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Honors Thesis

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“Mark in this”: Strategies of Persuasion and Argument in John Donne’s Poetry

Whether he is writing an erotic lyric, a mutual love poem or a holy sonnet, John Donne’s poems employ a similar argumentative structure. Although "The Flea," an erotic lyric, "The Canonization," a mutual love poem, and "Batter My Heart," a holy sonnet portray different types of love, Donne’s argumentative structure in these poems is similar to each other. In "The Flea," "The Canonization," and "Batter My Heart," Donne's speakers present a claim or command which they defend throughout the rest of the poem. The speakers use persuasive strategies to defend and validate their assertions. As the poems conclude, the speakers remain confident that their propositions will triumph.

In “The Flea,” the speaker tries to seduce a lady by arguing that the lady’s blood and his blood are combined in a flea. The speaker provides an analogy between the union of his and the lady's blood within the flea and the physical union during sexual intercourse. By presenting this comical argument, the speaker hopes that the lady will admire his wit and be persuaded to satisfy his desires. In “The Canonization,” the speaker defends his love for a woman to a possibly, skeptical or unsympathetic addressee. The speaker attempts to discourage criticism of his love, and he tries to persuade the addressee that his love is innocent. Through an exaggerated argument, he claims that the love between the two lovers will lead to their sainthood. In “Batter My Heart,” the speaker chastises God's subtle actions and commands God to execute forceful and violent actions. The speaker argues that God can renew his soul by raping him. This

scandalous argument shows that God should make him righteous by violating his soul and liberating him from the devil. In each poem, the speakers illustrate strategies to validate their propositions. The persuasive strategies Donne employs vary as well: in "The Flea," the speaker contends that having sex is a religious obligation; in "The Canonization," the speaker asks rhetorical questions to illustrate that his love is innocent; and in "Batter My Heart," the speaker chastises God's subtle actions and asks God to be violent with him. Donne concludes each poem with a triumphant speaker: in "The Flea," the speaker is convinced that the lady will eventually yield to his desires; in “The Canonization,” the speaker suggests that the two lovers will become saints, and he is confident that people will invoke them for a “pattern of [their] love”; and in “Batter My Heart,” the speaker is confident that God can make him virtuous by raping him (line 45). Donne's strategies of persuasion and argument are clearly indicated in close readings of the poems.

In "The Flea," Donne writes primarily about satisfying sexual desire. The male persona, "a lusty lover seeking the ultimate favor from a young lady," argues that yielding to physical desires is not a sin (Brumble 150). The speaker constructs a conceit of the flea to represent the union him and the lady would create while engaging in a sexual union, and he compares it to the Holy Trinity. He creates an elaborate claim that having sex is equivalent to religious worship; thus, he claims that having sex is a religious obligation. The speaker's entertaining attempts to persuade the lady illustrate his cleverness and sense of humor. The speaker wants the lady to recognize these traits through this brilliant argument and feel compelled to satisfy his desires.

Donne creates a pleading persona who advances an elaborate argument in order to tempt his lover to have sex with him. The speaker's tone is desperate and persuasive as he tries to fulfill his desires. The poem begins abruptly with the speaker announcing, "Mark but this flea, and

mark in this,/ How little that which thou deny'st me is" (lines 1-2). The speaker starts the poem with an amusing demonstration to compare the size of the flea to the sex which the lady is denying him. By making this rhetorical argument, the speaker makes the lady's chastity and virginity insignificant.

The speaker makes various persuasive arguments within the first stanza to prove that he and the lady are united in the flea. In his first argument, the speaker tries to illustrate that a bond has been formed within the flea. He says, "Me it suck'd first, and now sucks thee,/ And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be" (lines 3-4). He uses the flea as a conceit to represent the mixing of their bloods. The speaker wants the lady to accept that their bloods have been mixed, so having sex with him would not change anything; their union has already been established. The speaker attempts to make the lady feel naive and unreasonable about denying his desires. By drawing an analogy between their union within the flea and a sexual union, the speaker reveals his cleverness and wit; he hopes that these qualities will convince the lady to yield to his desires.

In his second argument, the speaker tries to convince the lady that having sex would not destroy her chastity. He says, "Thou know'st that this cannot be said/ A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead" (lines 5-6). This indicates that the speaker is aware of the lady's apprehension about engaging in sinful behavior. However, he is persistent; the speaker makes this argument to convince the lady that having sex does not defy God. The speaker's outrageous claims in convincing the lady to satisfy his desires make this poem humorous. By telling the lady that having sex is not a sin, the speaker leads her into his next argument in which he compares their sexual union to a holy union.

The speaker is nervous that the lady may refuse his offer. In the second stanza, he pleads, "Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare" (line 10). The flea represents his life, her life, and the

flea's life as a trinity. The reference to the "three lives" is also indicative of the Holy Trinity (line 10). The speaker repeats "three" many times throughout the poem to draw an analogy between his and the lady's sexual union and the union that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit embody (line 10). The speaker tries to depict sex as a holy union between him and the lady, one which mirrors the Trinity. The speaker is telling the lady that refusing to have sex with him would not dissolve the union that already exists; he tries to make her feel guilty and helpless. The speaker presents this sacrilegious argument by exploiting the sacredness of the Trinity; he uses the Holy Trinity, a religious symbol to justify their sexual union. By making this comparison, Donne is representing sex as a form of worship. He tells the lady that satisfying his sexual desires is equivalent to obeying God and that performing sex as a means of worship does not jeopardize her chastity. By presenting scandalous but intelligent arguments, the speaker is eager to make the lady recognize his cleverness.

After comparing a sexual union to the Holy Trinity, the speaker doubts that the lady is convinced of his argument. The speaker's hesitancy is evident when he debates his choice of words in this line: “we almost nay more than married are” (line 11). He is afraid that saying they are “almost” married would leave him unsatisfied, so he tells the lady they are “more than married,” since their bloods have been mixed (line 11). By altering from "almost" to "more than," the speaker indicates his attempt to exaggerate his argument (line 11). The speaker suggests that having sex is equivalent to being married, but his doubt foreshadows the lady's unyielding nature. The speaker is trying to channel the lady’s spiritual bond with God into a sexual union with him. Overall, the speaker shows his devotion to physical satisfaction; he hopes that his outrageous arguments will impress the lady and convince her to yield to his desires.

The speaker is determined to fulfill his desires. Donne reinstates the flea metaphor when

the speaker says, “This flea is you and I, and this/ Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is” (lines 12-13). By placing "[their] marriage bed” before “marriage temple" the speaker continues to equate physical union with religious union (line 13). He wants to persuade the lady by saying that a sexual union is equivalent to the spiritual union in a marriage. The speaker "spiritualizes his lady by first identifying her with a flea, and then spiritualizing the flea! The flea is a cloister, a 'temple'" (Brumble 150). When the bed is being used to unite the speaker and the lady in sexual union, the lady is obeying her lover and God, as she would do in a temple. The speaker wants the lady to honor him and his offer as she would honor religious obligations; by making himself superior to the woman, the speaker wants the lady to believe that her submission to him will make the bed equivalent to a house of worship. The speaker implies that by having sex with him, the lady would fulfill a religious duty as she would in a church; thus, the bed is equated with a temple. The speaker wants to use the relationship between God and his servant as a parallel for the relationship he wants with his lover. Donne creates audacious arguments that shock the reader. The speaker's persistence and creativity are revealed in his amusing arguments as he attempts to dazzle the lady.

Donne's persuasion does not only include his and the lady’s point of view, but incorporates her parents as well. He says:

> Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
>
> And cloistered in these living walls of jet,
>
> Though use make you apt to kill me,
>
> Let not to that, self murder added be
>
> And sacrilege, three sins in killing three. (lines 14-18)

The speaker says that her parents will be upset when they learn that their daughter has had sex.

He is telling the lady that even though her parents will have a "grudge," it is not a justified reason to kill the flea (line 14). He recognizes that a marriage needs to be performed, other than in bed in order to satisfy her parents and society. This shows that the speaker understands the lady's desire to fulfill her duty towards God and her parents; he is trying to be sympathetic. The lady, however, is not impressed with the speaker's argument, and she kills the flea.

However, this action does not stop him from arguing his point; the speaker is relentless in demonstrating that having sex is a holy act. By saying, "Though use make you apt to kill me,/ Let not to that, self murder added be,/ And sacrilege, three sins in killing three," the speaker wants the lady to feel guilty for killing the flea (lines 16-18). He says that killing the flea is the same as killing three beings, the flea, himself, and herself. And by killing herself, the lady violates sacred law because suicide is a sin. The speaker is connecting the killing of the flea with an image of destroying the Holy Trinity, and her faith. He asks the lady if she has "[p]urpled [her] nail in blood of innocence?" (line 20). He is connecting the flea to Christ's crucifixion by saying that "like Christ, [the flea] is nailed, though not to a cross" (Brumble 151). He wants the lady to believe that by killing the flea, she is also killing her own faith. Donne's ability to produce bizarre yet, well-constructed claims is demonstrated through the speaker's attempts of persuasion. The speaker is fully invested in persuading the lady to satisfy him.

In the last stanza of the poem, the speaker is aware that the lady has evaded him. She did not succumb to his desires, but he is still confident that she will. The speaker describes the "murder" as spilling the "blood of innocence" (lines 17, 20). Ironically, the flea represents the sin of having sex before marriage, and yet, the blood within the flea is innocent. The flea represents the sin of having sex, but the speaker tries to make the woman feel guilty for killing it. He says that the flea's only mistake is that it sucked blood from her. The speaker also implies that the

lady thinks she has “triumph’st” and is stronger in her faith, but that, to his mind, the "murder" has not changed anything (lines 17, 23). He says, “Just so much honor, when thou yield’st to me,/ Will waste, as this flea’s death took life from thee” (lines 26-27). Since the woman does not regret killing the flea, and instead feels empowered by it, the speaker is playing with her sense of victory and her strength by comparing it to the honor she would lose if she has sex with him. He tells the lady that when she yields to his desires, she will only lose as little honor as she did by killing the flea, and he sees no evidence of a loss of honor, only a triumph. The speaker remains persistent, even though the lady rejects him.

As the poem ends, the speaker is still convinced that the lady will yield to him at some point. By saying that the lady will not lose her honor, the speaker is reinstating his belief that the lady’s chastity and virginity are insignificant. Donne's dramatic arguments express the speaker's persistence in attempting to fulfill his sexual desire. In "The Flea," neither the speaker nor the lover express deeper feelings towards each other or exhibit a spiritual connection; the speaker's sole focus is to persuade his lover to have sex with him by suggesting that it is equivalent to religious devotion. Throughout the poem, he tries to convince the lady that it is unreasonable not to have sex, and he also equates sex with marriage. The speaker claims that having sex is holy and that denying his desires is a sin. The speaker begins "The Flea" by demonstrating how three lives are united in the flea, and throughout the poem, he tries to make the lady yield to his desires. Even though, the speaker's arguments do not convince the lady, he is not upset; rather, he is confident that she will eventually succumb to his desires. The speaker creates shocking assertions as a means of revealing his cleverness and wit. Throughout the poem, his exaggerated arguments are humorous, and his confidence upon the close of the poem is amusing.

In contrast, in "The Canonization," Donne writes about the mutual love between two

people and how it will eventually lead to their sainthood. The male persona is addressing a person who has skeptical or unsympathetic thoughts about his love. The speaker presents comparisons between himself and the addressee; he also poses rhetorical questions and provides examples to show that his love is innocent. The speaker creates an argument that his love will benefit him and others rather than cause any damage. As the poem progresses, the speaker reveals how his love is harmless, and then he attempts to persuade the addressee that he and his lover will become saints of love. The speaker exaggerates his claim so that the addressee will stop disturbing him; he does not want to be bothered with the addressee's opinions. The speaker explains how their love will be preserved and how people will invoke him and his lover, the saints of love, after their deaths.

The speaker in "The Canonization" argues that his love for a lady will lead to his sainthood. The poem opens with a defensive speaker who says, "For Godsake hold your tongue and let me love" (line 1). The speaker is talking to a person and defending his love; he does not want the addressee to undermine or mock his love. The speaker appears to be defensive since he is possibly responding to criticism or skepticism from one who does not comprehend the depth of his love; he is also impatient because he does not want his thoughts of love to be disturbed. He says, "chide my palsy, or my gout,/ My five gray hairs, or ruin'd fortune flout" (lines 2-3). The speaker says that the addressee can mock his bad fortune or his poor health; the addressee can chastise anything but the speaker's love. By presenting comparisons, posing questions, and providing examples, the speaker shows that his love is innocent, unifying, and finally, that it makes the lovers saints of love after their deaths. In this poem, the speaker suggests that his love will lead to holy recognition. The examples that the speaker provides make it clear that the lover is confident in his love. His comparisons, questions, and examples persuade the addressee to

focus on other things in the world rather than the speaker's love. Donne creates a speaker who is invested in talking and dreaming about his love; he does not want to be disturbed with negative comments.

By asking the addressee a series of rhetorical questions and providing examples of how the world remains unaffected by his love, the speaker suggests that his love will lead to his sanctity. In the second stanza, the speaker continues his effort to make the addressee realize that his love does not harm anyone or change anything in a negative way. He asks, "Alas, alas, who's injur'd by my love?" (line 10). The speaker poses questions which compare his feelings and conditions to people and patterns that remain unaffected by his love. In order to prove that nothing is impaired by his love and to eliminate the addressee's skepticism, the speaker asks:

> What merchant's ships have my sighs drown'd?
>
> Who says my tears have overflow'd his ground?
>
> When did my colds a forward spring remove?
>
> When did the heats which my veins fill
>
> Add one more to the plaguy bill?
>
> Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
>
> Litigious men, which quarrels move,
>
> Though she and I do love. (lines 11-18)

Donne draws powerful connections between the speaker's state and actions to regular images in society. The speaker points out that his love is harmless. He wants the addressee to realize this so he does not interfere with his love.

In the first question, the speaker connects his sighs to a drowning ship by saying that his sighs have not drowned any merchant's ships. In the second question, the speaker connects his

tears to flood, and he says they have not flooded any ground. In the third question, the speaker connects his colds to spring, and he shows that his poor health has not postponed the beginning of spring. In the fourth question, the speaker connects his fever to the plaguy bill, a list which includes the names of people who died due to the plague, and he says that his heats have not increased the spread of the epidemic. In addition, the speaker demonstrates that people continue fulfilling their jobs and interests by saying that "[s]oldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still/ Litigious men, which quarrels move" (lines 16-17). According to the speaker, soldiers will continue to look for wars to fight, and lawyers will continue to look for men who entertain controversies and enjoy debating about them. This line also indicates a difference between soldiers, lawyers, and the speaker; it is "at once a comparison of the lover's virtues with those unvirtuous acts of other men" (Clair 302). The speaker refers to professions that deal with quarrels and fighting to show that by spending his time loving, he is not harming anyone. As Donne brings the stanza to a close, the speaker says "[t]hough she and I do love"; even though they love each other, the rest of the world remains unchanged (line 18). The speaker suggests that he has poor health, grief, or worries by saying he has sighs and tears. But his sighs and tears do not put anything to an end and neither would his love. The questions and examples serve as proof for the speaker's claim that his love has not injured anyone; he is eager to prove that his love is innocent.

After demonstrating the harmlessness of their love, the speaker is determined to show the balance and unity of their love. In the third stanza, the speaker depicts the lovers' bond. He says, "[c]all us what you will, we are made such by love" to indicate that he remains unaffected by the addressee's skepticism or opposition (line 19). The lovers "are made such by love," so that detaches them from everyone else; they aren't concerned with anybody's opinions (line 19).

Instead, they are bound together. This idea that they are made by love is also indicative of their creation and conception. By saying "[c]all her one, me another fly," the speaker signifies that the addressee can call them anything, as long as they are equal; he does not want either of them to be superior or inferior to the other (line 20). The speaker says the lovers "are tapers too, and at [their] own cost die" (line 21). The candle is a phallic symbol and a religious symbol for life. By comparing himself and his lover to candle flames he shows that their love is warm and brings light and life to him. He is aware that the flames will eventually fade away, marking their death. The cost of their death is giving up their love, but it will not be lost; the speaker exaggerates the innocence of his love to say that it will be canonized.

To demonstrate the balance between their personalities, the speaker says, "we in us find the Eagle and the Dove" (line 22). The eagle and dove are religious symbols which represent courage and peace, respectively. The varying traits of these animals represent how the lovers balance each other. The speaker says the "Phoenix riddle hath more wit/ By us, we two being one are it" (lines 23-24). The Phoenix is a "mythical bird [that] burns itself to ashes every five hundred years, and emerges renewed from the fire" (Rudrum 107). The speaker compares the Phoenix's consumption by fire to the way the lovers are consumed in passion. Donne creates a paradox of the two lovers being one to show that the lovers are complete when they are together. The speaker uses these powerful images of sharing traits and building a partnership to indicate the strength of their relationship.

The speaker wants the addressee to know that the lovers are invested in each other so the addressee does not interrupt his thoughts of love. The following lines: "So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit,/ We die and rise the same, and prove/ Mysterious by this love" express the lovers' desire to achieve sanctity through sex (lines 25-27). Through this union the couple can share

their weaknesses and strengths. He says they "die and rise" to refer to "sexual climax" (line 26, Rudrum 107). The sexual climax depicts an enhancement of their traits and their spirituality since they will become "[m]ysterious" (line 27). According to theology, a mystery is "a truth known only through faith or revelation and incomprehensible to the human reason" (Mystery 647). The speaker is saying that by having sex, they are "prov[ing]" that they are becoming mysterious, or engaging in an act to gain sacred knowledge (line 26). The audacious speaker suggests that having sex will make the lovers mysterious and lead to their sainthood. Donne's bold and clever arguments are shocking enough to distract the addressee from his opposition. The reader may also become distracted and start believing the argument since it is well-constructed.

After explaining how they become mysterious, the speaker demonstrates how the lovers will become holy. In the last two stanzas of the poem, the speaker describes how they will be remembered, canonized, and invoked by others. The speaker says that the lovers can "die by it, if not live by [their] love" (line 28). Even if people disapprove of their love and they are "unfit for tombs and [a] hearse," the lovers' "legend" or "the life of a saint" will be an account of their love (lines 29-30, Rudrum 107). Their account will be fit for "verse," for poetry if people are not willing to pass down the legend (line 30). The speaker's preconception that they may not receive a proper burial indicates that he is uncertain about whether people would approve of his love, but he still argues that he has achieved a devout understanding through his relationship. He says:

> [a]nd if no piece of chronicle we prove,
> We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;
> As well a well wrought urn becomes
> The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,

And by these hymns, all shall approve

Us canonized for love. (lines 31-36)

If the love his life exhibits doesn't "prove" worthy enough to be recognized as a "chronicle" or the "life of a great man," he can still narrate it through the "pretty rooms" he'll build in "sonnets" (lines 31-32, Rudrum 107). The speaker provides an analogy between the legend of a saint and the story of his love. The speaker is confident that his story will be passed down, and if others choose not to speak about his love, he will provide an account through poetry. He furthers his argument by describing an urn that holds the "greatest ashes" in a "half-acre [of] tombs" (line 34). By comparing the "ashes" to his sonnets, now called "hymns," the speaker is equating the "greatest ashes" to the story of his love (lines 34-35). The "greatest ashes" are referring to the ashes of saintly or virtuous people whom society follows or pursues (line 34). The speaker's claim is outrageous since it attempts to incorporate love and sex as a means to become sacred, and it depicts the love for a woman as a means of becoming closer to God.

In the last stanza of the poem, the speaker describes how people will invoke the lovers as the saints of love. The speaker is confident that people will yearn for a love similar to his and that they will try to mimic the lovers. They would say:

You whom reverend love

Made one another's hermitage;

You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage,

Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove

Into the glasses of your eyes

So made such mirrors, and such spies,

That they did all to you epitomize,

Countries, towns, courts: Beg from above

A pattern of your love. (lines 38-45)

The speaker and his lover have been appointed by the reverend of love as "one another's hermitage" (line 38). The speaker is described as one who taught love as peace rather than wrath, and as the one who took everyone's souls, bonded them together, and put them in his sight. This is an indication that the speaker feels he will be able to look over everyone, when he becomes the saint of love. He suggests that the love he shares with a woman rather than God will lead him to a powerful position in religion. The speaker believes that he will be able to watch everyone since his eyes will serve as "mirrors, and spies" (line 42). By saying the souls within the "glasses of [his] eyes" will be "mirrors," the speaker shows his desire to see people follow him and imitate his thoughts and actions (lines 41-42). By calling them "spies," it shows the speaker's obsession (line 42). He wants the souls to serve as agents, who will find his opposition and possibly, convert them. To conclude, the speaker says, people from "[c]ountries, towns, [and] courts" will "[b]eg" for a "pattern of [their] love" (lines 44-45). Throughout the poem, the speaker establishes how his love is innocent and how it will make him holy. Therefore, if the addressee disapproves of the speaker's love, he is actually preventing the speaker from becoming holy and is encouraging him to grow apart from God. Donne creates his bizarre claim to distract the addressee and to eliminate any negative thoughts he has about the speaker's love. Donne employs a clever strategy to intensify his claim as each stanza progresses.

"The Canonization" presents a lover's effort to prove his love worthy and holy to a person who doubts the value of the speaker's love. The speaker exhibits complete confidence in his love, and he also claims that it will lead him to sanctity. The speaker defends his love throughout the poem, and poses arguments in the form of questions to persuade his addressee. He says that love

creates unity and balance in his life. The unity is achieved through sexual intercourse, which will elevate a person's state of mind, in both, a secular and spiritual sense. After giving examples to prove that his love is praiseworthy, the speaker recognizes that people may not accept his ideas. However, he claims that people will regard him and his lover as the saints of love after their deaths. The conclusion depicts the speaker's desire to be admired and imitated. The speaker depicts love and sex as channels through which one can achieve holiness. Donne creates these outrageous claims to depict the speaker's eagerness to love and not be criticized. By portraying love as a means of attaining sanctity, Donne represents love in a positive light.

In "The Flea" and "The Canonization," the speakers depict their love for a woman, while in "Batter My Heart," the speaker depicts his love for God. In "Batter My Heart," the speaker is asking God to break his relationship with the devil. Throughout the poem, the speaker commands God and asks God to convert him to a moral man. The speaker also chastises God's actions as a way of convincing God to overthrow him. He employs an analogy between his relationship with the devil and an "an usurped town" (line 6). Since the speaker's soul has been seized by the devil, he is eager to be taken over by God. The speaker wants God to overcome him because he loves God and wants God to love him in return. However, he feels that the only way God can become part of him is through a violent rape. The image of God raping someone appears bizarre, but it is clear that the speaker has this idea in mind from the beginning of the poem. The speaker's love for God, and his desire for God's love fuels his plea. He wants God to long for him, the way he longs for a union with God. The images he uses throughout the poem describe the speaker's condition and why he commands God to rape him.

In "Batter My Heart," Donne creates a commanding persona. The sonnet begins unexpectedly with the speaker announcing, "Batter my heart, three person'd God," as the speaker

commands God to beat him (line 1). By calling God "three person'd," the speaker makes reference to the Trinity: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (line 1). The speaker wants God to be violent with him and "three person'd" is indicative of God's excessive amount of strength; the speaker is "imploring him to exert all his power, his triple power, to rescue him from Satan" (line 1, Parish 300).

The speaker starts chastising God in the second line of the sonnet. In an undermining tone, he says, "for you/ As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend" (lines 1-2). After talking about God's ability to "[b]atter" him, the speaker criticizes God by saying that God's actions are too delicate (line 1). "[K]nock, breathe, shine, and seek" are verbs that describe the actions that God is constantly engaged in (line 2). Since knocking is most often associated with knocking on one's door, God's "knock[ing]" is a reference to him seeking entry into people's lives (lines 2). The speaker says God "breathe[s]" because he blows the breath of life into all of mankind (line 2). By breathing life, God is also breathing faith into his creations. "Shine" is used to describe God because he created day and light (line 2). In addition, his guidance can be interpreted as guiding light. Being on a religious path is often associated with receiving guidance from God. When God "seek[s] to mend" people, he is trying to help those who are astray so they may follow the righteous, guided path (line 2). All the actions that the speaker associates with God are vital attributes that a believer would associate with him. However, the speaker makes God's actions appear useless and unimportant. Donne provides a contrast between God's subtle actions and the forceful actions which the speaker requests.

Then the speaker describes his reasons for seeking an overthrow. The speaker wants God to overcome him violently. He also has the audacity to tell God how to overcome him. It appears as if he wants to be God's sole focus. He wants to "rise, and stand" and in order to achieve that

the speaker wants God to "o'erthrow [him], and/ bend [His] force, to break, blow, burn and make [him] new" (lines 3-4). The speaker wants to be reborn, and he does not want God to attempt to "mend" him, or restore him in a passive manner (line 2). The speaker wants God to conquer his soul and is asking God to use the full force of his strength to make him righteous. The verbs the speaker uses to express God's actions and the verbs he uses to illustrate the actions he wants God to take are set up as parallels. Donne's use of alliteration in "break, blow, [and] burn" places emphasis on the parallels, forcing the reader to notice the stark differences between the two sets of actions (line 4). The speaker is asking God "to break" as opposed to "knock" gently, because if God seeks entry, the speaker may be tempted to refuse (line 2). He wants God to "break" into his soul (line 4). The speaker reveals that he is weak and needs to be overthrown in order to be upright. He wants God to "blow" life into him as a means of renewing him (line 4). By "blow[ing]" life into the speaker, he will experience a spiritual rebirth (line 4). The speaker needs God's path to "burn" brightly at him, and not merely "shine" because the blaze created by burning would be too powerful for him to disregard (lines 2, 4). The speaker realizes that his soul cannot be restored; he needs to start over and be made "new" (line 4). This is an indication that the speaker has been immoral and sinful, but wants an opportunity to redeem himself.

The speaker elaborates his argument by comparing himself to "an usurped town, [which is] to another due" (line 5). Like a seized town that belongs to someone other than its rightful inhabitants, the speaker has been taken over by the devil. At the moment, he owes the devil his soul, but the speaker is confident that a violent overthrow by God will break his bond with the devil and transform him. The speaker "[l]abour[s] to admit [God]" because the devil dominates him (line 6). God's enemy will do everything possible to keep the speaker misled so the speaker has to expend his energy and work hard to transform. The speaker says, "Reason your viceroy in

me, me should defend," because he is likely to "defend" his bond with the devil since that is what the devil will encourage him to do (line 7). The speaker wants God to "[r]eason" with him as a means of implanting his presence into the speaker's soul (line 7). The speaker is warning God that he will resist the overthrow, but he wants God to encourage the change despite his resistance. The speaker does not want God to give up on him because he yearns for a union with God.

The speaker continues to say that he "is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue" (line 8). The description of the speaker being captivated relates to the image of an "usurped town" (line 5). Since he is under the devil's control, the speaker is likely to be "weak or untrue" or both (line 8). This is also a reference to Adam and Eve who had God's guidance but suffered a downfall for dishonoring God when they acquired "[r]eason" (line 7). The speaker is making a reference to Adam and Eve which shows how two rightly guided people fell into the devil's trap and were punished. He is comparing himself to Adam and Eve because he too has fallen into the devil's trap.

In the beginning of the poem, the speaker is commanding God to "[b]atter [his] heart," and then he explains the reasons for his command (line 1). The speaker justifies his commands by chastising God's actions. The speaker commands God when he tells Him to "[r]eason [his] viceroy in [him]" (line 7). This strategy of commanding God and then providing an explanation is consistent throughout the sonnet. The speaker explains that he wants God to “[r]eason" with him and persuade him; he wants God to know that he yearns to become a virtuous man (line 7). He says, "Yet, dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,/ But am betroth'd unto your enemy" (lines 9-10). Despite his connection with the devil and his possible resistance to God's "o'erthrow," the speaker loves God. He wants God to love him in return, but he knows that would

not be possible as long as he is "betroth'd" to the devil (line 10). Marriage is used to represent the union he has already achieved with the devil. The speaker's shocking claim equates his relationship with the devil to a holy covenant. It shows that the speaker is devoted to the devil, and he needs a violent force to set him free.

The speaker is clearly aware of the intense relationship between himself and the devil. He knows that breaking such a bond will require God's intrusion and his persistence as well. Donne employs three sets of commands and explanations in this sonnet. In the last command, the speaker says:

> Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
> Take me to you, imprison me, for I
> Except you enthral me, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me. (lines 11-14)

Since the speaker describes his relationship with the devil as a marriage, he is asking God to "[d]ivorce" him from that marriage (line 11). He wants to dissolve his bond with the devil and instead unite with God. The images he uses to break the bond such as "[d]ivorce, untie, [and] break that knot" offer a sense of escape and freedom (line 11). When something is "untie[d]," it is let loose and freed (line 11). A "knot," which holds two things tightly together, is set free when it is broken (line 11). The speaker seeks freedom from the devil through God's love and acceptance.

Even though, the speaker seeks freedom through God, he says that he will achieve this freedom when God "imprison[s]" him (line 12). Here, Donne presents a paradox linking freedom and imprisonment. The speaker says that he will only be free when God "enthral[s]" him (line 13). The speaker wants God to take pleasure in him. And unless God does so, he claims to be

bonded with the devil, and he will never be "chaste" (line 14). The speaker's relationship with the devil dominates him, but he wants God to violate him and set him free. The speaker longs for a union with God, and he wants God to yearn for him the same way. If God longs for the speaker and imprisons him, he will be free from the devil's imprisonment. In this sonnet, "[b]attery, slavery, [and] rape - horrors of human conduct are employed as metaphors of God's dealings with those he loves" (Sykes 166).

In the conclusion to the poem, the speaker says, "for I/ Except you enthral me, never shall be free,/ Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me" (lines 12-14). He asks God to "ravish," or rape him (line 14). Donne creates a bizarre claim in "Batter My Heart." The speaker loves God with a vehement passion and wants God to commit a violent rape to make him righteous. Donne incorporates actions associated with rape throughout the sonnet. And all the actions related to rape are stated in the speaker's commands. By raping the speaker, God would have to "o'er throw" him and "force" him to accept God's way (lines 3-4). The image of an "usurped town" is also symbolic of rape (line 5). If a town is being seized, its lawful inhabitants or owners do not control it, and this is analogous to the way a person is seized and overcome during a rape. The speaker is confident that he can become righteous, and the speaker wants God to use his power and force to make the speaker virtuous. Donne creates this outrageous claim to depict an extreme desperation and fervent for God's love and acceptance.

As "The Flea," "The Canonization," and "Batter My Heart" demonstrate, Donne creates speakers with outrageous claims. Initially, the arguments appear bizarre and comical, but the speaker is persistent in making his point evident. Each poem embodies its own set of persuasive strategies which the speaker uses to convince his addressee. Simultaneously, Donne uses these strategies to convince the reader of the speaker's assertions as well. At the conclusion of each

poem, the speaker remains confident that his claims or demands will triumph.

In "The Flea," the speaker opens the poem by demonstrating how three lives are united in the flea, and throughout the poem, he tries to make the lady yield to his desires. The speaker employs different persuasive strategies: he says that the lady will not lose her honor; he tries to convince the lady that it is sacrilegious not to have sex; and he also equates it with marriage. The speaker suggests that having sex is holy and that denying his desires are a sin. Donne's dramatic arguments express the speaker's persistence in attempting to fulfill his sexual desires. Even though, the speaker's arguments do not convince the lady, he is not upset; rather, he is confident that she will eventually succumb to his desires. The amusing arguments and shocking assertions Donne creates reveal his cleverness and wit.

In "The Canonization," the speaker opens the poem defending his love for a woman. The speaker defends his love throughout the poem and poses arguments in the form of questions to dissuade his addressee from criticizing his love. The speaker uses rhetorical questions, comparisons, and examples to demonstrate that his love is innocent. As the stanzas progress, the speaker strengthens his claim that him and his lover will become saints of love. The conclusion depicts the speaker's desire to be admired and imitated. The speaker is confident that he has established a good reputation for his love as he imagines people invoking them, as saints of love. By concluding with a potential invocation, the "'tone with which the poem closes is one of triumphant achievement, but the tone is a development contributed to by various earlier [persuasive] elements'" (Rooney 37). Donne creates this outrageous claim to depict the speaker's eagerness to love and not be criticized.

In "Batter My Heart," the speaker opens the sonnet with a command to God. The speaker chastises God and commands God to be violent with him throughout the poem. The speaker's

persuasive strategies include, using commands and explanations. In addition, the speaker employs and analogy between the seized town and his relationship with the devil. The speaker loves God with an intense passion and wants God to commit a violent rape to make him virtuous. The speaker wants God to long for him the way he yearns for God. At the conclusion to the poem, the speaker is confident that he can become righteous, and the speaker wants God to use his power and force to make the speaker virtuous. Donne creates this scandalous claim to depict an extreme desperation and fervent desire for God's love and acceptance.

Although “The Flea, “The Canonization,” and “Batter My Heart” depict different types of love, Donne employs a similar argumentative structure in these poems. The speakers present claims and defend them with persuasive strategies throughout the poems. As the poems conclude, Donne presents triumphant speakers who are confident that their propositions will prevail.

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