

Textu(r)al Performances of Affect in John Donne's Valediction Poems

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This article suggests a method of 'differential' reading—that is, reading for the affective surplus beyond a text's semantics—in order to analyse the role of affect in John Donne's poetry. Derived from contrasting several twenty-first-century theories of affect (Massumi, Sedgwick, Brinkema), such a differential reading wants to explore the way in which affect is expressed through poetic form and through the more immediately experiential, or material, dimensions of a poem: that is, through its texture. Donne's valediction poems make use both of their evocation of a concrete materiality that affords touching and being touched and of their creation of cognitive intensity through semantic overdetermination to perform affect in their poetic language, allowing for affective experience and cognitive reading to merge in a blend of thinking and feeling.

As far removed as the seventeenth century seems from present-day scholarly discussions at the interstices of neuroscience and philosophy, many of the recent debates on the theory of affects seem to take their origin, or at least have central points of reference, towards the end of the early modern period. The mind–body dualism as formulated by René Descartes has dominated discourse on the affects over the past centuries, but it has increasingly come under attack in the last fifty years or so through a renewed focus on the work of another seventeenth-century philosopher, Baruch Spinoza. Spinoza's monism, which rejects the separation of mind and body, has been key to the revival of philosophical interest in the affects in the late twentieth century, in work by Gilles Deleuze and later Brian Massumi.¹

The relation of mind and body in the experience of affects has emerged as perhaps the central question in contemporary affect studies. Particularly in the context of text-based approaches in literary or cultural studies, this is closely connected to the question of how embodied non-cognitive sensations can be represented in language²—or, in other words, whether and how affect can be read. Answers have been provided from different quarters and are partly conflicting: some materialist theorists of affect seek to keep affect strictly separate from cognitive processes, which would involve emotion. In this manner, they relegate affect to the extra-linguistic domain, because linguistic expression, or any form of intentional representation, involves a degree of cognition—at least this is certainly

¹ See Alex Houen, 'Introduction: Affect and Literature', in *Affect and Literature*, ed. by Alex Houen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 1–30 (p. 5).

² See Houen, 'Affect and Literature', p. 2.

the case for the aesthetically crafted language of poetry. Meanwhile, Eugenie Brinkema's formalist criticism makes the opposite case, arguing that affect is present only in the representational forms it assumes. The position I want to take here is somewhere in between: combining formalist with phenomenological approaches to literary affect and building above all on work by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Denise Riley, and Alex Houen, I outline the potentials of a 'differential' reading of/for affect in literature. Reading differentially, as I understand it, means to read for the affective surplus beyond meaning, to be attuned to the affordances of form and texture and to how language itself may performatively express affect.

In the context of early modern poetry, the strand of seventeenth-century English poetry known as 'metaphysical' poetry proves particularly interesting when it comes to the expression of affects, as the moniker itself strikes at the heart of the question of their representation. Not only can the gist of the contemporary debate around the status of affects be traced in the history of the reception of metaphysical poetry, but the love poems of John Donne, the foremost representative of this style of writing, collapse the body–mind distinction in their expression of affect. Focussing on Donne's four valediction poems, I want to show how affect is expressed in them through a textu(r)al performance that involves the affordances of the poems' textures as much as their engagement of readers' cognitive facilities. Donne's poems rely on the interplay of materiality, form, and semantic overdetermination to create affective intensity. In this way, they express affect in language beyond semantics or the mere description of feelings or passions. What such a differential reading of the valediction poems may show, then, is that Donne's engagement of the affects is not only conceptually surprisingly close to present-day affect theories, but that Donne's poetry is predicated on the aesthetic, textual, or rhetorical, as well as on the physical, or textural, presence of affect.

I. Reading Affect

After being out of fashion for most of the twentieth century, which first saw the New Critics warn against the 'affective fallacy' of taking a reader's emotional response to a text into critical consideration³ and then the dominance of text-centred structuralist and post-structuralist criticism, the study of affects has received its fair share of attention from literary and cultural critics in the early twenty-first century. This revival has been described as an 'affective turn', which due to its focus on the body in its material configurations has itself been placed in the context of a wider 'nonhuman turn' in the humanities and social sciences.⁴ It promises to do away with centuries of privileging cognition, or the thinking mind,

³ W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (London: Methuen, 1954), pp. 21–39.

⁴ *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*, ed. by Patricia Ticineto Clough with Jean Halley (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. by Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

over matter, or the body—a tendency that can be traced back at least to Descartes's substance dualism.⁵

Influenced by Gilles Deleuze's reading of Baruch Spinoza's monist philosophy, Brian Massumi has emerged as one of the most prominent voices in twenty-first-century affect theory. In 'The Autonomy of Affect', Massumi describes affect as 'irreducibly bodily and autonomic', that is, as independent of cognition.⁶ For Massumi, this is what distinguishes affect from emotions, as the latter are 'qualified' in that they are 'semantically and semiotically formed'⁷—in other words, they are cognitively reflected and hence distinct from the purely bodily and 'asignifying' affect.⁸ Massumi instead associates affect with 'intensity',⁹ which he understands as 'the strength or duration of [an] image's effect'.¹⁰ Affect, that is, is the durable effect of an encounter. There are two major consequences from such an understanding of affect as autonomic or 'unqualified' by cognition: first, affect is also necessarily an impersonal force that is detached from subjectivity;¹¹ and second, affect theory, understood in this way, does not deal with 'recognizable emotional states (such as anger, jealousy, or love)',¹² but precisely with what is not cognisable—hence also the use of the singular 'affect' to underline this impersonal intensity.¹³

⁵ See Howard Robinson, 'Dualism', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Spring 2023 edition) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/dualism/>> [accessed 25 May 2023]. For a critique of Cartesian mind-body dualism, see Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Putnam, 1994).

⁶ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 23–45 (p. 28).

⁷ Massumi, *Parables*, p. 28.

⁸ Massumi, *Parables*, pp. 27, 41.

⁹ Massumi, *Parables*, p. 27.

¹⁰ Massumi, *Parables*, p. 24. This echoes Deleuze's reading of Spinoza in Gilles Deleuze, 'Spinoza and the Three "Ethics"', in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 138–51. There Deleuze observes that affection 'has an effect on my own duration—a pleasure or pain, a joy or sadness', and that the 'continuous variations of power [*puissance*] that pass from one state to another' in this way are properly called *affects* (p. 139).

¹¹ See Grusin, p. xvii.

¹² Nicholas Manning, 'Why Study Unknowable Intensities? On Contemporary Affect Theory, with an Interview with Rachel Greenwald Smith', *Revue française d'études américaines*, 151.2 (2017), 140–50 (p. 142).

¹³ Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), p. xiii. It should be noted that many theorists of affect reject the notion that affect theory should avoid theorising concrete sensations—Brinkema herself notably uses the plural 'affects', as she refers to concrete affects like grief or sadness rather than to the abstract notion of affect. I will use both singular and plural forms here, with the singular usually referring to the abstract notion of affect as intensity or force and the plural to its concrete realisations.

Massumi's position has proved very influential on affect studies,¹⁴ as can be seen from Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth's definition of affect in the introduction to their *Affect Theory Reader*, which closely echoes Massumi:

Affect [...] is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability.¹⁵

Importantly, these forces—the plural form tacitly concedes that affect may in fact be more than a single amorphous intensity—are both active driving forces and more passive dispositions to be affected. This leaves affect in an intermediary position, or, as Gregg and Seigworth put it, 'Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon'.¹⁶ Its intermediary constitution is what allows affect to circulate among humans, but it is also what makes affect very difficult to pin down (in critical debate as well as in literary representation) and hence what makes it perhaps even more difficult to read.

This raises the question to what extent and in what manner affect can be contained in a (literary) text and whether and how we can read (for) affect. While most literary critics interested in affect would to some extent agree that 'imaginative works mediate and modulate relationships between body and mind, and sensation and cognition'¹⁷—that is, works of art, including literature, may 'transmit' affects to their recipients or even somehow share emotions between author and reader¹⁸—

¹⁴ This is particularly true for the strand of affect studies rooted in cultural studies that is most popular with literary critics. However, Massumi's strand of affect theory has also been roundly criticised. For instance, Ruth Leys has offered a comprehensive critique of Massumi's positions, arguing that Massumi's strict distinction of affect and emotions propagates precisely the sort of mind-body dualism he professes to eschew; see Ruth Leys, 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique', *Critical Inquiry*, 37.3 (2011), 434–72 (p. 455). For an overview of positions from affective science, see Patrick Colm Hogan, 'Affect Studies', in *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.105>> [accessed 23 May 2023]; for an overview of historical and present-day discourses on affect, see Donald R. Wehrs, 'Introduction: Affect and Texts: Contemporary Inquiry in Historical Context', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism*, ed. by Donald R. Wehrs and Thomas Blake (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1–95.

¹⁵ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, 'An Inventory of Shimmers', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 1–25 (p. 1).

¹⁶ Gregg and Seigworth, p. 1.

¹⁷ Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi, 'Introduction', in *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts: Politics, Ecologies, and Form*, ed. by Amanda Bailey and Mario DiGangi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1–23 (p. 13).

¹⁸ See Hogan. Although it seems straightforward enough to assume that a work of art or literary text may excite emotions in its recipients, the precise nature of this affective transfer is unclear. It is highly doubtful whether an affective reaction in readers is in any way predictable. Even if art really is 'a bundle of affects [...] waiting to be reactivated by a spectator or participant' (Simon O'Sullivan, 'The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art Beyond Representation', *Angelaki*,

Eugenie Brinkema's radical formalist claim is that form in itself is affective, irrespective of its recipients, whereas 'strict' Massumian interpretations question whether affect can ever be expressed in language. For if Massumi's conception of affect as purely material and bodily, distinct from cognition, holds true, speaking of affects is itself impossible, as it would require a cognitive representation of what is beyond cognition.¹⁹ In this sense, the representation of affect(s) is strictly paradoxical, fraught with impossible self-effacement—it is the representation of the 'ineffable'.²⁰ Thus, Simon O'Sullivan describes affects as both 'extra-discursive and extra-textual': they are extra-discursive because they are "'outside" discourse understood as structure' and 'precisely what is irreducible to structure' while they are extra-textual because 'they do not produce [...] knowledge'.²¹ As a consequence, 'you cannot read affects, you can only experience them'.²² This of course represents a conundrum for textual criticism, which inevitably must rely on reading: such a strict separation of affects and emotions almost by necessity prevents the study of affects in any kind of text, simply because reading is an inherently cognitive practice—even if my aim were to solely *experience* a literary text, I would still need to *read* it in order to do so. But such a strict separation of affect and text is not even entirely borne out by O'Sullivan himself, since he concedes (tellingly in a footnote) that in a different sense 'affects might [...] be understood as textual in that they are felt as *differences in intensity*'.²³ This latter point strikes me as particularly interesting with regard to affect in literature: if, as O'Sullivan suggests, differences in intensity can indeed be realised textually, then

6.3 (2001), 125–35 (p. 126)), it is far from clear how affects become 'bundled up' in this way (the production of affective art), how or whether at all recipients might disentangle or 'unbundle' such art and whether such bundled up affects should take specific forms, and if so, which ones. Further, there is also an ongoing debate over whether affects elicited by art are the same or different in kind from 'real' affects experienced outside texts (see Houen, 'Affect and Literature', p. 16).

¹⁹ Following Massumi's lead (Massumi, *Parables*, p. 5), Nicholas Manning has argued that abstraction is the only way for affect theory to do justice to the 'dynamic, unstable and unnamable' force that is affect, since 'language itself perhaps becomes truly affective when it not only becomes unknowable, but embraces this unknowability as the very condition of its being' (Manning, p. 143). So far, so unknowable in theory—but in both critical and poetic practice, this still leaves many questions unanswered: would a linguistic, text-based work of art like a poem have to withdraw to the abstract as well in order to represent affect? How does language 'become unknowable'? And what might abstract poetic affect look like? Brinkema for this reason has criticised Massumi's affect theory for retreating to abstract notions that do not allow critics access to 'any particular textual workings' (Brinkema, p. xiii). It should be pointed out that in his more recent work Massumi concedes that affect 'includes very elaborated functions like language' (Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), p. 7) and so opens the door for more text-centred approaches to affect.

²⁰ Stephen Ahern, 'Introduction: A Feel for the Text', in *Affect Theory and Literary Critical Practice: A Feel for the Text*, ed. by Stephen Ahern (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 1–21 (p. 7).

²¹ O'Sullivan, pp. 126, 131, n. 4.

²² O'Sullivan, p. 126.

²³ O'Sullivan, p. 131, n. 4.

a literary/poetic/textual aesthetics of affect must exist and the force or intensity of affect should be traceable in literature. Further, if it is affect's *difference* that is thus textual, the implication is that affect can be read in/through difference. This also follows from Massumi's claim that '[I]anguage [...] is not simply in opposition to intensity. It would seem to function *differentially* in relation to it'.²⁴ Affect might then require a different kind of reading, one that pays heed to affect's 'in-betweenness' and that in this manner shows 'attunement to the text's affective valences'.²⁵ I want to call this method of reading a *differential* reading.

Such a differential reading would certainly need to take into account what is different in literary texts from their mere contents, and in particular focus on their form, their texture, and their performativity. All three occupy positions in between text and reader, and hence in the impersonal 'spaces' where affect might be expected to circulate. As all three are also encoded in the language of a literary text, or poem, they of course require reading—not a strictly formalist or strictly materialist reading, but a reading that is responsive to intensity in and beyond the text, to the way in which a text's experience is inextricably linked to its cognition but also goes beyond mere cognition of content, a reading of and through affect's differentials. This approach is then in line with Houen's suggestion that 'we need to think of affect, language, and cognition as thoroughly conjoined yet open to various modes of interaction, coassembly, and fusion'.²⁶ A differential reading therefore needs to trace what is in between the work of cognition of reading a text—a search for meaning in its content matter—and the affective, material experience of a text. It is a mode of reading which reflects that '[i]n practice, [...] affect and cognition are never fully separable—if for no other reason than that thought is itself a body, embodied'.²⁷ Its aim is to be sensitive to a text's intensities beyond semantic content and simultaneously to thought's material embodiment in/through its textual traces. This way of reading differentially might then be a step towards 'an approach to affects in theory and in literature that is neither strictly cognitivist nor noncognitivist, and that is open to considering literary affect in terms of fusions of content and form' that Houen has called for.²⁸ Reading differentially is such a hybrid form of reading that is alert to affect's aesthetic intensities.

II. Affect's Linguistic Differentials: Form, Texture, and Performance

In order to engage with affect's linguistic differentials, those dimensions of a text that signify beyond its semantics must be considered. Rejecting the notion that affect is somehow 'outside of language', Eugenie Brinkema has made the case that from the perspective of textual criticism, attention to the concrete specifics of form

²⁴ Massumi, *Parables*, p. 25; my emphasis.

²⁵ Ahern, p. 7.

²⁶ Houen, 'Affect and Literature', p. 8.

²⁷ Gregg and Seigworth, pp. 2–3.

²⁸ Houen, 'Affect and Literature', p. 5.

is key to the study of affects—in marked contrast to O'Sullivan, Brinkema stresses that '*Affect is not where reading is no longer needed*'.²⁹ On the contrary, she calls for close readings of textual form, contending that affect takes on 'exteriority in textual form as something that commands a reading'.³⁰ In what is a radical reversal of Massumi's stance, Brinkema argues that affect is only engendered through reading:

*it is only because one must read for it that affect has any force at all. The intensity of that force derives from the textual specificity and particularity made available uniquely through reading, the vitality of all that is not known in advance of close reading, the surprising enchantments of the new that are not uncovered by interpretation but produced and brought into being as its activity.*³¹

While I do not share Brinkema's opinion that affects are properties of forms irrespective of their recipients—like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick I think they are 'irreducibly phenomenological'³²—, Brinkema's focus on affective form nevertheless provides valuable insight for any text-centred approach to affect. Despite her opposition to Massumi's understanding of affect as abstract visceral force, she still retains the notions of force and intensity, now ingrained in 'textual specificity'—that is, in form. This would mean that affect's differential function in relation to language is traceable in the ways in which a text's form signifies differentially to its contents, in which it challenges, disrupts, and affords readings.³³ Crucially, if affect is thus entangled with form, this opens up a much broader and at the same time more concrete horizon for the textual differentials of affect—as varied as literary forms themselves. After all, forms in the broadest sense comprise 'all patterns of repetition and difference'.³⁴ As such they are themselves in between, somewhere between an abstract pattern and its concrete shape and between the pattern's concept and its material manifestation.³⁵ They share this in-between-ness with affect and this is what allows them to express affect's intensity.

This still raises the question of how we engage with form, or how affective form 'commands a reading'. It seems to me that particularly with regard to Donne's poetry, the texture and textual performance of affects are central to this process: they are different but related expressions of affectivity. Texture has been

²⁹ Brinkema, p. xiv.

³⁰ Brinkema, p. 4.

³¹ Brinkema, p. 38.

³² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 21.

³³ On the affordances of form, see Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 6–11.

³⁴ Levine, p. 3.

³⁵ See Levine, pp. 8–9.

theorised as ‘the experienced quality of textuality’,³⁶ and can hence be seen as a link between reading and experiencing a text. The term refers to those elements that make a text tangible and so allow it to be felt. In this way, texture ‘addresses the dynamic interwovenness of material form and immaterial processes of signification by anchoring acts of reading in the differentiable layers of materiality and mediality in a given text’.³⁷ It opens up texts to touching and feeling, and thus, as Sedgwick has it, to affect itself.³⁸ Situated between materiality and immaterial signification, texture is then clearly one answer to the question of how affect may ‘function differentially’ in relation to language—texture emerges as a site of that very differential of affect.

But there is yet another way to conceptualise how affect may be ingrained in language, one that comprises form, texture, and content. Poet and critic Denise Riley has argued that language performs affectivity.³⁹ Riley finds that ‘[t]here is a forcible affect of language which courses like blood through its speakers’.⁴⁰ This linguistic affect can be found almost everywhere in language: it permeates grammar, syntax, and material form (typography, layout), as well as semantic content—but, importantly, for Riley it is part of the language, ‘not extralinguistic’.⁴¹ This linguistic affect is the result of language’s performative quality: while bodily affects may not translate directly into speech, ‘feeling, articulated, *is* words and is also *in* the words’.⁴² Once expressed, affects seem to take on a life of their own: they have now entered language, where they are no longer the experience of a single body but circulate in text. In this sense, ‘language does not so much “express” feeling, but (to use American English) in itself it “does” feeling’.⁴³ In other words, ‘language exert[s] an *illocutionary* force of affect’.⁴⁴ If we follow Riley, form and texture are key to language’s affective performance. As is the case with all performances, reading the textual performance of a work of literature is not straightforward: it cannot be a purely analytical reading that does not address the immanence of affective performance. Instead, it should be a reading that addresses how the text’s affective ‘force’ or ‘intensity’ unfolds—a differential reading. It

³⁶ Peter Stockwell, *Texture: A Cognitive Aesthetics of Reading* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 1.

³⁷ Christoph Reinhardt, ‘Reading Textures’, in *Theory Matters: The Place of Theory in Literary and Cultural Studies Today*, ed. by Martin Middeke and Christoph Reinhardt (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 319–34 (p. 319).

³⁸ Sedgwick, p. 17.

³⁹ Denise Riley, *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); and Denise Riley, *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

⁴⁰ Riley, *Impersonal Passion*, p. 1.

⁴¹ Riley, *Words of Selves*, p. 35.

⁴² Riley, *Words of Selves*, p. 36.

⁴³ Riley, *Words of Selves*, p. 36.

⁴⁴ Alex Houen, ‘Introduction: Affecting Words’, *Textual Practice*, 25.2 (2011), 215–32 (p. 217).

should have become clearer by now what presence affect may take in poetry: affect may be present in the way a poem's form affords, a poem's texture touches, and a poem's language performs intensity beyond meaning—these are (some of) affect's linguistic differentials that I hope to put to the test in a differential reading of John Donne's valediction poems.

III. 'Affecting the Metaphysics': Feeling in Metaphysical Poetry

Thinking about affect in early modern texts is to some extent anachronistic: as Benedict Robinson argues, the early modern term that might seem closest to affect is 'passion', but the early modern understanding of passion as 'embodied judgment or appraisal' involved cognition,⁴⁵ and in this sense early modern passion would not qualify as affect (in Massumi's sense) but rather as emotion. Yet the absence of early modern theories of affect does not mean the absence of affect, which can be seen as a 'transhistorical concept'.⁴⁶ In fact, it seems particularly fruitful to think about literary affect in the way sketched out above when it comes to texts from the early modern period, as they might encourage reading differentially forms and textures for their affective capacities. On the one hand, there is a tendency in early modern texts towards a 'materialization of the passions' that links feeling to physical contact and concrete objects⁴⁷—and so to affect's bodily intensity, but also to a finely tuned attention to textures. On the other hand, early modern writing was strongly influenced by theories of rhetoric which had the aim to move the addressees of a text, transferring affects from author/speaker to reader/listener.⁴⁸ As Heinrich Plett has shown in his study on the rhetoric of affects in the English Renaissance, early modern poetics assumed that texts can attain an energy, forcibleness or *energeia* (the latter two are Philip Sidney's terms in the *Apology for Poetry*) that may move their readers.⁴⁹ For example, Plett identifies in John Rainolds's *Oratio in laudem artis poeticae* (c. 1572) the conception of a kind of stylistic energy as precondition for affecting readers.⁵⁰ This is a notion that seems very close to Riley's linguistic performance of affect, and indeed Benedict Robinson remarks that early modern rhetoric, due to its rootedness in

⁴⁵ Benedict S. Robinson, 'Feeling Feelings in Early Modern England', in *Affect and Literature*, ed. by Alex Houen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 213–28 (p. 214). See also Robinson's 'Thinking Feeling', in *Affect Theory and Early Modern Texts*, ed. by Bailey and DiGangi, pp. 109–27.

⁴⁶ Bailey and DiGangi, p. 2.

⁴⁷ Robinson, 'Feeling Feelings', p. 221.

⁴⁸ Robinson, 'Feeling Feelings', p. 218. See also Emanuel Stelzer, 'Passionate Writing: The Rhythms of Jealousy in Early Modern English Texts and Drama', in *Writing Emotions: Theoretical Concepts and Selected Case Studies in Literature*, ed. by Ingeborg Jandl and others (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017), pp. 215–32 (p. 215).

⁴⁹ Heinrich F. Plett, *Rhetorik der Affekte: Englische Wirkungsästhetik im Zeitalter der Renaissance* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1975), pp. 131–43.

⁵⁰ Plett, p. 133.

oral traditions, embraced performative aspects of speech.⁵¹ Early modern literature thus seems rife for a reconsideration in light of its affective properties.

This is perhaps particularly the case when it comes to John Donne's poetry. Intriguingly, a clash between thinking and feeling, as a precursor to the debate over the non-cognitive bodily autonomy of affects and the cognitively 'qualified' emotions in Massumi's sense,⁵² and over the ways in which texts may or may not be affective, can be traced all the way back to critical discussions of early modern poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From early on, critical engagement with Donne's poetry has been concerned with his poems' affectivity, or rather with the supposed lack thereof. As is well known, the label 'metaphysical poets' for the group of seventeenth-century English poets whose most prominent representatives are Donne, George Herbert, and Andrew Marvell originally was a disparaging term attributed to them only by a later generation of critics. These metaphysical poets were seen to be extremely clever: an early meaning of 'metaphysical' recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for the mid-seventeenth century is 'excessively subtle or abstract'.⁵³ However, at the same time early critics accused them of a lack in genuine feeling. Thus, John Dryden in 1692 wrote about Donne that '[h]e affects the Metaphysics [...] in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts'.⁵⁴ With regard to Donne's poetry, this is the first known use of the term 'metaphysics', which by the early eighteenth century had come to mean '[a]ny abstruse, confusing, or (deliberately) deceptive form of reasoning or discussion; abstract talk with no basis in or relevance to reality'.⁵⁵ This is almost certainly the sense in which Samuel Johnson in the late eighteenth century used the term when he coined the moniker 'metaphysical poets': these poets were for Johnson too much preoccupied with 'pursuing [their] thoughts to their last ramifications' and, categorically, 'were not successful in representing or moving the affections'.⁵⁶ What becomes clear from this early criticism of the metaphysical poets' work is how it implicitly repeats and reinforces a dualism, where the mind, or cognition, is at odds with feeling or affection.

Only a good century after Johnson's dismissal of the metaphysical poets' capacity of 'representing the affections' did their poetry experience a reappraisal that included a new perspective on their engagement with feeling. In 1921, T. S.

⁵¹ Robinson, 'Feeling Feelings', p. 218.

⁵² Massumi, *Parables*, p. 28.

⁵³ *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, s.v. 'metaphysical (*adj.*), sense I.1.b', March 2024 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1002486880>>.

⁵⁴ John Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, ed. by George Watson, 2 vols (London: Dent, 1962), II, 76.

⁵⁵ *OED*, s.v. 'metaphysics (*n.*), sense I.2', March 2024 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1022666751>>.

⁵⁶ Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), I, 13, 36, 14.

Eliot argued that in Renaissance poetry, in the works of Ben Jonson and George Chapman, but particularly in metaphysical poetry, thinking and feeling were not separate; rather, Eliot identified in Donne's poetry 'a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling' and attests to Donne's poetry that it searches for 'verbal equivalent[s] for states of mind *and* feeling'.⁵⁷ What becomes apparent from this change in how the metaphysical poets were received is perhaps both a change in attitudes towards what counts as particularly 'moving' or 'affecting' in poetry and that the so-called 'metaphysical poetry' is inherently ambiguous in representing feeling or affects.

IV. Donne's Valediction Poems

Indeed, the 'metaphysical subtleties' of Donne's poetry in particular are directly linked to the way these poems engage the affects. Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*, and perhaps above all the valediction poems, which express the pain felt at leave-taking, when 'relationships are put under the most acute pressure',⁵⁸ offer themselves for a differential reading because of the ways in which they express affect. They are textual performances⁵⁹ of affect in Riley's sense that are rooted both in the concrete materiality of Donne's conceits with its attendant textures and affectivities and in a *cognitive* intensity brought about by the 'metaphorical supercharging' of the conceits, which transposes the intensity of the affect they describe to a meta-level at which affective experience and cognitive reading merge in the moment of reception. In this sense, the term metaphysical may prove felicitous after all: Donne's poetic language goes beyond (*meta-*) the physical experience of affects and adds the surplus of language's affective differentials.

'A Valediction of Weeping' may serve as a first example to show how this cognitive intensity and textual performativity is achieved in the *Songs and Sonnets*.⁶⁰ The poem's speaker ostensibly sheds his tears as an expression of grief or pain at having to part from his lover. What he actually pours forth is more

⁵⁷ T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber, 1972), pp. 281–91 (pp. 286, 289); my emphasis.

⁵⁸ Katrin Ettenhuber, "'Comparisons Are Odious'?: Revisiting the Metaphysical Conceit in Donne", *Review of English Studies*, n.s., 62.255 (2011), 393–413 (p. 399).

⁵⁹ This does not mean the narrow sense of performativity suggested by Ted-Larry Pebworth in 'John Donne, Coterie Poetry, and the Text as Performance', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 29.1 (1989), 61–75. Pebworth sees Donne's poems as 'scripts for performances' for a coterie (p. 62). Rather, as Wolfgang G. Müller argues, performativity results from 'textual strategies'—or, I would add, textural strategies—that 'can be identified in the poem regardless of the role the text may have played in a performance situation on the occasion of its original presentation'; Wolfgang G. Müller, 'The Poem as Performance: Self-Definition and Self-Exhibition in John Donne's *Songs and Sonnets*', in *Solo Performances: Staging the Early Modern Self in England*, ed. by Ute Berns (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 173–188 (p. 176). For a study of various ways in which Donne's poetry is performative, see Margret Fetzer, *John Donne's Performances: Sermons, Poems, Letters and Devotions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

⁶⁰ John Donne, *John Donne's Poetry*, ed. by Donald R. Dickson (New York: Norton, 2007), pp. 96–97.

than just tears, however: these tears become supercharged with meaning and rich association that creates an intensity in the process of cognition or reflection. Over the poem's twenty-seven lines, the tears are in increasingly hyperbolic succession associated with a whole array of different material objects, with whom they typically are in either metonymic or metaphorical relationship, with the round shape and liquid texture being the most frequent ground of the comparison. In this chain of association, tears are linked to: first, the crying speaker, who produces them and immediately dissociates and physically distances himself from them—the tears, he says, are poured 'forth | [...] whilst I stay here' (ll. 1–2); the subjective expression of grief is thus 'set free' to attain affective charge. Second, the tears are associated with the lover's face that 'coins' (l. 3)—that is, causes or produces them and is not just reflected, but contained in them; which, third, links them to coins that have a similarly round shape and that are likewise stamped (l. 3) with a face in minting to make them 'something worth' (l. 4).⁶¹ This comparison not only stresses the value of the addressee to the speaker but also foregrounds the texture of coins through references to their minting: this transfers the coins' tangibility and materiality to the tears and opens them up to feeling. It is the texture of coins that must make the addressee's face appear as yet in cold relief. But they are then, fourth, linked with pregnancy or the pregnant body (l. 6) and their texture changes to that of human skin, of a pregnant belly; again, the round shape as well as the idea introduced earlier by the speaker that someone else is being carried inside serves as the basis of the metaphor.⁶² At the same time, 'pregnant' can also mean a semantic richness or suggestiveness 'implying more than is obvious or stated', a meaning that is in evidence at the time of Donne's writing.⁶³ With regard to the tears in the poem, their pregnancy then already indicates the 'overflow' of meaning attached to them, a surplus beyond what is 'obvious or stated'. Fifth, tears are associated with 'fruits' (l. 7), which themselves like pregnancy are metonymically linked to fertility and again typically associated with roundness. These five different and partly conflicting meanings attached to the tears can be found in the first stanza alone, creating a rich semantic fabric while also grounding the speaker's argument in everyday material experience and its varying textures.

⁶¹ This is in keeping with early modern notions of value generation in minting: 'The face of the sovereign on the coin [...] serves as a guarantor of the value already inherent within it; the stamp initiates an act of faith whereby users of coin trust they are dealing in *real* value'—so the stamping to a greater extent than the material value of silver or gold created a coin's value and was the basis of the 'trust relationship embodied in that coin' (Brian Sheerin, *Desires of Credit in Early Modern Theory and Drama: Commerce, Poesy, and the Profitable Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 96).

⁶² There may also be overtones here of the widely held Renaissance belief in the 'particular performative power [...] attributed to women's gaze and emotions', especially during pregnancy, when the object of a woman's gaze was believed to 'imprint[] on the "soft mass" of the foetus' (Nadia Maria Filippini, *Pregnancy, Delivery, Childbirth: A Gender and Cultural History From Antiquity to the Test Tube in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 55).

⁶³ *OED*, s.v. 'pregnant (*adj.*)', sense I.1.a', December 2023 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7011140436>>.

The second and third stanza continue in this vein. They associate the tears with, sixth, a globe—that is, a ‘round ball’ (l. 10) just like a tear—which is created and ‘imprinted’ by an artisan to contain a likeness of the world, just like the speaker’s tears contain his lover’s likeness. Seventh, through an expansion ‘from the image to the thing itself’,⁶⁴ the tears now become the entire world, or rather multiple worlds, since there are multiple tears and each corresponds to a world; eighth, they are associated with the deluge in which these worlds drown; and ninth and finally, with the more cosmic forces of the moon and tides. While the address ‘O more than moon’ (l. 19) means the lover, not the tears, the association with the tears is still present, once more through the round shape; the contiguity of shape between moon, lover’s face, and tears hearkens back to a similar association in the first stanza, where the lover’s face ‘coins’ the tears.⁶⁵

This complex conceit foregrounds the material quality of the speaker’s tears and by comparing it with an array of other objects implies that the tears are both touching and to be touched in manifold ways. For in the poem’s sliding across different textures, the affective qualities of these textures are likewise activated. It is not without reason that Sedgwick, who does not distinguish between affects and emotions in this context, observes that ‘a particular intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions’, an intimacy that can be seen from the double meaning, ‘tactile plus emotional’, of the words ‘touching’ and ‘feeling’.⁶⁶ Over the course of the poem, the shifting textures undergo a stretching, are filled up with more and more things, connotations, and resonances, until they contain the entire world. Finally, they ‘overflow | This world’ (ll. 17–18), and so themselves—as does the poem’s form in the enjambement here—, just as the speaker’s feeling builds up to an overwhelming and destructive deluge. If ‘affect is integral to a body’s perpetual becoming (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter’,⁶⁷ then these tears certainly enact this affective becoming: they are the result of an encounter—shed ‘before thy face’ (l. 2)—and in perpetually shifting their imagined poetic shape and texture they express the seemingly boundless intensity of the speaker’s grief. This is how ‘A Valediction of Weeping’ puts into poetic form sites of affect, namely ‘those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to

⁶⁴ Patricia Garland Pinka, *This Dialogue of One: The ‘Songs and Sonnets’ of John Donne* (Tuscaloosa: Alabama University Press, 1982), p. 35.

⁶⁵ This intricate connection has a further conceptual and material dimension, as the moon was associated with silver, which in turn was widely used in coins of the period. For example, as Sheerin points out with reference to the late-seventeenth-century *A Discourse of Coin and Coinage*, astronomical relations between sun and moon were used to set an exchange ratio between gold and silver (Sheerin, p. 95; see Rice Vaughan, *A Discourse of Coin and Coinage* (London: Thomas Dawks, 1675), pp. 74–75).

⁶⁶ Sedgwick, p. 17.

⁶⁷ Gregg and Seigworth, p. 3.

bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves'.⁶⁸

There is, however, an additional dimension in which the poem addresses affect through cognitive reflection. When Donne writes that the tears are 'fruits of much grief [...], emblems of more' (l. 7), this adds yet another layer of meaning: the tears are not just images of more grief that is yet to come with the lovers' parting, and not only a pun on the name of Donne's wife, Anne More,⁶⁹ but they are the result of strong affect ('much grief') and through the conceit's overload signify yet *more*: an excessive semantic overdetermination that ensues from the poem's 'pregnant' language. In more than just the literal sense, these emblems truly are 'pictures whose full meaning depends upon the words that accompany them'.⁷⁰ Donne's description of the tears as 'emblems of more' is thus a metapoetic statement that draws attention to the overwhelming richness of association 'A Valediction of Weeping' presents readers with.

It is precisely this sense of excess, overwhelm, or intensity created by the complexity of Donne's conceit that is instrumental in the poem's expression, or rather performance, of affect. Tears, in the first place, are a bodily expression of affect, an uncontrollable and non-cognitive pouring forth, but the way Donne engages with these tears and gives them form certainly is anything but non-cognitive. In a poem about the formation of tears, the aesthetic form these tears take is of course central: in this case, they are protean entities, seemingly as indeterminate in form as they are determinate in the strength, or affective intensity, of the underlying sentiment. This is the forcefulness the speaker's tears attain—only that, oddly enough, it is a forcefulness the poem presents in its metaphorical overdetermination that creates an equally forceful process of semiotic and affective transfer between body and mind. The intensity expressed is both corporeal and mental, which suggests that the strict separation of the two cannot work in the first place—and certainly not in poetic language that itself strives to be both body and mind.

Donne's poetic affect then manifests itself in his language: it is in the semantic supercharging of the conceit itself that 'A Valediction of Weeping' 'does' feeling in Riley's sense: this is the form affect takes on in the poem, the way in which affect has been woven into Donne's language. There is a sense of analogy, if not metonymic replacement, between the bodily intensity of affects and the cognitive intensity of the representation of affects in Donne's poem. The resulting textual performance of affect makes use of the poem's cognitive dimension as much as of the bodily, non-cognitive side of affect. Crucially, it is Donne's poetic language that through its semantic and formal overdetermination enacts the poem's affective disposition. As Margret Fetzer has observed, just like the workman creating the

⁶⁸ Gregg and Seigworth, p. 1.

⁶⁹ See Harry Morris, 'John Donne's Terrifying Pun', *Papers on Language & Literature*, 9.2 (1973), 128–37 (p. 131).

⁷⁰ Pinka, p. 34.

globe, the speaker's words 'turn the nothing of a tear into "All"'.⁷¹ This means the words become active, transformative forces that enact the all-encompassing power of the speaker's affect. They recreate an overwhelming intensity through cognitive excess in tandem with the evocation of shifting material, textural qualities that are closely linked to the tactile and the affective, to touching and being touched. This is how Donne's language performs the linguistic differential of affect.

Similar textu(r)al strategies are at play in 'A Valediction of My Name in the Window', where the texture of glass and of the engraved name in the glass turns into material and cognitive intensity in the speaker's reflections on love and death.⁷² The poem begins with several evocations of hardness: the speaker's name adds his 'firmness' (l. 2) to the glass; since the engraving the window 'hath been | As hard, as that which grav'd it, was' (ll. 3–4); and the value the engraving attains when the mistress looks at it surpasses that of 'diamonds of either rock' (l. 6). Over the course of the valediction, the window's hard texture is then paradoxically associated with two conflicting ideas: first, hardness as durability or rigidity, understood here as mental firmness or the speaker's faithfulness. Just as the glass's hardness affords it durability and will prevent the engraving from withering, 'So shall all times find me the same' (l. 16), the speaker claims.⁷³ Second, and with more immediate affective impact, the hardness of the window is also linked to the severity of death and physical decay. The name is 'engrav'd' (l. 1) or 'grav'd' (l. 4) in the window, with obvious overtones of burial;⁷⁴ it is likened to a memento mori, 'a given death's head' (l. 21) and its firmness is now replaced by the increasing brittleness of the 'scratch'd name' (l. 20) and of the speaker's dead and decaying body itself, when the mistress is exhorted to 'think this ragged bony name to be | My ruinous anatomy' (ll. 23–24). There is then a duality of body and mind, frailty and firmness, that is bridged in the hardness of the engraved name in the window, whose texture affords both the firm and the fragile.

At the same time, the smooth and transparent texture of the glass is also a precondition for (self-)reflection. It is 'all-confessing and through-shine' (l. 8), just as the speaker himself claims to be, and so it is both transparent medium and an

⁷¹ Fetzer, p. 83.

⁷² Donne, pp. 86–88.

⁷³ Texture is clearly (and conventionally) gendered in 'A Valediction of My Name in the Window'. The speaker's male firmness—and his rival's equally hard, and physically forceful, 'batt'ry' (l. 46) to the mistress's heart—are in marked contrast with female softness as textural metaphor for inconstancy: the maid is 'melted' (l. 49) by bribery and puts a rival's letter on the speaker's mistress's 'pillow' (l. 51)—which of course evokes a soft texture that is no match for the rival's 'batt'ry'. The maid then goes on to discuss and defend the letter's contents and so 'tam'd' the mistress's 'rage' (l. 52) until she 'thaws' (l. 53) to the rival's efforts. With regard to the poem's affective disposition, it is in particular the phrase 'tam'd thy rage' (l. 52) that is interesting, since 'tame' may mean to 'reduce the *intensity* of; to tone down; to temper, *soften*, mellow' (*OED*, s.v. 'tame (v.I), sense 3', July 2023 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2162945668>>; my emphases). Female softness is thus conceptualised to provide a counterpoint to male intensity and yet is also the very reason for the latter.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Thomas Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 178.

object that simultaneously takes on the role of an expressive, or ‘all-confessing’, subject. The mistress can look out of the window and see through it, but inevitably in an act of ‘double vision’ she will also see the engraved name, the window’s confession, in it, making the window a site of both looking outward and inward (where reading the name establishes a mental connection to the speaker and so allows for introspection or reflection).⁷⁵ Further, it serves as a mirror that ‘reflects’ (l. 10) the mistress, which adds another kind of seeing to Donne’s increasingly complex conceit. This is complicated even further because despite its supposed transparency, which would make it (metaphorically at least) easy to understand, it is also subject to ‘love’s magic’ (l. 11), and so to what cannot be seen through, but only marvelled at.⁷⁶ What love’s magic creates, and the glass’s mirroring texture affords, is the already mentioned double vision, expressed in Donne’s chiasmic pairing of subject and object, self and other: ‘Here you see me, and I am you’ (l. 12). The speaker (metonymically replacing the engraving of his name) becomes his mistress’s reflection, he is seen as object of contemplation and simultaneously is the subject of identification.

It becomes clear then that Donne’s poetry relies both on the material affordances of texture to touch and be touched and on the creation of a cognitive forcefulness to ‘do’ affect. The window here is supercharged with meaning in much the same way as the tears are in ‘A Valediction of Weeping’. Given that the tone of ‘A Valediction of My Name in the Window’ can at times become ‘unmistakably sexual’⁷⁷ and yet also religious, if the engraved name, as Thomas Docherty has argued, is a veiled reference to Christ,⁷⁸ there are plenty more elements to the semantic overdetermination of Donne’s language. Again, the cognitive intensity created in this way emulates affect’s intensity. This cognitive intensity and the textural affordances of hardness and transparency, which are themselves at least

⁷⁵ These qualities of window glass are thematised in a similar way by George Herbert’s poetic meditation on church windows in ‘The Windows’, which ends in a discussion of the affordances of stained glass, a multisensory medium that tells Christ’s story:

‘Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one
When they combine and mingle, bring
A strong regard and aw: but speech alone
Doth vanish like a flaring thing,
And in the eare, not conscience, ring’

(George Herbert, *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 247; ll. 11–15). As Herbert suggests, it is the window’s see-through texture, which allows colours and light to combine in/through it with storytelling, that gives the window cognitive as well as affective intensity, or ‘a strong regard and aw’.

⁷⁶ The *OED* cites this passage as an example of the figurative meaning of ‘magic’ as ‘[a]n inexplicable and remarkable influence producing surprising results; an enchanting or mystical quality; glamour, appeal’ (*OED*, s.v. ‘magic’ (*n.*), sense 2’, March 2024 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1142440759>>). Magic is then precisely not what can be seen through easily, and this is what gives magic its affective dimension as glamorous or appealing.

⁷⁷ Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 70. Targoff makes this statement in reference to lines 29–30.

⁷⁸ Docherty, pp. 178–81.

double, form the linguistic differentials of affect that are key to Donne's poetic performance of affect.

'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' likewise can be read (differentially) as linguistic performance of affect.⁷⁹ The poem is an investigation into the body's capacities to affect and be affected that takes place in and through language. At first glance, the poem would suggest differently: the speaker argues for a quiet, unemotional parting, in which his/her lover should 'No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move' (l. 6).⁸⁰ As opposed to 'dull sublunary lovers' love' that 'cannot admit | absence' (ll. 13, 14–15) and so is dependent on the presence of the other's body, the speaker lays claim to a spiritual connection to her/his lover. They are 'inter-assured of the *mind*' (l. 19; my emphasis) and, as one of the poems' two famous conceits puts it, their unified souls are 'like gold to airy thinness beat' (l. 24) and so stretch out to remain one even though the speaker must part. However, there can be no doubt that 'the imagery that expresses these sentiments is insistently physical'⁸¹ and 'striking but oddly materialist and emotionally clashing'.⁸² Donne's image relies on the materiality of gold, or on the affordances of its texture (and on the texture of the alchemical processes described),⁸³ and so counteracts the speaker's extolling of the lovers' immaterial souls. In this way, it 'blur[s] the lines [...] between the material and immaterial' and hence also between body and mind, or feeling and thinking.⁸⁴

The central conceit of the pair of compasses functions in a similar way, as it likewise provides a material object as an anchor for the idea of an immaterial, disembodied love that transcends physical separation. This makes it an example of how 'Donne's lovers [...] seek solace in embodied forms of language and thought':⁸⁵ although the speaker of 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' might

⁷⁹ Donne, pp. 71–72.

⁸⁰ The distribution of genders between speaker and addressee has been a matter of critical debate. Frequently, scholars have argued that despite the phallic vocabulary associated with the addressee (l. 34) the speaker is male and the addressee female; see, for example, John Freccero, 'Donne's "Valediction Forbidding Mourning"', *ELH*, 30.4 (1963), 335–76 (p. 350); A. S. Byatt, 'Feeling Thought: Donne and the Embodied Mind', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. by Achsah Guibbory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 247–57 (p. 252). However, Wisam Mansour has made the case that the gender roles are reversed in the poem, pointing to the speaker's call to the addressee to behave as 'virtuous men' (l. 1) would do. Ultimately, '[t]here is no linguistic evidence whatsoever in the text to determine the gender of the addresser and the addressee' (Wisam Mansour, 'Gender Ambivalence in Donne's "Valediction Forbidding Mourning"', *ELN*, 42.4 (2005), 19–23 (p. 19)). This ambivalence adds a layer of complexity to the poem and so contributes to its cognitive intensity.

⁸¹ Blaine Greteman, "'All this seed pearl": John Donne and Bodily Presence', *College Literature*, 37.3 (2010), 26–42 (p. 32).

⁸² Hugh Grady, *John Donne and Baroque Allegory: The Aesthetics of Fragmentation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 154.

⁸³ The role of alchemy in 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' is discussed, for example, by Freccero (pp. 362–69).

⁸⁴ Targoff, p. 74.

⁸⁵ Ettenhuber, p. 409.

suggest otherwise, s/he is ‘sublunary’ as well and subject to the affectivity of materiality. According to John Freccero, the image of the compasses ‘protests, precisely in the name of incarnation, against the neo-Petrarchan and neoplatonic dehumanization of love’.⁸⁶ It does so by providing a body to the speaker’s idea of love and so untethering it from pure contemplation and restoring it to the realm of the sensory and tangible, and to the realm of affect. In this sense, it also describes the affective power two lovers have over each other. After all, they can move, or affect, each other—as ‘Thy soul, the fix’d foot, makes no show | To move, but doth, if th’other do’ (ll. 27–28)—and the poem ends with the implication of sexual intercourse that in itself adds affective intensity: one leg of the compasses ‘grows erect, as it comes home’ (l. 32) and the last line, ‘And makes me end where I begun’ (l. 36), has been read as reference to a vagina.⁸⁷ The vehicles of Donne’s conceits thus lend the poem materiality and endow it with affective potential.

As in the other valediction poems discussed so far, a cognitive intensity complements the affectivity of texture. In a similar way to the tears in ‘A Valediction of Weeping’, Donne’s conceits evoke this intensity. Katrin Ettenhuber links the compasses to the tears, as both are ‘far-fetched catachrestic comparison[s]’ that demand ‘that the mind travels and [...] “travails” while doing so’.⁸⁸ This is then not only a rhetorical strategy to overcome separation, since ‘catachresis yokes things together that lie far apart’,⁸⁹ but also a way in which the text may create its own forcefulness and so perform affect, as can be seen from Samuel Johnson’s criticism of the metaphysical poets’ conceits, in which ‘[t]he most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together’.⁹⁰ The ‘violence’ Johnson complains about in these conceits might also be termed forcefulness or intensity—it is the result of the linguistic performance of affect inherent in Donne’s conceits (and those of other metaphysical poets). This is achieved by the inherent doubleness these images possess: they encompass the material as well as the immaterial, the corporeal as well as the spiritual, and the male as well as the female.⁹¹ In a poem whose speaker declares that the separated lovers still ‘are one’ (l. 21), their souls unified, yet also twice uses the phrase they ‘are two’ (ll. 25, 26), the conceits show a surprising ‘resistance to unity’.⁹² Their catachrestic oneness-in-twoness not only connects the separated lovers, but also creates a doubleness in meaning and hence a semantic overdetermination. It finds its match in the twoness-in-oneness of the material object of the central conceit, the compasses.

⁸⁶ Freccero, p. 336.

⁸⁷ Grady, p. 155.

⁸⁸ Ettenhuber, p. 399.

⁸⁹ Ettenhuber, p. 399.

⁹⁰ Johnson, p. 14.

⁹¹ Cognitive overload is also created in more subtle ways, since the poem is brimming over with hidden multilingual wordplay that adds additional layers of meaning; see Matthias Bauer, ‘*Paronomasia celata* in Donne’s “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 25.1 (1995), 97–111.

⁹² Grady, p. 155.

As Matthias Bauer observes, the compasses are a 'meta-conceit, representing the function of the conceit itself, which connects a tenor to a vehicle even when they shift'.⁹³ Thus, they certainly are supercharged with meaning as well as endowed with a sense of being materially touching, and so are instrumental in creating the intensity characteristic of Donne's textu(r)al performance of affect.

Meanwhile, 'A Valediction of the Book' has a somewhat different focus than the other valediction poems:⁹⁴ its take on the well-known topos of the eternalising power of poetry can be seen as a reflection on the performative power of affective language. The poem's premise is that in the speaker's absence his mistress should create a compendium, a book of all their letters, which has the quadruple function of (1) preserving their love, and so (2) 'anger[ing] destiny' (l. 2) that would keep them apart, while also (3) heaping 'glory' (l. 6) on the mistress for writing the book, and (4) to provide, 'To all whom love's subliming fire invades, | Rule and example' (ll. 13–14).⁹⁵ The book envisioned in Donne's valediction is then not just a private recollection or a lovers' manual, but a fount of universal knowledge, a 'repository of all recorded wisdom'⁹⁶ for 'love's clergy' (l. 22) or 'divines' (l. 28), for 'lawyers' (l. 37), and for 'statesmen (or of them, they which can read)' (l. 46). The lovers' 'myriads | of letters' (ll. 10–11) are thus semantically over-determined once more, but now the poem reflects on this: the letters, it states, form an 'all-graved tome | In cypher writ, or new made idiom' (ll. 20–21), a self-consciously hermetic language of desire and absence that contains 'all' but is also, the speaker insinuates, opaque to understanding as a cypher of the lovers' affects.

But there is a second, more material and more immediately affectively charged possibility Donne's poem raises: the book itself, a materialised metonymy for both reading and writing, embodies the lovers and their feelings in its texture/engraving. In this book, 'this our universe' (l. 26), a material world the lovers created for themselves, the speaker claims, he 'shall stay, though she [destiny] eloin me thus' (l. 3).⁹⁷ In this way, the book, and by extension language itself, becomes a substitute for the body and its affective capacities. Consequently, the language of the lovers' letters is attributed with performative power, since 'Love this grace to us affords, | To make, to keep, to use, to *be* these his records' (ll. 17–18; my emphasis). In other words, '[t]he lovers produce and preserve these records in themselves, but they are at the same time also made by them, in as far as they

⁹³ Matthias Bauer, 'John Donne, *Songs and Sonnets* (1633)', in *Handbook of English Renaissance Literature*, ed. by Ingo Berensmeyer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 537–56 (p. 549).

⁹⁴ Donne, pp. 89–91.

⁹⁵ See Robert H. Ray, *A John Donne Companion* (New York: Garland, 1990), p. 346.

⁹⁶ James S. Baumlín, *John Donne and the Rhetorics of Renaissance Discourse* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), p. 186.

⁹⁷ As Bauer points out ('*Paronomasia celata*', pp. 97–98), just like in 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' (and similarly in 'A Valediction of My Name in the Window', one might add), this premise echoes Donne's verse epistle 'To Sir Henry Wotton', which he begins with the claim, 'Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls: | For thus, friends absent speak' (Donne, p. 54; ll. 1–2).

use them—constituted by their discourses’.⁹⁸ Donne’s ‘Valediction of the Book’ in this sense is a poem about language embodying lovers and so becoming a site expressing, or rather performing, their affects.⁹⁹ Much like the tears in ‘A Valediction of Weeping’, the book itself becomes a physical container for entire worlds and offers its readers ‘all they seek’ (l. 29): it comprises ‘abstract spiritual love’ (l. 30) as much as tangible materiality, ‘Something which they may see and use’ (l. 34). This very much includes the materiality of the book itself, as the punning line ‘Beauty a convenient type may be to figure it [love]’ (l. 36) makes clear—the type and figure of love both obliquely refer to the book’s own texture. In this way, the lovers’ book is not only about affect or a medium for affect, but it is, or rather ‘does’, affect. It provides texture and so makes affect tangible, but also *is* the text that does affect. In its textu(r)al performance of affect, it vicariously brings together the lovers, or reader and writer, as the speaker’s exhortation in the last stanza makes clear: ‘Thus vent thy thoughts; abroad I’ll study thee’ (l. 55). The book, this assemblage of letters, is then a substitute for bodily contact and affective engagement that seeks to embody the lovers wholesale. What James Baumlin writes about the poem itself is then certainly true of its object, the book: ‘it must seek, ultimately, to overcome the separation of *verba* from their *res*, enabling the poet and lady [...] to be incarnate in the flesh of language’.¹⁰⁰

This leads to a poetic paradox of presence and absence, or affect and reflection, in this metapoetic valediction poem: the reflection on language’s affective power that the poem provides seems ultimately devoid of affective presence. Thus, Ramie Targoff, who criticises ‘A Valediction of the Book’ as ‘arguably the least successful of the four Valedictions’, finds that the poem offers no hope or consolation and ultimately depersonalises the lovers’ letters into ‘a source of information for “Love’s clergy” rather than a compensatory presence during his [the speaker’s] time abroad’.¹⁰¹ Likewise, Baumlin gives the ‘all-graved tome’ of the book a deconstructive reading and points to the absence at the heart of Donne’s tome/tomb pun—the physical presence of the book of letters is conditioned on the physical absence of the lovers.¹⁰² If read as a poem about language’s affective power, ‘A Valediction of the Book’ then appears to be self-defeating in that it must, to some extent, eschew this affective power in the process of reflecting on it. In a similar vein, Robert Ray contests that ‘the “valediction” will not matter: their love will endure, just as he [the speaker] supposes that the “book” of that love will be

⁹⁸ Fetzer, p. 145.

⁹⁹ This is at odds with the speaker’s assertion at the end of ‘A Valediction of My Name in the Window’ that ‘glass and lines must be | No means our firm, substantial love to keep’ (ll. 61–62). Since the ‘lines’ of Donne’s poem express and so sustain or keep their love and through their material groundedness give it some substance, this assertion perhaps deserves some scepticism, coming as it does from a speaker who confesses to his own bodily and mental infirmity (ll. 63–66). The ‘Valediction of the Book’ seems to set the record straight on that matter.

¹⁰⁰ Baumlin, pp. 189–90.

¹⁰¹ Targoff, p. 66.

¹⁰² Baumlin, pp. 188–89.

permanent'.¹⁰³ Paradoxically, then, as is the case with the form of the valediction in general, the book's/poem's presence depends on the lover's absence. And because the book matters, because of its physical presence, its being there to touch and afford the lovers each other's presence, the 'valédiction' as a gesture of leave-taking does not matter as much. Yet the poem itself still does matter and draws its matter from its self-reflective nature—it traces affect's linguistic differentials of form, texture, and performance, and so in the end manages to be affect's record. 'A Valediction of the Book' is thus the most self-reflexively metapoetic of the valediction poems. Its performance of affect consists in a metapoetic statement on the affective power of language and of its material embodiment in the poet's book.

V. Conclusion: Performing Feeling Thinking

Affect's linguistic differentials can then be traced in the ways in which Donne's valediction poems performatively 'do' affect through their cognitive intensity and texture. What I have described as the textual performance of affect through cognitive intensity is in the tradition of T. S. Eliot's assessment of the metaphysical poets and their capacity for the 'recreation of thought into feeling'. This argument is also in line with more recent discussions of affect in early modern literature. A. S. Byatt has described how Donne is 'feeling thought'.¹⁰⁴ This phrase has a double meaning: on the one hand, it implies that someone—either the speaker of a poem or, as Byatt suggests, its readers—can *feel* their thoughts in or through the poems, suggesting an experiential quality of thought; in a slight variation, Byatt argues that Donne allows his speaker and his readers alike to feel not any particular thought, but 'the peculiar excitement and pleasure of mental activity itself'.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, 'feeling thought' might equally be read to imply that it is the thought itself that feels, or in other words that the cognitive dimension of Donne's poems 'does' or performs the feeling. This echoes Byatt's claim that the complexity of Donne's language, grammar, and rhythm essentially *is* his 'feeling of thought'.¹⁰⁶ The reason is that this is Donne's way of having his poetic language perform affectivity. In this, Donne's poetic engagement of affect suggests a thinking of feeling as much as feeling that thinks.¹⁰⁷

The blurring of boundaries between cognition and affect this suggests seems quite fitting in view of the way in which Donne's poetry cognitively and materially

¹⁰³ Ray, p. 349.

¹⁰⁴ Byatt, pp. 142–52.

¹⁰⁵ Byatt, p. 148. While I agree with Byatt's broader idea, her argument that Donne's poems are affective because they let our neurons fire at full tilt has been strongly criticised as far too reductive from the perspective of neuroscience, as Hartner outlines in a recent article; see Marcus Hartner, 'Between "Loose" and "Strict" Thinking: Interdisciplinarity in Literary Studies and the Case of A. S. Byatt's Cognitive Reading of John Donne', *Anglistik*, 32.3 (2021), 71–85.

¹⁰⁶ Byatt, p. 256.

¹⁰⁷ In view of all this, it is then perhaps no coincidence that when Robinson traces early modern theories of passions as 'simultaneously cognitive and embodied responses of a soul' ('Thinking Feeling', p. 123), his article has the title 'Thinking Feeling', a phrase that is the mirror image of Byatt's 'Feeling Thought'.

performs affects. For after all, as I hope to have shown in reading Donne's valediction poems differentially, attuned to the affective surplus in language, the affordances of texture, that is, the experiential, physical qualities of the texts—their bony hardness, their faithful firmness, their airy thinness, or their pregnant fullness—make them appear tangible and touching at the same time, endowing them with affect's in-between-ness. As the material conduit of affect, Donne's textures are an integral part of the way affect is performed in his valediction poems. In their performance of affect, Donne's 'metaphysical' valediction poems are thus about the physical as much as they go beyond it—they are 'emblems of more' that textu(r)ally perform feeling and thinking and feeling in/through thinking. They show how poetry can be affective and signify beyond meaning—reading them differentially may attune us to their affective surplus.

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