially possible through the small jewelry box she takes with her as she elopes, containing the turquoise ring love token Shylock received from Jessica's mother, Leah.

Bonds in *The Merchant of Venice* are constantly in flux, and their instability is amplified by characters' decisions to broker bonds (and relationships) through love tokens. As tangible

³ For an explanation of how Jessica's casket of treasure and Portia's miniature and ring become objects of resistance against patriarchal systems, see Boose, especially 335-338. For an engaging look at how Portia's ring becomes a subversive gift that turns traditional structures of exchange upon their head, see Karen Newman. Sharp also supplies some insight into the larger structures of exchange prevalent within the play and how some of the material objects function as gifts.

⁴ For various discussions of how bonds function in the play see Burckhardt, Hinely, and Kallay. Burckhardt discusses how the pound of flesh bond and Portia's ring indicate various patterns of circulation and how supposedly destructive bonds actually function as instruments of deliverance. Hinely provides an overview of the various human bonds in conflict with each other in the play, and Kallay discusses how bonds function linguistically. Also see Sisk.

pledges of romantic commitment, it initially seems as if love tokens should eliminate the ambiguity associated with relationships, whether they be betrothals, marriages, or mere courtships. Yet, early modern English society's deep-seated distrust over wooing words carried over to early modern views of love tokens, and Shakespeare's treatment of wooing objects reflects those deeply-engrained cultural attitudes.

Contemporary suspicion over courtship language was widespread in early modern England. Although courtship literature and love poetry certainly attracted moral suspicion, it was not merely the printed word that was suspect. In his popular contemporary instruction book for women, *The Instruction of A Christen Woman*, Juan Luis Vives warns against the flattering but ultimately deceptive nature of *spoken* love language that young ladies might hear from suitors courting them.⁵ Analogously, in *The Schoolmaster*, Roger Ascham warns young men traveling abroad not to jettison England's more traditional morals once they become versed in the art of Continental seduction:

. . . being free in Italie, to go whither so ever lust will cary them, they do not like, that lawe and honestie should be such a barre to their like libertie at home in England. And yet they be, the greatest makers of love, the daylie daliers, with such pleasant wordes, with such smilyng and secret countenances, with such signs, tokens, wagers purposed to be lost, before they were purposed to be made. (85)

Like the disingenuous love games Ascham looks down upon, early modern love lyric (both English and Continental) turns upon equivocality, often incorporating double meanings and self-aware role-playing that makes it rather difficult to pin down authorial intent. Ilona Bell notes that the very articulation of desire in Renaissance courtship (especially in poetry penned by men to

⁵ See Bell "Women in the Lyric Dialogue of Courtship" especially 81. Also see Vives, especially Chapter XIII "On Love Affairs." For a sampling of Vives' instruction on amorous printed literature to avoid, see Chapter V "Which Writers are to be read and which are not to be read," especially 73-77.

court ladies) instigated contemporary anxiety over the truthfulness of such language. (“Women in the Lyric Dialogue” 78-79; 83). Bell also proposes that:

. . . both poetry and courtship thrive on the unsaid—on enigmatic inferences and double meanings . . . In any given lyric or lyric sequence the poet/lover may be using allegorical language to ascertain his beloved’s interest or to test his mistress’s wit. He may be unwittingly deceiving himself or deliberately deceiving her . . . In some sense the more intricate the poetry and the more intimate the relationship, the more the male poet/lover and the female listener/reader have to fear. (*Elizabethan Women* 23-24)

Along these same lines, Catherine Bates suggests that cultural concerns over deception did not just extend to the written word (love literature); men and women also remained acutely aware that “external gestures of courtship—touching, kissing, and above all, talking are not in themselves sufficient indication of inner and innocent intention” (91).

Not surprisingly, this ambiguity associated with courtship language extends to courtship gifts and tokens. Diana O’Hara observes that tokens’ openness to a variety of personal interpretations meant that a man and woman might have highly differing views of a love token’s meaning.⁶ Furthermore, accepting a token was not a matter to be taken lightly given the potential social obligations that often followed the acceptance of a love gift (O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint* 77). As Laura Gowing points out, the obligatory nature of courtship and betrothal gifts was underscored by love tokens’ presence as a: “a key part of contest at the court; the extensive details about tokens and analyses of their meaning that plaintiff and defendants gave focused on material exchanges as a proof in themselves of commitment to marry” (159).

In a play like *The Merchant of Venice*, full of economic, relational, romantic, and marital bonds that frequently interfere with one another, it is significant that Shakespeare represents, redefines, and negotiates these bonds through love tokens. Portia’s miniature jewel, the ring she gives Bassanio, and the letter Antonio writes Bassanio generate more tension than security

⁶ See O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, especially 63, 68 and 74.

within the play's central relational bonds, and I suggest this is due to these tokens' complex relationships with language (spoken, written, and literary) and with the body. Portia's ring, in particular, emerges as a complex little token not only because of its close links to the couple's exteriors (Portia's and Bassanio's bodies) but also because of its links to their interiors (specifically, the inward quality of honor). Portia does invoke the ring as a symbol of marital fidelity. But she also posits it as a distinct object of "virtue" that brings her and Bassanio's personal conceptions of honor to the forefront, using the token to show her husband how crucial his *inward* self and identity as a gentleman of his word are to her.⁷

Before I turn to the first token in my analysis—Portia's miniature jewel—I want to outline how I address the categories of language, the body, and honor and their respective impact upon the miniature, ring, and letter tokens in the play. In *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*, Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones suggest that as material belongings change hands, they change meaning (194). In *The Merchant of Venice*, characters' language (spoken or written) generates a meta-narrative that is always redefining the love token in question. What complicates this further is that love tokens are not originally written or spoken into being by language the way, for instance, love poems are. As highly symbolic objects, love tokens already possess a history of traditional associations that are visually conveyed. So when language (including figurative language and literary allusion) enters the scene, it elaborates upon and often rewrites the initial visual meaning (or meanings) present. For instance, Portia's miniature jewel, with its intricate physical detail and high degree of visual ornament, mirrors her suitors' Petrarchan discourse with its high level of verbal artifice. The degree to which the gendered language of Petrarchism complicates female agency has received a fair amount of critical

⁷ Leonard Tennenhouse points out that early in the play Bassanio is "an idealized portrait of a courtier" (57).

attention, but I suggest that Portia's miniature complicates not only her sense of self but Bassanio's identity as well.⁸ Portia must "rewrite" the Petrarch-laden "baggage" of her stylized miniature before either of them can adequately secure their own betrothal bond to each other and claim their newfound identity as an engaged couple.

In addition to language, the miniature, ring, and letter in *The Merchant of Venice* achieve meaning through their relationship to the body. For Portia's suitors, conjugal access to her body is brokered through her miniature jewel. When Bassanio and Graziano take their love bonds with their ladies too loosely for Portia's and Nerissa's liking, their laxity is manifested in the men's bodily relationship with their ring tokens (i.e. their decision to "give" the rings away to other bodies). The letter that Antonio writes to Bassanio is not a token that can be worn like the miniature or the rings, but it still recalls the highly bodily pound of flesh Antonio is prepared to surrender for his friend.

In addition to addressing Portia's miniature and ring and Antonio's letter through the lenses of language and the body, I will also explore the significance of the "shadow" or counterpart tokens that each of these love-objects possesses. Portia's miniature jewel in the lead casket is shadowed by Jessica's casket full of jewelry and money, including Shylock's turquoise ring, which I will discuss briefly. The ring Portia gives Bassanio is mirrored by the posy ring Nerissa gives Graziano. And the letter Antonio writes to Bassanio has two counterpart "tokens": the pound of flesh "token" that Antonio is prepared to sacrifice for Bassanio and the second letter that Portia gives Antonio at the close of the play.

Love tokens' close attachment to the body (physical or figurative) introduces the possibility that these objects can also be detached from bodies. The physical mobility of love tokens implies a parallel,

⁸ For a thorough assessment of various Renaissance authors' engagements with Petrarchism and recreations of Petrarchan convention, see Dubrow. In her analysis, Dubrow contests two common critical assessments: the suggestion that Petrarchism is concerned not with love but with politics and feminist claims that read Petrarchism as a relentless male power play that silences the Petrarchan mistress. Also see Vickers whose analysis of Canzone 23 illustrates how the Petrarchan blazon favors fragmentation of the lady over a cohesive image. Vickers suggests that Petrarch's incorporation of the Diana/Actaeon myth, rather than unifying the poet's sense of self through a "scattering" of Laura, also fragments the poet's own emotions and body, thus paralleling the poet with the lady.

figurative looseness. Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones point out that it is the ‘detachable’ (yet highly physical) nature of wearable accessories like jewelry or tokens that invariably complicates matters: “. . . they can move from body to body. That is precisely their danger and their value: they are bearers of identity, ritual, and social memory, even as they confuse social categories” (5).⁹ In *The Merchant of Venice* it is not so much “social categories” that are confused through slippery tokens as it is the play’s central bonds between characters. When certain love tokens are “removed,” “given away,” or even temporarily appropriated by someone outside two characters’ relational bond with each other, the bond in question is almost always threatened by the selfsame token that initially secured it.

Additionally, I suggest that this link between tokens and the body is further complicated by Portia’s ring’s strong associations with ideals of honor: both female honor (chastity) and male honor. Antonio’s letter to Bassanio also invokes honor to some extent, but with Portia’s ring the connection is quite strong. Portia simultaneously reestablishes her love bond with Bassanio and relegates Antonio’s and Bassanio’s friendship bond to its proper place by redefining the ring as a token that emphasizes her honor, as well as Bassanio’s and Antonio’s honor. In a play where much of what is esteemed is material, and with every relational bond brokered through either money or a token of some sort, it is momentous that Portia uses a ring she gives Bassanio—a highly tangible object—to call attention to the internalized, intangible quality of personal honor in order to rehabilitate two of the key relationships in the play.

“Fair Portia’s counterfeit”: introducing the portrait miniature

Before Portia’s ring makes its first appearance in the play though, we are introduced to another token: her portrait miniature. As the central player in the casket tests that structure her courtship, Portia’s miniature is described throughout the play as a “picture”, a “form”, a

⁹ In addition to Jones and Stallybrass, see Fisher.

“counterfeit,” and a “shadow,” but since the likeness is contained within a casket, (which the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes as “a small box or chest for jewels, letters, or other things of value, itself often of valuable material and richly ornamented”) it is obvious that Portia’s portrait is a miniature (“casket” def. 1a).¹⁰ According to the will of her deceased father, the suitor who chooses the correct casket is the one who uncovers Portia’s portrait, and whoever possesses her portrait will possess Portia in marriage. Since Portia is attainable only through her miniature, and her miniature is only retrievable through rightly interpreting the devices orchestrated by her father, Portia’s future is circumscribed within the parameters of a tiny portrait jewel. Given these logistics of the casket test, the line between the reality of Portia’s self and the art of her painted visage is blurred from the beginning. Portia is circumscribed not only by her miniature but also by the two bonds that it brokers. The first is a patriarchal bond with her father that is also economic since Portia inherited her wealth through her father. The second bond brokered by the miniature is, of course, the betrothal bond, an economic bond too given the wealth Portia’s betrothed will inherit by marrying her.

However, what most complicates Portia’s miniature as a betrothal token, in particular, is the degree to which its visual artifice is mirrored in the highly ornamental, verbal, Petrarchan artifice of her suitors. I suggest that this mirroring so circumscribes Portia’s sense of self that she is compelled to re-script both the miniature token and the equally restrictive linguistic embellishments of the men courting her. This creative modification of her miniature jewel will be the first in a series of token “rewritings” spearheaded by Portia. Portia’s creative ability to reconstitute the most central of the play’s intimate belongings (whether the token in question is a miniature, a ring, or a letter) becomes essential to the rehabilitation of some of the most tested

¹⁰ The earliest *OED* date listed for the referenced definition is 1467. What is especially interesting in terms of my argument is that the *OED*’s definition of a casket emphasizes the little box’s decorative nature. Not only can its contents be costly, but the casket itself was seen as an object of rich materiality and value in its own right.

relational bonds in *The Merchant of Venice*. To better understand how Portia rewrites her portrait miniature though, we must first consider the art history and social significance of the Renaissance miniature, both as a functional love token and as an aestheticized ideal of female beauty.

“A golden mesh t’untrap the hearts of men”: the Petrarchan aesthetic of Portia’s portrait

By and large, Renaissance visual art and early modern jewelry design were Continental in origin and influence. But the art of miniature limning stands out as a particularly English contribution; the portrait miniature enjoyed far more popularity in England than anywhere else in Europe.¹¹ The history of miniatures in English courting (both political and domestic) is well-established, with portrait miniatures really developing as an art form in the beginning of the sixteenth century when miniatures gained popularity in Henry VIII’s court.¹² Of royal origin, miniatures were used as tokens of political favor. Given their small, transportable size, they were ideal for passing among members of the European ruling classes at processions, royal visits, and official galas as reminders of promised oaths and shared loyalties (Strong, *English Renaissance Miniature* 9). These political party favors eventually hit the mainstream, becoming love mementos with mass appeal, popular among couples as courtship and betrothal tokens.

Perhaps the miniature’s intense popularity in England explains why this evocative accessory makes so frequent an appearance in Renaissance love lyric and various early modern

¹¹ For insight into the English roots of the portrait miniature, see Reynolds especially 4-6 of Chapter 1.

¹² Graham Reynolds explains that the first miniature actually appeared sometime in the mid fifteenth century: a tiny enameled piece commonly believed to be a self-portrait of miniaturist Jean Fouquet (2). But for the next few decades, this original example existed in isolation with no subsequent miniatures produced until the 1520s (Reynolds 2).

English courtship narratives.¹³ Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* plays upon the idea of a miniature as a silent self, with Olivia telling Cesario that her tiny portrait is incapable of causing offense since it is a mute version of herself: "Here, wear this jewel for me, 'tis my picture—/ Refuse it not, it hath no tongue to vex you—" (3.4.184-185).¹⁴ In the opening lines of Donne's elegy "His Picture," the narrator gives his beloved a miniature of himself, but maintains that he will hold her picture in his heart: "Here take my Picture; though I bid farewell / Thine in my heart, where my soule dwels, shall dwell" (1-2).¹⁵ In "On Julia's Picture," one of Herrick's typically effusive Julia odes, imagining how exciting it would be if Julia's painted image sprung to life, the narrator exclaims: "How am I ravish'd ! when I do but see / The painter's art in thy sciography? / If so, how much more shall I dote thereon /When once he gives it incarnation?"¹⁶

Both a form of art (diminutive portraiture) and a piece of jewelry (miniatures were often worn as locketts or brooches), the miniature's tiny size allowed men and women to hold renditions of their lovers in the palms of their hands. The very transportability of the piece was not only practical but also highly suggestive. Not only could you carry your beloved's image wherever you went, but you could *wear* your beloved upon your person.

The aesthetics of the Elizabethan miniature intertwine nature (the seemingly realistic) with artifice (the conspicuously ornate), and at first glance, a Tudor miniature appears

¹³ Renaissance love poets like Spenser and Sidney played with the idea of a miniature or image fastened upon the walls of the heart. In Sonnet 78 from the *Amoretti* Spenser's poet reveals: "Lackynge my love, I go from place to place / lyke a young fawne that late hath lost the hynd / and seeke each where, where last I sawe her face / whose ymage yet I carry fresh in mynde." (1-4) See Spenser, *Amoretti* for bibliographic information on the edition I am using. Similarly, in Sidney's Poem 39 from *Astrophil and Stella*, Astrophil states: "Move not thy heavy grace, thou shalt *in me*, / Livelier than elsewhere Stella's *image* see." (113-14, italics mine). See Sir Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* for bibliographic information on the edition I am using.

¹⁴ See Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* for bibliographic information on edition I am using.

¹⁵ See Donne, *Songs and Sonnets. The Complete English Poems*: all Donne references and quotations come from this edition. Donne also invokes the image of the miniature in "Witchcraft by a picture" in which he details his lady's ability to create and destroy tiny pictures of him through her tears, and a similar trope is at work in "A Valediction of weeping" in which teardrops become token miniatures through the lovers' reflected images in each other's eyes. I cover both of these Donne poems in great detail in Chapter 4.

¹⁶ See Herrick. *The Complete Poems of Robert Herrick*.

photographic in its attention to detail. Yet peering closer, one realizes, as has been noted, that the emphasis is not so much on the features of the sitter's face as the intricacies of his or her clothing and jewelry.¹⁷ In *A Treatise Concerning the Arte of Limning*, renown Elizabethan limner Nicholas Hilliard praises the skills of the stonecutter who can cut facets into gemstones to make them more beautiful than they might be in their natural state: "Therefore proportion given to a Stone by Arte, by the Cunning Artificer helpeth nature, and addeth beautye as well as nature doeth . . . Soe an excelent workman can grace them both in cutting, setting, and making them in valewe double of that they weare before"(41). Hilliard incorporates this philosophy into his painting style, glossing over facial imperfections and age-lines to mint a flattering aesthetic ideal that would have great influence on sixteenth and seventeenth-century limning techniques. A goldsmith and jeweler by trade, Hilliard was fascinated by jewels and thought the five perfect colors were best exemplified within five particular gemstones:

. . . there are besides white and black, but fyve perfect cullors in the world which prove by the fyve principall precious stones (bearing cullor) and which are all bright and transparent stones, as followeth . . . *Ammatist orient* for murrey, *Rubie* for red, *Saphire* for blewe, *Emrod* for greene, and hard *Orient Topies* for yellowe. (37)¹⁸

Not surprisingly given Hilliard's skills as a jeweler, two trademark features of his miniatures are the abundance of gleaming jewel tones used and the sheer quantity of accessories and jewelry adorning his sitter. A typical Hilliard miniature displays painted baubles in abundance: a string of pearls around the neck, glinting rings upon the fingers, dainty diamonds woven into the hair (Strong *English Renaissance Miniature* 69). Of course, Hilliard did not merely paint jewelry into his portraits; he also made miniatures into literal jewels, framing his vellum ovals in cases richly

¹⁷ For insights into the nuances of Hilliard's portraiture aesthetics and his fascination with jewels, see Fumerton *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament*, Chapter 3, especially 78-79. For some interesting insights into the extraordinarily detailed nature of miniatures' designs (in particular, limners' depictions of the sitter's clothing and embroidery) see Hazard, especially 29-36.

¹⁸ For more on Hilliard's love of jewels as shimmering examples of pure color, see Salamon 85-87.

ornamented with enameling and gems.¹⁹ Incredibly intricate designs bordering on the fussy were the preferred aesthetic with lids so painstakingly carved they look like metal lace. Encasings reveal labyrinthine patterns outlined in precious stones and enameled with initials, flowers, animals, sea-scenes, and inscriptions.²⁰

So what exactly does all of this art history of the early modern English miniature have to do with Portia's tiny portrait token? I want to suggest that within the metals, jewel-tone colors, and limning techniques Hilliard used to make his sitters into pretty little jewels, a particular aesthetic of feminine beauty emerges that is rather Petrarchan.²¹ As John Freccero observes, Petrarch describes Laura throughout the *Rime sparse* by not only breaking her body into parts, but by frequently transforming those parts into fine metals and gems (28). Petrarch often reimagines Laura as a shimmering composite of gold and assorted jewels. In poem 30, Laura is the "harsh laurel that has branches of diamond and golden locks", whose tresses are spectacular enough to out-dazzle "gold and topaz in the sun above the snow." (23-24; 37)²² In poem 199, her fingers are "the color of five oriental pearls", with her hands being of "clear ivory" and her nails "fresh roses," and in 200 "her lovely angelic mouth" is "full of pearls and roses and sweet words"(199: 5;10 200:10-11).²³ In poem 157, Petrarch really outdoes himself, constructing a mini-blazon of Laura as a golden haired, snow-faced beauty with ebony eyebrows, eyes of starlight, crystal tears, and pearl teeth:

¹⁹ See Jones and Stallybrass 41-44 for more on Hilliard's techniques.

²⁰ See Strong *The English Renaissance Miniature*, especially 87 and 120-127 for more details on the encasing styles and materials used to frame early modern English miniatures.

²¹ Obviously, many of Hilliard's miniatures also featured male sitters, and men were limned in the same, highly ornamental style as female sitters. Yet in the miniatures that feature female sitters, the potent combination of a highly ornamental, Hilliard-esque style and an artfully rendered lady evokes Petrarchan overtones.

²² All quotations and references to Petrarch's verse come from Durling's edition; see Petrarca, *Rime sparse* for the full bibliographic information. Poem 30, lines 23-24 and line 37: ". . . duro lauro / ch' à i rami di diamante et d'or le chiome" "L'auro e i topacii al sol sopra la neve"

²³ Poem 199, lines 5 and 10 "di cinque perle oriental colore"; ". . . che copria netto avorio et fresche rose" Poem 200, line 10-11: "la bella bocca angelica di perle / piena et di rose, et di dolci parole"

Her head was fine gold, her face warm snow, ebony her eye-
brows, and her eyes two stars whence Love never bent his bow
in vain;

pearls and crimson roses, where gathered sorrow formed ardent
beautiful words, her sighs flame, her tears crystal. (9-14)²⁴

What such a description accomplishes, according to Freccero, is an image turned idolatrous:

The external quest has become an internal obsession; the image of the beloved (idolo) is quite literally an idol. . . The comparison of Laura's face to gold and topaz on the snow, sparkling in the sun, is not only reified and coldly beautiful, it is radically fragmentary in a way that scarcely seems accidental . . . Her virtues and her beauties are scattered like the objects of fetish worship. (28-29)

But such descriptions also, I would argue, generate an aesthetic ideal of feminine beauty that manages to be extraordinarily tactile in its imagery—glittering diamonds hard to the touch, a mouth full of roses and iridescent pearls, a face of snow—while avoiding direct mention of the physicality of the female body. Sensuous but never sexual and certainly never earthy, such imagery parallels the visual effect of the limned visages showcased in so many early modern miniatures.

And so by virtue of being aligned with her miniature whose design aesthetic turns upon a Petrarchan standard of beauty, Portia is remade into the ultimate Petrarchan lady. Like Laura who was perpetually projected through the lens of Petrarch's desires, Portia is also delineated by men's desires (both her father's will and her suitors' courtship quests). However, unlike Laura who was transformed into an elusive icon by words alone (Petrarch's verse), Portia is doubly

²⁴ Poem 157, lines 9-14:

*La testa or fino, et calda neve il volto,
ebeno i cigli, et gli occhi eran due stelle
onde Amor l'arco non tendeva in fallo;*

*perle et rose vermiglie ove l'accolto
dolor formava ardenti voci et belle,
fiamma i sospir, le lagrime cristallo.*

shrouded in Petrarchan ornament. With her token portrait exhibiting a highly visual Petrarchan aesthetic of beauty in its limned design, the verbal artifice of her suitor's words refigure her into an art-piece mirroring the miniature's visual embellishments. Three scenes in the play—Bassanio's inaugural description of Portia in scene 1 of Act I, the Moroccan prince's casket test exchange with Portia in scene 7 of Act II, and Bassanio's memorable discourse throughout his own casket test in scene 2 of Act III—collectively underscore how Portia becomes a Petrarchan archetype through her miniature and her suitors' language.

In Act I, Bassanio's initial description of Portia underscores both her monetary worth: "In Belmont is a lady richly left," and the many suitors vying for her hand: "Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth, / For the four winds blow in from every coast / Renowned suitors" (1.1.161; 167-169). In language imbued with economic and architectural metaphor, Bassanio goes on to describe Portia's tresses as spun gold, making her seem less woman and more sculptural treasure-piece: "and her sunny locks / Hang on her temples like a golden fleece, / Which makes her seat of Belmont Colchis' strand" (1.1.169-171). This image of Portia as treasure to be won is a figurative association that soon will be made literal when Bassanio lifts her miniature jewel out of the leaden casket, ensuring his own financial security through his future marriage to the heiress. But Bassanio's language also echoes Petrarch's descriptions of Laura's hair. In many of his poems from the *Rime sparse*, Petrarch details Laura's locks as gold treasure. In poem 196 Petrarch describes Laura's tresses as "golden locks now twisted with pearls and gems, then loosened and more blond than polished gold" (7-8).²⁵ In 198, a Rumpelstiltskin-like Love spins the gold of Laura's hair: "The soft breeze spreads and waves in the sun the gold that Love spins

²⁵ Poem 196, lines 7-8: "*et el chiome, or avolte in perle e 'n gemme, / allora sciolte et sovra or terso bionde*"

and weaves with his own hands” (1-2).²⁶ In poem 160, Laura’s waves are fine metal, burnished to a sheen: “What sweetness is it in the spring to see her walking alone with her thoughts, weaving a garland for her polished, curling gold!” (12-14).²⁷ In 220, Petrarch wonders from where the gold was unearthed that constitutes Laura’s brilliant braids: “Where and from what mine did Love take the gold to make two blond tresses?” (1-2).²⁸

Bassanio pushes his rendition of Petrarchan imagery further when he remakes Portia into the prototypically silent Laura, stating that: “And she is fair, and, fairer than that word, / Of wondrous virtues. Sometimes from her eyes / I did receive fair speechless messages.” (1.1.162-164). Slipping himself into the role of the Petrarchan poet who finds words inadequate in capturing his lady’s beauty, Bassanio places Portia in the complementary role of Petrarchan muse. She becomes the elusive lady who communicates through “speechless messages” sent through her gaze and replayed within Bassanio’s imagination. From the very onset of the play then, Bassanio does not merely equate Portia with her monetary worth, but remakes her into a Petrarchan ideal.

Portia’s Moroccan prince suitor follows Bassanio’s descriptive lead. As I mentioned earlier, John Freccero highlights Petrarch’s tendency to so rarify Laura’s beauty that she becomes an idol. Along these same lines, the Moroccan prince remakes Portia into a saint, worthy of pilgrims’ homage: “From the four corners of the earth they come / To kiss this shrine, this mortal breathing saint” (2.7.39-40). Intermingling imagery of the spiritually precious with imagery of the materially precious, the prince then compares Portia’s miniature to a gold-stamped “angel” coin:

²⁶ Poem 198, lines 1-2: “*L’aura soave al sole spiega et vibra / l’auro ch’Amor di sua man fila et tesse.*”

²⁷ Poem 160, lines 12-14: “*Qual dolcezza è ne la stagione acerba / verderla ir sola coi pensier suoi insieme / tessendo un cerchio a l’oro terso et crespo!*”

²⁸ Poem 220, lines 1-2: “*Onde tolse Amor l’oro et di qual vena / per far due treccie bionde?*”

Never so rich a gem
Was set in worse than gold. They have in England
A coin that bears the figure of an angel
Stamped in gold, but that's insculped upon;
But here an angel in a golden bed
Lies all within. (2.7.54-59)

The prince's words also call attention to the circumscribing effects of Portia's tiny miniature jewel. Like the tiny angel imprinted on the center of the coin and encircled by the coin's edge, Portia's visage is replicated on a tiny surface, hemmed in by the miniature jewel's metal border and further contained within a jewelry box of lead. By describing Portia as an angelic trinket laid upon a "golden bed," the prince evokes the visual circumscription of the portrait miniature. In turn, his speech, like the miniature, sharply restricts what Portia may say in response to him. Her words are at an absolute minimum during her interaction with the prince. And when she does speak, she parrots the prince's sentiments, further reducing herself to a passive ornament. As the Moroccan prince gets ready to select a casket, Portia instructs him: "The one of them contains my picture, Prince / If you choose that, then I am yours withal" (2.7. 11-12). Once he selects a casket, she makes an even stronger linguistic bond between her self and her miniature, stating: "There, take it, Prince; and if my form lie there, / Then I am yours" (2.7. 61-62). Form can simply mean image in this context, but by pushing the interpretation further, it can also mean bodily form, which underscores the slippage between Portia's body and her portrait. Constrained by the boundaries of her own courtship, visually hemmed in by the decorative borders of her little miniature, and verbally circumscribed by the speech of the prince, Portia reflects these limitations through her own equally limited speech.

Through her miniature's visual design and her suitors' speech, Portia is remade into a Petrarchan ideal of beauty (that in turn reflects the play's overall obsession with materiality), and nowhere does this become more apparent than in Bassanio's courtship casket test. Although

Bassanio opens the play with highly ornamental language, describing Portia's hair as a sought-after golden fleece, he begins his casket test, ironically enough, by lambasting embellishment: "So may the outward shows be least themselves. / The world is still deceived with ornament" (3.2.73-74). Although he mentions male artificers, Bassanio's greatest wrath is reserved for feminine ornamentation, which not only can hide an ugly essence: "Hiding the grossness with fair ornament," but can even demarcate sexual wantonness (3.2.80):

. . . Look on beauty
And you shall see 'tis purchased by the weight,
Which therein works a miracle in nature,
Making them lightest that wear most of it.
So are those crispèd, snaky, golden locks
Which makes such wanton gambols with the wind
Upon supposèd fairness, often known
To be the dowry of a second head, (3.2. 88-95)

Although hypocritical, Bassanio's take on artifice, denouncing ornamentation even as he liberally infuses his own language with embellishment, is in alignment with Renaissance perceptions on the relationship between nature and art. Elizabethans were simultaneously enthralled by and suspicious of the highly ornamental. In his *Defence of Poesy*, Sir Philip Sidney seems wary of ornamentation for ornamentation's sake, suggesting that the poet or courtier "using art to show art, and not to hide art flieth from nature, and indeed abuseth art," but still, Sidney is no advocate for outright realism (247). Stressing that the poet can use art to remake nature into something far more marvelous than the original, Sidney defines a great poet as one who: "disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature" (216).

This preference for an artful rendering over the real deal is apparent in Bassanio's casket test scene. After choosing the correct casket and uncovering Portia's much sought after miniature

jewel, Bassanio is thoroughly bedazzled by the tiny portrait. He promptly launches into a dizzying blazon that is one of the most itemized descriptions of Portia's beauty in the play. The most startling aspect of the blazon is that Bassanio does not even blazon Portia! He instead blazons "Fair Portia's counterfeit." Cataloguing every limned aspect of her picture token, he goes feverishly from painted eyes to painted mouth, from limned lips to hatched hair. He begins with the painted gaze: "Move these eyes? / Or whether, riding on the balls of mine, / Seem they in motion?" (3.2.116-118). Scanning the painted face, he next pauses to praise the "severed lips / Parted with sugar breath" (3.2.118-119). Evidently not bothered by the fact that he previously condemned the fair tresses of an overly made-up woman as "those crisped, snaky, golden locks / Which makes such wanton gambols with the wind," Bassanio likens the miniature's painted strands of hair to a finely meshed, gold-spun net:

Here in her hairs
The painter plays the spider, and hath woven
A golden mesh t'untrap the hearts of men
Faster than gnats in cobwebs. (3.2.120-123)

Bassanio is not simply praising a painted version of Portia but one that is overtly stylized and overtly Petrarchan too. In comparing Portia's painted blonde locks to a pretty mesh trap, Bassanio closely echoes poem 181 from the *Rime sparse* in which Petrarch notes that: "Love set out amid the grass a gay net of gold and pearls, under a branch of the evergreen tree that I so love" (1-3).²⁹ In the poem, Laura's hair lures Petrarch into a trap held by her fair hand: ". . . and the rope was wrapped around the hand that surpasses ivory and snow / Thus I fell into the net; and I have been captured here by her sweet bearing . . ." (10-13).³⁰ Like Petrarch's depictions of

²⁹ Poem 181, lines 1-3: "*Amor fra l'erbe una leggiadra rete/ d'oro e di perle tese sott' un ramo / dell'arbor sempre verde ch' i tant' amo*"

³⁰ Poem 181, lines 10-13: "*e l' fune avvolto / era a la man ch' avorio et neve avanza. / Così caddi a la rete, et qui m'àn colto / gli atti vaghi*" For the poetic reverse of the blonde haired, fair-complexioned beauty, see Shakespeare's Sonnet 130.

Laura as an irresistible lure made of ivory, snow, gold, and pearls, Portia's painted miniature attracts through breath spun of sugar and hair woven of golden mesh. Her monetary status as a wealthy heiress is also played upon here. When describing Portia to Antonio in Act I, Bassanio mentions her as a golden fleece to be won, and now having uncovered her miniature he again equates her with gold (money). In fact, Bassanio is so caught up in the glittering image of the miniature that he has to literally jolt himself out of his reverie, audibly announcing that he should direct his attention to Portia instead of her portrait:

Yet look how far
This substance of my praise doth wrong this shadow
In underprizing it, so far this shadow
Doth limp behind the substance. (3.2.126-129)

That the token's meaning as a symbol of betrothal to an actual fleshly woman initially escapes Bassanio's attention only emphasizes the extent to which Portia as ornament has become not only an aesthetic ideal but an amatory ideal as well.

“catch this casket”: Jessica's “shadow” tokens and Shylock's turquoise

What is also interesting about Portia's miniature jewel within its leaden casket is that the token does not exist in isolation. The metal chest containing Portia's miniature is actually closely paralleled with a second casket that appears in the play: the trinket box that Jessica takes when she elopes. Jessica's decorative casket full of ducats, jewelry and Shylock's turquoise shares a series of striking similarities to the leaden casket holding Portia's miniature.³¹ Both caskets hold trinkets that came from fathers. Portia's father designed her elaborate casket test courtship, and Jessica's casket holds her father's beloved ring that she steals from him. And as follows, both caskets facilitate marriages through funding them: Jessica's casket holds the treasure that will

³¹ Tennenhouse makes the cogent claim that Jessica's theft of Shylock's turquoise ring establishes the link between rings and betrayal, which will crop up again when Bassanio gives away Portia's ring (58).

finance her marriage to Lorenzo, while the leaden casket holds Portia's miniature, granting her body and fortune to Bassanio who chose correctly. And just as Portia seems to transform into a pretty ornament through the high visual artifice of her miniature jewel and the Petrarchan prattle of her suitors, Jessica similarly remakes herself into a treasure-piece, yelling down to Lorenzo that she will adorn her body with money before making her escape: "I will make fast the doors, and gild myself / With some more ducats, and be with you straight." (2.6. 49-50).

Moreover, the turquoise ring, like the portrait miniature, emerges as a highly problematic token. If the miniature restrictively circumscribes Portia, remaking her into a Petrarchan ornament, the turquoise deeply complicates both Jessica's and Shylock's identities, but in the reverse manner by greatly expanding our conception of these two characters. Shylock's lament over the loss of the turquoise is the only scene in which we see him as capable of harboring sentimental, emotional attachments to things (rather than valuing objects purely for their monetary worth). His touching attachment to the ring his wife gives him during their courtship: "It was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys" paints him in a refreshingly relatable manner that generates sympathy (3.1.100-102). The turquoise challenges our conception of Jessica in just the opposite manner though, remaking her into a less sympathetic character. In love with Lorenzo, Jessica's elopement and even her theft of some of Shylock's money do little to tarnish her likeability. But her theft of the turquoise does, precisely because of what she does with the token. A ring that was presumably her mother's, Jessica's lack of respect for the sentimental value of a trinket that was not hers to take in the first place is a little upsetting, but her inexplicable decision to trade it for a monkey is outright bizarre: "One of them showed me a ring that he had of your daughter for a monkey" (3.1.98-99). If the turquoise had been directly traded to finance Lorenzo's and

Jessica's newlywed life, then the ring would have fulfilled its original purpose as a love token. Originally betokening Shylock's and Leah's love, it would have gone on to support Lorenzo's and Jessica's love. Granted, the monkey could be traded for money down the line to help the couple, but this makes the trade-in of the turquoise a rather circuitous way to go about such a transaction. From what we can glean from the play, the turquoise is simply given away to satisfy an impulse buy. And as Tubal informs Shylock, rather than spending the casket's treasury carefully to help set up house, the couple seems to be spending rather quickly and wastefully: "Your daughter spent in Genoa, as I heard, one night fourscore ducats." (3.1.90-91).

Thus, Jessica's casket of ducats and baubles, including the turquoise, becomes an interesting counterpart to Portia's lead casket and the miniature jewel within. Both caskets contain small love tokens that further complicate the play's depictions of the respective women, albeit in very different ways. After Shylock's outburst over the ring, the turquoise is not mentioned again. For Portia, however, even though her miniature is not specifically cited after Bassanio's notorious blazoning of the token, I suggest that Portia revisits her tiny picture twice: before and after Bassanio wins her as his wife. Showing her acumen for rewriting tokens, Portia replaces the ornamental confines of the portrait jewel with verbal portraits of her own devising.

The "full sum of me": Portia's reconfiguration of the portrait token

Given this problematic link between women and treasure that Shakespeare underscores through the miniature token, it is little wonder that Portia uses language in a most innovative way to rewrite her miniature and herself. Quieted throughout the duration of her casket tests, Portia is restricted from voicing her desires to her suitors; as she laments to Nerissa in Act I: "O me, the word 'choose!' I may neither choose who I would nor refuse who I dislike; so is the will of a

living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father” (1.2.19-22). Like Petrarch rewriting Laura to express his desire for poetic fame and the woman herself, Portia’s suitors speak her into being throughout the casket tests, and since the rules of her courtship demand that she remain largely silent they can make her into who they want her to be. But Portia does have moments where she reclaims her voice. I suggest that she mitigates both her suitors’ limiting language and the confines of her miniature token by invoking her own clever Petrarchan counterdiscourses to counteract her portrait jewel and its limiting Petrarchan image of her.³²

Before Portia’s courtship casket tests even begin, Shakespeare foregrounds Portia’s ability to counteract her miniature’s impact by having her speak a series of “verbal portraits.” Frustrated by the elaborate game staged by her father where she will have little voice, Portia invents a diversion of her own, entertaining her waiting woman Nerissa by playfully “painting” a picture of each of her suitors through witty description: “I pray thee overname them, and as thou namest them I will describe them; and according to my description, level at my affection” (1.2.31-33). Portia departs from the traditional Petrarchan blazon by refusing to comment on physical attributes, instead focusing on the personality quirks and nationality of her suitors:

NERISSA. First there is the Neapolitan prince.

PORTIA. Ay, there’s a colt indeed, for he doth nothing but talk of his horse, and he makes it a great appropriation to his own good parts that he can shoe him himself. I am much afeared my lady his mother played false with a smith.

NERISSA. What say you then to Falconbridge, the young baron of England?

PORTIA. You know I say nothing to him, for he understands not me, nor I him. He hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian, and you will come into the court and swear that I have a poor pennyworth in the English. He is a proper man’s picture, but alas, who can converse with a dumb show? How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere.

³² I am using Heather Dubrow’s wonderfully apt term “Petrarchan counterdiscourses” here. As Dubrow points out in *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and its Counterdiscourses*, many English Renaissance writers didn’t reject or slavishly imitate Petrarchan convention but instead cleverly engaged it in highly innovative ways.

NERISSA. What think you of the Scottish lord, his neighbour?

PORTIA. That he hath a neighbourly charity in him, for he borrowed a box of the ear of the Englishman and swore he would pay him again when he was able. I think the Frenchman became his surety, and sealed under for another.

NERISSA. How like you the young German, the Duke of Saxony's nephew?

PORTIA. Very vilely in the morning when he is sober, and most vilely in afternoon when he is drunk. When he is best he is little worse than a man and when he is worst he is little better than a beast. (1.2.34-38; 55-75)

Infused with humor, Portia's verbal sketches give us a no-holds look into her suitors' personalities. Clothing is mentioned only so far as it reveals interiors. For example, Portia's catalogue of her English suitor's doublet, hose, and bonnet illustrates how his garb reflects satirical conceptions of the typical, travelling Englishman whose worn amalgam of Continental fashions reflects his parochial ability to adopt everything but the native language of the countries he has visited. It is significant that Bassanio is the only suitor Portia does not descriptively catalogue and the only suitor that Portia calls by his given name. When Nerissa mentions Bassanio, Portia refuses to verbally sketch him, responding by simply naming him: "Yes, yes it was Bassanio—as I think, so was he called . . . I remember him well, and I remember him worthy of thy praise" (1.2.97;100-101).

Portia's restrained reference to Bassanio is in high contrast to Bassanio's itemizing, highly ornamental delineations of her. Before Bassanio even chooses the leaden casket and blazons her miniature, Portia predicts his verbal tendency to itemize her. Using language that emphasizes division and possession, Portia references both the words Bassanio will use to fragment her once he uncovers her miniature and the divvying up of her own fortune and property that will occur when she takes him as husband:

Beshrew your eyes,
They have o'erlooked me and divided me.
One half of me is yours, the other half yours—

Mine own, I would say, but if mine, then yours,
And so all yours. O, these naughty times
Puts bars between the owners and their rights;
And so, though yours, not yours. (3.2.14-20)

Her words here obviously convey frustration at having to wait to see if the man she loves will win her hand. But her speech here also functions as a sharp critique of Bassanio's own Petrarchan gaze and the manner in which he later blazons that stylized, stock amalgamation of Petrarchan beauty: her portrait miniature.

As Bassanio carefully looks over the caskets trying to decide which one to select, Portia's musicians break into song:

Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart, or in the head?
How begot, how nourished?
Reply, reply.
It is engendered in the eyes,
With gazing fed; and fancy dies
In the cradle where it lies. (3.2.62-69)

Much has been made of the song as Portia's subliminal method of providing clues for Bassanio, urging him to choose the lead casket. As Harry Berger explains, the last syllables of 'bred,' 'nourished,' and 'head' rhyme with the word, 'lead', and before the song begins, Portia echoes the inscription on the lead casket "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath" by stating "I stand for sacrifice" (156-157; 2.9.20; 3.2.57). But as Berger goes on to point out, "Critics go astray when they insist that Portia either did or did not offer Bassanio clues to the right casket . . . The point is that the script encourages us to wonder about, and even to debate the possibility" (157). To me, the question of whether or not the song allows Portia to provide hints for Bassanio is not nearly as interesting as the idea that the song's overarching thematic content allows Portia to playfully critique Bassanio (and all of her suitors for that matter).

The musicians' song is about desire, after all, and more specifically how desire is formed through the gaze, echoing Andreas Capellanus' twelfth-century musings on the inception of lust: "For when a man sees some woman fit for love and shaped according to his taste, he begins at once to lust after her in his heart; then the more he thinks about her, the more he burns with love, until he comes to a fuller meditation" (29). With its focus upon the gaze as the gateway to desiring a woman: "It is engend' red in the eyes, / With gazing fed . . ." the song also takes on a distinctly Petrarchan cast, mirroring how Portia has been figured forth throughout her courtship. The song lyrics thus provide Portia a medium through which to insert a subtle critique of the male gaze. For as the song goes on to suggest, desire born out of the gaze runs the risk of burning so intensely it self-implodes: "With gazing fed: and fancy dies / in the cradle where it lies." And as it happens, after Bassanio chooses the correct casket, his misguided gaze gets so caught up in the ornamental allure of Portia's miniature that he initially fails to turn his attention to the woman herself.

Once Bassanio finally does extricate Portia's miniature from the lead casket and delivers his blazon of the little jewel, the drawn-out courtship officially ends. Portia is freest to speak herself, and her speech continues to question the convention-bound ways her suitors (including Bassanio) have construed her. In her first extended speech to Bassanio after he uncovers her miniature, Portia delivers a "counter" blazon of herself. Rather than underscore various parts of her external, physical self as Bassanio did when he blazoned her miniature, Portia responds by emphasizing the wholeness of her devotion to him, as well as the cohesion of her inner qualities and inward self-image:

You see me, Lord Bassanio, where I stand,
Such as I am. Though for myself alone
I would not be ambitious in my wish
To wish myself much better, yet for you

I would be trebled twenty times myself,
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich,
That only to stand high in your account
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends
Exceed amount. But the full sum of me
Is sum of something which, to term in gross
Is an unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractised,
Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn . . . (3.2.149-161)

Responding to Bassanio's blazon of her miniature token by piecing herself together again, Portia offers Bassanio her whole person: "the full sum of me." A careful look at her words also reveals how she subtly critiques her suitors' fixation on her wealth and their collective tendency to equate her with a wide array of ornamental treasures.³³ Portia admits that for herself she is enough: "Though for myself alone / I would not be ambitious in my wish / To wish myself much better" but when she thinks of Bassanio—who initially pursues her perhaps as much for her wealth as for her beauty—she states that she wishes she could further embellish her beauty and her riches: "yet for you I would be trebled twenty times myself, / A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times more rich" (3.2.150-154).

For a woman who has been pursued for her wealth and has been remade into an ornamental treasure-piece through her miniature token and her suitors' language, it initially seems odd that Portia wants to further "ornament" herself with additional beauty and riches for Bassanio. But as soon as Portia offers this fantasy image of herself, she quickly dismantles it. Figuratively stripping herself down to her essence, she simply becomes: "an unlessoned girl, unschooled, unpractised" (3.1.159). Highlighting her emotional interior, Portia draws attention to how marriage will affect her personal growth for her husband-to-be: "Happy in this, she is not

³³ I argue that Portia demonstrates her active agency in this frank speaking of herself although Newman sees Portia in this particular speech as one who "suppresses her own agency in bestowing herself on Bassanio" (25). Newman does, however, go on to suggest that Portia's overall gifting of the ring and later admission of exclaiming on Bassanio if he gives the ring away become powerful acts of subversion.

yet so old / But she may learn . . .” (3.2.160-161). This spoken self-portrait with its emphasis on her inward essence becomes a clever method for Portia to counteract both her suitors’ and her miniature’s tendencies to reduce her to the ornamental.

After she speaks herself, Portia gives Bassanio a ring to betoken their upcoming marriage and the transfer of her wealth to him. In “unwording” herself as treasure embodied and “rewording” herself as treasure giver, Portia transforms her former passivity (her suitors speak for her) into active, declarative agency (she speaks for herself and actively gives to the one she loves). As evidence of this, the miniature token is jettisoned for a token of Portia’s own choosing, the ring. In replacing the miniature (a token chosen by Portia’s father) with her own ring token, Portia dissolves two, old bonds that previously defined her. Her patriarchal bond to her father and her allegiance to his casket test mandate is broken. Likewise, Portia displaces her betrothal bond to Bassanio with an imminent marital bond through the ring.

Bassanio’s first spoken line after Portia’s rather dramatic speaking of herself is noteworthy. Previously full of rhetorical flourishes, Bassanio responds to Portia by admitting that he has no words left: “Madam, you have bereft me of all words. / Only my blood speaks to you in my veins.” (3.2.175-176). Of course, Bassanio’s understated moment of relative quietness is quickly undone by the fact that he goes on to speak several more lines in quick succession. But his initial revelation that he has been “bereft” of all words nonetheless offers a subtle invocation of the silent Petrarchan beloved. Barred from revealing anything about the caskets’ contents throughout her courtship, Portia had been the embodiment of the aloof, quiet Petrarchan beloved. Yet when she finally does speak herself, it is nothing less than poetic justice that Bassanio becomes the silenced partner. Bassanio, whose words and blazon had heaped the most verbal ornament on Portia, finds the mantle of the mute Petrarchan beloved transferred to him by his

fiancée's emphatic speaking of herself. And even though Bassanio is hardly silenced more than a moment, the symbolic impact of him being temporarily robbed of speech underscores how fully Portia has been able to reclaim her voice and her identity through her own creative rendition of her portrait miniature token.

A “hoop of gold, a paltry ring”: understanding rings in *The Merchant of Venice*

It is significant that Portia's reclamation of her voice and identity occurs after she has relinquished her miniature token for a self-chosen ring token. Like the miniature, the ring that Portia bestows upon Bassanio as a symbol of their union is a highly complex, multi-layered object. As much as the ring recalls the marital bond between Portia and Bassanio, it also hints at threats to that bond and is susceptible to others outside of the love bond. More so than language, the body becomes integral to the ring's function in the play. The bodily overtones of rings (including Nerissa's ring which Graziano notes at the end of the play) have been critically noted, but the ways that Portia's ring highlights concepts not only of interiorized female honor (namely chastity) but Bassanio's own sense of male honor are also crucial. In a way, the ring's associations with that inward virtue of honor undercuts both the ring's delineation as an outward token worn on the body and the ring's functionality as a tangible sign of sexual fidelity. Since female honor is tied to chastity, Portia will later reference the ring in relation to her body. But in doing so, she makes it clear that her playful threat of sexual looseness (i.e. disregarding her female honor) is directly contingent upon Bassanio's breaking oath with her (disregarding his gentleman's honor to be a man of his word). In such a way, the ring moves from being a mere outward sign of love to a token that is both outward (worn) and inward (a sign of personal honor and keeping one's word).

Before looking at the bodily connotations of the ring and its impact on constructs of male and female honor, it will be helpful to first firmly situate the ring as a gift.³⁴ Unlike the miniature, the ring that Portia bestows on Bassanio is a freely given and independently chosen gift.³⁵ As the play progresses though, Portia's ring temporarily becomes a somewhat hostile gift (for both her and Bassanio) as soon as Bassanio gifts it to "another" at Antonio's urging.³⁶ After Bassanio wraps up his blazon of the portrait token and reads the accompanying doggerel scroll which instates Portia as his wife-to-be, Portia makes it clear that through their marriage Bassanio will be the recipient of not just one gift (her as his bride) but a host of other financial and material gifts (her body, her estate, her servants, her land). She bestows all of these through the tiny gift of the ring:

Myself and what is mine to you and your
Is now converted. But now I was the lord
Of this fair mansion, master of my servants,
Queen o'er myself; and even now, but now,
This house, these servants, and this same myself
Are yours, my lord's. I give them with this ring,
Which when you part from, lose, or give away,
Let it presage the ruin of your love
And be my vantage to exclaim on you. (3.2. 166-174)

Portia's speech clearly posits the ring as a gift that gives a series of subsequent gifts: "I give *them* with this ring"; however, Portia's ring token also demands a reciprocal standard of behavior from Bassanio. As Diana O'Hara points out, in early modern England, accepting gifts during courtship rites obligated the recipient to a certain emotional state of commitment and often to a host of other expectations as well (*Courtship and Constraint* 77).³⁷ Depending on the

³⁴ For a look at how *The Merchant of Venice* subverts Elizabethan gender standards and interrogates traditional structures of exchange by featuring Portia as a female gift giver, see Newman especially 28-33.

³⁵ See Lawrence, especially Chapter 1 "The Venice of Merchants."

³⁶ For examples of early modern gift-giving gone awry see, Zemon Davis especially Chapter 5 "Gifts Gone Wrong." Also see Mauss' classic study, especially 58-62 for insights into unwelcome gift obligations.

³⁷ Also see O'Hara "The Language of Tokens and the Making of Marriage"

type of gift, the particulars of its exchange, and when in the courtship process it was given, a woman's acceptance of a gift from a man meant that she was willingly submitting herself to certain emotional and social expectations, even the legal intent to marry.³⁸ Although both men and women exchanged gifts during courtship, a man's gift was routinely perceived as more binding than a woman's in early modern England. Women gave courtship gifts with enough frequency that they were often depicted as gift-givers in Renaissance and medieval love literature, but a lady's gift was still seen as more frivolous than a man's.³⁹ In light of these cultural attitudes, Allison Scott suggests that Portia's initial gifting of the ring is shadowed by fear that the token will not be respected as a serious love gift, and Bassanio will somehow jettison the ring (80). Perhaps this in part explains Portia's adamant insistence on Bassanio's obligation to keep the ring on his person. Thus, before Bassanio even puts the ring on, it is already marked as a suspect token that he might not cherish enough.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, this attitude that women's tokens should not be taken as seriously as men's love gifts is also evident when we look at the ring Nerissa gives Graziano. Nerissa's posy ring acts as a counterpart or "shadow" token to Portia's ring, as both ladies' rings are "given away" by their husbands. In Nerissa's case, Graziano does not merely give the ring away; he belittles its significance and disregards his word to his lady:

GRAZIANO. About a hoop of gold, a paltry ring
 That she did give me, whose posy was
 For all the world like cutlers' poetry
 Upon a knife— 'Love me and leave me not'
 NERISSA. What talk to you of the posy or the value?
 You swore to me when I did give it you,
 That you would wear it till your hour of death, (5.1.146-152)

³⁸ See Gowing, especially Chapter 5 "The Economy of Courtship" 159-164.

³⁹ For an interesting look at how agency is tied to gift giving in medieval French literature, see Wright, especially 561-565. Also see Lawrence 48.

Popular throughout the late Middle Ages, posy rings came into their own during the Elizabethan era. As Joan Evans explains, by the sixteenth century, “. . . posies were everywhere: on fruit trenchers, on knives, on girdles and garters, on poke-dials, on brooches, on memorial rings, as well as on love and marriage rings. No gift between lovers was complete without a motto to accompany it,” which explains why Graziano denigrates the inscription upon his ring as “cutlers’ poetry / Upon a knife.” (Evans *English Posies* xix). His reaction to the posy ring is in some ways a stereotype of the overly literal, male mind. Graziano wonders why Nerissa is so distraught since he simply sees the loss of a cheap, easily replaced ring. But Nerissa is quick to remind him that it is not the monetary loss of the ring or even his lack of sentimental regard for the little engraved message that bothers her: “What talk you of the posy or the value?” (5.1.150). Rather, it is Graziano’s betrayal of *his spoken words* to her:

You swore to me when I did give it you
That you would wear it till your hour of death,
And that it should lie with you in your grave.
Though not for me, yet for your vehement oaths
You should have been respective and have kept it. (5.1.151-155)

Graziano obviously slights Nerissa by giving away her love token, but by going back on his word, Graziano also disregards his own honor to keep his pledge. As Nerissa is quick to remind him, even if his love for her was not strong enough to persuade him to keep the posy ring, then his personal honor to uphold “his vehement oaths” should have held sway. Giving away the ring becomes akin to “giving away” his honor.

Like Nerissa’s posy ring, Portia’s ring is also rich in expectations of personal honor. Although through the ring token, she obviously gives herself bodily to her husband, Portia also gifts her inward self to Bassanio: “This house, these servants, and this *same myself* / Are yours, my lord’s. I give them with this ring” (3.2.170-171, italics mine). Mentioning nothing about her

physical body before giving the ring to Bassanio, Portia instead refers to her inward essence. She describes herself as “this same myself”; “the unlessoned girl”; the “gentle spirit” which “commits itself to yours to be directed / As from her lord, her governor, her king”; and the lady who knows herself to be “Such as I am” (3.2.170;159;163;164;150) And in giving Bassanio the ring and urging him to keep it lest “it presage the ruin of your love / And be my vantage to exclaim on you,” Portia imbues the ring with a sense of male honor as well. Bassanio’s word, fidelity, and his newly acquired wealth—everything that transforms him from poor suitor to “lord” of Portia’s estate—are guaranteed through his keeping of the ring (3.2.173-174). Just as the ring is tied to Portia’s holistic sense of herself, the ring reflects Bassanio’s gifting of his whole self to her. In pledging to Portia that “But when this ring / Parts from my finger, then parts life from hence, / O, then be bold to say Bassanio’s dead”, Bassanio reiterates that if the ring is lost, he is lost (3.2.183-185).

For Portia to choose a ring as a betrothal token seems to be par for the course. Dating back as far as ancient Rome, rings worn on the left hand were routine betrothal tokens (Bury *An Introduction to Rings* 15-16). But on the other hand, Portia’s choice of a ring to delineate her and Bassanio’s love makes sense given that Renaissance rings, in particular, could be extraordinarily personalized pieces of jewelry. Although we do not know what Portia’s ring looked like, the fact that she chose a token that could be highly personalized is fitting. When Portia gives Bassanio the ring, she takes pains to emphasize not only that individualized, inward sense of who she is but also her expectation of who Bassanio will be for her. Early modern rings were often highly detailed, highly whimsical, and distinctly mannerist in style: a jewel encrusted, book-shaped ring; a ring fashioned as a sundial; a band decorated with a languorous, reclining river

goddess.⁴⁰ The designs were anything but prosaic, and rings often revealed personal details about the wearer. One notable, enameled example from the mid-sixteenth century features a white stag with diminutive, golden antlers and a tiny red wound upon its flank, delicately chewing green, enameled dittany (Hackenbroch, plate ix). Given the rich associations that this image of a wounded deer nibbling on dittany would have aroused in sixteenth-century society, this ring might have suggested the wearer's strength in recovering from a broken heart, or even pious religious devotion.⁴¹ Incorporating layers of allusion, early modern rings reveal multiple aspects of the wearer's identity: religious affiliation (iconographical rings), family name (armorial rings and signet rings), relationship status (posy rings and betrothal rings), or even courtly/political aspirations (emblematic rings)—and many times some combination of all of the above. As art historian Yvonne Hackenbroch points out, even royal rings of the monarchy were not simply replete with national insignia but just as frequently displayed symbols addressing private aspects of the monarch's life. A ring dating from Mary Stuart's reign features a bezel with the initials HM alongside a true lover's knot, while the inside of the band is engraved with a crowned coat of arms, lion rampart, and the name, Henry L. Darnley, along with the date of the couple's marriage (Hackenbroch xi; 286). An apt example of how many different layers of public and private meaning could be merged into one piece, the ring calls as much attention to Mary's new marriage to Darnley as to her political identity as a Scottish queen.

⁴⁰ For examples of Renaissance rings and their extraordinarily detailed designs, see Hackenbroch, plates IX and XVI. Dame Joan Evans describes the mannerist style of Renaissance jewelry as a "phase of elaboration and virtuosity, of smaller scale, more violent movement, of ornate splendour rather than noble simplicity" (*A History of Jewellery 1100-1870* 111). For more information on early modern English rings, see Oman, Chapter 5 "Love Rings and Rings Given in Marriage", especially 37-44. Also see Bury *An Introduction to Rings*, especially the section entitled "Love and Marriage Rings"

⁴¹ See Barber 51-57. Barber's translation from the 13th century Latin original provides a richly reproduced glimpse of a medieval bestiary. According to Barber's translation, stags tended to nibble on dittany because the green plant's properties were able to "draw out" any hunters' arrows that might have wounded them (51). But as Barber goes on to note, deer were also known for their peripatetic nature, journeying from homeland to homeland, and because of this tendency, stags were seen as analogous to Christian pilgrims of the Church wandering in hopes of reaching the greenest pastures of heaven (51-52).

And so when Portia gives her ring-token to Bassanio, she gives him a piece of jewelry that in theory could be as individualized as the person wearing it. Relinquishing her old, male-scripted self-image symbolized through her miniature token, Portia uses her self-chosen ring token to commemorate a new self-image for both herself and Bassanio. The couple's old identities (bachelor and maiden) have merged into a new entity (betrothed couple) and will soon merge into yet another entity (that of married couple). Just as the lines between what is his and hers are dissolving—the lines between *who* he is and *who* she is deliberately blur through the ring token; as Portia tells Bassanio: “this same myself/ Are yours, my lord's” (3.2.170-171). Of course, what becomes problematic is that the token's bolstering of the bond between Portia and Bassanio (and the couple's inwardly experienced sense of themselves and their individual senses of honor) is contingent upon the ring's outward (bodily) position. If Bassanio is always wearing the token, all is protected and safe. If he is not, well . . . honor, love, identity, and the marital bond are seemingly up for grabs.

The ring and the letter: “I have engaged myself to a dear friend”

I want to suggest that the ring's function as a token ensuring sexual fidelity and representing both Portia's and Bassanio's sense of personal honor can only be understood through another token: Antonio's letter.⁴² A love token in its own right, Antonio's letter shares an intimate connection with Portia's ring token in three main ways.⁴³ First, the ring initially brokers the forthcoming marital bond between Portia and Bassanio, but the arrival of Antonio's

⁴² Letters in Shakespeare are notorious for causing confusion at best, and at worst, outright tragedy. For an overview of the multi-layered roles letters take in Shakespeare's plays, see Stewart. Stewart states that letters appear in every First Folio Shakespeare play except for five and conjectures that Shakespeare presented some 111 letters in total onstage (4).

⁴³ For a look at the way letters highlight issues of credit in *The Merchant of Venice*, see Stewart especially 163-192 of Chapter 4. In addressing Antonio's letter to Bassanio, Stewart emphasizes the letter's financial overtones, suggesting that the letter makes the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio analogous to the relationship between Shylock and Bassanio given that loans are present in both.

letter interrupts that imminent marital bond in a particularly pointed manner. Secondly, just as the ring is intimately associated with both Portia's and Bassanio's body (worn on Bassanio's finger, representative of Portia's chastity, and given as a sign of marital, sexual union between Portia and Bassanio), the letter is intimately linked not only with Antonio's body but Bassanio's body too. Thus, as the ring figuratively yokes Portia and Bassanio together through its bodily symbolism as a worn token, the letter (rich in body references) figuratively yokes Bassanio and Antonio. And thirdly just as the ring elicits a strong response from Bassanio and Portia on the role of personal honor, so does the letter. Antonio's letter not only causes Bassanio to directly underscore the extent of Antonio's unimpeachable honor, but the letter also puts the spotlight on Bassanio's own honor-bound obligation to come through for his friend.

Viewing the letter as a love token representing the strong male-male bond between Antonio and Bassanio places Portia's ring in more accurate focus. First, the letter's entrance comes at a crucial juncture. Portia and Bassanio are celebrating their upcoming nuptials and the engagement of Nerissa to Graziano when Antonio's letter arrives. By virtue of appearing on stage mere minutes after Bassanio has dramatically placed Portia's ring on his finger, the letter threatens to displace the ring. And indeed once the contents of the letter are read, we see the emerging conflict between the ring's bond (between Portia and Bassanio) and the letter's professed bond (between Antonio and Bassanio). When Bassanio first reports the letter's troubling contents, Portia suggests money as a solution, but immediately follows her offer with the urgent request that she and Bassanio marry *before* Antonio's requests in the letter are met:

First go with me to church and call me wife,
And then away to Venice to your friend;
For never shall you lie by Portia's side
With an unquiet soul. You shall have gold
To pay the petty debt twenty times over.
When it is paid, bring your true friend along,

...
... Come, away,
For you shall hence upon your wedding day.
Bid your friends welcome; show a merry cheer. (3.2.302-307, 309-311)

Portia initially privileges her ring token and the bond it suggests (marriage) over the letter token and the bond it suggests (friendship). Bassanio is free to go to his friend with her blessing and her money after they are married. The ring trumps the letter but only momentarily. When Portia asks Bassanio to actually read the letter aloud, it becomes apparent that the epistle is a love message, reiterating the deep bond between Bassanio and Antonio: “and since in paying it, it is impossible I should live, all debts are cleared between you and I if I might see you at my death. Notwithstanding, use your pleasure. If your love do not persuade you to come, let not my letter” (3.2.316-319). Given the letter’s poignancy, Portia puts off her desires, allowing her ring to be displaced (at least temporarily) by Antonio’s letter: “O, love! Dispatch all business, and be gone” (3.2.320).

Just as Portia’s ring has obvious bodily overtones, so does the letter. Bassanio introduces the letter as a series of open wounds: “Here is a letter, lady, / The paper as the body of my friend, / And every word in it a gaping wound” (3.2.262-264). A symbolic stand-in for Antonio’s physical body, the undercurrents of Antonio’s letter-token echo his pound of flesh deal with Shylock. On the cusp of having to sacrifice his body for Bassanio, Antonio’s token threatens to become a tragically self-fulfilling prophecy; through the wounded, paper “body” of his letter, Antonio warns that his fleshly body is to be wounded fatally. The bodily images connected with the letter do not stop there. Just as Portia’s ring evokes both Bassanio’s body (he is never to take it off) and her own body (she threatens to be with other men once she discovers he has given the ring away), if we look closely at Bassanio’s reaction to Antonio’s letter, we see how liberally Bassanio refers to his own body as he processes the gravity of his friend’s message. By way of

explaining Antonio's letter and thus the loan he requested from him, Bassanio tells Portia that his moneyless status an engrained, physical part of him: "When I did first impart my love to you. / I freely told you all the wealth I had / Ran in my veins" (3.2.252-254). This figure of speech connects Bassanio to Antonio since just a few lines later, he delineates Antonio's written message as penned words on paper "issuing lifeblood." Bassanio continues to describe his loan with Antonio in bodily terms, delineating his need for the money as akin to feeding a deep hunger: "I have engaged myself to a dear friend/ Engaged my friend to his mere enemy, / To feed my means" (3.2.261-262).⁴⁴ Shakespeare's decision to define Portia's ring through her and Bassanio's bodies and Antonio's letter through Antonio's and Bassanio's respective bodies generates tension between the respective relational bonds of two different "couples." Bassanio's and Antonio's friendship is placed in direct competition with Bassanio's and Portia's love.

In addition to its strategic entry point in the play and the strong bodily associations of the letter, the third way Antonio's letter recalls Portia's ring token is through its emphasis on male honor. Upon receiving Antonio's letter, Bassanio reaffirms the seriousness of his bond to Antonio, revealing to Portia that he is not just bound to her but has also committed himself (in a manner of speaking) to another man: "I have engaged myself to a dear friend," (3.2.260). Although engaged obviously means "pledged" in this context, the word also recalls the recent engagement of Bassanio and Portia; even more importantly, it evokes Bassanio's own honor to do good by his friend who has given so much on his behalf. Bassanio tells Portia that when he confessed that he was poor in material goods but rich in character, he was speaking the truth as a gentleman: "When I did first impart my love to you, / I freely told you all the wealth I had / Ran in my veins: I was a gentleman; / And then I told you true." (3.2.252-255). Yet, as he goes on to

⁴⁴ Tennenhouse also makes an interesting parallel between Antonio's letter and Shylock, suggesting that the "wounded" letter Bassanio receives makes it seem as if Shylock is already feasting upon Antonio even though the pound of flesh deal has not yet been made reality (60).

explain, Antonio's current predicament has put Bassanio's former truthfulness and his honor in jeopardy. With Antonio about to offer up his life to compensate for his friend's need of quick cash, Bassanio's former forthrightness means little to nothing. As he admits to Portia, he has been made less of an honorable man by Antonio's honor-bound sacrifice:

and yet dear lady,
Rating myself at nothing, you shall see
How much I was a braggart. When I told you
My state was nothing, I should then have told you
That I was worse than nothing, for indeed
I have engaged myself to a dear friend,
Engaged my friend to his mere enemy,
To feed my means. (3.2.255-262)

Downplaying his own honor, Bassanio places Antonio's reputation upon a pedestal.

When Portia asks if it is Antonio who sent the letter: "Is it your dear friend that is thus in trouble?" Bassanio confirms by underscoring Antonio's unimpeachable honor:

The dearest friend to me, the kindest man,
The best conditioned and unwearied spirit
In doing courtesies, and one in whom
The ancient Roman honour more appears
Than any that draws breath in Italy. (3.2.291-295)

This idea of male honor as a richly traditional, inherently noble character trait—as much about internal qualities as externalities such as wealth, title, and family lineage—is driven home when Bassanio links Antonio to the great ancients who came before. As a merchant, Antonio embodies the current growth, capitalism, and burgeoning commercialism on the rise in Shakespeare's London. And as Leonard Tennenhouse suggests, Antonio can also be seen as "an idealized version of the Renaissance patron": well-off, successful, and generous almost to a fault (61). Yet by defining his friend's character as that "ancient Roman honor," Bassanio further

elevates Antonio by trumpeting his inward nobility. Antonio becomes the ultimate Renaissance man whose financial success is counterbalanced by his ability to exhibit classical virtues.

And so Antonio's letter and Portia's ring parallel each other in striking ways. Both tokens demonstrate Portia's and Antonio's devotion to Bassanio; both tokens call attention to the body and to personal honor. And perhaps most importantly, both tokens attempt to broker bonds that are becoming increasingly tenuous as the play progresses. When Portia replaces her portrait miniature token with the self-chosen ring token, she demonstrates how she is moving beyond old bonds that once defined her. Her daughterly bond to her father, her patriarchal bond to his written will, and even her tenuous bond to her suitors as a courted lady are all exchanged for an imminent marital bond with Bassanio, brokered through the ring token. Yet if we look closely at the ring and the letter, both tokens (at least midway through the play in Act III) are becoming almost as problematic as Portia's miniature. The ring's attempts to formalize a marital bond have been stalled by the receipt of the letter. And the letter evokes the painful reality of a male-male friendship bond strained by Shylock's pound of flesh deal.

“Your own honour to contain the ring”: a final rewriting of the ring

The ring's somewhat shaky footing—made even more so when Bassanio actually gives the token away in Act IV—lays the groundwork for Portia's and Bassanio's verbal acrobatics in Act V. In Act V, Portia must redeem her ring token and the love bond it brokers with Bassanio, but she must do so by relegating Antonio's and Bassanio's friendship bond to a clearly subordinate position. Fittingly, she uses the same man (Antonio) and the same tokens (the ring and a letter) that initially disrupted her love bond to reestablish it.

When the ring re-emerges in Act V after being “given away,” Portia re-scripts it by taking those previously referenced categories of body and honor to exaggerated heights. What most bothers Portia about Bassanio’s relinquishing of the ring is not so much his light regard for her token or perhaps even the thought of physical infidelity but that he tarnishes his honor by going back on his word. And in doing so, he tarnishes her honor by default. In order to better understand this, it is essential to see how Portia’s and Bassanio’s dialogue in Act V link the outward (the body and sexual faithfulness) to the inward (integrity and personal honor) through their respective references to the ring.

The ring first enters conversation in Act V when Portia takes Graziano to task for giving away Nerissa’s posy ring gift:

You were to blame, I must be plain with you,
To part so slightly with your wife’s first gift,
A thing stuck on with oaths upon your finger,
And so riveted with faith unto your flesh.
I gave my love a ring, and made him swear
Never to part with it; and here he stands.
I dare be sworn for him he would not leave it,
Nor pluck it from his finger for the wealth
That the world masters. (5.1.165-173)

What is telling here is the degree to which Portia links parts of Graziano’s body to his spoken word: “A thing stuck on with *oaths* upon your *finger*, / And so *riveted with faith* unto your *flesh*.” Graziano’s spoken promises have figuratively fused the ring to his finger; his physical body and his verbal word are irrevocably intertwined. According to Portia, the integrity Graziano displays through his word is as much a viable part of his person as his hand is.

Portia further underscores the importance of male honor when she switches her attention from Graziano to Bassanio:

I gave my love a ring and made him swear
Never to part with it; and here he stands.

I dare be sworn for him he would not leave it,
Nor pluck it from his finger for the wealth
That the world masters. (5.1.169-173)

Subtly but quite deliberately, I think, Portia links Bassanio's pledge "I gave my love a ring and *made him swear*" to her own promised word "*I dare be sworn for him* he would not leave it." In such a way, Portia links Bassanio's honor and the integrity of his spoken word to her honor by offering her own spoken pledge—daring to "be sworn for him"—as a symmetrical counterpoint to Bassanio's promise that he would never give her ring away.

Of course what adds more complexity to the situation is that Antonio convinces Bassanio to part with the ring in Act IV by also citing honor, mentioning the "deservings" of the doctor and the sterling quality of his own love for Bassanio as reasons enough: "My lord Bassanio, let him have the ring, / Let his deservings and my love withal / Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandement" (4.1.445-447). Antonio elevates the inward virtues of himself "my love withal" and the virtues of the cross-dressed Portia posing as the doctor ("his deservings") above Portia's worth and her spoken covenant with Bassanio ("your wife's commandement"). And when Bassanio finally admits to Portia that he did indeed give away the ring, he too brings honor into the equation. Linking the ring to both his body and honor, he admits that it would have been better to have lost the ring in a vigorous fight defending the token than to have ever given it away: "Why, I were best to cut my left hand off, / And swear I lost the ring defending it / . . . / . . . but you see my finger / Hath not the ring upon it. It is gone" (5.1.176-177;186-187). What is striking about these cross-comparisons between Portia's, Antonio's and Bassanio's respective speeches is that all three characters link the ring's physical position on the hand to the inward, immaterial virtue of honor.

Honor is tossed about in conversation in an even more pointed manner when Bassanio and Portia argue back and forth about Bassanio's decision to relinquish the ring. Attempting to defend himself, Bassanio emphasizes the worthiness of both the "doctor" ("to whom I gave the ring") and Antonio ("for whom I gave the ring") as valid reasons for breaking his oath. Instead of admitting that his *lack* of honor was the reason he gave the ring away, Bassanio suggests that his abundance of honor is the reason he parted ways with the ring:

Sweet Portia,
If you did know to whom I gave the ring,
If you did know for whom I gave the ring,
And would conceive for what I gave the ring,
And how unwillingly I left the ring
When naught would be accepted but the ring,
You would abate the strength of your displeasure. (5.1.192-197)

But Portia rightfully reminds Bassanio that while he might have been graciously honoring Antonio and the doctor with his decision, the worth of the ring and Portia's own worthiness and honor (as well as Bassanio's honor) were all ignored when he gave away her love token:

If you had known the virtue of the ring,
Or half her worthiness that gave the ring,
Or your own honour to contain the ring,
You would not then have parted with the ring.
What man is there so much unreasonable,
If you had pleased to have defended it
With any terms of zeal, wanted the modesty
To urge the thing held as ceremony? (5.1.198-205)

Discrediting Bassanio's objections (if you knew "to whom", "for whom", "for what" I gave the ring), with a parallel rebuttal (if you had known "the virtue of the ring", "her worthiness that gave the ring", "your own honour to contain the ring"), Portia bests Bassanio's language with her own words. With honor as central a tenet of masculine identity as chastity is a tenet of feminine identity, Portia's repeated references to Bassanio's "own honour to contain the ring" intonates that his failure to hold onto the ring is an emasculating failure of who he should be as a man. As

she reminds him, even other men (like the “doctor”) would have been aware of the importance of keeping one’s word as part of the cultural code of a gentleman. Bassanio’s “defense” of the ring would have not only earned him esteem in her eyes, but in other men’s estimations as well:

“What man is there so much unreasonable, / If you had pleased to have defended it / With any terms of zeal, wanted the modesty /To urge the thing held as ceremony?” (5.1.202-205).

After his beloved has questioned him so sharply, Bassanio defensively tries to rebuild his sense of self, repeating the word ‘honor’ twice and remaking his choice to give away the ring into an admirable action bordering on the chivalrous:

No, by my honour madam, by my soul,
No woman had it, but a civil doctor,
Which did refuse three thousand ducats of me,
And begged the ring, the which I did deny him,
And suffered him to go displeased away,
Even he that had held up the very life
Of my dear friend. What should I say, sweet lady?
I was enforced to send it after him.
I was beset with shame and courtesy,
My honour would not let ingratitude
So much besmear it. (5.1.208-218)

Bassanio’s emphasis on his emotions (a mixture of shame and courtesy) as prompting him to give away the ring so as not to let ingratitude to the doctor “besmear” his honor underscores how essential honor has become to his conception of himself. Portia though resists letting him off too easily by bringing up her chastity. As Bassanio tries to bolster his own sense of gentlemanly honor, Portia responds by doing just the opposite; she threatens to dismantle her own chaste and honorable reputation:

Since he hath got the jewel that I loved,
And that which you did swear to keep for me,
I will become as liberal as you.
I’ll not deny him anything I have,
No, not my body nor my husband’s bed.

.....

Now by mine honour, which is yet mine own,
I'll have that doctor for mine bedfellow. (5.1.223-227; 231-232)

Reiterating that “mine honour” is “yet mine own,” Portia underscores her agency by threatening to use her honor in any way she chooses, including discarding it for a romp in the bedroom with the “doctor.”⁴⁵

This drawn-out exchange between Portia and Bassanio demonstrates how they construe their personal sense of honor through each other. Bassanio pledges to be an “honorable” husband by containing his ring by always wearing it upon his hand, just as he contains his wife’s desires by loving only her. But Portia is keen to show Bassanio that honor is not merely exteriorized sexual honor but also that interiorized virtue of integrity. As Portia is well aware, if she chooses to throw her honor out the window and behave unchastely, her husband’s honor is lost; he has gone from gentleman to cuckold in one flip of the bed sheets. And the ring is not merely an objective object in this larger discussion on honor. Portia imbues it with moral value, reprimanding Bassanio for not fully understanding “the virtue of the ring.” In such a way, the token becomes much more than an innuendo-laden symbol for sexual looseness. Instead, through Portia’s and Bassanio’s words, the ring emerges as a highly personal representation of the deep, inward self and all that it contains.

Eager to re-establish himself and his integrity, Bassanio overwrites his old broken oath (to always keep the *ring*) with a new promise to always keep his *word* to Portia:

Portia, forgive me this enforcèd wrong,
And in the hearing of these many friends
I swear to thee, even by thine own fair eyes
Wherein I see myself—
.....
Pardon this fault, and by my soul I swear

⁴⁵ It is interesting to note Portia’s deft agency in handling her body any way she sees fit in Act V. As Lawrence Normand points out, in Act I, II and some of Act III, Portia’s body and her bodily desires are the very things she can’t act upon or have any jurisdiction over given the dictates of her father’s will (56).

I never more will break an oath with thee. (5.1.239-242; 246-247)

Bassanio admits that Portia's perception of him is unparalleled. She sees him better than he sees himself: "even by thine own fair eyes/ Wherein I see myself." And so to fully reassert the honor of his word to Portia, Bassanio pledges the most inward part of himself, his soul: "and by my soul I swear / I never more will break an oath with thee." Not quite ready to relinquish Bassanio's past misstep, Portia reminds him that his duplicity is still fresh in her mind. Therefore, if he is going to re-pledge himself based upon how she sees him, he needs to do it accurately: "Swear by your *double* self, And there's an oath of credit" (5.5.243-44 italics mine).

This need for Bassanio to redeem his broken pledge to Portia only intensifies when Antonio enters the negotiations. Antonio's written token (his letter in Act III) and his spoken words to Bassanio in Act IV temporarily overrode Portia's ring token, re-constructing a love-triangle of loyalties. Although the ring had simply been given to a cross-dressed Portia; symbolically and verbally, the ring's bond had been stretched to include Antonio. Since Antonio urged Bassanio to give away the ring, Antonio must re-pledge Bassanio to the ring and actively re-establish the bond between Portia and Bassanio. When Antonio offers his apologies to Portia, like Bassanio, he promises upon his own soul, again evoking the importance of the inward self in earning Portia's trust: "I dare be bound again / My soul upon the forfeit, that your lord / Will never more break faith advisedly" (5.1.250-252). Portia tangibly solidifies Antonio's request through the ring token, basically having Antonio undo his previous misstep through a subsequent action that is the reverse: "Then you shall be his surety. Give him this, / And bid him keep it better than the other" (5.1.253-254). The ring now holds not just Bassanio but both men accountable to upholding Portia's and Bassanio's marital bond.

Portia's words and her highly symbolic re-gifting of the ring posit her as the ultimate arbiter of her token. She determines the ring's fresh symbolism as a sign of Bassanio's renewed honor as a husband of his word, and she dictates that the ring will now be given with Antonio as the surety. In doing so, Portia introduces a final token, a letter of good news:

Here is a letter. Read it at your leisure
It comes from Padua, from Bellario.
There you shall find that Portia was the doctor,
Nerissa there her clerk . . .
.....
And I have better news in store for you
Than you expect. Unseal this letter soon.
There you shall find three of your argosies
Are richly come to harbor suddenly.
You shall not know by what strange accident
I chanced on this letter. (5.1.265-269;273-278)

It is no coincidence that Portia gives Antonio a letter to close the play; in many ways, it marks how her control of tokens has come full circle. In Act III, Antonio's letter convinced Bassanio to put Portia on hold and go to his assistance. Thus, Antonio's letter was also indirectly responsible for Bassanio's decision to break oath with Portia by giving away the ring. Now after Portia instructs Antonio to return her ring to Bassanio, she completes the cycle by gifting a letter to Antonio. And again, just as Antonio's symbolic gesture of giving the ring back to Bassanio acted as a perfect antithetical counterpart to his earlier gesture of urging his friend to give the ring away, the contents of the letter Portia presents to Antonio are the antithesis of the letter Antonio sent Bassanio in Act III. A fortuitous revision of luck transpires (Tennenhouse 65).⁴⁶ Three of Antonio's ships have made harbor, goods and wealth intact. Thus Portia simultaneously restores Antonio to his rightful position as a wealthy merchant through a letter token and Bassanio to his rightful position as devoted man of his word through the ring token.

⁴⁶ Tennenhouse observes that by giving Antonio the letter in Act V, Portia is not merely the bearer of good news but becomes the source of good fortune, restoring Antonio's loss of wealth (65).

With their multiple layers of meaning, love tokens can be notoriously hard to pin down, and their small, transportable size means they are physically slippery as well. Capable of being rewritten, lost, given away, or outright jettisoned, tokens frequently seem incapable of firmly cementing something like a love bond—which depends upon a certain immutability—at least ideally. In *The Merchant of Venice*, where bonds are often strained and challenged, the inclusion so many tokens and pieces of jewelry as the sureties under-girding the play's bonds only exacerbate these tensions, which is precisely why there are so many dramatic reconstitutions of tokens in this play. Portia's ability to at least partially rewrite her miniature jewel, the ring she gives Bassanio, and even Antonio's letter to Bassanio is essential if she is to redeem the relational bonds that have been so greatly complicated by the little tokens in the first place.

Although uncomfortable tensions certainly remain at play's end (the questionable justice of Shylock's sentence, Antonio's solitary status, the still lingering threat of infidelity), the ring token, perhaps more than any other material object, sounds an optimistic note for Portia and Bassanio. The couple's relationship may have been born out of an economically driven casket test courtship, brokered by an ornate miniature token, and complicated by Antonio's letter token. But for all of its materiality as a highly tangible piece of jewelry worn upon the hand, Portia's ring is able to sustain itself and her love bond with Bassanio because of the *immateriality* of what it ultimately symbolizes once Portia re-inscribes the love token to fit her ideals. By remaking her ring into a viable symbol for the inwardly held quality of personal honor, Portia is able to elevate her token into a higher sort of love gift that recalls what she most wants Bassanio to be: a gentleman of inward integrity. In doing so, Portia redefines both her love bond with Bassanio and Bassanio's and Antonio's friendship in terms that are not overtly monetary. And so we leave

The Merchant of Venice with a ring token and a love bond that have the potential to move beyond the trappings of economic transaction in a play notorious for its relentless materiality.

CHAPTER 3

A Diamond-bound wager, “a manacle of love,” and the “stain upon her”: Privacy and Honor Lost through Intimate Tokens in *Cymbeline*

In this chapter, I turn my attention once again to Shakespeare, addressing three central love tokens in *Cymbeline*. The costly diamond ring Innogen gives Posthumus, the sentimental bracelet Posthumus gives his wife, and Innogen’s mole (a bodily stamp that I argue decorates her body like an accessory, thus acting as the third “token” in my analysis) are my three main objects of focus.¹ Even more so than in *The Merchant of Venice*, tokens in *Cymbeline* are intimately aligned with the issue of honor, in particular Innogen’s chastity, which emerges as the preeminent point of concern in the play. More specifically, the ease with which Innogen’s personal honor and privacy are dismantled by Giacomo’s narratives is both facilitated and highly complicated through these three tokens.

Posthumus’ diamond ring wager with Giacomo puts his wife’s honor on the line as the two men form an uneasy bond that hinges upon the diamond ring token and Innogen’s body. As the play progresses and Giacomo gains access to Innogen’s bedchamber, her bracelet and her mole join the ring as increasingly powerful symbols of chastity lost: Giacomo’s voyeuristic gaze, his artful ability to construct plausible visual proof of infidelity, and his aptitude for wild story-

¹ For matters of space (and given my emphasis on more definitive love token objects) I had to be selective with my choices. There are, of course, other material objects of interest in the play beyond the ones I cover, but overall they do not function as love tokens. For example, letters loom large in *Cymbeline*, but they tend to function more as misleading messages (or death warrants in disguise). I briefly touch on the letters from Posthumus that Innogen discards, but for some additional observations on letters in *Cymbeline* and other Shakespeare plays, see Stewart. Textiles also appear frequently including: clothing sets (Innogen’s Fidele disguise and Posthumus’ clothes that Cloten wears when heading for Milford Haven), the cloth that Pisanio sends to trick Posthumus into thinking Innogen has been killed as he ordered, and Posthumus’ handkerchief, which he waves when he departs from Britain. The clothing sets and the cloth don’t function as love tokens, and although the handkerchief precipitates Innogen’s longing when she hears Posthumus kissed it as he sailed away, its appearance in the play is very brief.

telling utterly reshape the significance of all three tokens. Instead of the bracelet representing Posthumus' love for Innogen and her loyalty to him only (as was intended when the trinket was first given), the stolen bauble becomes a false sign of Innogen's sexual looseness (i.e. her tendency to "publicly" share her body and give her tokens to other men). Similarly, the diamond ring, which initially demonstrates Innogen's devotion to Posthumus, her honor as a chaste wife, and Posthumus' honor-bound pledge to always wear the token upon his hand, becomes a cheapened jewel that turns Innogen's chastity into the object of public barter between two men.² Even Innogen's sleeping body is publicized and used against her. Giacomo refigures Innogen's mole, which represents not only her feminine beauty in microcosm but also the protected privacy of that beauty, into a mark of her supposed harlotry.

Tokens go rogue in *Cymbeline*. Giacomo's manipulative narratives pervert their intended function as intimate love gifts and dismantle the sense of self and honor of the characters who originally exchanged them. Innogen finds her privacy, chastity, and reputation viciously violated and maligned by Giacomo (and her own husband), and Posthumus, whose entire sense of self pivots upon his wife's purity, is undone when her character is questioned. In addressing exactly how the ring, bracelet, and mole go rogue, it is imperative to understand how *Cymbeline* assesses the relationship between privacy and art (particularly visual art), as the rather entangled interlacing of the two frames my reading of this play.

Shakespeare's emphasis on tokens' mobility, in particular, (apparent in the ease with which Giacomo convinces Posthumus to bet the ring and is able to slip Innogen's bracelet off her

² See Rubin. Rubin admits that although gift exchanges do not always result in the objectification of women, the power dynamic sways in favor of the men brokering the transaction (174). Also see Diana O'Hara's article. O'Hara explains that although token exchanges were certainly initiated by both women and men, it was customary for men to be the primary givers; as such, early modern courtships, betrothals, and marriages were marked with the understanding that giving was "predominately a male ritual" (O'Hara "The Language of Tokens" 11). As I discuss in my reading of the diamond ring barter between Posthumus and Giacomo, the token exchange between the men not only solidifies Innogen's chastity as the ultimate prize but also highlights how tightly Posthumus' own honor is tied to his wife's.

wrist) underscores the larger, contemporary recognition of the desirability of private domestic space in the late sixteenth century.³ Love tokens generally tend to be tiny, which makes them transportable. They can be moved from person to person and from space to space. And in *Cymbeline*, Giacomo's intrusion upon that most private and domestic of spaces, Innogen's bedchamber, facilitates his publication of the couple's tokens. From the fireplace andirons and the book Innogen is reading before falling asleep, to the tapestries lining her walls and the plaster design above her fireplace, we get a plethora of vivid details from Giacomo about the furnishings of an innately private (and highly feminine) space. Giacomo's voyeurism and his invasion of Innogen's private bedchamber have been addressed by other critics.⁴ But what has not received enough attention is how situating not just Innogen, but some of the most personal, diminutive objects that belong to her (like her bracelet token and her mole), within as intimate a room as the bedchamber deeply complicates the ostensible privacy of these tiny tokens, which in turn leads to the intrusive "publication" of the lady herself. As Giacomo's story-telling transforms Innogen's boudoir into a virtual bordello, with her belongings and tokens translated into public signs of betrayal, both Posthumus and Innogen find their most inward sense of private self quickly compromised. Loss of privacy for Innogen becomes synonymous with loss of honor.

In *Cymbeline*, this notion of privacy is closely related to the rich world of visual art. The play is replete with layers of visual art, decorative art, and even literary art. In Innogen's

³ For a more general overview of the emerging importance of privacy that began to take root in early modern Europe around 1500, see the Introduction to Volume III of *A History of Private Life*. For insights into how the increased need for privacy can be seen through early modern architectural design and the importance of alcoves, studies, and bedchambers see Ranum, especially 217-229. Also see Ziegler, especially 73-74. See Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, for information on the layout of estate houses in early modern England.

⁴ See Frye for insight into how some of the decorative objects in Innogen's room, particularly textiles, represent Innogen's body as something that can be appropriated by men. Frye also connects Innogen's chastity to the chastity of the literary figures depicted in Innogen's book, chimney carvings and wall tapestry. Also see Simonds, especially 119-126 of Chapter 3, "The Iconography of Innogen's Bedchamber." For information on how Giacomo's descriptions of the tapestries and of Innogen function as ekphrasis, see Olson 45-64. For an overview of the voyeurism apparent in the bedchamber scene and its effect on the construction of Innogen, see Gajowski, 95-97 and also Ziegler, especially 81-83.

bedroom, we have mention of various household items (white sheets, bedside candle, bed), nighttime reading material, and actual artwork (tapestries cloaking the walls, carved details above the fireplace, more carved art upon the ceiling, sculpted fireplace andirons). Art's role in *Cymbeline* has been explored extensively with the arras adorning Innogen's bedchamber walls attracting the lion's share of attention.⁵ And as other critics have noted, *Cymbeline* plays upon the reality of what is actually perceived, delighting in the slips and slides of observation, misperception, disguises, and mistaken identities.⁶ But what has been somewhat overlooked is the uneasy intertwining of visual art and issues of privacy in the play. Privacy and art are not only diametrically opposed in many ways in *Cymbeline* but are also deeply intertwined.

Art in its essence is show. It must be externalized (publicized, if you will) to its audience in order to be expressed and received. When the love tokens in *Cymbeline* are reconstructed as art—open to interpretation, viewed by a greater audience, highly visual and highly consumable—their intimate status becomes threatened. At the play's beginning, the ring, bracelet, and mole hold private significances known only to Posthumus and Innogen. But once they are gazed upon and glossed by Giacomo's verbal artistry, the ring, bracelet, and mole become public art-pieces, the star features in an open exhibit staged to deceive Posthumus.

Manipulating the material objects in Innogen's bedchamber: her artwork, personal belongings, and especially her tokens into increasingly public entities also allows Giacomo to violate Innogen's most private space (her bedchamber) and her sexual honor, thus placing the entire lady on display. Just as he reconstitutes tiny tokens like Innogen's bracelet and mole into diminutive art-pieces, he so conflates Innogen's beauty with her bracelet, mole, or one of the

⁵ See Frye 215-250 and Olson 45-64. See Standen 129-133 for an interesting look at the distinctions between early modern arras and tapestries.

⁶ For other critical takes on various kinds of misperception in *Cymbeline* and the argument that the play hinges more on different types of seeing (rather than mere misperception), see Lewis. For insights into how disguise is a crucial complicating factor in the play, see Hayes 231-247; also see Thomas 137-145.

many decorative pieces in her bedchamber that the lady's very body metamorphoses into an art-piece of sorts. Giacomo's gaze is sexually passive but creatively active. As Evelyn Gajowski notes, it is Petrarchan in some ways.⁷ Of course, Giacomo's gaze obviously has a nefarious twist. For the love tokens in the play, their association with art accelerates their transformation from private pieces to public entities. Moreover, as the couple's tokens move out of the private realm of domestic love gifts and into the public realm of malleable, publically negotiable art-pieces, they become capable not only of representing Innogen and Posthumus but of *mis*representing them. In particular, Innogen is turned into a "public" woman as Giacomo appropriates the descriptive details of her bedchamber, body, and tokens to paint a portrait of a wife made strumpet.

A "basilisk unto mine eye": publicly trading the ring for the wife

Posthumus' diamond ring quickly becomes a male-scripted token. Appropriated by Giacomo, it evolves into the central pawn brokering Innogen's body in the resulting bet between the two men. To understand how the diamond loses its original, intended meaning as a love token, we must address those original layers of significance the token possesses in its introduction in the play, when Innogen is the one actually scripting the gift. The ring had belonged to Innogen's mother, and in giving Posthumus this piece of jewelry, Innogen underscores its sentimental value as not only a marriage token but as a family jewel: "This diamond was my mother's. Take it heart: / But keep it till you woo another wife / When Innogen

⁷ See Gajowski, especially 95-97. Gajowski claims that Giacomo's voyeurism in the bedchamber is about power: "The bedchamber scene dramatizes the power dynamics of the Petrarchan discursive tradition regarding the status of women under patriarchy" (97). Although certainly Innogen's privacy is being violated (along with her body metaphorically), I suggest that the most striking Petrarchan echoes in the bedchamber scene have less to do with power and more to do with art: the deliberate aestheticizing of Innogen into an artifice-laden ideal that conflates her with the various decorative objects adorning her room.

is dead” (1.1.112-114). The ring denotes Innogen’s economic status as the daughter of royalty even as it conveys her resistance against such patriarchal authority. In marrying Posthumus, whose lower social status makes him an unfit match for the king’s daughter, Innogen breaks ties to her father on both a filial and political level. When Cymbeline scolds her for the marriage, he berates her not only for her daughterly disloyalty: “O disloyal thing, / That shouldst repair my youth, thou heap’st/ A year’s age on me” but also for marrying someone so beneath her that she risks making a mockery of Cymbeline’s crown: “Thou took’st a beggar, wouldst have made my throne / A seat for baseness” (1.1.133-134;141). Moreover, in selecting her birth mother’s ring as her marital token of choice, Innogen distances herself from her scheming stepmother and signifies her own personal shift in loyalty from a maiden (under the care of her father) to a wife (bonded to her husband). Indeed, as Innogen reiterates when she gives the ring to Posthumus, the token is to stay on his hand as a reminder not only of their love but of *her* identity as his beloved, an identity that only death can shake: “But keep it till you woo another wife / When *Innogen* is dead” (1.1.113-114, italics mine).

Not only does the ring embody Innogen’s family lineage and her own sense of self, but it also, interestingly enough, connotes cultural views that would have been familiar to a contemporary early modern audience. Innogen gives Posthumus a diamond instead of a plain gold band. This is not an especially unusual choice. As art historian Shirley Bury notes, Renaissance nobility put a premium on diamonds as the finest means of memorializing a marriage; if a diamond could be afforded, it was used (*An Introduction to Rings* 16-17).⁸ But despite a diamond betrothal or wedding ring being a status symbol of wealth and rank, there were also some superstitions surrounding gemstone betrothal rings. Setting a diamond (or any

⁸ Shirley Bury notes that although Mary Tudor chose a plain gold band for her wedding to King Philip II, it was a choice made in the name of romantic quaintness, a selection hearkening back to pre-Reformation customs (16). Others of Mary’s station would have deemed a diamond the preferred piece of marital jewelry.

stone) onto a ring breaks the circular continuity of the ring's band. As historian Charles Oman notes, the way the gemstone abruptly breaks the infinite circularity of such rings was seen by some as potentially ominous, forecasting a similar breaking off of the engagement or marriage (38).⁹ Thus *Cymbeline* opens with a marital pledge between Innogen and Posthumus brokered by a somewhat contentious piece of jewelry that is both a family heirloom and a questionable omen that also suggests a contrast between Innogen's wealth and Posthumus' poverty. This disparity between Innogen's social station and Posthumus' is not an unimportant distinction; as Evelyn Gajowski has noted, Posthumus' seemingly unlimited capacity for gullibility could also be attributed to his insecurities over his lack of wealth and his wife's loftier rank (93-94).

The diamond ring enters the play as a token tied to Innogen's identity, but the only time Innogen has any part in constructing her ring's meaning is when she first gives the diamond to Posthumus. Upon receiving the ring, Posthumus calls attention to its value, comparing it with the modest bracelet he gives Innogen and thus hinting how he is beneath his wife in social status. From this point onwards, the diamond is "spoken" either by Posthumus or Giacomo. Consequently, it loses its original demarcation as a love gift, which reflected not only Innogen's and Posthumus' marital bond but also Innogen's identity as a wife, princess, and daughter. Once the ring enters the wager between Posthumus and Giacomo, it is tied not so much to Innogen as to her body, becoming an increasingly problematic sign of her chastity and a fraught reminder of how intimately Posthumus' own self-worth pivots upon his wife's sexual honor. As the ring becomes an increasingly public object, referenced and punned upon in the men's debate with

⁹ In explaining the peculiar belief that gemstone rings might be unlucky, Oman cites Thomas Fuller's *The Holy State, the Profane State*, a 1642 collection of colorful anecdotes, moral tips, and character sketches (38;284). Oman quotes Fuller as explaining that: "Some hold it unhappy to be married with a diamond ring; perchance (if there be much reason in their folly), because the diamond hinders the roundness of the ring, ending the infiniteness thereof, and seems to presage some termination in their love, which ought ever to endure" (284).

each other, Innogen's chastity becomes a "publicly" bartered prize, metaphorically marketed by her husband through the very heirloom ring token she gave him.¹⁰

Innogen's troubling conflation with the ring token is manifest throughout the two men's verbal sparring, which refigures her as a woman who can either solidify or undo Posthumus' precarious sense of self:

POSTHUMUS. I praised her as I rated her; so do I my stone.

GIACOMO. What do you esteem *it* at?

POSTHUMUS. More than the world enjoys.

GIACOMO. Either your unparagoned mistress is dead, or she's outprized by a trifle.

POSTHUMUS. You are mistaken. The one may be sold or given, or if there were wealth enough for the purchase or merit for the gift. The other is not a thing for sale, and only the gift of the gods. (1.4.66-74 italics mine)

Taking Posthumus to task for engaging in the same verbal slipperiness he is so adept in, Giacomo suggests that Posthumus has lost sight of his wife in the midst of the wager: "Either your unparagoned mistress is dead, or she's outprized by a trifle." Posthumus refuses to admit that he is already displacing his wife with his diamond: "The one may be sold or given . . . The other is not a thing for sale, and only the gift of the gods," but it becomes obvious that he has not only conflated Innogen with his ring token but has also made the preservation of *his* own honor contingent upon hers.

Quick to take advantage of how dependent Posthumus' identity is upon the sexual purity of his wife, Giacomo posits both the diamond ring and Innogen's body as would-be private entities gone troublingly public, suggesting that all women—even seemingly devoted wives—are susceptible to the advances of other men: "You may wear her in title yours; but, you know, strange fowl light upon neighbouring ponds. Your ring may be stolen too; . . . A cunning

¹⁰ In her treatment of the wager between Posthumus and Giacomo, Gajowski references Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's thesis of homosocial desire, suggesting that Posthumus' need to strike a deal with Giacomo points to Posthumus' own insecure need to bolster his station by partnering with a more powerful man and using Innogen's body as a conduit for this transaction (93).

thief or a that-way accomplished courtier would hazard the winning both of first and last” (1.4.77-82). Giacomo suggests that both the diamond ring that Innogen gives Posthumus and her body are susceptible to outside, public threats: a thief can pilfer a jewel as easily as a suave courtier can bed a wife. Posthumus’ rejoinder to Giacomo’s implications: “I fear not my ring” not only conflates Innogen with the diamond but more troublingly shows how fully Posthumus has begun to parrot Giacomo, reducing his wife to an object traded between men (1.4.86).

The bartering over the diamond ring and Innogen’s sexual chastity intensifies when a deal is struck between the two men, with Posthumus pledging the ring as surety: “I will wage against your gold, gold to it; my ring I hold dear as my finger, t’is part of it” (1.4.116-117). Posthumus’ decision to risk his ring-token via a bet is the figurative equivalent of extending his wife’s body to Giacomo: “I shall but lend my diamond till your return. Let there be covenants drawn between’s. My mistress exceeds in goodness the hugeness of your unworthy thinking. I dare you to this match. Here’s my ring” (1.4. 126-129). By putting an official price tag on Innogen of 10,000 ducats, Giacomo’s response to Posthumus’ wager only solidifies the commercial nature of the transaction and Innogen’s commodification:

If I bring you no sufficient testimony that I have enjoyed the dearest bodily part of your mistress, my ten thousand ducats are yours; so is your diamond too. If I come off and leave her in such honour as you have trust in, she your jewel, this your jewel, and my gold are yours . . . (1.4.131-135)

By inviting Giacomo to “test” his wife’s virtue and allowing money to pass hands as part of the deal, Posthumus cheapens Innogen’s honor. But when he puts Innogen’s ring gift on the line, Posthumus also undermines his own honor by reneging on his word. When Innogen first gives Posthumus the diamond, Posthumus assures her that the ring will never leave his person: “How, how? Another? / . . . / And cere up my embracements from a next / With bonds of death!

Remain, remain thou here” (1.1.115; 117-118). Offering to give the ring away (if Giacomo wins the bet) is an affront made all the more palpable when Giacomo requests that Posthumus make the deal official through clasping hands and transcribing the wager: “Your hand, a covenant. We will have these things set down by lawful counsel, and straight away for Britain, lest the bargain should catch cold and starve. I will fetch gold and have our two wagers recorded” (1.4.144-147).

In a striking perversion of a betrothal handclasp, Giacomo and Posthumus seal the wager by invoking the familiar folk-tradition of hand-fasting betrothals where a couple clasped hands and spoke aloud their desire to marry each other as public testament to their future intent.¹¹ The diamond ring, initially betokening the marital covenant between Innogen and Posthumus is now the lynchpin anchoring a new covenant between two men. Although Posthumus is oblivious to the repercussions of his action, offering his wife’s marital diamond token as potential prize and memorializing the transaction with a handclasp that mocks a romantic betrothal ceremony only underscores that Giacomo has wheedled “rights” to Innogen’s body as well. The diamond may be the first private love token in the play that is re-scripted into a publicly circulated branding device, but the pattern is set and only intensifies once Giacomo uncovers additional tokens of intimacy (the bracelet and the tiny mole) in Innogen’s bedroom.

“A manacle of love”: blazons, bodies, and the introduction of the bracelet

Just as the diamond ring recalled aspects of Innogen’s identity such as her mother’s lineage and Innogen’s wealth and rank as the daughter of royalty, the bracelet that Posthumus chooses for Innogen reveals how he views himself and Innogen. The bracelet is a significantly less expensive piece of jewelry than the diamond ring, and Posthumus is acutely aware of this disjuncture in value. The couple’s token exchange highlights the social and financial inequality

¹¹ For more details on Renaissance betrothal ceremonies, see Mendelson and Crawford 118-119.

undergirding the marriage, and Posthumus takes pains to underscore the “infinite loss” his wife absorbs in accepting his “poor self” as her husband:

... sweetest, fairest,
As I my poor self did exchange for you
To your so infinite loss, so in our trifles
I still win of you. For my sake wear this. (1.1.119-121)

Recasting the bracelet into a Petrarchan cliché of sorts (but with an important twist), Posthumus not only tightly defines the bracelet’s purpose as a love token; he also stresses that Innogen is to be contained by his love gift: “It is a manacle of love. I’ll place it / Upon this fairest prisoner” (1.1.122-123).¹² Throughout the *Rime sparse*, Petrarch repeatedly references how he is imprisoned by Love and Laura. In poem 76, Laura is the vigilant jailer who so beguiles his heart he is taken further away from himself: “Alluring me with his promises, Love led me back to my former prison and gave the keys to that enemy of mine who still keeps me banished from myself” (1-4).¹³ In poem 89, in typical paradoxical fashion, Petrarch laments his lack of freedom but acknowledges the pleasures of being imprisoned by desire for Laura: “ ‘Alas, the yoke and the chains and the shackles were sweeter than going free!’ ” (10-11).¹⁴ When Posthumus gives his bracelet to Innogen though, he makes it clear that it is she, not he, who is the prisoner. Taking on the role that Love or Laura typically plays in Petrarch’s verse, Posthumus is the one doing the imprisoning as he refigures the bracelet into an ornament of matrimonial and sexual possession:

¹² Jewelry historian Diana Scarisbrick notes that bracelets began to grow in popularity in sixteenth-century England as common love or remembrance tokens (88). Posthumus’ description of the bracelet as a manacle of love almost exactly mirrors bracelets’ contemporary label in Tudor England of “Cupid’s manacle(s)” (Scarisbrick 88). One might also recall Wyatt’s poem, “Whoso list to hunt” with its image of the alluring deer (Boleyn) wearing a diamond linked collar that spelled out another man’s (Henry VIII’s) right of possession: “*Noli mi tangere*, for Caesar’s I am / and wild for to hold, though I seem tame” (13-14). Wyatt’s poem is a rendition of Petrarch’s poem 190 from the *Rime sparse*.

¹³ All of my quotations and references to Petrarch’s verse come from Robert M. Durling’s translation and edition of Petrarch’s *Rime sparse*. Poem 76, lines 1-4 “*Amor con sue promesse lusingando / mi ricondusse a la prigione antica, / et die’ le chiavi a quella mia nemica / ch’ancor me di me stesso tene in bando.*”

¹⁴ Poem 89, lines 10-11. “ ‘*Oimè , il giogo et le catene e i ceppi / eran più dolci che l’andare sciolto!*”

“a manacle of love.”¹⁵ Through her bracelet token, Innogen becomes a contained beauty—“this fairest prisoner”—whose passivity is mandated out of love for her husband: “for my sake, wear this.”

Incidentally, it is worth noting that Renaissance bracelet designs were hardly staid, conventional pieces of jewelry. Extraordinarily few examples have survived intact. However, intricate bracelet models were routinely carved in wood, providing the jeweler a malleable surface to test his designs on before implementing them in metal. Judging from the prints that were made of these wooden models, Renaissance bracelets frequently featured extraordinarily elaborate designs: flora mixed with fauna interspersed with reclining nudes (Hackenbroch 122-123). Even Renaissance bracelets less anthropomorphic in design might feature intricately inlaid emblem links, making the bracelet an enigmatic puzzle to be deciphered (Evans *History of Jewellery* 125-128). As Ian Wardropper notes, a deliberately blurry interplay between artifice and nature is vividly on display in Renaissance jewelry. In fact, in aristocratic Renaissance homes, a popular way to display not just curiosities or knick-knacks but jewelry too was to place pieces in *wunderkammern* (cabinets of curiosity). Great care was taken to artfully juxtapose the manmade necklaces or bracelets with elements from nature such as seashells or bird feathers in order to visually amplify the verisimilitude of the jewelry (Wardropper 9-10).

In keeping with such a dynamic design aesthetic, it is fitting that Innogen’s own bracelet possesses a rather vibrant agency. Instead of remaining an inert trinket around the wrist, her bracelet instead will become an increasingly live agent as the play progresses. Each time Innogen

¹⁵ Fittingly, given its celebration of matrimonial love, in Spenser’s *Amoretti* both the lady and the poet experience willing, mutual bondage to one another. In Sonnet 67, once the huntsman stops his vigorous pursuit, the deer (lady) approaches the hunter and allows herself to be captured: “There she beholding me with mylder looke, / sought not to fly, but fearelesse still did bide:/ till I in hand her yet halfe trembling tooke, /and with her owne goodwill hir fyrmely tyde” (9-12). Conversely, in Sonnet 73, it is the poet who binds himself to the lady through his captured hart (punning on male deer): “Being my self captyved here in care, / My hart, whom none with servile bands can tye / but the fayre tresses of your golden hayre / breaking his prison forth to you doth fly” (1-4). My quotations come from the 1989 *Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*: Oram et. al.

moves her arm or lifts her hand, she feels upon her the living “manacle of love,” a tangible reminder of her husband. The bracelet doubles as a potent mnemonic, as Innogen will make clear when she laments the loss of her token after Giacomo slips it from her wrist.

Defined through Posthumus’ Petrarchan discourse in its original gifting, the bracelet not only reminds Innogen of Posthumus, but it also becomes increasingly aligned with Innogen’s body and her honor (chastity), once Giacomo steals the trinket. Before Giacomo even sets foot in Innogen’s bedchamber, he sets a precedent for how he will objectify and aestheticize Innogen and her bracelet. In his first meeting with Innogen at her father’s court, Giacomo blazons her, but in an extraordinarily explicit manner that contrasts parts of Innogen’s body (“this cheek,” “this hand”) with parts of a strumpet’s body (“lips as common as the stairs,” “hands made hard with hourly falsehood,”):

Had I this cheek
To bathe my lips upon; this hand whose touch,
Whose every touch, would force the feeler’s soul
To th’oath of loyalty; this object which
Takes prisoner the wild motion of mine eye,
Firing it only here: should I, damned then,
Slaver with lips as common as the stairs
That mount the Capitol; join grips with hands
Made hard with hourly falsehood—falsehood as
With labour; then by-peeping in an eye
Base and illustrious as the smoky light
That’s fed with stinking tallow— (1.6.100-110)

By detailing fantasies of himself kissing Innogen and touching her hand (“Had *I* . . . should *I*”), Giacomo constructs a blazon that posits Innogen as a desirable lady beyond compare who outshines any competition. Yet by transitioning immediately into images of a prostitute, Giacomo slyly suggests Innogen may be anything but a lady by almost conflating her with a loose woman who might be receptive to his fantasies. Later in the scene, he reveals as much when he propositions her:

I dedicate myself to your sweet pleasure,
More noble than that runagate to your bed,
And will continue fast to your affection
Still close as sure
.....
Let me my service tender on your lips. (1.6.137-139;141)

Innogen's sexual honor has become the overarching contested good. Posthumus thinks he is safeguarding it through his bracelet love gift and diamond ring wager, while Giacomo hopes to sabotage it through the exact same tokens. And so it is fitting that when Innogen finally responds to Giacomo, she puts him in his place by invoking that selfsame, all-important quality of honor, or in Giacomo's case, a lack thereof:

If thou wert *honourable*
Thou wouldst have told this tale for virtue, not
For such an end thou seek'st, as base as strange.
Thou wrong'st a gentleman who is as far
From thy report as thou from *honour*, and
Solicit'st here a lady that disdains
Thee . . . (1.6.143-149, italics mine)

“ ‘Tis plate of rare device, and jewels of rich and exquisite form”: setting the stage for the bedchamber scene

Giacomo's comparisons of Innogen's body with a strumpet's anticipate the violations he will enact once he actually invades her bedroom. And, given how liberally he will use verbal ornament to paint a vivid picture of Innogen's room, body, and her infidelity, it is apt that when Giacomo finally manages to sneak into Innogen's bedchamber, he is stowed away in a chest brimming with material ornament (jewels, silver plate, and purported gifts):

GIACOMO. Some dozen Romans of us, and your lord—
Best feather of our wing—have mingled sums
To buy a present for the Emperor
Which I, the factor for the rest, have done
In France. 'Tis plate of rare device, and jewels
Of rich and exquisite form; their value's great,

And I am something curious, being strange,
To have them in safe storage. May it please you
To take them in protection?

INNOGEN: Willingly,
And pawn mine honour for their safety; since
My lord hath interest in them, I will keep them
In my bedchamber. (1.6.186-196)

Giacomo's decision to stow himself in a large wooden chest in order to ruin Innogen's and Posthumus' marriage by tarnishing Innogen's honor (the very thing she ironically vows to pawn for the safekeeping of the chest) is not merely circumstantial. Rather, I suggest it plays upon the idea of a *cassone* perverted. *Cassoni*, those elaborately painted, beautifully inlaid, and intricately carved marriage chests, were gilded fixtures in upper class, fifteenth and sixteenth-century Italian weddings. A sumptuous gift for the newlywed couple and given by the bride's family, a *cassone* held the contents of a bride's dowry. After the wedding, a *cassone* was bound for a high place of honor in the couple's bedchamber, becoming a prominent piece of furniture with a value akin to a cherished family antique. Before the actual wedding, a *cassone*'s contents were frequently displayed in the bridal chamber by the mother of the bride so curious guests could take in the array of gifts and admire the wealth of the bride's family who had the economic wherewithal to provide such a fine dowry.¹⁶ Thus, an open *cassone* exhibits its contents as a rich, visual testament to both the bride's honor and that of her family. Of course, Giacomo emerges from a chest in Innogen's chamber to construct a visual testament aimed at just the opposite: dismantling the lady's honor.

Like the elaborately woven tapestries adorning Innogen's bedchamber, *cassone* often featured lavishly decorated panels. As Luke Syson and Dora Thornton point out, the scenes painted on *cassoni* frequently took on a highly feminine cast, given that *cassoni* were often

¹⁶ For a fine, rich overview of *cassoni*, their painted designs, and their overall cultural function in Renaissance Italy see Syson and Thornton, especially 69-72 of Chapter 2: "Betrothal, Marriage, and Virtuous Display."

situated in the bedchamber and were given by the bride's family as part of her dowry. If mythical or Biblical narratives were incorporated (and they often were), female characters featured prominently as symbols of wifely virtue (Syson and Thornton 71). Perhaps even more fascinating was how frequently scantily clad figures were incorporated into *cassone* panels as symbols of conjugal consummation and fertility. One of the more discreet places for such figures to be painted was upon the underside of the heavy *cassoni* lids, visible only to the couple when they opened the chest to take something out or put something away (Syson and Thornton 70). As I will discuss more fully in my next section, Innogen's bedchamber, with its assorted personal belongings and artwork, is depicted as an intensely feminine space. Its innate privacy makes Giacomo's presence all the more intrusive for Innogen. And given Giacomo's pending aestheticizing of Innogen's body and personal belongings into a richly visual narrative, it is quite fitting that he steps out of a trunk that echoes these Italian marriage chests, which so often featured symbolically loaded, pictorial painted panels.¹⁷ Before Giacomo even enters Innogen's bedchamber then, he is already aligning the space with a highly evocative piece of bridal furniture: one that is not merely functional but also unabashedly artful.

“How bravely thou becom'st thy bed”: the bedchamber as private space, the private lady as public art

Innogen's bedchamber is not only one of the more memorable Shakespearean spaces; it is also a space that makes us feel like voyeurs. In Renaissance homes, the bedchamber was often

¹⁷ In describing just how vibrant the painted panels of many *cassoni* were, Syson and Thornton include an aside that illustrates how captivating the chests would have been for couples' children: “Generations of children would have known them well as a kind of open storybook, dramatic and colourful, encountered when toddling around on the floor of their parents' bedroom” (72). Syson and Thornton go on to point out that religious reformer Savonarola was quite concerned about the popularity of *cassoni*, chastising parents for allowing their children to see furniture so often painted with rather risqué subject matter.

tucked into the interior of the house, accessible only through a succession of other rooms, which gradually became increasingly private.¹⁸ When Innogen's bedchamber scene begins, she is silently reading, nestled in the most private room of the house and occupied with what was becoming an increasingly private, individual activity.¹⁹ Listening to her give late night instructions to her maidservant before bed, we are made aware of how insulated she is from the outside world:

Fold down the leaf where I have left. To bed.
Take not away the taper; leave it burning,
And if thou canst awake by four o'th' clock,
I prithee call me. Sleep hath seized me wholly. (2.2.3-7)

As Giacomo emerges from the treasure trunk, his mere presence in Innogen's room already marks an obvious transgression. Given the privacy of the bedroom in the Renaissance (at least for the homes of the upper middle class and nobility), a gentleman's presence in a woman's bedchamber had sexual implications. In Book III of Leon Battista Alberti's fifteenth-century treatise, *I Libri Della Famiglia*, Alberti illustrates how powerfully sexual intimacy could be conveyed through merely standing in the bedchamber.²⁰ Alberti's character Giannozzo narrates his personal recollections of showing his new wife his home, which will now be her home, shortly after their wedding. Leading his bride through each room, Giannozzo ends the visit in the bedchamber where he rather dramatically presents all of his prized possessions to her: garments, silver, and tapestries. He then requests not only that she never sleep with another man, but also that she never let anyone other than him into their bedroom: " ' . . . my wife, see that you never want another man to share this bed but me. Your understand.' She blushed and cast down

¹⁸ See Girouard, *Life in the English Country House* especially 38-45.

¹⁹ See Lawrence Stone. As Stone elucidates, although Elizabethans still preferred being read aloud to, the printing press and the burgeoning publication of books for the mass market during the Renaissance were slowly making reading a more private activity. For an excellent overview of reading's incremental transition from a public, oral tradition to more of a private, silent pursuit, see Goulemot.

²⁰ Orest Ranum's fine essay "The Refuges of Intimacy" in *A History of Private Life*, Volume III first brought my attention to this particular exchange in Book 3 of Alberti's *The Family in Renaissance Florence*.

her eyes. Still I repeated that she should never receive anyone into that room but myself” (Alberti 81). That Giannozzo immediately follows his command that his wife not share her body with anyone else with a request that she not open their bedroom door to anyone else sends a clear message. For a wife to let another man enter the bedchamber is tantamount to letting another man access her body, and this attitude was not merely pertinent to fifteenth-century Italy. As Orest Ranum points out, well through the eighteenth century (and presumably beyond), the bedchamber and especially those specific nooks and corners within the bedchamber continued to be depicted in contemporary literature and paintings as intensely sensual spaces (220-222).²¹

To fully understand Giacomo’s excitement at gaining access to Innogen’s bedchamber, it is important to remember that Innogen’s bedchamber is not only construed as an intensely private space; it is also depicted as an intensely feminine space that reflects Innogen. Georgianna Ziegler points out that there is a longstanding precedent for women being intimately associated with enclosed rooms like bedchambers, as the sequestered bedroom denotes their matrimonial status as removed from the world and their sexual status as chaste:

The association of woman with room comes from a long patriarchal tradition in which the chaste female is metaphorically an enclosed garden, vessel or chamber . . . The city outside is the world in which her husband procures his goods . . . And she herself is the greatest of his goods, responsible for guarding that which makes her most valuable, her chastity. (76)

Yet as Ziegler goes on to point out, the bedchamber was also an intensely personal space of expression, a place where a woman’s identity was not just contained but was also most tangibly demonstrated.²² A sixteenth-century painting attributed to François Clouet, entitled *Diane de*

²¹ See Ranum especially 220-222. Ranum is especially interesting in his insights on spaces within spaces. Ranum explains that tiny nooks within bedrooms like *ruelles* (the space between the wall and bed) and alcoves frequently were viewed as extremely intimate areas.

²² Ziegler defines the lady’s bedchamber, as often depicted in Shakespeare, as a space where the totality of the lady’s person can be present, a place that: “has represented her ‘self’: both her physical body and mental/spiritual nature” (87).

Poitiers visually evokes the distinctly feminine atmosphere of the lady Diane's bedchamber as an evocative space where her comeliest, most personal belongings reside. In Clouet's painting, Diane sits at her bedroom dressing table. An array of objects including a jewel-encrusted mirror, a comb, strands of pearls, rings aplenty, and several small floral bouquets are all spread out before her. She appears to be either dressing or undressing as her torso is draped only with a thin, gauzy veil. Her hair has been done up in jewels and is fastened back with a pearl-studded diadem. Tiny pearl earrings dangle from her ears, bracelets encircle both wrists, and she holds a small ring in her fingertips, poising it over her open jewelry box, which is spilling over with additional rings and necklaces. Eyes are instantly drawn to not only the lady's worn jewelry, which stands out against her skin and hair, but also to all of those dainty accessories scattered about her table like a glittering menagerie.

Likewise, part of what makes Innogen's bedchamber scene so memorable in *Cymbeline* is the plethora of detail we glean about the material objects outfitting the room. Filled with her art, her tokens, and her belongings, Innogen's bedchamber is a material reflection of her identity. But courtesy of Giacomo's narrative-making, the image of Innogen that is reflected through her bedchamber is a highly manufactured version of the woman herself—a self-image as stylized and artful as the gold-threaded arras draped against her walls and the intricately carved andirons flanking her fireplace. Prior to Giacomo's theft of the bracelet and his prurient spying upon the mole, he crafts Innogen into the center-stage ornament in a room filled with decorative pieces through a second blazon of her body. Just as he superimposed the body of a strumpet with Innogen's body in his Act I blazon, Giacomo's second blazon also features a double veneering of sorts. Gazing upon the sleeping Innogen, Giacomo itemizes her physical attributes by continually glossing the various decorative objects near her bed:

How bravely thou becom'st thy bed! Fresh lily,
And whiter than the sheets! That I might touch,
But kiss, one kiss! Rubies unparagoned,
How dearly they do't! 'Tis her breathing that
Perfumes the chamber thus. The flame o'th' taper
Bows toward her, and would underpeep her lids,
To see th'enclosed lights, now canopied
Under these windows, white and azure-laced
With blue of heaven's own tinct . . . (2.2.15-24)

Each descriptive mention of a part of Innogen's body is met with an equally illustrative mention of a bedroom accessory. Her beautiful body 'becomes' her bed. Her skin is whiter than the sheets. Her breath becomes the room's perfume. Her eyelids emulate shut windows of mottled white and blue. Taking artifice to its limits, Giacomo's blazon borders on the bizarre, remaking Innogen into an oddly mixed amalgam of woman and household items. Her skin, eyes, and lips are juxtaposed with a finely dressed bed, crisp white sheets, and flickering candlelight. The lady has become, through the art of Giacomo's blazon, the predominant piece setting off an impeccably decorated room.

Giacomo's intrusive presence in Innogen's room is a simultaneous act of violation and voyeurism.²³ As Evelyn Gajowski observes, Innogen becomes the ultimate blank canvas ready to be painted over with Giacomo's narratives of choice; asleep, she is unwittingly accessible to "the free play of his imagination over her body" (97). Analogously, Patricia Simons has observed that in many fifteenth-century portraits of Florentine ladies, the profile was the preferred position for female sitters, as it made a return gaze impossible to detect. Eyes were chastely averted by default, more or less encapsulating not only the virtuous ideal of the shy, chaste lady but also the sexual ideal of a beautiful woman aesthetically framed to perfection (i.e. for men's uninterrupted

²³ See Gajowski, especially 95-97. Gajowski observes that the bedchamber scene exemplifies visual violation and a Petrarchan power dynamic in which the man has total autonomy to inscribe meaning upon the woman.

gazes only).²⁴ In the bedchamber scene in *Cymbeline* we have this idea taken a step further. Not only are Innogen's eyes averted; they are closed, making any sort of disapproving return gaze from her impossible. Like Laura who emerges from the pages of Petrarch's verse as a highly aestheticized, silent beauty (excepting a few speaking moments in the *Rime Sparse*), Innogen is also silenced (being asleep). Free to stare at Innogen's beauty without constraint, Giacomo is akin to a Petrarchan lover but with an aberrant spin. Petrarch writes Laura as the quintessential woman of honor; Giacomo remakes Innogen into the quintessential harlot.

To this end, Giacomo does not merely take mental note of the bedchamber and Innogen's body; he physically writes down details of the room on tablets of paper. In other words, before he ever narrates his tales to Posthumus, Giacomo is tangibly and concretely "making" art out of Innogen and her space:

But my design—
To note the chamber. *I will write all down*
Such and such pictures, there the window, such
Th'adornment of her bed, the arras, figures,
Why, such and such; and the contents o'th' story
Ah, but some natural notes about her body
Above ten thousand, meaner movables
Would testify t'enrich mine inventory. (2.2.23-30, italics mine)

For Giacomo the thrill comes not merely from spying on a beautiful woman as she sleeps, or even from exerting full creative control over her image as he reconstructs Innogen's private space (bedroom), private exterior (body), and private interior (honor) into whatever vision he desires. Rather, what most deeply compels Giacomo is his power to utterly expose these extraordinarily private entities, thus the reason behind his feverish note taking.

Giacomo chooses to publicize Innogen by conflating her with her bedchamber's art: both the larger art pieces like the tapestries adorning her walls and the smallest of material objects

²⁴ See Simons 8-12.

objects like her love token bracelet and the bodily mark of her mole. Of all the ornaments in the room, the highly ornamental, gold-embroidered arras draped upon the walls have garnered the most attention from critics.²⁵ Addressing the interrelation between textiles and the often violent treatment of the female body in *Othello* and *Cymbeline*, Susan Frye argues that early modern English women were valued for producing textiles, with spun wool being a primary English export. However, as Frye notes, in the two plays, the central female characters are uneasily made into the textile itself rather than being the primary textile makers:

. . . textiles mark and then signify the contested female body, which can be possessed entirely by men and, thus reduced, may be disposed of violently . . . At the same time that *Othello* and *Cymbeline* register women's historic connection to textiles, however, the plays generate their violent narratives from the disruption of the material relation between female subject and textile object . . . in *Othello* and *Cymbeline* women tend to become the cloth rather than its producers and consumers. (221)

As Frye suggests, Innogen's character and privacy is indirectly violated through textiles through Giacomo's devious narrations of her bedchamber décor, and as Frye notes, there are other instances of violence being played out through fabric in *Cymbeline*.²⁶ As additional critics have noted, not only the tapestry subject matter but also the design carved upon the fireplace mantel and Innogen's bedside table book collectively represent female paragons of either dedicated love or chastity.²⁷ Cleopatra's meeting with Antony is woven onto Innogen's bedroom wall tapestries.

²⁵ For a rich look at how Giacomo's descriptions of both the tapestries and Innogen function as ekphrasis, see Olson. For insights into the way women are compared to textiles and are used and discarded in *Othello* and *Cymbeline*, see Frye. Campbell offers insights into the materials and terminology of sixteenth-century tapestries (less costly) vs. arras (more valuable due to the use of gold embroidery thread), as does Standen.

²⁶ Susan Frye observes that just as sixteenth-century textiles were often cut down and reshaped in a process called *translating*, so too are textiles reworked in interesting ways in *Cymbeline*. Frye provides the example of Cloten who is wearing Posthumus' clothes when he is killed by Innogen's brother. Frye points out that Cloten had been contemplating raping Innogen; thus Innogen's "maidenhead" is saved through Cloten's beheading, and the "reused" clothes are implemental in this exchange of one "head" for another (244).

²⁷ See Frye 237-240 for an overview of the bedroom décor's symbolism. Also, for a thorough look at all of the objects adorning Innogen's bedchamber and their symbolic significance, see Simonds, Chapter 3, "The Iconography of Innogen's Bedchamber."

Diana's indignation at having her bath interrupted by Actaeon is carved above the fireplace, and the virtuous Philomel's rape by Tereus is the subject matter of Innogen's nighttime reading.

But a key insight that has been largely overlooked about this rich trio of material objects (tapestries, mantel-piece carving, bedside table book) is that each object also depicts women (Cleopatra, Diana, and Philomela) who are on varying levels of public display, whose beauty and bodies have been made into a consumable show. As Enobarbus' descriptions in *Antony and Cleopatra* make clear, Cleopatra's shoreline arrival in her gold burnished barge is an opulent panorama, ensnaring the eyes and hearts of all that see her sail to shore:

For her own person,
It beggared all description. She did lie
In her pavilion—cloth of gold, of tissue—
O'er picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature . . .
.....
. . . From the barge
A strange invisible perfume hits the sense
Of the adjacent wharfs. The city cast
Her people out upon her, and Antony
Enthroned i'th' market-place, did sit alone,
Whistling to th'air which but for vacancy
Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too. (2.2. 203-207; 217-222)

Innogen's tapestry apparently captures this very same moment when Cleopatra sails in to meet Mark Antony. Although Cleopatra makes a self-generated show of her beauty for the public (and her beloved), Diana and Philomela have their private bodies intruded upon against their wishes. By aligning the sleeping Innogen with these characters that adorn the material objects in her room, Giacomo similarly puts her on display. Acknowledging that it is the lady herself who will generate the most convincing portrait of infidelity, Giacomo molds Innogen into his own brand of art to cast aspersion on her chastity: "Ah, but some natural notes about her body/ Above ten thousand, meaner movables/ Would testify t'enrich mine inventory." (2.2.27-29). And to this

end, Giacomo quickly moves from the artwork adorning the bedchamber to Innogen's body and two of the delicate objects adorning it. The bracelet (love token worn on the wrist) and the small, five-spotted mole (love-mark worn on the skin) become the last of the artful artifacts that Giacomo appropriates to undermine Innogen's image.

“This will witness outwardly”: the bracelet and mole transformed into public show

In “Poetic Interpretations of “The Lady at her Toilette” Theme in Sixteenth-Century Painting” Elise Goodman-Soellner writes about the striking parallelism between a female portrait subject's physical features and her accessories that often appears in sixteenth-century Venetian portraits. Describing the late sixteenth-century painting *The Lady at her Toilette*, Goodman-Soellner notes that the blonde sitter's gold jewelry reflects the flaxen strands of her hair; her fair skin mirrors the pale luminescence of pearls worn around her neck, while the rosy tint of her lips repeats itself in the coral decoration upon her mirror (432). Analogously, the cultural and social ramifications of Florentine bridal accessories—particularly the earrings, bracelets, necklaces, rings, and hair ornaments that proper Italian Renaissance brides were expected to adorn themselves with—has generated some interesting scholarship.²⁸ Art historian Adrian W.B. Randolph argues that Florentine bridal jewels indicated a host of inferences about the bride, her body, and the economic status of her family and her husband: “In portraits the jewels marked the bridal body as stable and immutable. Frozen in a zone between chastity and sexuality, the bride could represent for both husband and wife a moment of economic and social honor” (196).

²⁸ See Syson and Thornton especially 40-47 and 51-52 of “Chapter 2: Betrothal, Marriage, and Virtuous Display.” Syson and Thornton claim that bridal jewels were so crucial to the honor of the bride, her family, and her husband-to-be that if finances made such finery impossible to purchase, jewels were frequently borrowed for the occasion. Also see Simons and Randolph.

Like a Florentine bride, whose wedding finery marks a constellation of interrelated representations (everything from her chastity to her husband's economic status), Innogen, throughout the course of *Cymbeline*, has been deeply connected with both the objects she surrounds herself and the objects she wears. Unlike a fifteenth or sixteenth-century Italian bride though, whose finery reflected (and one could even say constructed) her chastity and her husband's honor, Innogen's material adornments have the opposite effect. Rather than having trinkets heaped upon her as a visual testament to her husband's honor, Innogen will have her adornments (bracelet and mole) "stripped" from her in the bedchamber scene through Giacomo's intrusive descriptions and his theft of the bracelet. Innogen's bracelet, first compared in Act I to a Petrarchan "manacle of love" re-merges in the bedchamber when Giacomo removes the bauble from the sleeping Innogen's wrist: "Come off, come off: / As slippery as the Gordian knot was hard" (2.2. 33-34). Simply being in Innogen's bedchamber already places Giacomo in a far more intimate relation to Innogen than she would ever be party to, and removing her bracelet takes this imposed intimacy a step further. Giacomo's removal of Innogen's bracelet is also an active antithesis of Posthumus' Act I gifting of the token to his wife. Posthumus actually fastens the bracelet on Innogen's wrist (rather than simply giving her the trinket to put on herself): "It is a manacle of love. *I'll place it* / Upon this fairest prisoner." (1.1.122-123, italics mine). Giacomo then unclasps what Posthumus has fastened, metaphorically "opening" up Innogen when she had previously been utterly contained by her husband's "manacle" that constrained her body to Posthumus alone.

Giacomo also underscores the physicality of the bracelet token by immediately following his unclasping of the bracelet with his most forward gesture thus far, peering at the tiny mole upon Innogen. The mole is obviously part of Innogen's body, but in many ways it functions as a

love token. As a small, subtle mark that would be visible to no one except her husband and to him only during times of intimacy, the mole works much like an intimate lover's gift. It is tiny and beautiful, a unique gift shared only between Innogen and her husband. And it quite literally adorns Innogen's body. Not merely content to gaze upon the mole, Giacomo actually aestheticizes it into a tiny, crimson spotted flower: "On her left breast / A mole, cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops / I'th' bottom of a cowslip" (2.2.37-39).²⁹ Worked into his carefully crafted narrative, the mole is remade into Giacomo's own brand of art aimed at fooling a gullible Posthumus.

Giacomo expresses his newfound ownership over both the bracelet and the mole by renaming the tokens according to his purpose. In doing so, he plays up the contrast between what the tokens have become under his artistic control (outward, broadcasting symbols of infidelity and love lost) and what they once were when they represented the love and private, inward selves of Innogen and Posthumus. When describing Innogen's bracelet as an outward "witness," Giacomo references a deeply interiorized part of Posthumus' self, his conscience: "'Tis mine, and this will witness outwardly/As strongly as the conscience does within,/ To th'madding of her lord" (2.2.35-37). Analogously, the mole becomes the "voucher" that invades that most inward part of Innogen, her honor: "This secret/ Will force him think I have picked the lock and ta'en /The treasure of her honour" (2.2.37-42).

"Never saw I figures so likely to report themselves": honor undone by feminine art

In addressing the dialogue between Giacomo and Posthumus in the penultimate scene of Act II and Posthumus' rant in the final scene of Act II, I will pay particular attention to the way

²⁹ Peggy Muñoz Simonds points out that the mole's tiny five spots are symbolically resonant with five being a number commonly associated with matrimony (126). For more insights into the symbolism of the mole and other art-pieces in Innogen's bedchamber, see Simonds, Chapter 3, "The Iconography of Innogen's Bedchamber."

Innogen is remade into deceptive art of the highest degree. From the largest scale arras on the walls to the most diminutive objects like the bracelet, Giacomo depicts the art-pieces that he conflates Innogen with as increasingly anthropomorphic. A striking inverse correlation emerges; the more Giacomo emphasizes how convincingly life-like and realistic the art is that bedecks Innogen's bedchamber, the more aggressively he ossifies Innogen into an ornamental object, a move that takes her further away from her true identity. Moreover, Giacomo underscores not only Innogen's "art-likeness" but also her "artfulness:" the insouciant, outward display he claims testifies to her infidelity. It is this distinction, I would argue, that ultimately gets to Posthumus. Not only is Posthumus distraught because he thinks his wife has been unfaithful, but his honor has been especially shamed since he thinks Innogen has been unfaithful in a most artful, public way. As soon as he is convinced that Innogen is loose, Posthumus not only takes her to task for what he thinks is her sexual infidelity, but his diatribe is full of misogynistic attacks against art, particularly women's "art."

When Giacomo returns to make good on his bet with Posthumus, Posthumus challenges Giacomo to prove that Innogen has been untrue. Giacomo responds by first providing a detailed account of the bedchamber's art, replaying it in such vivid detail that as Rebecca Olson has pointed out, we actually get the bedchamber scene twice: once when Giacomo is actually in the room and a second time when he vividly describes the room's contents to Posthumus (61). In his descriptions, Giacomo reiterates that the artwork was so realistic that he half-thought the tapestries and fireplace ornaments might spring to life. Of the arras, Giacomo exclaims that "such the true life on't was" that he found himself wondering if it was some wild creation sprung into being on its own (2.4.76). Of the carved Diana mantelpiece, Giacomo reveals that: "Never saw I figures / So likely to report themselves," and he then highlights the eyes of the fireplace

andirons as: “two winking Cupids / Of silver, each on one foot standing, nicely/Depending on their brands” (2.4.82-83; 89-91).

To further convince Posthumus, Giacomo follows his descriptions of the anthropomorphic large-scale art in Innogen’s bedchamber with his tale of the small-scale bracelet token:

Be pale, I beg but leave to air this jewel. See!
And now ‘tis up again; it must be married
To that your diamond. I’ll keep them.
.....
She stripped it from her arm. *I see her yet.*
Her pretty action did outsell her gift,
And yet it enriched it too. She gave it me,
And said she prized it once. (2.4.96-103 italics mine)

Giacomo brags that Innogen does not merely give the bracelet; she *strips* it from her arm for his pleasure, his emphasis clearly on both the flirtatiousness and directness of the gesture: “Her pretty action did outsell her gift.” Sensualizing Innogen’s fabricated actions into a detailed show-and-tell allows Giacomo to suggest how brazenly Innogen places herself on display by making such a forward (public), coquettish production out of giving a gift. Not only is Innogen depicted as artfully giving away her love token, but both she and the token are dramatically re-performed as living art in Giacomo’s narration of the fabricated event. Theatrically whipping out the bracelet like a magician revealing a *tromp l’oeil* trick, Giacomo reveals the token as one would unveil a long-awaited portrait: “I beg but leave to air this jewel. See!” (2.4.96).

Giacomo’s simple command urging Posthumus to “See!” reiterates the highly visual nature of the bracelet, and brings Giacomo’s own voyeurism into the frame. Emphasizing that Innogen’s gifting of the bracelet was so alluring that Innogen and her gesture are forever on mental replay: “I see her yet,” allows Giacomo to punch the image home to Posthumus twice. He first retells of Innogen’s gesture and then admits to Posthumus that it was such a beguiling action, he keeps

rerunning it in his imagination. Thus, through the bracelet narrative, Giacomo offers not one but three deceptive varieties of visual stimuli: the bracelet itself, Posthumus' own memories of the bracelet as a once intimate love gift, and Giacomo's colorful fib of the token as an agent of seduction.

Not only is the bracelet dramatized as a lively art-piece in Giacomo's narratives, but it also becomes an increasingly autonomous trinket even in Innogen's descriptions of it. In the scene just before Giacomo confronts Posthumus with his proof, Innogen discovers that her beloved bracelet is gone. Troubled, she tells Pisanio to alert her maidservant to search for it, portraying the bracelet in strikingly anthropomorphic terms:

Go bid my woman
Search for a jewel that too casually
Hath left my arm. It was my master's. 'Shrew me.
If I would lose it for a revenue
Of any king's in Europe! I do think
I saw't this morning; confident I am
Last night 'twas on mine arm; I kissed it.
I hope it be not gone to tell my lord
That I kiss aught but he. (2.3.135-143)

As a walking, talking ornament, the bracelet becomes an undoubtedly lifelike token, with its verisimilitude directly tied to Innogen's body. She remembers the feel of it: 'Last night 'twas on my arm" before imagining the bauble taking a stroll, conjecturing that it "too casually / Hath left my arm." And just after she demonstrates how tangible her tenderness is for her love token, revealing that last night "I kissed it," she imagines the bracelet with a tiny mouth of its own, playfully tattling on her to her husband: "I hope it be not gone to tell my lord/That I kiss aught but he." The bracelet thus registers as a highly anthropomorphic, autonomous token both through Innogen's descriptions and when Giacomo works the bracelet into his narrative.

After hearing Giacomo's bracelet tale, Posthumus vacillates between doubting his wife and wanting to believe in her honor. Falling back into the highly visual language of art that has so far defined the two men's exchange, Posthumus asks Giacomo to remake Innogen (once again) into a series of bodily symbols that will generate more convincing proof than the bracelet can: "Render to me some corporal sign about her / More evident than this; for this was stol'n" (2.4.119-120). Having used the bracelet as a precursor of sorts, Giacomo responds with the ace—the most convincing little art-piece in his pictorial deck—the tiny mole on Innogen's body:

If you seek
For further satisfying, under her breast—
Worthy the pressing—lies a mole, right proud
Of that most delicate lodging. By my life,
I kissed it, and it gave me present hunger
To feed again, though full. You do remember
This stain upon her? (2.4.133-139)

The bracelet was a private love gift that routinely never left Innogen's wrist, but once stolen, it becomes a public, outward show of Innogen's loss of honor. Similarly, the mole is on a private area of Innogen's body. Yet once it is visually and verbally uncovered by Giacomo it becomes a vivid marker, "this stain upon her" which tarnishes Innogen's reputation beyond repair with her husband. Just as Innogen metamorphoses from wife to loose lady through Giacomo's narrative, the bracelet and the mole go from private demarcations of Innogen's marital purity to public displays of chastity lost.

As Innogen's body, love gifts, and even the décor of her bedroom are collectively remade into a series of signs aimed at highlighting her loss of honor, the lady herself is increasingly aligned not merely with art but with deceptive, uncontrollable art. After he hears Giacomo speak so intimately of Innogen's mole, Posthumus is gulled. Convinced that his wife has been untrue, Posthumus rails against the injustice of men's dependence on their wives' sexual fidelity if they

want legitimate children. He questions even his own mother's chastity. What is striking about Posthumus' rant in the last scene of Act II is that he fills it with the vocabulary of art. Referencing stamped coins, counterfeits, and questionable coiners, he lambasts women as indiscriminate reproduction artists, creating illegitimate copies:

We are bastards all,
And that most venerable man which I
Did call my father was I know not where
When I was stamped. Some coiner with his tools
Made me a counterfeit; yet my mother seemed
The Dian of that time: so doth my wife
The nonpareil of this. (2.5.2-8)

Maintaining that women's artfulness lies in their ability to seem the picture of purity, crafting a believable, beautiful façade, Posthumus attributes feminine artfulness to women's reproductive ability. Able to conceive and give birth, women have the power to physically produce living art of the most profound type (legitimate heirs), but their fertility also gives them license to produce illegitimate children (second-rate, knock-off art or counterfeits as it were). Thus, husbands are always in danger of being publicly shamed as cuckolds by an unfaithful wife's "bad art."

As he moves from a generalized attack on all women to a more personal attack on Innogen for her infidelities, Posthumus delivers two antithetical images of his wife, juxtaposing the cool loveliness of his bride's sexual restraint with a vivid image of her caught *in flagrante delicto*:

Me of my lawful pleasure she restrained,
And prayed me oft forbearance; did it with
A prudency so rosy the sweet on't
Might well have warmed old Saturn; that I thought her
As chaste as unsunned snow . . .
.....
. . . Perchance he spoke not, but
Like a full-acorned boar, a German one,
Cried 'O!' and mounted; found no opposition
But what he looked for should oppose and she

Should from encounter guard. (2.5.9-13; 15-19)

Innogen's pious refusal to engage too heavily in marital passion is slammed as deceitful. What Posthumus had most esteemed about his wife at play's opening—her sexual honor—is now despised not only as delusive but as a spurious cover for her true profligate nature.

These two oppositional images of Innogen show how deeply and troublingly her outward and inward self have been distorted beyond recognition not only by Giacomo but by her own husband. In her article on ekphrasis and tapestry design in *Cymbeline*, Rebecca Olson makes the interesting argument that once Innogen is made aware of Posthumus' violent condemnation of her she realizes she will no longer be allowed "on display," as Olson puts it, since as Olson explains, Innogen "fails to project what her husband desires" (61). Referencing Innogen's outburst in Act III, scene 4 when she compares herself to an outdated garment: "Poor I am stale, a garment out of fashion / And for I am richer than to hang by th' walls/ I must be ripped," Olson argues that the comparison could be expanded to encompass an outmoded tapestry that must be ripped apart to make way for a new piece (61-62). Susan Frye points out that tapestries were such valuable and popular pieces in sixteenth-century homes that they were routinely reused by being cut down and reshaped in a process called, interestingly enough, translating (241-242). Playing upon the larger significance of Frye's mention of "translating," Olson suggests that Innogen's self-comparison with a tapestry in need of translation should invoke for us the role of costumes and disguise in the play (Innogen will later cross-dress as Fidele) as well as readers' own processes of "translating" the text that is the play itself (61-63).

I would like to suggest another, additional angle; I think Innogen's self-description in this particular scene ultimately validates her identity in a subtle way. Using Olson's and Frye's intelligent observations as a springboard, it is quite interesting when Innogen actually describes

herself (instead of being figured forth by Giacomo or Posthumus), she chooses to compare herself to a material object that could either be worn on the body or remade into a highly visual display upon a wall. As Olson suggests, Innogen remakes herself into a *used* textile that has to first be cut down in order to be put on display, in order to be used again and again (61-63). This means that Innogen defines herself just as she has been defined by Giacomo. She remakes herself into a highly visual piece that when utterly deconstructed by another would bear little resemblance to the original but would nonetheless invite the gaze and pictorially tell a story. This, of course, is exactly what transpires when Giacomo re-narrates Innogen's love token bracelet and mole. He doesn't so much remake Innogen as he "unmakes" her, using her most intimate possessions to slander her.

However, it is important to remember that in the scene where Innogen compares herself to a garment that must be ripped, Pisanio has just shown her the letter in which Posthumus accuses her of infidelity, and she is livid. I think that Innogen's outburst here both calls attention to and actually attempts to redress (albeit in a small way) Giacomo's and Posthumus' unfair representations of her. Recast throughout the play as an ornamental ring, a pretty art-piece, a coy seductress, an unchaste wife, and an expert deceiver, Innogen has been reduced to a fusion of male-scripted visuals that distance her self-image from anything resembling her actual nature. And so, it is quite telling that when she speaks herself, she references outward adornment (the garment) only to vehemently throw it off ("I must be ripped"). Furthermore, just moments later in this same scene, Innogen mirrors her verbal throwing off of an old-fashioned garment by also physically casting off the love letters she had previously received from Posthumus:³⁰

³⁰ See Stewart for more on the various letters that crop up in *Cymbeline*. Referencing this particular scene in *Cymbeline* and Innogen's comparison of the letters to ornamental stomachers, Stewart notes that: "The bosom was, of course, the preferred location for a love-letter right next to the heart." (251). Also see Sanders for an exploration of the various incidences of letters, texts, and writing that crop up in the play.

The scriptures of the loyal Leonatus
All turned to heresy? Away, away,
Corrupters of my faith, you shall no more
Be stomachers to my heart. (3.4.80-83)

It is crucial to note that these letters weren't just beloved possessions, nor had they simply been stored close to her heart (both figuratively and literally). Innogen makes it clear that in her mind the letters had adorned her body like a lady's decorative, highly ornamental stomacher worn beneath a gown. In other words, the letters had doubled as love token accessories of a sort. Thus her paired forsaking of the garment and the love letters is a minor way, at least, that Innogen is able to define herself on her own terms. By rather dramatically *un*-adorning herself, she delivers a subtle corrective to Giacomo's and Posthumus' attempts to malign her through the overtly adorning token objects of the ring, bracelet, and mole.

“With tokens thus and thus”: the return of the ring, bracelet, and mole

After Posthumus has tried to have Innogen killed for her purported indiscretions; after Innogen flees to the forests of Wales cross-dressed as Fidele; after the dense, lustful Cloten (dressed in Posthumus' garments) plots to rape Innogen only to be killed by her brother, and after Posthumus has expressed guilt over condemning Innogen to death (before he finds out she is really alive), the last scene of Act V attempts to right a host of wrongs. Innogen is not fully defined for who she is until the final scene of the play. The original love tokens (ring, bracelet, and mole) are not returned to her and Posthumus until the last act, when Giacomo finally comes clean. And although the last scene of *Cymbeline* endeavors to tie up the fluttering loose ends of mistaken identities, separated siblings, a wrongfully accused Innogen, stolen love tokens, and a broken marriage—complete resolution falls short. *Cymbeline*'s notorious inconsistencies in setting and time, far-fetched plot lines, and the romance's generic tendency to favor wonderment

over realism certainly contribute to the nagging feel that things gets sorted out too hastily to be even somewhat plausible. Beyond those particulars though, the reunion of Innogen and Posthumus and the return of the ring, bracelet, and mole at the end of the play leave far more questions unanswered than answered about the ultimate status of these key love gifts and the marriage they greatly complicated.

I have argued that Posthumus' anguish over Innogen's purported infidelity is exaggerated further through Giacomo's polished verbal art, which undermines Innogen's inward, private honor by publicizing her bedchamber's decor, her love token bracelet, and her body (mole). By taking things a step further and casting Innogen as the willful orchestrator of her own publication—the artful seductress—Giacomo aligns Innogen with her own material objects (and with art in general) in an unsettling manner. And even at play's end, despite the resolutions offered, the most troubling tensions that have plagued Posthumus' conception of his wife re-emerge. They are reintroduced, fittingly, through the three tokens: the ring, bracelet, and mole.

In the last scene of the play, Innogen (disguised as Fidele) asks Giacomo “Of whom he had this ring,” precipitating at last Giacomo's extended *mea culpa* “re-narration” of not only the ring but the bracelet and mole tokens too (5.6.135). Detailing his culpability to Cymbeline, Giacomo admits that everything—the token appropriations, the chicanery, the spying—hinged upon Innogen's sexual honor: “Your daughter's chastity—there it begins” (5.6.179). And as he provides details to Cymbeline, Giacomo links Innogen's bedchamber décor, the diamond ring, bracelet, and mole together as the tools of his trade in tricking Posthumus:

Made scruple of his praise, and wagered with him
Pieces of gold 'gainst this which then he wore
Upon his honoured finger, to attain
In suit the place of s'bed and win this ring
By hers and mine adultery . . .

.....

With tokens thus and thus; averring notes
Of chamber-hanging, pictures, this her bracelet—
O cunning, how I got it!—nay some marks
Of secret on her person, that he could not
But think her bond of chastity quite cracked, (5.6.182-186; 200-207)

Giacomo admits that it was the hiddenness and private nature of the mole in particular (that mark “of secret on her person”) that swayed Posthumus. And it is interesting that Giacomo emphasizes the mole here as a private, intimate mark made public. For it is in Giacomo’s descriptions to the king that the diamond ring, bracelet, and mole re-emerge as private love gifts that have been publicized by someone outside Innogen’s and Posthumus’ love bond not once but thrice throughout the course of the play. First, Giacomo violates the intimacy of the couple’s tokens when he first appropriates them. They are then made public when they become the principal pieces of material proof in Giacomo’s narrative performed for Posthumus in Act II. And now in the last scene of the play, they re-emerge publicly for a third time as the key components in Giacomo’s public admission of guilt to Cymbeline. As a result, the intimate love gifts initially shared between Innogen and Posthumus never fully regain their original privacy. They appear in the last scene of the play only to be inserted into yet another public narrative of Giacomo’s, showcasing tensions more than actually resolving them.

Even though Innogen’s mole is not returned *per se*, since it was never really taken, a substitute return of the mole occurs. Innogen’s brother Guiderius is rightfully claimed as the king’s son when Cymbeline remembers that his son had “Upon his neck a mole, a sanguine star” (5.6.365). Belarius reunites both sons to their father, and in doing so, he highlights the referenced mole on Guiderius which clearly marks him as the king’s son: “This is he, / Who hath upon him still that natural stamp.” (5.6.367-368). As other critics have observed, the mark that once demarcated Innogen as a loose woman in Posthumus’ eyes, destroying her sense of honor, now

becomes a validating, honorable birthmark for her brother, positing him as the king's noble-born son, who will carry on the royal lineage when he marries.³¹ Guiderius' mole reestablishes a previously sundered familial bond between himself, his brother Arviragus, and their father and sister, hinting at the future healing that will bolster the family's royal lineage once Innogen and her brothers produce heirs.

Although the mole token has been somewhat redeemed through Guiderius, the ring and bracelet have been stretched too far from their intended meaning as love gifts to convincingly regain their original status in quite the same way. The two trinkets are physically returned to Posthumus by a repentant Giacomo: “. . . but your ring first / And here the bracelet of the truest princess / That ever swore her faith,” but the total rehabilitation of these tokens by play's end is somewhat questionable (5.6.416-418). Partial redemption, at best, seems to be more accurate. The irony still remains that for Innogen's inward honor (and the original meaning of the couple's tokens) to be validated, it must be done in an extraordinarily public way. Just as Giacomo made a rich visual show of “disproving” Innogen's honor through tiny token objects, he also makes an equally externalized spectacle of restoring her reputation through the same tokens.

As for Posthumus and Innogen, the awkward way the two are reunited at play's end underscores the muddying of their respective identities. Innogen, still cross-dressed as Fidele, approaches a distraught Posthumus who thinking her dead is in the midst of deriding himself for being susceptible to Giacomo's trickery. Unable to trust Innogen since he first wagered a bet on her chastity, Posthumus' shortsightedness becomes abundantly clear in the play's last scene. Not recognizing his wife in her disguise, Posthumus strikes her to the ground. His inability to truly

³¹ Other critics have made this connection between Innogen's mole and Guiderius' mole and the symbolic import of its conversion from a sign of female dishonor to a sign of royal honor. See Sanders, who in a footnote reference cites Karen Cunningham and Cunningham's article, “Female Fidelities on Trial” *Renaissance Drama* 25 (1994): 1-31 as a cogent source where this interesting tie-in is explored fully.

see Innogen is exposed in a most melodramatic manner. Beyond Posthumus' action is the troubling issue of Innogen's cross-dressed form. Innogen's disguise at the end of *Cymbeline* actually reintroduces the disquieting issues of art and deception that have undergirded her treatment throughout the play. Although Innogen is finally vindicated through Giacomo's earlier confession and ultimately reunited with her husband, both of these crucial events happen while she is cross-dressed, which only reiterates how frequently her image (and true inward self) have been obscured throughout the play.

Moreover, I suggest that the actual logistics of Posthumus and Innogen's reunion reinsert the troubling shadow of tokens (or the hint of such, at least) into the play's final scene. After Posthumus has struck her and Pisanio has revealed Innogen's true identity to those gathered, Innogen confirms herself as princess and wife by throwing her arms around Posthumus in an embrace: "Why did you throw your wedded lady from you? / Think that you are upon a lock, and now/ Throw me again" (5.6.261-262). Posthumus' response: "Hang there like fruit, my soul, / Till the tree die" compares Innogen to a piece of fresh fruit dangling from the branches of a tree (5.6.264). Yet given the play's preoccupation with the ring, bracelet, and mole tokens, it is perhaps not too much of a stretch to also construe this embrace as remaking Innogen into a bodily token of sorts. With her arms encircling her husband, Innogen physically adorns Posthumus like a living, breathing necklace. Once again she is construed as an object of adornment, and although this time the gesture is one of her own devising, it nonetheless reinserts the problematic outline of tokens into the play's final treatment of the couple.

Like the art-pieces in Innogen's room, which Giacomo describes as so lifelike they could spring into action, all tokens in *Cymbeline* project a similar duality. Privately exchanged, privately shared, and deeply tied to the most internalized part of Innogen and Posthumus (their

honor) at the opening of the play, the ring and bracelet tokens and the bodily token of Innogen's mole prove themselves to be acutely susceptible to publication. In many ways their very design precipitates this. Perhaps it should come as little surprise that these diminutive, material objects in the play, the tokens, are naturally aligned with art since, in large part, they are art. And as the outward expression of inward inspiration, art must be externalized on some level in order to be viewed, studied, and appreciated. When love tokens in *Cymbeline*—such private objects in so many ways—become forcibly publicized as little art-pieces they naturally lose their intended function and form. And Posthumus and Innogen, whose love and collective sense of self the tokens once represented, find themselves unnervingly exposed: on display in an open admission exhibit that is rather precariously built upon the very love gifts they exchanged.

CHAPTER 4

Publicizing the Private: Tokens, Desire, and the Self in Donne's Love Lyric

Send me some tokens, that my hope may live,
 Or that my easelesse thoughts may sleep and rest;
Send me some honey to make sweet my hive,
 That in my passions I may hope the best.
I beg noe ribbond wrought with thine owne hands,
 To knit our loves in the fantastick straine
Of new-tought youth; nor Ring to shew the stands
 Of our affection, that as that's round and plaine,
So should our loves meet in simplicity.
 No, nor the Coralls which thy wrist infold,
Lac'd up together in congruity,
 To shew our thoughts should rest in the same hold,
No, nor thy picture, though most gracious,
 And most desir'd 'cause 'tis like thee best;
Nor witty Lines, which are most copious,
 Within the Writings which thou has addrest.

Send me nor this, nor that, t'increase my score,
But swear thou thinkst I love thee, and no more.

(Donne "The Token" 1-18)

If Shakespeare stretches our perception of what love tokens can convey, then John Donne stretches the definition of what constitutes a love token in the first place. Donne was fascinated by the relationship of the particular and microcosmic to the universal.¹ Conflations of the tiny and vast are scattered throughout his lyric, and Donne frequently found creative significance within diminutive objects (fleas, jewelry, teardrops). Given their smallness and propensity for conveying a broader symbolism beyond themselves, love tokens also fascinate Donne. More specifically, tokens illuminate one of the most pressing challenges in Donne's love lyric:

¹ For a detailed look at Donne's fascination with the relationship between microcosmic and macrocosmic elements within his world, see Norford 409-428, and also see Kawasaki.

sustaining a vibrant and private love-world in the midst of external, public threats (time apart, separations, threat of infidelity, and even death). In illuminating this challenge, love tokens address the issue of privacy—always a complex subject in Donne’s love lyric—by becoming a medium through which couples attempt to sustain their sense of private love and self. However, as I will show in my treatments of Donne’s elegy, “His Picture” and several of his *Songs and Sonnets*, this quest is not always successful.

This insistence on love as a private entity whose insularity must be protected is a prevalent theme throughout Donne’s love lyric. Earl Miner and Anthony Low have noted that Donne’s love poems exhibit a strong bent towards achieving domestic privacy.² As Low states:

Donne was a chief actor and influence in what may be called the “reinvention of love,” from something essentially social and feudal to something essentially private and modern . . . In short he effectively anticipates Romantic and modern views of marriage as a retreat from, rather than integrated aspect of, the daily interactions of people in society . . . somehow the individual can cut himself loose from the social order and instead construct, on the basis of private experience, a psychological space, within which he can safely live, love, and discover new truths of feeling. (33; 64)³

Similarly, William Shullenberger has observed that the love affairs Donne recounts in the *Elegies*, in particular, are frequently complicated by the omnipresence of a third person observer.⁴ That Donne would place a premium on domestic seclusion makes sense as the English Renaissance introduced changes in the way people perceived personal privacy.⁵ More

² See Low, especially 48-54. Also see Miner *The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley*, particularly Chapter 1, 3-47. In this chapter, Miner provides a rich overview of what he deems Donne’s “crucial redirection of poetry into the private mode” (12).

³ Although Donne’s verse often lauds the value of privacy, his personal life at times ran counter to that; see Huebert’s article.

⁴ See Shullenberger, “Love as a Spectator Sport in John Donne’s Poetry”

⁵ See Ariès 4-8 for more insights into what Ariès deems the “triumph of individualism in daily life” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (7). Ariès also suggests that from 1500-1800, people became increasingly sensitive to the privacy of the body (4). And as Lawrence Stone points out, the early to late seventeenth century was increasingly defined by “clear iconographic and literary evidence for a new interest in the self, and for recognition of the uniqueness of the individual” (153).

specifically, as Lena Cowen Orlin has argued, conceptions of privacy took on a decidedly domestic cast, becoming something increasingly identified with one's house, one's household goods, and one's land (*Private Matters and Public Culture*). And indeed, Donne often relays the private through his poetic descriptions of space.⁶ In his elegy "The Perfume," for example, domestic space is bifurcated into the public and private as the house is compartmentalized into enclosed hideaways or exposed rooms full of eavesdropping walls. For Donne though, privacy is also conveyed through the mental spaces of the mind. Anthony Low speaks eloquently of Donne's redefining the word "microcosm" to refer not only to the individual who finds parallels between the inner workings of his being and that of the universe but also to indicate that carefully crafted, wondrously ordered, private world generated by a loving couple (50).

I am not suggesting that Donne was the first to explore the long-established theme of lovers yearning for a retreat from the everyday world, but his love lyric does break ground in its attempts to sustain a private love and self through tiny material objects. Despite the early modern cultural precedent for a more attuned interest in privacy and Donne's own novel treatment of the topic through tokens, the relationship between privacy and Donnean love tokens has not received the attention one would expect. Furthermore, when Donnean tokens or love gifts have been the focus in recent criticism, the tokens are often posited as the medium through which some sort of power struggle is explored.⁷ Analogously, there has been a tendency to take

⁶ For an evocative exploration of the preoccupation with private space (particularly enclosed spaces) in Donne's love lyric, see Canteli. For an overview of how architectural metaphors relating to rooms and closets worked their way into early modern English lyric as a way of describing the inward self, see Ferry, especially 46-49.

⁷ When love gifts have been covered in Donne's love lyric, they are often posited as anxiety-inducing exchanges, as a way to critique the lady, or as objects that showcase Donne and his lady locked in an impasse over the lady's greed. Hammons' book touches on love tokens in Donne's lyric. However, since she covers many other poets, (including heretofore-overlooked female poets) her close readings of Donne's verse are fairly scant. When tokens in Donne's lyric garner mention, Hammons focuses on Donne's anxiety over unequal gift exchanges or his use of "negative" gifts (like the jeat ring) to portray the lady in question negatively. See Hammons 81, 96 and 104. For a Marxist take on the lady's lost bracelet in "The Bracelet," see Correll, and for a look at the bracelet as a symbol of economic battles over the lady's greed, see Revard. One exception to this trend is Ramie Targoff's book,

the poetic self that Donne displays in his lyric and extrapolate self-portraits of a power-hungry egocentric whose thwarted ambitions and unrealized desire for professional clout restlessly drive the thematic content and tone of his lyric. For example, John Carey's revisionist *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* depicts Donne as a self-contradictory, divided man whose inner tensions (and professional struggles) reflect his innate egotism. Carey offers some rich observations; he is particularly illuminating on Donne's predilection for acute self-analysis and his ongoing quest for self-knowledge. But Carey can stretch the literature too far at times to fit his overarching critical agenda. In particular, as other critics have noted, Carey's controversial reading of "To his Mistress going to bed," comes to mind, in which the lady is remade into a victimized girl, trembling before a speaker bent on dominating her.⁸ Along similar lines, Arthur Marotti's still influential *John Donne, Coterie Poet* addresses Donne's poetry through Donne's quest for patronage, at times recasting Donne's lyric into little more than wittily expressed career frustrations posing as love poems.⁹ Perhaps due to Carey's and Marotti's influence, much critical discourse has followed suit, reducing Donne's love lyric to a sounding board for an unchecked ego preoccupied with its own voice, its own desires, and its own need for linguistic/sexual/poetic control.¹⁰

A central criticism of Carey and Marotti (and likeminded critics) is that they oversimplify the contrasts and rifts within Donne's love lyric to a perpetual power play.¹¹ At times, Donne's impassioned poetic voice also becomes evidence enough for the utter silencing or subjugation of

which doesn't focus primarily on love tokens in Donne, but still offers some fine insights into Donne's views on love and touches briefly on a few Donnean tokens.

⁸ See William Kerrigan, who offers a witty, cogent assessment of Carey's book (2-3). For additional critical reviews of Carey's book, see Empson, Ricks, and Taylor.

⁹ See Summers' review of Marotti's book.

¹⁰ For various critical renditions on the issue of power in Donne, see the following critics' articles: Cunnar, Fish, Halley, Singer, and Guibbory, "'Oh, let me not serve so': The Politics of Love in Donne's *Elegies*".

¹¹ As Kerrigan notes: "Today's critics use power to drive out other human concerns" (7). Kerrigan provides an excellent critique of the power trend in Donne criticism in his article.

the woman.¹² This tendency to make the desire for power the central motivator in Donne's love poems suggests that the overriding tension within the poems is an adversarial one, when more often than not, the poet speaker is conjoined with his lady, giving collective voice to the experiences and challenges they shoulder as a couple. It is also important to remember that there is no single, dominant discourse of desire running throughout Donne's lyric.¹³ Critics have been quick to assign one voice to Donne and thus dismiss the mutuality of experience that many of Donne's love poems express. My own critical benchmark here is Ilona Bell's assertion that:

... what Donne *and* his speaker expressed most intensely was not egocentricity or intellectuality but empathy, a quality all-too-rarely considered by Donne's critics ... [R]egardless of what he may say at any given moment, whether he professes indifference or canonizes love, Donne is never able to disregard the woman's point of view ... I think Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* are the first Renaissance love poems written for adults, loving and empathetic enough to grant the man's and the woman's point of view equal credence.

("The Role of the Lady" 115;116;129)¹⁴

With a nod to Bell's argument that the lady is a viable, essential presence, I turn in this last chapter to some of the more memorable love token exchanges in Donne's lyric. In her insightful book, *John Donne: Body and Soul*, Ramie Targoff rightly notes that one of the most problematic challenges for Donne was how to sustain love at its pinnacle. As Targoff explains, "What distinguishes Donne as a love poet ... is at once the intensity of the pleasure he conveys in the moment of mutual love, and the ferocity with which he attempts to prolong that moment

¹² If the lady's presence is acknowledged, then she is frequently portrayed as subsumed by her man's more forceful shadow. For example, Hammons attests that: "Donne's version tends to echo the legal theoretical notion of coverture: the male speaker and beloved become one, and that one is the male speaker." (44 *Gender, Sexuality*). For examples of similar critical views that argue for the silencing of the woman in Donne's lyric and for an overview of the critical disagreement on Donne's view towards women, see Larson, especially Chapter 5, and also see Halley.

¹³ Donne provides a variety of perspectives on love, women, and romantic desire. The same man who penned soaring love odes like "The Extasie" and "A Valediction forbidding mourning" also wrote cynical diatribes like "Song: Goe, and catche a falling starre" and "Womans constancy." William Kerrigan has noted that Donne's verse is not meant to produce a uniform, comprehensive stance (2-3).

¹⁴ Also see Bell. "Gender matters: women in Donne's poetry." And for a defense of the presence of Anne More in Donne's love lyric and the warmth of that relationship, see Slights.

for as long as he can, knowing full well that its end may be near” (49). Targoff makes the interesting argument that Donne’s fervent individualism (and some of the theological and philosophical views expressed in his sermons) suggest that he is actually somewhat uncomfortable with the notion of lovers bridging physical distances through a truly mutual and transformative exchange of hearts or souls (64-65). Thus, Targoff suggests that for Donne, love tokens become one potentially less problematic way for couples to remain present to one another in times of absence, without exchanging or offering up those key parts of the self (65).¹⁵

However, for Donne’s speaker and his lady, the gifting of tokens actually does entail exchanging and even merging—often quite profoundly—crucial parts of themselves. Given Donnean tokens’ close relation to the body (miniatures held in the hand and hung in the heart, bracelets woven of hair, teardrop pictures suspended in the eyes), token exchanges actively embrace an extraordinarily intimate sharing of body, self, and experience. And it is these tiny tokens (in and of themselves), which generate so much consternation for Donne’s speaker and his lady. Given tokens’ close relationship with the poetic couple’s very identities, I suggest what really unsettles Donne’s speaker and his lady are these intimate objects’ own inherent, publicizing properties. Donne’s speaker feels compelled to protect the private realm that he and his beloved create together, especially when that inward world is threatened by externalities like job duties or times of separation. Love tokens seem one way to accomplish the task. But the mere externalization of internal passions through objects like tokens becomes a nuanced but piquant form of publication, and such externalization never fails to give pause to both Donne’s speaker and his lady. Moreover, given how love tokens are so intimately tied to the very selfhood of Donne’s speaker and his lady, when a Donnean couple tries to perpetuate their private world

¹⁵ For further insight into Donne’s “poetics of taking leave” (to borrow Targoff’s eloquent phrase on 50), see Targoff, Chapter 2.

through such tokens, they find their own sense of subjectivity is frequently fragmented, caught in a cycle of vacillation between public and private identities.

Given Donne's preoccupation with sustaining a private love, it is rather striking that tokens (with their tendency to outwardly memorialize) feature as prominently as they do. Although many poems from the *Elegies* and the *Songs and Sonnets* seek privacy (sometimes so robustly the poet almost writes himself and his lady into obscurity), other Donne poems present a startling about-face. In both "The Sunne Rising" and "The Canonization," (neither of which features tokens, which is significant), Donne opens by lambasting the prurient gaze of the public, but by the poems' ends, he is trumpeting his desires to an audience he has invited into the private domain of his and his lady's love-world. Why the disparity? Part of the answer might lie within Donne's own life, which was marked by tension between private desires and public pressures. It has been duly noted that Donne's career aspirations were thwarted by his love life, namely his clandestine marriage to Anne More.¹⁶ In light of these pressures, it makes sense that a prevalent Donnean theme is poet and lady struggling to nurture private passions and selves amidst public pressures. And given what we know about Donne's verse, it follows that he might explore this struggle through seemingly antithetical angles. Despite Donne's at times divergent treatments of privacy throughout the scope of his lyric, a striking number of his love poems consistently voice a desire for private love, and they voice it, interestingly enough, through love tokens. Moreover, the majority of Donne's love poems that deal with privacy and do feature love tokens—even those that begin with a public acclamation of the couple—almost always close with a firm validation of the couple's need for privacy, expressing dissatisfaction with anything that threatens it.

¹⁶ Carey is quite informative in his comments on Donne's marriage and how Donne's resulting rift with his in-laws (who did not approve of him as a husband for their daughter) cost him in the public arena of his career, finances, and even social reputation (70-72).

Donne scatters a dizzying array of love gifts throughout his verse; this chapter explores the tokens that best highlight the struggle to maintain a private sense of love and self over the course of a given poem.¹⁷ As my selections suggest, I am most interested in more unusual Donnean tokens such as the etched windowpane name, or internally held ones like “mental miniatures.”¹⁸ Out of personal preference, I am focusing primarily on tokens in the *Songs and Sonnets*, but I do open my close readings with Donne’s elegy, “His Picture,” as its duo of miniatures sets the stage for many of the themes that I survey further in this chapter.¹⁹ One of the most original ways that Donne calls attention to his poetic couple’s desire for a private, interiorized love is through his distinctions between outward tokens (visible and tangible) and inward tokens (hidden and intangible). Indeed, Donne’s speaker is always pondering the significance (and innate drawbacks) of the tokens that he and his lady exchange, whether those tokens be outward, inward, reflected, self-made, or purely imagined.²⁰ As tokens become too limited or concrete to do justice to the love that Donne’s speaker and his beloved share, they quickly become unwelcome gifts (ironically of the couple’s own devising).²¹ As a result, many

¹⁷ For the sake of space, I had to limit my lyric selections. Overall, I find that token poems in the *Songs and Sonnets* deal with the issue of love and privacy in a more interesting way than the token poems in the *Elegies*. Some other Donne poems which feature tokens, but which I chose not to analyze in this chapter include: “A Jeat Ring sent,” “Sonnet. The Token,” and “Valediction to his booke.” One could also, I think, make the argument that the worn perfume in “The Perfume” acts as an unwitting love token. Interestingly, all of these poems with the exception of “Valediction to his booke” depict tokens in a rather negative (or at least ambiguous) light, suggesting that Donne’s discomfort with tokens is somewhat widespread throughout his lyric.

¹⁸ I address the following tokens in this chapter: the miniature jewel and its counterpart mental image in “His Picture”, the bracelet and other token “relics” in “The Relique” (via an introductory, comparative look at the bracelets in “The Bracelet” and “The Funerall”), the teardrop “miniatures” in “A Valediction of weeping”, and the teardrop miniature and miniature held in the heart in “Witchcraft by a picture,” and the etched name in the windowpane in “A Valediction of my name, in the window.”

¹⁹ Although some notes pertaining to the *Elegies* are cited from Stringer’s edition of the *Elegies*, all quotations and other references to Donne’s verse are from the following edition: C.A. Patrides *The Complete English Poems*. See bibliography for complete citation information for both sources.

²⁰ See Zemon Davis. In her study on gift exchange in early modern France, Natalie Zemon Davis remarks that early modern gift culture was so engrained that “people were evaluating gifts all the time, their own gifts and those of others, deciding what was at stake, and judging whether it was a good gift or a bad gift or even a gift at all” (9).

²¹ For examples of early modern gift-giving gone awry see, Zemon Davis, Chapter 5 “Gifts Gone Wrong” For further insights into unwelcome obligations from gifts see Marcel Mauss’ classic study, especially 58-62.

of Donne's most memorable love poems are marked by a fascinating series of token reconfigurations. Donne's poet speaker constantly re-imagines the tokens he and his beloved exchange in an attempt to come up with a love gift rarefied enough (and interiorized and intangible enough) to adequately signify and safeguard the couple's love and make whole and insular again what has been threatened.

"This shall say what I was": "His Picture"

Can love (which is experienced internally at its deepest levels) be sustained through an outward, tangible object such as a token? What about internally conceived tokens (like mental images encapsulated in the heart and mind)? Are these more genuine and valid since they are immaterial and held within? These are the larger questions framing "His Picture" and the poem jumps right into them in its opening line, with the narrating poet giving his beloved a miniature jewel of himself: "Here take my Picture; though I bid farewell;" (1). On one level, the miniature becomes a way for the speaker to memorialize his and his lady's love for each other. But the miniature also becomes a potent mode for memorializing the self. As the speaker relays, his miniature will become for his lady, throughout his absence, a more vivid embodiment of the speaker than the speaker himself: "'Tis like me now, but I dead, 'twill be more / When wee are shadowes both, than 'twas before" (3-4). At the same time though, this act of giving his miniature to his lady implies an odd diminishing of the self. Patricia Fumerton argues that miniaturists like Nicholas Hilliard and sonneteers like Sidney revealed a private self through their "public" art but really obscured that self even more by the very artifice they used to supposedly showcase it.²² Something similar is afoot in "His Picture," but in more dramatic fashion. As the speaker admits, the miniature is "like me now" but in the future, once he is

²² See Fumerton "'Secret' Arts: Elizabethan Miniatures and Sonnets."

away from his lady (and she away from him) the miniature token will become even more like him as it invokes his absent presence: “’Tis like me now, but I dead, ‘twill be *more* /When we are shadowes both, than ‘twas before.” (3-4, italics mine). In order for the miniature to most vividly represent the speaker to his lady, they must be absent from one another: a separation so palpable it can feel as painful as death. The token’s efficacy only functions if the private self is (pardon the pun) already out of the picture. Surely the irony was not lost on Donne that the miniature—that most conspicuously self-referential of all love tokens—also ends up being the most adept at self-erasure.

These divisions between the speaker’s real self and the miniature’s externalized representation of that self are complicated further when the speaker states there is not one but actually two miniatures being given: “Here take my Picture, though I bid Farewell; / Thine, in my heart, where my soule dwels, shall dwell.” (1-2). The speaker states that he too will carry a miniature of his lady: a mental image that he will keep in his heart.²³ This idea of a mental miniature also emerges in Donne’s elegy, “The Dreame,” where the speaker compares daydreams of his lady to metal coins:

Image of her whom I love, more then she,
Whose fair impression in my faithfull heart,
Makes mee her *Medall*, and makes her love mee,
As Kings do coynes, to which their stamps impart
The value . . . (1-5)

In “The Dreame”, the speaker underscores the material sway of his imagined image of his lady, stating that its influence over him is as tangible as freshly stamped coinage. In doing so, he also

²³ The idea of an image of a beloved suspended within the mind’s eye or heart is made more concrete when the image is construed as a portable picture (like a miniature). Images held within the heart are favorite tropes of Donne’s but certainly not original to him. See Petrarch’s Poem 96, lines 4-5. In Poem 96, Petrarch speaks of Laura being painted into his heart: “But that lovely smiling face, which I carry painted in my breast / and see wherever I look . . .”. “*Ma ‘l bel viso leggiadro che depinto / porto nel petto et veggio ove ch’io miri.*” Other English Renaissance poets also incorporated this motif into their lyric. See my footnote 13 in Chapter 2 for references to Sidney and Spenser. All quotations from Petrarch’s *Rime sparse* are from Robert Durling’s translation and edition.

gives a nod to the mutuality of the image-making, reiterating his lady's agency in the endeavor. It is she who stamps herself into his heart: "Makes mee her *Medall*, and makes her love mee" (3).

Initially "His Picture" seems to be making a similar move with its implied contrast between the speaker's mental miniature of the lady enclosed within his heart and that tactile jewel of himself that he gives her. Traditionally, early modern English miniatures featured subjects painted in deep, vibrant, jewel-tone colors on tiny vellum canvases. The canvas was encased in fine metal and sometimes encrusted with gemstones and further embellished with engravings, initials, or even mottoes.²⁴ Less a realistic visage and more of a jewel, an elaborate Renaissance miniature could be almost sensuous with its contrast of smooth paint, cool metal, and glittering gems. Its very aesthetic turned upon a certain tactile tangibility. That the speaker chooses such a token for his lady underscores the innate contrast between the token that he gives her (highly tactile, richly visual) and the mental miniature of her he keeps in his heart (intangible, invisible, and utterly internalized).

However, no sooner does the speaker delineate the two miniatures as contrasting external/internal modes working in tandem to bring the lady's face to the speaker and his visage to her, than he begins to question the miniature's ability to do just that. Imagining his body on his return: "My body'a sack of bones, broken within / And powders blew staines scatter'd on my skinne;" the speaker fears he will look nothing as he does now, having been ravaged by his travels (9-10). Although his miniature is supposed to preserve his image for his lady while he is gone, what happens when he returns and looks nothing like her miniature jewel? He holds out hope that in mirroring what he used to look like: "This shall say what I was", the token will

²⁴ For more information on the use of gemstones in miniatures and the particular style of Nicholas Hilliard, see Fumerton "'Secret' Arts: Elizabethan Miniatures and Sonnets" especially 66-68. For his own insights into his art and style, see Hilliard. For a detailed study of the early modern English miniature, see Strong *The English Renaissance Miniature* 87; 120-127. Also see Reynolds, especially 10-20 of Chapter 2.

refresh her love for him (13). Yet by giving so much descriptive space to conjecturing how his travels may coarsen his looks, the speaker also highlights his miniature's inability to reflect his sense of identity, which is dynamic. He will return changed by his experiences, but his miniature will have remained the same, preserving an outdated self-image. The miniature token may, as the speaker notes, be able to "say what I was" but can it adequately convey who he is?

The speaker's anxieties have a counterpart in his descriptions of his lady's fears. The speaker frets over how he will compare physically with his miniature once he returns; his lady fears that the travails of her beloved's duties will so infiltrate his day-to-day that his public obligations will obscure his inward image of her: "and thou shalt say, / Doe his hurts reach mee? doth my worth decay?" (13-14). By merging herself with the speaker's mental image so completely—"Doe his hurts reach *mee*? / doth *my* worth decay?"—the lady's sense of self becomes utterly dependent on the fate of her mental image. If it fades, she fades. The lady goes on to question the strength of the speaker's love for her, worrying that he might need her bodily presence to continue loving her: "Or doe they reach his judging minde, that hee / Should now love lesse, what hee did love to see?" (15-16).

And so, the lady's worries that close the poem bookend the speaker's concerns, which open the poem. Although "His Picture" is not a formal dialogue, the speaker takes pains to generate his lady's responses alongside his own, perhaps as a way to underscore the couple's mutually shared emotions on their imminent period of separation. I also think Donne gives us both the lady's and the speaker's voices because the poem is intimately concerned with the couple's respective mental states as they both try to imagine their upcoming time apart, their future reunion, and how their love will fare. Much of what is being pondered in "His Picture" has not actually happened, which adds a distinctly Petrarchan element to the poem. Like the vast

majority of the poems in Petrarch's *Rime sparse*, which as Robert Durling observes, tend to: "transpose all "events" to the level of recollection and reflection . . . into a zone where the dividing line between fact, illusion, and fiction is obscured," Donne's "His Picture" is an exercise in prolonged fantasizing about the repercussions of a couple's future parting and future reunion (6).

And so throughout the poem, we as readers find ourselves in a rather personal space, deep inside the couple's respective thought patterns, which brings me to the last lines of the poem:

That which in him was faire and delicate,
Was but the milke, which in loves childish state
Did nurse it: who now is growne strong enough
To feed on that, which to disus'd tastes seems tough. (17-20)

The ending lines of "His Picture" are complex, and as Helen Gardner notes, "present some difficulty" (333). Gardner argues that Donne's line "to disus'd tastes seems tough," incorporates the Pauline antithesis of milk for babies and meat for adults (333). Playing upon this idea, Donne draws on contemporary devotional literature, which made distinctions between new believers' young ways of worshipping God and the richer, more nuanced way of expressing devotion to God that the seasoned faithful enjoyed (Gardner 333-337).²⁵ Gardner goes on to suggest that the last lines summarize the lady's own mental state; the lady is referring directly to the maturation of *her* love for the speaker:

. . . so Donne's mistress distinguishes between her childish love, which was nursed on his outward fairness, and her full-grown love, which has by practice in loving come to feed on 'tougher meat' . . . As for her own feelings, she will assert that when her love was new and childish it was nursed on the outward beauty of his form and face, but that now, when it is mature and strong, it is able to feed on the 'meat' of his inner self, which is too hard or 'tough' for beginners in love to enjoy. (333;335)

²⁵ See also Stringer 833, notes on lines 17-20 of "His Picture."

I like the gist of Gardner's interpretation, and I agree that the couple's realization of their fully ripened, mature love is the overarching focal point of the lines. But I would like to suggest that the lines could also refer (perhaps simultaneously) to the lady's thoughts on her *beloved's* mental state, the maturation of *his* love for her—and even more to the point, I would add—his mentality regarding that inward miniature of her that he carries in his heart. The speaker sets up just such a context for this reading in the lines directly preceding the final four of the poem. In line 13, the speaker stops discussing the miniature jewel he has given his lady (“This shall say what I was”) and abruptly switches to his imagined projection of his lady's voice (“and *thou* shalt say”). Donne's speaker imagines the lady asking a series of hypothetical questions not just about the state of her man's love but about how well his mental miniature of her will fare while they are apart. And so, in lines 14-16, we get the speaker's voice dropping off and the lady's voice taking over, as she expresses her concerns over the couple's time of separation. The lady's focus is centered upon her beloved's experiences, thoughts, and that mental image of her he carries within: “Doe *his* hurts reach mee? doth my worth decay?/ Or doe they reach *his* judging minde, that *hee* / Should now love lesse, what *hee* did love to see?” (14-16 italics mine).

Given that these lines so squarely deal with the lady's imagined projection of her beloved's thoughts and experiences, I believe the same perspective could be at work in the poem's closing lines:

That which in him was faire and delicate
 Was but the milke, which in loves childish state
 Did nurse it: who now is growne strong enough
 To feed on that, which to disus'd tastes seems tough. (17-20)

The line: “That which in him was faire and delicate,” could refer not only to the speaker's pre-departure good looks (yet untarnished by his journey and ordeals in the world) as Gardner suggests it does, but also to the mental miniature of the lady that the speaker holds in his heart.

In these moments before the speaker departs from his lady, the image he carries of her face and form is at its freshest and most immediate. Untested by the trials of their time apart, he holds an internal picture of his lady as she is right now, a picture “faire and delicate.” But just as he is acutely aware that the miniature jewel he gives her may not match how he looks upon his return, the lady is also aware that the mental image the speaker carries of her in his mind may prove incongruous. After all, this is a poem that is always rolling headlong towards the couple’s imminent time of separation in order to conjecture how their time apart will affect them. And so the lady first imagines the time of absence; then, she imagines her beloved returning to her, perhaps after months or even years apart. In her mind, both he and she have reached a point in their love where the externals (whether they be physical looks, miniatures, or mental images remembered) have ceased to matter: “who now is growne strong enough / To feed on that, which to disus’d tastes seems tough” (19-20). In these final lines, the lady does more than differentiate between an undeveloped love and the fully mature love she and the speaker have come to know. She also brings the couple’s respective miniatures into the frame, denouncing any picture memorial of what the speaker “was” or any mental memento of what she was as the “milke” of a more “childish” affection. If their love is in its prime then they are dependent upon nothing except their love to sustain their love.

Once the couple discovers that there is no need for either of them to match up to the miniature images of each other that they have exchanged in preparation for their time apart, their picture tokens become void. The lady acknowledges that when her beloved returns, she will take him as he is, and he will do the same for her. The couple needs no externalizing modes to perpetuate their love in absence. Their passion remains “strong enough” to actively delight in a hard-earned, greatly tested love that has survived time apart only to emerge all the stronger on

the other side. For a lesser couple, such love would seem impossible or “tough” but for Donne’s lovers it is delectable stuff to “feed on.”

“As all confessing, and through-shine as I”: introducing tokens in the *Songs and Sonnets*

Donne grapples with many of the same issues centering on tokens, privacy, and the self in the *Songs and Sonnets* as he does in the “His Picture”, but he does so increasingly through a creative reworking of Petrarchan convention. “The Relique” contains some subtle Petrarchan intonations here and there. But of the selections I cover in this chapter, it is really the two teardrop poems (“A Valediction of weeping” and “Witchcraft by a picture”) and the windowpane poem (“A Valediction of my name, in the window”) where Donne re-works Petrarchan motifs in remarkably fresh ways. To what extent Donne was or was not a Petrarchan poet and how exactly he incorporated/rejected/rewrote Petrarchan convention has been debated, without any definitive consensus being reached.²⁶ In regard to Donne’s Petrarchism, I tend to side with Heather Dubrow who demonstrates how Donne and many of the best early modern poets had a nuanced relationship with Petrarch, not slavishly imitating or outright rejecting his influence but engaging in an ever-evolving series of counterdiscourses (to borrow Dubrow’s apt label) that re-conceive Petrarchan convention in ways that served their own creative purposes.²⁷ In “A Valediction of weeping” I suggest Donne puts his own spin on the unreciprocated Petrarchan gaze by making it an emphatically shared one, and in “Witchcraft by a picture” it is the lady who is fashioner, gazer, and artist, remaking her man through *her* stare. In “A Valediction of my name, in the

²⁶ For a landmark study on how and where exactly Donne fits into the Petrarchan tradition, see Guss. Also see Ruffo-Fiore. Although densely written in sections, Estrin provides an interesting take on how Petrarch gleans power from Laura’s absence as opposed to Donne who seems to need the lady’s presence for more viable lyric friction. See Estrin, especially 170-174.

²⁷ See Dubrow’s excellent book, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and its Counterdiscourses*.

window” Donne goes a step further in his Petrarchan counterdiscourses by making the recipient of the gaze not the speaker or the lady but the love token name scratched into a windowpane.

Gordon Braden and William Kerrigan have observed that in the poems of Petrarch, who longed for Laura with little hope of reciprocation (much less consummation), the love gaze has nowhere to go except inward. However, a certain creative autonomy emerges that partially compensates for the lack of actualized desire. As Braden and Kerrigan explain:

Action hits a wall, and the rebound goes inward, into the resources of the poetic self. . . . Away from all human interference, desire can exercise itself with a new freedom and ease, projecting an image of the beloved onto the passive landscape The woman’s very distance enables a heady sense of power on the lover’s part, of the capacity of his own mind to transform or displace external reality. At its most cogently celebratory, Petrarchan love poetry exalts the poet’s own imagination. (160-161)

Like Petrarch, who used Laura as a creative springboard for self-reflection, self-recreation, and the remaking of day-to-day realities, something similar is at work in both of Donne’s teardrop poems, but with significant differences. For Petrarch, the gaze is a vehicle for self-reflection, and it is his own solitary self that Petrarch is most interested in exploring. Laura largely remains an enigma. For Donne’s couples though, the gaze does not immediately go inward, at least not initially. In Donne’s “A Valediction of weeping” and “Witchcraft by a picture,” the couple’s shared gaze at one another actually spawns a series of love-token images of themselves, generating further reflection on their communal identity as romantic partners. In “A Valediction of my name, in the window” the couple’s gaze does not create their love token; instead, their gaze is firmly fixed upon their token. The speaker is almost unable to visualize or think about his lady, except in the context of his etched name, which he carves into window glass as a farewell token to keep his beloved faithful. The etched name becomes the medium through which the speaker explores his own desires and doubts (akin to the way Petrarch uses Laura as

the lens through which he gazes at his own psyche). Furthermore, in addition to the speaker imagining his own lady gazing upon his carved name every time she glances out the window, he amplifies the token's powers by fantasizing how his lady's own desires will also be influenced by his etched name.

In the *Songs and Sonnets* selections I cover ("The Relique," "A Valediction of weeping", "Witchcraft by a picture," and "A Valediction of my name, in the window"), tokens are exchanged to bolster love in absence or as a reassurance of fidelity, but the little love gifts (with the exception of the final miniature in "Witchcraft by a picture") ultimately end up being jettisoned so sharply that we are unsure what exactly we are left with. Is it love unhindered by material mementos? It is a love incapable of being sustained in the manner the speaker is attempting to? Is it a love that must simply exist for its own sake, not as a catalyst for any sort of Petrarchan self-exploration or interiorized battle over a beloved's level of devotion? Are we left with a love that can be redeemed only through throwing off anything that attempts to externalize it—material tokens, imagined tokens—even words and the written poem itself?

"All measure, and all language, I should passe"—memorial tokens in "The Relique"

Hoping to shed light on these questions, I begin with "The Relique," which opens with the vision of a buried couple, whose bones (and love token bracelet wrapped round a bone) are unearthed. Bracelets are recurring tokens in Donne's lyric, as are the tiny reflections weeping couples see in each other's eyes or tears, but the speaker's devotion to the bracelet token that appears in "The Relique" stands in marked contrast to the somewhat flippant treatment bracelets receive in other Donne poems. For example, in "The Bracelet," from Donne's *Elegies*, the speaker bemoans losing his beloved's gold bracelet not for sentimental reasons but instead for

the “bitter cost” that he will incur when he has to melt down twelve gold coins to fashion a duplicate. Playing upon the Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophical concept of form (more specifically, the idea of substantial form, that which makes a thing what it essentially is) the speaker questions whether the twelve coins can possibly keep their identity when melted into a bracelet bauble for his lady’s wrist.²⁸ His lady adamantly affirms they can: “Thou say’st (alas) the gold doth still remaine,/ Though it be chang’d, and put into a chaine” but the speaker rebukes the notion, explaining that form is essential: “For, forme gives being, and their forme is gone” (69-70;76). In “The Funerall,” another Donnean poem featuring a woven bracelet worn to the grave, the speaker admonishes the public that his bracelet be left alone, just like the speaker in “The Relique” does. However, the similarities between the bracelets in the two poems end there. The speaker in “The Funerall” is a peeved lover whose lady rebuffed his advances during his lifetime. He attempts to reverse such injustices through the lady’s bracelet, which he will wear to the grave as an instrument of posthumous revenge. The bracelet becomes a stand-in for the lady, with the speaker vindictively hoping “That since you would have none of mee, I bury some of you” (24). The statement has definite sexual implications, revealing the speaker’s own frustrated desire to sexually top (or “bury”) his lady in the hereafter since he was denied in the here and now.

The playful cynicism that marks “The Bracelet” and the bitterness underlying “The Funerall” are absent from “The Relique” though. Donne’s bracelet in “The Relique” is unique, in part because of the reverence it inspires in both the lady and the poet speaker. Woven from the lady’s hair, the bracelet is an intensely intimate, earthy thing that nonetheless possesses the potential to expedite a spiritual reunion in the afterlife: “Who thought that this device might be

²⁸ See Stringer 537, notes on lines 75-76 of “The Bracelet.” Stringer notes that Donne borrows directly from Aquinas in the line “For, forme gives being, and their forme is gone” (537). For further information on Aquinas’ philosophical views on form, see Davies 45-49.

some way / To make their soules, at the last busie day, / Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?” (9-11). The hair bracelet also encircles a bone, most probably the speaker’s wrist bone. Thus we have a part of the lady’s body wrapped around part of the speaker’s body. The speaker protests later in the poem that his and his lady’s love is an innocent bond bordering on the platonic (“Yet knew not what wee lov’d, nor why, / Difference of sex no more wee knew, / Then our Guardian Angells doe”), but the encircling of the speaker’s arm bone with a woven bracelet of his lady’s hair slightly complicates this later assertion of a purely innocent love (23-25). The token bracelet offers the visual suggestion, at least, that the couple enjoyed, if not a physical and spiritual love, then at least a pure love as deeply and profoundly felt as marital, consummated love. With the lady so closely associated with her token bracelet and the speaker’s bones acting as a powerful *memento mori* for his own person, the interlocking position of these tokens in the grave hints at the equally strong, interlinked love the couple once enjoyed. Unlike the hair bracelet in “The Funerall” which attempts to symbolically enact a union never enjoyed in real life, the hair bracelet in “The Relique” commemorates a rich love so fully enjoyed that the couple wishes it to continue into the great beyond.

The hair bracelet wrapped around the bone also clearly sets up the speaker and his lady as a unified couple, joined in life and death by the mutuality of their love. This mutuality is emphasized by the speaker’s incessant use of the first person plural in reference to himself and his lady. Throughout the poem, “us” is on repeat: “Will he not let’ *us* alone / . . . / Then, he that digges *us* up, will bring/ *Us*, to the Bishop, and the King / To make *us* Reliques” and in the last section, almost every line either features the pronoun “we” or “our” (7; 14-16, italics mine). This strong linkage between the speaker and his lady not only underscores their bond as a couple, but also heightens the irritation expressed when their grave is impinged upon. In

Marvell's world, the grave may be "a fine and private place" but in Donne's world, not so much. Private things of the most intimate sort (a gravesite, a love token bracelet, the remains of a couple, memories of a love union) are juxtaposed with a brazenly public action (digging up the grave to put everything on show).

It is no coincidence that the speaker's first request in the poem is a plea for privacy: "Will he not let' us alone / And thinke that there a loving couple lies." (7-8). However, as is typical in many a Donne love poem, this initial desire for privacy quickly turns into the speaker's own (perhaps inadvertent) publicizing of the very token and love relationship he originally wanted undisclosed: "Who thought that this device might be some way / To make their soules, at the last busie day / Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?" (9-11). The fact that the "device" in question is a handmade piece of love-token jewelry is also telling. As Diana O'Hara points out, giving jewelry was not merely a courtship rite but also a highly visual, translatable discourse: "a language for conducting and defining relationships"(Courtship and Constraint 57). What Orest Ranum calls "relic-objects" or the "souvenir object" may be intimate gifts whose exchange frequently occurs in private, but their meaning takes on a much more public significance. Ranum explains: "The souvenir-space . . . and the souvenir-object (book, flower, clothing, ring, ribbon, portrait, letter) were quite private, having been possessed by an individual unique in time and space. Nevertheless, the significance of such space and objects was encoded and perfectly comprehensible to others. The meaning was social" (207). By broadcasting the private meaning of the bracelet, the speaker transforms his initial protest for privacy into publicizing speech and his love token into a public object. The speaker's disclosure brings not only the bracelet's purpose into the open but also pushes the speaker and his lady out of the grave and into the public realm.

Despite the title's emphasis on just one "relic" though, "The Relique" does not simply revolve around the initial, single token of the hair bracelet. I suggest the poem actually contains four token representations: the woven bracelet, the couple exhumed as relic-bones, the speaker's written words (i.e. the poem), and the series of "miracles" attributed to the couple's love. Furthermore, this series of four token types becomes progressively more outward and publicizing, heightening tensions between the couple's initial plea for privacy and their contradictory push towards more public forms of commemoration.

Keeping with this pattern, the speaker does not simply imagine his love-token bracelet exhumed. Instead, he pushes that parallel to a new extreme, providing the poem's second example of private token turned public by positing the remains of himself and his lady as relics for a future age fallen upon "mis-devotion:"

Then, he that diggs us up, will bring
Us, to the Bishop, and the King,
To *make* us Reliques; then
Thou shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I
A something else thereby;
All women shall adore us, and some men;
And since at such time, miracles are sought,
I would have that age by this paper taught
What miracles wee harmlesse lovers wrought. (14-22 italics mine)

It is striking that Donne's speaker states the King and Bishop won't declare the couple relics but will *make* them relics, for the couple's identities have already undergone two re-makings (from living couple to buried couple to exhumed relics) and will undergo a few more throughout the course of the poem. By conflating the private view of the couple's bracelet as an intimate love token for two with the image of the couple's bones as public, religious relics for the adoring masses, Donne gives us a multi-layered token that is simultaneously public and private. The bracelet still contains its original meaning as a private love symbol, yet the bone it is wrapped

around has been declared a public marvel. Donne elevates the couple's bones to the status of unique hybrids: part religious relic, part love token. This double-ness of the two intertwined tokens (bracelet and bone) mirrors the double-ness of the couple who begin as utterly private and hidden from view (buried in the grave), yet end up on display as icons admired by many.

Unsurprisingly in a poem that opens with an advocacy for privacy, this double-ness generates uneasiness, underscored by Donne's speaker's decision to label his lady Mary Magdalene. In Mary Magdalene, we have a Biblical woman who is considered a saint by both the Catholic and Anglican church, even though later church tradition and medieval lore unfairly portrayed her as a fallen woman, creating a stigma that has lingered in popular perception despite the fact that nowhere in the Bible is she defined as a prostitute or even as remotely loose.²⁹ The paralleling of the speaker's lady with Mary Magdalene clearly plays upon these contrasts. A woman with a purportedly checkered past turned saintly follower of Christ encapsulates a merging of seemingly antithetical qualities. This oxymoronic yoking is also seen in the unique hybrid nature of the couple's bracelet (private love token turned public relic) and even in the speaker's insistence that the couple's love is deeply intimate but also wondrously innocent: "Difference of sex no more wee knew, / Then our Guardian Angells doe" (25-26).

Furthermore, by imagining his lady as Mary Magdalene, the poet speaker forecasts the couple's eventual disapproval of such public memorializing. For the once-Catholic turned Protestant Donne, relics already had a dubious cast. To have them feature as structural motifs in a poem concerned with perpetuating a couple's love beyond the grave exacerbates the inherent contrast between more private modes of Protestant devotion (stripped down, interiorized, and distrustful of any sort of devotional excess) and the more ornate, tradition-laden legacy of Catholic devotion (rich in the cult of the saints and replete with visual modes of worship).

²⁹ For a solid, concise overview of the Biblical Mary Magdalene, see Collins.

Addressing Donne's religious verse, David K. Anderson argues that Donne rejects physical, material icons in favor of mental images that can be held in the mind. As Anderson explains in his article, this privileging of the personal, inward icon allows Donne to simultaneously distance himself from stereotypes of Catholic idolatry and generate a meaningful form of worship for the individual Christian.³⁰

In "The Relique," Donne will ultimately suggest that any outside mode of sustaining love (internalized or externalized) is problematic. Of course, it takes most of the poem for the speaker to reach such a realization. In the meantime, he continues to generate increasingly public memorials to himself, his lady, and their love. In addition to the couple's woven bracelet and their relic bones, the speaker inserts a third token (perhaps the most public of all) into the mix when he calls attention to the love poem itself. The speaker defines the poem as a highly tangible set of instructions that explains the true, authentic meaning of the miracles he and his lady have accomplished: "I would have that age by this paper taught / What miracles wee harmlesse lovers wrought" (21-22). "This paper," as Donne's speaker concretely labels the poem, takes readers through the couple's progression in detail: first memorializing their private bracelet token, then describing their transformation into religious relic tokens, and finally uplifting their love as miraculous. One could argue that all love poems publicize a private relationship, but the speaker explicitly calls attention to the poem's overarching purpose as a publicity tract highly conscious of its own publicizing nature. As a result, we have a "double memorializing" of sorts. First, Donne's speaker memorializes himself and his lady via their bracelet, their bones, and their miracles. Then, the speaker calls attention to the physical paper of the poem itself and how he will use it as a didactic token to further memorialize himself and his lady: "*I would have that age by this paper taught / What miracles wee harmlesse lovers wrought*" (21-22, italics mine).

³⁰ See Anderson, "Internal Images: John Donne and the Iconoclast Controversy"

We get a highly ironic and self-aware “meta-memorial”: a memorial to a poem, written with the intent to further memorialize a couple, who ultimately claim to be against any sort of memorializing!

Returning to the idea of the poem as didactic manual, the speaker stresses that his verse will reveal what miracles he and his lady have performed through their love:

First we lov'd well and faithfully,
Yet knew not what wee lov'd, nor why,
Difference of sex no more wee knew,
Then our Guardian Angells doe,
Coming and going, wee,
Perchance might kisse, but not between those meales.
Our hands ne'r toucht the seales,
Which nature, injur'd by late law, sets free
These miracles wee did . . . (23-31)

I suggest that these referenced miracles make up the fourth and last “token type” in “The Relique” (21-22). Describing the miraculous acts of their love, the speaker denotes their fidelity; their innocence of “what wee lov'd,” “why” we loved, and even “difference of sex”; and their chaste kisses. In doing so, he itemizes “These miracles wee did” into a strand of token testaments that cement the couple’s love as one for the ages. Collectively then, the original love token bracelet, the imagined remains of the couple as quasi-religious relics, the poem itself as textual, paper token, and the couple’s “miracles” provide four, creatively re-imagined token types. Donne’s speaker also ends up doing precisely what he critiqued the hypothetical gravedigger for doing. He unearths himself and his lady to such an extent that he refashions them into the antithesis of their private reality. No longer a loving couple lying within the grave, they are an odd fusion of bracelet, bone, paper, and documented miracles.

This explains the poem’s abrupt turn in its final two lines. Returning to that fourth token type of “miracle,” the speaker lifts up his lady as the ultimate miracle, but simultaneously

undercuts such elevation by admitting that no external measure can capture her worth: “All measure, and all language, I should passe, / Should I tell what a miracle shee was” (32-33). Wailing about their rough-hewn lack of skill in the midst of self-aware sonnets is a favorite strategy of Renaissance writers, but Donne is not incorporating literary convention to feign humility or turn a brighter light on his own poetic ability. By waiting until the last two lines of “The Relique” to refute his ability to proclaim his lady as the fine miracle she is, Donne’s speaker overturns the entire memorializing purpose of the poem. The bracelet love token in the grave meant to sustain their love in their afterlife, the couple’s bones as relics meant to transform them into public icons, their chastity as a chain of miracles to be emulated by the many, and even the poem itself as a text for all posterity—all of these memorials are dashed when the speaker concludes that no external means can adequately portray his lady.

Any sense of who the couple was in the opening lines of the poem has been greatly overshadowed by the series of memorializing processes they undergo, illustrating just how quickly the publication of the couple’s private love can result in a strange diminishing of who they are. By having his speaker admit that “All measure, and all language, I should passe, / Should I tell what a miracle shee was,” Donne also undermines the agency of the narrating voice as the creative force of the poem by rendering void the speaker’s ability to fully portray his lady. Downplaying the ability of tokens or even poems to relay love or convey who the couple is, Donne’s poet writes his own writing out of the picture. In doing so, he not only nullifies previous recreations of himself and his lady; he also leaves them curiously alone. Such a move actually re-establishes the couple’s lost privacy. Without even the structure of the poem to say who they are, the couple is figuratively stripped bare, and the poem circles back, fittingly enough, to its original focus. “The Relique” opens with the quiet, enclosed image of a loving couple who had

passed through life together, and in death, commemorated their love silently through the inclusion of a love token bracelet. And the poem ends with the same image.

“Fruits of much griefe they are, emblemes of more”—teardrop tokens in “A Valediction of weeping”

In “The Relique”, the speaker begins the poem with the most private of tokens (a love-gift bracelet buried in a grave) but steadily progresses towards a more public display before undercutting everything in the final two lines.³¹ A similar crescendo occurs in “A Valediction of weeping,” a farewell poem that begins with a departing couple’s teardrop miniatures of each other: “Let me powre forth / My teares before thy face, whil’st I stay here / For thy face coines them, and thy stampe they beare” (1-3). As the poem unfolds, the initial teardrop reflections shift into increasingly expansive entities: map-maker’s globes, watery worlds, and finally, rushing flood-waters. Looking at the details of why the poet imagines his and his lady’s tears as he does illuminates the poem’s innovative reworking of the Petrarchan gaze and the speaker’s unique process of self-making, two themes which will resurface in “Witchcraft by a picture” and “A Valediction of my name, in the window”.

“A Valediction of weeping” opens as a classic farewell poem. Saddened over the speaker’s upcoming journey, the speaker and his lady face each other in tears. Like the bracelet in “The Relique,” the couple’s tears in “A Valediction of weeping” are intimately associated with their bodies. In synchronization, both the lady and speaker produce the tokens of their love through their teardrops. Since they are facing each other, their tears reflect each other’s faces.

³¹ As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, opening a love poem with a fervent plea for privacy only to end up inviting the public in is a signature Donne move as evidenced in “The Sunne Rising,” “The Canonization,” and even to some extent “The Extasie”, in which the intimate, two lovers gazing at one another while holding hands are transformed into public examples for all other lovers by poem’s end.

For Donne's speaker, the tiny reflections within the couple's tears are not incidental images but self-made, deliberate art. The speaker's tears do not just hold the lady's reflection; she has tangibly imprinted herself upon them, elevating teardrops into love tokens and giving them merit: "For thy face coines them, and thy stampe they beare, / And by this Mintage they are something worth" (3-4).

Although Donne deviates from Petrarchan convention in that the central actions in the poem—weeping and teardrop token making—are shared ones, he also incorporates the Petrarchan emphasis on inward self-making to highlight the way the couple's teardrop tokens evoke and threaten to dissolve their sense of self. Gazing at a beautiful woman, which precipitates further meditation on her beauty and further reflection upon oneself, is a common convention of Petrarchan love poetry, but the Petrarchan gaze is one-sided. There are a few instances in the *Rime sparse* where Petrarch reports Laura returning a look or speaking, and the bulk of Laura's quite limited speech occurs—not coincidentally—after her death (Prendergast 81).³² As Gordon Braden and William Kerrigan have noted, Laura's lack of actual interaction with Petrarch allowed him all the more creative autonomy to poetically depict her as he so desired; Laura's passivity fuels Petrarch's poetic agency (160). Although Donne's couple's tear tokens are visible, outward manifestations of their love for each other, their teardrops also direct energy inward suggesting an individualized contemplation of who and what they are, much like Petrarch's imaginings of Laura do. For the speaker to actually see his image within his lady's teardrop tokens she must gaze at him so longingly that she cries and produces little tear portraits. Once she does, her tear tokens visually direct the poet inward as he sees his own visage staring right back at him circumscribed within his lady's tears. We have the same scenario for her; she

³² Prendergast notes that Laura only speaks twice when alive in the *Rime sparse* (81). As Prendergast explains, Laura's speech notably increases after her death with five subsequent poems (279, 330, 342, 359, 362) featuring her posthumous speech (81).

sees her own face and grief floating in the beloved's tears. And thus, both the lady and the speaker are drawn further into their own emotions (and their own selves) through their mutually made tokens. Unlike Petrarch who explored his psyche through a purely solitary effort (his own self-generated imaginings of Laura), the lady and the speaker enable each other's self-introspection, providing another example of how conjoined they are.

Furthermore, the couple's teardrop reflections don't just stop with self-revelation but are actually deemed fertile in nature.³³ The speaker describes the tear tokens that reflect his lady's face as being impregnated with her image: "For thus they bee / Pregnant of thee" (5-6). The childbirth imagery continues with the speaker stating: "Fruits of much griefe they are, emblemes of more" suggesting that the teardrops are iconic representations of something far greater than just the couple's grieving (7). A child, the proverbial fruit of his mother's body, is often construed as a tiny imprint of his parents. Likewise, the couple's tears are their own, self-generated, organic creations and are evocative reflections of who the speaker and his lady consider themselves to be, both individually and as partners. Interestingly enough, if we read "emblemes of more" as a pun upon Donne's wife's maiden name, seeing the teardrop tokens as imprints of the self makes even more sense. As Ronald Huebert notes, Anne Donne was pregnant at least eleven times over the span of their marriage (13). Her fertility was a constant reminder of the Donnes' ability to bring new beings into the world.

However, as frequently happens in Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* token poems, the lady and the speaker become so conflated with their tears that this great sense of self embodied within those tears threatens to self-destruct. Crying, which creates the couple's teardrop miniatures, also dissolves their miniatures. Once his tears roll down his face and disappear, the speaker knows the

³³ For more insight into how Donne incorporates the metaphor of pregnancy into his verse and the larger significances it had for him as a poetic trope, see Huebert especially 9-14.

little tear pictures of his lady's face disappear too: "When a teare falls, that thou falst which it bore" (8). The teardrop miniatures are also extinguished by distance. When the couple takes leave of each other, there can be no more staring into each other's eyes and no more reflected images. With crying and distance as the two unavoidable threats to their teardrop miniatures, the speaker concludes that the couple's tears—the very things which gave them identity as a parting couple—will inevitably remake them into nothing: "When a teare falls, that thou falst which it bore/ So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore" (8-9).

And so, the poet begins rebuilding his and his lady's identities not through the private, domestic image of their shared tears but through things evocative of the outside world and his upcoming travels. It is a somewhat ironic choice, especially since travel is pulling him away from his beloved in the first place. Moving on from the void left at the end of the first stanza: "So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore," the speaker equates the couple's tears to a globe in the making. Devoid of meaning until it is plastered with continents and oceans, a blank sphere morphs into a model of the world:

On a round ball
A workeman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia
And quickly make that, which was nothing, *All*, (10-13)

Like the blank ball remade into a globe, the lady's and speaker's tears which had dissolved them into nothingness are reconfigured into vast worlds:

So doth each teare,
Which thee doth weare,
A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
Till thy teares mixt with mine doe overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so. (14-18)

The speaker continues pushing the metaphor, imagining his and his lady's tear globes inflating to such a degree that they break out of their microcosmic mold and wreak havoc, bringing floodwaters. The same tears that make up the tear globes threaten to flood them: "Till thy teares mixt with mine doe overflow / This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so" (17-18).

Water in one of its tinier forms (teardrops) changes to water in one of its most massive forms (floods so vast the oceans are shaken), and as the poet moves his and his lady's tear tokens through these various manifestations, each new version carries a more widespread scope of influence. Earlier, I mentioned that this use of voyaging imagery is an ironic choice for a speaker who is being pulled away from his lady by precisely just that. But perhaps this is the point. Rather than distancing himself from the public pull of his duties, the speaker throws himself and his lady fully into the midst of their reality but tries to take creative control by remaking that reality to his specifications. However, the speaker has so conflated himself and his lady with the outside world that he loses that sense of private love and self he was so diligently trying to sustain at the poem's beginning. Just as we see in "The Relique," the increasingly large-scale, public reconstructions of the couple and their love eventually reach a point of no return. Throughout "A Valediction of weeping," each version of the couple's tears dissolves itself, necessitating a new version.³⁴

As the speaker discovers, the creative momentum of continually coming up with new means of memorializing his and his lady's love can't be sustained indefinitely. Much like the poet in "The Relique", as soon as the speaker has expanded the couple's teardrops to their largest

³⁴ Many Donne poems feature a series of ever-changing and modulating metaphors; it is a Donnean trademark. But in Donne's love lyric, it is interesting to see how often the metaphorical progression from intimate, interiorized tokens to increasingly public ones becomes an exercise in futility, threatening both the insularity and the stability of the couple's love.

and most public scope (floodwaters), he unceremoniously cuts them from the lyric. Switching gears completely, he calls for an end to all expressions of tear tokens:

O more then Moone,
Draw not up seas to drowne me in thy spheare,
Weepe me not dead, in thine armes, but forbear
To teach the sea, what it may doe too soone
Let not the winde
Example finde,
To doe me more harme, then it purposeth,
Since thou and I sigh one anothers breath,
Who e'r sighes most, is cruellest, and hastes the others death. (19-27)

Even the couple's reworking of Petrarchan convention in their earlier representation of each other is challenged with the rejection of the conventional lover's sigh: "Since thou and I sigh one anothers breath, / Who e'r sighes most, is cruellest, and hastes the others death" (26-27).

All tokens that once defined the couple's love and collective sense of self are dismissed as self-destructive.

However, unlike "The Relique," which resurrected the couple's love by returning them full circle to an utterly private state where they could simply be, the ending of "A Valediction of weeping" strikes me as somehow deflated. No longer crying, no longer sighing, no longer grieving at their forthcoming parting, the speaker and the lady seem curiously emptied. In a poem entitled "A Valediction of weeping" the speaker would naturally jettison all forms of memorialized grieving. However, perhaps the speaker goes too far. To cancel out the many recreations of parting tokens itemized earlier in the poem (we are tears; no wait, we are tear portraits; better yet, we are globes and torrential rain!), the speaker's last directive is nothing more than a negation. Telling his beloved that: "Since thou and I sigh one anothers breath, / Who e'r sighes most, is cruellest, and hastes the others death" the speaker asks her to not cry, sigh, or grieve. Since no alternative way to express themselves or their love is given though, the

couple's capacity to voice themselves is oddly jerked out from under them. They are reduced to a breath that can't be exhaled. Not just a farewell to crying poem, "A Valediction of weeping" becomes an emphatic farewell to the token poem.

"My picture vanish'd, vanish feares"—token portraits in "Witchcraft by a picture"

Like both "The Relique" and "A Valediction of weeping," "Witchcraft by a picture" weaves a strand of token images throughout the verse. And like "A Valediction of weeping," "Witchcraft by a picture" is a farewell ode featuring teardrop pictures. Although there are no traditional, painted miniatures in "Witchcraft by Picture," by referring to his image as "his picture," Donne's speaker equates the reflection of his face with a miniature. This idea of the traditional miniature token is reconfigured through three transformations: the speaker's reflection held in his lady's eyes, his reflection held in her tears, and his image held in her heart. In contrast to the speaker of "A Valediction of weeping" who opens with the image of private teardrop miniatures of himself and his lady but keeps expanding them into increasingly outward and monumental images, "Witchcraft by a picture" does just the opposite. Each time the speaker's lady re-crafts her beloved's "picture," she delivers a version of him more intimate, internalized, and private than its previous manifestation.

The poem opens with a scene similar to the opening of "A Valediction of weeping": a couple stares into each other's eyes. Like "A Valediction of weeping" with its teardrop miniatures, the existence of the speaker's little picture in this poem is also contingent on physical proximity. He and his lady must be staring at each other for his reflected image to appear in her eyes, and their closeness to one another underscores the privacy of his picture. Seeing his "picture" reflected in his lady's gaze, the speaker invokes the idea of a painted miniature: "I fix

mine eye on thine, and there / Pitty my picture burning in thine eye” (1-2).³⁵ As the poem unfolds, the lady progresses from staring at the poet to staring at him while crying. And the second picture that emerges of the speaker—his face encapsulated within her tears— is more internalized than the first due to its ephemeral nature: “My picture drown’d in a transparent teare” (3). As soon as a tear rolls down the lady’s face, the speaker’s image dissolves with it. Drawing on folk superstition, the speaker suggests that had his beloved had the skill of an enchantress she could destroy him by merely destroying his image. His lady, although no magician, nonetheless dissolves his reflection each time one of her teardrops rolls down her face, and so the speaker teasingly notes that walking away from her will preserve his image:

But now I have drunke thy sweet salt teares,
And though thou poure more I’ll depart;
My picture vanish’d, vanish feares,
That I can be endamag’d by that art; (7-10)

Dismissing his first two pictures (the reflection in his lady’s eyes and the reflection held in her tears) as insubstantial, the speaker imagines a final image of himself that his lady keeps within her heart: “Though thou retaine of mee / One picture more, yet that will bee, / Being in thine owne heart, from all malice free” (12-14). This is the most internalized, private image of the speaker to date, and as the speaker stresses, the most secure. Protected from all eyes, including his own, this most concealed “picture” is the ideal representation because as long as the lady stays true to him, his self-image will thrive in her heart.

One of Donne’s favorite poetic images is two lovers staring so intently at each other that some sort of mutual bonding occurs. Sometimes it is quite dramatic (the spiritualized, soul

³⁵ One might be reminded of Hilliard’s circa 1595 miniature, *Man against a Background of Flames*. Painted flames make up the background of the miniature, but the accessories the gentleman wears are quite telling. Most notably, he wears a locket around his neck, which Patricia Fumerton claims “undoubtedly contains a miniature of his mistress.” (*Cultural Aesthetics* 84-85). Thus, we have a miniature within a miniature. Fumerton offers some interesting insights into the hiddenness of the sitter’s heart and his mistress in her analysis of this miniature.

sharing in “The Extasie”); other times, more intimate and subtle (the reflected teardrop portraits in “A Valediction of weeping”). “Witchcraft by a picture” initially seems to be another of those Donne poems anchored by mutually intertwined lovers. After all, it starts out with two lovers standing so close the speaker can see his face floating in his lady’s eyes. But there is no mention of the speaker shedding any tears along with his lady; only her weeping is mentioned. Although he does kiss her sadness away: “now I have drunke thy sweet salt teares,” there is no mention of the lady seeing *her* reflection in her man’s eyes or tears, even though they are clearly gazing at one another. A deeper sense of shared grief and shared “pictures” is curiously absent here.

I suggest that this makes “Witchcraft by a picture” both Petrarchan and somewhat un-Petrarchan. Like Laura whose inaccessibility led to far more self-exploration for Petrarch than any sort of reciprocation, the lady in “Witchcraft by a picture” also seems to be the incentive and the medium for the speaker’s own self-reflection. Her isolated features that are highlighted in the poem—her eyes, tears, and heart—could be read as a portrait of the prototypically fragmented woman, but the absent-present Petrarchan lady is innovatively reworked here. The key difference between Petrarch’s Laura and Donne’s lady in “Witchcraft by a picture” is the lady in Donne’s love poem is directing the show; it is she who is the artist. In “Witchcraft by a picture,” the lady enables the speaker’s self-exploration, not passively, but actively. She actually creates the love token art that redirects the speaker’s visage right back to him, and her heart holds his image. With a nod to Petrarchan inwardness, Donne gives us a speaker in search of self who exchanges one “picture” for another and another, but unlike Petrarch, Donne’s speaker is not the one generating the images. In direct contrast to “His Picture,” “The Relique, and “A Valediction of weeping,” the speaker in “Witchcraft by a picture” is not the one directly attempting to encapsulate the couple’s love. Instead he simply memorializes his lady’s memorializing.

Perhaps that is why once he reaches the most inward of images—the private picture of himself that his lady has created in her heart—he refuses to remove it. He did not make it; she did. And so, the last metamorphosis of the speaker’s self-image is not discarded but trumpeted as being “One picture more, yet that will bee / Being in thine owne heart, from all malice free” (13-14). It is an interesting move and somewhat of an exception for Donne, who when it comes to tokens, usually cleans house completely. But it makes sense in this poem. After all, the poem’s overriding message—that the lady remains the speaker’s truest and finest measure of himself and their love—pivots upon the protection of that final, inwardly dwelling picture in the woman’s heart. In “Witchcraft by a picture”, the speaker manages to exit the poem with one external, love token (of the most private sort) still standing, but it is a picture whose inward art he has little to do with, and that is what makes all the difference.

“Here you see me, and I am you”—the etched signature in “A Valediction of my name, in the window”

“A Valediction of my name, in the window” contains Donne’s most memorable recreation of a love token: the speaker’s own name, which he carves into a windowpane with a diamond. The etched name in glass functions as a multi-layered, magical lens through which the narrating poet reveals the most interior parts of himself, as well as his ongoing attempts to understand his lady’s own interiority. In other Donne poems, the lady’s sense of self is a central part of the lyric, often intertwined with the speaker’s as they collectively try to sustain their love in times of absence. In “A Valediction of my name, in the window” though, the lady’s identity (her thoughts, her commitment to their love, her inner desires) practically consume the speaker. In the process of trying to better understand her psyche, the speaker reveals a great deal about his

own. Linking his emotional openness to the physical transparency of window glass, he actually describes the windowpane where he etches his name as “all confessing, and through-shine as I” (8). It is a fitting label, for “A Valediction of my name, in the window” is a highly confessional retelling of the speaker’s private insecurities.

Donne’s ongoing conflation of the speaker with his love token, his exploration of the speaker’s jealousy through public/private delineations of domestic space, and his innovative reworking of Petrarchan convention through a love token carved into a windowpane are the three main ways he explores desire and self in “A Valediction of my name, in the window.” Since one of the poem’s most prominent features is how closely the speaker links himself to his etched name love token, let me start with subject/object conflation.³⁶ In a lyric where self-exploration is actualized through a name etched in a window, the link between poetic speaker and love token is obviously significant. In no other Donne poem is the merging between narrating subject and token object quite as pronounced as it is in “A Valediction of my name, in the window.” In *The Gift*, Marcel Mauss notes that exchanged objects can take on a highly personal, inner life-force of sorts that is reflective of the exchange, the giver, the recipient, and the past history of the gift object being given: “. . . things had a personality and a virtue of their own. Things are not the inert objects . . .” (48). Not just a memorial to the couple’s love or their desire for a private self, nor a mere vehicle for self-exploration, in “A Valediction of my name, in the window,” the etched name token *is* the speaker’s self fully revealed.

Not only does the etched name become the lyric’s central character and voice, it also functions as a domestic safeguard protecting house and lady from outside suitors. With his

³⁶ In the past twenty or so years, there has been quite a bit written about the nature of subject-object relations in early modern literature. See the following authors: Fisher; de Grazia, Quilligan, and Stallybrass; Jardine; Hammons *Gender, Sexuality, and Material Objects in English Renaissance Verse*; Gil Harris and Korda; and Jones and Stallybrass.

upcoming journey on his mind, the speaker fears that the love he and his lady share will be threatened by the outer world, namely other men, once he leaves. This fear is dramatized by the poem's focus on the private, domestic space of the home. Not only are the concepts of home space construed along public/private lines but so are perceptions of interior self. The speaker's worries that he can't fully know his lady (both what she may do in his absence and who she really is) drive his compulsion to gain entry into what he considers her most interior, private space: her mind.

With self-image and identity such prominent concerns in "A Valediction of my name, in the window," it is not surprising to find echoes of Petrarch in the poem. In many ways, the windowpane token itself is a quintessentially "Petrarchan" object. A token of intense but highly insecure desire, the etched name is dependent upon the gazes of the lady to function, and in return, it represents various renditions of the speaker's love for the lady even as it manifests his deep anxieties over that love. And in a very Petrarchan turn, the windowpane etching's seemingly mystical powers are a reality only within the poet's imagination. Somewhat analogously, in the *Rime sparse* Petrarch's preoccupation with Laura's eyes extends to her veil, which covers her face. The veil signifies what Petrarch states he most desires (Laura's beauty, in particular, her dark eyes and blond hair), while simultaneously frustrating the actualization of that desire by obscuring its object. And because the veil so intimately conceals Laura, the object of Petrarch's desire, the veil becomes a highly charged, evocative thing. As Petrarch admits in Poem 11:

but since Love has made you aware of me, your blond hair
has been veiled and your lovely gaze kept to itself.
What I most desired in you has been taken from me; thus the
veil controls me . . . (8-12)³⁷

³⁷ Petrarch Poem 11, lines 8-12 "*ma poi ch'Amor di me vi fece accorta, / fuor i biondi capelli allor velati / et l'amoroso sguardo in sé raccolto. / Quel ch'i' più desiava in voi m'è tolto, / sì mi governa il velo*"

Likewise, in Poem 52, the veil no longer functions as a mere symbol of Petrarch's longing for Laura; it becomes the very object of his desire, seemingly superseding Laura herself. Petrarch notes that what makes him tremble with the "chill of love" is not seeing Laura's face or her free-flowing blond hair, but watching her wash the veil:

Not so much did Diana please her lover when, by a similar
chance, he saw her all naked amid the icy waters,
As did the cruel mountain shepherdess please me, set to wash a
pretty veil that keeps her lovely blond head from the breeze; (1-6)³⁸

The veil turns into a mesmerizing object in and of itself, capable of both enticing Petrarch and frustrating him given its intimate associations with Laura.

Likewise, Donne's etched name in the window is a token that exacerbates the speaker's fraught desires to know his lady. Instead of the speaker catching a quick glimpse of his lady's beauty or dwelling on a mental image of her (traditional Petrarchan modes that lead to self-reflection), the speaker focuses the gaze of his mental attention on his etched token instead. In the speaker's imagination, his lady is indelibly conjoined with his etched name in the windowpane; he never comments on her or imagines her in any other context. Laura's veil enchants Petrarch but seemingly has no effect on Laura, but the windowpane token shapes the speaker's lady as profoundly as it influences him, at least in the speaker's mind's eye. For one thing, the lady's visual perception is always, unavoidably circumscribed by the etched name, since every time she looks out the window, she sees her beloved's carved token. Not only does

³⁸ Petrarch, Poem 52, lines 1-6.

*Non al suo amanta più Diana piacque
quando per tal ventura tutta ignuda
la vide in mezzo de le gelide acque,*

*ch'a me la pastorella alpestra et cruda
posta a bagnar un leggiadretto velo
ch'a l'aura il vago et biondi capel chiuda*

the speaker imagine his lady gazing upon the name, but he envisions her own thoughts being influenced by the token. Integrating these Petrarchan counterdiscourses into his depiction of the windowpane token allows Donne to intensify the interiority evoked through an already incredibly self-conscious lyric, leading us further into the nuanced account of the desiring self foregrounded in this poem.

Like the speaker in “A Valediction of weeping,” and “Witchcraft by a picture,” the speaker in “A Valediction of my name, in the window” opens the poem with a departure. About to embark on a journey, he is struggling with the reality of time away from his beloved. The speaker’s first words link him to his love token, which he has carved into his lady’s window. Stating that he is transposing his own firm fidelity onto the windowpane through his etched name, the speaker reasons that the firmness of his love for his lady mirrors the firmness of his fixed name engraved in the windowpane, which in turn mirrors the firmness of the diamond he uses to carve the glass. The etched name becomes the vehicle for imparting parts of the speaker’s inner qualities onto external, inanimate objects like window glass:

My name engrav’d herein,
Doth contribute my firmnesse to this glasse,
Which, ever since that charme, hath beene
As hard, as that which grav’d it, was, (1-4)

The speaker then links both the token and himself to his lady—more specifically her gaze: “Thine eye will give it price enough, to mock / The diamonds of either rock” (5-6). This Petrarchan move, which introduces the gaze by placing emphasis on the lady’s eyes, sets a precedent that the speaker will return to again and again. His lady’s gaze is yoked to his love token etched name, suggesting that the etched name is always overlaid with the presence of the lady. Thus the speaker’s self-inscribed love token depends upon the lady for its potency, and if

his etched token symbolically reflects various facets of himself, so does the lady. She becomes the lynchpin not only of the speaker's desire but of his own self-description.

In the second stanza, eager to posit the windowpane and his etched signature as transformative love tokens, Donne offers a fresh twist. In Poem 146 from the *Rime sparse*, Petrarch details the facets of Laura's beauty through highly figurative, symbolic language. In compelling lines, he describes Laura's blushing face as "roses scattered on a sweet drift of living snow, in which I mirror and polish myself" (5-6).³⁹ Laura's face (or at least Petrarch's imagined projection of her face) becomes the mental mirror through which he can refine and hone his own self-image.

Donne reworks this idea of mirroring oneself within another's image to great effect. Through the transformative power of "loves magique," plain window glass is capable of revealing the most remarkable vision:

'Tis much that glasse should bee
As all confessing, and through-shine as I,
'Tis more, that it shewes thee to thee,
And cleare reflects thee to thine eye.
But all such rules, loves magique can undoe,
Here you see me, and I am you. (7-12)

When the lady gazes at the name etched in the glass window, she sees both the actual reflection of her beloved and a highly symbolic representation of her beloved. Given that he is probably standing close to her to show her his etched name, she is able to easily see his reflection in the clear glass of the window. His love token to her—his name etched into the window—is transposed over his reflected face. But this is not just a rendition of the Petrarchan love gaze turned self gaze. The lady does not simply see herself reflected, or her reflected image alongside her man's, or even their images alongside the etched name. Instead she is metamorphosed *into*

³⁹ Petrarch, Poem 146, lines 5-6: ". . . *rose sparse in dolce falda / di viva neve in ch'io mi specchio et tergo*"

her beloved through the etched name on the windowpane. When the lady looks at the speaker's signature carved in the window, she sees a multi-dimensional super-image that combines her beloved's etched name, her reflected face, and his reflected face into one fantastic blend.

Doubting his lady's fidelity during his absence, the speaker literally maps himself onto her through the windowpane glass of his love token: "Here you see me, and I *am* you" (12 italics mine). It is the ultimate form of poetic and Petrarchan refashioning that hints at the speaker's underlying anxiety over the shortcomings of his own gaze: specifically, not being able to fully see and trust his own beloved.

As the poem progresses, the speaker conflates himself more dramatically with his love token. Previously, the speaker's love token signature represented his internal qualities: his "firmnesse," his "all confessing" and "through-shine" nature, his ability to be the "same" at "all times" for his lady. In the fourth stanza, he suggests that his signature encapsulates not just his interior but his exterior as well. Donne's speaker tells his lady that if his lesson in fidelity seems far-fetched coming from a mere signature, she should instead imagine that his etched name is more than a mere name. She should imagine it as the speaker's body:

Or if too hard and deepe
This learning be, for a scratch'd name to teach,
It, as a given deaths head keepe,
Lovers mortalitie to preach,
Or thinke this ragged bony name to bee
My ruinous Anatomie. (19-24)

The speaker houses both the internal and external facets of himself within his etched signature.

As the speaker's stand-in body during his time away, the token is to remind the lady of her man's imminent return:

Or thinke this ragged bony name to bee
My ruinous Anatomie.

Then, as all my soules bee,
Emparadis'd in you, (in whom alone
I understand, and grow and see,)
The rafters of my body, bone
Being still with you, the Muscle, Sinew, and Veine,
Which tile this house, will come againe. (23-30)

The physicality of the speaker's phrases here, "ragged bony name" "body, bone," "Muscle, Sinew and Veine," is pronounced. Aware that he is leaving his lady for some time, the speaker needs his love token to be as tangible a memorial to himself as possible. Linking his skeleton to his windowpane signature, the speaker figuratively leaves behind "the rafters of myn body, bone / Being still with you, the Muscle, Sinew and Veine" to remind his lady (and himself) that he will return in full bodily presence.

The poem's attention to domestic space dovetails with the speaker's escalating anxieties over outside threats to his lady's constancy. The speaker's name carved in the window doubles as his body, which in turn doubles as the wood, rooms, and stone of every household room his lady will dwell in during his absence. His bones are linked to the wooden rafters of the house, and the muscles attached to his skeleton are like tiles filling the spaces: "The rafters of my body, bone / Being still with you, the Muscle, Sinew, and Veine, / Which tile this house, will come againe (28-30). Uneasy over leaving his beloved alone, the speaker sees a loosely guarded house as synonymous with a loose, unguarded lady. Fretting over his lady's ability to stay true, the speaker conjures up a series of hypothetical temptations firmly located within the spaces of the bedroom. In his mind, he sees his lady flinging open a bedroom window to converse with a suitor standing outside, or discovering a love letter from another man nestled beneath her bed pillows (43-45; 49-51). Often situated in the interior of the house, the bedroom was frequently

accessible only by proceeding through a succession of other rooms, which gradually became more private.⁴⁰ Anne Ferry notes that in many sixteenth and seventeenth-century literary descriptions of the self, references to closets and chambers, in particular, become metaphors for self-examination.⁴¹ Not only did the bedchamber suggest private activities like self-reflection, but there were obvious sexual implications in a lady allowing a gentleman entrance into her bedchamber, and Donne clearly plays upon these. Since the speaker so strongly links the security of his house to the security of his lady's chastity, he must firmly attach the love token he leaves her to the house itself. The speaker does not leave his lady a small, mobile token (like a ring or pendant) that could be easily shoved into a drawer or otherwise placed out of sight. Instead, he stamps his signature onto her bedroom window. By etching his name on one of the most visible and transparent structural elements of the home, the speaker makes his love token difficult to ignore, telling his lady: "No doore 'gainst this names influence shut" (39).

After informing his lady that his etched signature is a figurative deadbolt safeguarding her and the house, the poet fitfully remembers that windows can be opened:

When thy inconsiderate hand
Flings ope this casement, with my trembling name,
To looke on one, whose wit or land,
New battery to thy heart may frame,
Then thinke this name alive, and that thou thus
In it offendst my Genius. (49-54)

There is an obvious correlation here between a window open to outsiders and a lady open to outsiders. The more extreme the speaker's fears over his lady's inconstancy, the more involved a role his love token plays in his imaginings. The windowpane signature becomes startlingly anthropomorphic. The thin line separating the narrating poet from his etched loved token

⁴⁰ For more on early modern architecture and the layout of Renaissance homes, see Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, especially 38-45

⁴¹ See Ferry, especially 46-49.

dissolves so completely that love token and speaker stop merely mirroring each other and actually become each other. As soon as the speaker imagines his lady privy to the glances and flirtations of other men, he visualizes his “trembling name” springing to life to divert her attention back to its proper place: “Then thinke this name alive, and that thou thus / In it offendst my Genius” (47-48). The speaker’s inscribed name becomes the supreme mnemonic designed to bring the lady’s thoughts back to her man, whenever she is in danger of forgetting him. When the lady opens her bedroom window, she not only opens herself up to other men and their potentially peering gaze, she also offends the “Genius” or guardian spirit of her beloved by disrupting the protective barrier of her beloved’s etched name. Whenever she looks at the closed bedroom window, she sees her lover’s name staring back at her, inscribed in the pane. By opening the window, she breaks the continuity of that reflection. A closed window reveals her lover’s name in glass and evokes their privately shared love. An open window lets in the outside world and undoes the associative power of the name token.

Although the speaker originally etched his name in the window to alleviate his worries over being apart from his lady, the token seems only to exacerbate his concerns. In a repeated pattern, which we saw in “the Relique” and “A Valediction of weeping,” each time the speaker stretches the powers of his love token, he worries about an equally stalwart public threat matching the token’s influence. When the speaker allows himself to dream up the far-fetched scenario of a devoted admirer convincing the lady’s maidservant to sneak his love letter into that most private of places (the lady’s bed pillows) in that most private of rooms (her bedchamber), such a fantasy necessitates equally aggressive action on the part of the speaker’s etched name token:

And when thy melted maid,
Corrupted by thy Lover’s gold, and page,

His letter at thy pillow' hath laid,
Disputed it, and tam'd thy rage,
And thou begin'st to thaw towards him, for this,
May my name step in, and hide his. (49-54)

Here, the public threats are both the maid bribed to leave the love letter on the lady's pillow and the suitor hoping to win the affections of the lady. As the speaker visualizes his windowpane name stepping up to blot out another man's name inked on the love letter, we get one of the most amusing images in the poem, that of dueling signatures which also double as dueling love tokens: one etched in glass and one penned on paper, both vying for the lady's attention.

Pondering what would happen if his lady actually succumbs to all of this fabricated attention and does more than simply open a window, the speaker imagines her writing a letter back to the suitor:

And if this treason goe
To an overt act, and that thou write againe;
In superscribing, this name flow
Into thy fancy, from the pane.
So, in forgetting thou remembrest right,
And unaware to mee shalt write. (55-60)

Here, the inscribed token name actually moves from its external position on the windowpane to take root deep within the lady's imagination. We get a conflation of the external/internal and public/private dualities that have been woven throughout the poem, as the etched name goes from external token merely looked upon by the lady to completely interiorized token, held inside her innermost thoughts. The etched name becomes a fluid, intimate part of the lady's interior: "In superscribing, this name flow / Into thy fancy, from the pane" (57-58). In this poem full of rich Petrarchan overtones—where everything that happens has only been *imagined* to happen—it is fitting that the last "action" the inscribed name takes is to fly from the windowpane to the inner recesses of the lady's heart and imagination. In a way, such a flight represents the ultimate

fantasy for the narrating poet. With a nod to Petrarch who was forever trying to decipher Laura's purported glances as signs she might care, Donne's speaker does one better. Rather than try to interpret his lady from her outside looks and words, the narrating poet gains inside entry by having his love token enter his lady's mind: that most personal of personal spaces. Dwelling in her heart and thoughts, the token becomes witness to her every whim and is able to put her affections in proper balance. So even though she might momentarily stray, the windowpane token quickly brings her desire back to her beloved. And the lady subconsciously acquiesces, responding to another man's love letter by writing to the speaker instead of the suitor who sent it: "So, in forgetting thou remembrest right, / And unaware to mee shalt write" (59-60).

Like Petrarch whose verse occupied a world spun out of yearning for Laura, the speaker of "A Valediction of my name, in the window" creates a poetic fantasy world out of his anxieties over his lady's love. He uses his love token name to negotiate that world, but the windowpane signature also serves another function, I think. The poem's main example of imagined infidelity (the possibility of the lady writing back to a suitor) and main example of imagined reconciliation (the lady writing to her beloved instead) are both acts of writing. Even the poem's main character, the engraved name in the window, is the speaker's own written word. The speaker of "A Valediction of my name, in the window" may not be after literary renown to the degree of Petrarch who pursued the laurel along with Laura. But still, it seems a symbolically loaded gesture that of all the things Donne's poet could have given his lady as a token he decides to write *his name* into her bedroom window, generating a self-made love gift out of his own signature. When the speaker imagines his lady writing a letter to another man, he pictures his windowpane token (which he has literally written into being) entering his beloved's innermost

thoughts and somehow so swaying her desires that she writes to him instead. Could there be any more emblematic a vision of authoring the lady?

Carving his name on the window may seem like the supreme authorial imprint, but the close link between the speaker's etched name and his own identity does not simply stop with him. It invariably extends to his lady's identity—who she is within and who she is to him—suggesting that his creative reconstitutions of the etched name are perhaps his misdirected desire to fully know her in the innermost way. As the poem progresses, the etched name becomes an increasingly internally held love token so intimately linked to the lady that it enters her thoughts, but a token so intensely interiorized proves impossible to sustain. In what has become a typical Donnean about-face, the speaker, who has spent the previous ten stanzas fretting over the fragility of his lady's devotion, suddenly admits the foolhardiness of trying to plumb the depths of her emotions, desires, and thoughts through a love token. Nonchalantly reducing his authorial super-stamp to mere “glasse, and lines,” the speaker states in no uncertain terms that a love token cannot and should not substantiate the couple's love: “But glasse, and lines must bee, / No meanes our firme substantiall love to keepe;” (61-62). All that he has laid out in the lyric is turned abruptly upon its head when he insists his talk has been nothing more than crazy ramblings: “And this I murmure in my sleepe; / Impute this idle talke, to that I goe, / For dying men talke often so” (64-66).

“A Valediction of my name, in the window” showcases a highly confessional (if not slightly paranoid) speaker compelled to script his lady through his love token in order to rest more securely in their love. But as soon as the speaker slams the door on his love token's ability to refashion his relationship and his lady, he also shuts the door on his own creative agency. By labeling his former thoughts and imaginings “idle talke” the narrating poet calls into question

any previous semblance of authorial and creative clout he may have claimed through his token. And by making it clear that only “dying men talke often so,” he goes a step further and actually sounds the figurative death knell for his old performative self that he had tried to actualize through his windowpane signature.

Throughout the majority of “A Valediction of my name, in the window,” we are witness to one of the most self-revelatory of Donnean speakers who puts himself and his relationship on display in an attempt to transform his lady and their love into something impervious to outside temptation. For a poem seemingly fueled by the poet’s doubts and apprehensions over his lady’s ability to be faithful to him while he is away, it is startling to suddenly hear the speaker refer to his romance with his lady as “our firme substantiall love” (62). Here, we have the speaker using the first person plural for the first time in the poem: the speaker affirms their coupledness simply and mutually. It is not a coincidence that this most unexpected, optimistic assessment of the speaker’s love for the lady comes in the same stanza where he lets go of any need to perform himself and her through his love token. Once again, as so often is the pattern in Donne’s lyric, love is freest to shine when it is expressed in the most unencumbered, private way.

I have argued that Donne’s love lyric routinely features love tokens as exteriorized memorials attempting to sustain a love that in the end cannot be perpetuated by anything external to itself. As a result, tokens almost always complicate the stability of desire and selfhood so crucial to couples in the *Elegies* and especially within the *Songs and Sonnets*. Donnean love tokens are in a constant state of flux, always metamorphosing, as Donne’s poetic speaker pushes them through a veritable merry-go-round of creative reconfigurations. Through various Petrarchan counterdiscourses, Donne’s speaker re-imagines and reconstitutes tokens at every poetic turn in the hopes of creating a material manifestation of desire and self that will better

bolster his and his lady's love. Of course, the speaker's attempts to figure forth a series of tokens that can accomplish this goal prove futile. And so, the couple routinely finds themselves jettisoning the very tokens they generate throughout the course of a given love poem. "His Picture," "The Relique," "A Valediction of weeping," "Witchcraft by a picture," and "A Valediction of my name, in the window" all seem to be searching for a way to do away with the need for love tokens or any sort of memorial (outward or inward) altogether. For Donne's couples, there is a mutual yearning to openly enjoy and more permanently sustain the privacy of their love and the domestic space they have created together, especially during times of separation. Yet, perhaps their even greater desire is to keep their passion so sublime that any gift or token beyond their own love bond simply ceases to matter.

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