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**Gender Fluidity and Violence in Edward Herbert's 'Echo to a Rock'**

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The echo poem is a specific example of what Helen Vendler has described as the oddity of a poet creating an 'invisible listener'.[1] In the secular echo poems of late sixteenth-century England, the identity of this invisible other is ambiguous. The poetic pretense is that of a conversation between a male lover and the mythological figure of Echo, cursed by Juno so that even when she 'was a body . . . and not an onely voyce / Yet of her speach she had at that time no more than now the choyce, / That is to say of many wordes the latter to repeate' (3, 447-9).[2] Echo is an object onto which any passing man may write his own words, in the form of a script: she is the object of what I term 'male ventriloquism' rather than of the male gaze. Even seemingly choiceless repetition alters the context and thus the sense, so that Echo sometimes seems to be permitted her own voice and agency: she either repeats the words of the masculine speaker with a difference or she adapts them for her own purposes.[3] This independence is fictional, however, as often the poet uses this device to place into a supposedly-female mouth complaints about women. In her discussion of Echo in drama, Susan L. Anderson asserts that 'Echo is, simultaneously, a woman speaking and a woman silenced and can stand in for both'.[4] The fictive conversation between Echo and the speaker is a version of the 'collaborative nature of most writing' in the early modern period, a collaboration noted by Margaret Simon in her

[1] Helen Vendler, *Invisible Listeners: Lyric Intimacy in Herbert, Whitman, and Ashbery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 1.

[2] W.H.D. Rouse (ed.), *Shakespeare's Ovid, being Arthur Golding's Translation of the* Metamorphoses, https://archive.org/details/shakespearesovid00oviduoft/page/70/ [accessed 02 Jan 2023].

[3] Cf. Ovid's Echo, who reverses the meaning of Narcissus's 'I first will die ere thou shalt take of me thy pleasure' when she replies 'take of me thy pleasure' (3, 486-87).

[4] Susan L. Anderson, *Echo and Meaning on Early Modern English Stages* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 117.

discussion of Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia*.[5] The pretense of collaboration in echo poems is especially appropriate considering Dorothy Stephens's argument that Echo expresses the speaker's 'potentially unfaithful' inner self, which is depicted as feminine, with implications of chaos.[6] Stephens asserts that the masculine lover was often seen as effeminate, and thus his speaking through Echo underscores the gender fluidity of both. As Anthony Archdeacon points out, the male poet's identification with Echo 'invert[s] the Petrarchan gender stereotypes, feminis[es] the speaker, and perhaps even implicitly equat[es] male and female desire'.[7] Anderson comments: 'Echo is a form of doubling and redoubling, consistently creating space for both/and rather than either/or, and then undoing, revising and re-creating even this space itself'.[8] The poet splinters into the devoted lover and the female figure standing in for the beloved woman, as well as presenting himself as narcissistic, sometimes suicidal, and occasionally predatory.[9] Even more troubling than the manipulation of the feminine Echo is her employment as an accomplice in committing verbal or physical violence against women. While the echo poems of Sidney and of Barnabe Barnes have been studied in terms of gender fluidity, and Barnes's in terms of violence, similar early seventeenth-century echo poems such as those by John Taylor and Edward Herbert have been overlooked. This essay, which will first review the discussion surrounding the sixteenth-century poems, asserts that Herbert's 'Echo to a Rock' is worthy of further consideration as part of the tradition of narcissism, gender fluidity, and violence in early modern echo poems.

## Sidney: Echo as an Accomplice in Verbal Abuse

The single echo poem in Sidney's *The Old Arcadia* (1580) may serve as the most overt evidence of the artificiality of Echo and the narcissism of the speaker. Echo presents herself as the scornful woman, like Mira, the lady who rejects Sidney's alter-ego

[5] Margaret Simon, 'Collaborative Writing and Lyric Interchange in Philip Sidney's *Old Arcadia*', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 19.2 (2017), 1-16 (p. 1).

[6] Dorothy Stephens, *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative: Conditional Pleasure from Spenser to Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 8.

[7] Anthony Archdeacon, 'The Influence of Ovid's Echo and Narcissus Myth on English Petrarchan Poetry', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 20.1 (2018), 1-29 (p. 13). https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/journal/index.php/emls/article/view/372.

[8] Anderson, p. 117.

[9] See, for instance, Eric Langley, in *Narcissism and Suicide in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 'Sandys explains how those who "sequester themselves from publique converse and civill affaires" and surround themselves only with those who "applaud and admire them, assenting to what they say, like as many Ecchoes", become "depraved, puft up with uncessant flattery"' (pp. 39-40); cf. Anderson, p. 13.

Philisides; at the same time, Sidney informs us that 'what words [Philisides] would have the echo reply unto, those he would sing higher than the rest, and so kindly framed a disputation betwixt himself and it'.[10] After he concludes his song, Philisides is 'commended for the placing of his echo', his auditors recognizing his skill and explicitly acknowledging the artifice.[11] Thus, when Philisides asks, for instance, 'Fair rocks, goodly rivers, sweet woods, when shall I see peace?' he cannot be surprised to hear the answer 'Peace':

> Fair rocks, goodly rivers, sweet woods, when shall I see peace? Peace.
> Peace? What bars me my tongue? Who is it that comes me so nigh? I
> I do know what guest I have met; it is echo. 'Tis echo.
> Well met, echo, approach; then tell me thy will too. I will too.
> (140-1; 1-4).

After he provokes Echo's reply of 'Peace', Philisides changes roles with her, choosing to echo Echo with the challenge, 'Peace? What bars me my tongue? Who is it that comes me so nigh?' Even Echo's identity is controlled by the shepherd: when she asserts herself with the monosyllabic 'I', the shepherd acknowledges her, 'I do know what guest I have met; it is echo', forcing the confirmation, ''Tis echo'.

Having established both Echo's identity and an adversarial relationship with her, he begins to complain to her:

> Echo, what do I get yielding my sprite to my griefs? Griefs.
> What medicine may I find for a pain that draws me to death? Death.
> O poisonous medicine! What worse to me can be than it? It.
> In what state was I then, when I took this deadly disease? Ease. (141; 5-8)

Initially, Philisides depicts himself as the faithful and respectful lover who has been transformed by love and rejection from a man at 'Ease' to a man of 'Griefs'. Through the echo, he explores the idea of suicide. According to Langley, the poem concerns the

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[10] Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia (The Old Arcadia)*, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 140.

[11] Ibid, p. 143. Anderson comments: 'This is a rather odd-sounding principle for a song setting, but the text invites us to imagine an ideal performance in which such rendering is desirable or even possible. Furthermore, this design seems to misrepresent the way an echo works in nature. By asserting that the singer is deliberately selecting particular words for Echo to repeat, Sidney's text shows that it is neither concerned with creating a credible representation of a genuine echo, nor with revealing ostensibly unintended meaning. Instead, it emphasises the way echo verse showcases skill and artifice' (p. 14).

dangers of '[d]angerous isolationism' becoming melancholy, with the lover experiencing a divided self: 'Death is the poisonous medicine for the medicinal poison of love, and deadly suicide the apt cure for self-division'.[12]

As Langley notes, the text ultimately rejects 'the empassioned but self-destructive irrationality of erotic indulgence' and 'the trivial concerns of cheapened pastoralism'.[13] The rejection of self-violence, however, comes with a misogynistic shift, as the speaker manipulates Echo into placing all the blame on the source of that misery: Mira.

> Silly reward! Yet among women hath she of virtue the most. Most.
> What great name may I give to so heav'nly a woman? A woe-man.
> Woe, but seems to me joy that agrees to my thought so. I thought so.
> Think so, for of my desired bliss it is only the course. Curse.
> Cursed be thyself for cursing that which leads me to joys. Toys.
> What be the sweet creatures where lowly demands be not heard? Hard.
> Hard to be got, but got constant, to be held like steels. Eels.
> How can they be unkind? Speak for th'hast narrowly pried. Pride.
> (148; 35-42)

After agreeing that Mira is the most virtuous of all women, Echo redefines 'woman' as 'woe-man'. In the shepherd's next line, Philisides again echoes Echo: 'Woe, but seems to me joy that agrees to my thought so'. The two continue in an exchange where she often adapts his words (for instance, 'joys' becomes 'Toys' and 'heard' becomes 'Hard') and he often adopts and adapts hers (following 'I thought so' with the imperative 'Think so'), collaboratively building a depiction of Mira as 'Hard' to her lover, but as flexible and slippery as 'Eels'. Loving a 'woe-man' seems to promise joy, but is in reality a curse, as it brings only pain. Women are 'unkind' because filled with 'pride'. Echo produces all the criticism, criticism denounced by Philisides: 'Cursed be thyself for cursing that which leads me to joys'. Yet it is Philisides himself who has prompted the replies, manipulating the very Echo that he blames. Echo serves as his alter ego, so that Philisides is at once both masculine and feminine, just as Sidney's Pyrocles 'takes on the disguise of the warrior princess "Cleophila", [and] becomes a literal inversion of his beloved's name, "Philoclea"'.[14] Marvin Hunt asserts that 'Pyrocles the man/woman, prince/princess, lover/beloved must be understood as an equilibrium of opposing experiences and values';

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[12] Langley, p. 200.

[13] Ibid, p. 202.

[14] Marvin Hunt, 'Charactonymic Structures in Sidney's *Arcadias*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 33.1 (1993), 1-19 (pp. 10-11). *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/450843 [accessed 1 November 2019].

similarly, Bi-qi Beatrice Lei comments on Pyrocles's 'transgression of gender boundaries' and the 'infamous misery' he brings to Arcadia through 'the monstrosity of [his] unstable gender'.[15] Just as Pyrocles's use of feminine clothing operates to destabilize his masculinity, producing the hybrid Pyrocles/Philoclea, Philisides uses Echo's feminine voice to achieve the temporary equilibrium of opposites, to become Philisides/Echo.

At the same time, the transgressive hybrid Philisides/Echo replicates traditional misogyny. For instance, in 'woe-man', 'pride', and 'curse', the dialogue evokes readings of the Fall that place the blame solely on Eve. The lover pursues 'toys' rather than deeper, long-lasting pleasures; Philisides predicts that if he should obtain the love of a woman, she would be true as steel, but Echo threatens that she would be as elusive as an eel. Like 'toys', 'eels' is both dehumanizing and negative: women are trivial objects or serpentine animals, evocative of Satan and again of the original 'curse'. Finally, Philisides pronounces that women are 'holy' and – after replying 'O lie' – Echo denounces them as 'dev'ls', while telling Philisides to join them in hell:

> Horrible is this blasphemy unto the most holy. O lie.
> Thou li'st false echo, their minds as virtue be just. Just.
> Mock'st thou those diamonds which only be matched by the gods? Odds.
> Odds? What an odds is there since them to the heav'ns I prefer? Err.
> Tell yet again me the names of these fair formed to do ev'ls. Dev'ls.
> Dev'ls? If in hell such dev'ls do abide, to the hells I do go. Go. (44-9)

Since Philisides is so deluded that he fails to comprehend the true, devilish nature of Mira and woman in general, he is damned; but also, ironically, at the end of the poem, Echo has assumed the role of Philisides's disdainful beloved, and Philisides once more faces rejection.

Just as Echo is simultaneously the lover and the beloved, so she also maintains and violates the expectations for chaste womanhood. She represents a woman who is not restricted to the house but who inhabits open places, waiting for men with whom to converse. Peter Stallybrass asserts that:

> The surveillance of women concentrated upon three specific areas: the mouth, chastity, the threshold of the house. These three areas were frequently collapsed

[15] Hunt, p. 11. Bi-qi Beatrice Lei, 'Relational Antifeminism in Sidney's *Arcadia*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 41.1 (2001), 25-48 (p. 36). *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1556227 [accessed 1 November 2019].

> into each other... Silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity. And silence and chastity are, in turn, homologous to woman's enclosure within the house.[16]

Echo talks, and speech is the opposite of chastity; on the other hand, she is made to talk, and forced speech is the equivalent of violated chastity. To the extent that Echo parallels the beloved (especially by scorning the masculine speaker), the beloved is also pressed into conversation with the lover, a conversation which she has heretofore evaded. When Echo incites the speaker into more forceful action, as in Barnabe Barnes's *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* (1593), the beloved object is 'asking for it'.

## Barnes: Echo as an Accomplice in Sexual Assault

Barnes has received critical attention largely for the final poem of his sequence, a sequence clearly modeled on Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, starting with the title. In the controversial Sestine 5, Parthenophil invokes Hecate (the inclusion of whom is a transgression in itself, as Jeffrey Nelson has noted) to bring the unwilling Parthenophe to him – naked – for the purpose of 'physical consummation', as Carol Thomas Neely politely describes the sexual assault.[17] This 'physical consummation' is clearly nonconsensual, as Parthenophe is under an enchantment to arrive 'with loues enrag'd and kindled' (129; 61).[18] On behalf of Parthenophil, Hecate has administered the early modern equivalent of a date rape drug. The sexual violence against Parthenophe is foreshadowed by Parthenophil breaking up her beloved tree with a 'brasen Axe', and then 'in loues furies / …tread[ing] on it' while proclaiming, 'let her feele such woundes this night' (128; 29-31). Rémi Vuillemin argues that the rape may have a 'morally edifying dimension': that is, 'The notion that the lover might be construed as an anti-model aimed at pointing to the dangers of love, and therefore not to be followed'.[19] In this latter reading he follows

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[16] Peter Stallybrass, 'Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed', in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 123-142 (pp. 126-127).

[17] Jeffrey N. Nelson, 'Lust and Black Magic in Barnabe Barnes's *Parthenophil and Parthenophe*', *The Sixteenth Century Journal: Journal of Early Modern Studies* 25.3 (1994), 595-608. *JSTOR,* https://www.jstor.org/stable/2542636 [accessed 29 Sept 2021]. Carol Thomas Neely, 'The Structure of English Renaissance Sonnet Sequences', *ELH: English Literary History* 45.3 (1978), 359-89 (pp. 369, 382).

[18] Barnabe Barnes, *Parthenophil and Parthenophe: A Critical Edition*, edited by Victor A Doyno (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971).

[19] Rémi Vuillemin, 'Barnabe Barnes's Sonnet Sequences: Moral Conversion and Prodigal Authorship', in *The Early Modern English Sonnet: Ever in Motion*, ed. by Rémi Vuillemin, Laetitia Sansonetti, and Enrica Zanin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 128-39 (p. 130). Vuillemin also asserts that

Thomas Roche, who describes Sestine 5 as ‘a shocking and eery poem and an entirely unexpected conclusion for a sonnet sequence’:

> Although there are many solutions to the problem of human desire, rape is not the most usual nor the most acceptable answer. It is nonetheless the answer that Barnes gives as the conclusion of the poem, a conclusion that once more raises the question of the degree to which the reader’s sympathies should be engaged in the plight of the poet-lover. In this case more clearly than in any other the question is answered ‘None.’[20]

All the above-named critics discuss Sestine 5 without considering the third and most extended echo poem, which omission is problematic: Sestine 4 is key to the rape, as it is in this poem that the sequence changes to physical violence. Not only is the crime premeditated, but also the initial suggestion comes from Eccho. Parthenophil opens Sestine 4 by inquiring, ‘what shall I do to my Nymphe, when I goe to behold her?’ In her reply, Eccho could potentially name the essence of Parthenophe (‘her’), reiterate the male gaze (‘behold her’), or order physical restraint (‘hold her’), and she opts for this last:

> Eccho, what shall I do to my Nymphe, when I goe to behold her?
> *Eccho*, hold her.
> So dare I not, least she should thinke that I make her a pray then?
> *Eccho*, pray then.
> Yea, but at me she will take scorne, proceeded of honor?
> *Eccho*, on her.
> Me beare will she (with her to deale so saucilie) neuer?
> *Eccho*, euer.
> Yea but I greatly feare, she will haue pure thoughtes to refuse such?
> *Eccho*, fewe such.
> Then will I venture againe more bold, if you warne me to do so?
> *Eccho*, do so. (120; 1-6)

The phrasing of the initial question – ‘what shall I do to my Nymphe’ – suggests that the speaker sees Parthenophe as property and a potential victim: he is already considering ‘do[ing]’ something ‘to my Nymphe’, ‘mak[ing] her a pray’, even as he depicts himself

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the sequence may be a dream, a possibility suggested by the narrator’s comment, ‘Now I waxe drousie, now cease all my teares, / Whilst I take rest and slumber neare this woods’ (Barnes 129; 70-1).

[20] Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), p. 246.

as unwilling to do so. Parthenophil's chief concern is not one of ethics but of effectiveness, for if he treats 'his' Parthenophe with boldness, she may reject him: 'she will take scorne, proceeded of honor', for instance, and 'she will haue pure thoughtes to refuse' his advances. Eccho counters each objection by urging Parthenophil toward physical action – 'hold her', 'on her' (rather than his word, 'honor'), and 'do so' – while simultaneously denying Parthenophe's resistance – 'Me beare will she . . . neuer? / *Eccho*, euer'. She also denies Parthenophe's purity: to his query 'she will haue pure thoughtes to refuse such?' Eccho replies 'fewe such'. One of two critics to consider the context of Sestine 5, Sean McDowell reads Sestine 4 as the first in a series of poems 'leading to the rape, [in which] Parthenophil willfully misconstrues all evidence and all arguments as corroboration of his carnal intentions'.[21] It is easy to see such deliberate misinterpretation in the poem, which proceeds in this vein for seventy-eight lines, but Eccho's advice goes beyond mere misconstruction into enabling of violence, as Archdeacon (the only other critic to consider Sestine 4 in this way) recognizes: 'Echo's replies... appear to have some agency in Parthenophil's subsequent move from suitor to rapist... Parthenophil goes beyond identifying with Echo or silencing her, to appropriating her voice in a fantasy of male control and female submission'.[22] If Parthenophil's 'teares, and sighes' are not enough to 'remoue her' (that is, to move her from her position of resistance), Eccho urges him to 'moue her', suggesting some other means of persuasion, perhaps physical (120-121; 8). Lying and flattery are not 'dishonor', as he thinks, but 'honor':

> If any that shall affirme for a truth, I shall hold that they lye then?
> *Eccho*, lye then.
> If I studie to death (in kinde) shall I lye neuer?
> *Eccho*, euer.
> Oh what is it to lye, is't not dishonor?
> *Eccho*, honor.
> Then to flatter a while her, is't not dishonor?
> *Eccho*, honor. (121; 10-13)

[21] Sean McDowell, 'Stealing or Being Stolen: A Distinction between Sacred and Profane Modes of Transgressive Desire in Early-Modern England', in *Sacred and Profane in English Renaissance Literature,* edited by Mary A Papazian (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp. 132-158 (p. 145). The three odes following Sestine 4 refer to the lover's suffering and to the echo, as here in Ode 19: 'Why should teares, plaintes, and sighes mingled with heauy grones / Practise their crueltie, whiles I complaine to stones?' (126; 5-6). Sonnet CV announces the change from 'endlesse meanes and prayers' to a 'magicke spell' with which the Parthenophil will 'compel' Parthenophe's 'hard indurate hart' (127; 3, 13-14).
[22] Archdeacon, p. 26.

Echo urges him to make Parthenophe weep: ‘Then will I wrest out sighes, and wring forth teares when I do so? / *Eccho*, do so’ (121; 14). When Parthenophil asks—twice—if ‘she will proudly refuse, and speakes in iest neuer?’ Echo replies ‘euer’ (122, 24-25): a woman’s ‘no’ is always a jest, that is, a thinly disguised ‘yes’. Eccho further incites him to ‘attempt her’ and to ‘tempt her’, the latter traditionally the role of Eve or the serpent:

> Such [signs of true love] will I seeke but what shall I do when I first shall attempt her?
> *Eccho*, tempt her.
> How shall I tempt her-eare she stand on terms of her honor?
> *Eccho*, on her.
> Oh might I come to that! I thinke it is euen so
> *Eccho*, tis euen so.
> Strongly to tempt, and moue (at first) is surely the best then?
> *Eccho*, the best then. (122; 27-30)

That this ‘tempting’ is rape is underscored by Parthenophil describing the proposal as ‘a blunt proeme’ (32), and by the reference to the law that a rape victim must cry out in order to prove that the sex is nonconsensual: ‘when they do repugne, yet cry not forth’ (31). Amy Greenstadt explains that the burden to prove that she did not consent was on the woman, who might demonstrate such evidence by crying out for aid: in 1634, for example, Tymothy Tourneur advised Thomas Egerton, the Earl of Bridgewater, to refrain from prosecuting a rape because every rape was a crime ‘wherein the proffe of the act of copulacion is but secondary and the disagreement of the woman at the tyme of the act is primarie’. [23] Parthenophil concludes Sestine 4 by thanking Eccho for her advice, which he follows in Sestine 5 by trying it ‘on her’ rather than respecting Parthenophe’s ‘honor’. Thus, even if Sestine 5 represents a dream, Sestine 4 represents premeditation of a crime, a crime against a woman but suggested by a feminine voice. Yet since Eccho is forced by Parthenophil to speak these words, she also has suffered assault.

At the same time, that Barnes’s speaker presents himself as incapable of either seduction or sexual assault, without encouragement by a feminine voice, underscores his impotence. His feminine alter ego, even while manipulated by him, mocks him as effeminate. As Cynthia Marshall comments on Petrarchan sonnets, ‘the fundamental paradox of speaking of love through a language of violence... dissolves purported oppositions between self

[23] Amy Greenstadt, *Rape and the Rise of the Author: Gendering Intention in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 21.

and other, pleasure and pain, masculine and feminine, mastery and submission'.[24] Without mentioning Barnes, Marshall calls early modern Petrarchan sonnets 'fantasies of sadistic destructiveness and masochistic frenzy', which would be an apt description of Barnes's rape fantasy as well as of Sidney's poem.[25] Not only does Barnes provide the logical extension of Sidney's misogyny – as Archdeacon terms it in his discussion of Barnes, 'the unspoken misogyny of Petrarchan discourse' – but also he draws into question both the nature of consent and the nature of gender.[26]

**Edward Herbert: Echo and/as a Rock**

Herbert wrote several echo poems (including 'Echo in a Church', 'Ditty to the tune of *A che del Quantomio* of *Pesarino*', and '*Melander* suppos'd to love *Susan*, but did love *Ann*'), but 'Echo to a Rock' (published in 1665 but written earlier) is of particular interest.[27] Although Echo answers, the speaker addresses a rock that he pretends to think will be kinder than the beloved:

> Thou heaven-threat'ning Rock, gentler then she!
> Since of my pain
> Thou still more sensible wilt be,
> Only when thou giv'st leave but to complain.
> *Echo* Complain.[28] (46; 1-5)

Does Echo usurp the role of the rock, or is Herbert alluding to the physical cause of echoes? More broadly, what is the relationship shared by the beloved, Echo, and the rock? Why does the speaker interject an inanimate object between himself and the feminine figure? In that the echo poem by its nature destabilizes gender, Herbert further complicates the situation by including a genderless object as a purported conversational partner. By repeating the speaker's final word, Echo reveals herself as 'sensible'; if Echo is (speaking for) the rock, it is ironic that the rock is more sensible than flesh and blood (the beloved), or a bodiless figure that was once flesh and blood (Echo). The suggestion

[24] Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 11.
[25] Ibid, p. 76.
[26] Archdeacon, p. 26.
[27] Edward Herbert, Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648) was the oldest brother of George Herbert, who also wrote an echo poem, 'Heaven'.
[28] Edward Herbert, *The Poems English and Latin of Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury*, ed. by G C. Moore Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), pp. 46-7.

here is one of misogyny: women are like rocks, insensible and insensitive to men's needs, as well as existing to be acted upon. Echo/Rock is also more accommodating than the beloved: here, unlike in the presence of the beloved, the lover's complaint is accepted; no matter how long he chooses to speak, the rock cannot choose to leave his presence, and the echo cannot choose to ignore his words. However, whether the auditor is 'gentler then she' is unclear: the reply's bare 'complain' may be taken as granting 'leave but to complain', as the speaker requests, assuring him of an audience, or as mockery. The speaker certainly interprets the reply as providing no assurance, and as the conversation unfolds his interpretation seems correct:

> But thou dost answer too, although in vain
> Thou answer'st when thou canst no pity show.
> *Echo* Oh.
> What canst thou speak and pity too?
> Then yet a further favour do,
> And tell if of my griefs I any end shall know.
> *Echo* No. (47; 6-12)

Echo's wordplay, baldly negating the speaker's wish for grief to turn into joy, confirms what surely must be his own fears, even as he persists: 'Sure she will pity him that loves her so truly' (13). Echo's 'You ly' contorts his 'truly' into its opposite; the speaker deceives himself when he imagines that his love will result in pity from the beloved (14). Since Echo has turned to verbal abuse, the speaker continues with a threat of violence:

> Vile Rock, thou now grow'st so unruly,
> That had'st thou life as thou hast voice,
> Thou should'st dye at my foot.
> *Echo* Dye at my foot. (15-18)

The echo's words may be understood as an extension of the speaker's own threat: in the hypothetical scenario in which the rock could die, it would do so at Echo's foot (if she had a foot, as once she did). Since the poet treats Echo and Rock interchangeably, the threat may be directed toward Echo, a disembodied voice who cannot die (again). Conversely or simultaneously, Echo may be claiming the imperative as her own, directed at the speaker, who should die in place of the rock. If she speaks for the rock, the man should die at the base of the rock. Since, as he admits, he cannot kill that which is not alive, Echo's imperative has more force, or at least more likelihood. Yet the outcome is not inevitable. Just as a man cannot cause a rock or a mythological figure to die, neither

(he counters) can her hard words make him commit suicide, and words are all she has to offer:

> Thou canst not make me do’t,
> Unless thou leave it to my choice,
> Who thy hard sentence shall fulfill,
> When thou shalt say, I dye to please her only will.
> *Echo* I will. (19-23)

Here we return to the question of the echo’s identity. Is it the speaker’s own (masculine) voice echoing from a rock, the representation of his own inner thoughts, the voice of an ungendered inanimate object, or the voice of a (female) mythological figure? Is it some sort of combination of these? The interpretation of ‘I will’ hinges in part on the answer. Echo’s reply is similarly nuanced: she at once asserts that she will ‘make [him] do’t’ by leaving the decision to the lover (who will choose death), that she will interpret the desires of the beloved (who will be pleased by his death), and that she will pronounce his ‘hard sentence’. Echo asserts her intimate knowledge of the lover and the beloved, as the former will be pleased with sexual consummation, and both will be pleased at his death if he is denied sexual access to the beloved. She also reinforces the idea that she is an extension of the lover, and that she and the beloved and the rock – anyone but the lover himself – are responsible for his suicidal ideation, and perhaps for his suicide. In this case, the violence is not that of sexual assault, but violence is still present, and the feminine is still complicit. The poem’s final lines, pronouncing Echo as the speaker’s ‘Monument’, confirm his identification of her as his representative: ‘When she comes hither, then, I pray thee, tell, / Thou art my Monument, and this my last farewell’ (24-5). Echo’s reply, ‘Well’, expresses both her satisfaction in seeing the lover depart, forever, and her willingness to serve as a memorial to him rather than to claim her own identity (26).

Herbert’s poem continues the tradition of earlier echo poems in manipulating the feminine voice and shifts blame from the speaker to Echo so that Echo as the representative of womankind assumes responsibility for the speaker’s own actions. Echo becomes not an accomplice to rape, as in Barnes’s Sestine 4, but the cause of suicidal ideation. In the end, though, just as the speaker is never exclusively masculine (since he is so closely identified with Echo), and while Barnes’s sequence may provide the most extreme example of effeminacy in that the speaker cannot commit sexual assault without the participation of Echo, Herbert’s speaker cannot commit suicide without the permission of Echo and/or the beloved. Similarly, Echo is never exclusively feminine; in ‘Echo to a Rock’ Echo’s gender is further undermined and confused by triangulating the conversation with the

inclusion of an inanimate object, a rock which may or may not be identified with Echo, the beloved, and/or the speaker's inmost thoughts.