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Elegy for Before, Behind, Between, Above, Below

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Richard Hague

*Elegy for Before, Behind, Between,
Above, Below*

after Donne's "On His Mistress Going to Bed"

This is good: you, the pious clergyman,
doing it as us randy lesser men must do: omnivorous,
explorative, privateer of desire, the Drake
of her several oceans, alpinist
of her upthrust whitenesses,
excited skater-of-edges,
hand-spanning her silken reaches,
her thatched shires,
her musky fingerling precincts.

And better: she, inviting,
cave, strand, sheaves of unfolded linen,
moist purse gorged with gems and treasure,
she, open as the ocean to the oceanographer,
awash with consummatory tides
(which God has blessed and smiles upon),
and heaving against the shores
of you her naked wild beauty,
her moaning holy siren's song
in your delighted shipwrecked ear—

Oh, Donne—
body's world, the life
you made of love,
compassed and encompassing,
part and whole, onenesses
conceiving and conceived—

unmapped is the map, and lost
the lovely way:

Oh, Donne,
Donne.