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CONFRONTATION AND CONFLICT IN THE POETRY OF JOHN DONNE

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of English

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Roger M. Peirce

November, 1969

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Accepted for the faculty of The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska at Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

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PREFACE

The poetry of John Donne reveals the mind of a man very much in contention with itself. Not only does the obvious violence of the battling ideas in his writing produce this fervor, but even in the cacophony of the verse, in the diversity of the images, and in the extravagance of the metaphysical conceit, one is able to detect a confused intellect. Surely, a great deal of this confusion can be explained as a singular product of one man's revolt against his strict and controlled upbringing, a thesis which is not unpopular among critics of Donne.[1] The argument seems to be quite plausible, and it is not an oversight that the direction of this discussion is toward the minimizing of a biographical study of the poet; rather this writer agrees with Grierson and the others who stress that the peculiar character of Donne in combination with the influence of aspects of the Renaissance forced him to react against the idealism of the Middle Ages. It would seem, however, that evidence of a schism from established tradition would justify the examination of the historical forces which engendered that split; consequently, it will

[1]H. J. C. Grierson points out that the disciplines of Roman Catholicism were forced upon Donne in his youth by his mother. He sees the conflict of moods evident in the poet as the product of a man of the Renaissance, exposed to Spanish and Italian influences, in revolt against the stringency imposed upon him by the temper of Catholicism. (<u>The Poems of John Donne</u>; 1912 ed. [London, 1937], II, xvi.)

be the object of this paper to investigate the relationship of the man to his Age. Donne's attitudes are indicative of the late Elizabethan temperament, of the troublesome dichotomy which the Middle Ages had left in legacy to the Renaissance. The period of the English Renaissance lies between the Scholastic blindness of the Middle Ages and the empirical illumination of the Scientific Reformation, and, in such position, is heir to decision between the two most compelling polarities of thought, the material and the immaterial.

CHAPTER I

THE PHILOSOPHICAL LEGACY

i

In tracing the heritage of the concern over the relative values of the material and the immaterial, one can see that the problem was considerably significant in Medieval thought as a great deal of the philosophical writings of the Age were dedicated to the problem of the universals. The question of whether reality existed in the form or the particular, however, was not a speculation peculiar to the Middle Ages. The academic controversy, as far as one can determine, found its germination in the Hellenic tradition of Plato and Aristotle; a brief recall of its ancient history, then, would seem to be in order.

In his theory of knowledge, Plato maintained that the form, or the idea, was real, exercising a priority over the particular and that man, in order to realize a successful existence, can have a valid knowledge of the individual only after understanding the species. Aristotle, on the other hand, argued that reality is realized in the particular, in the various concrete things that surround us and that the reality of the form, the idea of these

individual things, can be realized only through an examination of the particular.[1] In _The Republic_, Plato establishes, although somewhat precariously, his argument for the relative reliability of the senses in determining truth. The allegory of the cave in the seventh book demonstrates the philosopher's distrust of the validity of the images impressed upon man through physical perception as Plato envisions him in the shadows of a cave, never seeing the light. As Frederick Copleston explicates the passage, those in the cave see only the shadows of each other and of the objects passed before them; and, if presented with the realities of these shadows, they would be blinded by the glare and convinced that the shadows they knew were the realities.[2] The warning from Plato is that matter is in a continuous state of motion, in a state of "becoming," and although one may perceive in matter a partially-perfected form, he may also receive a corrupted image.

In _The Theaetetus_, Plato embraces this theory of

[1]It should be understood that Plato did not argue that the universal was alone real and that study of the particular yielded no validity; or conversely, that Aristotle suggested that reality existed only in the particular. Rather, each theory contains an epistemological method of attaining truths, employing both the form and the particular. An understanding of the Medieval determination to reach absolutes in the midst of the later schism of Aristotelianism and Platonism, will shed light on the consequent dichotomy facing Renaissance man.

[2]_A History of Philosophy_ (Westminster, Maryland, 1960), I, 161.

the reality of the universal as Socrates defends Protagoras against Theaetetus' conviction that "what it is that of which I am sensible."[3] As Plato's spokesman, Socrates

> . . . accepts from Protagoras that belief in the relativity of senses and sense perception, but he will not accept a universal relativism: on the contrary, knowledge, absolute and infallible knowledge, is attainable, but it cannot be the same as sense perception, which is relative, elusive and subject to the influence of all sorts of temporary influences on the part of both subject and object. . . . The object of true knowledge must be stable and abiding, fixed, capable of being grasped in clear and scientific definition, which is the universal. . . .[4]

In the dialogue, Plato's argument against the universality of sense perception manifests itself in Socrates' demands that his young friend "show, if you can, that our sensations are not relative and individual"; he proceeds to insist that although the senses perceive objects,

> . . . their essence and what they are, and their opposition to one another, and the essential nature of this opposition, the soul herself endeavors to decide for us by the review and comparison of them.[5]

Plato's epistemological doctrine, then, dictated that, in order to achieve true knowledge, man must rise above the image to the form; and as Copleston suggests, for him,

[3]Quoted by John Burnet, Greek Philosophy, Part I, Thales to Plato (London, 1928), p. 181.

[4]Copleston, pp. 149-50.

[5]The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett (London, 1892), IV, 223, 241.

the form was not a peculiar creation of the human mind but an "objective essence" discovered by man in a "separate world of transcendental essences."[6]

The controversy which arose between Platonism and Aristotelianism in the Middle Ages was induced not only by subsequent misinterpretation of Aristotle, but also from the misinterpretation of Plato by Aristotle himself. In an evaluation of Aristotle's writings, D. J. Allan points out that although Aristotle heads toward empiricism and Plato toward realism, ". . . it is plainly misleading to contrast Plato, as the exponent of a deductive, domestic philosophy, and a believer in innate ideas, with Aristotle as the champion of experience."[7] Allan's comments capsulize the schism of Platonism and Aristotelianism in the Middle Ages, and after examining Aristotle's evaluation of Plato's ideas, one can see that that schism was, in fact, precipitated by Aristotle:

> . . . he [Plato] believed that any knowledge of things as wholes must arise not from objects of sense perception, but from another kind of beings; for he thought it impossible to find a common definition for sensible things, since they are always undergoing transformation.[8]

Aristotle's criticism is not entirely accurate. Plato did

[6]A History of Philosophy, I, 164-65.

[7]The Philosophy of Aristotle (London, 1952), p. 158.

[8]Aristotle, Aristotle's Metaphysics, trans. Richard Hope (New York, 1952), I, 19.

not suggest in his ideas of "becoming" that sense perception held no value in achieving knowledge. A re-examination of the words of Socrates in _The_ _Theaetetus_ will demonstrate Plato's true position:

> . . . for no one can suppose that in each of us, as in a sort of Trojan horse, there are perched a number of unconnected senses, which do not all meet in some one nature, the mind, or whatever we please to call it, of which they are the instruments, and with which through them we perceive objects of sense.[9]

It would seem that, despite the traditional split of those of the Platonic school and those of the Aristotelian school which developed in the post-Hellenic period, the epistemologies of the two philosophers were, in actuality, not as polarized as one might think. Concerning their respective theories of knowledge, the summation of their differences can be made only with the respectful reservation such voluminous and profound efforts deserve; but attempting that summary, one might say that while Aristotle maintained that the universal "knowing" of the intellect cannot exist without the particular images of sense perception,[10] Plato held that the form, or the universal, was a reality which need only be discovered through accurate accumulation and evaluation of sense data.

[9] _Dialogues_, IV, 245.

[10] John Herman Randall, Jr., _Aristotle_ (New York, 1960), p. 95.

Contemporary with Plato and Aristotle, the Skeptical tradition amplified the struggle of the ideal and the real which was beginning to make itself felt in the mind of man. The Skeptics argued against Platonic ideas, holding that the Platonic form was simply a non-existent metaphysical ambiguity; and they rejected Aristotelian thought, maintaining that the senses often produce images which don't convey truth. The resultant attitude of the Skeptics is epitomized in Pyrrho's conviction that neither the senses nor reason can effect certain knowledge.[11] Oswald Reichel comments on the despair which the school adopted:

> . . . the development of the Platonic and Aristotelian speculations by those who were not able to follow them, had made men distrustful of all speculation, until they at last doubted the possibility of all knowledge.[12]

The conclusion of the Skeptics, then, was that knowledge of truth by any epistemology was unattainable.

ii

This reconciliation of the dilemma of the universals became satisfactory for some of the Graeco-Roman Age, but with the advent of Christianity, the faithful

[11]Oswald J. Reichel, _The Stoics, Epicurians, and Skeptics_, trans. Dr. Edward Zeller (New York, 1962), p. 522.

[12]_Ibid._, p. 516.

were encumbered by a need for a solution which would transcend the denial of knowledge and subsequent attraction to a Hedonistic existence. Some, such as Clement of Alexandria, offered the idea that philosophy was good since it was willed by God,[13] but, for the most part, in the early years of the Church, the Patristic Fathers regarded philosophy with skepticism and insisted that the foundation of the Church be constructed on the words of Christ alone. The solution which Christianity found was, in effect, a substitute for epistemology--faith. Tertullian, for instance, exemplifying the dominant thinking of the Church, saw the intervention of philosophy into matters of faith as heresy in his demand that the Church rid itself of

> . . . all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic and dialectic composition![14]

The absolute reliance on faith, however, proved to be an unsteady basis on which to rest the development of the Church. Under the leadership of Saint Ambrose and Saint Jerome, more enthusiastic members demanded justification of their religion by applying principles of philosophy to it. The tone of the philosophical arguments to which Christian thinkers were attracted was, for the most part, Neo-Platonic; and it was this strain that Saint Augustine

[13]Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (New York, 1955), pp. 29-31.

[14]Quoted by Etienne Gilson, p. 44.

adopted in the fourth century.

The essence of Augustine's philosophy proved to be that to which the mood of the Middle Ages was akin. Augustine, not unlike Donne, turned to the Church after a disillusioned search for unchallengeable demonstration of eternal truths. In the early years, he was attracted to the philosophy of the Skeptics, but it was not long before his thirst for truth wrenched him from their despair;[15] however, every direction of the philosophies he explored led to uncertainty, and as a result, he fell into the comfort of authority. His acceptance of the doctrine of divine illumination is described by Etienne Gilson as a "decisive moment in his own [Augustine's] liberation from skepticism," in which the existence of God is proved through the acceptance of immutable truths.[16] His resultant philosophy was that man could find truth within himself through the Church; these truths are imposed upon the soul of man when he has accepted the authority of the Church. Man's reason will help him to interpret these truths, but it cannot lead him to truth without the aid of faith. In Augustinian thought, one can see two major theses which filtered into the Middle

[15] Gilson (p. 76) sees a similarity between Augustine and Plato in this respect. He suggests that both find a "safeguard" against skepticism in the conviction of the existence of "intelligible truths."

[16] Ibid.

Ages: (1) that reason is subordinate to faith; and (2) that, in the Platonic vein, the ideal, or truth, exists independently of man's knowledge of it.

In the early Middle Ages, the general inclination was to fall in line with the Augustinian tradition of subordination of philosophy to theology, but there was intellectual unrest among those who would embrace an Aristotelian philosophy. Until the thirteenth century, Christian thinkers had adhered to a Platonic philosophy since Aristotelianism was considered in opposition to Christian beliefs. The reason for this Medieval interpretation was that the Nominalist school, spearheaded by Averroes, had formulated the modified Aristotelian position affirming the absolute reliability of sense perception over the Platonic hypothesis of the reality of the universal. Averroes maintained that matter was indestructible, that our world was an infinite material world.[17] Gilson expands on this point by summarizing Averroes' theory of knowledge:

> If we can understand the nature of manufactured objects, it is because they themselves came from some thought, that is, from intelligible forms present in the intellects of those who made them. . . . The Platonists were wrong in believing in the existence of separate ideas, but not in thinking that the sensible things

[17]Sterling Lamprecht, <u>Our Philosophical Traditions</u> (New York, 1955), p. 172.

> hold their intelligibility from some intelligible beings.[18]

The only "form" which Averroes accepted was that in the mind of man; and as for their reality,

> It would be a mistake to think that the universals exist in themselves, outside of individuals . . . it is the intellect which gives universality to forms.[19]

As Sterling Lamprecht points out, this position demanded recognition of the theory of the soul's dependence on the body. Averroes' philosophy brought to the Nominalist school of Aristotelianism an exclusively empiricist view which ignored the Christian concept of the immortality of the soul.[20] Viewed in the light of what Medieval Christians knew of Aristotelianism, the reason for their attraction to Platonism becomes obvious.

With the recovery of Aristotle's texts during the first half of the thirteenth century, however, Medieval thinkers were able to make a direct examination of Aristotelian thought. Thomas Aquinas was especially instrumental in adapting Aristotelian philosophy to Christian beliefs. Separate systems of epistemology for theology and philosophy,paradoxically, also become a part of the synthesis. As Copleston notes, for Aquinas, knowledge in

[18] _History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages_, p. 221.

[19] _Ibid_.

[20] Lamprecht, pp. 172-73.

theology proceeds from the general (dogmatic revelation) to the particular; whereas philosophy proceeds from the particular to the general. Both can reveal the same truths, but reason and faith never contradict each other.[21] The paradox is resolved as the thinking which eventually evolved into the school of Moderate Realism progresses; Aquinas reveals his affinity for Platonism when he describes God as "an exemplar form, but not a form that is part of a composite."[22] Further, he makes clear his ideas of the relationship of Platonism to Aristotelianism:

> Hence the truth of the divine intellect is immutable. But the truth of our intellect is mutable, not because it is itself the subject of change, but in so far as our intellect changes from truth to falsity. . .[23]

Developing Saint Albert's position on the problem of the universals, the "Moderate Realism" of Aquinas asserted the reality of both the universal and the particular, the former in the mind of God, and the latter individuated in matter; consequently, both the Realistic school of Platonism and the Nominalist tradition of Aristotelianism were made a part of the world-view.

[21] _A History of Philosophy_, I, 161.

[22] _Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas_, trans. Anton C. Pegis (New York, 1945), I, 35.

[23] _Ibid._, I, 178.

iii

The Thomistic synthesis effected a fusion not only of Platonic and Aristotelian thought but also of the Classical and Christian traditions. The result of the synthesis was the creation of the Medieval mood, of a secure well-established serenity in unity. Dante, a Thomist himself, captures the feeling as he describes the ascent of Beatrice and himself to the heaven of the sun:

> The uncreated Might which passeth speech,
> Gazing on His Begotten with the Love
> That breathes Itself eternally from each,
>
> All things that turn through mind and space made more
> In such great order that without some feel
> Of Him none e'er beheld the frame thereof . . .[24]

And, as the Medieval mind dictated, should one element of this perfect system be dislodged, the whole creation of harmony would be affected:

> . . . gaze enamoured on the Master's art,
> Whence never he removes the eye of Him,
> Such is the love He bears it in His heart.
>
> Observe how, branching off as from a stem
> Runs slant the circle that the planets ride,
> To meet the call that the world makes on them;
>
> For were their path not tilted thus aside,
> Much heavenly power would go for naught, and nigh
> All earthly potencies unborn had died;
>
> While more or less than this if it should lie
> Out of the straight, 'twould cause a grievous lack
> Of order in the low world and the high.

[24] Il Paradiso, X, l. 1-6, trans. Dorothy Sayres, The Comedy of Dante Alighieri (New York, 1962), p. 135.

[25] Ibid., vs. 10-21.

The physical and spiritual influence of the Ptolemic system on Medieval life is exemplified in the passage. A benevolent deity observes the perfection of his creation in the order of "all things that turn through mind and space." Even in the apparent error of the planets' tilted orbits about the earth, there is purpose; for, should they "not be tilted thus," the perfect balance of the universe would be upset, and chaos would result "in the low world and the high." The security of the Age rested on the dependence on a faith in God; should the system be upset, it would be only through the vain meddling of man.

As Hiram Haydn suggests, the Middle Ages had realized an end to the quest for unity; the order of the universe indicated a centralized power in the intellect of God.[26] The oneness of the universe is further realized in Aquinas' hierarchy of being; even in differentiation, the Medieval mind found evidence of a perfectly-ordered environment:

> Hence in natural things species seem to be arranged in a hierarchy: as the mixed things are more perfect than the elements, and plants than minerals, and animals than plants, and men than other animals; and in each of these one species is more perfect than others. Therefore, just as the divine wisdom is the cause of the distinction of things for the sake of the perfection of the universe, so is it the cause of inequality.

[26]The Counter-Renaissance (New York, 1950), p. 131.

> For the universe would not be perfect if only one grade of goodness were found in things.[27]

In every part of the universe, Medieval man saw design and purpose. Thomas' proofs for the existence of God give evidence of the harmony which He established. The universe was a balanced system in which all relationships were governed by cause and effect, the initial motivation having been provided by the Prime Mover. Design and purpose manifested itself in civic life and in the desire for a universal church and universal language. Science, too, was centered not on an investigation of how things came about, but on the motives behind scientific phenomena. And finally, the truths of God, revealed through dogma, were unassailably valid; philosophy would not contradict matters of faith since the law of nature dictated the Divine operation of reason in man.[28] Charles Coffin, evaluating historical influences on Donne, aptly sums up the feeling of the Middle Ages:

> The world picture which he inherited and with which he early acquainted himself through study was first, from God to man and nature a unified conception. Second, it revealed a purposive principle at work with man at the focal point of its activities. . . . Third, as the elementary and celestial worlds coalesce

[27] Basic Writings of Thomas Aquinas, trans. Father Laurence Shapcote, O.P., ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York, 1945), I, 461. Cited by Sterling Lamprecht, p. 182.

[28] Haydn, pp. 134-38.

> into the harmonious whole and ingenious system of mutual dependencies, to alter any detail would be to throw discord into the whole universe. Additions may be made serving to elaborate and enforce the scheme of things, but to discover that any one of the elements composing the earthly or heavenly kingdoms is substantially different from what it appears to be, would amount to destroying the whole, and bringing confusion to the mind which finds solace in its acceptance.[29]

Medieval man had assured himself of a purposeful, balanced environment. The doubts about faith and reason, about God, even about knowledge itself, with which the thinkers of previous ages had concerned themselves, had been securely set aside, and man was at peace with himself.

[29] John Donne and the New Philosophy (New York, 1937), p. 48.

CHAPTER II

THE THREAT TO MEDIEVALISM

i

The arrival of the Renaissance was announced with a variety of reactions to Medieval thought. Dominant among these reactions was the challenge from those who, inspired with the spirit of Humanist learning, sought to break from the intellectual enslavement to authority which had overpowered their Scholastic predecessors. In Italy, the temper of the Renaissance found its maturation in the revival of facets of Hellenic tradition which had been ignored by Medieval scholars; and, ironically, the model for this new philosophy of the Academy at Florentine was Plato. The Platonism familiar to Medieval thinkers, however, was not that to which Lorenzo, Ficino, Mirandola and the others of the school drew themselves. Rather, as in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's _Oration on the Dignity of Man_, they attempted to grasp the essence of Plato's ideas as they were originally recorded. Having favored the appeal of Humanism over Medieval Platonism, Mirandola arrived at a concept of the chain of being more loyal to Plato's ideas than that of the Middle Ages had been. Paul

Kristeller enlarges on this theme, referring to Mirandola's allusion to God's prediction to Adam: "thou shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature."[1] Mirandola's thesis, concludes Kristeller, was that man, rather than simply occupying a fixed place in the hierarchical chain, was capable of occupying any degree of life, according to his choice.[2]

Humanism was rapidly disengaging Medieval Idealism on the continent during the latter part of the fifteenth century; but, at the same time, elements of the Platonism of the Middle Ages were still surviving. That patriarch of Medieval Idealism--courtly love--for example, continued to flourish in the popularity of the courtesy books. Nearly one-half a century after the productive apex of the Florentine Academny, Castiglione reveals, through Peter Bembo, a Medieval view of love:

> I say, then, that according to the definition of the ancient sages love is naught but a certain desire to enjoy beauty; and as desire longs only for things that are perceived, perception must need always precede desire, which by its nature wishes good things, but in itself is blind and does not perceive them.[3]

Aristotelianism is clearly reflected in Bembo's words, but

[1] Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance (Stanford, California, 1964), p. 67.

[2] Ibid., p. 66.

[3] The Book of the Courtier, trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdyche (New York, 1929), p. 287.

recalling the comments of Chapter I, the reader can also identify the lines with Platonic thought. Castiglione effects a synthesis of his own as the soul and the flesh converge:

> Thus it [beauty] agreeably attracts the eyes of men, and entering thereby, it impresses itself upon the soul, and stirs and delights her with new sweetness throughout, and by kindling her it excites in her a desire for its own self.[4]

Equating beauty with the universal, Castiglione approaches a philosophy which combines both Aristotelianism and Platonism. Epistemologically, the process involved generation from the particular to the general in accordance with the Medieval view of Aristotelianism; and metaphysically, the superiority of the spirit over the flesh is defended in terms of Medieval Platonism.

The Renaissance in England, too, produced a myriad responses to Medievalism. Probably most influential in the first half of the sixteenth century was the strain of Christian Humanism inspired by the Dutch scholar, Erasmus, and adopted by Colet, More, and others. This school of thought differed from that of their Italian contemporaries in that, while replacing Medieval dogmatism with a faith in the intellectual capabilities of man, the English Humanists were more sympathetic toward Medieval Christianity in their revival of pagan philosophies. Supporting this

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 286.

argument, Douglas Bush emphasizes the importance of Christian Platonism in its various forms among these writers.[5] The Platonism of the Renaissance, however, departed from the Platonism of the Middle Ages in its recall of the humanistic spirit expressed by the ancient philosopher. In Utopia, for instance, More, attracted by the Renaissance spirit and drawing from Plato's idea of the commune, attacked one of the traditions of Medieval harmany--the hierarchy of nobility; and even in the later years of the sixteenth century, Christian Humanism continued to exert its influence through such men as Sidney, Spenser, and Daniel.[6] As late as the first quarter of the seventeenth century, faith in the nobility of man continued to challenge the Medieval hierarchy. Victor Harris speaks of the expression of this attitude in Thomas Browne's Pseudodoxia, suggesting that Browne maintained that "we should seek truth in nature itself rather than in the authority of past."[7]

ii

For other Englishmen, the transference from one world-view to another was not accomplished with the

[5]The Renaissance and English Humanism (London, 1956), p. 72.

[6]Ibid., p. 95.

[7]All Coherence Gone . . . (Holland, 1966), p. 152.

sublime compromise which their continental predecessors managed. Despite the seemingly successful adaptation of the blasphemies of Florentine Humanism to Christian beliefs, the reaction to the demands of the Renaissance encompassed two other significant attitudes: (1) the refusal to desert the security established in the Middle Ages; and (2) the confused schism which developed as a result of the imminent dissolution of traditional values. The potency of these reactions and its significance to this study deserve a close examination.

Investigating the former strain, one discovers a faithful adherence to the secure world-view courted by Medieval man. Consider, for example, the mid-sixteenth century dictates for order and degree proposed by Edward VI:

> Almighty god hath created and appointed all things, in heaven, earth, and waters, in a most excellent and perfect order. In heaven he hath appointed distinct orders and states of archangels and angels. In earth he hath assigned kings, princes and other governors under them, all in good and necessary order. . . . The sun, moon, stars, rainbow, thunder, lightning, clouds, and all birds of the air do keep this order. The earth, trees, seeds, plants, herbs, corn, grass, and all manner of beasts keep them in their order. All parts of the whole year, as winter, summer, months, nights, and days, continue in their order. . . . And man himself also, hath all his parts, both within and without, as soul, heart, mind, memory, understanding, reason, speech withal, and singular corporal members of his body in a profitable, necessary, and pleasant order . . . where there is no right order, there reigneth all abuse, carnal liberty, enormity, sin, and Babylonical

> confusion . . . for Almighty God is the only author and provider of this fore-named states and order.[8]

The Book of Homilies, of course, provided a mandate by which Edward could keep his subjects in line, but it is also indicative of the continuing influence of the Medieval tradition. Summarized above is the security which the Middle Ages had come to accept in the hierarchical chain of being, all material things being set in harmonious order by the unifying power of God.

Although the Homilies may suggest to the skeptic merely the attempts of a ruler to suppress dissension in his kingdom, the evidence of the continuation of similar, but less politically-minded, proclamations as late as 1594 should dispel any doubts:

> . . . of Law there can be no less acknowledged, than that her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world; all things in heaven and earth do her homage, the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power: both angels and men and creatures of what condition knows, though each in different sort and manner, yet all with uniform consent admiring her as the mother of their peace and joy.[9]

The echoes of Medievalism are obvious; the "peace and joy"

[8]The Book of Homilies, Norton Anthology of English Literature, I, 721-722.

[9]Richard Hooker, "The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity," The Works of That Learned and Judicious Divine, Mr. Richard Hooker . . ., ed. Rev. John Keble, 2 vols. (New York, 1845), I, 194.

which man has enjoyed is acknowledged to be the result of a Divinely-established hierarchical system of order creating the "harmony of the world." The harmony of which Richard Hooker speaks in the religious work is not a singular remnant of a previous age; quite the contrary, the persistent clutching to endangered precepts of a disappearing but comfortable world-view is evident in the writings of his contemporaries, too. John Davies, for example, conceives the universe to be organized in a dance as Antonius wooes Penelope:

> 'If then fire, ayre, wandring and fixed lights,
> 'In euery prouince of the imperial skie,
> 'Yield perfect formes of dauncing to your sights,
> 'In vaine I teach the eare that which the eye,
> 'With certaine view, already doth descrie:
> 'But for your eyes perceiue not all they see,
> 'In this I will your Senses master bee. . . .
>
> 'Only the Earth doth stand for ever still:
> Her rocks remoue not, nor her mountaines meet,
> (Although, some wits enricht with Learning's skill
> Say heau'n stands firme and that the Earth doth fleet,
> And swiftly turneth vnderneath their feet)
> Yet though the Earth is euer stedfast seene,
> On her broad breast hath dancing ever beene.'[10]

Even at the end of the sixteenth century, the Medieval world-view of "perfect forms of dauncing" in "the imperial sky" was far from being extinguished. On the contrary, it was being desperately defended, an action which can hardly be enigmatic when one considers the centuries of doubt

[10]"Orchestra, or a Poeme of Dauncing," The Complete Poems of John Davies, ed. Rev. Alexander B. Grosart, 2 vols. (London, 1876), II, 179-80.

that had expired before man had finally reconciled the material and the immaterial into a defensible philosophy of unity. Yet, regardless of the evidence in favor of Renaissance Medievalism, one cannot ignore the subdued voices of the protestors. Even in the sedately conservative proposals of Davies, one reads of those "wits enricht with Learning's skill" who were challenging tradition with the suggestion that "heau'n stands firme" and "the Earth doth fleet." This grudging acknowledgement of the New Science from conservative thinkers such as Hooker and Davies found more concerned expression in the seventeenth century. The subdued reaction of sixteenth century Elizabethans yielded to the more positive activity of those seventeenth-century challengers who brought to the surface the same unrest which fostered the doubts of Donne.

iii

In partial reaction to the security of the Middle Ages, and, for that matter, to its lingering into the sixteenth century, the explosive confusion of the temper of the first half of the seventeenth century reopened the doubts which the Middle Ages had reconciled. Haydn sees this segment of the Elizabethan Age as a transition period between two secure world-views, that of the Scholastic Period and that of the Newtonian Age of Reason and the

Scientific Reformation.[11] Considering the period in this light, one can see the reasons for the paradoxes, the confused and opposing points of view, the harshness of sound, and the extravagant images that permeate this strain of seventeenth-century Elizabethan literature. Science was revealing empirical evidence which shattered the serenity of a harmonious world-view proposed by the Medievalists. The Copernican revolution disproved the theory that the Earth was the center of the Universe and placed its operation relative to the position of the observor; medieval order was uprooted. The tenets of Medieval security were challenged in every aspect; and the result was the dissolution of a mood of confidence in perfect unity, a view that had been engendered through centuries of doubt. It can be understood why Elizabethan literature should possess qualities of agitated contradiction and confusion in light of the transitory aspect of the age.

During the century which elapsed between Copernicus' proposal that the sun was the center of motion and Kepler's purification of the theory in 1627,[12] much contemplative activity, not confined to astronomy, had evolved. In England, the voice of the New Science was

[11] Haydn, p. 17.

[12] J. L. E. Dreyer, _A History of Astronomy from Thales to Kepler_ (New York, 1953), p. 412.

being heard through the radical modernism of Francis Bacon; The Advancement of Learning was published as early as 1605. Bacon introduced to the Isles not only the revolutionary proposal of the fallibility of the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, but also its philosophical ramifications. In Novum Organum, published in 1620, he suggested that the accomplishments of Copernicus, Galileo, and Kepler had freed Aristotelian epistemology from its medieval Platonic bonds of Scholasticism in the re-vitalization of empiricism:

> The human understanding is, by its own nature, prone to abstraction, and supposes that which is fluctuating to be fixed. But it is better to dissect than abstract nature; such was the method employed by the school of Democritus, which made greater progress in penetrating nature than the rest. It is best to consider matter, its conformation, and the changes of that conformation, its own action, and the law of this action or motion; for forms are a mere fiction of the human mind, unless you will call the laws of action by that name.[13]

The empirically practical mind of Bacon enabled him to accept the revolution which scientific investigation was bringing to man. It would seem that he was totally a product of the Renaissance, finding no difficulty in adapting to the loss of the concepts of the Middle Ages. The replacing of the form, that "figment of the human

[13]"Novum Organum," The Advancement of Learning and Novum Organum, ed. James Edward Creighton (New York, 1899), p. 322.

mind," by matter, was an easy transition for those who had foreseen the coming of the New Philosophy.

iv

For those of more sensitive humor, however, the imminent arrival of the Stranger provoked a variety of responses. Late in the first half of the century, perhaps having exhausted his faculties of reconciliation, Robert Herrick expressed what one might expect of the Cavalier response:

> A sweet disorder in the dress
> Kindles in clothes a wantonness
> A lawn about the shoulders thrown
> Into a fine distraction;
> An erring lace, which here and there
> Enthralls the crimson stomacher;
> A cuff neglectful, and thereby
> Ribbands to flow confusedly;
> A winning wave, deserving note,
> In the tempestuous petticoat;
> A careless shoestring, in whose tie
> I see a wild civility;--
> Do more betwitch me, than when art
> Is too precious in every part.[14]

Although some may object to equating Herrick's casual reference to the "delight in disorder" of the lady's garments to the welcoming of the disappearance of the confining Medieval harmonious order ("too precise in every part"), there should, no doubt, be unanimous reception to

[14]"Delight in Disorder," Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York, 1963), pp. 41-42.

the thesis that cavalier poetry, in general, was the result of severance from the Middle Ages. For others, the New Philosophy carried more serious tones, tones of despair, confusion and the desire to cling to the old values, which, alone, would have salvaged man from the chaos which was permeating seventeenth-century thought:

> Broken in pieces all asunder,
> Lord, hunt me not,
> A thing forgot,
> Once a poor creature, now a wonder,
> A wonder tortured in the space
> Betwixt this world and that of grace . . .
>
> All my attendants are at strife,
> Quitting their place
> Unto my face:
> Nothing performs the task of life:
> Th' elements are let loose to fight,
> And while I live, try out their right
>
> O help, my God! let not their plot
> Kill them and me,
> And also thee,
> Who art my life: dissolve the knot,
> As the sun scatters by his light
> All the rebellions of the night.[15]

Herbert's view of his age is one of chaos, in which his contemporaries are defying God and letting loose the elements until the world is "broken in pieces all asunder." The elements have been wrenched from the chain of being by the blasphemous scientists, and the harmonious system in which man's performance is dedicated to the next world no longer functions. He pleads to God to crush the

[15]George Herbert, "Affliction (IV)," The Works of George Herbert, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1964), pp. 89-90.

revolution and to let form control matter once again.

Both Herrick and Herbert express attitudes common to Donne's era, and Donne encompasses both in his poetry. Even in the lyric poetry, he carries the concern expressed by Herbert to the Cavalier temper. A stability attained through centuries of doubt is challenged, and the result is the emergence of a diversity of moods in the seventeenth century. In the challenging of this all-encompassing view of perfect order, the reader can clearly see the spirit of the age reflected in Donne's dichotomous writings.

CHAPTER III

DEATH AND RESURRECTION: THE "ANNIVERSARIES"

i

To the casual student of English literature, the two distinct aspects of Donne's works are well-known: the early Cavalier verses of cynicism expounding the unfaithfulness of women and the subsequent need for men to become indifferent lovers; and the later passionately religious sermons which reveal a dynamism of extraterrestrial concern. But upon closer observation, one can see the opposing strains of the material and the immaterial tugging at his intellect, not only in the chronology of his writings, but also in its permeation throughout the entire two phases of his life. Because of the presence of this inconsistent dichotomy, a study such as this would not be competent should it be directed toward making a dualistic dissection of cavalier and preacher in the thought, versification and imagery of the poet's work. The futility of such an attempt would be recognized at the first uncovering of the religious idealization of woman in an early love lyric, or of the grotesque sexual imagination in a later divine poem. Consequently, although an awareness of the drastic

changes in Donne's life is contemplated, the scope of this chapter and the next will pre-empt a chronologically dualistic examination of his work in favor of investigation of the struggle of the old and the new as it presents itself in both phases of his poetry.

ii

In the Medieval world-view, the harmony of the universe was initiated by Divine Power. In the chain of being, as Charles Coffin points out, degrees of purity were contingent upon position in the order of hierarchy. Elements of the celestial, being the closest to God, were pure and incorruptible.[1] Astronomy and the other sciences, although based on Aristotle's Physics, were essentially Platonic and deductive in approach; the essence of a thing could be realized only through the intellect's faculty of abstraction. The quantitative aspects of the New Science which Galileo, Kepler and others were introducing to seventeenth-century England were, of course, in contradiction to the Realistic philosophy. The concern of those who saw the old science threatened is exemplified in Donne's "First Anniversary." The inspiration for the poem, probably in part a business venture, was occasioned by the first anniversary of the death of Elizabeth Drury, the

[1] Coffin, pp. 44-45.

daughter of an important and wealthy landowner.[2] Typical of most occasional poems, however, it evolves into a discourse on various subjects, including death, mutability, and the meaning of life. Introducing the poem with a lament for Elizabeth and a contemplation of the decay of the earth since the fall of Adam, Donne proceeds to examine the destructive effects of man's intervention with the works of God:

> . . . And the New Philosophy calls in all doubt,
> The Element of fire is quite put out;
> The Sun is lost, and th' earth, and no mans wit
> Can well direct him where to looke for it.
> And freely men confesse that this world's spent,
> When in the Planets, and the Firmament
> They seeke so many new; they see that this
> Is crumbled out againe to his Atomies.
> 'Tis all in peeces, all cohaerence gone;
> All just supply, and all Relation:
> Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne, are things forgot,
> For every man alone thinkes he hath got
> To be a Phoenix, and that then can bee
> None of that kinde, of which he is, but hee,
> This is the world's condition now.[3]

[2] Harris (p. 125), Haydn (p. 13) and Frank Manly (_John Donne_: _The Anniversaries_ [Baltimore, 1963], pp. 2-5) are also sympathetic with Harris' suggestion. Others, however, see the inspiration for the poem as a sincere correlation between Elizabeth's death and the decomposition of the ideals of the Middle Ages. Richard E. Hughes (_The Progress of the Soul_ [New York, 1968], p. 199), for instance, views the poem as an "unsolicited manifestation" of the connection suggested by the parallels between "the death of a virginal fourteen-year-old" and "a plan underlying the jumble of history."

[3] "The First Anniversary," _The Poems of John Donne_, ed. Sir Herbert Grierson, 1933 ed. (London, 1960), I, 213-14, vs. 205-19. Unless otherwise noted, future quotations from Donne are taken from this edition.

The "New Philosophy" of science had resulted in a decentralizing process. The Ptolemaic system had dictated that the earth was the center of the universe, and, consequently, the celestial bodies maintaining constant orbits about the earth, could be observed in their true form by man. The popularization of the discoveries of Copernicus, however, had discredited Medieval astronomical concepts with the doctrine that the validity of observation of these spheres was contingent only upon the earth's position in its orbit about the Sun and the observer's point on the earth. For Donne, then, as Haydn suggests, the result of the Copernican revolution of relativity was the loss of the sun and the earth, or total chaos.[4]

The effects of the Copernican Revolution on Donne's perception of the disintegration of the world were not limited to the upper levels of the hierarchical chain. As Grierson points out, the revelations of Galileo and Copernicus had "displaced the concentric arrangements of the

[4]Haydn, p. 163. The interpretation of lines 206-7, "The Sun is lost, and th' earth, and no mans wit/Can well direct him where to looke for it," that both the sun and earth have been lost rests its plausibility on the intended punctuation of the lines. Some editors have not included a comma after the word "earth," thus implying that both "earth" and "no mans wit" are the subjects of the verb "can direct." The contextual evidence in favor of inclusion of the commas and the editorial authority of Grierson, however, present favorable light on the interpretation offered above.

elements--earth, water, air, fire."[5] The reference which the critic makes is to line 206, in which Donne claims that the "Element of fire is quite put out." Manly elucidates the enigma of the poet's specific concern with this element by quoting Sermon number VII, in which Donne refers to the argument of the new Philosophers that, unlike "popular opinion," the element of fire should not be admitted among the other elements since, contrary to the abundance of inhabitants of earth, water and air, the fourth "produceth no creatures."[6]

For Donne, the ramifications of the introduction of the New Science, then, meant the loss of the order of the universe from the elements to the celestial spheres. The magnitude of this loss, although seemingly diminished by the accomplishments of twentieth-century explorations, nevertheless, presented to this poet a confrontation with chaos. Inconceivable as it may seem to us, the extraterrestrial observations of these scientists suggested to Donne that they were forsaking earth: "And freely men confess that this world's spent.. . ." The result of this betrayal, of this seeking for "so many new" meant for Donne, the crumbling of the world which he had inherited. Man was no longer satisfied with his humble position in the chain

[5]Grierson, 1933 ed., II, 189.

[6]Manly, p. 144.

of being; rather, blasphemously misdirected by the Humanist spirit, he sought to soar above this spent world like the immortal Phoenix. The poet's depression is finally epitomized in his conviction that the harmonious world-view for which his predecessors had struggled so long was uprooted, "all in peeces, all cohaerence gone."

As Donne continues with his "anatomy of the world," he examines what he conceives of as its decay in the death of "she," who is, perhaps, a symbol of Eve and Paradise. Crippled by her death, the destructive power of the New Philosophy pursues its course of havoc. The sickness is not confined to any one humor, but, destroying beauty and harmony, it permeates the entire human environment; and once again, he refers to the cause of the world's turbulence--man's vain adventures:

> . . . We thinke the heavens enjoy their Sphericall,
> Their round proportion embracing all,
> But yet their various and perplexed course,
> Observ'd in divers ages, doth enforce
> Men to finde out so many Eccentrique parts . . .
> (251-55)

The lines echo the earlier passage proclaiming the calling in of all doubt. Presented with the series of astronomical observations which preceded him, Donne sees the loss of the "sound proportion embracing all" as an indication of man's turning away from the ways of the previous age to the realm of the unknown, which had been, and should be, dominated only by faith. And again, the shattering of

tradition is viewed as the new arises from the rubble:

> . . . Such divers down-right lines, such overthwarts,
> As disproportion that pure forme: It teares
> The Firmament in eight and forty sheires,
> And in these constellations then arise
> New Starres, and old doe vanish from our eyes:
> As though heav'n suffered earthquakes, peace or war,
> When new Towers rise, and old demolish't are. . . .
> (256-62)

The discreditation of the Ptolemaic division of stars into forty-eight constellations is seen by the poet as the tearing apart of forty-eight spheres.[7] In the midst of the demolition of the traditional ideas of the heavens, man continued to challenge the old with his discoveries of new stars in the constellations.[8] The Age of Discovery with which Donne matured is clearly reflected in this concern with the metamorphic effects of extraterrestrial exploration, a concern which, as Coffin points out, causes Donne to envision all systems of "natural philosophy" as transient and not sufficient "as a foundation for a satisfactory religious faith."[9] The effort to reconcile the relativity of science with the apparent logic of empirical investigation becomes a major task. Manly capsulizes the

[7]Grierson, 1933 ed., II, p. 190.

[8]Manly (p. 148), explaining Donne's reaction in these lines, suggests the inspiration for the statement, "then arise/ New Starres": in 1572, Tycho Brahe discovered a new star; in 1606, Kepler discovered two others; and, in 1610, Galileo discovered an innumerable quantity of stars, in addition to four satellites of Jupiter.

[9]Coffin, p. 181.

dilemma of the poet when he speaks of the common reception of the New Philosophy:

> . . . To most men of the time that [the discoveries of Brahe, Kepler, and Galileo] meant that there was madness somewhere, either in the astronomers or in the sky itself. For according to the Ptolemaic system, the heavens are immutable, subject neither to generation nor corruption.[10]

Moreover, in addition to the thesis of the immutability of the heavens, was the faith in their control over the fate of man. Consequently, the mortal disruption of the spheres brought not only chaos in the shattering of beliefs and the probable restructuring of society and religion but also fear in the tenativity of man's fate dictated by astrology.

In the remainder of the poem, Donne widens his exploration of the comprehensive scope of the decay of the world. At times, he assumes a curiously playful mocking tone similar to his parodies of courtly love in the lyrics:

> . . . Loth to goe up the hill, or labour thus
> To goe to heaven, we make heaven come to us.
> We spur, we reine the starres, and in their race
> They're diversly content t'obey our pace. . . .
> (281-84)

But, as in the lyrics too, he never fails to remind us of the potency of the dilemma dominating his thought: ". . . Shee, shee is dead, shee's dead. . . ." (325). Her death,

[10]Manly, p. 148.

the death of Elizabeth Drury on the literal level, the death of traditional order of the allegorical level, extends its eruptive consequences to morals and aesthetics:

> . . . but yet confesse, in this
> The worlds proportion disfigured is;
> That those two legges whereon it doth rely,
> Reward and punishment are bent awry.
> And, Oh, it can no more be questioned,
> That beauties best, proportion, is dead. (301-306)

The assertion that proportion is dead reconciles all doubt in the reader's mind concerning the allegorical identification of "shee." The parallel between the decay of Medievalism and her death, then having been established, one would suspect that the poet would have exhausted his exploitation of figures; but, epitomizing the problem created by "this commerce twixt heaven and earth," he makes a final allusion:

> . . . The father, or the mother barren is.
> The cloudes, conceive not raine, or doe not powre,
> In the due birth time, downe the balmy showre;
> Th' Ayre not motherly sit on the earth,
> To hatch her seasons, and give all things birth;
> Spring-times were common cradles, but are tombes.
> (379-85)

The congruency of the passage with ancient fertility myths and the Fisher-King of Celtic legend immediately strikes the reader. The barrenness of the earth, the rain-stopped clouds, the metaphors of the birthlessness of the seasons, all invoke a comparison of the impotency of the Fisher-King to the death of "Shee"; and, as in the legends, the moral and spiritual decay of man is encompassed within the

comprehensive barrenness.

In the closing lines of the poem, however, Donne uncovers an optimistic inclination, not unlike the faith expressed in his sermons:

> As oft as thy Elizabeth's feast sees this widowed
> earth,
> Will yearly celebrate they second birth,
> That is, thy death; for though the soul of man
> Be got when man is made, 'tis borne but than
> When man doth die. . . . (449-53)

The Fisher-King will be revived; from the floundering values of the Middle Ages, Donne's faith in the immortality of the soul emerges as a prelude to his pursuit of the ideal in "The Second Anniversary."

iii

Although "The Second Anniversary" exhibits, for the most part, an emphasis on the spiritual re-birth of Elizabeth's soul as opposed to the indictment of the New Philosophy, the latter's presence is by no means minimized. As in the divine poems and the sermons, the Challenger's imminence, although having lost much of its power to make the poet dubious of the purposefulness of life, is, nevertheless, significantly acknowledged. At the outset of the poem, in fact, Donne previews the religious faith from which will evolve his theme:

> . . . Thy Soule (deare virgin) whose this tribute is,
> Mov'd from this mortall Spheare to lively blisse.
> . . . (3-4)

Yet hardly does he allow a few lines to contemplate the rejuvenating power of the immortality of the soul before he returns to the melancholy he experienced on the first anniversary of the girl's death. The vision of a decaying world once again overpowers religious faith:

> . . . Yet a new Deluge, and of Lethe flood,
> Hath drowned us all, all have forgot all good.
> . . . (27-28)

The eruption of the vision of chaos stirs and staggers the poet's mind, and the earlier proclamation of faith in the serenity of the immortal soul yields once again to a melancholic lament for man's loss:

> . . . Shee that first tried indifferent desires
> By vertue, and vertue by religious fires,
> She to whose person Paradise adher'd,
> As Courts to Princes, shee whose eyes enspheare'd
> Star-light enough, T'have made the South Controule,
> (Had shee beene there) the Star-full Northerne Pole,
> Shee, shee is gone: she is gone. . . . (75-81)[11]

The allegorical "shee" having been slain by humanist learning, the world no longer enjoys the earthly Paradise of comfort and order.

From the defiance and melancholy of these lines and

[11]Manly (p. 178) provides an explanation of the perplexing lines,

> . . . she whose eyes enspheare'd
> Star-light enough, T'have made the South controule,
> (Had shee beene there) the Star-full Northerne Pole.

by referring to Donne's words in the _Devotions_,

> We say that the _Firmament_ is full of _starres_ as though it were equally full; but we know, that there are more _stars under_ the _Northerne_ than under the _Southerne_ Pole.

The implication of the former lines, then, is that "she" represents the power of balance among the spheres.

the "First Anniversary," however, there suddenly emerges a new passion, and the fragmentary visions of peace are resurrected in the form of what almost appears to be a solution. Still expressed in terms of hyperbolic resistance, the resolution of the dilemma becomes a motif which consistently appears throughout the poem. Early in the elegy, Donne unveils this first stage in the progress of his soul on earth: "Forget this rotten world . . ." (49). The dramatic exclamation shocks the reader with the impact which he has come to expect from the extravagance of the metaphysical conceit. From the despair of "The First Anniversary," one might predict such a defeatist conclusion had not Donne conveyed a sincere concern over the world's condition. Having succeeded in his histrionic effect and having stirred the curiosity of his audience, he continues:

> . . . Be not concern'd: study not why, nor when;
> Doe not so much as not believe a man.
> For though to ere, be worst, to try truths forth,
> Is far more businesse, then this world is worth.
> The world is but a carkasse; thou art fed
> By it, but as a worme, that carkasse bred;
> And why shoulds't thou, poore worme, consider more,
> When this world will grow better than before,
> Then thou thy fellow wormes doe thinke upon
> That carkasses last resurrection.
> Forget this world, and scarce thinke of it so,
> As of old clothes, cart off a yeare agoe . . . (49-62)

The solution found by the poet, we learn, is a shedding of the doubts forced upon the contemplative spirit by the unwelcomed progress of the idols of science. At this turning

point in the poems, and perhaps in his life,[12] the intellectual inquistiveness of Humanism, and, ironically, of the Scholastics, too, falls victim to his new-found passion of escape. Both, trying "truths forth," become business far more than "this world is worth." The vicarious sacrifice of man's mortal life gains momentum in the image of man as a worm, feeding upon the carcass of the world in preparation for his immortal life as Donne approaches the theme of mutability.

At this juncture in the intellectual development of Donne, the attraction to the conviction of the transcience of the flesh seems a natural exodus from the theological dilemma confronting the poet and his contemporaries. No longer saturated with the sublime, Donne was forced, as were his ancestors before the Thomistic Synthesis, with a choice between the material and the immaterial. One discovers, as in "The Second Anniversary," that the reaction to the persistent and boorish widening of the scope of this dualism is expressed in vehement rejection of his society:

[12]Haydn (p. 165) is confident in his affirmation of this thesis. He views "The Anniversaries" as a definite climax in Donne's life in which the confusion brought to him by the loss of unity is replaced by faith and grace. He maintains that the poet, "trapped in this transitional period between two confident and optimistic world orders" turned from the uneasy feeling generated by the vanishing Medieval stability to the comfort of fideism.

Thinke further on thy selfe, my Soule, and thinke
How thou at first was made but in a sinke;
Think that it argued some infirmitie,
That these two soules, which then thou foundest
in me,
Thou fedst upon, and drewst into thee, both
My second soule of sense, and first of growth.
Think but how poore thou wast, how obnoxious;
Whom a small lumpe of flesh could poyson thus.
This curded milke, this poore unlittered whelpe . . .
Thinke in how poore a prison thou didst lie. . . .
(157-73)

The obnoxious presence of dualism preys upon his mind, and its relevancy manifests itself in the dynamically repulsive images of "curded milke," "prison," "unlittered whelpe," and poison. But, should one insist that this attitude is a personal peculiarity of Donne, he need only witness the words of a prestigious contemporary:

O, that this too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. Oh God! Oh God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely . . .[13]

Nor can one ignore the parallel between Donne and Shakespeare in the mutual awareness of the shattering of order:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the
cocks. . .
Smite flat the thick rotundity o' the world![14]

[13]William Shakespeare, Hamlet, The Living Shakespeare, ed. Oscar James Campbell (New York, 1958), p. 756, I, ii, 129-37.

[14]King Lear, p. 906, III, iii, 1-7.

"The Anniversaries" are a microcosm of Donne's life as we can gather from his poetry and his history. From the initial doubt and melancholy expressed in "The First Anniversary," we see him escape from the lamentful loss of traditional values to the violent detachment from the embryonic ideas of his maturing era. As Hiram Haydn describes his growth, he

> . . . finds his answer to being cast adrift in an infinite and unknown universe--the answer of fideism, to which he clung, more or less consistently, throughout the remainder of his life.[15]

The escape from the duality presented to him, it would appear, was more than a suicidal desire to be released from problems which denied solution. Donne would have us believe that his conversion was a genuine illumination, but let us examine this pursuit of idealism as it emerges in its various forms.

[15]Haydn, p. 165.

CHAPTER IV

PURSUIT OF THE IDEAL

i

Some critics seize upon Donne's Roman Catholic background as an explanation of his personal revolt against contemporary philosophies. Clay Hunt, in fact, amplifies this theme into the suggestion that Donne's background provided a cause not only for a feeling of persecution and subsequent isolation but also for an attitude of detached elevation from his contemporaries. In support of his thesis, Hunt infers that Donne was surrounded at home by people of "moral courage, intellectual integrity, and personal cultivation" but that the anti-Catholic feeling of the Age prevented him from realizing these values in society. As a result of these frustrations, concludes Hunt, Donne's poetry exposes his attempt to pursue ideals which were absent in his society.[1] Although Hunt's theories have undergone the attacks of reputable modern criticism,[2] and one might disagree with his concept of the

[1]*Donne's Poetry: Essays in Literary Analysis* (New Haven, 1954), pp. 165-172.

[2]Of those critics who stress the Roman Catholic background of Donne, perhaps Grierson has the most

causes for Donne's reactions, the critic's understanding of Donne's pursuit of the Platonic ideal must be allowed credence. A further study into concern over the relationship of the soul and the body introduced by the poet in terms of the mutability of the flesh in the "Anniversaries" will elucidate the plausibility of this element of Hunt's remarks.

In the secure Medieval world-view, it is interesting to note that, for the most part, the quest for unity did not apply to an interpretation of the relationship of the body and soul. The proposed dualistic nature of man was accepted by the majority of Medieval thinkers apparently without insecure feelings that the criteria of unity was affected. Others, however, realizing the need to justify the theme of unity, argued for the oneness of soul and body. Saint Thomas, for example, contended that an immaterial and rational soul was infused into the embryo through a miracle of God, and that, once infused into the body, the entire human being became a unitary

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palatable approach. Although he places particular emphasis on Donne's religious upbringing, unlike Hunt, he does not credit this environment with effecting feelings of isolation and persecution in the poet. Rather, dating Donne's visit to the continent as occurring in 1597, he concludes that the passionate poems of seduction and illicit love among the Elegies and Songs and Sonnets are merely indicative of the influence of the Italian and Spanish Renaissance on the poet. He goes on to point out the contrast which these earlier poems illustrate in relation to the more sedately Platonic poems written after his marriage to Ann More. (1912 ed., II, xvi-xx).

form individuated by the body. Similarly, Dante suggests in the Paradiso that God breathes a spirit peculiar to man into the soul of the unborn child; the spirit then draws all the life forces into a single individualized being.

Donne seems to be in the Thomistic tradition in his attempts to convince himself of the interdependence of the soul and the body. In "The Extasie," faced with Empirical usurpation, he exhibits a desire for unity:

> For, th' Atomies of which we grow,
> Are soules, whom no change can invade.
> But O alas, so long, so farre
> Our bodies why do wee forbeare?
> They' are ours, though they' are not wee; Wee are
> The intelligences, they the spheare.
> . . . .
> As our blood labours to beget
> Spirits as like soules it can,
> Because such fingers need to knit
> That subtile knot which makes us man:
> So must pure lovers' soules descend
> T' affections, and to faculties,
> Which sense may reach and apprehend;
> Else a great Prince in prison lies. (47-52; 61-68)

He is attempting to define a unified soul by emphasizing the thesis that the soul owes its existence to the body, but his argument collapses; flesh and spirit remain separate entities, and he is unable to refuse the Platonic concept of the immaterial form ("pure lovers soules"). Grierson provides a convincing argument for the presence of this Platonic idea by disclosing striking parallels between the poem and "ecstasy" in Neo-Platonic philosophy:

> In a letter to Sir Thomas Lucy, Donne writes: 'Sir I make account that this writing of letters, when it is with any seriousness, is

> a kind of extasie, and a departing, and secession, and suspension of the soul, which doth then communicate itself to two bodies.' Ecstasy in Neo-Platonic philosophy was the state of mind in which the soul, escaping from the body, attained to the vision of God, the One, the Absolute. Plotinus thus describes it: 'Even the word vision does not seem appropriate here. It is rather an ecstasy, a simplification, an abandonment of self, a perfect quietude, a desire of contact, in short a wish to merge oneself in that which one contemplates in the Sanctuary.'[3]

Grierson continues, specifically outlining the parallels in the exodus of souls:

> Our soules, (which to advance their state,
> Were gone out,) hung 'twixt her, and mee. . .
> (15-16)

the perfect quiet,

> All day, the same our postures were,
> And wee said nothing all the day. . . (19-20)

the new insight,

> This Extasie doth unperplex
> (We said) and tell us what we love
> Wee see by this, it was not sexe. . . (29-31)

and the contact and union of souls,

> Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe againe
> And makes both one, each this and that. (35-36)

According to Grierson, then, Donne achieves a realization of the perfection of the One through the Plotinian concept of the progress of the soul from its exodus, to quietude, to insight, and finally, in its culmination of contact and union. Similarly, Coffin claims that Donne attains

[3]Grierson, 1912 ed., II, 42.

satisfaction in the poem but carries the idea a step further, suggesting also a reconciliation of the old and the new philosophy.[4] Although the poet recognizes the dualism of the new world, religion (or the spirit) having the power of faith alone, and reason (or matter) having the power of the discovery of truth, persisting through his poetry is the faith that these two elements touch one another. In the "Extasie," concludes Coffin, "the mingling of the world of nature and the world of spirit" has a final effect of "complete unity."[5]

It would seem that Grierson and Coffin prefer to envision the harmony for which Donne strives in the poem is achieved;[6] yet, one is left with the impression that the poet has not fully reconciled the duality of flesh and spirit despite his attempts to unify:

> So must pure lovers souls descend
> T'affections. (65-66)

[4]Coffin, pp. 20-23.

[5]*Ibid.*

[6]Andreasen (p. 168), departing from Grierson and Coffin, but going beyond this writer's stand, provides an interesting analysis of the poem. He suggests that "The Extasie" is a satiric comedy in which the lovers are ridiculed by Donne in their attempts to spiritualize their profane love: "The lovers of 'The Ecstasy' persuade themselves that their love is essentially spiritual, but as the poem works its way toward its conclusion, they show that their professions are only special pleading, a hypocritical pretense which inadequately masks an essentially sensual attraction." Andreasen's comments would appear to be perhaps too ingenious. Perhaps it is Donne himself, not the lovers, who "masks an essentially sensual attraction."

The tone of the poem is one of struggle. Man must "labour to beget spirits," in order to free his soul from the "prison" of his body. Although Donne searches for unity in the desire to re-unite with God (the One in Neo-Platonic thought), he cannot escape from the earthly concept of the separation of the material and the immaterial. Struggle as he may, the poet seldom presents evidence that his conversion is a total one; the emphatic rejection of the grossness of the flesh always suggests, by the necessity of its violence, the unsuccessful sublimation of the appeal of the material. Recall, for example, the necessary fervor with which Donne made the break:

> The world is but a carkasse; thou art fed
> By it, but as a worme, that carkasse bred.
> ("The First Anniversary," 55-56)

Even in the later divine poems, there is a tone of struggle and an implication that the earlier turbulence is not completely submerged by faith:

> You which beyond that heaven which was most high
> Have found new sphears, and of new Worlds can write,
> Powre new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
> Drowne my world with my weeping earnestly,
> Or wash it, if it must be drown'd no more:
> But oh it must be burnt! alas the fire
> Of lust and envie have burnt it heretofore,
> And made it fouler; Let their flames retire,
> And burne me Lord, with a fiery zeale
> Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heale.
> ("Divine Poem V," 5-14)

The image of the new seas discovered by those who would expand the knowledge of Medieval man evokes a response which leads one back to the "Second Anniversary":

> Yet a new Deluge, and of Lethe flood,
> Hath drowned us all. (27-28)

In the sonnet, however, his reaction to the deluge takes an ironic, or perhaps satiric, tone as he skillfully counteracts his disdain for the Scientific Age with a plea "to those who have found new sphears." Admitting the term of "subtle satire" to his vocabulary of literary criticism, the student of Donne finds its exemplary application in the metaphorical invocation to the New Adventurers to turn their discoveries to the cleansing of the poet's soul. This playful treatment of his empirical contemporaries, nevertheless, yields to an obsession with the mutability of physical desires. The evidence for the awareness of the blatant dichotomy of flesh and spirit is expressed in Donne's desire for a forceful schism: "lust and envie" must be burned or drowned to be purged from his soul. Yet, confusing the issue, at other times, Donne continues his pursuit of unity with conspicuous ease. Witness the validity of the comments of Grierson and Coffin if applied to a later sermon in which Donne attacks the problem with a more confident approach:

> . . . yet by death the soul falls from that for which it was infused and poured into man at first, that is to be the form of that body, the King of that kingdom; and therefore when in the general resurrection the soul returns to that state for which it was created and to which it hath an affection even in the fulness of the joys of Heaven; then when the soul returns to her office, to make up the man, because the

> whole man hath therefore the soul hath a resurrection.[7]

In this particular sermon, faith in the immortality of the soul effects a belief in metaphysical unity less turbulently achieved than in "The Extasie." Despite the adherence to the Neo-Platonic concept of the One, occasionally expressed with conviction in the sermons, however, the dominating preoccupation with the dichotomy of flesh and spirit is a constant reminder that the poet has not achieved the goal of his pursuit.

ii

The manifestation of the search for the ideal in a Platonic idealization of the relationship between man and woman reveals the polarities of Donne's mind in contention with each other. Grierson suggests that the poet expresses a reaction against the Medieval tendency to idealize woman and love,[8] and others have seen Donne's love poetry as little more than parodies of the courtly love tradition. The proposals of Andreasen and those of the latter critical stand are precarious, but Grierson seems to have initiated a valid argument. Donne's imagery is

[7]Quoted by Grierson, 1933 ed., p. xxiii.

[8]Grierson, 1912 ed., II, xxxv. For a brief, but competent, summary of this subject, see also John Smith Harrison, Platonism in English Poetry (New York, 1930), pp. 141-65.

taken from everyday things, an extraction making the object of his love poems a corporeal woman; whereas such poets as Dante tended to identify woman exclusively with a religious experience, consequently creating a religion of love. Surely, Donne gives evidence of a less idealistic concept of woman in his earlier cynical songs such as "Goe and Catche a Falling Starre" and "The Indifferent"; and one would need ingenious faculties to find idealism in the line, "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love." ("The Canonization," 1). Clearly, Donne indulges in parodies of the Tradition; consequently, to dispel the skepticism of those sympathetic to this criticism, it would be well to examine this facet of his poetry as it affects the theme of this discussion.

The song, "Goe and Catche a Falling Starre," frequently anthologized as one of Donne's earlier libertine verses, expresses the poet's discomfort with the ideals of the courtly love tradition. The poem sounds the echo of the familiar contemporary lyric, the poet voicing his complaint about the infidelity of woman; but Donne, in characteristic imaginative vision introduces the lyric with the proposal of elaborate impossibilities which rival the later conceits:

Goe and catche a falling starre,
   Get with child a mandrake roote,
Tell me where all past yeares are,
   Or who cleft the Divel's foot,
Teach me to heare Mermaides singing,

Or to keep off envies stinging,
And finde
What winde
Serves to advance an honest minde. (1-9)

The demands, apparently stated to an idealistic contemporary in ridicule of the impracticality of the courtly concept of love,[9] present a series of absurd suggestions from making pregnant a phallic symbol to hearing the fabled song of the Sirens to Ulysses. Admittedly, Andreasen's thesis, unlike its application to "The Extasie,"[10] appears more plausible when he speaks of parody in this lyric:

> Donne's libertine lovers frequently present themselves as frank realists who refuse to be tricked by the false facade of amatory conventions. . . . Although the singer of "Goe and Catche a Falling Starre," is speaking instead to a masculine idealist, he also places fidelity and honor in the impossible realms of folklore and romance. . . .[11]

Although one must view with discerning sight the suggestion of intent of parody which Andreasen generally attributes to the poet, the role of Donne the satirist here is quite evident. Having established the hypothesis in hyperbolic terms, Donne approaches his conclusion in a skillful reversal, in what Arnold Stein perceives as the "elusive and haunting effect of the whole poem--the disproportion between the lavish imaginative details and the basic scheme

[9] Andreasen, p. 198.

[10] See footnote 6 of this chapter.

[11] Andreasen, p. 198.

of the epigrammatic joke":[12]

> Ride ten thousand daies and nights,
>   Till age snow white haires on thee,
> Thou, when thou retorn'st, wilt tell mee
> All strange wonders that befell thee,
>   And sweare
>   No where
> Lives a woman true, and faire. (12-18)

The disproportion of which Arnold speaks exhibits more than Donne's ability to startle the reader with a witty turn; it also makes him aware of the poet's bout with the ideal of courtly love, and, on a more comprehensive level, of his realization of the tentativeness of the entire Medieval concept of a purposeful life.

Despite the macrocosmic undertones of "Goe and Catche a Falling Starre," one cannot ignore the libertine playfulness with which Donne approaches the subject of the infidelity of woman. In other poems of "Jack Donne, Rake," however, the seriousness with which one associates the poet in his later contemplative songs and sermons is more obvious. "The Indifferent," for example, probably written during the earlier period of his life, suggests that the theme of "Goe and Catche a Falling Starre" is one which did not receive an exclusively light-hearted treatment. On the contrary, this poem discloses the deeper concern burrowed in the poet. Not unlike the more playful manner of many of his Cavalier lyrics, though, Donne begins

[12] John Donne's Lyrics: The Eloquence of Action (Minneapolis, 1962), p. 105.

the poem in a casual manner:

> I can love both faire and browne,
> Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want betraies,
> Her who loves loneness best, and her who masks and
> plaies,
> Her whom the country form'd, and whom the town,
> Her who believes, and her who tries,
> Her who still weepes with spungie eyes,
> And her who is dry corke, and never cries;
> I can love her, and her, and you and you,
> I can love any, so she be not true. (1-9)

Although his complacent establishment of choiceless opposites does not duplicate the hyperbolic proposals presented in "Goe and Catche a Falling Starre," the satiric element still emerges. Yet, as the lyric progresses, its tone takes a quite different turn. As in the more rakish poem, "The Indifferent," there is a "haunting reversal," depressing confrontation with a proposed reality:

> _Venus_ heard me sigh this song
> . . . .
> And said, alas, Some two or three
> Poore Heretiques in love there bee,
> Which thinke to stablish dangerous constancie.
> But I have told them, since you will be true,
> You shall be true to them, who' are false to you.
> (19-27)

The confrontation has caused Donne to view the courtly lover from a more contemptuous angle; the ridicule of one "born to strange sights" is transformed into a "poore heretique." It would seem that Donne's attitude in the latter poem has become less of the complacent acceptance of woman's infidelity to "two, or three," and more of the serious martyr-like concern that one must "be true to them, who' are false to you."

The similarity of the two poems is striking in their respective reversals of attitude, but underlying their obvious congruencies are diametrically opposing tones. Making himself aware of these similarities and contrasts, the reader recognizes the familiar struggle in the poet's mind. Attracted on the one hand by the gay Cavalier attitudes, he delights in the joke of his parody of courtly love; yet, on the other hand, deeply concerned about the disintegration of Medieval values effected by this confrontation with reality, he mourns for the necessity of the parody.

Observing the mind of Donne at work in his early love poems, one cannot overlook Donne the Parodist. The poems cited above certainly testify to this element of his character; yet to dismiss such poems as merely the product of a whimsical pastime in which the poet pokes fun at the idealism of courtly love would be to ignore the essence of his poetry. Quite the contrary to the conviction of some critics, these parodies are an integral part of the poet's pursuit of idealism. When one recognizes that this apparent rejection of a Medieval tradition is, in fact, a reflection of the potency of the dilemma engendered by the conflict of two secure world-views, he is able to decipher the enigmatic puzzle of Donne's reconciliation. Less enigmatical, more ironical, the poet approaches a faith in God through the very concept which he has

ridiculed. From the Hedonistic worship of the flesh to the passionate awareness of human mutability, he arrives at a doctrine of faith which transforms woman and lust into divine love.

iii

Donne's apparent attainment of the ideal is often expressed in the idealization of woman. Considering the woman of his earlier poetry, the reader suspects her later enshrinement to be justification for the rakish activities of Jack Donne; and the question of the sincerity of his conversion continually infects one's analysis of his poetry. Nevertheless, in spite of his rejection of the material activities of his world, the element which, ironically, was the center of these activities, is the sole survivor to pass into Donne's spiritual life. Returning momentarily to "The Second Anniversary," we discover his reversion to the Medieval concept of woman as he embarks upon the next phase of his intellectual development:

> She, of whose soule, if wee may say, 'twas gold,
> Her body was th'Electrum, and did hold
> Many degrees of that; wee understood
> Her by her sight; her pure, and eloquent blood
> Spoke in her cheekes, and so distinctly wrought,
> That one might almost say, her body thought. (241-46)

The compliment is hardly intended as a parody. He is quite serious when he speaks of her purity and eloquence, but most significant to this study is the degree in which he

establishes his idol, for, in this relatively moderate view, the incremental growth of idealism can be recognized. The moderation of his approach in these lines is particularly clear in light of Grierson's explication of the gold image:

> 'The ancient Electrum,' Bacon says, 'had in it a fifth of silver to the gold.' Her body, then is not pure gold, but an alloy in which are many degrees of gold. In Paracelus' works, Electrum is the middle substance between ore and metal, neither wholly perfect nor altogether imperfect. It is on the way to perfection.[13]

Consequently, although her soul is pure gold, her body contains only a degree of perfection. Yet, in this degree of perfection and in the pursuit of perfection implied by the Electrum image, the poet places her above other mortals whom worms "insensibly devoure." And, at the base of this transformation, is the prologue to the intellectual consummation of love, "one might almost say her body thought." (246) in which Donne expresses perhaps a justification for his physical desires, perhaps a genuine belief that sexual union is an intellectual and divine experience.

The climax of the poet's illumination in the poem, whether sincere or contrived, involves a vision of woman as an earthly divinity:

> She who in th'art of knowing Heaven, was growne
> Here upon earth, to such perfection,

[13] *Poems*, 1912 ed., II, 199.

> That she hath, ever since to Heaven she came,
> (In a far fairer print,) but read the same:
> Shee, shee not satisfied with all this waight,
> (For so much knowledge, as would over-fraight
> Another, did but ballest her) is gone
> As well t'enjoy, as get perfection. (311-17)

Surpassing the earlier concept that she merely progressed toward perfection on earth, Donne now proclaims that, having soared above the material world despite the weight of the "wrangling schools" of empiricism, she "read the same" Heaven while on earth. In fact, Donne appears to be disclosing envy of her ability to reconcile the dilemma which obsesses him. In these lines there is evidence of sublime wonder as he observes that the same concern which holds him confined in his body was a stabilizing factor for Elizabeth Drury on her progress toward perfection. More precisely, while she was able to approach the Age of Reason without sacrificing the Medieval concept of the subservience of reason to faith, Donne has not yet attained this state of mind. The respect for this principle, however, is expressed in terms of her idolization in the poem; and it serves as an illustration and harbinger of the commitment to faith expressed in terms of the divine relationship between man and woman, a triumph over the sensual orientation of that union.

Even in the earlier poems, despite his frequent attachment to the convention of exposing the frailty of the courtly love tradition, Donne's quest for some sort

of immortality seeks fruition in the immutable qualities of love. "The Canonization" is introduced with a plea which invokes echoes of the careless iconoclasm familiar to his contemporaries: "For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love," (1) and continues with indignation,

> Call us what you will, wee are made such by love;
> Call her one, mee another flye,
> We' are Tapers too, and at our owne cost die,
> And wee in us finde the' Eagle and the Dove.
> The Phoenix ridle hath more wit
> By us, we two being one, are it. (19-24)

The defiance of those who would mock his concept of ethereal love yields to a vision of two lovers joined in a singular divine soul, the longing for which manifests itself in "The Extasie" and finds fulfillment in other poems:

> Our two soules therefore, which are one,
> Though I must goe, endure not yet
> A breach, but an expansion,
> Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate.
> ("A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," 21-24)

The concept of the unified soul reaches its epitome when the poet concludes with the assignment of a place in the Heavens for the earthly lovers:

> And by there hymnes, all shall approve
> Us canoniz'd for love:
>
> And thus invoke us . . .
> . . . .
> Countries, townes, courts: Beg from above
> A patterne of your love! (35-37, 44-45)

The canonized lovers assume the roles of "saints who may

intercede between God and man on man's behalf."[14] Through the divine enshrinement of woman, he arrives at a spiritual vision of mortal love, enjoyed by the devout, and flaunted before the new breed who fail to escape from the sensuous confinement of the flesh.

iv

Clearly, Donne seeks refuge from the undeniable demands of the empirical philosophies in pursuit of Medieval idealism, but the immediacy of the precepts presented to the poet forces some sort of compromise. At times, understandably self-conscious that he is being ensnared by the same folly which captured his Petrarchan predecessors and contemporaries, he allows himself a discriminating appraisal of his rapid approach to extremism. Lest he become too attracted to the very idealism which he had previously ridiculed, he reminds himself that, in order to justify his vacillation between extremities, he must arrive at a philosophy of moderation. Accordingly, he introduces "Aire and Angels" with a frank self-evaluation:

> Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
> Before I knew thy face or name,

[14]Douglas L. Peterson, The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne: A History of the Plain and Eloquent Styles (Princeton, 1967), p. 318.

So in a voice, so in a shapelesse flame,
Angells affect us oft, and worship'd bee;
Still when, to where thou wert, I came
Somme lovely glorious nothing I did see. (1-6)

Andreasen has some pertinent comments about the lines. He suggests that the speaker is admitting that he had worshipped his lady before with a "vague hazy love," which was, in actuality, an attraction to her as a Form,[15] or merely a concept of "Somme lovely glorious nothing." As a result of the awareness of the excess to which Donne is leading, there is, in effect, a personal counter-reaction to the empirical orientation of his age. Recognizing that he could be guilty of the demand for absolutism in the Form just as the Empiricists were in their convictions that only reason could uncover truth, Donne reverses his direction toward a fulcrum of moderation:

But since my soule, whose child love is,
Takes limmes of flesh, and else could nothing doe,
More subtile then the parent is,
Love must not be, but take a body too,
And therefore what thou wert, and who,
I bid love aske, and now
That it assume thy body, I allow,
And fixe itself in thy lip, eye, and brow. (6-14)

The metaphysic of love, the poet concludes, cannot be sustained by mortals as an independent entity. Consequently, the speaker of the poem must call upon the abstract feeling of love which he has experienced to bring sensuous meaning to the form; and form becomes matter as he allows

[15] Andreasen, p. 212.

himself to give substance to a "shapelesse flame," observing the physical characteristics of his lady, her "lip, eye, and brow." "Thus to ballast love" with the practicality of an ethereal woman, he hopes to subdue the excesses of Platonism.

The apparent success in unifying the soul and body through a reconciliation of the material and the immaterial, however, is transient, and the poet soon sees the flaws in his decision to fix his love upon the flesh:

> With wares which would sink admiration,
> I saw, I had loves pinnace overfraught,
> Ev'ry thy haire for love to worke upon
> Is much too much, some fitter must be sought. (17-26)

As the argument continues within the poet's mind, the problem of the universals posed by the controversy between the Realists and the Nominalists is conspicuously recalled:

> For, nor in nothing, nor in things
> Extreme, and scatt'ring bright, can love inhere.
> (21-22)

Hoping to subdue the vague concept of the reality of the Form (in this case, love), he seeks its concrete manifestation in the flesh; yet the pre-occupancy with the body, with "Ev'ry thy hair," too, yields an extreme of particularization unsatisfactory to one who would seek a more meaningful philosophy.

One would expect a solution for the dilemma to appear in the concluding lines of the poem, but, not unusual to Donne's thematic practice, the enigma is

compounded:

> Then as an angell, face, and wings
> Of aire, not pure as it, yet pure doth weare,
> So thy love may be my loves spheare;
> Just such disparities
> As is twixt Aire and Angells puritie,
> 'Twixt womens love, and mens will ever bee.
> (23-27)

The myriad of critical responses which these lines have aroused attests to their perplexity. Most agree with Grierson's explication that the allusion to air and angels is based upon Neo-Platonic doctrines expressed by Plotinus and developed by Christian philosophers including Dionysius the Areopagite and Saint Thomas Aquinas. The theory adopted by Aquinas was that the angels, in order to manifest themselves to man corporeally, would, by necessity, take the form of one of the elements, normally air. Having assumed a "body," then, they were naturally less perfect than when only a spirit.[16] An understanding of these thoughts sheds some light on Donne's reference to the varying degrees of purity between air and angels and establishes a common basis of interpretation. Nevertheless, having accepted Grierson's resolution of Donne's allusion, the critics have branched out in several directions from this common hypothesis in their discussions of the last two lines of the poem. Doniphan Louthan has proposed an

[16]Theodore Redpath, The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne (London, 1959), pp. 31-32. See also Grierson, 1912 ed., II, 21-22 and Andreason, p. 213.

interpretation which is, no doubt, the most attractive to this writer as it most closely approximates the thesis of this paper. Departing from the stands of most critics, Louthan suggests that the poet, rather than implying that the purity of woman's love is superior to that of man's, proposes precisely the opposite. He maintains that the word "love" is used as a synonym for "beloved," consequently, effecting a reversal of the relative significance of the two lovers. The reason for the imperfection of woman's love, continues Louthan, is that its object, man, is less pure than woman.[17] Useful as it may be to further the theme for the poet's idealization of woman, the argument unfortunately appears to be a bit ingenious; the blatant concluding statement that woman's love is less pure than man's cannot be overlooked by semantic circumvention. Donald Guss approaches the problem with a more realistic analysis:

> Donne assumes an attitude of overwhelming devotion, and begins a search. He encounters various difficulties in his search: he tries to love his lady as pure spirit, but finds her too intangible; he tries to love her body, but cannot really care for all of it; and he settles on her love as the object of his affections, though her love is less pure than his own. Throughout, he has nothing but praise for her: her pure spirit, lovely and glorious, works angelically: her bodily beauty, scattering bright, overwhelms ad-

[17] _The Poetry of John Donne: A Study in Explication_ (New York, 1951), pp. 108-11.

> miration. But Donne's devotion is perpetually disappointed; and it is not really surprising when he finally concludes, with epigrammatic point, that woman's love is ever less pure than man's.[18]

Guss has summarized the intellectual joust between the flesh and spirit which taunts the poet's thoughts in the poem; yet his conclusion that Donne finally accepts the disappointment of a partially-requited love because the lover is more divine than the beloved leaves the reader with an awareness of the tentativeness of the critic's comments. The criticism seems to offer the unsatisfactory conclusion that the poet is simply embracing the same self-pity we observed in "The Indifferent." Andreasen, on the other hand, by way of defining Donne's concept of perfect mortal purity, sees the poet's conclusion not as cynical, but complimentary toward woman. Donne's discovery is that of "moderated purity" which has been realized through an awareness of the earthly qualities of woman's love. In short, "the moderation of his love adjusts it to the human world, saving it from either the extreme of worshipping his beloved's disembodied spirit or the extreme of rapt admiration of her physical beauty."[19]

Admittedly, the conclusion of the poem remains an enigma. At first glance, it may appear to be only another

[18] John Donne: Patrarchist (Detroit, 1966), p. 169.

[19] Andreasen, pp. 214-15.

complaint such as one observes in the self-sacrificing attitudes presented in other lyrics; yet one cannot ignore the lavish praise afforded his lady throughout the poem. Nor can one dismiss the fact that it is unusual for Donne to approach such a subject with merely a meiotic epigram. Having labored over the poem and having witnessed the obvious confusion among the critics, the reader is convinced that its enigmatic quality supports the label of a "difficult poet" attributed to Donne. Certainly, the resolution of the riddle of the concluding lines can only be a personal one. For this writer, that singular view is that the composition of the poem perhaps occurred during a stage in his maturation seeking the median between the extremes of Platonism and Empiricism in the mixture of ethereal purity and earthly practicality of woman. Such a conclusion may invoke the question of its relevance to the thesis that the idealization of woman and love is an element of Donne's contesting the material and the immaterial. The response to this question is, first, that the major part of the poem outlines, metaphorically, the two world-views between which the poet finds himself; and secondly, to dispel any objection to the failure to reconcile the poem's conclusion with the interpretation of the first twenty-four lines, that the power of love can moderate the poet's inclination to be attracted to absolutism of the ideal. Not unique for Donne, however, he

demonstrates to the reader in this poem that he is capable of altering former positions in an attempt to salvage his belief in a meaningful earthly existence:

> We find him sometimes intensely and defiantly (though never exclusively) preoccupied with the body (as in 'To His Mistress Going to Bed'); sometimes disgusted with its unpleasant characteristics, yet conscious of its beauty at the best of our inability to rid ourselves of its imperfections (as in the second Anniversary); sometimes tempted to believe with the Neo-Platonists that one can leave bodily desire, 'forget the He and She,' and love only ideal Virtue and Beauty (as in 'The Undertaking'). But surely no human being will deny that it is natural for a man to change his mind on that perplexing topic, as his experience grows, or his mood changes, or he becomes older in years.[20]

Certainly, from an awareness of the complexities presented in "Aire and Angells," one sees the microcosm of the man changing his mind "on that perplexing topic," a vacillation, which we have seen, is not uncommon for Donne.

V

The moderation for which Donne consciously strives in "Aire and Angells" assumes a sublime strangeness when contrasted with the more dynamic obsession of the search for the ideal in other poems. Despite the desire to give corporeal form to his heaven-seeking thoughts, the demand for ethereal superiority will not be compromised.

[20]George Reuben Potter, "Donne's 'Extasie,' Contra Legouis," PQ, XV (July, 1936), 250-51.

Consider, for example, the Platonic orientation of "The Relique":

> Thou Shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I a
> something else thereby;
> All women shall adore us, and some men;
> And since at such time, miracles are sought,
> I would have that age by this paper taught
> What miracles wee harmlesse lovers wrought. (17-22)

The metaphor hardly approaches Dante's conception of Beatrice, but it demonstrates that although Donne was in contention with Medieval convention at times, the appeal of feminine idolization eventually overcomes moderation. There is scarcely a hint that the poet feels the need to bring the divine quality of love into conjugal harmony with the flesh:

> First, we lov'd well and faithfully,
> Yet knew not what wee lov'd, nor why,
> Difference of sex no more wee knew,
> Than our guardian Angells doe;
> Coming and going, wee
> Perchance might kisse, but not between those meales,
> Our hands ne'r toucht the seales,
> Which nature, injur'd by late laws sets free. (23-30)

Despite the fact that the concept of ideal love has been "injur'd by late laws," insists Donne, like the ethereal love of the angels, mortal love between man and woman can be a divine communication. The poet and his lover, transcending the superficialities of the desires of the flesh, are equated with the angels and saints and, through their love, achieve a divine relationship.

Similarly, "The Undertaking" evolves into a spiritualization of mortal love as woman ascends from the

sensuous bonds of earthly existence. As in "The Relique," an approach toward acceptance of the ideal can begin once mutable sensuality has been abandoned:

> For he who colour loves, and skinne,
> Loves but their oldest clothes. (15-16)

Having taken this step, the lover finds that the brilliance of the soul exposes the ugly shadow of the body:

> . . . he who loveliness within
> Hath found, all outward loathes. (13-14)

Those who would seek the true values of their lives, concludes Donne, will not find them in the sensuous appeal of beauty but, rather, in the reflection of the ideal in woman ("Vertue' attir'd in woman"). Consequently, recognition of the ideal emerges from a denunciation of the pleasures of the flesh and, ultimately, from an unsexing of one's self, "and forget the Hee and Shee . . ." (19) much as it does in "The Relique": "Difference of sex no more wee knew." (25) Having untied the bonds of physical passion, the poet, through the idealization of woman, hopes to soothe the sores of the materialistically-minded New Philosophy. Although more of an escape than a reconciliation, his conviction, nevertheless, appears to be sincere.

CHAPTER V

IMAGES OF CONFLICT

i

The enigmatic irresolution propagated by the dilemma facing Donne finds expression not only in the thematic inconsistency of his poems but also in the metrical and figurative composition of the verses. Obviously learned in all aspects of the Middle Ages and of his own age, the poet demonstrates through rhythm and imagery the myriad of ideas to which he is drawn. Assuming the role of the dispassionate lover, he can convey a feeling of futility through the consistency of a song-like rhythm:

> Goe and catche a falling starre,
> Get with child a mandrake root.
> ("Song: Goe and Catche a Falling Starre," 1-2)

Or, saturated with evidence of mortal frailty, he can show both despair and disgust with a conspicuous hexasyllabic line: "forget this rotten world." ("The Second Anniversary," 49). Or possessed with the fervor of religious devotion, he can utter a plea to be violently wrenched from the afflictions of the body in an introductory trochee followed by alternating iambs and spondees:

> Batter my heart, three person'd God; for you
> As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend.
> ("Holy Sonnet XIV," 1-2)

And in the same poem, three alliterative and stressed words intonate the wrathful nature of God: ". . . breake, blowe, burn and make me new." (4) Whether the poet adopts these prosodiac variations or the figures of paradox and hyperbole (as in "Song: Goe and Catche a Falling Starre"), the effect is the same--the aesthetic reflection of an intellect disturbed with the turbulence of its environment.

The most striking patterns of parallelism between versification and thematic conflict, however, are manifested in Donne's imagery. The multiple sources of these images attest to the poet's desire to encompass all of his learning in a singular world-view. One might refer to the fact that, in his poetry, images are taken from nearly all realms of seventeenth-century England--astronomy, law, religion, war, eating and drinking, the human body, marriage, weather, politics, death, business[1]--in support of the thesis that Donne reveals total commitment to the ideas of the late Elizabethans. We find him, though, equally attracted to images of Medievalism. As Milton Rugoff indicates, the latter inclination is illustrated in the poet's adherence to basic Aristotelian concepts through the assertion of a belief in the immutability of the heavens:[2]

[1]Redpath, p. xxviii.

[2]<u>Donne's Imagery: A Study in Creative Sources</u> (New York, 1962), p. 32.

> Thy beauty, and all parts, which are thee,
> Are unchangeable firmament. ("A Feaver," 23-24)

Nevertheless, the argument in favor of Donne's attachment to the sciences of his era focuses the reader's attention on the figurative domination of the New Science in his poetry. Yet, upon close scrutiny, one also recognizes the poet's attempt to fuse the concrete and the general, a courtship forced upon Donne by the challenge of the New Philosophy to Medieval tradition. Fearing that he might absorb himself totally in Platonic ideas, the poet acknowledges the necessity of adjusting idealism to the momentous force of Empiricism. Through the coalition of abstractions and material things, he strives for the evocation of Medieval ideals. Charles Coffin summarizes the potency of the threat imposed by the New Science:

> The appeal to concrete experience made the new science particularly acceptable to the poetic mind . . . Thus, it was inevitable that the old conception of the world, drilled into his [Donne's] imagination by study and tradition, should be laid seige to by the facts from which the new order was to be built, once those facts were thoroughly grasped.[3]

Clearly, Donne is aware of the "seige," and his reaction is a defense of the old. The pattern of the defense may be presented in an ironic image of the dehumanization of Humanism:

> My Physitians by their love are growne

[3]Coffin, p. 81.

Cosmographers, and I their Mapp, who lie
Flat on this bed. ("Hymne to God, in my Sickness,"
6-8)

It may be reflected in stronger terms of repulsion:

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let Maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne,
Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.
("The Good-Morrow," 12-14)

Or his resistance may be expressed by ascension over the human organism:

But we by a love, so much refin'd
That our selves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse.
("A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," 17-20)

The denial of the new and defense of the old, however, have little chance for survival as autonomous entities, and they seek reconciliation in Donne's poetry. The inability to maintain the separation of Platonic idealism and physical fact is especially evident in the mingling of sensual physical imagery and Platonic love in his lyrics. Consider, for example, the juxtaposition of the thematic adoption of metaphysical love and the sensuous images in "The Extasie":

Our hands were firmly cimented
With a fast balme, which thence did spring,
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thred
Our eyes, upon one double string. (4-7)

The sexual connotation of the poem presents itself in rich sensousness; yet the appeal at the end of the poem is to an ideal concept of love. Andreasen concurs with this interpretation, seeing the poem's incongruence as the

"witty yoking of heterogeneous ideas, of sexual love in the initial imagery with Platonic love in the remainder of the poem."[4] The poet's attraction to the two world-views in the "yoking of heterogeneous ideas" is obvious; and an awareness of the strength of these two forces leads one to recognize the germination of the metaphysical conceit in his poetry.

The pattern of Donne's imagery presents a microcosm of the philosophical struggle which dominates his themes. Historically, as the discoveries of contemporary scientists challenged the ideals courted by the Scholastics, Donne sought to meet the challenge by wrenching common objects from his learning to fuse them with abstractions. The birth of the metaphysical conceit was inevitable, and it was a matter of course that it should be met with critical attack. Samuel Johnson's renowned assault on the Metaphysical School substantiates this fact of literary history:

> But wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike . . . The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions.[5]

[4] *John Donne: Conservative Revolutionary*, p. 9.

[5] "Life of Cowley," *Lives of The English Poets*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols. (New York, 1967), I, 20.

Johnson's indictment of the wit of the School is clearly influenced by a narrow discipline of literary criticism: "Their courtship was void of fondness and their lamentation of sorrow. Their wish was only to say what they hoped had never been said before."[6] Nevertheless, despite his commitment to the theory that poetry must contain some moral value, Johnson admits to the occasional and accidental evocation of truth by the wit of metaphysical poetry: "yet great labour directed by great abilities is never wholly lost: if they frequently threw away their wit upon false conceits, they likewise sometimes struck out unexpected truth."[7]

For many modern artists and critics, the aesthetic propriety of the wit of the Metaphysical Poets is more significant than the striking out of "unexpected truth." T. S. Eliot, for example, armed with a broad-minded approach to criticism, is sympathetic with the _discordia concors_ of Donne's imagery:

> A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility. When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind

[6] _Ibid._

[7] _Ibid._, p. 21.

> of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.[8]

It seems only natural to this modern saviour of seventeenth-century metaphysical wit that the violent yoking together of "disparate experience" becomes the measure of the prowess of poetic imagination. The problem involved with the position, however, develops from Eliot's implication that images are selected merely in order to create the art object. To examine Donne's imagery in an aesthetic vacuum would be to suggest that the adolescent techniques and investigations of his era merely served to increase the poet's vocabulary. On the other hand, if one considers Eliot's concept of the faculty of the poetic imagination to form "new wholes" from heterogeneous experience in light of the thematic duality of Donne's poems, he arrives at a lucid understanding of the poet's inclination to fuse dissimilar images together. Unable to reject the empirical agents of his time, he attempts to make them a part of the Medieval world-view. The resultant metaphysical conceit is not merely the wit of poetic genius but also an expression of hope that, out of his chaotic age, unity can be realized once more.

[8]"The Metaphysical Poets," <u>Selected Essays, 1917-1932</u> (New York, 1934), p. 247.

ii

The struggle for a monistic philosophy thematically asserts itself through the interrelationship of the images in Donne's poetry. Despite the occasional fascination with sex to the exclusion of any metaphysical concern, evident, for example, in "Elegie XIX," the emphasis of the conceit in most of his poetry is toward ethereal qualities. Even in a seemingly frivolous poem such as "The Flea," this direction of the imagery manifests itself. In bed with his mistress, Donne notices a flea which has flown from him to her:

> Marke but this flea, and marke in this
> How little that which thou deny'st me is;
> It me suck'd first, and now sucks thee,
> And in this flea our two bloods mingled bee. (1-4)

Through the image of the mixture of the lovers' blood in the flea, Donne approaches, by way of two lovers united in a singular soul, the Neo-Platonic concept of the One. Perhaps, as in "The Extasie," the undertones of a spiritual union are merely indicative of an attempt to justify physical love, but, whatever the psychological source of the poet's drive, the need for harmony finds expression as the metaphor develops:

> Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
> Where wee almost, yea more than maryed are:
> This flea is you and I, and this
> Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is. (10-13)

The description of the speaker's attempt to dissuade his

mistress from destroying the flea illustrates the poetic imagination of which Eliot speaks. The successful blending of the concrete and the abstract in the metaphor, however, is the result of more than a mere search for the most bizarre polarities of the particular and the general. Rather, as the guise of the familiar contemporary defrocking of the religion of virginity yields to the metaphysical metaphor, the poem unravels into a statement of reconciliation of the material and the immaterial. Assuming a role more dynamic than a mere literary pose, Donne allows the elementary conceit to evolve into that search for unity which we have seen dominate his themes. Eliot refers to the process as the "forming of new wholes"; his criticism assumes a broadened scope as one observes Donne imagining the murder of the flea as a "sacrilege" and sexual union as a "mariage temple." Donne's formation of "new wholes" is not an aesthetically isolated practice, but an obsession with making physical love a spiritual fact.

The supersession of metaphysical concerns over the cavalier pose is similarly effected in other love poems, and, once again, the search for unity in ethereal love is presented in the struggle of the conceit:

> My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares,
> And true plain hearts doe in the faces rest,
> Where can we finde two better hemispheares
> Without sharpe North, without declining West?
> ("The Good-Morrow," 15-18)

The cosmological image equates the lovers to the

hemispheres, but the conclusion of the poem involves the ascension of the lovers' souls over the cosmos into the realm of universality:

> If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
> Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die.
> (20-21)

For Donne, the forming of new wholes is more than an experimental journey in aesthetic activity; it is an attempt to re-create a whole from what he sees as the disintegration of his old world.

Drawing his images from sources which were challenging Medieval tradition, Donne seeks in the resultant metaphor the immortality of the soul. As in "The Good-Morrow," the search begins with an attempt to etherealize love in other poems also. In the well-known conceit of "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," he finds in the tools of his Empirical contemporaries the opportunity to explore the possibility of reconciliation of the two world-views:

> Our two soules therefore, which are one,
> Though I must goe, endure not yet
> A breach, but an expansion,
> Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate.
>
> If they be two, they are two so
> As stiffe twin compasses are two,
> Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if the 'other doe. (21-28)

An instrument of science is chosen as an image of two souls joined in immortal unity; there is a suggestion that the selection is precipitated by something more than the capture

of a convenient device of poetic creation. Although the poet would naturally be inclined to favor that experience assimilated from an exposure to seventeenth-century Empiricism, two worlds are presented, the new in the physical image, and the old in the abstraction developed by the image. While there is an obvious attempt to reconcile the two philosophies, there is also evidence of the eruption of the persistent dichotomy in the forceful polarities of the conceit.

The exploration of the relationship between man and woman in terms of the metaphysical conceit abides throughout Donne's poetry. As in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," and "The Good-Morrow," Donne again strives to equate the cosmos with the Platonic world of love in "A Valediction: Of Weeping." The poem is introduced with an image of materialism:

> Let me powre forth
> My teares before thy face, whil'st I stay here,
> For thy face coines them, and thy stampe they beare.
> (1-3)

The tears, a symbol of grief, are yoked to the mintage of coins, a symbol of the materialism of the New Science,[9] and as the poem progresses, the metaphor assumes another side:

> On a round ball
> A workeman that hath copies by, can lay

[9]Redpath (p. 59), shedding some light on the conceit, suggests that the speaker's lady has caused the tears (coining) and that her face is reflected in his tears (stamping).

An Europe, Afrique, or an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, <u>all</u>
So doth each teare,
Which thee doth weare,
A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
Till thy teares mixt with mine doe overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my
heaven dissolved so. (10-18)[10]

The seventeenth-century expansion of the world inspired by the discoveries of explorers, for Donne, is equated with a personal experience of grief. Obviously disturbed by the impression that the empirical emphasis on material things heralds the debasement of the Platonic concept of love, the poet hopes to harmonize the symbol of his grief with the new universe through the metaphysical conceit.

The strength of love in "A Valediction: Forbidding Weeping" assumes a different power from that which we have come to expect from the poet. In the poem, there is a suggestion that love, "under the duress of grief" can "annihilate the lovers on whom it has laid hold."[11] The paradox presents immediate confusion, but perhaps its resolution lies in the understanding that Donne is

[10]The flood image in these lines recalls similar metaphors from other poems. It appears, for example, in "The Second Anniversary," "yet a new Deluge . . . hath drowned us all," (27-28) and in "Divine Poem V,"
Powre new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
Drowne my world with my weeping earnestly,
Or wash it, if it must be drown'd no more. (7-10)

[11]Coffin, p. 17.

concerned not with the destructive power of love but, rather, with the destruction which the blasphemy of metaphysical love can effect. One would find support for this idea in the "death of shee" in "The First Anniversary" as well as in the thoughts expressed in "The Feaver":

> But yet thou canst not die, I know;
> To leave this world behinde, is death,
> But when thou from this world will goe,
> The whole world vapors with thy breath.
> . . . .
> O wrangling schooles, that search what fire
> Shall burne this world, had none the wit
> Unto this knowledge to aspire,
> That this her feaver might be it? (5-8, 13-16)

The comparison of the lady's sickly state to the argument among the Stoics concerning which type of fire would devour the earth[12] presents an interesting parallel to the destructive power of love evoked in "A Valediction: Fordidding Weeping." The elements of both conceits are obviously similar;[13] and when one considers the tear image of "A Valediction: Forbidding Weeping" in connection with the fire image of "The Feaver," he concludes that Donne is examining the effect which loss of love can bring to the world. Coffin develops the connection between this personal experience and the advent of the New Philosophy:

> In so far as the order of things to which it ["the particular fact"] belongs is associated in the poet's mind with a still greater set

[12]Redpath, p. xxviii.

[13]The metaphor is also reminiscent of the Fisher-King legend. See pages 37-38.

> of principles, universal in their influence and importance, even including the divine, so do the particular objects of science help to extend the meaning of the poet's experience to suggest the intermingling of the concrete and the abstract, the real and the spiritual, which is the mark of the metaphysical. Thus, by associating the lover's particular experience significantly with the cosmographer's art, the poet is able to analyze his emotion in scientific terms which are swiftly extended in his imagination to include a reflection upon the creation of the world, its vastness, and its dissolution by some heaven-sent flood.[14]

As Coffin suggests, the force of the poem lies in the poet's manipulation of the imagery into the metaphysical conceit, into the mingling of "the concrete and the abstract, the real and the spiritual." The conclusion of the poem is not as clear as the conviction felt in "The Feaver":

> These burning fits but meteors bee,
> Whose matter in thee is some spent.
> Thy beauty, 'and all parts, which are thee,
> Are unchangeable firmament. (21-24)

Less fervently stated in "A Valediction: Forbidding Weeping," Donne's faith in the immortality of the metaphysic of love is disguised in the concluding assertion that, should such faith be lost, mortal love can become mutable:

> Since thou and I sigh one another's breath,
> Whoe'er sighs most, is cruellest, and hastes
> the other's death. (26-27)

[14]Coffin, p. 18.

iii

Attraction to the metaphysical conceit in the love poems is a natural attitude for Donne; the very nature of love demands from the poet the need to coalesce its physical demands and its spiritual significance. To deny one facet of love would be to deny the reality of Platonism, and to deny the other would be to deny the validity of empirical investigation. The result of the refusal to eliminate either world-view, as we have seen in the love poems, is the mixture of the concrete and the abstract. The yoking together of the material and the immaterial, however, is not peculiar to the poems concerned with mortal love. Despite the apparent escape from the obsession with the mutability of the flesh after his personal reformation, Donne shows that he is still capable of capturing the earlier dynamic metaphors in his religious poetry. In a Holy Sonnet, for example, a favored metaphor, slightly modified, once again arises:

> Oh! of thine onely worthy blood,
> And my teares, make a heavenly Lethean flood,
> And drowne in it my sinnes blacke memorie.
> ("Holy Sonnet IX," 10-12)

As in "The Second Anniversary" and "A Valediction: Forbidding Weeping," the poet seeks in the image of a Lethean flood, the purgation of his soul; and the conceit assumes a Christian orientation as Donne would have the blood of Christ blend with the water of Lethe to effect the

cleansing.

A second familiar metaphor also appears in the religious poetry. As he attempts to harmonize an ethereal concept of love with the cosmos, so does he draw from symbols of the scientific expansion of the universe to mould a unified system in which physical objects can be equated with the abstraction of divine worship:

> Let mans Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this,
> The intelligence that moves devotion is.
> ("Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward," 1-2)

Grierson explains that Donne is adopting the Medieval belief that each sphere has an intelligence or angel to guide it.[15] Through the growth of the conceit, Donne extemporizes on this idea, suggesting that, as each sphere is directed by a divine intelligence, so should each man's soul be guided by devotion.[16] Despite the metaphor's evolution from Medieval Christian dogma, the two sides of the equation lose their congruency as he allows himself to question the validity of its statement in light of the temper of his age:

> And as the other Spheares, by being growne
> Subject to forraigne motions, lose their owne,
> And being by others hurried every day,
> Scarce in a yeare their naturall forms obey:
> Pleasure or businesse, so our Soules admit
> For their first moves, and are whirld by it. (3-8)

[15] Poems, 1912 ed., II, 236.

[16] Clements, p. 91.

In the poet's view, just as the spheres are affected by the motion of other celestial bodies, so are the attitudes of his contemporaries influenced by the rise of Humanist learning, of "forraigne motions." The result, concludes Donne, is that man is no longer inspired by contemplation of the Divine but by the new "first mover," the force of a materialistic drive.

To conclude the study of the patterns of Donne's imagery, a consideration of "Holy Sonnet XIV" would be in order; for the multitude of images and metaphors within the fourteen lines of this poem epitomizes the extent to which he can carry the metaphysical conceit. As J. C. Levenson points out, three conceits are developed within the poem: that of metal-working, of military might, and of sexual activity.[17] Conceiving of God as a tinker, Donne pleads with Him to mould his soul:

> Batter my heart, three person'd God, for you
> As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
> That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee, 'and bend
> Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.
> (1-4)

In the second quatrain, the poet proceeds from the image of God as a forger of man's soul to that of God as a military conqueror:

> I, like an usurpt towne, to'another due,
> Labour to 'admit you, but oh, to no end,
> Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,
> But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue. (5-8)

[17] "Donne's Holy Sonnets, XIV," Explicator, XII (April, 1954), item 36.

In the concluding sestet of the poem, Donne reveals the dynamism which he can effect in the metaphysical conceit as he compares his devotion to God to a sexual experience:

> Yet dearely' I love you, 'and would be loved faine,
> But am betroth'd unto your enemie:
> Divorce mee, 'untie, or breake that knot againe,
> Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
> Except you 'enthrall mee, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee. (9-14)

The initial invocation to a "three-person'd God" would seem to imply that the subsequent metaphors would encompass the three figures of the Trinity. Some critics, in fact, have suggested that this is precisely Donne's reference.[18] Despite the ingenious explicatory methods of supporting this theme, however, the attractiveness of the argument is sublimated by the consistent reference to the violent nature of God.[19] It would seem, at first glance, that the characteristics of the three persons of the Trinity are represented in the three conceits: the creativity of God the Father in the image of the blacksmith; the saving power of Christ in the form of the military conqueror; and the spirit of love of the Holy Ghost in the metaphor of sexual union. Yet, force is the

[18] See A. L. Clements' "Donne's 'Holy Sonnet XIV,'" MLN, LXXVI (June, 1961), 484-89 and George Knox's "Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, XIV," *Explicator*, XV (October, 1956), item 2.

[19] Doniphan Louthan (pp. 123-24) points out that the metaphors in the poem are dominated by overtones of violence.

controlling tone; the serene aspects of the Trinity are denied. The creative power of God is viewed as a rigorous process in which God, like the craftsman, must "batter," "knock," "bend" and "burn" to mould the soul of man; He must "usurp" and "captivate" the soul of man. Finally, even the image of sexual union is provoked by the demand that the Holy Spirit ravish, enthrall and imprison him.

Whether Donne applies the metaphysical conceit to his love lyrics or his religious poetry, the result is the same--the explosive mixture of the concrete and the abstract. James Smith describes the poet's conceit as a solid union, the elements of which can yet maintain their "separate and warring identities":

> The multiplicity submits to the unity for its coherence, and at the same time preserves itself as multiplicity; while the unity without ceasing to be unity, receives from multiplicity its significance. The two support and complete, and, at the same time, deny each other.[20]

Figuratively, the evaluation is valid; Donne's conceits effect support and completion. Thematically, the conceits present conflict. In the conflict, one recognizes the emergence of the struggle of multiplicity, or Aristotelianism, and Unity, or Platonism. The schism of the polarities of the metaphysical conceit is a poetic image of this philosophical struggle.

[20] "On Metaphysical Poetry," Scrutiny, II (December, 1933), 234-35.

CHAPTER VI

THE TOTAL PATTERN

Any serious attempt to trace a singular theme in Donne's poetry is thwarted by a confrontation with the conflict of the opposing affinities between which the poet wavers. Having observed the poet voice the emotions generated by the conflict, the reader no doubt remains confused and exhausted with the myriad of concepts and images to which Donne is drawn. Totally frustrated, one finally concludes that he is unable to resolve the contradictory elements of the poetry; but his despair is overcome upon recognition of the feelings which familiarity with the works of Donne has generated. Acknowledging this personal reaction, the reader suddenly understands that the poet has transferred his emotions to his audience; the dilemma of Donne has become the dilemma of his listeners. Assuming that the purpose of creative art is to convey the emotion of personal experience, one might venture to say that Donne was a successful craftsman. Despite the strength of his poetic imagination, however, the poet never satisfactorily reconciled his dilemma.

Lest we too harshly indict Donne for his indecision, though, we should first reconsider the influence

of the philosophical heritage of the conflict which he encountered. The source of the problem confronting the poet and his contemporaries must be traced to the Hellenic tradition of Plato and Aristotle. The oblique schools of Realism and Nominalism which developed from the respective philosophies of the two Ancients extended from epistemology to metaphysics and widened the gap between Platonism and Aristotelianism. Unable to accept the pluralistic assertion of Aristotelianism, the Church fathers adopted Platonism, and, because of its association with the Church, this philosophy became the controlling force in the early Middle Ages. With the coalition of Aristotelianism and Platonism in the Thomistic Synthesis, Medieval man was convinced that the supreme way of life had been achieved and that all doubts about its relevancy were reconciled in a comprehensive and harmonious system of the material and the immaterial. Against this system of serenity, the progressive spirit of the Renaissance sought to challenge concepts which had been generated through centuries of struggle and doubt. Some found the Humanist spirit an acceptable manifestation of their personal philosophies; for others, however, the wrenching of man from his comfortable position in the Great Chain of Being was a blasphemy against the old order. For many of the latter sympathy, there emerged a struggle which contested the validity of Empiricism

against the faith of Medieval Idealism; the poetry of Donne is dominated by this struggle.

It is conceivable that images of the New Science should be particularly attractive to the poetic imagination of Donne; and equally plausible is the appeal of the logic of scientific fact to the active intellect of the poet. The combination of his affinity to the poetic image and to scientific rationalism forces from the poet some form of recognition. The acknowledgement of the New Philosophy initially asserts itself in the denial of Medieval concepts, a practice which may be exercised in the occasional parodies of courtly love in the early lyrics or in the frivolous comparison of his mistress' body to a newly-discovered land which his hands are licensed to explore ("Elegie XIX"). The parodies and the libertine attitudes, however, prove to be transient; and the apparent obsession with the pleasures of the flesh yields to the search for unity and the ideal in the metaphysic of love. Similarly, the poet clings to images of materialism in the "Anniversaries" only to describe the destruction which Empiricism has hurled upon a secure world-view; and, recovering from the despair over the dissolution of the Medieval world, the poet finds solace in faith in the immortal and universal soul.

It would appear that Donne's desire is to contain both world-views in a singular philosophy, but the total

result of the attempted harmonization is a picture of a dichotomous system. Despite his attempts to coalesce the material and the immaterial, the schism remains. Even in the later sermons, the assertion that the soul must be wrenched violently from the flesh in order to achieve immortality suggests the persistence of the dichotomy. The indecision which is engendered by the force of the polarities of this dualism and which controls the poetry of Donne is a reflection of the turbulent period in which he lived. The literature of his era presents a culminating effect of the philosophical progress established by its ancestral traditions. Being traced as far back as the Hellenic tradition, the separate lineages of Platonism and Aristotelianism were synthesized in the unified and stable temperament of Medieval man. Sired by the materialistic revolution of science and Humanism, Medieval frigidity forced birth of the volcanic instability of Donne's age. In the violent contradiction of thought, in the harsh tonality of verse, and in the unique breeding of the metaphysical conceit, one cannot find a more conspicuous respresentative of the mood generated by the Age of Discovery than John Donne.

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