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A STUDY IN THE COMPARATIVE REPUTATIONS

OF JOHN DONNE AND ABRAHAM COWLEY

by

MARJORIE JONES RYAN

B. A. Montana State University, 1926
M. A. Montana State University, 1930

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Approved by:

Chairman, Board of Examiners

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PREFACE

This thesis on the comparative reputations of John Donne and Abraham Cowley was undertaken at the suggestion of Dr Leslie A. Fiedler, to whom I am grateful for having given me a topic which has broadened my knowledge of criticism and of metaphysical poetry. I have appreciated the kindly interest, helpful suggestions, and generous loans of valuable materials from Professor E. L. Freeman, Dr Vedder M. Gilbert, Dr Seymour Betsky, and Dr Walter N. King. My particular thanks goes to Dr Robert Charles, my advisor, for the hours which he spent during a busy summer in reading my rough draft and making thoughtful and patient comments for its improvement, and to Dr Walter Brown and Dr E. L. Marvin for their careful reading and generous appreciation of my thesis. I also wish to thank the Dean of the Graduate School, Dr Ellis Waldron, and his staff, and the librarians at Montana State University for their cooperation and helpfulness.

Marjorie Ryan

MSU
August, 1957

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INTRODUCTION

The great revival of interest in the poetry of John Donne is one of the accepted literary phenomena of our time.[1] Written during the last decade of the sixteenth century and the first two decades of the seventeenth, his poetry circulated mostly in manuscript during his lifetime and was first published in 1633, with several successive

[1] Joan Bennett, Four Metaphysical Poets (Cambridge, 1953), pp. 2-21.
Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn (New York, 1947), p. 21.
William John Courthope, A History of English Poetry, III (London, 1903), 167-168.
T. S. Eliot, Selected Essays 1917-1932 (New York, 1932), pp. 241-250.
Herbert J. C. Grierson, Donne's Poetical Works, II (Oxford, 1912), v-lv.
Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century (Oxford, 1921), pp. xiii-lviii.
Clay Hunt, Donne's Poetry (New Haven, 1954), pp. 197-201.
C. S. Lewis, English Literature of the Sixteenth Century (Oxford, 1954), pp. 546-551.
Louis L. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven, 1954), pp. 1-4.
George Saintsbury, A Short History of English Literature (New York, 1935), pp. 365-368.
Theodore Spencer, ed., A Garland for John Donne (Cambridge, /Mass./, 1931).
Leonard Unger, Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism (Chicago, 1950).
Helen C. White, The Metaphysical Poets (New York, 1936), pp. 37-47.
George Williamson, The Donne Tradition (Cambridge, /Mass./, 1930), pp. 21-57; 227-247.
Virginia Woolf, The Second Common Reader (New York, 1932), pp. 196-197.

editions up to 1669.[2] As the dominant poet of the metaphysical tradition he exerted great influence on his contemporaries and on the poets of the next generation, until about 1650.[3] Then, with the growing trend toward the simpler language and more formal style of the Age of Classicism, with the increasing faith in scientific and philosophical rationalism, and with the growing distrust of emotion and the inclination toward intellectual caution prompted by the excesses of the Civil War, Donne's highly individual and speculative poetry fell into an almost total eclipse.[4] Late in the eighteenth century critics feeling their way toward the Romantic Revival began again to notice Donne with an interest echoed later by Coleridge, Lamb and De Quincey.[5] During the more formal mid-Victorian era Donne fell again into relative oblivion until about the last quarter of the century, when perhaps the insight of a kindred spirit, Robert Browning, helped to turn the

[2] Grierson, Works, II, lvi.

[3] Williamson, p. 75, et passim.

[4] Hunt, pp. 198-199.

[5] Arthur N. Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Johnson and the Romantic Revival," SP, XXII (1925), 81-132.
Hunt, pp. 200-201.
Herbert J. C. Grierson and J. C. Smith, A Critical History of English Poetry, 2nd rev. ed. (London, 1950), p. 99.

attention of critics to the powerful and passionate poetic spirit underlying the irregular and often puzzling form of Donne's poetry.[6] Inspired in part by the extensive studies of Sir Herbert J. C. Grierson and later by the dominant influence of T. S. Eliot, there rose to a peak during the 1920's and 1930's a flood of critical studies which has only recently begun to abate.[7] One might safely say that for the past generation the poetry of Donne has been the model _par excellence_ for both poets and critics.

There can be no doubt that such an absorbing interest could happen only in an age which feels a sense of kinship with the age in which Donne lived. Some of the same qualities of thought and expression by which Donne in his poetry recreated the spirit of the late Renaissance appear in the works of T. S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway, who, with their followers, have articulated the mood of the past generation. A few of these parallels include a widespread probing of the mind and soul resulting from the disruptive effect of new scientific theories on long-established patterns of thought; a tendency to preserve poetic and traditional values from philosophies no longer acceptable

[6] Charles Wells Moulton, ed., _The Library of Literary Criticism of English and American Authors_ (Buffalo, 1901), I, 717-719.

[7] Frank Kermode, "The Dissociation of Sensibility," _Kenyon Review_, XIX (Spring, 1957), 169.

as fact;[8] a feeling of let-down, uncertainty, and loss following upon a period of expansive exuberance; a cynical approach to love as a reaction against an over-conventionalized romanticism; a libertinism in thought and conduct, which with those of our day is a reaction against Victorianism, as with Donne it was a reaction against the Petrarchan tradition of courtly love; a sense of the presence of death and a shuddering horror,[9] which leads to the exploitation of the imaginative values of the ugly, and at the same time to an effort to escape from these depths into the finer realms of human compassion and humorous reflection; an effort to present precise images which create a unified intellectual and emotional impression upon the reader;[10] and a search for new literary form, which in both periods came to be characterized by a rugged masculinity, a precision of detail and a search for the exact word, a wide use of metaphor of far-reaching implication, and a closer imitation of the rhythms of speech, to mention but a few of the commonly observed qualities of style. Thus the writers of a whole generation have found in John Donne a kindred spirit and have conceded him great influence over their work.

[8] Courthope, III, 148; 154; 168.

[9] Williamson, p. 18.

[10] _Ibid._, p. 51.
Eliot, _Essays_, pp. 241-250.

Yet the seventeenth century admired another poet, who, though he was during much of his career a conscious follower of Donne and though he produced a fairly large body of verse exhibiting certain metaphysical qualities, has nevertheless failed to arouse much interest in our time. Abraham Cowley's book of juvenile poems was published in 1633, the same year as Donne's first posthumous edition; thus his active career follows Donne's by exactly a generation. He is regarded as the most representative man of the period of transition, between the time in which metaphysical poetry was a dominant strain and the Age of Classicism.[11] Sharing as he did some of the qualities of the latter age, Cowley suffered a somewhat slower loss of reputation than did Donne, although his imitation of the "conceits" of Donne had come to be regarded as a major fault by 1692, when Dryden wrote his "Original and Progress of Satire." In his own day Cowley was immensely popular, being rated by Milton as next to Shakespeare and Spenser.[12] By the time of Samuel Johnson, a century after his death (1667), though he had meanwhile suffered a considerable decline, he was still regarded as the first of the "moderns,"[13]

[11] Williamson, pp. 188-189.
Ernest Rhys, Lyric Poetry (London, 1913), pp. 235-236.

[12] Samuel Johnson, "Cowley," in The Works of Samuel Johnson, Literary Club Edition (Troy, New York, 1903), VII, 334.

[13] Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature, rev. ed. (New York, 1935), p. 581.

and as the "last of the metaphysical race and undoubtedly the best;"[14] the intellectual quality of his poetry appealed to Johnson more strongly than did the intense peculiarity of Donne. Early Romantics tended to forgive the "roughness" of form and to respond to the "soothing melancholy" of Cowley's verse, and Lamb found him "delicious."[15] Late Victorian critics, particularly Gosse, found him interesting as a character in literary history, "but as a poet a dead name", though Grosart defended his right to "an inner circle of readers" and published his works in 1881.[16] During the 1920's Arthur N. Nethercot made an extensive study of his life and published a series of articles on the literary reputations of Cowley and other metaphysicals;[17] but any slight revival of interest in Cowley has been merely incidental to the general interest in metaphysical poetry. As a poet he remains almost unknown and unread in our time, the few prose essays of his later career being his chief present claim to attention.

The question arises: Why has Donne been so thoroughly resurrected and Cowley so generally ignored in our time?

[14] Johnson, VII, 311.

[15] Nethercot, pp. 125-132.

[16] Edmund Gosse, From Shakespeare to Pope (Cambridge, 1885), pp. 171-177.
Gosse, Seventeenth Century Studies (New York, 1897), pp. 226-227.

[17] Nethercot, Abraham Cowley: the Muses' Hannibal (London, 1931), pp. 289; 345.

The purpose of this paper will be to discuss basic differences between the poetry of Donne and that of Cowley, both by a compilation of critical comment and by an individual evaluation of representative works of the two men. An effort will be made to account for today's great appreciation of the one and the equally great indifference toward the other, when their works are judged in the light of current standards as to what constitutes good poetry. In discussing the fluctuations in their literary reputations, it will be necessary to recreate something of the successive "climates" of critical opinion which have existed between their day and ours, as indicated by the comments of representative critics of each period. A further key to the sensibilities of each age will be found in changing definitions of, and shifting emphasis placed upon, such aspects of the creative mind as wit, fancy, imagination, and judgment. The attempt will also be made to establish a few currently recognized standards for judging poetry, and to define the term metaphysical as it has been analyzed and understood by modern critics.

Thus the problem acquires two aspects -- the placing of the poets against a background of changing fashions, and the judging of their poetry by standards which we should like to regard as permanent criteria of poetic value. These two aspects represent the attitudes of two schools of critical thought, the historical relativists and the critical

absolutists, whose antithetical positions call for somewhat further definition.

The historical relativists recognize the poet as the voice of the sensibility of his own age and evaluate his poetry in the light of an attempted recreation of that sensibility. Thus, from their point of view, the fluctuations in the reputations of Donne and Cowley from their day to ours seem due to changing literary fashions and points of emphasis, to which their poetry has or has not been acceptable. James Sutherland states the relativist point of view succinctly:

> It is never easy to realize that the poetry of one's own contemporaries is only the latest fashion.[18]

One of the most outspoken defenders of the relativist position is Mr Frederick A. Pottle:

> There are two attitudes in criticism which may be called respectively the dogmatic and the historical. Underlying the dogmatic position are always two assumptions expressed or implied: The first, that there exist canons, rules, or methods for judging absolutely the worth of literature; the second, that the critic, ideally at least, can apply these measures without error...There is another attitude in criticism which I shall call the relativistic or historical. It questions the possibility of absolute critical judgments because it can find no evidence in history that a permanent standard measure can be devised for literature, or that it could be applied without error if it were devised.

[18] James Sutherland, A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry (Oxford, 1948), p. 9.

> It believes that the poetry of every age is the expression of, or expresses itself through, the sensibility of that age...It suffers extroardinary shifts at given historical points, and it is these shifts that mark off the "periods" in literature. If one considers the rules or standards which each age has advanced for the evaluation of literature, one will find that instead of being objective and permanent, they are merely the definition of the sensibility of that age...The historical critic believes that all original criticism is subjective: the description of the impact of the work on his own historically limited sensibility...In dealing with the mind of the artist, we are all relativists...There is no more basis for supposing that a critic can make absolute judgments than there is for thinking that poets can write poetry that will never need historical justification.[19]

On the other hand, the critical absolutists, while not denying the fact that historical influence and changing sensibility do in part account for what a poet writes and for his reputation at any given time, still hold that there are certain absolute values in poetry, especially with respect to form, which can be used as a basis for judging the quality of all poetry, whether old or new. Certain values are said to underlie all changing fashions and to provide a guide for distinguishing good poetry from bad. Much of the effort of the New Criticism has been to establish such a set of criteria and to arrive at a fixed evaluation of the poets of the past. Mr Cleanth Brooks

[19] Frederick A. Pottle, The Idiom of Poetry (Ithaca, New York, 1946), pp. 148-153.

states the case for the absolutists:

> ...I insist that to treat the poems discussed primarily as poems is a proper emphasis, and very much worth doing...We are not likely to ignore those elements which make great poems differ from each other. It is entirely possible, on the other hand, that the close kinship that they bear to one another may be obscured -- those qualities that make them poems and which determine whether they are good poems or bad poems. Good and bad, we have been taught, are meaningless terms when used absolutely. They must refer to some standard of values, and values, we know, are hopelessly subjective...But in giving up our criteria of good and bad, we have, as a consequence I believe, begun to give up our concept of poetry itself...The studies of particular poems which fill up the earlier chapters of this book take as their assumption that there is such a thing as poetry, difficult as it may be to define, and that there are general criteria aginst which poems may be measured...The judgments are frankly treated as if they were universal judgments...The attempt to locate the "poetry" in a special doctrine or a special subject matter or a special kind of imagery... speedily breaks down...Yet if we are to emphasize, not the special subject matter, but the way in which a poem is built...the form which it has taken as it grew in the poet's mind, we shall necessarily raise questions of formal structure and rhetorical organization...and the formal pattern suggested by these terms seems to carry over from poem to poem...I do not mean to ignore the important differences between poets. Yet what must be sought is an instrument which will allow for some critical precision, and yet one which may be used in the service, not of Romantic poetry or of metaphysical poetry, but of poetry.[20]

Mr Brooks makes amply clear the difficulty of the absolutist position by continuing with a long discussion of principles,

[20] Brooks, pp. 197-200.

wherein he repeatedly refutes the positions and judgments of other critics, including Mr Pottle as well as a number of gentlemen from his own side of the fence; the very extent to which personal argument bulks in modern criticism tends to make suspect the hope of establishing any wide agreement on absolute standards.

In 1858 "A Poetical Scale" was published, possibly by Goldsmith, in which Cowley was rated equal to Shakespeare and just below Dryden and Milton; Donne was passed off with the remark:

> Dr Donne was a man of wit, but he seems to have been at pains not to pass for a poet.[21]

We smile at the solemn effort of the past and proceed with our own. Can any set of criteria be anything other than the codification of the sensibility of the age in which it is established?[22] Dryden thought he knew what was "correct," but we do not entirely agree with him; we recognize the vast good sense of Dr Johnson but question many of his specific judgments, especially as regards the metaphysical poets; we see the greatness of Coleridge's analysis of the poetic imagination but reject much of the poetry of his age; and our concept of literary excellence demands some-

[21] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Johnson," p. 86.

[22] Pottle, pp. 150-151.

thing more than Arnold's "high seriousness" or "sweetness and light." Yet the modern critical temper is predominantly absolutist.

Dr Johnson recognized the necessity of both the relativist and the absolutist points of view. In support of the relativist position he said:

> In order to make a true estimate of the abilities and merit of a writer, it is always necessary to examine the genius of his age, and the opinions of his contemporaries... Every man's performances, to be rightly estimated, must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived, and with his own...opportunities.

But he also asserted the need for the operation of absolutist principles:

> It is, however, the task of criticism to establish principles; to improve opinion into knowledge;...criticism reduces those regions of literature under the dominion of science, which have hitherto known only the anarchy of ignorance, the caprices of fancy, and the tyranny of prescription.[23]

Between the warring camps of the relativists and the absolutists Mr Eliot has posited a working principle of compromise, in which he allows for personal judgment in the applying of critical standards and also recognizes that emphasis on certain elements defined within those standards may vary from time to time:

> I by no means wish to affirm that the importance of a particular poet, or of a particular type of poetry, is merely a

[23] Joseph Epes Brown, The Critical Opinions of Samuel Johnson (Princeton, 1926), pp. 44-47.

> matter of capricious fashion. I wish simply to distinguish between the absolute and the relative in popularity, and to recognize in the relative (both when a poet is unduly preferred and when he is unduly ignored) an element of the reasonable, the just and the significant...We must assume, if we are to talk about poetry at all, that there is some absolute poetic hierarchy...some final Judgment Day, on which poets will be assembled in their ranks and orders...But at any particular time, and we exist only in particular moments of time, good taste consists, not in attaining to the vision of Judgment Day, and still less in assuming that what happens to be important to us now is certainly what will be important in the same way on that occasion, but in approximating to some analysis of the absolute and the relative in our own appreciation.[24]

It is in such a spirit of compromise that I approach the problem of tracing the critical reputations of Donne and Cowley against the background of the shifting sensibilities in the past three and a half centuries, and the corollary problem of accounting for their present positions in the light of current literary standards. However, these problems dealing historically and critically with the authors themselves require a previous consideration of some minor problems of definition. My second chapter will attempt to define the modern concept of the word *poetry*, to set up some of the generally accepted criteria for judging poetry, and to explain the meaning of the term metaphysical poetry as interpreted by modern critics.

24 T. S. Eliot, "Donne in our Time," in *A Garland for John Donne*, pp. 11-12.

THE MODERN CONCEPT OF POETRY, STANDARDS FOR JUDGING POETRY AND DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES OF METAPHYSICAL POETRY

In the criticism of today, as in that of the past, it has seemed difficult to find a single definition to cover all possible types and styles of poetry. Modern critics have had to defend themselves against the accusation that they define all poetry in terms of the metaphysical lyric; it is true that modern poetry has drawn great inspiration from this particular type, which flourished during the early seventeenth century, partly because moderns have felt a strong sense of kinship between the spirit of this age and that of post-Renaissance England. Metaphysical poetry, as good poetry, shares many of the qualities which are now recognized as virtues of poetry in general, but it has also certain limiting and distinguishing properties of its own. It is my immediate problem to define poetry in its broadest sense as conceived by the modern mind, and then to discuss the distinctive qualities of metaphysical poetry; in so doing I perhaps can arrive at certain broadly recognized standards for judging poetry and also partially describe the modern mood, which has produced both our poetry and our criticism.

Carl Sandburg, in his "Thirty-seven Definitions of Poetry," said, "Poetry is the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits." This definition allows for free interpretation and yet contains one word crucial to the modern view -- synthesis. This word, or this idea, appears in the comments of many modern critics; for example, W. K. Wimsatt emphasizes the synthetic nature of poetry by saying,

> Poetry is a feat of style by which a complex of meaning is handled all at once.[1]

This seems to me the most concise and yet inclusive definition that I have found.

Mr Cleanth Brooks recognizes the difficulty in discovering a general definition of poetry, but he also arrives at the idea of synthesis:

> The positivists have tended to explain the miracle away in a general process of reduction which hardly stops short of reducing the 'poem' to the ink itself. But the 'miracle of communication' remains...We had better begin with it, by making the closest possible examination of what the poem says as a poem.[2]

Here, briefly, is the creed of the New Criticism: analysis which aims to arrive at a concept of the poem as a whole -- an eventual synthesis. (Even "ink" is synthetic). Mr Brooks further emphasizes the idea of the ultimate unification of all elements in a poem:

[1] W. K. Wimsatt, Jr, The Verbal Icon (Lexington, Ky., 1954), p. 4.

[2] Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn (New York, 1947), Preface.

> The lyric quality, if it be genuine,...is the result of an imaginative grasp so sure that it may show itself to the reader as unstudied and unpredictable without for a moment relaxing hold on the intricate and complex stuff which it carries...The essential structure of a poem...is a pattern of resolved stresses...the closest possible relationship between the intellectual elements and other elements in the structure ...The dimension in which the poem moves is not one which excludes ideas, but one which includes attitudes...In the unified poem, the poet has 'come to terms' with experience.[3]

Mr Herbert Read, like Mr Brooks, has trouble defining poetry but points out the importance of synthesis; he further helps to broaden the general concept of poetry by emphasizing the idea of intuition as essential to the creative process:

> Poetry is properly speaking a transcendental quality -- a sudden transformation which words assume under a particular influence -- and we can no more define this quality than we can define a state of grace...All art originates in an act of intuition or vision...the <u>process</u> of poetry consists firstly in maintaining this vision in its integrity, and secondly in expressing this vision in words.[4]

The quality of synthesis also becomes apparent in Mr Read's definition of organic form, which he describes as

[3] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 162; 186-189.

[4] Herbert Read, <u>Form in Modern Poetry</u> (London, 1948), pp. 40-44.

> the most original and vital principle of poetic creation; and the distinction of modern poetry is to have recovered this principle. When a work of art has its own inherent laws, originating with its very invention and fusing in one vital unity both structure and content, then the resulting form is organic.[5] [Quoting Coleridge]: No work of true genius dares want its appropriate form, neither indeed is there any danger of this. As it must not, so genius cannot, be lawless: for it is even this that constitutes genius -- the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination.[6]

While Mr Read has discussed intuition and organic form as phases of modern poetry, he brings out that he regards them as essentials of a broad definition in this striking statement: "By modern poetry I mean all genuine poetry...of all time."

Intuition, or perhaps the broader implications of Freudian psychology, receive further emphasis from Mr Hazleton Spencer:

> One of the master-ideas of our time, an idea that has determined not only the content, the meaning, but also the very form of many important works in twentieth-century literature...[Is] the discovery that more is contained in the human mind than can be accounted for by exploring it at the level of consciously formulated thought.[7]

Mr Pottle also brings out the essential nature of

5 Ibid., p. 9.

6 Ibid., p. 40.

7 Hazleton Spencer, et al, edd., British Literature from Blake to Dylan Thomas (Boston, 1952), p. 890.

intuition in his discussion of an inclusive definition of poetry and of some of the qualities of poetry:

> Poetry is not a higher kind of reason; it is the first grade of generalized experience, prior to logic, prior to morality. The world...makes its impression on us. Our minds impose human form on this matter, grasp it intuitively...The mind expresses its intuition in verbal symbols, and that expression is poetry...There are degrees of expressive power: degrees of vividness, of coherence, of complexity...Poets are men of terrific voltage...[Poetic language] gives us the immediate qualities of an experience...expression of the qualities of an experience is felt to predominate greatly over statement concerning its uses ...Alliteration, assonance, rhyme, parallelism, even meter must certainly be excluded as essentials of a general definition, for it is possible to cite highly developed poetry that lacks one or more of them. Plot and metaphor go much deeper, and indeed, if you stretch the terms far enough, go to the very bottom.

Plot, according to Mr Pottle, can be stretched to include all aspects of meaning; and metaphor, to embrace "every use of speech that gives us the qualities of experience."[8] Mr Pottle, again, is synthesizing the qualities of poetry under two terms, plot and metaphor. He thus gives one interpretation of Sandburg's poetic definition: metaphor is the hyacinth and plot is the biscuit -- something to sink one's teeth in.

Modern poetry, then, attempts to associate itself with what the modern mind recognizes as the great tradition in

[8] Frederick A. Pottle, The Idiom of Poetry (Ithaca, New York, 1946), pp. 65-75.

poetry -- the poetry of unified and vivid expression of intuitive experience. Perhaps this statement should be let stand as a general definition. But there are other qualities in modern poetry, some of which point to useful criteria for judging poetry, both present and past. Some consideration of these additional qualities may help to throw light on the basic question of this thesis: Why have the works of Donne and not of Cowley been resurrected in our time? Many of these qualities seem to apply to poetry in general rather more than to metaphysical poetry. Mr William Van O'Connor has made one summary which supplements and supports those essentials already cited:

> Poets have been concerned with a language of indirection -- with concretion, wit, irony, tension -- in which feeling and tone may be understood and experienced as something more than supplementary to abstract meaning. The emphases upon appropriate rhythms, metaphor, ambiguity, and dramatic statement are all means of making the emotion integral in the poetic statement. It is as though the modern poets were proving that ideas...may be deeply meaningful only when they are expressed in a language that simultaneously involves the sensibilities and the intellect.[9]

Here the qualities of synthesis, intuition, and organic form are again implied, with more precisely defined qualities considered as a means of arriving at the more general values.

A revealing, but somewhat less complimentary, description

[9] Wm. Van O'Connor, Sense and Sensibility in Modern Poetry (Chicago, 1948), p. 4.

of the poetry and criticism of the 1920's seems still to apply rather widely:

> Poetry became obscure, experimental, irregular, antagonistic to didacticism, indifferent to any social value, the private language of small coteries, with much dependence on verbal subtleties and patterns of association so complex, unstable and fleeting as sometimes to become presently incomprehensible to the writers themselves ...The need was to fashion a new technique in diction and prosody to meet the requirements of the new subject-matter of a changing world...An arrogant assumption of authority in matters of taste was a characteristic of the period...The great names and achievements in literature were subjected to fresh valuation. Milton was dethroned in favor of Donne, in whose poetry was found a satisfying and imitable fusion of sensibility and intellectuality...there was a great display of abstruse learning... literary references which widen the vista and embrace tradition.[10]

One must concede that difficulty has been a concommitant of the effort to find a poetic language suited to the chaotic complexity of the modern era.

Mr Brooks defends himself from the charge that he defines all poetry in terms of the metaphysical style by saying,

> I should certainly dislike to be thought to maintain that English poetry ceased with the death of Donne, to be resumed only in our time.[11]

He further defends certain qualities apparent in metaphy-

10 Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), pp. 1583-85.

11 Brooks, p. 204.

sical poetry as being actually apparent in much of the good poetry of all types. One of these qualities is paradox:

> Paradoxes spring from the very nature of the poet's language: it is a language in which the connotations play as great a part as the denotations...Poets consciously employ paradox to gain a compression and precision otherwise unobtainable.

Mr Brooks cites Coleridge's famous statement on the creative imagination as a "series of paradoxes," and says that poetry requires a "fusion" that

> ...is not logical; it apparently violates science and common sense; it welds together the discordant and the contradictory.[12]

Other qualities which Mr Brooks defends as essential to good poetry include "original, spare, and strange"; "functional imagery, irony, and complexity of attitude"; "a coherent and powerful structure of attitudes"; "a tight and systematic structure of images"; and finally,

> A poem is to be judged by its coherence, sensitivity, depth, richness and tough-mindedness.[13]

Though no brief summary can do justice to the qualities of modern poetry, it may be said that it is unified by intellectual control over intensely felt emotion; its concepts are often intuitive and may be presented through

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 8-17.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 229.

sharply sensuous and subtly suggestive imagery or through symbols; idea, emotion, image, sound, meter, stanza-form -- all contribute to its final synthesis; it shuns overt didacticism but takes a serious view of the complexity of life, and reveals a complex attitude toward its material through irony, paradox, ambiguity and allusion; it is psycholgical in its suggested association of ideas and images, and in its effort to express the whole sensibility of the poet (as well as to demand a complex and complete response on the part of the reader); it is formal in pattern but acquires tension through variations on its basic structure; rhyme is frequent but not essential and may show variations, while assonance and alliteration add subtle effects to both the music and the tone; and modern poetry is difficult.

Having represented the absolutist point of view in attempting to define a few of the _sine qua nons_ of poetry, I shall now turn relativist and inquire: What are some of the characteristics of the times that have produced this poetry and these standards? One approach to this question will be to consider similarities between the twentieth and the early seventeenth centuries -- similarities which help to account for the popularity of Donne's poetry. It will also be suggestive to note certain parallels in the attitudes of Donne and Eliot as the most significant expositors of the spirits of their respective ages.

Not to overemphasize, however, the purely metaphysical aspects of either period, one should mention that there were other literary traditions active in Donne's time, just as there are today. Ben Jonson represented the neoclassical tradition, while the romantic Spenser was not forgotten. A blending of these various influences was evident fairly early in the century. A similar blending has been noted in our time by Miss Josephine Miles, whose extensive study of poetic language as used in the fourth decade of each of the last five centuries has led her to the conclusion that the 1940's present a synthesis of the metaphysical, neoclassical and romantic modes:

> Granting, then, that the 1940's may have drawn one order of poetry from the dominantly metaphysical 1540's and 1640's, another from the dominantly neoclassical eighteenth century, and a third and strongest from the dominantly romantic nineteenth, in a sense we are no one of these, but must take some new label for the combination we have arrived at...Further, no one of these major proportions brings with it the whole of its poetic language...Of no single poet can it be said that he is closer to another period than to his own, in his choice of language. His time defines him better than his type. We learn of this time, the 1940's, that its interest in objective truth and subjective interpretation dominates its language and distinguishes its poetry from that of other centuries. We learn that the sound, the structure, and the vocabulary are interallied, and allied to the concept of truth in art which makes for specific objects and qualities in interacting juxtaposition, for tonal pattern, for phrasal presentation, for a moderation of both verbs and adjectives in favor of nouns, for a laden and ordered cadence in

> which mind observes things and considers them...They bring some of the vocabulary and some of the tone of other poetries into the 1940's: romantic symbolism, classical simile, metaphysical metaphor, into twentieth-century context...reordering and thus modifying all of these into a newly varied mode.[14]

Miss Miles' analysis applied to the 1940's, where she noted a slight bent toward the romantic use of language. Herbert Read and George Williamson, in speaking for the 1920's, also noticed a blending of attitudes, which in itself may be characteristically metaphysical.

> If we must apply the historical distinctions to this age of ours, we shall be forced to admit that whilst it is possibly an age of satiety, it is not one of solidity; and if it is certainly an age of stress, we are more doubtful about its energy. That is to say, it is not clearly either a romantic or a classical age.[15]

> It is suggestive to think of metaphysical poetry as lying between the romantic and the classical poetry, as the product of an angle of vision in which the subjective and the objective meet...This imaginative form may be regarded as a form between the emotionally organized form of the Romantic and the rationally organized form of the Classic: the metaphysical seizes emotionally the idea or symbol which imposes its own logic upon the emotion.[16]

Hence, to Donne's age as to ours, we find the appeal of

[14] Josephine Miles, The Continuity of Poetic Language (Berkeley, 1951), pp. 514-515.

[15] Read, p. 84.

[16] George Williamson, "Donne and the Poetry of Today," in A Garland for John Donne, ed. Theodore Spencer (Cambridge, [Mass.], 1931), pp. 175-176.

metaphysical poetry to consist in its being a balance between, or synthesis of, the romantic and the neoclassical poetries.

Another reason for our sense of sympathy with Donne's era is cited by Mr Leavis and Mr Baugh, who emphasize the pervading sense of disruption of values in the 1920's; their comments might apply almost equally to the post-Copernican world of John Donne:

> Urban conditions, a sophisticated civilization, rapid change and the mingling of cultures have destroyed the old rhythm and habits, and nothing adequate has taken their place. The result is a sense, apparent in the serious literature of the day, that meaning and direction have vanished.[17]

> Conscious of the political and social chaos caused by the war [World War I] and its aftermath, and of the moral chaos consequent upon the widespread acceptance of Freudian psychology, repudiating this chaotic world yet reflecting in his work the chaos which disgusted him, the post-war poet claimed to be the voice of "a generation for whom the dissolution of value had in itself a positive value." [Quote from Eliot].[18]

Mr O'Connor finds in our age the need for highly personal perspective; this emphasis on the personal again recalls that individualism was one of the key-notes of the Renaissance and Jacobean eras. Also to be noted here is

[17] F. R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (London, 1932), p. 61.

[18] Baugh, p. 1583.

the effect which the science of each period had in disrupting older patterns of thought:

> Certain characteristics of modern poetry may be explained in terms of...the confusion of values and the multiple forms of belief which have developed in the post-Renaissance world...we are hard put to it now to find sanctions for forms of idealism...individual poets must rely upon whatever perspective they can work out for themselves.[19]
>
> In the poetry of both [Donne and Eliot] one finds recorded the 'disintegrating collision in sensitive minds of the old tradition and the new learning.' ... Whatever unity to be found must be personally found. This involves an examination of the actual processes of thought, 'their rapid alterations and sharp antitheses.' ...Our age...is more keenly aware of the process of association and the utter diversity of things. But the 'jagged brokenness of Donne's thought has struck a responsive chord in our age.' In his poetry Donne caught the sense of the intricacy, the interrelatedness and dissonances of experience which flow through the mind...Donne appeals to the modern mind.[20]

The criticism of Mr Eliot was undoubtedly important in maintaining interest in the poetry of Donne during the 1920's and afterwards, and it is intriguing to cite parallels between the two poets and their two periods, though admittedly there was considerable interest in Donne during the whole last quarter of the nineteenth century,

19 O'Connor, p. 7.

20 _Ibid._, p. 85.

Grosart, who published an edition of Donne's poems in 1872, Grierson, whose great edition came out in 1912, and Gosse, who is called the third of the "three G's," were all influential in creating interest in Donne and other metaphysical poets. Rupert Brooke, who was compared to Donne as a poet, had cited in his own criticism of Donne nearly every quality later familiarized by Eliot.[21] The power and significance of John Donne are the more amazing when one considers that he has occupied an important place in scholarly research for the past seventy-five years. Though Mr Eliot's criticism has perhaps received too much credit for arousing interest in Donne, it is still suggestive for interpreting the temper of our times to note some of the criticism of Eliot's work; comparisons between the following comments and contemporary criticism of Donne inevitably suggest themselves:

> His unique distinction among English poets is the balance he has maintained between the claims of his vision and the claims of his art...The effort of every true poet is to unify experience. Mr Eliot's poetry becomes the attempt to find meaning in the whole of his experience, to include all that he has known. To do this, he enters into himself, finding within himself his own music and his own language.[22]

[21] Joseph E. Duncan, "Revival of Metaphysical Poetry 1872-1912," PMLA, LXVIII (1953), 658-671.

[22] Helen Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot (London, 1949), pp. 184-185.

> To invent techniques that shall be adequate to the ways of feeling, or modes of expression, of adult sensitive moderns is difficult in the extreme...That is the peculiar importance of Mr T. S. Eliot.[23]

> Chief among T. S. Eliot's contributions to English poetic theory and practice, perhaps, has been his concern that intellect be restored to poetry.[24]

> He was more aware of the general plight than his contemporaries, and more articulate: he made himself the consciousness of his age, and he did this more effectively in that he was a critic as well as a poet...the debt is undisguised: it is assumed...that the general awareness of the important issues derives from Mr Eliot, and that the inevitable formulations are his...Mr Eliot has suffered a great deal of discipleship of varying degrees of naivete and subtlety...it has become a nuisance and even something of a menace...Mr Eliot is to be commiserated upon it: it is impossible where his influence is real.../Empson/ has clearly learned a great deal from Donne. And his debt to Donne is at the same time a debt to Mr Eliot. One might say that the effect of Eliot's criticism and his poetry together has been to establish the seventeenth century in its due place in the English tradition.[25]

A similar recognition of Donne's learning, originality, and influence appears in these comments of modern critics:

> All no doubt owe much to the mighty influence of Donne....His thoughts, even his conceits, are never far-fetched because his immense and brooding imagina-

23 Leavis, p. 25.

24 O'Connor, p. 3.

25 Leavis, pp. 196-199.

> tion reaches to them all without the trouble of fetching. The others have to fetch them.[26]

> ...the lyrics...really reveal Donne's greatness. ...the astonishing novelty of the _Songs and Sonnets_. Without wasting time on any proclamation that this is 'the new poetry' or any denigration of his predecessors, Donne created a kind of poem that had never been heard before.[27]

A widely used term which modern criticism owes to Mr Eliot is "dissociation of sensibility," or the separating of emotion from intellect. Just how this term applies to Donne's poetry has been a subject of some disagreement; Mr Eliot, in fact, contradicted himself with regard to Donne. After elaborating, in his essay "The Metaphysical Poets" written in 1921, on Donne's unified emotion and intellect, Mr Eliot came ten years later to the conclusion, expressed in his essay "Donne in Our Time":

> In Donne, there is a manifest fissure between thought and sensibility, a chasm which in his poetry he bridged in his own way.

In spite of Mr Eliot's self-contradiction, one may say that the unification still exists in the poetry, if not in the poet; the effect of combined passion and thought was noted by many critics before Eliot, even as far back as De Quincey.

[26] George Saintsbury, _A Short History of English Literature_ (New York, 1935), p. 411.

[27] C. S. Lewis, _English Literature in the Sixteenth Century_ (Oxford, 1954), p. 548.

Mr Robert Adams has recently commented:

> Eliot seems to have meant at different times that Donne did not suffer from dissociation of sensibility, and was therefore a model for our times, or that he did and was therefore akin to us...the rather complex fact seems to be that Donne did suffer from dissociation of sensibility, exploited the fact energetically, and felt rather strongly that he shouldn't, being in all respects like Eliot.

Mr Adams continued the comparison by discussing the "patient etherized" conceit of Eliot and the "compass" conceit of Donne and concluding that both poets were dramatizing their own complexity of attitude, or their recognition of dissociation within themselves. This observation led to a new definition of metaphysical poetry:

> A metaphysical poem is one which makes dramatic use of contrasted points of view.

As Mr Adams summarized the influence of Donne and Eliot on the poetry of their time:

> Eliot, like Donne, heroically turned the stream of English verse into dramatic channels, and thereby liberated the energy which arises from contrasts and disorder.[28]

Even indirectly, the relationship of Donne and Eliot plays an important part in the criticism of today, as is

[28] Robert Adams, "Donne and Eliot," Kenyon Review, XVI (1954), 278-286.

shown in a recent article by Mr Frank Kermode, who gives the whole theory of dissociation of sensibility some rather rough treatment. He holds that the theory is historically unsound, as many similar shifts in sensibility can be cited, and says that Eliot was probably translating his admiration for the unified appeal of the symbol into an idealization of his much-admired seventeenth century, when the conceit served a similar purpose, and that the theory snowballed far beyond his original intentions.[29] At any rate, it has been an influential theory in our time, and has had its effect on our poetry. Perhaps my emphasis on the word "synthesis" in my definition of poetry is a result of this theory. (There is something inconsistent in my defining poetry as a synthesis and wit as complexity of attitude, but I shall simply let both definitions stand as another of the paradoxes of poetry -- the same old problem of the Many and the One). Something did happen to the critical and poetic complexes of writers in the seventeenth century; and if any persons can be held responsible, I am inclined to place the cap and bells, or the hangman's hood, on the heads of Hobbes and Cowley -- the former for separating judgment from fancy and so divorcing the content of poetry from its form, and the latter for attempting to combine a very agile intellect with a very sluggish set of

[29] Frank Kermode, "Dissociation of Sensibility," Kenyon Review, XIX (Spring, 1957), 169-194.

passions.

The importance of the idea of unified sensibility will be apparent in many of the comments of modern critics on metaphysical poetry, a term which they find it rather difficult to define to everyone's satisfaction. However, they generally agree as to the excellence of the poetry so designated and as to the immense impact of this seventeenth century style upon the poets of our own time.

Mr Austen Warren has summarized the generally felt confusion regarding the scope of the term metaphysical:

> To critics of poetry, 'metaphysical' has become a term almost as troublesome as 'romantic.' Once pejorative, it has turned into an adjective of eulogy; but, as before, its scope remains uncertain. Sometimes it appears as a historical term, restricted to a literary movement which became obsolescent about 1650; sometimes it serves as a critical concept in the differentiation of one poetic 'kind' from another. With some critics, metaphysical poetry seems to be synonymous with Donne's, and specifically with Donne's _Songs and Sonnets_...with other critics, it means all seventeenth century poetry -- presumably, that is, before 1660. With some, it means poetry with a discursive or public structure; with others, it includes as well _symboliste_ poetry in which the narrative or logical continuum is chiefly absent and the movement from image to image effected by private association.[30]

I shall attempt to simplify this somewhat complicated statement. The most widely recognized quality of meta-

30 Austen Warren, _Rage for Order_ (Chicago, 1948), p. 1.

physical poetry is its use of the conceit, or far-fetched metaphor or simile, which depends for its point on the intellectual shock, or challenge to the imagination, required for the reader to grasp the connection implied in the metaphor. The conceit may be brief, or it may be ingeniously developed to the limits of its possibilities. Sources of the far-fetched element of the comparison may lie in scientific or philosophical interpretations of the universe, in scholastic philosophy with its references to the Chain of Being, the Doctrine of Correspondences, and the Book of the Creatures, in old or new concepts of astronomy and geography, in the fields of medicine, alchemy, physiology and law, and (with the moderns especially) in the newer sciences of psychology and anthropology.[31] Direct observation of nature and classical mythology play little part in this imagery. Wit, redefined in the seventeenth century manner as complexity of attitude and keen intellectual grasp and including the fanciful power to see likenesses, is characteristic of metaphysical poetry, appearing in such devices as the pun and the paradox, as well as in the conceit. The conceit is essential to the logical structure of the poem. Many critics have stressed the intellectual quality of metaphysical poetry, but more important is the

[31] Grierson, _Donne's Poetical Works_ (Oxford, 1912), II, 1-7.
Joan Bennett, _Four Metaphysical Poets_ (Cambridge, 1953), pp. 32-40.

close unity of intellect and emotion, or the quality of "felt thought." The seventeenth century poets, as well as the moderns, have found the metaphysical manner peculiarly well adapted to the poetry of religion, though this is by no means the only topic; love and other problems of the relationship of the individual to society loom large in this poetry.

Though the word metaphysical as a term in criticism is popularly credited to Dr Johnson, the first actual case of the term so used is found in the works of the Italian poet Testi (1593-1646), who referred to the "concetti metaphysici" of medieval poets. Dryden's famous quotation about Donne's "affecting the metaphysics and puzzling the brains of the fair sex" appeared in his "Original and Progress of Satire" in 1693. Spence's Anecdotes also employed the term, and Samuel Johnson is known to have had access to this work in manuscript. John Oldmixon (1728) mentioned the "metaphysical love-verses by which Donne and Cowley acquired so much fame." Pope, about 1734-36, remarked, "Cowley...as well as Davenant, borrowed his metaphysical style from Donne." Joseph Warton (1756) said in referring to Petrarch: "His sentiments of love are metaphysical and far-fetched." George Campbell, in his Philosophy of Rhetoric (1776), derided the "school-metaphysics" of Cowley and commented: "What an unsatiable appetite has this bastard philosophy for absurdity and contradiction!"

Thus Johnson, writing the famous discussion of the metaphysical poets as part of his life of Cowley in 1779, had considerable precedent for the use of the term, as well as some definition of the qualities of the poetry, from the works of previous critics. Johnson, however, seems to have popularized the term in criticism, though not without his usage having been called "unfortunate," "strange," "unhappy," and "improper" by later critics. There has also been much disagreement as to his and others' lists of poets whom they would include in the "school." Moderns are inclined to speak of a long "metaphysical tradition" rather than to recognize any true "metaphysical school" of poetry.[32]

Johnson organized a remarkable analysis of the qualities of metaphysical poetry, though he disapproved of many of the very things which constitute its appeal to the modern mind:

> The metaphysical poets were men of learning and to show their learning was their whole endeavor...they wrote only verses... they copied neither nature nor life...nor represented the operations of the intellect...Those, however, who deny them to be poets allow them to be wits...If... that can be considered as wit which is at once natural and new, that which, though not obvious is acknowledged to be just... to wit of this kind the metaphysicals have seldom risen...But wit...may be more rigorously and philosophically considered

[32] Arthur N. Nethercot, "The Term 'Metaphysical Poets' Before Johnson," MLN, XXXVII (1922), 11-17.

as a kind of discordia concors, a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtity surprises...they were not successful in representing or moving the affections...Their attempts were always analytic; they broke every image into fragments...their amplification had no limits...if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth: if their conceits were far-fetched, they were often worth the carriage. To write on their plan, it was at least necessary to read and think ...in the mass of materials which ingenious absurdity has thrown together, genuine wit and useful knowledge may be sometimes found, buried perhaps in grossness of expression...Cowley excelled his predecessors, having as much sentiment, and more music...they sometimes drew their conceits from recesses of learning not very much frequented by common readers of poetry...They were in very little care to clothe their notions with elegance of dress...They were sometimes indelicate and disgusting...They were not always strictly curious, whether the opinion from which they drew their illustrations were true: it was enough that they were popular. In forming descriptions, they looked not out for images, but for conceits... upon common subjects often unnecessarily and unpoetically subtle; yet where scholastic speculation can be properly admitted, their copiousness and acuteness may be justly admired...Cowley...was almost the last of that race, and undoubtedly the best.[33]

In order to arrive at a fair concept of the qualities

[33] Samuel Johnson, "Cowley," in The Works of Samuel Johnson, Literary Club Edition (Troy, New York, 1903), VII, 292-311.

which the modern mind associates with metaphysical poetry, I have found it helpful to note representative comments of a number of critics, some of whom agree as to certain aspects of the poetry, while others have rather more individual interpretations. Grierson gives a broad definition:

> A metaphysical poet in the full sense of the word is a poet who finds his inspiration in learning;...in the world as science and philosophy report it.[34]

The peak in the writing of metaphysical poetry came at a time when the Copernican theory was displacing the Ptolemaic, when a new approach to scientific investigation and wide explorations had caused "complex and far-reaching changes in men's conception of Nature."[35] Mr Leonard Unger, who has compiled the opinions of several critics, further quotes Grierson:

> ...the survival of the metaphysical strain, the _concetti metaphysici et ideali_...of medieval Italian poetry; the more intellectual, less verbal character of their wit;...their learned imagery; the argumentative, subtle evolution of their lyrics; above all the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination, which is their greatest achievement.[36]

Mr Unger also quotes T. S. Eliot's comments on the metaphysical conceit:

[34] Grierson, _Donne's Poetical Works_, II, 1.

[35] _Ibid._, II, v.

[36] Leonard Unger, _Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism_ (Chicago, 1950), pp. 4-5.

> Donne, and often Cowley, employ a device which is sometimes considered characteristically "metaphysical"; the elaboration ...of a figure of speech to the farthest stage to which ingenuity can carry it... There is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling...The conceit in itself is primarily an eccentricity of imagery, the far-fetched association of the dissimilar, or the overelaboration of one metaphor or simile.[37]

Mr Eliot agrees therefore with Johnson's definition of the conceit as a discordia concors; but both Eliot and Grierson recognize the quality of fused thought and feeling, a quality to which Dr Johnson was impervious.

Mr Eliot makes a further statement which corroborates but at the same time explains the remark of Dr Johnson about the metaphysical poets' not caring for the truth of the ideas which were the sources of their conceits:

> [Donne] is interested in and amused by ideas in themselves, and interested in the way in which he feels an idea; almost as if it were something that he could touch and stroke...attitude toward philosophic notions in his poetry may be put by saying that he was interested in ideas themselves as objects rather than in the truth of ideas.[38]

Clay Hunt also makes the same point about concern with ideas in themselves as a source of imagery:

[37] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[38] T. S. Eliot, "Donne in Our Time," in A Garland for John Donne, pp. 11-12.

> But it is not factual, scientific truth which man contemplates as he stands on the shores of Time and Space and looks out in the opening mysteries of the vast ocean which is God. These analogies are at least symbolically true...they are traditional imaginative patterns which men have contemplated throughout the ages as they have let their imaginations play, with wonder and delight, over...the great fact of Design in the Nature of Things. And their paradoxical character served merely to dramatize, to a medievalized imagination, the incomprehensible mystery of the Wisdom at the heart of things.[39]

Mr Courthope sees the metaphysicals' concern with ideas as an effort to salvage poetic values from the wrecks of skepticism; they

> ...seized upon the rich materials of old and ruined philosophy to decorate the structures which they built out of their lawless fancy.[40]

This same skepticism is associated by Mr Williamson with the wit which is a basic quality of metaphysical poetry:

> [Donne's] corrosive wit was his means of disintegrating doctrine and convention to which he could not assent. Wit is the intellectual equivalent by which one kind of emotional tension, or one part of an emotional tension is resolved.[41]

Wit is also recognized by Mr O'Connor as essential to metaphysical poetry; he defines this elusive quality somewhat

[39] Clay Hunt, Donne's Poetry (New Haven, 1954), p. 108.

[40] William John Courthope, History of English Poetry (London, 1903), III, 148.

[41] George Williamson, "Donne and Today," in A Garland for John Donne, p. 160.

more fully and relates it to the problems of our own time:

> [Such statements] emphasize the need a poet has, particularly in a complex and confused society, for a mature and analytical mind, one that is capable of evaluating experience in the light of 'other kinds of experience which are possible.' Wit is at once the intellectual agility that makes such evaluation possible, and the successful fusion of elements ordinarily considered foreign to each other, by which new attitudes are suggested.[42]

Cleanth Brooks agrees with O'Connor in emphasizing the quality of wit and also in its definition as complexity of attitude:

> ...metaphysical poetry is witty poetry. Wit is not merely an acute perception of analogies; it is a lively awareness of the fact that the obvious attitude toward a given situation is not the only possible attitude.[43]

Similarly, the idea of complexity is suggested by Mr Saintsbury, who gives a revealing and helpful interpretation of the conceit as a

> habit of always seeking to express something after, something behind, the simple, obvious first sense and suggestion of a subject...the metaphysicals emphasised the search for the after-sense. The conceit is something like it.[44]

Mr Unger draws together several of the critics' ideas about

[42] O'Connor, p. 84.

[43] Unger, pp. 17-18.

[44] George Saintsbury, <u>A Short History of English Literature</u> (New York, 1935), p. 411.

metaphysical poetry and its basic qualities:

> Our critics agree in the generalization that the poetry is characterized by the conceit and by wit. The conceit is regarded as a comparison of the dissimilar, frequently an extended comparison. As a characterization, wit, of course, remains more general than the conceit...The conceit is a device of wit. One can also mean that there are in metaphysical poetry the conceit and other wit devices... metaphysical poetry is witty by its expression of irony and complexity of attitude.[45]

The importance of the logical basis for wit is further emphasized by Mr Williamson, who adds a much-quoted definition:

> The rational basis for wit is felt in all metaphysical poetry. T. S. Eliot has defined wit as 'A tough reasonableness beneath a slight lyric grace.'[46]

Allen Tate also points out the necessity for logical coherence in this poetry, and suggests the further quality of ambiguity:

> ...in metaphysical poetry the logical order is explicit; it must be coherent; the imagery by which it is sensuously embodied must have at least the look of logical determinism: I say the look of logic because the varieties of ambiguity and contradiction beneath the logical surface are endless. ...The development

[45] Unger, pp. 20-21.

[46] George Williamson, The Donne Tradition (Cambridge, [Mass.], 1930), p. 30.

> of imagery by logical extension...is the hallmark of the poetry called metaphysical.[47]

Besides the extended imagery, there is also the shorter or condensed conceit, as noted by Mr Brooks, who also emphasizes logical structure:

> Even in Donne's poetry, the elaborated and logically developed comparisons are outnumbered by the abrupt and succinct comparisons -- by what T. S. Eliot has called 'telescoped conceits.' Moreover, the extended comparisons themselves are frequently knit together in the sudden and apparently uncalculated fashion of the telescoped images.[48]
>
> The metaphysical poets reveal the essentially functional character of all metaphor. We cannot remove the comparisons from these poems...without demolishing the poem.[49]

Rosamond Tuve has made perhaps the most extensive study of the relationship of logic to metaphysical imagery. She points out that students of the Renaissance and after were rigorously trained in logic and that poets naturally continued in the habits of thought which had been instilled in them while at school. Illustrations for rules of logic were frequently drawn from poetry. Ramus' reorganization of the rules of logic had been enthusiastically studied during the sixteenth century, especially at Cambridge;

[47] Unger, p. 15.

[48] Brooks, Well Wrought Urn, p. 23.

[49] Unger, p. 17.

certain of his adaptations which seemed especially suitable for poetry help to throw light on some of its qualities:

> I do not think it is possible to read through the major contentions of any Ramist handbook, and follow this with a re-reading of Donne's poems, without arriving at the notion that these intellectual developments of Donne's day explain his processes of thought, and his own attitude toward such processes far more satisfactorily than any of the current phrases about 'feeling' his 'thought.'
>
> Imagery seen in the light of these conceptions would be indisputably functional ...The nature of their terms might range from the most subtle of abstractions to the most ordinary of daily objects...Images framed and used according to these freshly emphasized conceptions of their functioning would not disdain hyperbole or potent suggestions, but their chief characteristics would be aptness, subtlety, accuracy of aim...logical power, ingenious or startlingly precise relationships or parallels, a certain 'obscurity' due to logical complexity or tenuous attachment ...These are normally the characteristics of metaphysical imagery.[50]

Exactly the same point of logical basis for metaphysical imagery is emphasized by Joan Bennett, who also discusses several other qualities of this poetry and makes suggestions for reading it successfully:

> The word 'metaphysical' refers to style rather than subject-matter; but style reflects an attitude to experience...The peculiarity of the metaphysical poets is not that they relate, but that the rela-

[50] Rosamond Tuve, Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery (Chicago, 1947), pp. 351-353, et passim.

> tions they perceive are more often logical than sensuous or emotional, and that they constantly connect the abstract with the concrete, the remote with the near, and the sublime with the commonplace...The poets who wrote most successfully in the metaphysical style were all self-conscious and analytic...Because of this analytic habit, the metaphysical poets preferred to use words which call the mind into play; words consecrated to the use of poetry are avoided because such words have accumulated emotion.../Poets/ cut themselves off from one of the common means of poetry and thus become entirely dependent on a successful fusion between thought and feeling. Often the rhythm is as intricate as the thought and only reveals itself when the emphasis has been carefully distributed according to the sense; its function is that of a stimulant, rather than a narcotic, to the intellect. Successful reading of metaphysical poetry necessitates at least a temporary conquest of the tendency to divorce feeling from intelligence...to be moved only at the cost of being unable to judge, and to judge well only when the sympathies are not engaged.[51]

> The real difficulty is not to discern what might be described as the 'prose meaning,' but to allow an image, which must first be seized intellectually, subsequently to affect one's whole sensibility...to arrive at the meaning is not the same as to experience the poem...Donne's analogy needs to be thought through to its consequences before we feel with him.[52]

Mrs Bennett has made two seemingly contradictory statements in the quotations given above, saying in the first that the reader must learn to think and feel simultaneously and in

[51] Bennett, pp. 1-13.

[52] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

the second that thinking must precede the emotional satisfaction. The important point, I suppose, is the eventual fusion of thought and feeling. Mr Read, quoted by Helen White, also believes that the intellectual effort precedes the delight in the poetry:

> Metaphysical poetry is determined logically: its emotion is a joy that comes with the triumph of reason, and is not a simple instinctive ecstasy. [Miss White continues] ...There are very few readers of poetry who would not at some time or other recognize the delight of seeing a complicated matter brought to unity...One of the main features of the development of seventeenth century thought is the imposition of mathematical pattern upon the multiplicity of reality.[53]

Miss White suggests that at times the pattern may be too mathematical for real poetic delight, as in some of Donne's map images. She supports the other critics who emphasize complexity of attitude, finding a paradoxical ambivalence especially in some of the religious poetry:

> So much of the personal and intellectual fascination of a John Donne or a George Herbert is due to this inner division, this never quite successfully delimited awareness, this never securely resolved ambivalence...The struggle of the distracted will, the puzzlement of the too perceptive mind, these are the centers of Donne's [religious] experience.[54]

This recognition of tension, of puzzlement in the face of the great metaphysical paradox of the Many and the One,

[53] Helen C. White, The Metaphysical Poets (New York, 1936), pp. 85-86.

[54] Ibid., pp. 401-402.

is the core of James Smith's highly metaphysical definition of metaphysical poetry.

> Metaphysics is 'puzzling'...such clues as there are, while equally trustworthy, are contradictory. The contradictions...spring from essence...whether the problems discussed by metaphysics...are or are not derived from that of the Many and the One, they resemble it in the nature of their difficulty. Should anyone make a list, I am sure that in it would be found every one of the subjects of Donne's greater poems...That verse properly called metaphysical is that to which the impulse is given by an overwhelming concern with metaphysical problems; with problems either deriving from, or closely resembling in the nature of their difficulty, the problem of the Many and the One.[55]

Mr Smith distinguishes two kinds of conceits, those in which the far-fetched elements "come together for a moment ...and then immediately fly apart," and those in which the elements remain fused. The true metaphysical conceit has the quality of a metaphysical problem:

> ...the elements of the conceit...must be such that they can enter into a solid union and, at the same time, preserve their separate and warring identity.

Thus the metaphysical conceit itself preserves the paradoxical quality of the problem of the Many and the One. Mr Smith considers that the poems of Herbert, Marvell, and Donne best satisfy his definition.[56]

[55] James Smith, "On Metaphysical Poetry," Scrutiny, II (1933), 226-228.

[56] Ibid., pp. 231-239.

Metaphysical poetry, then, is characterized by wit and by the use of the logically developed and structurally integrated conceit, or far-fetched comparison, which involves elements suggested by wide learning and by concern with metaphysical problems; it is the product of an age of intellectual disruption and disillusionment, resulting in a witty ambiguity of attitude, and a passionately intellectual approach to problems of deep personal concern; and it produces in its reader a fusion of emotional and intellectual satisfaction.

The fact that moderns have defined metaphysical poetry in terms of the excellences of John Donne may in part account for our failure to appreciate the poetry of Abraham Cowley, who represented the transitional mid-seventeenth century just as truly as Donne represented his era. The explanation of modern indifference to Cowley may lie partly in the fact that we find less in common with his period than we do with Donne's, partly in the differences between the personalities of the two men, and eventually in the differences in the quality of their poetry. Though Cowley has been called a metaphysical and though he imitated Donne, or tried to, he does not satisfy modern ideas of the metaphysical poet. A few quotations may suggest the present status of the two poets' reputations, and partly define their relationship to metaphysical poetry as viewed by the modern mind. Geoffrey Walton cites an interesting compari-

son:

> [Cowley] wrote poetry that was thought to be 'the thing,' in the manner of Dr Donne; but it was not disturbing or difficult to read. He did what the leading poets of the nineteen-thirties did. They provided simplified versions of the technique and some of the themes of Hopkins and Eliot, which those who were more interested in 'modern poetry' than in poetry preferred to the originals. Cowley is a far greater figure -- he lived, for one thing, in a greater century -- but the comparison is not perhaps entirely unfair.[57]

Ernest Rhys, writing in 1913, made an estimate of Cowley which seems still to represent the attitude of our time:

> ...Aptness of phrase and colloquial grace ...were beginning to take the place of the sheer lyric note. If it would be too much to say that Cowley was the type of poet of talents and intelligence, as against the poet of genius, it is yet true that with all his fervor he was a more finely directed than a finely inspired verseman. And this is why time has so far forgotten him, who seemed once the one authentic contemporary voice.[58]

Cowley has come to be regarded, according to Baugh, as less truly a metaphysical poet than he was formerly considered; he comes nearer to being the first of the Augustans than the last of the metaphysicals:

> Though Cowley followed Donne in the style of *The Mistress*, he followed him at a

[57] Geoffrey Walton, *Metaphysical to Augustan* (London, 1955), p. 53.

[58] Ernest Rhys, *Lyric Poetry* (London, 1913), pp. 235-236.

> greater distance than was formerly supposed, and his claim to the term metaphysical is rather shallow...sometimes he will develop an intricate metaphor...but these things are not the fabric of Cowley's thinking, as they are of Donne's; they are occasional ornaments, consciously selected and quite clearly worked out... Cowley's best poetry has more kinship with Pope's than with Donne's.[59]

Miss White (or one of her associates) makes a similar estimate of Cowley as a metaphysical poet and analyzes some of the reasons why his poetry fails to satisfy us:

> His range of subject matter, of types of poetry, and of manner is wide and constantly changing. And this constant responsiveness to the broad interests of his time, without ever quite striking into a profound and compelling vein of his own, suggests that despite his amazing precosity and brilliant objective success, his was probably not a deep poetic genius...By the definition we should today give to metaphysical poetry, and for the values we today seek there, Cowley is hardly a metaphysical at all. The poetry of The Mistress is all on one plane. There is no complex interplay in these poems between the actual, objective fact and the inner life of the poet's passion, between the momentary experience and the cosmic order and eternal values...His most important poetry is his Pindarics and other odes...Though the images of these poems are bold, condensed, and abrupt in presentation, they are essentially simple analogies, quite distinct from the far-reaching and often paradoxical images of metaphysical poetry. And though he uses medieval concepts in them, they are no longer essential parts of the fabric, but, as he himself tells us, ornaments, parts of the ceremonial tradition

59 Baugh, p. 667.

of poetry.[60]

In contrast to the modern attitude toward Cowley, at its best reserved and at its worst contemptuous, may be noted the long-standing enthusiasm and close sympathy which we feel toward Donne and his age. Although Miss White emphasizes Donne's great individuality as well as his representative qualities, moderns tend to regard him as one of the embodiments of the spirit of his time as well as of our own, and as one of the writers of "modern poetry," defined, in the words of Mr Read, as "all genuine poetry... of all time."

> All students of the English metaphysical poets would agree that Donne is the central figure in the group. Certainly not because Donne is typical, for it would be a very rash man indeed who would claim that Donne was typical of anybody but himself, but all students agree that he is the most metaphysical of the English metaphysicals in the sense of having perhaps more of the distinctively metaphysical qualities than any other poet of his time.[61]

> No matter what the theme of Donne's writing, the basic matter is the same, the infinitely subtle and endlessly ramified self-awareness of the man, John Donne...It is not only that Donne himself is such an engaging human being, compounded of so many oddly assorted interests and concerns. It is not only that any moderately candid reader will often recognize his own image in the varied portrait of the preacher's and the poet's irresolutions and gropings and distractions. It is that Donne's intellectual appetite was so

60 Helen C. White, et al, edd., Seventeenth Century Verse and Prose (New York, 1951), pp. 422-423.

61 White, The Metaphysical Poets, pp. 72-73.

> omnivorous, his capacity for assimilation of experience so catholic that this most individual of men is still perhaps the most representative of his time. That success so immediately dazzling as his should prove brittle is not surprising. What is astonishing is that when Donne had been almost forgotten in the changing intellectual and literary fashions of two centuries, he should have been rediscovered by a later age, and his work resurrected as its most intimately satisfying self-expression.[62]

Theodore Spencer also sees Donne as representative of his age, and describes that age in terms that might well apply to our own:

> Donne had expressed his age more accurately than anyone else, he had felt its cynicism, its disillusionment, all the unhappiness of its precocious subjectivity, and like it had withdrawn for reliance and authority into an attitude which considered humanity only in relation to something imcomprehensibly larger than itself.[63]

These, then, are some of the accepted attitudes of our day as to what poetry is and what makes it good or bad, as to our peculiar response to the qualities that we recognize in metaphysical poetry, and as to the relationships of Donne and Cowley to the poetry and criticism of our time. A further tracing of the two poet's reputations, both past and present, and a study of their poetry, may serve to substantiate or to question in part the justice of these critical estimates.

[62] White, _et al_, _Seventeenth Century Verse and Prose_, p. 72.

[63] Theodore Spencer, "Donne and His Age," in _A Garland for John Donne_, p. 201.

THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND AND CRITICISM OF DONNE AND COWLEY

The early seventeenth century was a period of confusion and crosspurposes; of reaction from the high enthusiasm of the Elizabethan era, though there remained the memory if not the reality of its spirit and its hopes; of growing philosophical skepticism resulting from new interpretations of the nature of the universe, paralleled paradoxically by a fanatical devotion to Christianity as a revealed religion; of highly intellectual and individual interpretation of religion under the influence of Puritanism, which was productive of a growing religious and political tension leading eventually to the Civil War; of rapidly expanding fortunes and increasing economic opportunity; of intensive education of the few, leading to an intellectual aristocracy; of broad rather than specialized learning; of continued interest in the classics, accompanied by the effort to interpret their spirit into the English scene and by something of a reaction against the overuse of classical allusions in poetry; of reaction against the clichés and oversweetness of the Petrarchan tradition in love poetry, which reaction frequently led to cynicism; of growing faith in scientific experiment and observation and in scientific

and philosophical rationalism.

The middle period of the century was dominated by the struggle of the Civil War and the ascendancy of the Puritans under the Commonwealth; the Court and many of its followers were exiled in France and there absorbed much of the spirit of French classicism and rationalism, while the people of England grew weary of the restrictions of Puritanism at home; the tendencies toward rationalism in philosophy and classicism in literature increased; interest turned from metaphysics to physics; there was a demand for simplification of prose writing in order to make it a better vehicle for scientific explanation; the heroic couplet took over as the major poetic form; in short it was a period of transition between the speculative, devout, individualistic, aristocratic post-Renaissance period and the period of the Restoration after 1660.

The return of the Stuarts to the British throne was a signal for great rejoicing and for a general relaxation from the strictness imposed by Puritan domination, though the Puritans kept many devout followers especially among the lower and middle classes; in contrast a spirit of licentiousness was obvious in Court circles and was reflected in the literature, particularly the drama of the Restoration era. Scientific and philosophic rationalism increased its hold on the thinking of many people; the emphasis was on judgment, common sense, tolerance and control of

emotion; religious freedom was established by law; business opportunities, material well-being, and education increased among the middle classes; toward the end of the century came a demand for reform, especially in the literature of the stage; satire and journalistic essays attempted to set up standards of manners and of taste; the dominant patterns of thought, with their appeal to "reason, truth and nature," began a reign which was to continue during much of the next century; social consciousness began to replace the individualism.[1] A quotation from an anonymous "Dialogue on Taste" (1762) reveals the change in literary taste as well as the complacent rationalism and smug materialism of this era, and shows that the attitude persisted:

> [1688]...Metaphysics, now no longer necessary in support of opinions now no longer useful in the acquisition of power and riches, sunk by degrees into contempt; and Nature having at last shewn her true and beautiful face, poetry, from acting the part of a magic lanthorn teeming with monsters and chimeras, resumed her genuine province, like the camera obscura, of reflecting the things that are.[2]

[1] Francis Gallaway, Reason, Rule, and Revolt in English Classicism (New York, 1940).
Herbert J. C. Grierson, Cross Currents (New York, 1929), pp. 325-340.
Richard Foster Jones, et al, The Seventeenth Century (Stanford, 1951).
Helen C. White, The Metaphysical Poets (New York, 1936), pp. 28-69.
Helen C. White, et al, edd., Seventeenth-Century Verse and Prose (New York, 1951), pp. 1-29.

[2] Arthur N. Nethercot, "The Term 'Metaphysical Poets' Before Johnson," MLN, XXXVII (1922), 16.

The terms wit, imagination, fancy, and judgment are closely associated with the study of the creative mind and with literary criticism. The variations in their definitions and in the relative emphases placed upon them provide a helpful key to understanding the sensibilities of the different literary periods with which we are concerned. Bacon recognized the imagination as the creative force in poetry and said that the purpose of poetry was

> ...to give some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of Man in those points wherein the Nature of things doth deny it.

Imagination, powerful as it was in producing the literature of the Elizabethan era, had also been associated with "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet" and tended to be under suspicion.[3] Hobbes, later in the century, still allowed it to be necessary to poets, but assumed that the type of imagination which could believe in witchcraft or fairies was the province of children, lunatics or the uneducated.

> Without steadiness, and direction to some end, a great fancy is one kind of madness.[4]

Wit is now recognized as an outstanding quality of metaphysical verse, and yet the term is hard to define. Ben Jonson used it as synonymous with "ingenuity"; it

[3] J. E. Spingarn, Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century (Oxford, 1908), I, xxviii-xxx.

[4] James Sutherland, A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry (Oxford, 1948), p. 3.

included the power of seeing resemblances which later became defined as fancy. Carew, writing in the 1630's, used 'Giant Phansie' in referring to Donne's wit. Modern critics have attempted to analyze the quality as it appears in metaphysical poetry; Eliot, for instance, describes the quality as he recognized it in Marvell's poetry:

> It is confused with erudition because it belongs to an educated mind, rich in generations of experience; and it is confused with cyncism because it implies a constant inspection and criticism of experience. It involves, probably, a recognition, implicit in every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible.[5]

Grierson emphasizes the power of seeing likenesses in his description of Donne's wit:

> Donne's wit followed no fashion: it was the natural working of a mind abnormally quick to apprehend likenesses in things divergent: from his multifarious learning analogies came into his head thick and fast, and were flung upon paper... wit and passion fuse in some electrifying phrase.[6]

Davenant, in his "Preface to Gondibert," associated wit with nearly every power of the creative mind, almost including divine inspiration. Hobbes in his reply to the same Preface produced a famous set of definitions, which

[5] Geoffrey Walton, Metaphysical to Augustan (London, 1955), p. 13.

[6] Herbert J. C. Grierson and J. C. Smith, A Critical History of English Poetry, 2nd rev. ed. (London, 1950), pp. 88-89.

were to exert considerable influence:

> Time and education beget experience; experience begets memory; memory begets judgment and fancy; judgment begets the strength and structure, and fancy begets the ornaments of a poem...Wit...denotes quickness of mind in seeing resemblances between disparate objects; judgment, or reason, finds differences in objects apparently similar.[7]

Hobbes here makes wit synonymous with fancy; in The Leviathan he further described wit as a "celerity of imagining... an agility of spirits."[8]

Cowley's poem "Of Wit" was probably written about the same time as Hobbes' and Davenant's essays, since Cowley was associated with them in Paris. His statement,

> In a true piece of Wit all things must be,
> Yet all things there agree,

comes close to Coleridge's definition of the creative imagination. In much of the poem, however, Cowley was defining wit by negatives in such a way as to make wit appear more like taste and judgment than like creation, and he warned against the overuse of wit; thus in fluctuating between regarding wit as a creative and as a controlling power, Cowley was showing his typical ambivalence between the more imaginative post-Renaissance era and the more

[7] Spingarn, I, xxviii-xxix.

[8] Jones, p. 239.

rational period of the Restoration.[9] A modern critic has made the further interesting observation that Cowley paralleled in almost every respect Longinus' treatise "On the Sublime," which was available in Latin at the time of Cowley's residence in Oxford. He apparently saw some relationship between wit in poetry and eloquence in speech, which was Longinus' subject; passion was the one item in Longinus which Cowley ignored. If this assumption is true, then the poem which has been called a brilliant piece of analysis was just another imitation.[10]

In his Preface to "Annus Mirabilis" written in 1667, Dryden said:

> The composition of all poems is, or ought to be of wit...Wit in the poet, or Wit Writing...is no other than the faculty of imagination...which like a nimble spaniel beats over and ranges the field of memory till it springs the quarry it desires to represent. Wit Written is that which is well defined, the happy result of thought or product of his imagination.[11]

Here Dryden conceived of wit much as Hobbes had somewhat earlier; but by 1677, in his "Apology for Heroic Poetry," Dryden had settled on a definition which he considered most satisfactory: "A propriety of thoughts and words."[12]

[9] Walton, pp. 19-20.

[10] Scott Elledge, "Cowley's Ode 'Of Wit' and Longinus 'On the Sublime,'" MLQ, IX (1948), 185-198.

[11] Jones, p. 226.
Walton, p. 16.

[12] Spingarn, I, xxxi.

Even as early as 1666, in his "Essay on Dramatic Poesy," Dryden had shown his inclination to introduce control over wit; he objected to Cleveland's overuse of strained metaphors and remarked, wittily:

> ...wit is best conveyed to us in the most easy language...as the best meat is the most easily digested.

Elsewhere in the same essay he equated wit with taste: "A thing well said will be wit in all languages." Thus, in the course of Dryden's thinking, the element of imagination gave way to judgment and taste. A similar definition was given by Dennis:

> A just mixture of reason and extravagance ...such a mixture as reason may be always sure to predominate.[13]

Nethercot summarizes the trends in the definition of wit and associates the changes with the declining popularity of metaphysical poetry:

> So long as the terms 'wit' and 'conceit' connoted primarily 'intellect' and 'imagination' respectively the metaphysicals were admired, for they possessed both these qualities. When the terms began to mean the power of perceiving similarities in differences (as Hobbes and Locke defined wit), and 'fancy' or 'ingenuity' (as conceit came to denote) the same poets were still almost universally praised, because they possessed these qualities in a superlative degree. But when, toward the end of the century, the emphasis began to shift from 'wit' to 'judgment' and 'reason' and the device of the

13 *Ibid.*, p. xxx.

> technical 'conceit' had become outworn in poetry, to be superseded by the 'turn,' the metaphysicals began to suffer likewise.[14]

A further interesting distinction, and one which involved Cowley's influence, has been made by Geoffrey Walton:

> Metaphysical and early seventeenth-century wit in a wider sense might be defined as a spiritual and intellectual poise, Restoration wit as a social poise...In Cowley one finds wit of both kinds clearly visible... The social denotation of wit...is very apparent when Dryden equates dramatic wit with the conversation of gentlemen; 'the coolness and discretion which is necessary to a poet' amounts to a kind of tact.[15]

Such, then, were some of the distinctions and shifts in definitions which reveal the changing sensibility of the writers of the seventeenth century. Further discussions, arguments and additions were to be indulged in by the writers of the eighteenth century, and will be discussed later.

The fate of Donne in a century of such changing ideas is already becoming apparent. Until about 1650 his poetry exerted marked influence over other poets, but as the neo-classical tenets calling for smoothness of verse, simplicity of language, and restraint of fancy gathered strength, readers and critics tended to become blind to the power of his poetry and to concentrate abuse on his idiosyncrasies

[14] Arthur N. Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Seventeenth Century," JEGP, XXIII (1924), 174-178.

[15] Walton, pp. 14-18.

of style, though he was still cited as a "great wit." Strangely, the lyrics, which appeal most strongly in our day, were among the first of his works to be forgotten; the Restoration retained memories of the preacher of St. Paul's and the Augustans imitated and criticized his satires; but it was not until after the middle of the eighteenth century, when the romantic spirit began to flicker into being, that readers would begin, and then rather hesitantly, to recognize the breadth of his genius. His name has been inevitably involved in my previous discussions of wit and of metaphysical poetry, as to the modern mind he represents the culmination of that style, but it may be of interest to take a closer look at the comments of his contemporaries and of other critics between his day and ours.

During the late Victorian era and especially since about 1920, a very considerable Donne research has fairly well established and made familiar the major details of Donne's life: his Roman Catholic family background and the Jesuit influence in his early education; his years at Oxford and Cambridge and later as a scholar of great breadth in the Inns of Court; his travel in Europe and familiarity with the literatures of France, Italy, and Spain; his service in Essex's expeditions to the Azores; his gay life in London as revealed by his early love lyrics; his acceptance of the Church of England; his marriage to Anne More and the resultant loss of his career in Court circles; his years of

poverty, illness, and anxiety as a virtual pensioner with a rapidly growing family; his friendships with the nobility and his willingness to write for patronage, especially that of the Countess of Bedford, Lady Herbert, and the Drury family; his eventual decision to take orders in the Church of England, as his only possibility of preferment; his later years as Dean of St. Paul's and his great reputation as a preacher; his long inward struggle for religious peace; and his posing in his own shroud for the statue which stands over his grave in St. Paul's. Critics today agree as to the breadth of his learning, the power of his wit, and the fascination of his personality; many have noted the power of his poetry to unify passion and thought -- one of the hallmarks of metaphysical poetry; and most of the critics of today, with all their praise, are still aware of his limitations.

The exact chronology of Donne's poetry is a matter for speculation, as the poems were generally not dated; obviously, certain types belong to different eras in his life. His _Satires_ and _Epigrams_ and the more cynical of his love lyrics were probably among his earlier work, written mostly in the 1590's; certainly some of the more profoundly realized love poems were expressions of his devotion to his wife during the years of his marriage, 1601-1617; his _Elegies, Epicedes_ and _Obsequies_, and his _Letters to Several Personages_ would seem largely to belong to the period between

his marriage and his taking of orders; some of the latter poems resulted from his necessity to write for patronage; the more formal and more Petrarchan of his love lyrics addressed in courtesy to his patronesses belong largely to his period of dependence; his Anniversaries, written in commemoration of the death of Elizabeth Drury, appeared in 1611 and 1612 and were among the few poems published during his life; a few of his Epithalamions can be dated by the marriages which they celebrated; his poem, "The Progress of the Soul," was dated by Donne himself in 1601, according to Grierson's notes: the years of doubt and hesitation as to whether he should take orders probably produced the bulk of his religious verse, though he wrote some poems of this type throughout his years as a preacher. For most readers today his Songs and Sonnets and his Divine Poems arouse highest interest and show most clearly his qualities as a metaphysical poet.

One of Donne's greatest contributions to the poetry of his own day, and of ours, was his deliberate reform of poetic language -- his rejection of the overworked classical allusion and the out-worn Petrarchan cliché, his adoption of precise vocabulary in his scientific allusions, and his use of the tones and rhythms of speech. As Eliot remarks:

> Donne ought always to be recognized as one of the few great reformers and pre-

servers of the English tongue.[16]

The "roughness" of the _Satires_ was a deliberate effort to make the effect of the sound contribute to the criticism in the satire and so to enhance the very ugliness to which Donne was calling attention. In the lyrics, Donne was experimenting in the creation of a more subtle music, by employing variations, especially spondaic substitutions, to lend weight to his intense feelings. Dramatic use of speech rhythms also contributed to the difficulty in scanning his lines mechanically. He probably also was trying to combine the accentual rhythm of the English verse with the quantitative rhythm of classical prosody, as is shown in the creation of heavy syllables by the piling up of consonants as well as by the use of long vowel sounds and word accents.[17] Donne's prosody has been the subject of a great deal of study and analysis by modern critics, who recognize his masterly skill and originality. F. R. Leavis has remarked:

> To those who see /the nineteenth-century poetic tradition/ to be dead...Donne is a major poet. To those...Donne is one of the greatest masters of technique who ever

[16] T. S. Eliot, "Donne in Our Time," in _A Garland for John Donne_, ed. Theodore Spencer (Cambridge, /Mass./, 1931), p. 19.

[17] C. S. Lewis, _English Literature in the Sixteenth Century_ (Oxford, 1954), pp. 369-370; 549-551.

lived.[18]

That Donne's immediate contemporaries appreciated some of the same qualities admired by students of today is made clear in Thomas Carew's "Elegy upon the Death of the Deanne of Pauls', Dr John Donne":

> Have we no voice, no tune? Did'st thou dispense
> Through all our language, both the words and sense?
> ....But the flame
> Of thy brave soul, that shot such heat and light
> As burnt our earth, and made our darkness bright,
> Committed holy rapes against our Will...
> As sense might judge what fancy could not reach.
> ...The Muses' garden with pedantic weeds
> O'erspread was purged by thee; the lazy seeds
> Of servile imitation thrown away;
> And fresh invention planted...and opened us a mine
> Of rich and pregnant fancy, drawn a line
> Of masculine expression...
> Since the awe of thy imperious wit
> Our stubborn language bends, made only fit
> With her tough-thick-ribbed hoops to gird about
> Thy giant fancy, which had proved too stout
> For their soft melting phrases...Yet from those bare
> lands
> Of what is purely thine, thy only hands
> ...have gleaned more
> Than all those times and tongues could reap before.
> Here lies a King, that ruled as he thought fit
> The universal monarchy of Wit.[19]

Though many of the elegies mourned the loss to poetry occasioned by Donne's death, Carew's showed the greatest critical insight; several elegies emphasized the sermons, while a few suggested that the license of his early life and poetry had been more than redeemed by his sacred poems

[18] F. R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (London, 1932), p. 199.

[19] Herbert J. C. Grierson, The Poems of John Donne (Oxford, 1912), I, 378-380.

and his sermons.[20]

The printer's introduction to the first edition of Donne's poems expressed also the high respect in which Donne's poetry was held, even after one allows that what a printer says may be somewhat in the nature of a blurb:

> You shall consider that this is not ordinary...I should say it were the best in this kind, that ever this Kingdom hath yet seen...the best judgments take it for granted...A piece which whoso takes not as he finds it, in what manner soever, he is unworthy of it, sith a scattered limb of this author, hath more amiableness in it, in the eye of a discerner, then a whole body of some other. If any man be of another opinion, I shall as willingly spare his money as his judgment. I cannot lose so much by him as he will by himself.[21]

Another contemporary poet who appreciated the genius of Donne with real poetic insight was Ben Jonson, even though he disagreed with some of Donne's theories of writing. Several of his epigrams and his much-quoted comments made to William Drummond of Hawthornen reveal Jonson's deep admiration for Donne, tempered though it was with Jonson's neoclassical judgment:

To John Donne

Donne, the delight of Phoebus, and each Muse,
   Who, to thy one, all other brains refuse;
Whose every work, of thy most early wit,
   Came forth example, and remains so, yet:
Longer a knowing, then most wits to live.

[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 371-395.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

> And which no affection praise enough can give!
> To it, thy language, letters, arts, best life,
> Which might with half mankind maintain a strife.
> All which I meant to praise, and, yet, I would;
> But leave, because I cannot as I should!

In a poem addressed "To Lucy, Countess of Bedford, With Mr Donne's Satires" Jonson paid the gracious compliment, "Rare poems ask rare friends"; and in another poem, "To John Donne," he showed how much he respected Donne's impartial and expert criticism, and how much he desired Donne's approval for his own epigrams.[22] However, the remarks recorded by Drummond indicate something of the trend which criticism of Donne was to take in the future:

> That Done's Anniversary was profane and full of blasphemies...if it had been written to the Virgin Marie it had been something; to which he answered that he described the idea of a woman and not as she was...That Done, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging...He esteemeth John Done the first poet in the world in some things...Affirmeth Done to have written all his best pieces ere he was twenty-five years old...That Done himself, for not being understood, would perish.

Drummond, besides quoting Jonson, expressed his personal opinion of some of Donne's lesser forms of verse:

> Donne among the Anacreontic lyrics, is second to none and far from all second. /Comparing Sydney/They can hardly be compared together...the one flying swift but low, the other like the eagle...I think,

[22] White, et al, Seventeenth Century Verse and Prose pp. 126-128.

> if he would, he might easily be the best epigrammatist we have found in English.[23]

Michael Drayton, in his "Epistle to Reynolds" (1627), also in his "Polyalbion" and in other poems expressed adverse opinion that is thought to have been directed against Donne; it has been suggested that there was some jealousy on Drayton's part because of Donne's position as a favorite of Lady Bedford:

Epistle to Reynolds

For such whose poems, be they ne'er so rare,
In private chambers that incloistered are,
And by transcription daintily must go,
As though the world unworthy were to know
Their rich composures, let those men that keep
Their wonderous reliques in their judgment deep,
And cry them up so...
I pass not for them.

Polyalbion

Whose verses hobbling run, as with disjointed bones
And make a viler noise than carts upon the stones;
...Inforcing things in verse for poesie unfit,
Mere filthy stuff that breaks out of the sores of
wit.
What poet recks the praise upon such antics heap'd
Or envies that their lines in cabinets are kept?

Mr Jenkins also remarks that Donne apparently had little friendship for any of the poets of the older school except Ben Jonson; he never mentioned any other poet, and admitted that he had few friends.[24]

Edmund Bolton in his "Hypercritica" (1618?) reminds us

[23] Spingarn, I, 211-216.

[24] Raymond Jenkins, "Drayton's Relation to the School of Donne," PMLA, XXXVIII (1923), 557-587.

that there was also a strong neoclassical school of thought even early in the seventeenth century; he expressed his strong preference for the writings of Ben Jonson and commented:

> ...the English verses of Sir Walter Raleigh, of John Donne...are not easily to be mended.[25]

It will be noted that much of the criticism of Donne throughout the next two centuries was directed against his "verses," his form, rather than against his ideas; his wit, though sometimes condemned as excessive, was always recognized as powerful, and his learning was deeply respected. The reaction against his "ruggedness" and his use of the conceit was due in part to changing fashions in expression, but perhaps more to the abuses of Donne's unique qualities in the hands of lesser poets who tried to imitate him. Grierson comments on Donne's powerful influence in "smashing the Petrarchan convention" and "bringing love-poetry back to nature."

> But for poets who had none of his passion and imagination no model could have been worse, witness much of the poetry from Cleveland to Cowley.[26]

Barrett Wendell also notes the great originality and intensity of thought and feeling in Donne's poetry and ex-

[25] Spingarn I, 211.

[26] Grierson and Smith, p. 99.

plains that imitation of Donne

> was bound to fall into affectations of a mannerism which grew lifeless the moment the master who vitalized it fell asleep.[27]

This is not to say that there were not other good poets -- Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw in the religious field, and Carew, Marvell, Lovelace and others in the secular poetry -- who were original in their adaptations of the metaphysical qualities; but the tradition was not to last, and it was only to be strongly revived in our own time.

Nethercot's extensive study of the reputations of the metaphysicals gives further comments on Donne as he appeared to writers of the later seventeenth century. Isaac Walton's "Life of Donne" (1640) mentions his "sharp wit," "high fancy," and "choice metaphors," but Walton should be regarded more as a biographer than as a critic; he did make a detailed and sympathetic study of Donne's life. Walton also quoted Donne's poem written as a take-off on Marlowe's "Come Live with Me and Be My Love," which Walton enjoyed because "it was about fishing."

> Verses that were made by Dr Donne to show the world that he could make soft and smooth verses, when he thought smoothness worth the labor.

The comment shows that Walton already felt it necessary to act as an apologist for Donne's meter; they also show how

[27] Barrett Wendell, The Seventeenth Century in English Literature (London, 1904), p. 126.

little Walton understood Donne's theory of poetry, and how completely he missed Donne's intended satire on the Elizabethan style.[28] Other mid-century references to Donne include one made by Cotton, "the whole world's beloved Donne," and Pettil's

> Prince of wits, illustrious Donne,
> Who rapt earth round with love
> And was its sun.

Apparently Donne was still very popular in these mid-century years. There was not much critical comment on Donne until after the Restoration, and then the majority seemed to remember him more as a preacher than as a poet. Beginning in 1633, Donne's poetry went through seven complete editions, the last being in 1669; there were also two editions of his _Juvenilia_ and one of his _Satires_ (1662). This shows that Donne's poetry was read most widely during the generation after his death and that it began to be neglected during the Restoration. Fuller's _Worthies_ (1662) refers to Donne as "one of excellent wit," but not as a poet. Pepys mentioned him only as a preacher. Aubrey's _Brief Lives_ did mention the fact that he was both a poet and Dean of St. Paul's. Edward Phillips, in his _Theatrum Poetarum Anglicanorum_ (1675) said somewhat more, though nothing very original:

[28] Isaac Walton and Charles Cotton, _The Complete Angler_, ed. John Major (New York, 1844), p. 176.

> He composed his more brisk and youthful poems, which are rather commended for the height of fancy and acuteness of the conceit, than for the smoothness of the verse...and as of an eminent poet he became a much more eminent preacher, so he rather improved than relinquished his poetical fancy, only converting it from human and worldly to divine and heavenly subjects.

William Winstanley published two compilations, England's Worthies (1684) and The Lives of the Most Famous English Poets (1687); in the first he barely mentioned Donne's poetry, while in the second he referred to Donne as "This pleasant poet, painful preacher, and pious person," a reference in which Winstanley was obviously more concerned with his own prose style than with the depth of his criticism. Anthony á Wood and Langbaine referred several times to Donne in their works, but said little of any critical importance. William Walsh wrote an attack on several of the earlier love-poets, in which he expressed the prejudice of the day with regard to the use of conceits in love poetry:

> [Walsh] allowed Donne to have the most 'copious fancy' possible and the greatest 'reach of wit,'...but could not imagine him...'to have been a very great lover.'[29]

[29] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Seventeenth Century," pp. 174-178.
Leonard Nathanson, "The Context of Dryden's Criticism of Donne's and Cowley's Love Poetry," Notes and Queries, IV (Feb., 1957), 57.

Robert Wolseley's remark in his "Preface to Valentinian" (1685) shows how completely the idea of "smoothness" as a virtue in poetry had become established:

> Let him remember hereafter that verses have feet given 'em, either to walk graceful and smooth, and sometimes with majesty and state, like Virgil's, or to run light and easy, like Ovid's, not to stand stock-still, like Dr Donne's, or to hobble like indigested prose.[30]

The criticism of Dryden is, of course, most representative of the Restoration period, and it too shows the characteristic appreciation of Donne's wit and the usual criticsm of his metrics. He undoubtedly had studied Donne, and he himself made considerable use of the conceit in his own poetry, especially in his earlier work. Grierson has given us an interesting statement on the relationship between Donne's and Dryden's poetry:

> It was as a 'metaphysical' that Dryden began. He had evidently read Donne with care and appreciation; from no poet does he borrow with less acknowledgment. He appreciated the condensation and pregnancy of metaphysical poetry, and one might say that his achievement as a poet was...to retain the pregnancy while making the thought more natural, more commonplace, if the deeper, more imaginative, passionate strokes which give power and sincerity to Donne's conceits have disappeared. Cowley's more superficial, clever wit is Dryden's model in his first extant verses.[31]

The new edition of Dryden which is being published by the

[30] Spingarn, III, 27. [31] Grierson and Smith, p. 179.

University of California notes eight direct allusions to, or imitations of, Donne in the first volume, which contains only a part of Dryden's poetry; this suggests that Dryden owed more to Donne than he admitted.[32] In the "Essay of Dramatic Poesy" (1668) Dryden remarked, after criticizing Cleveland's overuse of the conceit:

> So that there is this difference betwixt his satires and Dr Donne's; that the one gives us deep thoughts in common language, though rough cadence; the other gives us common thoughts in abstruse words.

The "Preface to Eleanore" is also partially complimentary to Donne:

> Dr Donne, the greatest wit, though not the best poet of our nation, acknowledged he had never seen Mrs Drury, whom he has made immortal in his admirable "Anniversaries." I have had the same fortune, though I have not succeeded to the same genius. However I have followed his footsteps in this panygyric, which was to raise emulation in the living, to copy out the example of the dead.

Dryden's "Original and Progress of Satire" (1693) contains several references to Donne and shows the growing spirit of criticism as the neoclassical ways of thought became more firmly entrenched. Included here is the often-quoted passage which is credited with having given the name metaphysical to the type of poetry. In what seems to us a rather absurd panygyric Dryden addressed the Earl of Dorset:

[32] Edward Niles Hooker, _et al_, edd., _The Works of John Dryden_ (Berkeley, 1956), I, 179, notes, _et passim_.

> Donne alone, of all our countrymen, had your talent; but was not happy enough to arrive at your versification; and were he translated into numbers, and English, he would yet be wanting in the dignity of expression...You equal Donne in the variety, multiplicity, and choice of thoughts; you excel him in the manner and the words. I read you both with the same admiration, but not with the same delight. Would not Donne's _Satires_, which abound with so much wit, appear more charming, if he had taken care of his words and of his numbers? But he followed Horace so very close, that of necessity he must fall with him; and I may safely say it of this present age, that if we are not so great wits as Donne, yet certainly we are better poets.

Pope probably got the idea of translating Donne's _Satires_ into "numbers" from this remark of Dryden's.

A remark in the Preface to Waller's _Posthumous Poems_ (1690), credited by Gosse to Francis Atterbury, shows how completely neoclassical ideas of form had been accepted, and yet the author, rather ironically, made use of a metaphysical image. "Ten lines of Donne" was to echo in critical arguments during the eighteenth century:

> Their poetry was then made up almost entirely of monosyllables, which, when they come together in any cluster are certainly the most harsh untuneable things in the world. If any man doubts this, let him read ten lines of Donne, and he'll quickly be convinced. Besides their verses ran all into one another and hung together...like the hooked atoms that compose a body in Descartes.[33]

33 Edmund Gosse, _From Shakespeare to Pope_ (Cambridge, 1885), p. 250.

Thus the seventeenth century ends on a note of criticism of Donne's versification, which began when Jonson said he deserved hanging. Increasing reference to Donne's Satires shows that they were coming to the fore as being more in accord with the mood of the age than were his other writings. The same preference was to continue well into the eighteenth century, in so far as Donne was read at all. As Nethercot remarks,

> New ideas of 'nature,' wit and smoothness were making their way; Donne's style was out of fashion.[34]

Modern criticism has injected a strong element of doubt into Dr Johnson's dictum that Abraham Cowley was "the last of the metaphysical race and undoubtedly the best." To our day he represents the decline of the metaphysical tradition, "the last extravagance of metaphysical wit."[35] "Fantasticality had run to seed in Cowley."[36]

> The ingenious excesses of Cowley need detain us no longer when we have discerned in them examples of how conventions, when they are followed with servility, must prove lifeless."[37]

[34] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Seventeenth Century," p. 194.

[35] Grierson and Smith, p. 175.

[36] Galloway, p. 54.

[37] Wendell, p. 146.

While, to our modern perspective, Cowley represents the decline of the metaphysical tradition, he represents, also, the growing strength of the neoclassical movement which was to culminate in the Augustans. "Cowley was the Janus of his time."[38] His adaptability to the changes taking place in the attitudes and tastes of his age make him a significant transitional figure to the student of the history of thought, even though his work disappoints the critical reader who is seeking real poetic power. Geoffrey Walton has adaquately summarized his position:

> Cowley's versatility -- or perhaps adaptability would be a more suitable word in his case -- was indeed remarkable...He seems to have searched all his life for his appropriate mode of expression, with frequent partial but never complete success. His versatility was of a kind that springs from weakness of creative talent. It led him to produce work which so completely suited the taste of his contemporaries that they could not help taking it for better than it really was...In Cowley's poetry of every period of his life one can find much metaphysical verse showing representative symptoms of decay, and verse in newer modes still exhibiting signs of immaturity...the general tendency is decidedly toward poetic modes characteristic of the Restoration.[39]

Josephine Miles notes the transition quality in Cowley's use of language:

[38] George Saintsbury, A Short History of English Literature (New York, 1935), p. 508.

[39] Walton, pp. 45-46.

> Donne's deeper emotional roughness and Herrick's lighter lyrical point on the one hand and Dryden and Pope's more tensely controlled measure on the other, have a sort of middle level in Cowley's poised, woven, and balanced four and five-stress speeches to his love.[40]

Perhaps the comment most indicative of the modern attitude toward Cowley, and one which I have frequently heard during the course of this study, is simply, "Who's he?"

Cowley was born in 1618 of a middle-class family. Like most aspiring poets, the precocious Cowley began by imitating; he produced a narrative poem, "Pyramus and Thisbe," in imitation of Spenser, when he was only ten years old. His first volume, Poetical Blossoms, appeared in 1633, when Cowley was a fifteen-year-old student, a King's scholar, in the Westminster School. Later, while in Trinity College, Cambridge, he was attracted to the poetry of Donne and began writing in the metaphysical manner, imitating the conceits but lacking the emotional fervor of his model. Early in his career Cowley gave further proof of his genius for imitation, and of his analytic powers, as he wrote satisfactory exercises simply by a process of imitating classical authors while he consistently refused to learn the rules of grammar. His work in drama, where he showed the obvious influence of Jonson, was largely a product of his school years. When possibly as young as sixteen he wrote a comedy,

40 Josephine Miles, The Continuity of Poetic Language (Berkeley, 1951), p. 49.

Love's Riddle, followed during his university years by a Latin play, Naufragium Joculare, and by The Guardian, a play quickly organized as entertainment in honor of a visit from King Charles I. Later, during the Restoration, the latter play was revised and produced as Cutter of Coleman Street. While still in the university, he also planned a religious epic, following the model of Virgil but using a Biblical subject; he actually composed four books of this epic, The Davideis, and a Latin version of one book; here he employed the heroic couplet then coming into fashion under the influence of Waller and Denham, and he is conceded by modern critics to have contributed significantly to the development of the closed couplet, which would be the dominant poetic form of the neoclassical period. E. M. Tillyard calls The Davideis "the first decidedly neoclassical poem," and considers it better than is usually allowed.[41] Cowley eventually decided against finishing the poem and published the fragment in 1656, thus antedating Paradise Lost by some ten years and gaining for himself the distinction of being the author of the first religious epic (if we except Piers Plowman)in English literature.

With the advent of the Civil War, Cowley followed the fortunes of the Royalists, first spending about two years

[41] E. M. W. Tillyard, "The English Epic Tradition," Proceedings of the British Academy, XXII (London, 1936), 19.

at Oxford, the Royalist headquarters, and then going to Paris in the retinue of Queen Henrietta Maria; his special task was the decoding of secret messages, a task which required many hours of his time, though he still found the opportunity to write. He told later of having destroyed, with the turn of the tide in the Royalist fortunes, three books of a poem about the Civil War, along with a number of shorter poems on the subject. As an adjunct to the Court, he naturally considered it the proper thing to write love lyrics; The Mistress, a volume containing over a hundred poems, was the product of this effort. It is this phase of his work that has probably drawn most of the critical comment that Cowley's poetry is metaphysical "in form if not altogether in feeling," and that it displays "wit without passion."[42] As Cowley himself remarked in the "Preface" to his 1656 edition of his works:

> So it is that poets are scarce thought free-men of their company, without paying some duties and obligating themselves to be true to love...it is not the picture of the poet, but of things and persons imagined by him. Neither would I here be misunderstood,...as to be ashamed to be thought really in love. On the contrary, I cannot have a good opinion of any man who is at least not capable of being so.[43]

Cowley never married, but is said to have been in love once

[42] George Williamson, The Donne Tradition (Cambridge, [Mass.], 1930), pp. 182-190.

[43] Spingarn, II, 85.

with a lady who finally married someone else because Cowley was too shy to declare himself; in his later years he quite pointedly avoided women.

While in Jersey as an emissary for the ex-Queen, Cowley found himself with little to depend on as a model except a volume of Pindar's Odes; thereupon he developed his own form of the Pindaric Ode, poems which come closer to our modern free verse than does any other earlier form, being characterized by varying line length, scattered rhyme and startling figures of speech. (Spratt, who later wrote Cowley's biography, mentioned the lack of any other model than Pindar; one wonders if he thereby unconsciously admitted that his idolized Cowley could not write without a model.) Cowley's adaptation of the Pindaric, which was to be the form of many of his more important occasional pieces written during his later years, started a flood of bad, and also good, imitations. This form became almost the only one to compete with the heroic couplet for nearly a hundred years, until Dr Johnson finally stopped the flow with his remark about "all the boys and girls" who could write like Pindar if they could not do anything else. Cowley explained the form in his "Preface":

> The numbers are various and irregular, and sometimes...seem harsh and uncouth, if the just measures and cadencies be not observed in the pronunciation. So that almost all their sweetness and numerosity...lies in a manner wholly at

the mercy of the reader.[44]

When Cowley was allowed to return to England in 1654, he took up the study of medicine at Oxford, apparently as a means of diverting suspicion from his Royalist undercover work. He eventually was arrested and imprisoned for some time as a spy, being released only upon the payment of heavy bail. He then spent some two years in retirement in Kent, where he studied medicinal plants; he had received an M. D. from Oxford but never entered actual practice. In these activities he evinced his growing interest in science, one of the trends characteristic of his time. His ode on Brutus, a regicide, and his discussion of the "state of Israel" in his revised Davideis, along with a few other pieces, were taken by the Royalists as evidence that he was trying to ingratiate himself with the Commonwealth. He may have been only trying to divert suspicion, but at any rate these writings cost him the favor of the King after the Restoration. His satirizing of the less admirable type of courtier in his play, Cutter of Coleman Street (1661), caused the Court to take further offense.

In 1656 Cowley published his collected poems with the "Preface," which stands as a model of self-criticism. He immediately acquired a very high reputation, one that we find it difficult to understand in view of his present

[44] Ibid., p. 86.

neglect. He was probably surprized himself, as he had declared in his "Preface" that, recognizing the fact that he had not fulfilled the promise of his youth, he was not going to write any more poetry. His statement of reasons for this decision contributed a rather important concept to the psychology of art, though admittedly it was suggested by Ovid's Tristitia:

> A warlike, various, and tragical age is best to write of, but worst to write in ...Neither is the present constitution of my mind more proper then that of the times for this exercise, or rather divertisement. The soul must be filled with bright and delightful ideas, when it undertakes to communicate delight to others, which is the main end of poesie ...The truth is, for a man to write well it is necessary to be in good humor.[45]

Cowley did write a number of prose monographs and essays following this decision; but the Restoration evidently improved his spirits to such an extent that he withdrew the resolution and produced several of his major Odes during his later years, celebrating, among other things, the work of the newly-formed Royal Society and the philosophy of Bacon and Hobbes, the latter of whom had been a personal friend during the years of exile in France. To demonstrate his belief that poetry could be of service to science, he wrote six books of Latin poems on plants, flowers, and trees, in imitation of the styles of various Latin poets.

[45] Ibid., pp. 79-83.

Though disappointed at not receiving more favors from the King, he did get land grants from Queen Henrietta Maria which allowed him to live in partial retirement at Chertsey, and struggle with the problems of a gentleman farmer. His essays in prose and verse, some of the verse being translations from Horace, another gentleman farmer, belong to this period. His praise of country life illustrates another of his tendencies in the direction of the Augustan ideal; (Dryden remarks in his essay "Translation of Virgil" that Cowley was actually writing in imitation of Virgil.) In his essays Cowley adopted the simple, unadorned style which the Royal Society was then recommending as suitable for its discourses. He was also interested in a group which hoped to set up a branch of the Royal Society empowered, as is the French Academy, to exert control over questions of language. The project was dropped at Cowley's death in 1667. He was buried near the graves of Chaucer and Spenser in Westminster Abbey, and the King remarked that he had not left a better man behind him.[46]

Cowley's career, which covered exactly the middle third of the century, exemplified many of the changes in attitude and taste which were then occurring. His very capacity for imitation had the virtue of making him responsive to the cultural atmosphere, so that he made significant con-

[46] Arthur N. Nethercot, _Abraham Cowley: the Muses Hannibal_ (London, 1931), p. 10, _et passim_.

tributions to current trends. He is credited with the first religious epic and the first truly personal essays in English, with the Pindaric Ode in his special form, and with definite contributions to critical theory, especially in the matter of translation. In his 1656 "Preface" he urged other poets to consider the possibilities as subjects for verse of Bible stories in place of the overworked classics, advice which the Augustans largely ignored. In discussing the writing of religious poetry he clearly foreshadowed a number of the artistic ideals of the Neoclassical period:

> When I consider...how many bright and magnificent subjects...the Holy Scriptures affords and proffers...to poesie, in the wise managing and illustrating whereof the glory of God Almighty might be joined with the singular utility and noblest delight of mankind: it is not without grief and indignation that I behold that divine science [poetry] employing all her inexhaustible riches of wit and eloquence, either in the wicked and beggarly flattery of foolish women, or the wretched affectation of scurril laughter, or at best on the antiquated dreams of senseless fables and metamorphoses. Amongst all the holy and consecrated things which the Devil ever stole and alienated from the service of the Deity, as altars, temples, sacrifices, prayers, and the like, there is none that he so universally and long usurpt as poetry. [Very Puritanical note is obvious here]. It is time to recover it out of the Tyrant's power and to restore it to the Kingdom of God, who is the Father of it;...neither will it want room by being confined to Heaven...For it is almost impossible to serve up any new dish of that kind [i.e. classical 'feasts of love and fables']. They are all but the cold-

> meats of the antients, new-heated and new set forth...All the books of the Bible are either already the most admirable and exalted pieces of poesie, or are the best materials in the world for it...In brief, he who can write a profane poem well may write a divine one better; but he who can do that but ill will do this much worse. The same fertility of invention, the same wisdom of disposition, the same judgment in observance of decencies, the same lustre and vigor of elocution, the same modesty and majesty of number, briefly the same kind of habit is required to both.[47]

One other famous dictum of the Augustans which Cowley is credited with having naturalized in England is that "The sound should be an echo of the sense." As Cowley expressed the idea in his notes to the *Davideis*,

> The disposition of words and numbers should be such as out of the order and sound of them the things themselves may be represented.[48]

Cowley's career illustrates the growing emphasis on intellectual over emotional qualities, the trend away from the metaphysical toward the Neoclassical era, the substitution of good sense for youthful enthusiasm, the growing interest in science, the feeling for the importance of simplicity in language, and something of the spirit of world-weariness and melancholy which was to underlie much of the culture of the coming century. The secret of both his contemporary success and his eventual failure lay in the

47 Spingarn, II, 88-90.

48 *Ibid*., p. 357.

fact that he was the true chameleon, never quite sure himself of the way he really wanted to write. Yet he fitted so exactly into the changing spirit of his age that he was immensely popular in his own day and for the generation to follow.

> The special reason for his fall was that he never could make up his mind whether to stand with the old age or the new, with the couplet or with the wilder verse, with mystical fantasy or clear common sense.[49]

> The people of the seventeenth century were weary of liberty, weary of the unmitigated rage of the dramatists, cloyed with the roses and the spices and the kisses of the lyrists, tired of being carried over the universe and up and down the avenues of history at the freak of every irresponsible rhymester.[50]

> Cowley gave the reading public a new experience...the severity of Cowley's writings, their intellectual quality, their cold elevation and dry intelligence, were as charming as they were novel. But the charm was not to last... A far greater man, Dryden, with assimilative genius of the most marvelous kind, was to tarnish the glory of Cowley by sheer superiority of imitation.[51]

Dryden, as the leading critic and author of the Restoration period, may well be regarded as an index to the changing ideas of the time; the eulogistic quality of his

[49] Saintsbury, p. 405.

[50] Edmund Gosse, From Shakespeare to Pope, p. 13.

[51] Edmund Gosse, Seventeenth Century Studies (New York, 1897), pp. 226-227.

remarks about Cowley which were made in the 1660's had changed by 1700 to a note of qualified criticism, yet the very frequency with which Dryden refers to him may indicate how fully Cowley occupied the public mind during most of the remainder of the century.[52] Editions of Cowley's works are further proof of his popularity. Beginning with the first posthumous edition, brought out by Spratt in 1668, a total of nine editions had appeared by 1700, as well as numerous partial editions of his works; such activity indicated a considerable demand, though Dryden remarked a falling-off of sales by 1700.[53]

Perhaps the relationship between Dryden's criticism and Cowley's reputation can be best approached by citing a number of important parallels in their interests and attitudes. Some of these parallels were their shift away from metaphysical imagery; their recognition of the distinction between magniloquence and wit; their growing emphasis on the power of judgment over emotion; their development and use of the Pindaric Ode; their common interest in classical translation; and their common contributions to the development of modern prose style.

As the years passed, Dryden became increasingly critical of Cowley's use of the conceit, or developed meta-

[52] Nethercot, "Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Seventeenth Century," p. 191.

[53] Arthur N. Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," PMLA, XXXVIII (1923), 603.

physical image, though he employed them so some extent in his own writing. In his first published poem, "On the Death of Lord Hastings," Dryden had been guilty of a more fantastic conceit with reference to smallpox than anything Cowley had written in his poem on the death of the "matchless Orinda." To quote Dryden:

> Blisters with pride swelled, which thro's flesh did
> sprout,
> Like rosebuds, stuck i' the lily skin about.
> Each little pimple had a tear in it,
> To wail the fault its rising did commit.

Cowley's poem "On the Death of Mrs. Katherine Phillips," thus apostrophizes the smallpox:

> Cruel Disease! Ah, could it not suffice
> Thy old and constant spite to exercise
> Against the gentlest and the fairest sex,
> Which still thy depredations most do vex?
> Where still thy malice most of all
> (Thy malice or thy lust) does on the fairest fall?
> And in them most assault the fairest place,
> The throne of empress beauty, even the face?
> ...Was't not enough, when thou, profane disease,
> Dids't on this glorious temple seize.
> Was't not enough, like a wild zealot there,
> All the rich outward ornaments to tear,
> ...And thy unbounded sacrilege commit
> On the inward holiest holy of her wit?

Cowley's poem, written three years before he died, shows that he never entirely gave up the use of metaphysical imagery, but at least it shows more dignity and judgment than Dryden's youthful effort. Dryden lived later and longer than Cowley and carried further the change of style, but remembering Dryden's early poem, one may be inclined to take with a grain of salt his criticism of Cowley's conceits.

In "An Essay on Dramatic Poesy" (1668) Dryden said that the Ancients and Elizabethans could show

> ...in the epic or lyric way...nothing so elevated, so copious, and full of spirit as Mr Cowley.

However, he criticized Cleveland's use of conceits in this essay; and he also recommended the use of rhyme in drama to "circumscribe a quick and luxuriant fancy." By 1692, when he wrote "The Original and Progress of Satire," Dryden had become more critical of Cowley. Having been advised to look for examples of the "turn,"

> I looked over the darling of my youth, the famous Cowley; there I found, instead of them, the points of wit, and quirks of epigram, even in the *Davideis*, an heroic poem, which is of an opposite nature to those puerilities.

In the same essay he made the famous remark about Donne's "affecting the metaphysics" and added:

> In this...Mr Cowley has copied him to a fault; so great a one...that it throws his *Mistress* infinitely below his *Pindarics*, which are undoubtedly the best of his poems, and the most correct.

In the "Preface to the Fables," written in 1700, the last year of his life, Dryden stated his most emphatic objection to conceits in general and especially to Cowley's. Though the following statement has sometimes been called Cowley's death-knell, it appears from eighteenth century criticism that he continued to be read:

> The vulgar judges, which are nine parts in ten of all nations, who call conceits

> and jingles wit, who see Ovid full of them, and Chaucer altogether without them, will think me little less than mad for preferring the Englishman to the Roman. Yet, with their leave, I must presume to say that the things they admire are only glittering trifles, and so far from being witty, that in a serious poem they are nauseous, because they are unnatural...A thousand such boyisms, which Chaucer rejected as below the dignity of the subject... passions are serious and will admit of no playing...As he /Chaucer/ knew what to say, so he knows when to leave off; a continence which is practiced by few writers...One of our late great poets is sunk in his reputation, because he could never forgive any conceit which came his way; but swept like a dragnet, great and small. There was plenty enough, but the dishes were ill-sorted; whole pyramids of sweetmeats for boys and women but little of solid meat for men. All this proceeded not from any want of knowledge, but of judgment. Neither did he want in discerning the beauties and faults of other poets, but only indulged himself in the luxury of writing; and perhaps knew it was a fult, but hoped the reader would not find it. For this reason, though he must always be thought a great poet, he is no longer estimated a good writer; and for ten impressions, which his works have had in so many successive years, yet at present a hundred books are scarcely purchased once a twelvemonth; for, as my Lord Rochester said, though somewhat profanely, 'Not being of God, he could not stand.'

Such a statement is a far cry from Dryden's "my better master, Cowley," which he wrote in his "Dedication to Aurengzebe" in 1675, or "though his authority is almost sacred to me," from "Of Heroic Plays" (1672); but it has importance in showing the trend of taste in the late seventeenth century. (In passing, one might remark that Rochester

had also named Cowley as his favorite among modern poets.[54]

"The Preface to the Fables" records another instance in which Dryden had disagreed with Cowley's opinion. Dryden had undertaken the modernizing of parts of Chaucer despite the opposition of the Earl of Leicester, who had regarded Chaucer as a "dry, old-fashioned wit, not worth reviving."

> I have often heard the late Earl of Leicester say, that Mr Cowley himself was of that opinion, who having read him over at My Lord's request, declared he had no taste of him. I dare not advance my opinion against the judgment of so great an author; ...Mr Cowley was too modest, perhaps, to set up for a dictator; and being shocked, perhaps with his old style, never examined the depths of his good sense.

The remark reveals the combination of respect and opposition which flavored many of Dryden's later comments on Cowley. It also reveals a singular failure on the part of Cowley's wit in not recognizing a superior. Perhaps the absence of conceits, as noted by Dryden, might partly explain Cowley's lack of interest in Chaucer. His attitude was strangely prophetic of the twentieth-century attitude toward Cowley himself.

When Dryden spoke of wit in a serious poem as being "nauseous...because it is unnatural," he revealed a definite contrast between the taste of 1700 and that of the Jacobean era, a contrast which also exists between Dryden's

[54] Samuel Johnson, Works, Literary Club Edition (Troy, New York, 1903), VIII, 137.

taste and ours. The very combination of "levity with seriousness" is one of the qualities which moderns appreciate in Donne, and which has come to be regarded as a definitive characteristic of metaphysical wit.[55] But to Dryden such a combination indicated lack of decorum, a failure to observe "propriety between thoughts and words." Geoffrey Walton has noticed that in certain poems of <u>The Mistress</u> Cowley showed a tendency to separate the light from the serious, and so to make his wit less complex. With regard to Cowley's "Elegy on the Death of Dr Harvey," Walton remarks:

> The social note of his wit is of a quieter kind. It is not metaphysical wit, for there is no element of levity.

Walton observes a similar separation in the work of Flatman, one of Cowley's imitators:

> On the whole Flatman keeps the serious and light sides of his sensibility apart and thus definitely belongs to the end of metaphysical wit.[56]

This separation of levity from seriousness might be considered one aspect of the dissociation of sensibility, which is supposed to have occurred during the seventeenth century.

A somewhat different phase of this dissociation, in which Dryden and Cowley were likewise both involved, is discussed by George Williamson:

[55] Walton, p. 69.

[56] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 60-61; 69-72.

> The intensity of Donne is passing away in Cowley, and the long struggle between reason and imagination is coming to a close in the victory of reason and good sense... The cool dry intelligence of Cowley appealed to the new sensibility and prepared the way for the greater genius of Dryden...The loss of passion and imagination which poetry suffered from this change in sensibility Cowley tries to repair by making poetry eloquent, as well as witty...Out of the high style of the Elizabethans, the seventeenth century, in T. S. Eliot's brilliant generalization, separated two qualities: wit and magniloquence. This separation first becomes clear in Cowley; this was his great service to Dryden.[57]

A similar observation was made by Loiseau:

> The grandeur of Cowley's Pindarics is an oratorical rather than a lyrical grandeur.[58]

Gosse also remarked in speaking of the seventeenth century:

> Oratorical effect took the place of observation and inspired interpretation of nature.[59]

Walton notes the effect of Cowley's use of the Alexandrine, or twelve-syllable line, as contributing to the "magniloquence":

> The Alexandrine draws to a close an effect of Restoration grandiose formality rather than Augustan politeness; it was one of Cowley's chief legacies to Dryden.[60]

The latter poet, in his "Dedication of the Aeneis," recog-

[57] Williamson, Donne Tradition, pp. 188-189.

[58] Walton, p. 87.

[59] Gosse, Seventeenth Century Studies, p. 226.

[60] Walton, loc. cit.

nized Cowley's use of the Alexandrine and its effect of magniloquence:

> Spenser has also given me the boldness to make use sometimes of his Alexandrine line, which we call, though improperly, the Pindaric, because Mr Cowley has often employed it in his Odes. It adds a certain majesty to the verse, when it is used with judgment.

Cowley's own tendency to emphasize judgment appears in his discussion of religious poetry cited previously; and his oratorical manner, in the selection from his "Ode on the Death of Mrs. Katherine Phillips." Thus Cowley contributed, along with Dryden, to the separation of levity from seriousness, the substitution of oratorical effect for wit, and the dominance of judgment over feeling, all of which are, I think, comprehended within the term "dissociation of sensibility."

The Pindarics have been mentioned as one of Cowley's principal contributions to poetic form. Saintsbury remarks that of all Cowley's writings, they came the nearest to producing the effect of genius.

> Nothing can ever be uninteresting which has, for a long time, supplied an obvious literary demand on the part of readers and provided employment for great writers. To Cowley we owe...the really magnificent odes of Dryden, Gray and Collins pretty directly; indirectly that still greater one of Wordsworth....Adoption of the form ...shows us what the time wanted, how it was sick of the regular stanza, how blank verse was still a little too bold for it, while it had not yet settled down or

> become satisfied with the regular tick of
> the couplet-clock.[61]

Cowley's <u>Pindarics</u> were less regular in stanza pattern than were Pindar's; this structural weakness was to be removed from the form by later poets who more fully analyzed Pindar's own stanza pattern.[62] It is clear that Dryden appreciated Cowley's ability in the Pindarics, though he also criticized him, with the usual apologies. In "The Author's Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic License" (1677), Dryden defended Cowley firmly:

> What fustian, as they call it, have I heard these gentlemen find out in Mr Cowley's Odes! I acknowledge myself unworthy to defend so excellent an author...only in general I will say, that nothing can appear more beautiful to me, than the strength of those images which they condemn.

In "Preface to Sylvae" (1685) Dryden made a further comment on the Pindarics, in which he was inclined to be a little more critical, having absorbed somewhat more of the neo-classical obsession with "numbers." It may be observed that imitators were already becoming a problem:

> One Ode...I have attempted to translate in Pindaric verse...Everyone knows it was introduced into our language, in this age, by the happy genius of Mr Cowley. The seeming easiness of it has made it spread; but it has not been considered enough, to be so well cultivated. It

61 Saintsbury, pp. 403-405.

62 Nethercot, "The Relation of Cowley's 'Pindaric' Odes to Pindar's Odes," <u>MP</u>, XIX (1921), 107-109.

> languishes in almost every hand but his... He indeed, has brought it as near perfection as was possible in so short a time. But if I may be allowed to speak my mind modestly, and without injury to his sacred ashes, somewhat of the purity of English, somewhat of more equal thoughts, somewhat of sweetness of numbers, in one word, somewhat of a finer turn and more lyrical verse, is yet wanting. As for the soul of it, which consists in the warmth and vigor of fancy, the masterly figures, and the copiousness of imagination, he has excelled all others in this kind.

Dryden's criticism grew stronger with the years, though he still defended Cowley in 1697, when he wrote his "Dedication to the Aeneis":

> Without being injurious to the memory of our English Pindar, I will presume to say, that his metaphors are sometimes too violent, and his language is not always pure. But at the same time I must excuse him; for through the iniquity of the times he was forced to travel, at an age, when, instead of learning foreign languages, he should have studied the beauties of his mother tongue.

In the matter of translation from the classics, Cowley and Dryden held rather different theories. Cowley assumed the right to add something of the translator's own ideas while following the spirit and general subject matter of the original; he believed that the translator should compensate for beauties lost in the change from one language to another, and that thereby he would be creating something better than the original; however, he admitted that some other name than translation might be more appropriate for such renderings of the classics. Denham and Cowley had

discussed this theory, and Denham was the first to publish a statement of the idea; but Spratt defended Cowley's claim to have been the first to practice it. Besides the few Pindarics which were actually based on Pindar, Cowley's chief work as a translator was based on the writings of Anacreon and Horace. His translations of Anacreon have been considered as among his most lasting successes. Though Dryden admitted that he sometimes followed Cowley's method, he felt that the translator ought to follow the content of the author more exactly; he did allow certain freedom in the wording so that the translator could better carry over the poetic qualities of the original. His essay, "Translation of Ovid's Epistles" (1680), shows Dryden's typically blended criticism and praise of Cowley:

> To add and diminish what we please... ought only to be granted to Mr Cowley, that too only in his translation of Pindar...A genius so elevated and unconfined as Mr Cowley's was but needed to make Pindar speak English, and that was to be performed by no other way than imitation...Yet he who is inquisitive to know an author's thoughts, will be disappointed in his expectation...To state it fairly; imitation of an author is the most advantageous was for a translator to show himself, but the greatest wrong which can be done to the memory and reputation of the dead.

The imitative quality of Cowley's mind is apparent in this theory of translation, as elsewhere, though he is entitled, too, to some credit for originality.

It remains to consider Cowley's and Dryden's influence

in the development of the heroic couplet, Cowley's use of which appears primarily in the Davideis. Tillyard regards Cowley's way of using the couplet as an important step in the development which culminated in Pope's Iliad.[63] Saintsbury likewise has recognized Cowley's contribution:

> [He was] a pioneer in the use of the authentic, balanced, self-contained couplet. We only want weight to give us Dryden and polish to give us Pope; the form is there already.[64]

Cowley is likewise credited with having demonstrated in the Davideis the suitability of the closed couplet to purposes of didactic rhetoric:

> To him and to him alone belongs the doubtful honor of inaugurating the reign of didactic and rhetorical poetry in England.[65]

Therein lies an important phase of Cowley's influence on Dryden. Though the latter was inclined to credit Waller and Denham with "sweetness and majesty" in the development of the couplet, he did, in his "Dedication of the Aeneis" mention Cowley's use of variations in the couplet, the triplet and the Alexandrine:

> Spenser is my example for both these privileges of English verses; and Chapman has followed him...Mr Cowley

[63] Tillyard, loc. cit.

[64] Saintsbury, loc. cit.

[65] Gosse, Seventeenth Century Studies, p. 227.

> has given into them after both; and all succeeding writers after him.

The Davideis, then, is important to later writers largely because of Cowley's use of the couplet. As a religious epic, it was doomed to drop out of sight in the face of a far greater work, Milton's Paradise Lost. Milton, by the way, was probably referring to Cowley when he explained his preference for blank verse in place of "tinkling rhymes" as the medium for handling his great theme. Cowley himself, in the 1656 "Preface," practically admitted that he had become bored with the Davideis. It has likewise bored everyone else who has tried to read it.

So it was that tendencies apparent in Cowley's work were continued and developed by Dryden during the Restoration; he saw fit to cite Cowley frequently as an authority or an example, while he criticized primarily Cowley's overuse of the conceits and his lack of "smoothness." Other critics added their voices to the chorus of priase, but tended, as with Dryden, to become more discriminating toward the end of the century, especially with regard to Cowley's conceits and versification. The general reaction against the metaphysical style applied in part of Cowley, though with less force than it had to Donne.[66]

At the time of Cowley's death, he was universally

[66] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Seventeenth Century," pp. 178-195.

lamented in terms of rather extravagant praise, such as the diarist Evelyn's "that incomparable poet and virtuous man, my very dear friend," or Pepys' quoting of the Bishop of Winchester and Dr Bates' grief for Cowley as "the best poet of our nation, and as good a man." For the posthumous edition of Cowley's works, Spratt wrote a long biographical and critical preface which praised greatly both his character and his writing. Cowley had instructed Spratt to omit anything "that might seem the least offense to religion or good manners." Spratt found very little to delete, though he regretted the inclusion of one or two pieces from the earlier edition. Much insight might have been gained into Cowley's life, had Spratt not seen fit to destroy his private letters. The high moral tone of Cowley's writings tended to keep them acceptable during the eighteenth century, when much of the Restoration licentiousness was frowned upon. Spratt's praise of Cowley included some defense, as will be noted in this passage:

> For certainly, in all ancient or modern times, there can scarce any author be found, that has handled so many different matters in such various sorts of style, who less wants the correction of his friends, or has less reason to fear the severity of strangers. In his life he joined the innocence and sincerity of the scholar with the humanity and good behavior of the courtier. In his poems he united the solidity and art of the one with the gentility and graciousness of the other...His fancy flowed with great speed, and therefore it was very fortunate to him that his judgment was equal

> to manage it...His invention is powerful and large as can be desired. But it seems all to arise out of the nature of his subject, and to be just fitted for the thing of which he speaks. If ever he goes far for it, he dissembles his pains remarkably well.

Nethercot remarks that evidently Spratt already felt the necessity for defending Cowley from the charge of being far-fetched, as he had in another passage of the preface seen fit to defend his versification from the charge of "ruggedness."[67] Spratt likewise defended his use of wit in the Davideis as being due to

> more youthfulness and redundance of fancy than a riper judgment would have allowed.

As if foreseeing the modern criticism that Cowley could not write with genuine passion, Spratt explained that Cowley

> in lighter kinds of poetry chiefly represented the humors and affections of others; but in these [moral and divine works] he sat to himself and drew the picture of his own mind.

Two other observations show Spratt's insight into Cowley's representative position in an age of transition: in matters of language he noted that Cowley "neither went before nor came after the use of his age," and he considered it

> most remarkable, that a man who was so constant and fixed in the moral ideas of his mind should yet be so changeable in the intellectual.

Thus Spratt, while being extravagantly eulogistic, also

[67] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," pp. 592-593.

noted by implication some of the tendencies which criticism of Cowley would take in years to come.[68]

Another contemporary and fellow man-of-letters who greatly appreciated Cowley was John Denham. His elegy, "On Mr Abraham Cowley" is typical of criticism of the time:

> But cursed be the fatal hour
> That plucked the fairest, sweetest Flower
> That in the Muses' garden grew
> ...Old Mother Wit and Nature gave
> Shakespeare and Fletcher all they have;
> In Spenser, and in Jonson, Art
> Of slower Nature got the start;
> But both in him so equal are,
> None knows which bears the happiest share;
> To him no author was unknown,
> Yet what he wrote was all his own;
> ...Horace his wit, and Virgil's state,
> He did not steal, but emulate...
> He not from Rome alone, but Greece
> Like Jason brought the golden fleece;
> ...Old Pindar's flights by him are reached,
> When on that gale his wings are stretched;
> His fancy and his judgment such,
> Each to the other seemed too much,
> ...His English stream so pure did flow,
> As all that saw, and tasted, know.
> But for his Latin vein, so clear,
> Strong, full, and high it doth appear,
> That were immortal Virgil here,
> Him, for his judge, he would not fear.

The poem goes on to suggest that Cowley was the re-incarnation of Virgil, and gives a number of parallels between the lives and writings of the two.[69] More to the point, for us, is Denham's neoclassical emphasis on the joining of

[68] Thomas Spratt, "Life and Writings of Cowley," in Spingarn II, 112-146.

[69] White, et al, Seventeenth Century Verse and Prose, p. 413.

nature and art, the emulation of the classics, and the interdependence of judgment and fancy. Mulgrave, in 1682 was inclined to contradict Denham and to criticize Cowley's powers of expression, though he ranked Cowley with Milton and Spenser as a composer of epic verse:

> Cowley might boast to have performed his part,
> Had he with Nature joined the rules of Art;
> But ill expression gives too great allay
> To that rich fancy which can ne'er decay.[70]

In general, the _Pindarics_ received the highest praise, while _The Mistress_ received more adverse criticism, both for its conceits and (by a few) for "lasciviousness." Addison, during the last decade of the century, criticized his overuse of wit, but praised the _Pindarics_; Swift, however, reversed the judgment in his _Battle of the Books_, as he pictured Pindar rejecting the Pindarics and keeping _The Mistress_.[71] An interesting debate took place between Walsh and Gildon, the former agreeing with Dryden that conceits were inappropriate to love poetry, which should be expressed by sighs intended to incite love rather than by intellectual cleverness; the latter defended the use of similes as helpful in expressing the lover's particular feelings -- "A poet in love is not absolutely out of his

[70] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Seventeenth Century," p. 195.

[71] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," pp. 597-604.

wits." Both critics agreed that "Reason and Nature" were to be strictly observed, merely disagreeing as to what was in accord with their great criteria.[72] Rymer, the most sternly neoclassical of all Restoration critics, discussed Cowley in his "Preface to Papin" (1674); he objected to the mixing of epic and lyric genre in the Davideis and said that it lacked unity of action, but he praised Cowley very highly for his versification and language:

> A more happy genius for heroic poesy appear in Cowley. He understood the purity, the perspicuity, the majesty of style and the virtue of numbers. He could discern what was beautiful and pleasant in nature, and could express his thoughts without the least difficulty or constraint. He understood to dispose of matters, and to manage his digressions. In short, he understood Homer and Virgil, and as prudently made his advantage of them.

Later still, Rymer maintained that the name of Cowley "would always be sacred to him." The fact that Cowley could weather the criticism of this most dogmatic of neoclassicists is evidence of the recognizably neoclassical quality of at least some of his work. Nethercot observes that, regardless of the arguments of the critics, the reading public probably paid considerable attention to all phases of Cowley's work, up to the end of the century.[73] Even as late as 1700, one

[72] Leonard Nathanson, p. 57.

[73] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," loc. cit.

finds some unmitigated praise, as the poem of Alexander Oldys, who imagined Dryden's soul being welcomed in Heaven by:

> ...Our English Abraham
> (In Heaven the second of that name,
> Cowley, as glorious there as sacred here in fame.)[74]

One can only remark, that if Dryden, after writing the "Preface to the Fables," found his soul "rocked in the bosom of Abraham," there was more Christian charity in that bosom than Dryden deserved.

[74] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Seventeenth Century," p. 196.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ATTITUDES TOWARD DONNE AND COWLEY

The first half of the eighteenth century carried on much of the spirit of rationalism which had characterized the Restoration. Under the influence of Locke's philosophy and Newton's physics, men felt that they lived in a reasonable and explainable universe, ruled by a rationally necessary Creator; religion, broadly interpreted, could be substantially agreed upon as reasonable and in accordance with Nature; conduct also could be based upon common sense and upon the natural moral sense posited by Locke; Nature was usually considered as that which seemed good to cultivated and reasonable human beings; expansion of power and material progress were the order of the day; aristocratic elegance in dress and surroundings, polish, good form, and decency characterized social life; the manor and the coffee-house tended to replace the Court as the centers of social life and cultivated conversation; humanitarian institutions could help to reduce the social evils, which necessarily existed even in the best of all possible worlds.

The literature of such a society emphasized "decorum," or the suitability of language to the "kind" in question;

rules, or "Nature methodized," set up in accordance with the models of antiquity, were to be observed as guides; the ancients had interpreted Nature, having been closer to it than modern man, and their rules had stood the test of time; the purpose of literature was to please in order that it might instruct; judgment should control imagination and wit, which, however, were necessary to the creative mind; smoothness, balance, polish, and proportion were the essentials of beauty in literary form; the reason and truth of Nature were best represented through generalizations and types rather than through specific details and unusual individuals; the license and libertinism of the Restoration was frowned upon; there was a demand for curbing and correcting the use of wit, and for emphasis upon poetic justice; the journalistic essay, the verse essay, the social comedy, and later the novel were the means to correcting errors, ridiculing opponents or forcing dissenters into line, and instructing readers in the elements of taste.

But there was another side of the picture also: Classicism could not satisfy all individuals; genius and ruling passions could not be rationally explained; the idea of the sublime in Nature and in art contended with "Nature methodized"; taste seemed more a matter of imagination and feeling than conformity to rule; the instinct of animals and the apparent adequacy of primitive man seemed to indicate that there were important aspects of life not to be accounted for

by cultivated rationality; intuition, instinct, and imagination kept cropping up and suggesting that reason was not a sufficient guide in many matters of life; Puritanism, with its emphasis on man's depravity and need for Grace, and other devout schismatic creeds contrasted with the more broadly rational established Church, especially among the laboring and middle classes; standards of taste refused to become fixed in view of growing contacts with the Orient and other parts of the world; interest in Celtic, Norse, and medieval cultures competed with the emphasis on classical Rome and Greece; beneath the complacent optimism lurked the melancholy of the "Graveyard School" of poets, and the moodiness of victims of the "spleen"; philosophy moved from the materialistic and rationalistic interpretations of Hobbes and Locke, through the idealism of Spinoza and the immaterialism of Berkeley, to the pre-romantic philosophy of Hume, with its emphasis upon emotion as the basis for morality, and faith rather than reason in religion.

Though many of these undercurrents reached far back into the eighteenth century, they grew more apparent and tended to replace the Augustan rationalism during the latter half of the century. Literature reflected the changing mood of the times. The Gothic novel competed with social realism, lyric poetry reappeared, both in original writings and in a revived interest in earlier lyric poets; ballads

contributed their share to the interest in medieval culture; "the proper study of mankind" came to include the simple, uncultivated man of the soil; the rugged and awe-inspiring aspects of nature began to appeal more strongly than the trimmed and tranquil; literature came to distrust the intellect and to reflect the heart. Such were some of the far-reaching changes by which the eighteenth century advanced from a period of rational re-organization to the final out-flowering of Romanticism.[1]

Josephine Miles' study of poetic language in the 1740's gives an interesting interpretation of the neoclassical spirit as work in poetry, and suggests also a possible beginning of the spirit of Romanticism:

> Consider the poetry of the 1740's...its reasonableness, its sublimity, its formal couplet, its graveyard gloom, its sharpness of antithesis, its splendor of scene and personification. Yet we may well be

[1] Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), pp. 823-846.

Francis Galloway, Reason, Rule, and Revolt in English Classicism (New York, 1940), pp. 21-44; 341-348; et passim.

Ian Jack, Augustan Satire (Oxford, 1952), pp. 1-14.

Percy Hazen Houston, Main Currents in English Literature (New York, 1926), pp. 180-278.

Richard Foster Jones, et al, The Seventeenth Century (Stanford, Calif., 1956), pp. 225-246; 306-315; 355-376.

Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (London, 1942), pp. 264-295.

Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background (New York, 1941), passim.

> reminded that seldom have we seen so many long poems, wide views, high emotions, vast conceptions. The primary vocabulary of nature, and power, day, heaven, in all their scope...as wit in wisdom has come to recognize more correspondence, less discrepancy between the passions of man and the qualities of nature. In the 1740's most poets used a closely metered and rhymed control of substantial general material in descriptive statement. The emphasis on natural and human similitudes, on temporal and special ranges...gave them a bond..."Classical" was a good word for them...and in a double sense: Their mode was to be seen also in the verse of Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and it was a mode which valued the generalities of class. The neo-classicist associated himself with orderly and grand objects in an orderly and grand universe. He used all those methods of similitude, in scansion, rhyme, onomatopoeia, simile, scene, which would strengthen the obviousness and universality.[2]

Within their framework of form and reason, literary men pondered, re-assessed, and redefined the forces of the mind. They knew that reason alone could not avoid dullness, that there must be a spark of genius, imagination, wit--call it what you will--by which they could make their writing delight and thereby instruct their readers; yet this spark needed the final control of judgment. We have seen how the all-inclusive term wit had been separated into fancy and judgment, and had finally come to mean almost the same as taste, "a propriety of thoughts and words." Locke retained Hobbes' distinction between judgment and fancy and likewise

[2] Josephine Miles, The Continuity of Poetic Language (Berkeley, 1951), pp. 163; 368-369.

defined wit as the power to see likenesses. Addison supplemented this definition by saying that the reader must be surprised or delighted by the likeness, either because of its far-fetched quality, or because of possible development of the original simile; it would seem from this analysis that Addison would have seen the virtue of Donne's conceits, which we now define very similarly, but there still was the limiting factor of "reason, truth and Nature" to keep ingenuity under control. In a series of essays, <u>Spectator</u> 58-62, Addison distinguished between false, mixed, and true wit: the first includes acrostics, tricks of arrangement in various forms, puns, plays on letters, etc.; mixed wit he defined as a combination of the pun and true wit, similarity being partly in the words and partly in the ideas:

> Reason puts in her claim for one half of it and extravagance for the other.

True wit he felt to be based on truth and good sense,

> that beautiful simplicity, which we so much admire in the writings of the ancients ...to make a thought shine in its own natural beauties.

He had the humor to remark that Dryden's "propriety of thoughts and words" had probably been best exemplified by Euclid!

Pope's "Essay on Criticism" has been fully analyzed by Mr Empson, who shows that Pope was probably playing several meanings of the word wit against each other. These meanings included intellect, genius, ingenuity,

imagination (with judgment sometimes included with it and sometimes opposed to it) fancy, polite learning and bright social conversation, and finally repartee and jokes. This latter meaning -- the one we commonly use today -- was then a fairly new meaning, probably popular as a sort of slang term with the smart social set that Pope addressed. Wit in the sense of repartee had been abused and overworked, both in Restoration drama and in the conversation of courtiers; it had lost favor as being frequently a cover for lewdness and profanity, or it had simply become a bore, as Sir Richard Blackmore's "Satire Against Wit" (1700) had indicated.[3]

Pope had a quarrel of some years' standing with Wycherly, the oldest of the Restoration dramatists, the latter contending for the right to use wit unrestrainedly, while Pope felt the need of some artistic control. It thus became necessary to distinguish between the various uses of wit and to defend "true wit" as the necessary quality of the creative mind which could preserve literature from dullness. Wit, as Pope sometimes used the word, included both imagination and judgment, both inborn genius and art. He said that wit should affect the whole rather than the parts of a poem (an idea not very different from the modern concept of organic as distinguished from decorative imagery).

[3] J. E. Spingarn, _Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century_ (Oxford, 1909), III, 325.

He agreed with Addison that wit should be based on Nature. Thus his full sense of the word was broader than Dryden's "propriety":

> True wit is nature to advantage dressed,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.[4]

Later in the century Johnson was to make a further definition of wit. He showed that the definition as sprightly social conversation was commonly accepted, when, in Rambler No. 128, he ironically sympathized with the person who had gained a reputation as a "wit" and so felt eternally obliged to sparkle in society. In his essay on Cowley, he gave a more literary definition of the term:

> That which is at once natural and new, that which, though not obvious, is upon first production acknowledged to be just; ...that which he that never found it wonders how he missed.

Here Johnson recognized the idea of novelty, one which had been coming into the word since about 1690.[5] He also defined metaphysical wit as the "discordia concors." Wit, as a critical term, tended to drop out after the eighteenth century, most of its functions having been absorbed into the neoclassicist good sense and the romantic imagination or fancy. It has been re-employed and again re-defined

[4] Jones, et al, pp. 225-46.
William Empson, "Wit in the 'Essay on Criticism,'" Hudson Review, II (1950), 559-577.

[5] Jones, et al, p. 243.

by modern critics in their analysis of metaphysical poetry.

The study of Longinus' "On the Sublime" definitely affected critical thinking during the eighteenth century. Cowley's possible earlier use of this essay has been mentioned. Longinus' purpose was to instruct a pupil in the art of creating moving eloquence in speech, and one of the qualities he emphasized was passion. Sir John Dennis, early in the century, emphasized the necessity for passion, and this in spite of his support of the tenets of the Age of Reason.[6] The work was discussed by many other critics during the course of the century, and it may well have contributed to the break-down of the neoclassical aesthetic concepts of restraint and moderation.[7]

Imagination, like wit, was subject to various interpretations, but was regarded as essential to the poet even in the days of the greatest emphasis on reason and judgment.

> Dennis, Shaftesbury, and Addison differed notably in their accounts of the imagination. To Dennis its function was to vivify, to present absent objects to the mind as if present...the source of enthusiasm in poetry...Dennis stresses the importance of judgment as a control over the imagination. To Shaftesbury imagination is primarily the force that elevates the mind...to lofty serenity. 'No poet... can do anything great in his own way with-

[6] Baugh, p. 836.

[7] Galloway, pp. 333-340.

> out the imagination or supposition of a divine presence...There is a fair and plausible enthusiasm, a reasonable ecstasy and transport...Addison...wishes to examine the workings of the imagination and its effects on the mind...A man of polite imagination is let into a great many pleasures, that the vulgar are not capable of receiving...a noble writer should be born with this faculty in its full strength and vigor...A poet should take as much pains in forming his imagination as a philosopher in cultivating his understanding.[8]

Classicist though he was, Addison is sometimes credited with laying the foundations of romantic aesthetics because of his emphasis on imagination as the basis for literary taste.[9] The later years of the century saw a growing emphasis on the imagination in the works of such critics as Lord Lyttleton, Edward Young, the Warton brothers, and Richard Hurd.[10] Dr Johnson, of course, was the last rugged bastion of the neoclassical traditions. The following study of the critical fates of Donne and Cowley during this century of shifting attitudes will be based largely on the very extensive investigations, in the reputations of the metaphysical poets and of Cowley in particular, made by Mr Arthur N. Nethercot.

The downward trend in Donne's reputation which had

[8] Baugh, pp. 840-841.

[9] Jones, et al, pp. 316-329.

[10] Galloway, pp. 56-57.

started during the Restoration continued throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, as the passion and artistry of his lyrics did not appeal to the sensibility of an age addicted to the ideals of common sense and polish. That he was not entirely forgotten is clear from the few efforts that were made to recast some of his satires, and even lyrics, into acceptable neoclassical form. His fate was shared in general by the other metaphysical poets, though Cowley was mentioned frequently and seems to have been the best known, perhaps because of his partially neoclassical bent.

> 'This age of taste' demanded that its literature be clear, elegant, and urbane; that it shun the extravagant and the outré; that it fix on the natural and normal instead of the individual and striking. Reason made a stronger appeal than emotion. The fact that Cowley had written several pieces with these neoclassical requirements served to keep him read by a limited group while greater poets such as Donne were stuffed away on the highest and dustiest shelf.[11]
>
> Donne was still known for his wit and learning, his preaching, his satires, and his rhythmical imperfections -- when he was known at all -- but his fame was already assuming the low estate which it was to hold until the nineteenth century.[12]

The fact that the Augustans found satire more to their

[11] Arthur N. Nethercot, Abraham Cowley: the Muses Hannibal (London, 1931), p. 287.

[12] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Pope," PQ, IV (1925), 176.

taste than lyrics, plus the fact that Donne had followed the classical models of Horace and Persius to some extent in his *Satires*, caused these poems to be read more than his other verse. The "roughness" of the *Satires*, due partly to Donne's imitation of Persius and partly to his experiments with the rhythms of speech, gave Donne's poetry its long-lasting reputation for "roughness."[13] Wasserman cites evidence that there was still some interest in the content of Donne's poetry, even of the lyrics, in spite of opposition to its metrics and its conceits:

> Tonson's edition of Donne in 1719 and his inclusion of fifteen of the poems in the 1716 *Dryden's Miscellany* are sufficient evidence that the early eighteenth century still considered the substance of the poetry worthy of attention. Pope himself was of the opinion that 'Donne had no imagination, but as much wit, I think, as any writer can possibly have." As he implies, it was *what* Donne had to say, not *how* he said it, that kept his poems alive.[14]

Pope made a revision of Donne's *Satire II* in 1713 and published a second revision in 1735; he also published a "versification" of *Satire IV* in 1734.[15] Parnell likewise revised *Satire III*, as did Reverend William Smith later in the century. John Glasse worked over the twelfth *Elegy*

[13] Nethercot, "The Reputation of John Donne as a Metrist," *Sewanee Review*, XXX (1922), 464.

[14] Earl R. Wasserman, *Elizabethan Poetry in the Eighteenth Century* (Urbana, /Illinois/, 1947), pp. 69-70.

[15] Ian Jack, "Pope and 'The Weighty Bullion of Dr Donne's Satires,'" *PMLA*, LXVI (1951), 1009.

and published both versions, expecting, no doubt, to profit by the comparison. Putting Donne into classical form was even apparently an exercise in the schools at times. Several of Donne's lyrics and epigrams were also reduced to current standards of "smoothness" (and rather completely ruined from our point of view). There are also some cases of the borrowing of a conceit from Donne and other Elizabethans.

> The Augustans generally borrowed from the Elizabethans their themes, a witty thought, an ingenious figure of speech, but rarely their artistry. Donne... was by no means forgotten as a lyrist, and his ingenious themes, usually modified were occasionally adopted, but, of course, adjusted to a greatly simplified, almost mechanical, versification.[16]

Pope, in his "versifications" of Donne's _Satires II_ and _IV_, saw fit to take over many of Donne's lines exactly as they were, especially when the idea was contained exactly in the line. More often his principal effort was to remove Donne's characteristic enjambments; instead of carrying the idea over the end of the couplet and stopping in the middle of a line, Pope fitted the idea to the couplet. Sometimes, however, he recognized the dramatic value of Donne's enjambments and retained them. He sometimes smoothed the meter simply by changing the order of words. He seems to have appreciated the power of Donne's imagery

[16] Wasserman, pp. 176; 184-186.

and diction and often followed both the image and the wording, particularly those which showed Donne's Roman Catholic bias of thought. In other cases, Pope changed the wording to fit the idea into the current background or to suit the level of idiom to Augustan ideas of "decorum." He clarified some of the conceits and provided fuller transitions, and also arranged the poems in paragraph structure as in his own Satires. Thus Pope showed himself to be still of the Renaissance cast of mind in his appreciation of Donne's imagery, but an Augustan in his sense of form. He considered Donne's "Epistles, Metempsychosis, and Satires...his best things," as they fitted best with Pope's own interests. At the age of nineteen, Pope borrowed a conceit from Donne and admitted:

> That simile is not my own,
> But lawfully belongs to Donne.[17]

Later Pope, and others, were to borrow with less acknowledgment. The fact that borrowings can be traced indicates that the spirit of Donne was not quite dead to the Augustans, though they felt the necessity to modify his form. In fact Donne's reputation for "roughness" was to last well through the nineteenth century, and was to blind many critics to his metrical genius even after his lyrics had begun to be appreciated.[18]

[17] Jack, pp. 1009-22.

[18] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Donne as a Metrist," pp. 464-472.

The Augustan definition of wit as being in accord with "Truth and Nature," and Addison's rejection of the pun as one of the forms of "false wit," also contributed to the decline of Donne's reputation during the first half of the century. Without naming Donne, Addison discussed the frequent use of puns during the reign of James I, even "from the pulpit," and "by the greatest authors in their most serious works."[19] The Tatler and Spectator make a few casual references to Donne, but not in the numbers which are included in Addison's works; in general Addison seems to have ignored him. The Guardian, in 1773, made a very definite criticism of Donne's and Cowley's use of wit:

> Of all our countrymen, none are more defective in their songs, through a redundancy of wit, than Dr Donne and Mr Cowley...one point of wit flashes so fast upon another, that the reader's attention is dazzled by the continual sparkling of their imagination.

John Oldmixon's Arts of Logic and Rhetoric (1726) stated the policy of citing examples from the errors of great men, "the faults of great men only being worth observation;" and Donne and Cowley provided their share of examples:

> How many geniuses have miscarried...for want of considering truth, in all productions of the mind, is what only renders them agreeable and useful, and that false brilliant [sic] of thoughts is like the glare of lightning, which

[19] Spectator, 61.

> dazzles and hurts the sight, as that does the understanding!...Thus it was that Dr Donne and Mr Cowley confounded metaphysics with love and turned wit into point... But those wits that subtilize, need only follow their genius to take flight, and lose themselves in their own thoughts. Dr Donne and Mr Cowley are sufficient instances of this vice in our language ...It seems strange to me, that after Suckling and Waller had written,...Mr Cowley should copy Dr Donne; in whom there's hardly anything that's agreeable, or one stroke that has any likeness to nature.[20]

Theobald's "Preface" to his edition of Shakespeare likewise cites Donne as a horrible example of wit:

> Now the age...having a wonderful affection to appear learned...they ranged through the circle of the sciences to fetch their ideas from thence...the ostentatious affectation of abstruse learning...fixed them down to this habit of obscurity. Thus became the poetry of Donne (tho' the wittiest man of that age) nothing but a continued heap of riddles.[21]

Thus the reputation of Donne was generally on the down-grade during the first half of the eighteenth century. Opinion thereafter was a mixture of three trends: a continued repetition of neoclassical condemnation; an occasional harking-back to seventeenth-century approval; and, as the groping toward Romanticism began to take hold, a cautious indication of a new appreciation of his poetic

[20] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Pope," pp. 173-175.

[21] Ibid., p. 179.

power, in feeling if not in form.

> The common opinion during the entire century was that Donne was greatest as a satirist, inferior as a lyrist, and that he knew nothing about 'numbers.'[22]

Pope's version of the *Satires* continued to be generally approved. Walter Harte, tutor to Lord Chesterfield's son, called Donne's *Satires* "maimed and bruised," but referred to Donne as "forgotten now; yet still his fame shall last." Joseph Warton, in his "Preface" to his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope* (1756), had given Donne a rating among poets of second rank, "who possessed true poetical genius"; in the same essay he had recalled an old query,

> any man with a poetical ear had ever read ten lines of Donne without disgust.

He had also remarked that

> Donne and Swift were men of wit and men of sense; but what traces have they left of pure poetry?[23]

The *Monthly Review* thereupon criticized Warton's inconsistency in giving Donne a "genius" rating and emphatically agreed with his more derogatory judgments. Warton, in his later publications, demoted Donne, but remarked regretfully,

[22] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Johnson and the Romantic Revival," *SP* XXII (1925), 81-84.

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.
Nethercot, "The Reputation of Donne as a Metrist," p. 465.

> If Donne had taken equal pains, he need not have left his numbers so much more rugged and disgusting, than many of his contemporaries.[24]

There is still the failure to realize that Donne's metrics were not the result of carelessness, but of a deliberate and complex metrical theory. David Hume, more philosopher than critic, followed the usual pattern: he observed in his essay "On Simplicity and Refinement in Writing" (1741-42) that wit was incompatible with passion and did not please after one reading;[25] later he said that he found in the Satires

> the hardest and most uncouth expression that is anywhere to be met with.

James Granger's Biographical History (1769) compared Donne's verses to "the running down of an alarum" and added that "his thoughts were much debased by his versification."[26]

Some favorable opinion of Donne was, however, expressed, in a few cases by biographers who followed seventeenth-century models; such was Cibber, who mentioned Donne in his Lives (1753) as an

> eminent poet and divine [whose] character as a preacher and a poet are sufficiently seen in his incomparable writings.

[24] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Donne as a Metrist," pp. 465-466.

[25] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Pope," p. 179.

[26] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Donne as a Metrist," p. 466.

Such also was the first edition of the Biographia Britannica which mentioned Donne's "beautiful similitudes."[27] While Bishop Warburton admired Pope's version of the Satires, he was almost a lone voice in recognizing the fact that Donne had written

> other poems, and especially..."The Progress of the Soul," /where/ his verse did not want harmony.[28]

This remark made in 1751 could almost be cited as the turning-point in the resurrection of Donne's reputation. Another critic who might be cited as representing the forward-looking, or pre-romantic attitude was Hurd; although he considered that Cowley's lack of harmony was due to the bad example of Donne and Jonson, "Who affected harsh numbers," and although he expressed the usual disapproval of metaphysical imagery, he was capable of rather independent appreciation of Donne:

> It may be worth observing, in honor of a great poet of the last century, I mean Dr Donne, that, though agreeably to the turn of his genius, and that of his age, he was fonder, than ever poet was, of these secret and hidden ways in his lesser poetry; yet when he had projected his great work on 'The Progress of the Soul'...his good sense brought him out into the freer spaces of nature

[27] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' in the Age of Johnson," p. 85.

[28] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Donne as a Metrist," p. 468.

> and open daylight.[29]

The Critical Review, however, in 1767 protested the

> inclination...the present age discovers toward the uncultivated measure of Donne and Jonson.[30]

Thus this influential periodical added its bit to the suppression of poetry in the name of "smoothness."

The outstanding critical influence of the latter part of the century was, of course, Dr Johnson, whose famous outburst on the metaphysical poets from his essay on Cowley appears earlier in this study. He opined that Donne had introduced the style into England in imitation of Marino, and cited a dozen examples from both Donne's lyrics and his Satires as illustrations

> of the modes of writing by which this species of poets, for poets they were called by themselves and their admirers, was eminently distinguished.

In some cases Johnson showed respect for Donne's learning and ability: "too scholastic...not inelegant," "abstruse and profound." Usually he ridiculed the exaggeration, difficulty, or absurdity of the conceits; one he found "indelicate." He criticized Donne's "light allusion to sacred things," and suggested that Cowley had followed him in this respect. While he condemned the metaphysical poets'

[29] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Johnson," pp. 88-89.

[30] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Donne as a Metrist," p. 468.

extravagance and oversubtlety in many cases, he added, showing his sense both of justice and "decorum,"

> Yet, where scholastic speculation can be properly admitted, their copiousness and acuteness may be justly admired.[31]

In short, Johnson granted certain intellectual points in favor of the metaphysical poets, but had no imaginative sympathy for, or insight into, their poetry.

Yet in spite of Dr Johnson the latter part of the century saw a slight revival of interest in metaphysical poetry, perhaps due to the relaxing of some of the more rigid neoclassical standards of form, a broadening of interests with a bent toward the antiquarian, and a greater allowance for imagination and feeling for lyric emotion, all or which characterized the pre-Romantic era. Donne, however, gained less support than a few of the other metaphysicals, possibly because his wide learning gave some critics the impression of pedantry. Comments generally favoring the metaphysicals became more frequent, and their poems were included in varying numbers and with varying degrees of critical approval in the numerous compilations which were popular at the time. Separate editions of several of the poets appeared, including two complete editions of Donne, Bell's reprint of Walton's edition in 1779, and a volume in Anderson's _Poets of Great Britain_ in

[31] Samuel Johnson, "Cowley," in _Works_, Literary Club Edition (Troy, New York, 1903), VII, _passim_.

1793.

A more severe criticism along the usual conservative lines replaced in 1882 Joseph Warton's earlier inclination to be generous toward Donne:

> But it was not only in numbers that Donne was reprehensible. He abounds in false thoughts; in far-fetched sentiments; in forced, unnatural conceits. He was the corrupter of Cowley...He had a considerable share of learning.

Thomas Warton, though more inclined toward Romanticism than his brother, was less attentive to the metaphysicals, considering Donne only as a satirist.[32] William Cowper, whose poetry represented the transitional attitude, was interested in Donne, not only as a poet, but as an ancestor for whom he felt considerable affinity, as is shown in one of his letters.[33] His feeling for Donne also appears in a poem addressed to a young relative:

> Be wiser thou, -- like our forefather Donne,
> Seek heavenly wealth, and work for God alone.[34]

The comment of Kippis, editor of the Biographia Britannica (1778-1793), illustrates the status of Donne's reputation as a poet, though it still retained the standard criticism of much of the century:

[32] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' in the Age of Johnson," pp. 103-132.

[33] William Cowper, Letters, ed. J. G. Frazer (London, 1912), II, 247-248.

[34] William Cowper, "To John Johnson," in Cowper's Poems (Chicago, n. d.), p. 495.

> The name of Dr Donne is now more generally known as a poet than in any other capacity, though none of his works are read at present, excepting his Satires...being modernized by Mr Pope...His versification is allowed to be intolerably harsh and unmusical; but different accounts have been given of his genius as a poet. Dr Birch observes, that his poetical works show a prodigious fund of genius, under the disguise of an affected and obscure style, and a most inharmonious versification.

Anderson, in his edition of Donne's poetry (1793), gave Donne credit as being something more than a satirist, and showed some appreciation of his power as a poet, though he still could not forgive Donne's versification:

> He seems...to have divided his studies between law and poetry; for, about this time, he composed most of his love poems, and other levities and pieces of humor, which sufficiently established his poetical reputation...Donne is better known as a poet, than as a divine; though in the latter character he had great merit. All his contemporaries are lavish in his praise. Prejudiced, perhaps, by the style of writing which was then fashionable, they seem to have rated his performances beyond their just value. To the praise of wit and sublimity his title is unquestionable. In all his pieces he displays a prodigious richness of fancy, and an elaborate minuteness of description; but his thoughts are seldom natural, obvious, or just, and much debased by the carelessness of his versification.[35]

Thus the century drew to a close with a gradual, almost grudging, recognition of the scope and power of Donne's

[35] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Johnson," pp. 114-126.

genius. There remained a two-fold block to full appreciation -- blindness to his deliberate and self-conscious metrical art, and failure to understand the virtue of the combined intellect and passion achieved by his conceits. He was still charged with carelessness and fantastic wit. It was to take another century of slowly growing appreciation and understanding before this block would disappear.

A considerable amount of the general admiration for Cowley which had characterized the Restoration period continued during the early eighteenth century, though the tendency grew to criticize him for the same reasons that Donne had been criticized -- the overuse of wit, extravagance of conceits, and roughness of metrical form, particularly as displayed in _The Mistress_, where he had most obviously copied Donne. His Latin poetry and his _Anacreontics_ remained popular, and his _Pindarics_ suffered less criticism than those of his imitators for a time; eventually they came in for their share of criticism on the score of extravagant metaphor; also further scholarly work on the _Odes_ of Pindar revealed certain regularities in stanzaic form which Cowley had not incorporated in his _Odes_. The _Davideis_, neoclassical in form though it was, had its overload of conceits which displeased the "age of taste"; furthermore Milton far outstripped Cowley in reputation as the model poet of the religious epic. The prose essays,

written in the simpler style of his later years, increased in popularity. After the middle of the century Cowley shared the slight rise in critical attention and approval accorded to the metaphysical poets in general, but his weaknesses remained a subject for comment; opinion tended to become more discriminating and selective during the latter part of the century.[36] Cowley remained better known than Donne throughout the century, while his reputation shifted with the changing sensibilities and criticism became more selective; it may be safe to say that he ended the century somewhat less popular than he began it, and better liked as a prose writer than as a poet.

Representative of the criticism of the early decades of the century, both in its justification of Cowley and in its rejection of his overuse of wit, is Addison's discussion in Spectator 62:

> There is another kind of wit, which consists partly in the resemblance of ideas, and partly in the resemblance of words; which, for distinctions sake, I shall call mixed wit. This kind of wit abounds in Cowley, more than in any author that ever wrote.

[36] Nethercot, Abraham Cowley: the Muses' Hannibal, pp. 280-288.

Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Pope," passim.

Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Johnson and the Romantic Revival," passim.

Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," pp. 605-618.

Addison cited a long paragraph of examples from Cowley's <u>Mistress</u>, in which the wit depends on a play with the words "fire" and "ice" in their obvious association with love, and continued:

> Speaking of it both as a passion and as real fire, surprises the reader with those seeming resemblances or comparisons that make up all the wit in this kind of writing...I cannot conclude this head of mixed wit, without owning that the admirable poet out of whom I have taken examples of it, had as much true wit as any author that ever writ; and, indeed, all other talents of an extraordinary genius.

Thus the wit most characteristic of <u>The Mistress</u> continued to be condemned as it had been by Dryden.

Pope voiced similar opposition to Cowley yet always maintained a certain respect for him. In "Windsor Forest" (1704) the young poet expressed the usual adulation:

> Who now shall charm the shades, where Cowley hung
> His living harp...?

By the time he wrote the "Essay on Criticism" (1711) Pope was inclined to join the neoclassical chorus and to emphasize the need for judgment to control wit; though he mentioned no names, his criticism of the metaphysical style is obvious:

> Some to conceit alone their tastes confine,
> And glittering thoughts struck out at ev'ry line;
> Pleased with a work where nothing's just or fit;
> One glaring chaos and wild heap of wit.[37]

[37] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," pp. 605-611.

However, even in the 1730's, Pope had a modified good word for Cowley, though possibly a better word for his prose than for his verse. In Spence's Anecdotes, Pope was quoted as saying, "Cowley is a fine poet, in spite of all his faults."[38] Indicative of the trend of the 1730's is the following quotation from Pope's "Imitations of Horace":

> Who now reads Cowley? If he pleases yet,
> His moral pleases, not his pointed wit:
> Forgot his epic, nay Pindaric art,
> But still I love the language of his heart.

Pope elsewhere mentions a quality which definitely appealed to the sensibility of the day: "Pensive Cowley's moral lay."

Other references during the early part of the century were sometimes completely adulatory and yet at other times condemned him without any of Addison's or Pope's reservations; the following praise, written by Samuel Wesley (1711) is flattering both in idea and in the fact that it is an obvious imitation of Cowley:

> Cowley does to Jove belong,
> Jove and Cowley claim my song...
> Whatever Cowley writes must please,
> Sure, like the Gods, he speaks all languages.
> Whatever he'll assay
> Or in the softer or the nobler way,
> He still writes best.

Oldmixon (1728), previously quoted as condemning both Donne and Cowley, took a further opportunity to blast Cowley as a

[38] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Pope," p. 170.

horrible example:

> Cowley especially, with as much wit as ever man had, shows little judgment, by which his poetry is in our days so sunk in the opinion of good judges, that there is no hope of its rising again. The following is an instance of how little he knew of right-thinking, though he knew so much of thought.

Besides numerous publications of parts of his works, there were three complete editions during the first twenty-one years of the century. As Nethercot observes:

> All of Cowley's works did not stand or fall together. Those works which best conformed to the literary standards which the age had formulated rose in esteem; those which violated the principles of reason and good sense, especially The Mistress, were debased.[39]

Mid-century criticism seems largely to have carried on under the influence of Pope and Addison, with a note of seventeenth-century approval occasionally reappearing, as was the case with Donne. About 1748 Robert Dodsley compared "Milton's true sublime with Cowley's wit." Clarendon's Life, which, though written in 1668-9, was first published in 1759, may have helped to turn the tide in favor of the metaphysicals, by such extravagant praise as, "Cowley had made a flight beyond all men." On the one hand, it became customary to use liking or disliking Cowley, especially in comparison with Milton, as a touchstone of one's literary taste: on the other, Richardson condemned the taste of a

[39] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," pp. 610-618.

day in which his favorite poet, Cowley, could be "out of fashion."[40] Professor Blair's lectures at the University of Edinburgh (1759-1762), which emphasized the changes in taste since Cowley's time and condemned his "labored and unnatural conceits," found wide agreement. A few poems from The Mistress continued to be popular, as did the Anacreontics, while the Pindarics became subject to increasing criticism, and the Davideis was practically forgotten. Blair's comments on the Pindarics, and on the developed conceit, are characteristic:

> As to the professed Pindaric Odes, they are, with few exceptions, so incoherent, as seldom to be intelligible. Cowley, at all times harsh, is doubly so in his Pindaric compositions. In his Anacreontic Odes, he is much happier...Nothing is more opposite to the design of this figure than to hunt after a great number of co-incidences in minute points, merely to show how far the poet's wit can stretch the resemblance. This is Mr Cowley's common fault.

A similar statement from another teacher, George Campbell, shows that Cowley was becoming a source of bad examples, against which students needed to be warned:

> Nothing has a worse effect than descriptions too long, too frequent, or too minute; witness the Davideis of Cowley.

Lord Kames' Elements of Criticism cited Cowley for a similar purpose:

[40] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Johnson," pp. 81-84.

> A metaphor...ought not to be crowded with minute circumstances; for in that case it is scarcely possible to avoid obscurity. A metaphor ought, above all, to be short; ...a metaphor drawn out to any length, instead of illustrating or enlivening the principal subject, becomes disagreeable by overstraining the mind. Here Cowley is extremely licentious.[41]

Further adverse opinion of Cowley appeared in the *Biographical History of England* (1769), by the Reverend James Granger, who stated the strictly neoclassical point of view:

> Cowley, who helped to corrupt the taste of the age in which he lived, and had himself been corrupted by it, was a remarkable instance of a true genius, seduced and perverted by false wit...There is a want of elegance in his words, and of harmony in his versification; but this was more than atoned for, by his greatest fault, the redundancy of his fancy...The standard of true taste was not then established. It was at length discovered, after a revolution of many ages, that the justest rules and examples of good writing are to be found in the works of ancient authors; and that there is neither dignity nor elegance of thought or expression, without simplicity.[42]

Joseph Warton's rating of Donne and Cowley as poets of genius (1756), which had elicited opposition from the *Monthly Review* in Donne's case, drew whole-hearted agreement with reference to Cowley:

> There can be no exception to the rank assigned that excellent genius, whose

[41] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," pp. 619-621.

[42] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Johnson," pp. 92-93.

> works are a valuable mine of literary and poetic jewels.

Warton evidently grew more conservative as time passed, for in 1682 he apologetically demoted Cowley:

> It is painful to censure a writer of so amiable a mind, such integrity of manners, and such sweetness of temper. His fancy was brilliant, strong and sprightly, but his taste was false and unclassical, even though he had much learning.

In 1797 Warton published an interesting list of poets rated on the basis of their learning:

> Our most eminent poets, with respect to their learning, in the following order: --Milton, Spenser, Cowley, Butler, Donne, Jonson, Akenside, Gray, Dryden, Addison.

James Beattie's comment in 1769 also showed respect for Cowley, and indicated perhaps a certain tendency toward romantic thinking:

> I know not whether any nation ever produced a more singular genius than Cowley. He abounds in tender thoughts, beautiful lines, and emphatical expressions, his wit is inexhaustible, and his learning extensive; but his taste is generally barbarous, and seems to have been formed upon such models as Donne, Martial, and the worst parts of Ovid...If the author's ideas had been fewer, his conceits would have been less frequent; so that in one respect learning may be said to have hurt his genius.[43]

Further evidence of the increasing appeal of the metaphysicals inspired by the growing tendency toward Romanticism,

[43] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," pp. 620-621.

appeared in the comments of Hurd, who published a selective edition of Cowley's works in 1772, a collection which was to run through several editions; even before this, Hurd had approved of Cowley's essays and of those poems which "came from the heart." His comment revealed a balance between the romantic and the neoclassical attitudes:

> A clear sparkling fancy, softened with a shade of melancholy, made him, perhaps, of all our poets the most capable of excelling in the elegiac way, or of touching us in any way where a vein of easy language and moral sentiment is required.

In the 1772 edition Hurd spoke also of the "sensible reflecting melancholy" and the "unforced gaiety" of Cowley's poems. Such references to melancholy, pensiveness, and love of solitude were to recur frequently and to show the growing Romanticism of the period. A comment on Hurd's edition from the Monthly Review went even further in showing the reaction against Neoclassicism: It suggested that Hurd's criticism still smacked too much of Pope in merely appreciating Cowley's

> moral air and tender sensibility of mind ...But the real cause why they still please is what Mr Pope could not judge of, because he was a stranger to it. It is enthusiasm; the genine spirit of enthusiasm that breathes through all those pages, where the poet is not professedly in chase of wit.

This same balance between the romantic and neoclassical attitudes was evident in a later comment from the Critical Review:

> Of Cowley, in particular, we may observe that those who can read him without feeling an interest in his soothing melancholy can have no hearts; those who can continue to read him without disgust can have no taste.[44]

Cowley's love of retirement made a special appeal of Cowper, whose transitional attitude is apparent in this quotation from The Task:

> I studied, prized, and wished that I had known,
> Ingenious Cowley! and though now reclaimed
> By modern lights from an erroneous taste,
> I cannot but lament the splendid wit
> Entangled in the cobwebs of the schools;
> I still revere thee, courtly though retired,
> Though stretched at ease in Chertsey's silent bowers,
> Not unemployed, and finding rich amends,
> For a lost world in solitude and verse.[45]

Samuel Johnson's essay on Cowley (1779) is frequently referred to in modern criticism because of his disquisition on the metaphysical poets. While he was critical of the metaphysical style as a whole, he judiciously recognized some of its virtues; in the same way he offered a sanely balanced judgment of Cowley's work, condemning his excessive ingenuity and carelessness as vices of his age, but acknowledging his learning, his versatility, and his influence. He praised Cowley's prose and was one of the first to recognize the value of his critical statements. Like other classical scholars, he enjoyed Cowley's Anacreontics:

[44] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Johnson," pp. 86-88; 114.

[45] Ibid., p. 107.

> His power seems to have been greatest in the familiar and the festive.

Of the Pindarics, he offered a divided opinion:

> To the disproportion and incongruity of Cowley's sentiments must be added the uncertainty of his measures...Many parts deserve, at least, that admiration which is due to great comprehension of knowledge and great fertility of fancy.

He commented on the general lack of attention to the Davideis and concluded that the reason lay

> partly in the choice of subject and partly in the performance of the work ...conceits are all the Davideis supplies.

The Mistress received some of his sharpest comment, with which moderns tend to agree:

> He that professes love ought to feel its power. The compositions are such as might have been written for penance by a hermit, or by a philosophical rhymer, who had only heard of another sex.

Johnson commented at length on individual poems and praised a number of them; he also made a careful analysis of Cowley's metrical faults and cited many examples of what he considered his misuse of wit. Though he did justice to many of Cowley's good qualities, he expressed his objections to Cowley's faults so cleverly that later critics seem to have paid more attention to the adverse than to the kinder criticism.[46]

[46] Johnson, "Cowley," in Works, III, passim. Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," p. 632, et passim.

That Cowley was read more widely than he had been during the middle quarters of the century is apparent from the number of editions of his works which appeared after 1772. Besides four editions of Hurd's selections, "select poems" were included in British Poets in 1773, and in Ritson's editions of 1783 and 1793. Complete editions of the poetry were included in Bell's Poets of Great Britain (1777), in Johnson's Works of the English Poets (1779), and in Anderson's Poets of Great Britain (1792). Even the plant poems, generally neglected except by Latin scholars for some time, came out in 1795.[47] Headley's Select Beauties of Ancient English Poetry (1787) omitted Cowley, because, as Headley explained, he was already well represented in the works of other publishers. Headley's statement offers an interesting review of Cowley's "fate":

> As the natural relish for tinsel and metaphysical conceit declined, his bays gradually lost their verdure; he was no longer to be found in the hands of the multitude, and untouched even in the closets of the curious: in short the shades of oblivion gathered fast upon him. In consequence, however, of many detached parts of him which teem with the finest pictures of the heart, Bishop Hurd undertook his well-known edition, in which the most exceptionable poetry (that had operated like a mill-stone and sunk the rest) is omitted, and the generality of his charms preserved, he has now a dozen readers where before

[47] Ibid., 634-635.

he had scarce one.[48]

A less complimentary comment appeared in the Gentleman's Magazine in 1795, which brought out the persisting effect of Johnson's criticism, in spite of the apparent revival of interest in parts of Cowley's poetry:

> This writer is ranked among the metaphysical poets; his wit is factitious, his genius artificial...But, admitting him to be really a poet, we might discover all the indiscretions of genius in his conduct; whilst we observe his officiousness in times of turbulence and peril, and the restlessness of his spirit in almost every situation.[49]

There is something in this last comment that is prophetic of the attitude of our own time.

[48] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Johnson," pp. 117-118.

[49] Ibid., p. 103.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND AND CRITICISM OF DONNE AND COWLEY

The spirit of Romanticism apparent during the last half of the eighteenth century culminated about 1800 and continued to dominate the first third of the nineteenth century; the most important landmark of this era was Wordsworth's and Coleridge's Lyrical Ballads and the authors' critical discussions relative to this work. Strengthening the English movement were influences from Europe: the German Romantic movement, the philosophy of Rousseau, with its emphasis on man's natural goodness and need for freedom, and the French Revolution, which inspired both an idealized political excitement and a reaction from its excesses. Though many of the general characteristics of the romantic sensibility have been mentioned, a summary of its more important features will help to explain why Donne for a time fared better than Cowley, for the first time since the Restoration. Dominant qualities of the romantic mood are the insistance on the superiority of the imagination over reason; belief in the freedom of the individual; reaction against the heroic couplet and a search for a wide variety of stanza and verse forms; concern, especially in Wordsworth's case, with the common man, particularly with the

man close to nature and the soil; the effort to employ in verse the language of everyday speech of simple people; the search for truth in the ideal and the beautiful rather than in the neoclassical generalities of reason and nature; the interpretation of the universal by imaginative insight into the minute detail and the particular individual; interest in remote places and earlier times, especially the Middle Ages; a probing into the mysterious, the occult, and the intangibles of the world of the spirit; a sense of communion with Nature as the basis for religious and moral conviction; a challenge to the infinite possibilities in man rather than a complacent acceptance of his limitations; an effort to create a spirit of social reform through the enlivening of men's perceptions rather than through overt didacticism; and emphasis on the word "passion" in the definition of poetry.[1]

An England involved in the Napoleonic Wars and in the

[1] Raymond MacDonald Alden, Critical Essays of the Nineteenth Century (New York, 1921), passim.

Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), pp. 1122-27.

Percy Hazen Houston, Main Currents of English Literature (New York, 1926), pp. 279-288.

Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature (New York, 1935), pp. 1026-34.

A. E. Powell, The Romantic Theory of Poetry (New York, 1926), pp. 1-14.

Hazleton Spencer, et al, edd., British Literature (Boston, 1952), pp. 3-14.

Basil Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies (London, 1949), pp. 10-31.

Cecil Maurice Bowra, The Romantic Imagination (Cambridge, [Mass.], 1949), passim.

problems growing out of the Industrial Revolution did not share immediately in all phases of the romantic sensibility; the novel and drama were popular, but the "new" poetry was more a concern of critics and scholars. The reading public was slow to accept the majority of the poets, first because of their oddity, later in some cases because of disapproval of their personal revolts against society. But the poets and critics were articulate in expressing the new sensibility, and in preferring metaphysical to neoclassical poetry.

> The literature of a small number, it never became really popular. To be more widely accepted, it had to wait until a reactionary movement towards balance had set in against it; and until with the evidence of its decline there was effaced the danger with which it had seemed to threaten society -- a society which above all desired to live.[2]

The very individualism of the romantic spirit led naturally to a wide variety in the types and forms of poetry and to much argument as to the principles involved in its composition. The unifying bond under this chaotic surface was the trust of emotion, feeling, intuition, and imagination in preference to reason. Mr Houston has noted the main trends and associated them with the leading individuals of the movement:

> The generation between the publication of the Lyrical Ballads and the death of Scott in 1832, is characterized by six rather indistinct phases: for they over-

[2] Legouis and Cazamian, p. 1034.

> lap, and a single writer may in himself be the expression of two or more of them. They are, first, a return to common life, chiefly represented by Wordsworth; second, wonder and mystery, "strangeness added to beauty," as revealed by Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats; third, the central revolutionary doctrine of the brotherhood of man and the revolt against institutions, splendidly set forth in Byron and Shelley; fourth, a revival of the medieval spirit, by Sir Walter Scott, and in a lesser degree by Coleridge and Keats; fifth, a greatly increased stimulation of sense impressions, as shown most abundantly by the poetry of Keats; sixth and finally, certain anti-romantic tendencies exemplified by Jane Austen, Thomas Love Peacock, Byron in his satires, and Wordsworth in his sonnets.[3]

A common spirit of mysticism and some of the more specific sources are noted by Mr Powell -- another aspect of Romanticism to which the spirit of Donne would be congenial:

> The six writers...represent a special form of the cult of feeling. All came in one way or another under the influence of a mystical philosophy. Coleridge and Shelley were influenced by a form of pantheism which they derived in great part from Spinoza. The same tendency led Coleridge to study Neoplatonism, whilst Shelley composed metrical interpretations of Plato. Boehme is traceable in the work of Blake. Both Coleridge and De Quincey attempted to suck mysticism out of the German idealists. Wordsworth was influenced by the reading and thought of Coleridge; and similar elements, derived in part from Wordsworth, helped to shape the earlier thought of Keats. Hence there arose in England a particular, a mystical form of romanticism...Art, like Nature, was beautiful only in so far as it expressed a transcendent Reality.[4]

[3] Houston, p. 288. [4] Powell, p. 10.

Purposes and definitions stated by the poets and critics of the time are one's best guides to understanding the spirit of Romanticism. The "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" states Wordsworth's early theory of poetic diction, one with which Coleridge and De Quincey did not agree. Donne in his Satires and Cowley in his Pindarics had foreshadowed Wordsworth's theory at least with respect to prose rhythms and word order, if not word choice, as they felt the dramatic quality of speech to be valuable to poetry. To quote Wordsworth:

> ...to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them...in a selection of language really used by men...to throw over them a certain coloring of the imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect...by tracing in them...the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement...All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of feelings...it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity...a large portion of the language of every good poem can in no respect differ from that of good prose.

Many essays in Coleridge's Biographia Literaria set forth his purposes, psychological ideas, and arguments with Wordsworth:

> It was agreed that my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which

constitutes poetic faith.

The redefinition of imagination and fancy placed greater emphasis on certain powers of the mind which had been included in the Elizabethan concept of wit. Coleridge and Wordsworth indulged in endless arguments over these definitions, which is it not my purpose to review here in all their hair-splitting details. It is only important to realize the great emphasis upon imagination as one distinguishing quality of Romanticism, and to recognize many of Coleridge's terms and concepts as alive in today's theories of art:

> The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends and (as it were) fuses each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. This power, first put into action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control,...reveals itself in the balance of opposite or discordant qualities.

Here continues Coleridge's famous set of paradoxes which may be resolved by the imagination; today's emphasis upon tension and fusion in poetry recognizes the same paradoxes, but places greater "relative worth and dignity" upon the intellect. The power of fusion is also recognized as the great virtue of Donne's wit; and Cowley was not far from the same concept when he said,

> In a true piece of wit all things must be,
> Yet all things there agree.

Coleridge made further significant distinctions:

> The primary imagination...the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the human mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination...an echo of the former... and differing only in the degree and mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate. Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with but fixities and definites...a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space... modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will...choice.

Fancy and the secondary imagination might work together but were regarded as essentially different in kind. "Milton had a highly imaginative, Cowley a very fanciful mind." To the modern mind, a similar distinction seems to hold good between Cowley and Donne at his best.

> Finally, good sense is the body of poetic genius, fancy its drapery, motion its life, and imagination the soul that... forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole.

Coleridge likewise redefined reason and understanding, his distinction being quite similar to that between imagination and fancy. The neoclassicist concept of reason has been demoted to understanding, while reason, as defined by Coleridge, has taken on the color of intuition:

> Reason is the 'source and substance of truths above sense'; Understanding is the faculty which judges 'according to sense.' Reason is the eye of the spirit...

Understanding is the mind of the flesh.[5]

To Coleridge has been ascribed an active imagination; to Wordsworth, a passive one. Coleridge, like Kant, conceived of the imagination as reaching out and imposing its own form upon concepts of Nature, while Wordsworth thought of Nature as an active force impressing itself upon the "wise passiveness" of the imagination, upon the "heart that watches and receives."

The almost lost term wit reappeared in Lamb's essay, "The Sanity of True Genius"; here Lamb, with his flair for the antiquarian word, went back to the all-inclusive Elizabethan concept, but he also showed how closely wit had become associated with imagination:

> So far from the position holding true, that great wit (or genius in our modern way of speaking) has a necessary alliance with insanity, the greatest wits ...will ever be found to be the sanest writers...The greatness of wit, by which the poetic talent is here chiefly to be understood, manifests itself in the admirable balance of all faculties ...The true poet dreams being awake... Herein the great and little wits are differenced...Their phantoms are lawless, their visions nightmares. They do not create, which implies shaping and consistency. Their imaginations are not active -- for to be active is to call something into act and form -- but passive as men in sick dreams.

So Lamb associated "great wit" with genius, the poetic

[5] Willey, pp. 10-29.
Alden, passim.

faculty, the creative imagination. One is left to assume that he did not include the great exponent of the passive imagination, Wordsworth, in the category of "men in sick dreams."

Passion as an essential to poetry was repeatedly emphasized by Hazlitt. This quality, perhaps more than any other, distinguishes the poetry of Donne from that of Cowley, and accounts for the greater appreciation of Donne in the Romantic era as well as in our own.

> Poetry is the high-wrought enthusiasm of fancy and feeling...Poetry is the language of imagination and passion, of fancy and will...Poetry is the imitation of nature, but the imagination and passions are a part of man's nature.[6]

The power and the passion of Romanticism had become somewhat modified by the 1840's, the decade for which Josephine Miles analyzes the poetic language. She shows the development of certain changes from their beginnings in the eighteenth century, through the period of Romanticism, and into our own time:

> Joseph Warton's Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope...accepted the old, but with reservations, tempering it toward the new...Warton does not preserve wit's more complimentary senses, but makes it third-class, elegant, fanciful, familiar, low rather, and on the way to being trivial; imagination is the term for more creative synthesis, which he allies to the sublime and pathetic ...The nineteenth-century poets would abandon the 'castled cliffs' as too wild and glittering, in Wordsworth's view, but they would preserve the detail of leaf, quail, and vegetable...Still

[6] Alden, pp. 197-200; 223-230.

these were major new poetic forces. They created the new vocabulary of detail in the poetry of the Wartons, Dyer, Thomson, and again in Wordsworth, Keats, and Tennyson, with a gradual increase of implication, through the Pre-Raphaelites, into the realm of the symbol...I take two works as representative critical landmarks, this Essay on Pope and the prose on the Lyrical Ballads, because they emphasize the consciousness of the shift to implicative particularity which the shifting poetic language most reveals. Hazlitt...was borrowing Schlegel's terms...'The most obvious distinction between the two styles, the classical and the romantic, is that the one is conversant with objects that are grand or beautiful in themselves, or in consequence of obvious and universal associations, the other, with those that are interesting only by force of circumstance or imagination'...The poetic changes through two centuries show just these interests... and as for Warton came to create a new standard of oddity, individuality, atmospheric detail, 'force of circumstance.' Against the extremes of...Gothic romanticism both Wordsworth and Coleridge rebelled...They wanted to reassert the classicism of universality now at the level of small things, the common man, the ballad structure, the 'simple' in all forms...Wordsworth stressed the old passivity, Coleridge the new activity of the imagination...This imaginative and emotional association helped successfully to reassert some romantic connections which critics had been making earlier between strangeness and familiarity, showing how each was a development from classical norms, strangeness out from, familiarity down from, and both inward from, the generally elevated center. In the 1840's a new and different agreement had been made upon a shorter, more intricately rhymed and metered stanza, upon more use of pause, short syllable, and refrain, in melody rather than onomatopoetic harmony, upon simple literal statement in combination with symbolic implication, and

> upon a vocabulary of atmosphere grown out of feeling...For Hunt, for Tennyson, for the 1840's and the Pre-Raphaelites as for Coleridge and Keats, the contrarieties rather than the similarities of association had asserted themselves, and pain, fear, mystery bloomed in the most delicate flower...The traits by which late romanticism may be characterized, the delicate and colorful, the tender and bright, the form and gleam and silence of suggestion and implication...the sense of inexpressible spirit was primary.[7]

Romanticism, as Miss Miles points out, was to become modified, but still to continue through the work of the Pre-Raphaelites, finally to blend with the Symbolism developing in France throughout the nineteenth century, and to become one of the submerged forces in modern poetry. Meanwhile, the literary efforts of Victorian England were to center largely in a thoughtful prose directed toward solving some of the problems of a growing democracy, a growing Empire, and a greatly expanding economy. Hard work on the problems of business continued to be the preoccupation of the middle classes, with the accompaniment of smug satisfaction in material progress, Philistinism in culture, and, as a reaction against the romantic excesses of individualism, a strong emphasis upon propriety in the social code and in literature. Modern frankness accepts in Donne much that the Victorian sensibility found shocking; even Cowley, commended at most times for his "moral air" and his high

[7] Josephine Miles, The Continuity of Poetic Language (Berkeley, 1951), pp. 350-371.

standards as compared with other Restoration writers, found some charges of indecency among Victorian critics. Yet perhaps moderns, fatuous in their freedom, are a little unfair when they accuse Victorians of unmitigated prudery. While we look back on the period as being sober, industrious, proper, and smug, we may forget that there was another side to the picture. Much individualism actually persisted, as the lives of several writers, for example, attest. Further, the Victorian era saw the development of a rich and humorous satire in the works of such novelists as Dickens and Thackeray, and in the creations of professional humorists. Wit continued its development in the sense of drollery and the quip, often at the expense of Victorianism.

> The truth is that, instead of inventing 'Victorianism,' the Victorians engaged in incessant warfare against the cant and hypocrisy they inherited from the maudlin sentimentality of the eighteenth century...it is a truth which critics of Victorianism ignore when they declare that the Victorians, forgetting the glorious freedom of Byron and Shelley, invented a pall of morality and snuffily turned from art to the sermon. Their leaders did nothing of the kind...The wit of the century which invented _Punch_ is perhaps its most valuable possession.[8]

Another aspect of the Victorian period which has contributed the disillusioned mood of our own time was the

[8] Howard Mumford Jones, "The Comic Spirit and Victorian Sanity," in _The Reinterpretation of Victorian Literature_, ed. Joseph E. Baker (Princeton, 1950), pp. 20-32.

struggle between science and religion. The parallel between the post-Copernican world and the post-Darwinian partly accounts for the sympathy toward metaphysical poetry, which began late in the nineteenth century. The resurgence of faith as a basis for religion, a personal rather than a dogmatic religion, had been one aspect of Romanticism; Puritanism had found a more congenial atmosphere within the Victorian sensibility, and the Oxford Movement had been enlivening the Church of England and moving it in the direction of Rome. But geological studies shook, and Darwin's theories shattered, the faith of many in a revealed religion. This doubt was to appear in varying degrees in much of the literature, particularly the poetry of the later century.

Besides the religious struggle, poetry was concerned with certain persisting aspects of Romanticism -- the supernatural, the emotional (at a lower pitch) and the antiquarian; interest in the classics, evident also among the later Romantics, increased, becoming apparent in the imitation of form as well as the borrowing of subjects. It has been observed that the reputation of Donne was probably at its lowest during the two periods when classicism was strongest, the Age of Pope and the mid-Victorian. The latter part of the century was to see the persisting undercurrent of Romanticism reappear in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites and in the cult of Art for Art's Sake. The fact that there was

something of a balance between romantic and classical interests may partly explain the growing attention to metaphysical poetry which has been noted during this time and which has continued until the present day.

Another factor which this period contributed to the poetry and sensibility of our time was the translation to English soil of the ideas of the French Symbolists, particularly through the efforts of Yeats. As the symbol has provided a means of objectifying the emotion and idea of the poet, it has performed somewhat the same function as the conceit did for the poets of the seventeenth century; thus the growth of Symbolism and Imagism has led to a better understanding of the conceit and so to a fuller appreciation of metaphysical poetry.

The widespread interest in the poetry of Browning, a devotee of Donne, no doubt contributed to the acceptance and understanding of the form of Donne's poetry. Browning's shows a similar compression of idea, dramatic approach, and roughness of line. Browning's range of interests and his vitality are reminiscent of Donne, though one fails to find in Browning the profundity and sense of complexity which have made Donne the more satisfying poet to the twentieth-century mind. Perhaps an even closer parallel in both spirit and form can be seen in the poetry of Thomas Hardy, also a confessed devotee of Donne. Here is something of the same cryptic wit, the combination of gloom and humor,

the wide-ranging philosophy, and also the condensed and roughened line of Donne.[9]

One could cite many authors whose works both expressed and helped to create the Victorian sensibility, and whose influence has carried over into our time; but in view of the purpose of this study, I have attempted to limit my discussion to factors which tended most strongly toward the metaphysical mood of today. Other attitudes and interests will be apparent in the closer study of the direct criticism of Donne and Cowley which follows.[10]

During the Romantic era, many critics began to appreciate the fact that Donne had written other poetry besides the *Satires*, and to respond to his lyric power; they also, metrical experiment being in the air, were sometimes inclined to see the virtues of Donne's metrics rather than to harp on "roughness," though the latter criticism still appeared; primarily they objected to Donne's conceits, occasionally to his licentiousness.[11]

[9] Baugh, pp. 1399-1403; 1472-3.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 1279-1308; 1475-1484.
Cecil Maurice Bowra, *The Creative Experiment* (London, 1949), *passim*.
Bowra, *The Heritage of Symbolism* (London, 1943), *passim*.
Houston, pp. 340-359.
Spencer, pp. 367-388; 881-901.
Ernest De Selincourt, *Wordsworthian and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1947), pp. 154-180.

[11] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets During the Age of Johnson and the Romantic Revival," *SP*, XXII (1925), 129-131.

Francis Jeffrey, who had previously referred to "the quaintness of Quarles and Donne,"[12] stated the typical attitude toward the conceits in his essay on Scott's "Lady of the Lake" (1810):

> A third sort distorted both nature and passion, according to some fantastical theory of their own, or took such a narrow corner of each, and dissected it with such curious and microscopic accuracy, that its original form was no longer discernible by the eyes of the uninstructed....For the most natural and obvious manner is always the most taking; and whatever costs the author much pains and labor is usually found to require a corresponding effort on the part of the reader,--which all readers are not disposed to make.[13]

Leigh Hunt's essay, "What is Poetry," written considerably later (1844), shows the same attitude toward the artificiality of the conceits; it also summarizes nicely the romantic attitude toward the relative value of the mental powers of the poet:

> Imagination, teeming with action and character makes the greatest poets; feeling and thought next; fancy (by itself) the next; wit the last. Thought by itself makes no poet at all...Taste is the very maker of judgment...The latter does but throw you into guesses and doubts. Hence the conceits which astonish us in the gravest and even subtlest thinkers, whose taste is not proportionate to their mental perceptions: men like Donne, for instance, who...seem to look at nothing as it really is, but only as to what may be thought of it. Hence, on the other hand, the delightfulness of those poets

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 131. [13] Alden, p. 61.

> who...run the great round of nature, not to perplex and be perplexed, but to make themselves and us happy.[14]

A number of references cited by Nethercot indicate that Donne was known and appreciated by leading writers of the time. Wordsworth, in whom some reviewers saw metaphysical qualities, knew and liked both Donne and Cowley; Lamb described both as "delicious"; De Quincey called Donne "the very first eminent rhetorician in English literature"; he also was one of the first critics to remark the fusion of passion and intellect which today is regarded as one of Donne's salient characteristics:

> Few writers have shown more extraordinary compass of powers than Donne; for he combined what no other man has ever done -- the last sublimation of dialectical subtlety and address with the most impassioned majesty.[15]

Hazlitt, however, in his Lectures on the English Poets (1818), admitted that he knew little of Donne except

> some beautiful verses to his wife...and some quaint riddles which the Sphinx could not unravel.[16]

Coleridge, in general one of the most understanding of all Romantic critics of Donne, could also be annoyed and

[14] Ibid., p. 397.

[15] Herbert J. C. Grierson, ed., Donne's Poetical Works (Oxford, 1912), II, ix.

[16] Nethercot, "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Johnson," pp. 131-132.

amused by him:

> With Donne, whose Muse on dromedary trots,
> Wreathe iron pokers into true-love-knots;
> Rhyme's sturdy cripple, Fancy's maze and clue,
> Wit's forge and fire-blast, Meaning's press and
> screw.[17]

Elsewhere, however, Coleridge showed real insight into Donne's interest in his own mental processes, which has been noted by Eliot and other modern critics:

> Where there exists that degree of genius and talent...the very act of poetic composition itself is...and is allowed to imply and produce, an unusual state of excitement...The vividness of the descriptions or declamations in Donne or Dryden is as much and as often derived from the force and fervor of the describer as from the...materials. The wheels take fire from the mere rapidity of motion.[18]

With regard to Donne's metrics Coleridge's remarks likewise foreshadow the modern interpretation, and seem the most intelligent comment to have been made since Carew's elegy:

> To read Donne you must measure time, and discover the time of each word by the sense of the passion...In poems where the writer _thinks_, and expects the reader to do so, the sense must be understood to understand the meter.[19]
>
> Since Dryden, the meter of our poets leads to the sense: in our older and more

[17] Edmund Gosse, _The Jacobean Poets_ (London, 1899), p. 65.

[18] Alden, p. 132.

[19] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Donne as a Metrist," _Sewanee Review_, XXX (1922), 471.

> genuine bards, the sense, including the passion, leads to the meter. Read even Donne's satires as he meant them to be read,...and you will find in the lines a manly harmony.[20]

Perhaps it was in response to Coleridge's protest that Oxford ought to keep Donne's sermons available to divinity students, that a six-volume edition of Donne's complete works was published in 1839.[21]

As another example of the greater discrimination directed toward Donne's poetry during the Romantic era, may be cited the comments on Donne in Chalmers' English Poets (1810), which included nearly a hundred pages of his poems. After giving a number of eighteenth-century criticisms, Chalmers added a remark which showed increasing awareness of the differences between Donne's various types of poetry:

> He appears either to have had no ear, or to have been utterly regardless of harmony. Yet Spenser preceded him, and Drummond, the first polished versifier, was his contemporary; but it must be allowed that before Drummond appeared, Donne had relinquished his pursuit of the Muses, nor would it be just to include the whole of his poetry under the general censure which has been usually passed...what inducement could he have to take pains, as he published nothing, and seems not

[20] Charles Wells Moulton, The Library of Literary Criticism (Buffalo, New York, 1901) I, 714.

[21] Austin Allibone, A Critical Dictionary of English Literature (Philadelphia, 1908), I, 513.

> desirous of public fame? He was certainly not ignorant or unskilled in the higher attributes of style, for he wrote elegantly in Latin, and displays considerable taste in some of his smaller pieces and epigrams.[22]

An essay in the 1823 Retrospective Review criticized Donne's conceits but excused them as being due to the fashion of the age. It emphasized Donne's virtues as more than compensating for his faults, and in general tended to encourage the reading of his poetry. Although it considered Donne's Epistles "cut and dried" and left the Divine Poems "to speak for themselves," it recognized the force more than the roughness of the Satires and called Pope's version an "impertinence." Most unusual of all was its special attention to the lyrics and its praise of their metrical beauty:

> Donne was contemporary with Shakespeare and was not unworthy to be so...at the head of the minor poets of that day. Imbued, to saturation, with all the learning of his age -- with a most active and piercing intellect -- an imagination... most subtle and far-darting, -- a fancy rich, vivid, picturesque...fantastical... --a mode of expression singularly terse, simple, and condensed, -- an exquisite ear for the melody of versification -- and a wit, admirable as well for its caustic severity as for its playful quickness; all he wanted to make him an accomplished poet of the second order was, sensibility and taste...The most pure and perfect beauties of every kind -- of thought, of sentiment, of imagery, of expression and of versification -- lying in immediate contact with the basest de-

[22] Alexander Chalmers, "The Life of Donne," in English Poets (London, 1810), V, 124.

> formities, equally of every kind...This may serve, in some degree, to account for the total neglect which has so long attended him...the unpleasant effect will soon wear off, and [the reader] will find great amusement and great exercise for his thinking faculties.[23]

A less tolerant attitude was apparent, however, in some of the critical comment, such as Thomas Campbell's (1819):

> The life of Donne is more interesting than his poetry....He addresses the object of his real tenderness with ideas that outrage decorum. He begins his own epithalamium with most indelicate invocation to his bride. His ruggedness and whim are almost proverbially known. Yet there is a beauty of thought which at intervals rises from his chaotic imagination.

Others were inclined to repeat the neoclassical dicta as to his metrics, stressing the roughness of the couplets as though he had never written anything else; typical of these is the remark of Henry Kirke White (1806):

> Donne had not music enough to render his broken rhyming couplets sufferable, and neither his wit, nor his pointed satire, were sufficient to rescue him from that neglect which his uncouth and rugged versification speedily superinduced.

To which may be added the witty comment of Southey:

> Nothing could have made Donne a poet, unless a great change had been wrought in the internal structure of his ears, as was wrought in elongating those of Midas.[24]

[23] "Donne's Poems," Retrospective Review, VIII (1823), 31, *et passim*.

[24] Moulton, pp. 711-715.

The last three comments, cited by Moulton, show that the greater appreciation and more discriminating judgment of Donne on the part of some Romantics was caught between the millstones of persistant neoclassical pedantry and incipient Victorian prudery. The early and mid-Victorian periods were to assume a general attitude of dislike for Donne on nearly all counts. The emphasis on propriety and the resurgence of classicism at this time perhaps help to account for this regression in Donne's popularity, which reached its dark hour before the dawn. Henry Hallam (1839) called him

> ...the most inharmonious of our versifiers ...lines too rugged to seem meter. Of his earlier poems, many are very licentious; the later are chiefly devout. Few are good for much; the conceits have not even the merit of being intelligible; it would perhaps be difficult to select three passages that we should care to read again.

Landor and Hartley Coleridge gave Donne a few lines in their poems on poets:

> With verses knarled and knotted hobbled on,

and

> Of stubborn thoughts a garland thought to twine;
> To his fair Maid brought cabalistic posies,
> And sung quaint ditties of metempsychosis;
> 'Twists iron pokers into true-love-knots,'
> Coining hard words not found in polyglots.

A literary historian, Edwin P. Whipple, speaking in what we often regard as the typical Victorian vein, recognized the power of Donne's intellect but considered it turned to false purposes:

> The intention is not to idealize what is true, but to display the writer's skill and wit in giving a show of reason to what is false. The effect of this on Donne's moral character was pernicious ...he could wittily justify what was vicious...cold, hard, labored, intellectualized sensuality.[25]

Elizabeth Browning, in her letters to Robert, referred to Donne as "your Donne,"[26] but in her Book of the Poets she proved more gentle than most of her contemporaries; she at least appreciated his spirit if not his form:

> Honor to the satirists...to Donne whose instinct for beauty overcame the resolution of his satiric humor....Honor, again, to the...lyrists and sonneteers...to Donne, who takes his place naturally in this new class, having a dumb angel, and knowing more noble poetry than he articulates.[27]

Another mid-century comment, which recognized that Donne had been receiving more critical attention, favorable or otherwise, and which made a slightly ironic prophecy regarding his reputation, was Allibone's statement in his Critical Dictionary of English Literature (first edition 1854):

> He enjoyed great reputation as a poet, being placed at the head of the Metaphysical school; and after long neglect has received some attention within the last few years; but his poetry is not of a character calculated to gain extensive popularity.[28]

[25] Moulton, p. 715. [26] Allibone, loc. cit.

[27] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, The Book of the Poets, in Complete Works (New York, 1900), VI, 263-278.

[28] Allibone, loc. cit.

It was during the 1860's that the tide of criticism seemed again to turn somewhat in favor of Donne, at least to the extent of recognizing the poetic genius that underlay his still unacceptable form. Comment was to remain mixed, however, until about the turn of the century, when a further analysis of his metrics, a recognition of his intensity, and a closer sympathy with his spirit were to make him one of the major sources of poetic inspiration and critical preoccupation of the twentieth century. George Gilfillan, in his Specimens with Memoirs of the Less Known British Poets (1860) made one of the earlier comments illustrative of the later Victorian trend:

> Donne, altogether, gives us the impression of a great genius ruined by a false system ...He begins generally well,...but quibbles, conceits, and the temptation of shewing off recondite learning, prove too strong for him...In no writings of the language is there more spilt treasure -- a more lavish loss of beautiful, original, and striking things.

George L. Craik also objected to the conceits, and to what seemed to him a lack of consistency, which moderns have interpreted as a commendable complexity of wit; he did, however, vastly prefer Donne to Cowley, as will be noted later:

> Things of the most opposite kinds -- the harsh and the harmonious, the graceful and the grotesque, the grave and the gay, the pious and the profane -- meet and mingle in the strangest of dances...A deeper insight detects not only a vein of the most exuberant wit, but often the

> sunniest and most delicate fancy, and the
> truest tenderness and depth of feeling.[29]

Mention has been made of the influence of Browning on Donne's reputation and of the similarities between their poetry. Appreciation of Donne during the latter part of the nineteenth century may have been incidental to the appreciation of Browning. In "The Two Poets of Croisic" Browning used a quotation from Donne as the turning point in an argument, and paid him open tribute, while still recognizing the quaintness of his language and versification:

> 'He's greatest now and to de-struc-ti-on
> Nearest.' Attend the solemn word I quote,
> O Paul! 'There's no pause at per-fec-ti-on.'
> Thus knolls thy knell the Doctor's bronzed throat!
> 'Greatness a period hath, no sta-ti-on!'
> Better and truer words none ever wrote
> (Despite the antique outstretched a-i-on)
> Than thou, revered and magisterial Donne![30]

The chorus of mingled criticism increased: critics recognized the genius, even as they analyzed, often with disapproval, the very qualities for which Donne is now admired. George MacDonald (1868) saw the basic logic of the poems but regarded the conceits as tasteless digressions. Moderns, more attuned to psycholgical connections, see the conceits as essential to the structure of Donne's poems. They also regard his metrics as the result of art and not of "indifference": To quote MacDonald:

[29] Moulton, pp. 715-716.

[30] Robert Browning, The Complete Poetical Works of Robert Browning, [ed. Augustine Birrell] (New York, 1917), p. 1146.

> The central thought...is nearly sure to be just; the subordinate grotesque and wildly associated...remind one of a dream wherein mere suggestion without choice or fitness rules the sequence...Donne would sport with ideas and with visual images or embodiments of them...He says nothing unrelated to the main idea...but whatever wild thing starts from the thicket of thought, all is worthy game to the hunting intellect of Dr Donne, and is followed without question of tone, keeping, or harmony...He enjoys the unenviable distinction of having no rival in ruggedness of metric movement and associated sounds...clearly the result of indifference ...strange to us when we find he <u>can</u> write a lovely verse and even an exquisite stanza.

Alfred Welsh (1882) likewise recognized and condemned the very quality which we now recognize as a virtue, the structural nature of Donne's conceits:

> We find little to admire, and nothing to love. We see that far-fetched similes, extravagant metaphors, are not here occasional blemishes, but the substance.[31]

Taine's History of English Literature (1871) considered Donne's exaggerations as an aspect of decadence, the result of following the metaphysical tradition; he sensed Donne's power, but called his conceits "absurd," much in the spirit of Dr Johnson. Moderns are inclined to stress Donne's originality, rather than the decadence:

> In all arts first masters and inventors discover the idea, steep themselves in it, and leave it to effect its outward form. Then come the imitators...who alter it by exaggeration...Donne in particular, a pungent satirist of terrible crudeness, a powerful poet, of a precise

[31] Moulton, pp. 716-717.

> and intense imagination, who still preserves something of the energy and thrill of the original inspiration. But he deliberately abuses all these gifts, and succeeds with great difficulty in concocting a piece of nonsense.[32]

So proceeds the mixed chorus: Chambers' "much bad taste ...real poetry... of a high order"; Palgrave's "strange solemn passionate ernestness...which underlie the fanciful 'conceits'"; Carpenter's "thoroughly original spirit... thoughtful, indirect, and strange...it does not sing"; Hannay's "enigmatical and debated, alternately attractive and...repellant." Even those who still could not enjoy or understand Donne conceded his great influence in English literature.[33]

Grossart's edition of Donne (1872) has been recognized as an influential force in the development of his modern reputation. So, likewise, have been Gosse's extensive studies of this "enigmatical and subterranean monster." Gosse's work during the last two decades of the nineteenth century show much of the trend which more recent thought has taken. He remarked that in "The Progress of the Soul" he found

> ...the poet's characteristics to the full. The verse marches with a virile tread, the epithets are daring, the thoughts always curious and occasionally sublime, the imagination odd and scholastic, with recurring

[32] H. A. Taine, History of English Literature, trans. H. Van Laun (Edinburgh, 1871), I, 203-204.

[33] Moulton, 716-718.

> gleams of passion.

To Gosse, Donne's Epistles were "stuffed hard with thoughts"; the Elegies showed "extraordinary aberrations of fancy" but "lovely sudden bursts of pure poetry"; in the Divine Poems "the Roman element was very strong...far removed from Puritanism"; and he found "the most interesting section... his amatory lyrics."

> As a rule these poems are extremely personal, confidential, and vivid; the stamp of life is on them...sincerity burns in every line, and the most exquisite images lie side by side with monstrous conceits and ugly pedantries. Scarcely two of the seventy are written in the same verse-form. Donne evidently laid himself out to invent elaborate and far-fetched meters.

Thus Gosse was one of the first modern critics to call attention to the very deliberate art of Donne in his verse and stanza form, and so contributed significantly to one important aspect of the modern appreciation of Donne:

> It seems even to be supposed by some critics that Donne did not know how to scan. This last supposition may be rejected at once; what there was to know about poetry was known to Donne. But it seems certain he intentionally introduced a revolution into English versification. A five-syllabled iambic line...seems to have vexed the ear of Donne by its tendency to feebleness... He desired new and more varied effects... No poet is more difficult to read aloud... But treat the five-foot verse not as a fixed and unalterable sequence of cadences, but as a norm around which a musician weaves his variations, and the riddle is soon read.[34]

[34] Gosse, The Jacobean Poets, pp. 52-63.

Schelling and Saintsbury were perhaps the most outspoken in their priase of Donne during the last decade of the century, while Leslie Stephen recognized his kinship with the spirit of our day. Felix Schelling (1895) urged the study of the life and works of Donne, so that a new view might remove many of the chronic misconceptions; he recognized the combination of emotion and intellect so often emphasized in studies of Donne:

> ...that grave and marvelous man, Dr John Donne....Donne, withdrawn almost wholly from the influences affecting his contemporaries, shone and glowed with a strange light all his own...No one, excepting Shakespeare...has done so much to develop intellectualized emotion in the Elizabethan lyric as John Donne.

Saintsbury, while openly recognizing Donne's faults, felt that he offered great and varied rewards to the reader who was wise in the complexities of human nature. In his Introduction to Poems of John Donne (1896) he spoke of Donne's faults, but more than redeemed the criticism:

> Faults are gross, open, and palpable... obscure his beauties even to not unfit readers...he is now and then simply and inexcusably nasty...extravagances which go near to silliness...For those who have experienced, or who at least understand, the ups-and-downs, the ins-and-outs of human temperament, the alterations, not merely of passion and satiety, but of passion and laughter, passion and melancholy reflection, of passion earthly enough, and spiritual rapture almost heavenly, there is no poet and hardly any writer like Donne.[35]

[35] Moulton, pp. 717-719.

And again in Saintsbury's Short History of English Literature (1898) additional foreshadowings of the modern interpretation of Donne, and higher praise than many moderns give him:

> All elements of the Renaissance spirit... death...passion...blend of classical and romantic form...taste for conceit spiritualized and made to transcend...roughness of thought does not lend itself to actually smooth expression...unique clangor of poetic sound...passion and meditation...the light the most unearthly that ever played round a poet's head.[36]

Leslie Stephen sensed certain similarities between Donne's spirit and the mood of the end of the century and also saw at work in Donne's poetry much of the fin-de-siecle aesthetic; the breadth of Donne's mind and art is apparent in the fact that the modern generation also feels a close kinship with Donne and his day, though not for exactly the same reasons:

> In one way he has pertly become obsolete because he belonged so completely to the dying epoch. The scholasticism in which his mind was steeped was to become hateful and then contemptible to the rising philosophy; Donne's poetical creed went the same way...but on the other side, Donne's depth of feeling, whether tortured into short lyrics or expanding into voluble rhetoric, has a charm which perhaps gains a new charm from modern sentimentalists. His morbid or 'neurotic' constitution has a real affinity for latter-day pessimists....He has the characteristic love for getting pungency at any price; for dwelling on the horrible until we cannot say whether it attracts or repels him; and can love the 'intense'

[36] George Saintsbury, A Short History of English Literature (New York, 1935), pp. 366-367.

> and supersublimated as much as if he were skilled in all the latest aesthetic canons.[37]

Thus the Victorians, who started by disliking Donne, ended by praising him; and the reputation of Donne entered upon an era of expanding importance in the twentieth century. There remain to notice a few more modern criticisms, and to illustrate from the poetry itself some of the reasons why Donne satisfies the modern criteria and Cowley does not. The twentieth century has not seen fit to revise to any great extent the estimate of the nineteenth century, which fairly well completed the burial of Cowley's reputation as a poet.

The end of the eighteenth century saw Cowley's prose more popular than his verse, parts of which, including the Davideis and much of The Mistress, had withered under neo-classical disapproval; The Pindarics had been subjected to considerable adverse criticism, while the Anacreontics were still enjoyed. No doubt many of the copies of Cowley's verse and of selections published during the late eighteenth century were still in the hands of readers during the Romantic era. Wordsworth, writing in 1810, referred incidentally to Cowley, implying that the book stalls of the 1780's had been rather overstocked with his works, though

> this is not said in disparagement of that able writer and amiable man.[38]

[37] Moulton, p. 719.

[38] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," PMLA, XXXVIII (1923), 635.

Coleridge considered Cowley well enough known to use him as an illustration in making an important distinction between imagination and fancy.[39] Nethercot summarizes the Romantic's assessment:

> the nineteenth century, on the whole, did not continue the development of this appreciation to quite the completion which might have been expected. Lamb, of course, loved Cowley for his flavor of oddity, eccentricity, and companionableness...Hazlitt... described him as 'melancholy and fantastical,'--'a great man, not a great poet.' But the Romantics did not read him as they did even the minor poems of Milton.[40]

Lamb probably gave the greatest support to Cowley's reputation during this period, to judge by the number of his references. He wrote a letter asking Coleridge's opinion of the "delicious" prose and verse of Cowley, whom he admitted to be "out of fashion":

> In all our comparisons of taste, I do not know whether I have ever heard your opinion of a poet very dear to me, though now out of fashion -- Cowley.[41]

Lamb also used Cowley as a source of apt quotations in a number of his essays; for example, in "The Superannuated Man" he quoted Cowley's verses on Business, "which so mightily agrees with my constitution.[42]

[39] Alden, p. 101.

[40] Nethercot, Abraham Cowley: the Muses' Hannibal (London, 1931), p. 288.

[41] Allibone, I, 438.

[42] Charles Lamb, Life, Letters and Writings of Charles Lamb, ed. Percy Fitzgerald (London, 1895), IV, 429.

Cowley's works, like Donne's were reviewed in the <u>Retrospective Review</u> (1827), but with an attitude which would tend to reduce the number of readers, rather than to increase them, as had been the case with Donne. The reviewer explained the metaphysical style as a reaction against Puritanism and emphasized the court wits in the group rather than the religious poets included by moderns. The romantic spirit is apparent in the author's emphasis on feeling, but there is also evident the undercurrent of continuity between the neoclassical and the Victorian concern with taste and propriety.

> Cowley is one of the school called metaphysical poets, although <u>why</u> they are so called is not easy to discover:...its character is, that it addresses itself to the head, and not to the heart; that it prefers what is strange to what is true; sacrifices feeling,...luxuriates only in the wantonness of words...delicacy, and refinement, and simplicity were alike abjured; and the perfection of good writing was to express out-of-the-way thoughts in mean and trivial language...What is very remarkable in Cowley is, that in the whole course of his poems we hardly meet with a single glimmer of feeling.

After emphasizing cases of Cowley's physiological imagery which seemed to him "disgusting," the reviewer proceeded:

> But we prefer the more agreeable employment of selecting what is really good, to the task of pointing out the sins of a man of genius against good taste and decency...In joyous abandonment, or exuberant gaiety, Cowley has few equals...We quote...'The Chronicle'...In the same airy and agreeable strain is composed "The Inconstant," one of the very few poems that is good for anything in <u>The</u>

> Mistress...The Pindaric Odes of Cowley have been much commended and a little blamed...we can only see in them what is low, vulgar, and trivial...we can find neither sublimity of sentiment nor style ...The part of Cowley's works in which he has attained the greatest excellence are his translations...very free translations, in which the author had more regard to the spirit than the mere words of the originals...His prose...the most agreeable and valuable of his compositions;...In the latter we find nothing mean or affectedly vulgar either in thought or language.[43]

Praise of Cowley's prose continued throughout the century, while his verse met with increasing indifference. A few Romantics did stress a certain sentimental appeal in Cowley, which found a response in romantic as it had in neoclassical readers. His early poetry was noted by Granger's Biographical History, published between 1769 and 1824, emphasis here being placed upon the precocious boy and the young lover:

> We are even more pleased with some of the juvenile poems, than with many of his later performances; as there is not everywhere in them that redundancy of wit; and where there is, we are more inclined to admire, than be offended with the productions of a boy. His passion for studious retirement, which was still increasing with his years, discovered itself at thirteen...The tenderness of some of his juvenile verses shows, that he was no stranger to another passion.

Thomas Campbell (1819) could praise only the childlike

[43] "The Works of Abraham Cowley," Retrospective Review, Second Series, I (1827), 351-385.

spirit, the melancholy, and the love of retirement, which have already been noted as appealing to the earlier Romantic spirit:

> He wrote verses while yet a child; and midst his best poetry as well as his worst, in his touching and tender as well as his extravagant passages, there is always something that reminds us of childhood in Cowley...Misanthropy, as far as so gentle a nature could cherish it, naturally strengthened his love of retirement, and increased that passion for country life which breathes in the fancy of his poetry and the eloquence of his prose.

But this sentimental appeal was more than overbalanced by the objections voiced at various times to the conceits and to other faults in Cowley's poetry. The Davideis was criticized for its conceits by Henry Neele (1827-29), and The Mistress some ten years later by Henry Hallem:

> The "Davideis" is much more disfigured by far-fetched conceits than even the Odes ...Still there are many scattered beauties ...many original ideas, and much brilliant versification.

> The most celebrated performance of the miscalled metaphysical poets...a series of short amatory poems...full of analogies that have no semblance of truth, except from a double sense of words and thoughts that unite the coldness of subtility with the hyperbolical extravagance of counterfeited passion.

Macaulay (1825) laid his finger on perhaps the most important reason why Cowley, in spite of his sentimental appeal, could not be of real interest to the era of Romanticism:

> Cowley, with all his admirable wit and ingenuity, had little imagination; nor indeed do we think his classical diction

> comparable to that of Milton.

Thus Cowley shared with Donne the Romantics' condemnation of the metaphysical conceit, but failed to gain even the passing tolerance which Donne's greater passion and imagination had won for him.

By mid-century, with the reaction against metaphysical poetry noted in the case of Donne, Cowley's reputation reached its lowest ebb. Leigh Hunt (1858) had a kind word for Cowley's personality (overgenerous, I think, in view of evidence from Cowley's life and writings), but was rather noncommittal with regard to his poetry. He, too, noticed the child-like quality in Cowley; one may note in passing that this very quality may partly explain Cowley's failure to satisfy the modern mind, which places emphasis on the virtues of intellectual adulthood and emotional maturity. To quote Hunt:

> A man of genius and benevolence, who would not have hurt a fly -- Abraham Cowley...one of the kindest, wisest, and truest gentlemen that ever graced humanity...His poetry is what every man's poetry is, the flower of what was in him; and it is at least so far good poetry as it is the quintessence of amiable and deep reflection, not without a more festive strain...Cowley, notwithstanding the active part he took in politics, never ceased to be a child at heart. His mind lived in 'books and bowers' -- in the sequestered places of thought.[44]

Elizabeth Browning took a more critical and scholarly

[44] Moulton, II, 195-201.

attitude, noting the difficulty of Cowley's transitional position, questioning the critical worth of the term metaphysical, and assessing Cowley's poetical gifts very nearly at today's evaluation, though she did display a little Victorian delicacy:

> We disclaim the classification, and believe ...that every poet, inasmuch as he is a poet, is a metaphysician. In taking note, therefore, of this Cowley, who stands on the very vibratory soil of the transition, and stretches his faltering and protesting hands on either side, to the old and to the new, let no one brand him for 'metaphysics.' He was a true poet, both by constitution and cultivation, but without the poet's heart,...and with a conscious volition, quick yet calm...to command from the ends of the universe the associations of material sciences and spiritual philosophies. The Elizabethan writers were inclined to a too curious illumination of thought by imagery. Cowley was coarsely curious: he went to the shambles for his chambers of imagery, and very often through the mud. All which faults appear to us attributable to his coldness of temperament, and his defectiveness in the instinct toward Beauty; to having the intellect only of a great poet, not the sensibility...paraphrases of Anacreon absolutely the most perfect of... their order...His other poems...profuse material...for three poets, each greater than himself. He approached the beautiful and the true as closely as mere fancy could...Yet his influence was for good... by inciting a struggle backward, a delay in the revolutionary movement...For his actual influence, he lifts us up and casts us down -- charms and goes nigh to disgust us -- does all but make us love and weep.[45]

Another mid-century critic whose comments interestingly

[45] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, _The Book of the Poets_, in _Works_, VI, 283-285.

foreshadowed the modern attitude was George L. Craik; though he had criticized Donne's style, he appreciated him in comparison to Cowley:

> His [Cowley's] imagination is tinsel, or mere surface gilding, compared to Donne's solid gold; his wit is little better than word-catching, to the profound meditative quaintness of the elder poet; and of passion, with which all Donne's finest lines are tremulous, Cowley has none. Considerable grace and dignity occasionally distinguish his Pindaric Odes... elegant playfulness of style and fancy in ...imitations of Anacreon...As for what he intends for love verses...the only sort of love is love of point and sparkle.

It would seem that such comments as Craik's and Mrs Browning's placed the final shovelfuls of dust on Cowley's grave as a poet; a few apologists have spoken up for him, but most of the interest in him since the mid-Victorian era -- perhaps earlier -- has been directed toward his place in literary history rather than toward his poetry as such. The general attitude of later Victorians appears in such comments as William Rossetti's (1872-78):

> One does not love his poetry; but one can admire it often, if only one would read it;

Thomas Humphrey Ward's (1880):

> Except for a few students like Lamb... Cowley's verse in this century remains unread and unreadable...Dryden absorbed all that was best in Cowley and superseded him for eighteenth century readers, and the nineteenth century, which reads Dryden little...reads Cowley less;

John Dennis's (1883), who blamed the conceits again:

> These quiddities and once-fashionable follies proved Cowley's death-warrant as a poet, for although some of his verses have a vital force and beauty, the great body of his poetry is...dead;

Leslie Stephen's (1887), which found the cause for Cowley's decline in pedantry and affectation:

> The 'metaphysical poets' are court pedants. They represent the intrusion into poetry of the love of dialectical subtlety encouraged by the still prevalent system of scholastic disputation. In Cowley's poems, as in Donne's,...the habit of thought is perceptible throughout. In the next generation the method became obsolete and then offensive. Cowley can only be said to survive in the few pieces where he condescends to be unaffected;

Francis T. Palgrave's (1889), to whom the je ne sais quois of poetry was lacking in Cowley:

> ...wanting...that indescribable something which eternally separates poetry from verse...rarely read, but never...without profit;

And Charles F. Johnson's (1900), who found him of purely scholarly appeal:

> His verse has not life enough to be of interest to any but special students of the period.[46]

In view of such a chorus, one finds it a little hard to accept Nethercot's claim that Cowley's works have been seeing a "slow rehabilitation" since the eighteenth century.[47] However, there were a few critics who, though re-

[46] Moulton, II, 201-202.

[47] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," p. 638.

cognizing Cowley's weaknesses and the current indifference to him, at least attempted to understand him.

Taine (1871), who had seen evidence of decadence in Donne, found the ultimate exhaustion of the metaphysical tradition in Cowley:

> On this boundary line of a closing and dawning literature,...Abraham Cowley, a precocious child...having known passions less than books, busied himself less about things than about words. Literary exhaustion has seldom been more manifest. He possesses all the capacity to say whatever pleases him, but he has just nothing to say...The substance has vanished, leaving in its place a hollow shadow ...Except for a few descriptive verses, two or three graceful tendernesses, he feels nothing, he speaks only; he is a poet of the brain...After reading two hundred pages, you feel disposed to box his ears...His prose is as easy and sensibile as his poetry is contorted and unreasonable.[48]

Edmund Gosse, writing during the last two decades of the century, also emphasized the complete demise of Cowley as a poet, though being, as Nethercot puts it, "pleasantly inaccurate" as to the extent and the timing of the oblivion. Gosse did make a rather thorough study of Cowley's place in literature and attempted to account for both his contemporary popularity and his decline. (I have previously quoted Gosse on Cowley's relationship to his own times). Taine had seen in Cowley the exhaustion of a tradition; Gosse sensed Cowley's personal exhaustion -- "the exhaust-

[48] Taine, I, 204-205.

ing precosity of Cowley's marvelous boyhood":

> From this interesting school of Cambridge writers Cowley emerged, the last and most exhausted of them all.[49]
>
> I think we can trace all this pedantic ingenuity to the personal training and example of Dr Henry More, who was the great oracle of English Platonism at Cambridge during Cowley's residence there. The taste for these ingenuities and paradoxical turns of thought came like a disease, and passed away. Friendship and poetry were the two subjects that alone set Cowley's peculiar gifts on flame. Languid or insincere on other subjects, on these two he never failed to be eloquent. No poet universally admired in his own age can be wholly without lasting merit.[50]

While Gosse was studying Cowley and admitting that he was "as little read as any fifth-rate Elizabethan dramatist," Grossart was editing his works (along with those of other seventeenth-century poets) and stoutly defending Cowley's right to, and actual possession of, "an inner circle of readers and students":

> Such supercilious assumption as that of Mr T. H. Ward...that Cowley is to be 'pooh-pooh'd'...is to my mind the superlative of uncritical and shallow misjudgment, and a literary blunder and offense combined...Cowley is as 'humble' but no humbler than in his lifetime, and, stands as worthy of his contemporary homage as ever.[51]

[49] Gosse, <u>From Shakespeare to Pope</u> (Cambridge, 1885), p. 173.

[50] Gosse, <u>Seventeenth Century Studies</u> (New York, 1897), pp. 191-228.

[51] Nethercot, "The Reputation of Abraham Cowley 1660-1800," pp. 189-190.

This was indeed a vigorous statement, but it failed to revive Cowley as a poet. One other voice raised in Cowley's defense during the latter quarter of the nineteenth century was that of William Cullen Bryant; perhaps the frigidity noted by many in Cowley was less offensive to Bryant, whom Lowell had twitted for having the same fault:

> If he stir you at all, it is just, on my soul,
> Like being stirred up by the very North Pole.

Bryant mentioned Cowley's influence on Scott and Pope and suggested that current writers might at least find him "worth imitating." He found "no emotion" in The Mistress, but praised and included selections from a number of longer poems, and considered the Anacreontics "finer than the originals." He, like Gosse, praised Cowley for moral superiority among Restoration poets, though Bryant, too, concluded, "That he is no longer read is not surprising."[52] With this conclusion the twentieth century is inclined to agree.

[52] William Cullen Bryant, "Abraham Cowley," North American Review, CXXIV (1877), 368-382.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY CRITICISM, CONCLUSIONS, AND ILLUSTRATIONS

The powerful appeal of John Donne to the twentieth century, which has been emphasized throughout this study, has not led to unreserved praise for all of his poetry. The tendency has been to place emphasis upon the _Songs and Sonnets_ and the _Divine Poems_, his poems of love and religion, and to discount the _Elegies_, _Epistles_, _Obsequies_, and most of the _Satires_. Perhaps the distinguishing quality of twentieth-century criticism is its re-evaluation of his metrics and its better understanding of his conceits. Characteristics of Donne's poetry most highly regarded today are: the range and suitability of his stanza structures, the emotional effect produced by variations in the meter, the dramatic quality of many poems, the intensity and passion which are kept under strict logical control (in contrast to the vague exuberance of outworn Romanticism), the unified structure and single final impact of each poem, and the author's psychological insight and complicated attitudes toward life and learning indicated by his wit and conceits. Critics disagree as to the integration of Donne's personality, some emphasizing his unified sensibility, others noting his struggle between the flesh and the spirit, between

the disappointed worldly ambitions of the courtier and the otherworldly dedication of the preacher, between the claims of intellect and faith. It is fairly agreed that he found a satisfying philosophy of love in the avowed interdependence of the spirit and the flesh, best expressed in his poems to his wife; and that his sermons and later religious poetry reveal the partial attainment of his goal in his search for God. One does not find in Donne a broad universal philosophy, but rather the picture of a keen and curious intellect drawing freely upon both the old and the new ideas of his day as they served to illustrate or objectify his emotions and his thought. It is as an artist revealing the struggles of a keen and complex mind in a confused and complex age, and finding a new form adequate to the expression of those struggles, that Donne appeals to the modern mind.

Mr Courthope's judgment of Donne may be taken as typical of the early part of this century -- a mixture of censure and admiration but with an admitted fascination:

> The essence of Donne's wit is abstraction ...separating the perceptions of the soul from the entanglements of sense, and after isolating a thought, a passion, or a quality...to make it visible to the fancy by means of metaphorical images or scholastic allusions...the flight of metaphysical wit soon reveals the limitations of its powers...Eagerness for novelty and paradox leads the poet to obscurity of expression...No more lively or characteristic representative can be found of the thought of an age when the traditions of the ancient faith met in full encounter

with the forces of the new philosophy.[1] Grierson made an extensive study of Donne in connection with his very scholarly edition of Donne's poetry, published in 1912; he discussed the various types of poetry, praising some and condemning others:

> In "The Storme" and "The Calme" Donne used his wit to achieve an effect of realism which was something new in English poetry ...Letters, certain Satires and "The Progress of the Soul"...Each is a vivid picture of the workings of Donne's soul at a critical period of his life. Letters to Ladies...fanciful and subtle compliment ...No one who knows the fashion of the day will read into them more than they were intended to convey. Epicedes...difficult to find a line that moves;...in the Anniversaries, amid much that is both puerile and extravagant, a loftier strain of impassioned reflection and vision...We must examine his love-poetry and his religious poetry. It is here that everyone who cares for his unique and arresting genius will admit that he must stand or fall as a great poet. Donne's love-poetry is a very complex phenomenon...subtle play of argument and wit...record of passion...of love as an actual, immediate experience in all its moods...imagery less classical... spirit penetrated with the sensual, realistic, scornful tone of the Latin lyric and elegiac poets...The finest note in Donne's love-poetry is the note of joy, the joy of mutual and contented passion... a passion in which body and soul alike have their part. There are qualities in the religious poetry of simpler and purer souls to which Donne's seldom or never attains...Effort is the note which predominates...passionate penitence, beating against the bars of self in the desire to break through to a fuller appreciation of the mercy and love of God...A poetry,

[1] W. J. Courthope, A History of English Poetry (London, 1903), III, 160-167.

> not perfect in form, rugged of line and careless of rhyme, a poetry in which intellect and feeling are seldom fused in a work that is of imagination all compact, yet a poetry of an extraordinarily arresting and haunting quality, passionate, thoughtful, and with a deep melody of its own.[2]

Grierson apparently disagreed with many critics as to the fusion of intellect and feeling in Donne's poetry; more recent criticism seems frequently to emphasize the synthesis which Donne achieved in his most successful poems, and to regard the fusion of thought and feeling as a basic quality of metaphysical poetry. For example, Walter De la Mare, in his lecture on "Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination" (1920) described very well a quality recognized in the poetry of both Brooke and Donne -- the combination of the intellect and the imagination:

> The intellectual imagination flourishes ...on knowledge and experience...There is less mystery, less magic, in its poetry...But...we can share its courage, enthusiasm, and energy, its zest and enterprise, its penetrating thought, its wit, fervour, passion, and we should not find it impossible to sympathize with its wild revulsions of faith and feeling, its creative skepticism...And in [Brooke's] metaphysical turns, his waywardness, his contradictoriness, his quick revulsions of feeling, he reminds us not less -- he even reminded himself (in a moment of exultation) of the younger Donne.[3]

[2] Herbert J. C. Grierson, The Poems of John Donne (Oxford, 1912), II, xiii, et passim.

[3] Walter De la Mare, Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination (New York, 1920), pp. 14; 28.

Though a few twentieth-century critics, such as Mr Grierson, Clay Hunt, and Helen C. White, feel that Donne may have sacrificed too much of the music of poetry in his rejection of typical Elizabethan prosody, more, including F. R. Leavis, W. F. Melton, Joan Bennett, and C. S. Lewis, are inclined to appreciate the originality of his metrics and to note the irregularities of his meter as devices of emphasis. The roughness of the *Satires* is generally agreed to be deliberate, though C. S. Lewis says that Donne was working on a mistaken theory.[4] The *Songs and Sonnets* are generally praised for the interplay of sounds and the variations in meter. Melton's study, *The Rhetoric of John Donne's Verse* (1906), no doubt contributed considerably to Donne's reputation as a metrical artist, even though Melton's theory is sometimes regarded as oversubtle. Primarily, Melton noted the frequent repetition of similar sounds in accented and unaccented syllables of the same line.[5] Mrs Joan Bennett has also analyzed Donne's techniques and has emphasized the relationship between the variations and the thought:

> His conception of rhythm was as original as his diction and imagery...Donne rejoices and grieves in intricate patterns that work through the mind...his rhythms

[4] C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 1954), pp. 469-470.

[5] Wightman Fletcher Melton, *The Rhetoric of John Donne's Verse* (Baltimore, 1906), pp. 142-164.

> arrest and goad the reader, never quite fulfilling his expectations but forcing him to pause here and rush on there, governing pace and emphasis so as to bring out the full force of the meaning.[6]

C. S. Lewis points out the interplay of speech rhythms against the regular iambic line.[7] And Helen White has noted, among other qualities, a peculiar effect of Donne's intellectual control on his verse patterns:

> The very sharpness and precision of the working of Donne's mind are noted in the felicity of his diction...in which precision is never sacrificed to grace and very seldom even to the sensational effect dear to Donne's heart...For the most part Donne follows the movement of talk...He bent each pattern to his own ends...within the line Donne certainly makes the most of that liberty of variation that is the one sure note of English prosody...Here indeed is the perfect musical counterpart of that emotional effect found so often in Donne where the imagination seems to fly out into infinity only to be caught swiftly and noiselessly back. For there is always to be felt the grip of an unseen and implicit principle of control, and that is the argument,...that here, as in the realms of feeling and imagination, is for Donne ultimately supreme. The shortcomings of the resulting music are obvious. Not its dissonances, not its deliberate cacophonies, not even its broken chords, with their sudden jets and starts of melody, are its most teasing deficiency, but this truncation of splendor, this sudden thwarting of starbound beauty. But even the defects of Donne have their value for devotional poetry...he who hopes to compress the ineffable into words had best

[6] Joan Bennett, <u>Four Metaphysical Poets</u> (Cambridge, 1953), pp. 40-43.

[7] Lewis, pp. 546-551.

> take care of the facility or the intoxication of his own rapture.[8]

Miss White's last remark implies the modern reaction against the emotional excesses of romantic poetry, a reaction which largely accounts for the popularity of metaphysical poetry in our time.

This same anti-Romanticism was expressed early in the century by T. E. Hulme, who "made a bet" that poetry would move in the direction of Classicism and rely more on fancy than on imagination.[9] Hulme thus helped to set up the intellectual basis for the Imagist school, a development from Symbolism. Ezra Pound, too, encouraged "the direct apprehension of the thing," a basic tenet of Imagism.[10] The activities of the Imagists encouraged precision of language and freedom of metrical form, as well as the objectifying of thought and emotion; thus they made for fuller acceptance of Donne's form and language, and helped toward a greater understanding of the conceits -- an understanding which has distinguished twentieth-century criticism from that of preceding eras. The term "imaginative distance" has replaced the earlier "far-fetched" or

[8] Helen C. White, The Metaphysical Poets (New York, 1936), pp. 91-93.

[9] Thomas Ernest Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," in British Literature, edd. Hazleton Spencer, et al (Boston, 1952), p. 963.

[10] Albert C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), pp. 1580-81.

"fantastical."

Twentieth-century criticism seems also to differ from that of earlier periods in placing greater emphasis upon the religious poets of the first half of the seventeenth century as belonging to the metaphysical tradition, as well as the court wits, who also showed to some extent Donne's influence. The latter, sharing as most of them did more of the influence of Jonson, are felt to be less truly metaphysical than are the religious poets, especially Gerge Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, Trahern, and Quarles. These poets, with Donne, are associated with the tradition of meditative poetry, based upon instructions for religious meditation as practiced in the Roman Catholic Church, especially in orders under the dominance of St Ignatius Lloyola and St Francis de Sales. Louis Martz has made an extensive study of the relationship of many religious poems to the meditative structure, even noting the parallel between Donne's Anniversaries and some of the longer and more complicated forms of meditation. Donne's early Jesuit training no doubt influenced the form of his religious poems; but certain forms of meditation were adopted by both the Anglicans and the Puritans, so that the meditative structure is evident in most of the religious poetry of the time. Though Donne is still recognized as one of the dominating influences of the seventeenth century, it is now assumed that he and others were writing within a

longer European tradition, both in religious and in secular poetry.[11]

Though the twentieth century has arrived at a fuller understanding and appreciation of Donne -- greater perhaps than he has had at any time since the Restoration -- he has not received unmitigated praise. Mr Hugh Fausset's careful study of Donne's life and personality emphasizes the great material difficulties attending much of his married life, brings out the suffering of a proud nature under the constant necessity for seeking preferment, and regards his final taking of orders as yielding to counsels of desperation.

> The truth was that panic was beginning to affect him...The security which middle age enthrones above all the virtues had begun to allure even this doughty adventurer, and to its attainment he was to sacrifice with growing desperation his dignity as a man, his gifts as a poet, and at last the scruples of his conscience.

Elsewhere Fausset rather qualifies this judgment and credits Donne's nature with honesty as well as complexity:

> Donne's life had the cardinal virtue of honesty...He failed to harmonize, but he refused to compromise...He enjoyed neither a physical nor a spiritual harmony, but was torn in the strife between his intelligence and his impulses. It was Donne's great and tragic destiny to experience the worst agonies of that inconclusive battle,

[11] Helen Gardner, John Donne: the Divine Poems (Oxford, 1952), pp. xv-lv.
Louis Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven, 1954), pp. 13-20; 43-56; 211-248.

> and to bequeath to literature a tale of it. In the stress of such a nature the problem of human life is starkly presented. Like some distracted microcosm, Donne reflects and condenses the long labor of the man to outgrow the beast and to approach the divine.[12]

A more recent study by Clay Hunt analyzes certain weaknesses of Donne's poetry and of the personality that appears therein; he concludes that Donne's sensibility was "precariously unified" and definitely limited in scope; he contrasts Spenser's wider wealth of tradition in the fields of love, nature, and mythology with Donne's deliberately narrowed area of vision, Marlowe's greater sensuousness with Donne's wit and intellectual passion, Marvell's finer artistic tact with Donne's intellectual impetuosity, and Milton's magnificence with Donne's thinness of music; he finds in Donne's religious verse a tendency toward emotional poverty and sensationalism, an intellectual analysis rather than a realization of mystical experience, and a morbid inclination to dwell on death and mutability. Yet he acknowledges that "Donne's poetry triumphs by virtue of its limitations." Hunt sees in Donne's precise vocabulary, and in his habit of checking theory against experience, examples of the scientific bent of mind, wherein lies one reason for his appeal to modern times; he also portrays Donne as egocentric, limited in broad human compassion,

[12] Hugh I'Anson Fausset, _John Donne: a Study in Discord_ (New York, [1924]), pp. 204; 313-318.

and detached from much of the spirit of his time, at least the 1590's, partly because of his Roman Catholic background and his consequent indifference to Queen Elizabeth.[13] But such opinions, though well documented, remain the opinions of one man, who has chosen to set himself against the crowd.

Whether always favorable or not, the bulk of twentieth-century criticism attests to the fascination which Donne has held for the modern mind. The General Literature and Essay Index and The Year's Work in English Studies show the trend, listing from ten to sixteen articles for each year from 1950 to 1956, when the number dropped to two. Such titles as "More Donne"[14] and such comments as "It is doubtful if there is much to be said for writing another general essay on Donne"[15] indicate that scholars are beginning to feel that they are reworking familiar material, or simply attempting to refute each other. And then comes such an original approach as "Donne, the Space Man"![16] At least, T. S. Eliot's prediction of 1931 has been refuted by another generation of fascinated scholars:

13 Clay Hunt, Donne's Poetry (New Haven, 1954), pp. 118-201.

14 Beatrice White, ed., The Year's Work in English Studies, XXXIV, (London, 1956), 189.

15 White, XXXV, 131.

16 William Empson, "Donne, the Space Man," Kenyon Review, XIX (Summer, 1957), 337-399.

> Yet, admirably and thoroughly as the subject has been handled, there might still be place for another book...except that, as I believe, Donne's poetry is a concern for the present and the recent past, rather than of the future...We may even say with some confidence that we probably understand sympathetically Donne today better than poets and critics fifty years hence will understand him.[17]

In contrast to the intense interest in Donne as a poet and as a person, the twentieth century exhibits little concern for Cowley, except as he is incidentally involved in the general study of metaphysical poetry. Again, Mr Eliot has made the succinct comment, this time being somewhat more accurate:

> The meaning of the term metaphysical is stretched to its utmost to include Cowley, and in considering Cowley as a metaphysical poet our interest in that subject is stretched to its utmost too.[18]

Landa's Bibliography of Modern Studies 1660-1800 bears out the truth of this remark, showing three studies of Cowley in 1926, four in 1931, and for other years to 1954 never more than one or two; several of these studies were the work of Mr Nethercot. Publication of Cowley's works has tended to concentrate on the prose; one complete edition of his English writings was published by Waller in 1905-06, one of The Mistress and Selected Poems by Sparrow in 1926,

[17] T. S. Eliot, "Donne in Our Time," in A Garland for John Donne, ed. Theodore Spencer (Cambridge, [Mass.], 1931), pp. 4-6.

[18] J. C. Ghosh, "Abraham Cowley," Sewanee Review, LXI (1953), 440.

and one selection of poetry, prose, and critical comment by Martin in 1949. In general, the twentieth century seems to be carrying on the judgment of the nineteenth.

Courthope described Cowley's work in some detail and partly explained his failure to interest later times:

> He possessed a fine fancy, a vigorous understanding and...quick receptiveness ...his imagination was inspired rather by poetical form than poetical matter ...aiming always at producing the appearance of novelty by clothing old thought in a new paradox or...metaphor...The right conclusion would seem to be that Cowley's "epic and Pindaric art" is to be regarded...as the expression of the spirit of the age reflecting its own decadence and exhaustion in the work of a representative poet. Both [Cowley and Butler] were above all things poets of their own age: they had their reward in the enthusiastic praise which their contemporaries bestowed upon their work.[19]

George Williamson, in The Donne Tradition, perhaps an over-eager effort to credit Donne's influence, made a number of comparisons between Donne and Cowley, generally to Donne's advantage:

> Cowley first drew fire because of The Mistress, his most direct echo of Donne, but not his best tribute of indebtedness...In one important respect Cowley's mind was like Donne's: it was susceptible to learning, and particularly to the influence of the new science and philosophy...His "Ode to Mr Hobs" and "Ode on the Royal Society" are sufficient witnesses of the peculiar skill with which he could figure forth the abstractions of philosophy in the concreteness of poetry...Even a casual reading of The Mistress will disclose the titles,

[19] Courthope, III, 340-376.

> themes, and images of Donne; the wit, antithesis, and startling introductions; but not the passion, personality, or intense intellectual vigor. But more interesting than actual borrowings are the things which Donne taught Cowley. First, there is the skill in analysis...Besides this art of analysis...there is the rational evolution, the lyric argument, which comes from Donne. Moreover, Cowley uses the homely and learned word and figure of Donne, for Cowley also practices the conceit...his conceits rarely succeed, like Donne's by throwing a new or unusual light on the psychology of feeling. When they do succeed, it is usually by a triumph of ingenuity, of sheer intellectual agility...somehow lacks the intellectual vigor, the agitated mind of Donne. This difference in Cowley's mind together with his lack of passion, probably accounts for his greatest gift, the light touch of his wit, his levity... The plangency and dark emotion of Donne's conceit contrast sharply with the dry point and gay malice of Cowley's. Metaphysical wit...can be highly imaginative and profoundly moving. To be such it must be born in an agitated mind, which Cowley seldom knew...The intensity of Donne is passing away in Cowley, and the long struggle between reason and imagination is coming to a close in the victory of reason and good sense...his wit, though attracted to the Donne tradition, never reflects the passionate, intellectual, and mystical conception of life and love and death which Donne and his disciples held. But the cool dry intelligence of Cowley appealed to the new sensibility and prepared the way for Dryden.[20]

Nethercot, one of Cowley's strongest apologists in our time, defends Cowley's right to the

> ...attention of everyone who pretends to an appreciation of and a regard for English

[20] George Williamson, The Donne Tradition (Cambridge, [Mass.], 1930), pp. 181-188.

> literature. The historians and critics, with the help of posterity, have begun to understand what Cowley stood for and what he accomplished...The uncertainty and lack of firmness of his own character, combined with the political conditions of the time, prevented him from achieving his ambition ...by the end of his life...a series of dilemmas muddled through rather than solved, he had renounced ambition...But during his career of almost forty years of writing, he had made more marks in English literature than most men would dare to hope for...most precocious... first religious epic...popularizer of the irregular ode...a liberal influence on versification...theory of translation... incipient critic...advanced ideas on science and education...influential factor in the formation of the Royal Society...prose among the best styles of the century...Things of importance were happening in his mind up to the day of his death.[21]

That Cowley does have the "inner circle of readers and students" claimed for him by Grossart and by Nethercot, is evidenced by two recent communications to the _Times Literary Supplement_: Harold F. Brooks notes several direct references to Cowley's poems in the works of Dryden, including the "Ode for St Cecilia's Day," "Religio Laici," and "Annus Mirabilis";[22] J. J. Cohane cites Yeats' use of the same stanza form in his elegy "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" which Cowley had apparently originated in his elegy "On the Death of Mr William Hervey." The correspond-

[21] Arthur N. Nethercot, _Abraham Cowley: the Muses' Hannibal_ (London, 1931), pp. 289-290.

[22] Harold F. Brooks, "Dryden and Cowley," _Times Literary Supplement_, April 19, 1957.

ent notes the likeness not only of the meter and rhyme scheme but also of the general tone and structure of both poems, and their freedom from the usual pastoral imagery of other elegies. Yeats employed the same stanza form in several other poems, including "Byzantium."

> It is perhaps needless to point out that in Yeats' hand the stanza becomes an incomparably more powerful instrument...Nevertheless, Cowley is a far finer poet than he is generally acknowledged to be, at least in the mind of this writer, who hopes that this brief exposition of his influence on the greatest of modern poets may help to create a deeper and wider appreciation of his merits.[23]

These comments indicate close and appreciative study of Cowley's poetry on the part of some modern scholars at least; but for most, I believe, interest in Cowley is more concerned with his position in literary history than with his poetry. Helen C. White's statement in Seventeenth Century Verse and Prose, with its slightly apologetic note of self-defense, perhaps fairly represents the modern point of view:

> We have included more of Cowley's poetry than is commonly included in anthologies. But he was so celebrated in his own day, and was so important in giving literary voice and literary forms to the temper of an age...that it is a real education of taste to give a few hours to the appreciation of his poetry as well as his prose.[24]

[23] J. J. Cohane, "Cowley and Yeats," TLS, May 10, 1957, p. 289.

[24] Helen C. White, et al, edd., Seventeenth Century Poetry and Prose (New York, 1951), p. 422.

Several of Geoffrey Walton's comments on Cowley have previously been quoted, but one deserves special attention in this discussion of modern criticism of Cowley, as it perhaps states the strongest reason for our indifference:

> Cowley was the heir to the whole range of metaphysical imagery, and I have not been able to find many conceits in The Mistress that he might not easily have picked up from other poets. His work was plagiaristic in a bad sense.[25]

Another recent study of Cowley by J. C. Ghosh fairly well corroborates the general attitude and assigns a number of additional reasons for our willingness to let Cowley's poetry gather dust. Ghosh points out the fact that nearly all the great critics have found something to admire in Cowley; that his metaphysical form was an affectation, and that for most of his career he was basically Augustan in feeling and in principles, which disunity between form and spirit he attempted to cover by his wit; that, though a skillful imitator of the poetry of both love and religion, he was not capable of passion on either subject; that he was best in the lighter vein; that he neither thought nor felt intensely; that he was in love with the new science, whereas Donne was disturbed by it and more aware of its implications; that he was versatile, but dissipated his interests and never found himself; that his poetry showed intellectual power but no feeling: "He could not sustain even

Geoffrey Walton, Metaphysical to Augustan (London, 1955), p. 63.

affection, the only genuine feeling he ever had"; that he was, and is, important to the history of thought, especially in poems showing the new attitude toward science; that he made significant contributions to verse forms; that his essays contained nothing very important or urgent; and that one must seek the cause for his loss of reputation in his poetry itself rather than in criticism about him.[26]

The problem remains to illustrate from the poetry of Donne and Cowley a number of the more salient comments of modern criticism and some of my own reactions to their work -- to show how the one poet satisfies the modern concept of what poetry should be, while the other fails in certain important respects. Both Donne and Cowley were widely educated and keenly intellectual men; the education of Donne's generation was more strongly influenced by scholastic philosophy and medieval attitudes of mind, which by Cowley's time were being replaced by a more rationalistic temper of thought and by faith in the new approach of inductive science; both poets knew classical literature, though Cowley shows more direct influence of classical models and wider knowledge of Greek than appears in Donne's poetry. Both were capable of hyperbole in their eulogistic poems, which were more in accord with the taste of their time than with ours. Perhaps it is in intellectual and logical strength that Cowley best stands comparison with

[26] Ghosh, pp. 433-447.

Donne. But with respect to other qualities which make for great poetry, the contrasts between Donne and Cowley are more evident than the comparisons: Donne is deeply original, Cowley highly imitative; genuine passion and emotional struggle in Donne contrast with Cowley's cool intellectual analysis of feeling and shallow or pretended emotion (except for a few genuine expressions of friendship); wit in Donne springs from broad intellectual grasp and complexity, in Cowley from intellectual ingenuity and cleverness; depth of thought and deep psychological penetration in Donne contrast with superficiality and complacency in Cowley; implication and suggestion in Donne challenge the reader to a greater effort toward emotional and intellectual apprehension, while in Cowley one finds sheer mental agility at best, and flat statement as the staple mode of expression; imagery is structural in Donne, and conceits often show logical or imaginative connections, which Cowley seldom achieves, his imagery tending toward the simile rather than the metaphor, toward the decorative rather than the structural, and toward a series of separate views rather than a "tight and systematic structure of images"; Donne shows keener perception of and recreation of sensuous experience than Cowley; Donne's vocabulary is precise and concrete, Cowley's frequently tends toward the Augustan generality; Donne's intense logic and emotion dictate the variations of his meter; Cowley is more regular

in verse and stanza pattern and tends to fit the idea to a prescribed form, even the varied Pindarics being the result of imitation; Donne's religious poetry reveals a perplexed mind and a struggling soul, Cowley's a devout but conventional piety; Donne is deeply self-aware, Cowley self-consciously aware of his audience; even in Donne's lighter poetry there is a gleefulness and gaiety, which equals the sparkle and wit of Cowley at his best, and which often has an undertone of seriousness not apparent in Cowley's famed "light touch." These, then, are some of the reasons why Donne is a vital force in modern poetry, while Cowley -- brilliant, versatile, and significant to his own day -- has become a historical curiosity. In illustrating these comparisons and contrasts, I shall try to resist the temptation to balance the worst of Cowley against the best of Donne, and shall select what seem to me representative poems from their various types:

The inherent and persisting force of scholastic philosophy clashing with the newer concepts of the universe appear in Donne's Anniversaries. Here Donne contrasts his worldly uncertainties with the heavenly assurance attained in death by Elizabeth Drury:

> Poor soul, in this thy flesh, what dost thou know?
> Thou know'st thyself so little, as thou know'st not,
> How thou did'st die, or how thou wast begot.
> Thou neither know'st how thou at first cam'st in,
> Or how thou took the poison of man's sin.
> Nor dos't thou (though thou know'st that thou art
> so)
> By what way thou art made immortal, know.

Thou art too narrow, wretch, to comprehend
Even thyself: yea though thou would'st but bend
To know thy body. Have not all souls thought
For many ages that our body 'is wrought
Of Air and Fire and other Elements?
And now they think of new ingredients,
And one soul thinks one, and another way
Another thinks, and 'tis an even lay.
......
And yet one watches, starves, freezes, and sweats,
To know but catechisms and alphabets
Of unconcerning things, matters of fact;
......
When wilt thou shake off this pedantry,
Of being taught by sense and fantasy?
Thou look'st through spectacles; small things seeme
great
Below; but up into the watch-tower get,
And see all things despoiled of fallacies:
......
In heaven thou straight know'st all, concerning it,
And what concerns it not, shalt straight forget.
--The Second Anniversary, vs.
254-300.

Donne's profound realization of the inadequacies of both the ancient philosophy and the new experimental science contrasts with Cowley's evident satisfaction in the scientific method of Bacon as contrasted with ancient authority:

From words, which are but pictures of the thought,
(Though we our thoughts from them perversely drew)
To things, the mind's right object, he it brought,
Like foolish birds to painted grapes we flew;
He sought and gather'd for our use the true;
And when in heaps the chosen bunches lay,
He pressed them wisely the mechanic way,
Till all their juice did in one vessel join,
Ferment into a nourishment divine,
The thirsty soul's refreshing wine.
......
So virtuous and so noble a design,
So human for its use, for knowledge so divine.
--To the Royal Society, st. 4 & 8.

The "Ode upon Dr Harvey" similarly interprets in verse the new enthusiasm for the scientific method, which pervaded

Cowley's generation:

> Thus Harvey sought for truth in truth's own book
> The Creatures, which by God himself was writ;
> And wisely thought 'twas fit,
> Not to read comments only upon it,
> But on th' original itself to look.
> Methinks in Art's great circle others stand
> Lock't up together, hand in hand,
> Everyone leads as he is led,
> The same bare paths they tread,
> ......
> Had Harvey to this road confin'd his wit,
> His noble circle of the blood, had been untrodden yet.
>
> --Ode upon Dr Harvey, st. 4

The influence of Persius and Horace on Donne's Satires has been noted by many scholars; Ovid, Propertius and Tibullus, the leading Latin elegists, also show influence in the animal sensuality of Donne's Elegies, though direct imitation or translation is comparatively rare.[27] Donne was inclined to discourage classical imitation as an over-worked poetic effort of his time; Cowley, on the other hand, took delight in translating and imitating both Greek and Latin poets, and his work in this field is regarded by many as his greatest success. Donne had classical authority in Ovid's Amores for expressing the sensual side of his nature as revealed in the Elegies, which, with the Satires, are his most classical forms:

> The heavens rejoice in motion, why should I
> Abjure my so much lov'd variety,
> And not with many youth and love divide?
> Pleasure is none, if not diversifi'd:

[27] Pauline Aiken, The Influence of the Latin Elegists, University of Maine Studies, second series, No. 22 (Orono, Maine, 1932), pp. 34-35; 108.

...
All things do willingly in change delight,
The fruitful mother of our appetite:
....Let no man tell me such a one is fair,
And worthy all alone my love to share.
.....
I love her well, and would, if need were, die
To do her service. But follows it that I
Must serve her only, when I may have choice
Of other beauties, and in change rejoice?
The law is hard, and shall not have my voice.
--Elegy XVII, vs. 1-25.

Donne based Satire IV upon a satire of Horace, but interpreted it into the English atmosphere, making an opportunity to criticize Court followers and informers; he followed Horace in describing an encounter with a bore:[28]

......Towards me did run
A thing more strange, than on Nile's slime, the sun
Ere bred; or all which into Noah's ark came;
A thing which would have posed Adam to name:
......
More than ten Hollinsheds, or Halls, or Stowes,
Of trivial household trash he knows; he knows
When the Queen frown'd, or smil'd, and he knows what
A subtle statesman may gather of that;
He knows who loves; whom; and who by poison
Hastes to an office's reversion:
.......So I sigh, and sweat
To hear this Maceron talk: in vain; for yet,
Either my humor, or his own to fit,
He like a privileged spy, whom nothing can
Discredit, libels not 'gainst each great man.
He names a price for every office paid;
He saith, our wars thrive ill, because delayed:
...... But the hour
Of mercy now was come; he tries to bring
Me to pay a fine to scape his torturing,
And says, "Sir can you spare me"; I said, "Willingly";
"Nay, Sir, can you spare me a crown?" Thankfully I
Gave it as ransom....
--Satire IV, vs. 17-20; 97-103; 116-123; 140-145.

[28] Grierson, Donne's Poetical Works, II, 117.

Cowley's translations or imitations include the Anacreontics, two Pindarics, and a number of translations of Horace, Virgil, and Martial included in his Essays in Prose and Verse; his theory of free translation, which sometimes followed merely the mood and general topic of a poem, has been discussed. As a sample of his light and lilting touch, for which the Anacreontics are often praised, I quote "The Epicure"; that the poem is obvious, trite, and superficial is Anacreon's fault as well as Cowley's:

> Fill the bowl with rosie wine,
> Around our temples roses twine.
> And let us cheerfully awhile,
> Like the wine and roses smile.
> Crowned with roses we contemn
> Gyge's wealthy diadem.
> Today is ours; what do we fear?
> Today is ours; we have it here.
> Let's treat it kindly, that it may
> Wish, at least, with us to stay.
> Let's banish business, banish sorrow;
> To the Gods belongs tomorrow.
>
> --The Epicure

The irregular form and eloquent tone of the Pindaric translations appears in Cowley's "Second Olympic Ode of Pindar":

> Queen of all Harmonious things,
> Dancing words, and speaking strings,
> What god, what hero wilt thou sing?
> What happy man to equal glories bring?
> Begin, begin thy noble choice,
> And let the hills around reflect the image of thy voice.
>
> --The Second Olympic Ode, st. 1.

A few lines from Cowley's translations of Horace and Virgil will serve to show his facility in turning Latin poetry into heroic couplets, and also indicate his Augustan delight in country life:

Happy the man whom bounteous gods allow
With his own hands paternal grounds to plow!
Like the first golden mortals happy he
From business and the cares of money free!
....
From all the cheats of law he lives secure,
Nor does the affronts of palaces endure.
--Horace, Epodon, vs. 1-8
Oh happy, (if his happiness he knows)
The country swain, on whom kind heaven bestows
At home all riches that wise nature needs;
Whom the just earth with easy plenty feeds.
Virgil, Georgics, vs. 1-4

Both Donne and Cowley translated passages of Scripture into English verse, working from the Latin texts. Donne's five chapters of the Lamentations of Jeremiah show that he was somewhat inhibited by his attempt at a close rendering of the text, but have dignity, simplicity, and something of the mournful quality of the original:

Now is the crown falne from our head; and woe
Be unto us, because we'have sinned so.
For this our hearts do languish, and for this
Over our eyes a cloudy dimness is.
......
Why should'st thou forget us eternally?
Or leave us thus long in this misery:
Restore us Lord to thee, that so we may
Return and as of old, renew our day.
For ought'st thou, O Lord, despise us thus,
And to be utterly enraged at us?
--Lamentations of Jeremy, vs. 377-390.

Cowley, in his notes, observed that the style of Isaiah was like the Pindaric in its bold figures and difficult connections, and admitted having "added a little and left out a great deal" in accordance with his usual method of translation. Cowley's eloquence is apparent in these lines:

I see the sword of God brandisht above;
And from it streams a dismal ray;

> I see the scabbard cast away.
> How red anon with slaughter will it prove!
> How will it sweat and reek in blood!
> How will the scarlet-glutton be o'ergorged with his food
> And devour all the mighty feast!
> Nothing soon but bones will rest.
> --The 34 Chapter of the Prophet Isaiah, st. 2.

In accordance with the custom of the day both poets wrote obsequies on the deaths of noted people, which have a tone of exaggerated flattery and implications of courting favor -- all of which is distasteful to the modern mind. The same may be said of some of Donne's Epistles and lyrics to his patronesses; if they seem insincere, we must remember that extravagant eulogy was the custom, and that to some extent Donne was forced by desperation to write with ulterior purposes. As in the Anniversaries, however, the mind of Donne grapples with the eternal problems suggested by the death of the particular person, so that the philosophy to some extent redeems the eulogy. A passage which shows both Donne's philosophizing and his seeking favor is taken from "Obsequies to the Lord Harrington, Brother to the Lady Lucy, Countess of Bedford"; Grierson calls this "ingenious and tasteless," and tells that Donne admitted in a later letter that the Countess paid his debts for writing it.[29]

> If looking up to God, or down to us,
> Thou find that any way is pervious,
> Twixt heav'n and earth, and that man's actions do

[29] Grierson, Donne's Poetical Works, II, 206.

Come to your knowledge, and affections too,
See, and with joy, me to that good degree
Of goodness grown, that I can study thee,
And, by these meditations refin'd,
Can unapparel and enlarge my mind,
And so can make by this soft ecstasy,
This place a map of heav'n, myself of thee.
.....
Thou at this midnight seest me, and as soon
As that Sun rises to me, midnight's noon,
All the world grows transparent, and I see
Through all, both Church and State, in seeing thee;
And I discern, by favor of this light,
Myself, the hardest object of the sight.
.....
Though God be our true glass, through which we see
All, since the being of all things is he,
Yet are the trunks which do to us derive
Things, in proportion fit, by perspective,
Deeds of good men; for by their living here,
Virtues, indeed remote, seem to be near.
--Obsequies to the Lord Harrington, vs. 5-13; 25-30; 35-40.

A few of Cowley's elegies rank among his finest poems, for in them are expressed a truly experienced friendship, one of the few emotional experiences of which Cowley was capable. Others, mostly the product of his earlier years, partake of the usual tasteless extravagance. The following lines are taken from his elegy on the poet Crashaw, to whom Cowley had been a close friend:

Poet and saint! to thee alone are given
The two most sacred names of earth and Heaven.
The hardest and rarest union which can be
Next that of Godhead and humanity.
Long did the Muses banished slaves abide,
And built vain pyramids to mortal pride;
Like Moses thou (though spells and charms withstand)
Hast brought them nobly home back to their Holy Land.
....
Nay with the worst of heathen dotage, we
(Vain men!) the monster woman deify;
Find stars, and tie our fates there in a face,
And Paradise in them, by whom we lost it, place.
....

Lo here I beg (I whom thou once didst prove
So humble to esteem, so good to love)
Not that thy spirit might on me doubled be,
I ask but half thy mighty spirit for me.
And when my Muse soars with so strong a wing,
'Twill learn of things divine, and first of thee to
sing.
--On the Death of Mr Crashaw, vs. 1-8;
24-28;69-74.

This passage incidentally shows something of Cowley's feeling that The Mistress was not his greatest achievement. A more typically eulogistic passage, and one exhibiting tasteless ingeniousness, is taken from "The Death of John Littleton...who was drowned leaping into the water to save his younger brother":

And shall these waters smile again? And play
About the shore, as they did yesterday?
......
It is unjust; black flood, thy guilt is more,
Sprung from his loss, than all thy watry store
Can give thee tears to mourn for.......
......
What have I said? My pious rage hath been
Too hot, and acts whilst it acuseth sin.
Thou'rt innocent I know, still clear and bright,
Fit whence so pure a soul should take its flight.
......
Weep then, sad flood; and though thou'rt innocent
Weep because fate made thee her instrument!
And when long grief hath drunk up all thy store,
Come to our eyes, and we will lend thee more.
---Death of John Littleton, vs.
1-2; 7-9; 11-14; 61-64.

One virtue often admired in Donne's poetry is its logical unity coupled with logical analysis -- a virtue also apparent in Cowley's poetry, either as the result of imitation or as the product of a keenly intellectual mind. This virtue is apparent in the elegies quoted above, though marred by some overingeniousness. That logic and wit are

not incompatible with some lyric emotion is evident in such poems of Donne as "The Flea," "Negative Love," "The Paradox," "A Lecture Upon the Shadow," and "Self Love." Cowley's "Ode, Of Wit," has often been cited as an example of his analytic power; he imitated Donne's "Negative Love" in the attempt to define wit by negatives, and his imitation of Longinus has previously been discussed. Lyrics from The Mistress which show especially Cowley's logical mind at work are "Written in Juice of Lemon," "The Wish," "The Bargain," and the companion lyrics "For Hope" and "Against Hope." The whole volume, The Mistress, is in a sense a logical tour de force, an analysis of various aspects of love, various attitudes which a lover might assume toward a consistently "coy mistress." Two brief quotations may serve to show both the quality of logic and a case of Cowley's direct imitation:

> If that be simply perfectest
> Which can by no way be expressed
>   But Negatives, my love is so.
>   To All, which all love, I say no.
> If any who deciphers best,
>   What we know not, ourselves, can know,
>   Let him teach me that nothing; this
> As yet my ease and comfort is,
> Though I speed not, I cannot miss.
>   --Negative Love, vs. 10-18.

> Tis not such lines as almost crack the stage
>   When Bajazet begins to rage.
> Nor a tall metaphor in the bombast way,
> Nor the dry chips of short lung'd Seneca.
>   Nor upon all things to obtrude,
>   And force some odd similitude.
> What is it then, which like the Power Divine
> We only can by Negatives define?
>   --Ode, Of Wit, st. 7.

Cowley's last lines of this same poem show an imitation of Ben Jonson's "On Lucy Countess of Bedford," in which, after attempting to describe an ideal woman, he concludes:

My Muse bade, Bedford write, and that was she.

Cowley uses the same device to conclude his attempt to define wit:

> And if any ask me then,
> What right thing wit, and height of genius is,
> I'll only show your lines, and say "'Tis This."

Further examples of Cowley's imitation of Donne may be sufficient to illustrate the imitative nature of his talent. The quotation from Donne's Elegy, given above, contains the pun on the word "die," meaning intercourse. In Cowley's "The Monopoly," he makes the same pun:

> So sweet's revenge to me, that I
> Upon my foe would gladly die.
> --The Monopoly, vs. 17-18.

Cowley's "Elegy on the Death of Mrs Anne Whitfield" begins "She's dead"; here we have an echo of Donne's repeated line in "The First Anniversary," "She, she is dead; she's dead... (v. 183, et passim.) and also of "The Dissolution," which begins with "She's dead."

A number of Cowley's poems start with a sudden conversational remark, the tone and rhythm of which are reminiscent of Donne's Songs and Sonnets or Elegies: Cowley- "For heaven's sake, what do you mean to do?"; Donne- "For Godsake, hold your tongue, and let me love"; Cowley-

I thought, I'll swear, I could have love'd no more
Than I had done before;

Donne-

Me thinks I lied all winter, when I swore
My love was infinite, if spring makes it more.

Cowley-"Here take my likeness with you, whilst 'tis so";

Donne- "Here, take my picture; though I bid farewell";

Cowley- "Go bid the needle his dear north forsake";

Donne- "Go and catch a falling star"; Cowley expresses an Augustan generality in somewhat the same form as Donne's personal warning: Cowley-

Take heed, take heed, thou lovely maid,
Nor be by glittering ills betrayed;

Donne-

Take heed of loving me,
At least remember I forbade it thee.

Cowley's poem "Platonic Love" expresses the same idea of the interdependence of body and soul which Donne expresses in "The Ecstasy". Cowley again states flatly as a generality, an intellectual concept, what to Donne was a personal philosophy, the result of intellectual and emotional struggle and the inspiration for a powerful metaphysical poem:

Indeed I must confess,
When souls mix 'tis an happiness;
But not complete till bodies too combine,
And closely as our minds together join;
......
For a perfect love implies
Love in all capacities.
......
That souls do beauty know,
'Tis to the bodies' help they owe;

--Platonic Love, vs. 1-4; 13-14; 22-23.

But O alas, so long, so far
   Our bodies why do we forbear?
They are ours, though they are not we, we are
   The intelligences, they the sphere.
We owe them thanks, because they thus,
   Did us, to us, at first convey,
Yielded their forces, sense, to us,
   Nor are dross to us, but allay.
....
So must pure lovers' souls descend
   T'affections, and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend,
   Else a great Prince in prison lies.
To'our bodies turn we then, that so
   Weak men on love reveal'd may look,
Love's mysteries in souls do grow,
   But yet the body is his book.
            --The Ecstasy, vs. 49-56; 65-72.

The last two poems show very well the difference between Cowley's intellectual and theoretical approach to the problems of love, and Donne's passionate intellectual grappling. A few of Donne's Songs and Sonnets are as intellectually ingenious as any of Cowley's poems, but nearly all show intensity of feeling and the stamp of deeply realized experience. One of Donne's wittily ingenious stanzas is taken from "Community":

But they are ours as fruits are ours,
He that but tastes, he that devours,
And he that leaves all doth as well:
Changed loves are but changed sorts of meat,
And when he hath the kernel eat,
Who doth not fling away the shell?
            --Community, st. 4.

In contrast to this witty cynicism is Donne's poem to his wife, "The Anniversarie":

All kings, and all their favorites,
All glory of honors, beauties, wits,

The sun itself, which makes times, as they pass,
Is elder by a year, now, than it was
When you and I first one another saw:
All other things to their destruction draw,
    Only our love hath no decay;
This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday,
Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.
--The Anniversary, st. 1.

A stanza from Cowley's "The Passions" shows his ingenuity, and also his habit of stating generalities:

From hate, fear, hope, anger, and envy free,
    And all the passions else that be,
    In vain I boast of liberty,
    In vain this state a freedom call;
    Since I have love, and love is all:
Sot that I am, who think it fit to brag,
That I have no disease besides the plague!
--The Passions, st. 1.

One of Cowley's more serious declarations, but still conventional, is "The Soul":

If mine eyes do e'er declare
They have seen a second thing that's fair;
Or ears, that they have music found,
Besides thy voice, in any sound;
If my taste do ever meet
After thy kiss, with ought that's sweet;
If my abused touch allow
Aught to be smooth or soft, but you;
If, what seasonable springs
Or the eastern summer brings,
Do my smell persuade at all,
Aught perfume but thy breath to call;
If all my senses' objects be
Not contracted unto thee,
And so through thee more powerful pass
As beams do through a burning glass;
If all things that in Nature are
Either soft, or sweet, or fair,
Be not in thee so'epitomized,
That naught material's not comprised,
May I as worthless seem to thee
As all but thou appears to me.
--The Soul, st. 1.

The complexity of Donne's wit, the ability to maintain

more than one attitude, is one of his important bases of appeal. "Twickenham Garden" shows this complexity: Donne here is paying a gracious compliment to his patroness, knowing she will take his protestations in the spirit in which he makes them, and yet wishing that their mutual affection and respect might be something more, making fun of the Petrarchan cliches, and employing Biblical figures as love imagery:

> Blasted with sighs and surrounded with tears,
> Hither I come to seek the spring,
> And at mine eyes, and at mine ears,
> Receive such balms, as else cure everything;
> . . . . .
> And that this place may thoroughly be thought
> True Paradise, I have the serpent brought.
> . . . .
> O perverse sex, where none is true but she,
> Who's therefore true, because her truth kills me.
> --Twickenham Garden, vs. 1-4; 7-8; 26-27.

A similar complexity appears in "The Funeral," "The Relique," and "The Dampe," the first two of which speak of the love-token, a strand of hair, found on a buried body, and the third of the mistress' picture being found in a lover's heart during an autopsy, combine protestations of eternal affection with the shuddering dread of death and dissolution; "The Relique," in the middle of a shudder over an open grave, inserts a joke about women's chastity, and then goes on to tell of a truly Platonic love. Donne accepted the resurrection of the physical body as a tenet of the Church, but was puzzled about the problems involved in re-assembling the atoms; this lugubrious puzzlement enters

incidentally into his "Obsequy to Lord Harrington," as a comparison to the difficulty of sorting out the gentleman's virtues:

> And as if man feed on man's flesh, and so
> Part of his body to another owe,
> Yet at the last two perfect bodies rise,
> Because God knows where every atom lies....
> --Obsequy to Lord Harrington, vs. 53-56.

The Sonnet "At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners," shows the same puzzlement and also the clash between the Copernican and Ptolemaic astronomies, yet turns to a beautiful prayer of penitence, all in fourteen lines:

> At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow
> Your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise
> From death, you numberless infinities
> Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go...
> --Sonnet VII, vs. 1-4.

Cowley borrowed the idea of the scattered atoms for his Pindaric on "The Resurrection," but his handling of it is rather glib and analytical, except for the line about the naked, shivering soul, which suggests metaphysical complexity:

> Whom thunder's dismal noise,
> And all that Prophets and Apostles louder spake,
> And all the creatures' plain conspiring voice,
> Could not whilst they liv'ed, awake,
> This mightier sound shall make
> When Dead t'arise,
> And open tombs, and open eyes
> To the long sluggards of five thousand years.
> This mightier sound shall make its hearers ears.
> Then shall the scattered atoms crowding come
> Back to their ancient home,
> Some from birds, from fishes some,
> Some from earth, and some from seas,
> Some from beasts, and some from trees.
> Some descend from clouds on high,

Some from metals upwards fly,
And where th' attending soul naked, and shivering stands,
Meet, salute, and join their hands.

There is intellectual ingenuity in the play of ideas in the first lines, the deaf living souls against the dead to whom the final trump gives ears; but in the description of the gathering atoms the writer seems more concerned with his Augustan antithesis and balance than with the complexity of the problem. The last stanza of this poem takes off on a discussion of the writing of *Pindarics* which has no place in the main theme, though it shows Cowley's sense of humorous self-observation, and his consciousness of his audience; here is a case of poetic inconsistency rather than the complexity of attitude characteristic of Donne's wit:

Stop, stop, my Muse, allay thy vigorous heat,
Kindled at a hint so great.
Hold thy Pindaric Pegasus closely in,
Which does to rage begin.....
.....
'Tis an unruly, and a hard-mouth'd horse,
.....
Disdains the servile law of any settled pace,
Conscious and proud of his own natural force.
'Twill no unskillful touch endure,
But flings writer and reader too that sits not sure.

Granted that digressions were one characteristic of *Pindarics*, a display of personal vanity hardly fits in with the Resurrection.

Another case of Cowley's intellectual ingenuity, and simulated emotion, appears in "The Change," the first stanza of which contains some of his most pleasing lyric lines:

Love in her sunny eyes does basking play;
Love walks the pleasant mazes of her hair;
Love does on both her lips forever stray;
And sows and reaps a thousand kisses there.
In all her outward parts love's always seen;
      But, oh, he never went within.
Within love's foes, his greatest foes abide,
      Malice, inconstancy, and pride.
So the earth's face, trees, herbs, and flowers do
            dress,
      With other beauties numberless:
But at the center, darkness is, and Hell;
There wicked spirits, and there the damned dwell.
.....
Oh take my heart, and by that means you'll prove
      Within, too, stor'd enough of love:
Give me but yours, I'll by that change so thrive,
      That Love in all my parts shall live.
So powerful is this change, it render can,
My outside woman, and your inside man.
            --The Change, st. 1, 2, & 4.

While Cowley shows a certain ingenious complexity at times, the thought itself rarely plunges to the probing depths which give Donne's poetry such a powerful appeal in our day. We feel the depth of Donne's objective and subjective insight, his penetrating view of the world, both physical and spiritual, and of himself. The probing quality of his intellect is perhaps most apparent in his Divine Poems, the Anniversaries, the third Satire, and some of his Songs and Sonnets. His third Satire discusses the question of religious liberty and the philosophical problems posed by the new science; one is impressed by Donne's awareness of the undermining implications of the new ideas, and by his sane broadmindedness, and yet his serious realization of the problems.

Flesh (itself's death) and joys which flesh can
   taste,

Thou lovest; and thy fair goodly soul, which doth
Give this flesh power to taste joy, thou dost loath.
Seek true religion. O Where?......Though truth and
falsehood be
Near twins, yet truth a little elder is;
Be busie to seek her, believe me this,
He's not of none, nor worst, that seeks the best.
.....Doubt wisely; in strange way
To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;
To sleep, or run wrong, is. On a huge hill,
Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
Reach her, about must, and about must go;
And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so.
.....
Hard deeds, the bodies pains; hard knowledge too
The minds endeavors reach, and mysteries
Are like the sun, dazzling, yet plain to all eyes.
--Satire III, vs. 40-43; 72-82; 86-88.

In "The First Anniversary" Donne is psychological, witty, and serious:

Thou know'st how ugly a monster this world is:
And learn'st thus much by our Anatomy,
That here is nothing to enamor thee:
And that, not only faults in inward parts,
Corruptions in our brains, or in our hearts,
Poisoning the fountains, whence our actions spring,
Endanger us: but that if everything
Be not done fitly'and in proportion,
To satisfy wise, and good lookers-on,
(Since most men be such as most think they be)
They're loathsome too, by this deformitie.
For good, and well, must in our actions meet;
Wicked is not much worse than indiscrete.
--The First Anniversarie, vs. 326-338.

Compared with Donne's probing within and without, Cowley seems to the modern mind superficial, platitudinous, and easily pleased with ideas, without being fully aware of their implications; his poem quoted above on the Royal Society and on Dr Harvey are examples of Cowley's typical attitude. His Augustan satisfaction with reason appears in his poem "Reason, the Use of It in Divine Matters":

Some blind themselves, 'cause possibly they may
Be led by others a right way;
. . . .
When we trust men concerning God, we then
Trust not God concerning men.
. . . . .
Visions and inspirations some expect
Their course here to direct;
. . . . . .
Sometimes their fancies they 'bove reason set,
And fast, that they may dream of meat.
. . . . . .
In vain, alas, these outward hopes are tried;
Reason within's our only guide.
Reason, which (God be prais'd!) still walks, for all
Its old Original Fall.
And since itself the boundless Godhead join'd
With a reasonable mind,
It plainly shows that mysteries Divine
May with our reason join.
Though reason cannot through faith's mysteries see,
It sees that there and such they be;
Leads to Heav'ens door, and there does humbly keep,
And there through chinks and key-holes peep.
--Reason, st. 1, 2, 3, 4, & 6.

Cowley's "Ode to Mr Hobs" likewise shows his easy acceptance of new ideas:

Vast bodies of philosophy
I have often seen and read,
But all are bodies dead,
Or bodies by art fashioned;
I never yet the living soul could see
But in thy books and thee.
'Tis only God can know
Whether the fair idea thou dost show
Agree entirely with his own or no.
This I dare boldly tell,
'Tis so like truth 'twill serve our turn as well.
--To Mr Hobs--st. 1.

As Donne's wit is complex and his thought penetrating, so his language has the power of suggestion, "after-sense," a richness of metaphor that implies more than it says; this effect may be brought about by the breadth of imagination, by the suggestion of symbolic meaning, by sly innuendo or

by plays on words. Though Cowley's poetry is loaded with conceits, the comparisons and suggestions are more obvious and less teasing to the imagination, and certain metaphors are worn to death. Much more frequently, too, than in Donne's poetry, one finds the simple, flat statement. One of Donne's suggestive metaphors was the comparison of man to the universe, the microcosm to the macrocosm, an idea which carries a wealth of imaginative suggestion. "The Good-morrow," "The Sun Rising," and "A Valediction: of Weeping," use this metaphor, as does the Sonnet "I Am a Little World Made Cunningly."

> Thou sun art half as happy'as we,
> In that the world's contracted thus;
> Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
> To warm the world, that'd one in warming us.
> Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
> This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.
> --The Sun Rising, vs. 25-30.

"The Cross" makes use of the symbol and all its associated meaning, and also plays on the meanings of the word:

> Then doth the Cross of Christ work fruitfully
> Within our hearts, when we love harmlessly
> That Cross's pictures much, and with more care
> That Cross's children, which our Crosses are.
> --The Cross, vs. 61-64.

Compared with Donne's power of suggestion Cowley's poetry is often clever, but obvious and sometimes trite. "Beauty" tells of the various weapons nature affords animals and men, then says women's weapon is beauty:

> And yet what flame, what lightning e'er
> So great an active force did bear?
> They are all weapon, and they dart
> Like Porcupines from every part.

Who can, alas, their strength express,
Arm'd, when they themselves undress,
Cap-a-pie with nakedness?
--Beauty, vs. 17-23.

I wonder what the grave and wise
Think of all us that love;
.....
Another from my Mistress' door
Saw me with eyes all watry come;
Nor could the hidden cause explore,
But thought some smoke was in the room;
Such ignorance from unwounded learning came;
He knew tears made by smoke, but not by flame.
--Resolved to Love, st. 1 & 3.

In his poem "On the Death of Mrs Katherine Phillips," Cowley is more serious, but still ingenious and rather obvious. The story is all there in the words and we are satisfied rather than challenged:

No violent passion could an entrance find,
Into the tender goodness of her mind;
Through walls of stone those furious bullets may
Force their impetuous way;
When her soft breast they hit, powerless and dead
they lay.
....
As when a prudent man does once perceive
That in some foreign country he must live,
The language and the manners he does strive
To understand and practice here,
That he may come no stranger there.
So well Orinda did herself prepare
In this much different clime for her remove
To the glad world of Poetry and Love.
--On the Death of Mrs Katherine Phillips,
st. 4 & 5.

The suggestiveness of Donne's imagery is enhanced by the interplay of images with each other, the logical or psychological connections between different images, or by the use of one basic metaphor throughout a poem. Thus his imagery is structural often the framework on which the

poem is built. "The Valediction Forbidding Mourning," which has perhaps been cited more often than any other poem as the model of its type, exhibits the subtle psychological connection between the various images. First the undemonstrative parting of the lovers is compared to a quiet death; "profanation" and "laiety" suggest a sacredness in their love, like the death of a virtuous man; "tear-floods" and "sigh-tempests" suggest the ocean and atmosphere which will separate the lovers, but also prepare for the next figure, the comparison of an earth-quake to the motion of the spheres, which is quiet and innocent, like the virtuous death, or like the dignified parting; also the spheres suggest heaven, a connection with the idea of sacred love; "sublunary" ties in with the cosmic notion of the spheres, and also with the sea and atmosphere background of the flood and tempests; "elemented" is a play on the idea of elements -- again the flood, tempest, earthquake connection; it may also prepare for the word "refined" in the next stanza; the lovers' relationship is refined like gold, which can be extended without breaking; the idea of extension picks up the cosmic figures again, as does "airy thinness"; "two souls which are one," reminds us of the sacred relationship again; the famous "compass" image then round out the poem, very ingeniously developed in itself, but also echoing the movement of the spheres, as the finished circle, the symbol of perfection in their love also suggests the moon, the

earth, and the spheres; and the final line brings out not only the return of the lover, but the gentle union of the soul with God, the figure of the first stanza. No doubt there are other connections and suggestions in this imagery. "St Lucie's Day" has the basic imagery of the change of seasons, with the imagery of alchemy also emphasizing the sense of reduction to nothingness which the lover feels at his loss. "Love's Infiniteness," is based on the Platonic ideas of the Ideal or the All; "A Lecture on the Shadow" is developed on the image of the shortening shadow at noon; "Hymn to God the Father" is unified logically through the successive prayers for forgiveness, and also by the close parallelism of sentence structure, by the tight rhyme scheme, and by the repeated pun on the poet's name and possibly on his wife's, Anne More (as has been recently suggested to me):

> When thou has done, thou has not done,
> For I have more.

Cowley's "Hymn to Light" is a series of developed images that show a certain degree of suggestive connection, as between the golden shower of Jove, the golden arrows, the rainbow, the moon, night and its creatures, the painted landscape and the colors of the flowers, the stream, the lake, and the ocean of light. For the most part Cowley's poems are merely a series of stanzas without close connections between the imagery; the logical structure of the poems is apparent, but the imaginative interweaving of

imagery is not. The poem "Beauty" (not the same one as quoted above) has a large number of vigorous images, some of which are briefly developed, but there is little connection between the imagery of different stanzas: Beauty is an ape, a flatterer, Babel, Love's scene and masquerade, coin, active, passive ill, tulip, flames but meteors, not stars, lives in fancy, conquests, thaw, fever, tyrant, thief, murderer and Devil, all in thirty-six lines. As Cowley explained, one striking quality of the _Pindarics_ was their sudden digressions; the one cited above, between the Resurrection and Pindaric verse, is a sample of digression which the modern mind does not appreciate. An example of decorative imagery from the Pindaric, "The Plagues of Egypt," illustrates the self-conscious dragging-in of inappropriate detail which here spils the intended mood of awe:

> Serpents in Egypt's monstrous land,
> Were ready still at hand,
> And all at the Old Serpent's first command.
> And they too gap'd, and they too hist,
> And they their threatening tails did twist,
> But straight on both the Hebrew-Serpent flew
> Broke both their active backs, and both it slew...
> --The Plagues of Egypt, st. 4.

The description of the Devil in _Davideis_, Book I, has a similarly comic note; the Devil has been upbraiding his followers:

> Oh my ill-changed condition! oh my fate!
> Did I lose Heaven for this?
> With that, with his long tail he lashed his breast,

And horribly spoke out in looks the rest.
....
No hiss of snakes, no clank of chains was known,
And souls amid their tortures durst not groan.
--Davideis, Book I.

And all Cowley's generalities about the impressiveness of the Devil in this scene fail to impress me. Cowley had an ingenious wit, and at times a sense of humor, but in this case he failed to realize that he was being simply comic.

Though Donne's approach was usually intellectual or emotional, there are times when he shows definite sensuous perception; this is especially true in poems dealing with sexual passion, especially the Elegies, where he shows a genuine sensuous delight:

Your gown going off, such beauteous state reveals,
As when from flowery meads the'hills shadow steals.
....
License my roving hands and let them go....
....
As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be
To taste full joys.
--Elegy XIX, vs. 13-14; 25; 34-35.

In "The Storm" Donne describes the coming of the wind:

Mildly it kissed our sails, and fresh and sweet,
As to a stomach starved, whose insides meet,
Meat comes, it came.
.....
...did the gale
Like shot, not fear'd till felt, our sailes assail.
--The Storm, vs. 18-20; 29-30.

From "The Apparition"

Bathed in a cold, quicksilver sweat will lie
A veryer ghost than I.
--The Apparition, vs. 12-13.

"The Ecstasy" tells of lovers, with cemented hands, seeing their reflections in each other's eyes; and "The Valediction:

of Weeping" suggests the reflection in a tear. "Now I have drink thy sweet salt tears" from "Witchcraft by Picture" completes a few examples which show the range and precision of Donne's sensuous imagery when he chose to use it.

Cowley is even less inclined than Donne to give precise sensations in his poetry; he deals in generalities or uses words which might give sensations with a double meaning, such as heat, cold, fire, ice, fever, darkness light, Physic -- all of these lose their sensuous quality by being interpreted into aspects of love. The description of Envy as one of the fiends in Hell introduces a number of details conventionally intended to produce a shudder, but this is not the same as sensuous experience:

> .....her black locks hung long
> Attired with curling serpents, her pale skin
> Was almost dropped from the sharp bones within,
> And at her breast stuck vipers which did prey
> ....
> Her garments were deep stained with human gore,
> And torn with her own hands, in which she bore
> A knotted whip, and bowl, that to the brim
> Did with greed gall and juice of wormwood swim.
> --Davideis, Book I.

Donne's Elegies I and XIII which describe a jealous husband and a jealous woman are much more precise and human in their details, having the flavor of modern realism rather than of classical mythology:

> Nor when he swollen, and pampered with great fare,
> Sits down, and snorts, caged in his basket chair,
> Must we usurp his own bed any more,
> Nor kiss and lay in his house as before,
> --Elegy I, vs. 21-24.

To vomit gall in slander, swell her veins
With calumny that Hell itself disdains,
.....
Her hands, I know not how, used more to spill
The food of others, than herself to fill.
--Elegy XIII, vs. 3-4; 21-22.

The above examples show the precision of Donne's vocabulary, which is remarkable in all his imagery; when us used figures from law, philosophy, medicine, geography, religion, he used the terms in the exact sense which they had in his day, as the following examples may indicate:

Since to be gratious (full of grace)
Our task is treble, to pray, bear, and do
.....
From indiscreet humility,
Which might be scandalous,
And cast reproach on Christianity,
From being spies, or to spies pervious,
From thirst, or scorn of fame, deliver us.
......
When want, sent but to tame, doth war
And work despair a breach to enter in...
--The Litany, vs. 12-24; 149-153; 183-184.

I said, if any title be
Convey'd by this, Ah, what doth it avail,
To be the fortieth name in an entail?
--Love's Diet, vs. 22-24.

Verse embalms virtue;'and tombs or thrones of rimes,
Preserve frail transitory fame, as much
As spice doth bodies from corrupt airs touch.
Mine are short-liv'd; the tincture of your name
Creates in them, but dissipates as fast,
New spirits: for strong agents with the same
Force that doth warm and cherish, us do waste;
Kept hot with strong extracts, no bodies last.
--To the Countess of Bedford, vs. 13-20.

Cowley's vocabulary was not usually so precise, though he often showed his knowledge of mathematics, medicine, and science in his imagery. He tends more frequently toward

the broader Augustan generality. A fairly precise usage appears in the following complaint to his Muse:

> When my new mind had no infusion known,
> Thou gav'st so deep a tincture of thine own,
>   That ever since I vainly try
>   To wash away th' inherent dye.
>   --The Complaint, st. 7.

In his "Ode to Dr Scarborough" Cowley showed his knowledge of diseases, but lost precision by poeticizing; this poem was the source of some accusations of indecency:

> The inundations of all liquid pain,
>   And deluge dropsy thou do'est drain.
>   Fevers so hot that one would say
>   Thou mightst as soon Hell-fires allay
> (The damn'd scarce more incurable than they)
>   Thou dost so temper, that we find
>   Like gold the body but refin'd;
>   No unhealthful dross behind.
> .....(Here he takes care of the ague and kidney
>   stones.)
> The Indian son of lust, (that foul disease
> Which did on this his new-found world but lately
>   seize;
> Yet since a tyrany has planted here,
> As wide and cruel as the Spaniard there)
>   Is so quite rooted out by thee,
>   That thy patients seem to be
> Restored not to health only, but virginity.
> .....
> What need there here repeated be by me
>   The vast and barbarous lexicon
>   Of man's infirmity?   (Why, indeed?)
> .....
> Let Nature and let Art do what they please,
> When all's done, Life's an incurable disease.
>   --To Dr Scarborough, st. 2, 3, & 6.

Cowley's vocabulary was heavily weighted with broad, general terms, which he preferred to more precise and exact ones; here he subscribed to what the modern mind, devoted to the precise detail as fostered by Romanticism and Imagism, sees as the fallacy of Classicism -- that the general is more

widely true and universally interesting than the particular. The distinction holds good for vocabulary as well as for ideas and characters; the following quotation from "The Inconstant" shows Cowley's use of the non-specific term:

> I never yet could see a face
>   Which had no dart for me;
> From fifteen years to fifty space,
>   They all victorious be.
> Love, thou'rt a Devil; if I may call thee one,
>   For sure in me thy name is legion.
> ....
> My soul at first indeed did prove
>   Of pretty strength against a dart;
> Till I this habit got of love;
>   But my consumed and wasted heart
> Once burnt to tinder with a strong desire,
>   Since that by every spark is set on fire.
>
> --The Inconstant, st. 1 & 7.

"Brutus" also illustrates Cowley's penchant for abstractions and Latin derivatives:

> Excellent Brutus, of all human race,
>   The best till Nature was improved by Grace,
> Till men above themselves Faith raised more
>   Then Reason above beasts before.
> Virtue was thy life's center, and from thence
>   Did silently and constantly dispense
>   The gentle, vigorous influence
> To all the wide and fair circumference.
>
> --Brutus, st. 1.

Volumes have been written on the power of Donne's prosody, on his playing the variations of speech rhythms against the basic iambic, and on his substituting of trochees and spondees at points of emphasis, thereby increasing the emotional and intellectual impact of his verse. The "roughness" for which he was so long condemned is now seen by the modern critic as a unique quality of his art. His variations have the effect of slowing down the

reading of his lines, especially when groups of consonants add their weight to long vowels and help to produce something of the effect of Latin quantitative verse. Only a few examples can be given here. A few lines from "The Storm" illustrate the tension and struggle of the ship's rigging in the wind, almost the lurching of the boat:

> Then note they the ships sicknesses, the mast
> Shak'd with this ague, and the hold and wast
> With a salt dropsy clog'd, and all our tacklings
> Snapping like too-high-stretched treble strings.
> --The Storm, vs. 53-56.

The rhythm of speech is apparent in the beginnings of many of Donne's _Songs and Sonnets_, as well as in his heroic couplets, the meter of most of his _Satires_, _Epistles_, _Elegies_, and _Obsequies_. His sonnet, "The Token", begins with an accented syllable, but is otherwise regular in meter, and yet in the word order of ordinary speech:

> Send me some token, that my hope may live,
> Or that my easless thoughts may sleep and rest.

"Twickenham Garden" begins with a line that is almost dactylic in meter, so that the two verbals gain emphasis from the variation, as does "hither" in the next line:

> Blasted with sighs and surrounded with tears,
> Hither I come to seek the spring,
> And at mine eyes, and at mine ears,
> Receive such balms as else cure everything.

The "mine eyes" and "mine ears" gain by being spondaic, and also in contrast to the light syllables which make up the rest of the line; the final line flows into regular meter, suitable to the thought expressed.

Few poems have the power and weight of piled-up sledge-hammer syllables such as appear in the <u>Holy Sonnet</u>, "Better My Heart", and in few poems does the metrical variation contribute more to the effect of passionate struggle:

> Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
> As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
> That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me'and bend
> Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
> I, like an usurpt town, to'another due,
> Labor to'admit you, but Oh, to no end,
> Reason your viceroy in me, me should defend,
> But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
> Yet dearly I loved you,'and would be loved fain,
> But am betrothed unto your enemy:
> Divorce me,'untie, or break that knot again,
> Take me to you, imprison me, for I
> Except you'enthrall me, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Compared with the power of such a poem, Cowley's eloquence at its best is sheer bombast. Previous quotations, especially from the <u>Odes</u> and <u>Pindarics</u> illustrate this lofty, if somewhat wind-blown, quality; the Restoration called for particular effort in this type of verse:

> Come forth, come forth, ye men of God belov'd,
>   And let the power now of the flame,
> Which against you so impotent became,
>   On all your enemies be proved.
> Come, mighty Charles, desire of nations, come;
>   Come you triumphant Exile, home.
> He's come; he's safe at shore; I hear the noise
> Of a whole land which does at once rejoice,
> I hear th'united people's sacred voice.
>
> --Ode upon His Majesty's Restoration and Return, st. 16.

The irregularity of the <u>Pindarics</u> was more a matter of line length and scattered rhyme than irregularity of scansion, though variations occur, especially to emphasize the first

word of a stanza. Cowley's heroic couplets were an effort in the direction of the regular closed couplet; occasional substitutions do lend emphasis, but his lines in general run fairly smoothly. The following passage illustrates not only Cowley's monotonous handling of the heroic couplet, but also his conventional piety, and his self-conscious appeal for fame:

> Thou, who didst David's royal stem adorn,
> And gav'st him birth from whom thyself was't born,
> Who didst in triumph at death's court appear,
> And slew'st him with thy nails, thy Cross, and spear,
> While Hell's black Tyrant trembled to behold,
> The glorious light he forfeited of old,
> Who Heav'ns glad burden now, and justest pride,
> Sit'st high enthron'd next thy great Father's side,
> ......
> Ev'en thou my breast with such blest rage inspire
> As moved the strings of tuneful David's lyre,
> Guide my bold steps with thine old trav'elling
> flame,
> In these untrodden paths to sacred fame;
> Lo with pure hands thy heav'enly fires to take,
> My well-chang'd Muse I a chaste Vestal make!
> From earth's vain joys and love's soft witchcraft
> free,
> I consecrate my Magdalene to Thee!
> Lo, this great work, a temple to thy praise,
> On polished pillars of strong verse I raise!
> .....
> Too long the Muses' lands have heathen been;
> Their gods too long were dev'ils, and virtues sin;
> But thou, Eternal Word, hast call'd forth me
> Th' Apostle to convert the world to thee;
> T'unbind the charms that in soft fables lie
> And teach that Truth is truest poesy.
> --Davideis, Book I.

Except for the Davideis, most of Cowley's religious poetry was translation of others' writings in classical languages or Biblical narrative, as in "The Plagues of Egypt." None show the intense religious emotion and struggle apparent

in Donne. "The Puritan and the Papist" shows Cowley's use of satire for religious argument; with a sort of undergraduate cockiness he wittily refuted the positions of the opponents of the Anglican Church: (The poem is addressed to the Puritans).

> They in a foreign, and unknown tongue pray,
> You in an unknown sense your prayers say:
> So that this difference 'twixt ye does ensue,
> Fools understand not them, nor wise men you.
> They an unprofitable zeal have got,
> Of invocating saints that hear them not.
> 'Twere well you did so; nought may more be fear'd
> In your fond prayers, than that they should be heard.
> --The Puritan and the Papist, vs. 59-66.

Perhaps part of the grip of Donne's poetry on the imagination of our time has been its portrayal of the "naked, thinking heart," the undeniable picture of a fascinating personality speaking through his poetry of all types, from the most cynical to the most devout; yet for all he revealed, we still feel his awareness of his own complexity and his effort to know himself.

> I am two fools, I know,
> For loving, and for saying so
> In whining poetry.
> .....
> Who are a little wise, the best fools be.
> --The Triple Fool, vs. 1-3; 22.

> Lest Thou thy love and hate and me undo,
> To let me live, O love and hate me too.
> --The Prohibition, vs. 23-24.

> My rags of heart can like, wish, and adore,
> But after one such love, can love no more.
> --The Broken Heart, vs. 31-32.

They who one another keep
Alive, ne'er parted be.
--Song, vs. 39-40.

O think me worth thine anger, punish me,
Burn off my rusts and my deformity,
Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace,
That thou may'st know me, and I'll turn my face.
--Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward, vs. 39-42.

In contrast to Donne's self-awareness, one sees the self-conscious Cowley making a bid for his audience's attention, as shown in the selections from the Davideis, and "The Resurrection." One of his earlier poems asserted his desire for literary fame:

What shall I do to be forever known,
And make the Age to come my own?
.....
Yet I must on; what sound is't strikes my ear:
Sure I Fame's trumpet hear.
It sounds like the last Trumpet; for it can
Raise up the bur'ied man.
--The Motto, vs. 1-2; 13-16.

When Cowley published his complete works in 1656, one of the copies was chained to the shelves of the Bodleian Library at Oxford; this recognition of his fame called for an ode, in which he tried to be modest: (The book is speaking here).

As when a seat in Heaven
Is to an unmalicious sinner given,
Who casting round his wondering eye,
Does none but Patriarchs and Apostles there espie;
.....
With trembling and amazement he begins
To recollect his frailties past and sinns,
He doubts almost his station there
His soul says to itself, "How came I here?"
It fares no otherwise with me
When I myself with conscious wonder see,
Amidst this purified elected company.

....
Ah, that my Author had been tied like me
To such a place and such a company!
Instead of sev'ral countries, sev'ral men,
And business which the Muses hate,
He might have then improved that small estate,
Which Nature sparingly to him did give...
--Ode. Mr Cowley's Book Presenting
Itself to the University Library
at Oxford, st. 4 & 5.

It was in the Preface to this edition that Cowley said he would write no more poetry, a resolution which he did not keep. His dissatisfaction is mingled in the poem above with self-congratulation and false modesty. Later, in "The Complaint" he berated his Muse for having kept him from more profitable activities, especially since he had been neglected by the Court:

When in the cradle innocent I lay,
Thou, wicked Spirit, stolest me away,
....And ever since I strive in vain
My ravished freedom to regain;
Still I rebel, still thou dost reign,
Lo, still in verse against thee I complain.
....
The foolish sports I did on thee bestow,
Make all my art and labor fruitless now;
Where once such fairies dance, no grass doth ever
grow.
......
Thou slack'nest all my nerves of industry,
By making them so oft to be
The tinkling strings of thy loose minstrelsy.
.....
This was my error, this my gross mistake,
Myself a demi-votary to make.
....
For all that I gave up, I nothing gain,
And perish for the part that I retain.
--The Complaint, st. 6 & 7.

So the self-conscious "Melancholy Cowley" attempted to gain the favors of the Court, and also admitted something of his

sense of failure as a poet.

The modern world, in so far as it notices Cowley at all, is inclined to agree that his poetry lacks many of the values which we seek. As Leigh Hunt remarked, "Thought by itself makes no poet at all"; and it seems the best we can give Cowley is a certain intellectual range and logical strength, plus a tiresome oversupply of cleverness; we miss the originality, the passionate intensity, the depth of insight, the power of suggestion, and the artistic mastery which we find in the best of Donne. Granted that a considerable amount of Donne's verse, some of which he wrote with the hope of gaining favor, is not much better than Cowley's, we still find in his poems of love and religion the complexity of wit, the depth of thought and feeling, the imaginative and intellectual grasp of his world, and the genuine passion which makes his poetry great. And as we see in his post-Renaissance world some of the same disruptions and uncertainties of which we are aware in our own, we find satisfaction for our minds and hearts in his poetry, not so much in the answers that it gives as in the attitudes that created it.

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