John Donne: Verse, Love and Unity

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Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Donne's poetry are drawn from Robin Robbins' revised edition of Donne's poems, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, republished in 2010. Citations from the Bible are taken from the King James Version (*KJV*), which was produced in Donne's lifetime and was the version from which Donne himself increasingly drew in composing his sermons and pursuing questions of controverted doctrine after its publication in 1611. Quotations from Donne's sermons are from Potter and Simpson's ten volume work, *The Sermons of John Donne* (*Sermons*), published between 1953-62 by the University of California Press. Spelling from all sources is preserved.

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Introduction

There is a peculiar energy and force to the poems of John Donne. One does not return to them for finely-wrought and painted scenes, for colour and flourish of descriptive language, for copious and flowery imagery, for pleasant flow of cadence, for majesty or decorousness of diction, for quaint sentiments, for epic and visionary flights, indeed, not for any of those elements for which poetry is often supposed to be any good, and for which the best of the English poets—Shakespeare, Milton, the Augustans, the Romantics—are thought to be great. What one discovers in Donne's verse, rather, is a dexterous and energetic mind. The strength of the poetry is the pressure and individualism of Donne's personality, and the agility and variety of his thought, the lodestone of which is the striking invention of unexpected figures and conceits. Notwithstanding the disapprobation the extravagance of his similes and metaphors has garnered him through the years—Samuel Johnson was particularly harsh on this '*discordia concors*' by which '[t]he most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together' (qtd. in A.J. Smith, *John Donne: The Critical Heritage* 218)—such surprising comparisons are the hallmark of Donne's poetic style and indicate something vital about the bent of his mind: he could not refrain from joining things.

Though Donne had little difficulty in piecing together disparate concepts by dint of some shared characteristic, literary critics have tended to resist applying the same method to the sprawling corpus of Donne's poetry. If the verse is studied with an eye toward connecting the various poems and genres, it is rarely with the understanding that Donne had abiding philosophical interests. Ramie Targoff, one scholar among a very few who have challenged the reticence among critics to investigate the 'metaphysics [which] lay behind Donne's work as a whole', observes, 'the project of reading Donne as an author with deeply held beliefs or preoccupations has been almost entirely obscured from view' (4, 5). The more common perspective, Murray Roston elucidates, is that Donne 'project[s] himself into a wide variety of roles with a casual and even sceptical disregard for personal consistency of viewpoint' (2).[1] Currently, perhaps the two most urgent questions in Donne scholarship, and those which this thesis will address, are how to connect the poems of Donne's younger years with the poems of his maturity, and whether or not the poetry evidences a sincerely held, consistent point of view on much of anything. What I hope to show in this essay is that we can trace the silver

[1] This evaluation was especially dominant in the early twentieth century, when Donne was 'rediscovered', and it has since proved to be entrenched; but these kinds of accusations of the capriciousness of Donne's philosophy began with Donne's contemporaries and immediate successors, and were cemented more recently in John Carey's landmark, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (1981).

thread of a single idea throughout Donne's verse. I maintain that the central impulse behind Donne's view of art and life, and that which overflows so powerfully into his writings, is, in his own words, the divinely ordained 'dislike of *singularity*; of being *Alone*' (*Sermons* 6: 81). Positively put, Donne's most continuous fixation is his metaphysically derived belief in the necessity and happiness of unity. This one idea is the catalyst for the greater part of all those Donnean idiosyncrasies and 'master images', as John Carey terms them (11). The drive towards oneness explains why Donne is always attempting to integrate heterogeneous concepts in improbable conceits, and why his love poetry and marriage songs persistently emphasise that lovers become one; it is why he believes so fervently in the union of body and soul and why he hates the discordant irregularities of his character. Donne's desire for unity is the thread which runs through his celebration of mutual relationship, his yearning for union with God, his hatred of the separation of departure and death, his ardent catholicity, and his repeated emphasis on 'all', 'symmetry', and 'proportion' (e.g. *The First Anniversary* 309-320). Such diverse motifs as phoenixes, hermaphrodites, fountainheads, roots and buds likewise have their provenance in a habit of compression by which Donne squeezes multiplicity into a singularity. These and the many other eccentricities of Donne's literary output can be traced to his overarching desire for a unity which mirrors the divine.[2]

Dogmatic Unity

Donne's consistent representation of unity in style and substance, I contend, is a consequence of his theology. Though the path of his religious experience was tortuous, the evidence points to a man who was always interested in the doctrines of divinity: 'even in his most sceptical and satirical phase he was deeply preoccupied by a search for religious truth' (Roston 7). His Catholic upbringing was a serious one, and the commitment of his near relatives to the faith made many of them martyrs, and those who did not fall to the sword frequently became destitute pariahs. When he converted to Protestantism, his conversion was hardly easy or glib, characterised as it was by a period of deep uncertainty, meticulous reading and strenuous debate (John Stubbs 5, 19-20). The importance of searching diligently for true religion is the central contention of 'Satyre III', written in the mid-1590s when Donne was in

[2] The instances of his synthesising mind in his verse abound to such an extent that the examples this thesis analyses must perforce be merely representative. One can hardly forget such lines as 'the sin'wy thread my brain lets fall / Through every part, / [Which] Can tie those parts, and make me one of all' or the 'flea' in which 'two bloods mingled be' so that man and woman are 'met / And cloistered in these living walls of jet' ('The Funeral' 9-11; 'The Flea' 4, 14-15), and yet I have not space to examine them. The sermons likewise contain seemingly endless material on the matter. Suffice it say that the way in which multiple parts or persons miraculously become one was never far from Donne's mind.

his mid-twenties: ‘Be busy to seek her; believe me this: / He’s not of none, nor worst, that seeks the best’ (74-75). Bearing out his own exhortation, the poet always kept abreast of the theological controversies which ‘had been integral to his personal reading since at the latest the death of his brother Henry’, when Donne was twenty or twenty-one (Stubbs 233), and he demonstrated some acumen for the subject in the polemical religious works he published years before becoming an Anglican minister or seriously considering a clerical vocation. Moreover, religious idioms, artifacts and disputes pervade even his secular poetry. In every phase of his life religion was near his heart and mind, an urgent, overshadowing fixation.

Donne approached the creeds of his religion seriously. It is therefore not overreaching to suggest that the precise conception of unity which the poet espoused is primarily derived from the Christian doctrine of God, who is at once a singularity and a plurality, a unified being composed of distinct persons, the ‘three-personed God’ whose creative works Donne believed to be a coherent whole (‘Batter my heart’ 1). The triunity of God is the most salient theme of Donne’s sermons, and he believed it to be ‘the heart of the Christian faith’, as P.M. Oliver notes (49). ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity’, Donne opines,

> as mysterious as it is…is insinuated and conveyed unto us, even in the first verse of the Bible, in that extraordinary phrase, *Creavit Dii, Gods,* Gods in the plurall, *created heaven and earth*; There is an unity in the action, it is but *Creavit,* in the singular, and yet there is a plurality in the persons, it is not *Deus, God,* but *Dii, Gods*: The Doctrine of the Trinity, is the first foundation of our religion…The simplest may believe it…The wisest cannot understand it’ (*Sermons* 6: 141-142)

Donne declares that the ontology of God, specifically of plurality in unity, is the most primary axiom of his worldview, which has significant repercussions for his art. Dr Johnson’s complaint that the metaphysical poets ‘cannot be said to have imitated any thing: they neither copied nature nor life’ falls short insofar as Donne intended his poetry, in keeping with early modern theories of art, to be mimetic of the harmony of God’s being and of the correspondence of God’s world (Smith, *Critical Heritage* 217; Frances Cruickshank 36; Rebecca M. Rush 552). Since God is the ultimate and perfect reality whose creation reflects his own internal unity, human poesis (‘making’) ought likewise to reflect divine unity in matter and manner (Cruickshank 115). The parallel between divine making and human making is accentuated by the biblical claim that the LORD created heaven and earth via verbal fiat, that is, through words, which grants to literature—and, I shall argue, especially poetry—a special capacity to embody divine order.

The precise nature of the simultaneous singularity and plurality of God further explains a conspicuous detail of Donne's poetic fusions. Critically, and paradoxically, the union which Donne searches for never compromises the individuality of the things joined. Donne's view of unity presupposes difference; if two or more things are to be joined, they must be distinct. John Carey observes, 'Donne liked imagining opposites which combined, while remaining opposites' (262). This paradox reflects the mystery of the trinity, as Donne understood it, a doctrine which postulates that God is at once one and three, touting the individuality of the persons of the Godhead and their unity as one God (Oliver 72-74). The need for distinction within unity, or the principle of sameness and difference, or multiplicity within simplicity, modifies all Donne's couplings.

The trinitarian nature of God is the model for a few other Donnean emphasises which relate to unity. The Bible and Donne affirm that 'God is love', for which reason we are to 'love one another' (1 Jn 4:7-8; *Sermons* 6: 170). P.M. Oliver observes that Donne held a view akin to Augustine's on the unity between the persons of the Godhead, in that both Donne and Augustine accorded to love a cohesive role in the relations between the Father, Son and Spirit (73-74).[3] Donne preached: 'in heaven, where God the Father, and the Son, love one another in the Holy Ghost, the bond of charity shall everlastingly unite us together' (2: 213-214). Reciprocal love, for Donne, is the means by which to achieve unity with another person, according to the command and pattern of the Deity. A secondary basis for union through love, and that which explains the prominence Donne gives to romance, is established in God's proclamation, 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be *one* flesh' (Ge. 2:24; my emphasis).[4] Romantic, conjugal love, therefore, assumes great importance in Donne's thinking about unity.

A further corollary of the ontology of God which influenced Donne's poetic choices is God's personhood and his communicativeness, which set a precedent for the human need for relationship, and for literature itself. The Christian Deity is neither an impersonal force nor a solitary being. Oliver writes of Donne's belief: 'God, who is plural, communicates himself as plural and expects his followers to be plural creatures. Solitude is unchristian' (75). Wherefore the famous lines from the prose *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*: 'No man is an *Illand*, intire of itself; every man is a piece of the *Continent*, a part of the maine' (qtd. in

[3] Oliver distinguishes their views by noting that Augustine believed the Spirit to be the bond of love between the Father and the Son, whereas Donne considered love in the abstract to be that bond.

[4] Donne frequently references this verse in his preaching, sometimes in order to draw a parallel between the union between husband and wife and the union of Christ and the church (e.g. *Sermons* 5: 113).

Stubbs xxii). The notion of human connection looms large over the poet's writings and can be seen even in the incessant poetic need to apostrophise, to speak directly to an absent person, a penchant which explains his attraction to the verse letter, the love lyric, and the devotional poem, which exploit communication between friends, lovers, and God, respectively.[5] One might contrast Donne with the Romantics, for instance, who tend to present themselves as solitary, detached figures consumed with introspection or insentient nature. For Donne, the relational aspect of God's being explains and necessitates an individual's interest in other rational beings. God, moreover, demonstrates not only intercommunication within himself, but with humanity through written revelation. The condescension of God to human language to convey himself justifies Donne's communicative passion—his itch to write—as it is the written word which enables communion through absence, joining far-flung persons through time and space, whether people with other people or God with humanity. Donne wrote touchingly in a poetic missive to his lifelong friend, Henry Wotton: 'Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls, / For thus friends absent speak' ('Sir, more than kisses' 1-2). One of the aims of this thesis will be to explore why Donne had a penchant for writing poetry specifically, but his loquacious habits more generally derive from a sense of the need for relationship, for which he finds a metaphysical basis in his concept of divinity.

The Significance of an Idea

Strangely, though it seems blatant, Donne's draw towards the concept of union has been overlooked as it pertains to the whole of his poetic works. Much has been made of his belief in union through romantic love (Helen Gardner, 'The Argument about the Ecstasy' 256-257), of the unity of body and soul (Ramie Targoff 1) and of his desire to return to a pre-lapsarian integrity (Achsah Guibbory 37), but efforts to connect these Donnean motifs within a larger system have been lacking, being studied only in isolation. Part of the problem, to which I have cursorily alluded and as Targoff argues, is that from the beginning 'literary history has developed a bias against considering Donne as a poet with serious theological or philosophical interests. However much Donne has been admired… he has also been maligned as an author who lacked a real focus or purpose' (3). The received interpretation is that Donne teasingly entertains for the sake of the poetry, flaunting his erudition without commitment to

[5] Pierre Legouis, a vocal Donne scholar writing in the beginning of the twentieth century, noted that though Donne's diction is 'as naked as can be', the near-universal presence of a second, mute addressee within his poems lends them a 'dramatic' weight (38-39). It is typical of scholars to mark the rhetorical or poetic effects of Donne's stylistic choices and to leave untouched the deeper levels of meaning behind his devices.

consistent thought.[6] The reason Donne is read that way, I would suggest, is his characteristic use of wit (not a simple concept to define, but I follow Roston's definition: 'The essence of wit is intellectual surprise'; 108), which is perceived as mere flippancy. Another factor to bear in mind which has undermined analysis of the rapport between Donne's ideas and his poetry is the proliferation of materialist interpretations of literature this last half century, which tend to disregard the ability of the individuals to extricate their imagination from their historical, cultural context. These readings prioritise understanding the historical-politico milieu in which the poet is embedded and how the poet seeks his own material interests therein (e.g. Arthur Marotti's new historicist approach; *Coterie Poet* iii). For these scholars, valuable though their research may be in shedding light on the politics of verse, interest in a system of thought or a sincere, cohesive principle which underlies the poems is an issue of secondary or tertiary importance at best. And finally, other iterations of literary postmodernism, with its suspicion of metanarratives and preference for linguistic slipperiness in lieu of cogency, has generally undercut holistic, connected readings between literary works.

A couple of literary critics shoot rather near the mark, however. In some ways, John Carey comes closest in formulating the predominant feature of Donne's art and mind which I am outlining in this thesis. He variously calls it Donne's 'impulse to seek conjunction, and his hypersensitivity to division', 'the habits of mind, simultaneously dualistic and synthesizing' (278), 'the impulse to bind opposites' (269) and a 'passion for fusion or interpenetration', which, he says, is the 'single, essential quality which makes Donne Donne' (14). Carey, however, is foremost among those who downplay the philosophical commitment of Donne's art, as he lays the compulsion to seek unity at the feet of Donne's 'character and circumstances', bypassing the primacy of metaphysical convictions which inspired the poet and stating that 'Donne…created his theology, as he created his poetry, for imaginative ends' (224). In contrast, I am arguing for an ideational rather than material or psychological understanding of Donne's poetry, though I do not preclude the viability of material influences on the artist's psyche. Although Carey comments on Donne's theological presuppositions, he

[6] The aspursions were cast early. Dryden remonstrates that Donne 'affects the Metaphysicks, not only in his Satires, but in his Amorous Verses, where Nature only shou'd reign; and perplexes the Minds of the Fair Sex with nice Speculations of Philosophy, when he shou'd ingage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of Love' (Smith, *Critical Heritage* 151). For Dr Johnson, the metaphysical school's use of conceit was merely a superficial technique by which its poets might 'say what they hoped had never been said before' (Smith, *Critical Heritage* 218).

does not explore nor recognise how far-reaching the poet's faith is in furnishing him with the quintessential patterns of his art.

Ramie Targoff, of course, reasserts the importance of Donne's metaphysics in the face of 'the bias against considering Donne as a poet with serious theological or philosophical interests' which 'has persisted for centuries' (3).[7] Where I diverge from Targoff is her insistence that 'the nature of the soul and its relation to the body' is the primary impetus of Donne's writing and 'the most continuous and abiding feature of his collected works' (5). I see the concern for 'the mutual necessity of body and soul' as a function of a larger philosophical proposition (4). For Donne, *everything* must be synthesized whilst remaining distinct, not merely the body and soul. Moreover, the chief synthesis is the unity between persons which love achieves, not the union of spirit and body. Donne has written entire poems on the subject of unity in love, while he has for the most part left only scattered lines here and there on the subject of the union of body and soul, so it is difficult to see how that dichotomy could be his primary fascination.

This thesis proposes an idea around which all of Donne's poetry can be seen to coalesce. I shall argue that unanimity is at the heart of Donne's philosophy. The accord of all things, sentient and inert, is the ideal to which Donne aspired. The unity which most preoccupies him is the union between persons, for which reason the mutuality of love is so vital. His poetry is energized by the metaphysical presupposition of the innate goodness of the mutual intertwining of individuals—individuals who maintain their distinct personhood even in their amalgamation. It bears quoting from a sermon at length to demonstrate how deep-seated and theological his belief in the unfitness of solitude and the goodness of unity is:

> From the beginning God intimated a detestation, a dislike of *singularity*; of being *Alone*. The first time that God himself is named in the Bible, in the first verse of Genesis, hee is named *Plurally*, *Creavit Dii* [Elohim], *Gods*, Gods in the plurall, Created Heaven and Earth. God, which is but *one*, would not appeare, nor bee presented so *alone*, but that hee would also manifest more persons. As the *Creator* was not *Singular*, so neither were the *creatures*; First, he created *heaven and earth*; both together; which were to be the generall parents, and out of which were to bee

[7] At least two other literary scholars who have produced books arguing for a sustained metaphysical focus within the whole of Donne's poetry are Terry G. Sherwood and Murray Roston. Roston's *The Soul of Wit* was published in 1974, and Sherwood's *Fulfilling the Circle: A Study of John Donne's Thought* in 1984. Targoff fails to give them mention.

> produced all other creatures; and then, he made all those other creatures plurally too; *Male, and Female created hee them;* And when he came to make *him*, for whose sake (next to his own glory) he made the world, *Adam*, he left not *Adam alone*, but joined *Eve* to him. (6: 81)

Donne believed that the longing to share one's life with another is woven into the fabric of reality. It is no coincidence, therefore, so much of his poetry has as its subject amorous relations, letters between friends, wedding celebrations, as well as sad departures, valedictions and deaths. The separation of persons, as much as of body and soul, was contrary to the very nature of reality as Donne perceived God had created it, whilst the union of persons was the most glorious feature of existence. This fascination with the union of things, especially individual persons, is the great subject of Donne's life and art.

Theory

Absent any grand theory, this thesis draws from scholars who have made similar attempts at describing the unifying vision of and primary impetus for Donne's work. The most prominent voices of late which argue for the continuity and vision of Donne's poetry, and those who have inspired my own position, are John Carey, Arthur F. Marotti, Ramie Targoff, and Achsah Guibbory. I will shape and contrast my own argument primarily against the work of these scholars. Each has written a book-length thesis on Donne, and each has proposed the main tenor and preoccupation of Donne's mind which bind his art into a whole. Furthermore, while they often prove critical of Donne, their analysis does not operate primarily from suspicion, but they permit themselves to admire the quality of his writing and the vastness of his thought. Additionally, I appreciate that these scholars do not mistake opaqueness for erudition, nor confuse muddle with virtue, and I aim to write as lucidly as possible after the pattern which they have set.[8] Before I make my case, I briefly summarise their arguments, as their writings are the framework of my own ideas.

In his book, *Life, Mind and Art*, published in 1981, John Carey outlines the contours of Donne's imagination as it is displayed in his poems, tracing the reoccurring 'master images' to which Donne repeatedly returns (11). Carey's analysis holds a distinct place in Donnean scholarship because it is both 'powerfully written' and boldly argued (Guibbory 221-222). His basic thesis is that though Donne's opinions shift and vary over the course of his life, there

[8] Both Guibbory and Carey, at least, say they are self-conscious in their decision to write without 'vagueness and muddle', as Careys puts it (9). Guibbory says that 'accessible' writing 'is necessary for the survival of the humanities' (3).

remains a 'distinctive structure of Donne's imagination' which reveals itself in 'the same lonely crag in different settings' (10, 11). Carey, in short, disavows any sustained philosophy which might have guided Donne's heart and pen, and argues rather that the subjective, individual and psychological preferences are determinative in the production of the poems. As regards Donne's psychology, Carey especially highlights the circumstances of Donne's 'apostasy' from Roman Catholicism and his worldly 'ambition', both of which leave an indelible imprint upon his psychological state and thence his poetry (14). Though he examines several of them, Carey suggests that the 'arbitrary preference' of Donne's imagination which is most quintessentially Donnean is his 'passion for fusion or interpenetration' (14), owing his sense of isolation, which Carey attributes to 'his early experience of persecution as a member of a beleaguered Catholic minority, and later to his disjunction from the Catholic church…as well as to the long-drawn-out failure of his secular career, and his disastrous marriage' (278-279). Carey, then, surmises what effects the events of Donne's life had upon his psyche, and, consequently, upon the choices he made in writing his poems.

Published just a few years later, Arthur F. Marotti's book, *John Donne: Coterie Poet*, exhibits considerable overlap with John Carey's.[9] Writing from a self-consciously 'new historicist' point of view, Marotti seeks to illuminate Donne's socio-cultural context as the principal determinant for his poetry (xiv). Morotti essentially develops two themes. The first is that Donne's outsider status and continually thwarted careerism account for the frustration and iconoclasm in virtually all his poems. The second is that Donne's socio-political relationship to his audience—usually a coterie of like-minded friends, but also patrons and patronesses—determines the content of the poetry. Marotti emphasises that the stimulus and shaping force of Donne's imaginative work is the political and socio-economic constraints of Donne's world, though he does not go so far as to claim that the authorial self is a mere illusion (xiii), as other new historicists and anti-humanists, and with some humility acknowledges that the historical context is not 'the whole story'(v). Like Carey, he underlines the influence of Donne's biographical circumstances upon his poetry; unlike Carey, he focuses more extensively on the determinacy of the political and economic spheres on Donne's art rather than on the individual imaginative choices of the artist.

Ramie Targoff's *John Donne: Body and Soul* examines the theological underpinning which animates Donne's poetry. She cuts against the grain of so much Donne criticism which

[9] Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Marotti are drawn from his monograph.

trivialises Donnes' pervasive 'metaphysical concerns', such as Carey's biographical and Marrotti's political reading. (4). Her central claim is that 'Donne's expression of his belief in the mutual necessity of body and soul, and his obsessive imagining of their parting, is the most continuous and abiding feature of his collected works' (5). She proceeds to trace the artistic outgrowth of this tenet through significant portions of his poetic corpus whilst providing commentary on the theological debates concerning the relationship of the body and the soul which frame Donne's thinking. Targoff further argues that his firm belief in the division of human beings into body and soul, in their interdependence, in the parting of the two upon death, and in the resurrection of the dead when the body will be reunited with the soul tie in to Donne's most profound desire to be fully himself, to be a whole individual, though it was an impossibility for the mortal Donne: 'And if on earth he could not experience what it might be for body and soul to be perfectly joined, he held out the hope for such a marriage in heaven' (22, 23). On earth, however, it is the act of writing which best realises Donne's 'deepest fantasy' of being 'fully present in both parts of the self' (23). She argues:

> Donne never seems to have felt more alive than when he was either putting his thoughts on paper or speaking them aloud from the pulpit. And this feeling of heightened aliveness is the closest he comes to tasting the fruits of what he calls "inanimation"—a neologism that emphasizes the act of putting the spirit in the body. Writing is Donne's experience of making the word flesh. (24)

Targoff thus re-interprets Donne's deeply-held, metaphysical conviction in a way that might resonate with modern readers who may have more sceptical and humanist-leaning sympathies—that of being fully oneself and feeling fully present in the moment. In contradistinction to Carey and Marotti, she contends that it is Donne's theological principles which best explain his imaginative output, and not his apostasy and ambition, nor his immediate socio-economic milieu.

Most recently of the aforementioned scholars, Achsah Guibbory has published her *Returning to John Donne*, a collection of a lifetime of her essays on Donne, including a few new ones. She notes that while 'it has become commonplace to stress the variety in Donne' she maintains 'that there is in Donne…a basic coherence and unity' (20). Her general portrait of Donne is that of a large-hearted humanist, possessed of a universal 'drive to figure out the meaning of experience' (3). Though he has a 'culturally specific' understanding, 'yet his writings are not so bound to the particularities of his culture…that we cannot identify with them. For we are all desiring, suffering, seeking beings, and Donne gives fresh expression to

these experiences' (5). At the centre of Guibbory's argument about Donne's persuasiveness as a poet is the core belief in a shared humanity and human spirit, for 'Donne obsessively analyses the experience of living' (5). Tellingly, her perspective on Donne's religion is that it 'is as much about imagining human identity and human relations as it is about God' (3). More so than Carey, Marotti and Targoff, Guibbory locates Donne's drive to write in his thirst to know and express the timeless truths of the human condition.

I am not in total disagreement with those literary scholars against whom I have structured my own thesis. Concerning the influences upon his imaginative choices, it may well be that Donne's longing for a mingling of souls stems in part from his sequestered childhood as a persecuted Catholic, as Carey would have it, or from his inability to find his place in the establishment, as Marotti emphasises. It may arise, as Guibbory would assert, from a universal human nature, something which Donne would not deny, or from his belief in a dualistic, soul-and-body make-up of his own being. But more primary than these is the metaphysical assumption of Donne's religion, both of his Catholic upbringing and Protestant maturity, of the notion of distinction within unity which stems from his understanding of the singularity and plurality of God. Nor is it surprising that Donne's preferred articulation of unity is love, in both its human and divine dimensions, for love is also theologically motivated. For Donne, the end of human existence was summarised in the words of Jesus Christ when he abridged the entirety of the Bible's commands in just two imperatives: to love God, and to love neighbour (Mt. 22: 36-40). Donne displays both his fondness for epitome and his yearning for love when he further reduces those two injunctions in one of his *Holy Sonnets*: 'Thy law's abridgement and thy last command / Is all but love; O let thy last will stand!' ('Father part of his double interest' 13-14). The testament which Donne has left us in his poetry is his yearning to achieve union with God and man. And upon these two, the whole of his verse hinges.

Method

This paper will pursue its analysis primarily through a survey of the love poetry of the *Song and Sonnets* and religious verse of the *Divine Meditations,* though it will delve into other works for ancillary material. This is because, in addition to the constraints of space, the most frequent and ardent expression of the ideal of unity in Donne's poetry is his passion for the union of rational beings through love. However, I believe I draw adequate examples from other poems—satires, epigrams, verse letters, funeral elegies, epithalamia and encomiums—to show that the ideal of unity permeates all Donne's works. Additionally, these two bodies of

Donne's verse represent the youthful and mature eras of his life, so traversing the gulf between them through an examination of a single theme tells us something about the whole man, and not him as he was in one period only. I acknowledge that the *Songs and Sonnets* are notoriously difficult to date based on external evidence.[10] A.J. Smith, editor of *John Donne: The Complete English Poems*, tells us that 'Donne probably wrote his love lyrics over some twenty years of his life, though we cannot certainly date any single one of them' (353). Smith probably has in mind the time between 1597, by which time Donne had left law school, finished his last naval expedition and found employment, and 1617, in which his wife, Ann More, died in childbirth. Marotti, however, conjectures that some of the love lyrics may have been written earlier, during Donne's days at the Inns of Court (1592-1596), alongside his *Elegies* and the first two *Satires* (Marotti 25, 73). That is a distinct possibility, as the love lyrics were only posthumously organised according to their common theme in the second printed edition of his verse under the unit titled 'Songs and Sonets', arranged by his anonymous editor (Smith 353). In other words, though they share generic overlap, there is no evidence that the lyrics have their origin in one period of the poet's life. Marotti makes a convincing case that some of the poet's lyrics very likely belong to the earlier phase of his life, and therefore, in examining both love poems and divine poems (which incontrovertibly belong to a later period), I am crafting an argument which spans, if not all, at least the greater portion of his poetic career.

I must make three concessions at the outset. My contention is that Donne's philosophy of unity in love is largely doctrinal. That is not to suggest there were no other influences. Love as a subject for poetry, for example, was a convention Donne imbibed from the very air of Renaissance England. William Kerrigan explains,

> [Donne] lived at a time when love could be said to be the dominant preoccupation of a major living philosophy, Neoplatonism, and not exactly peripheral in the university tradition. The creation of love poetry was a mark of literary seriousness…. From Wyatt to Donne and, somewhat transformed, from Donne to the Cavaliers and Milton, love was the paramount subject of the English Renaissance. (6)

Marotti adds that the socio-literary environment of Elizabethan England was particularly prolific in its production of the literature of romance and fiction in contrast to Jacobean England, in which the genres *à jour* were religious, political and philosophical. The timeline

[10] The title of this collection was originally spelled 'Song and *Sonets*', but I use the modern spelling.

of the transition is nearly perfectly mirrored in Donne's own choice of genre, as he appears to have written the lion's share of his amorous verse before James ascended the throne, and thereafter devotes himself to religious, philosophical and polemical writings in verse and prose (Marotti 180-181). So, while I maintain the idea of unity of love is indicative of a larger tendency in Donne's thinking, I concede the shape of his poetry is inevitably informed by his socio-literary culture, not least the literary preferences of the monarch.

Furthermore, others will take exception to the ways in which my analysis favours the serious elements of Donne's poetry and ignores the levity inherent in much of his work. It is true that I read the poems more loftily than many, and I grant that a certain playfulness, even irreverence, pervades a not insignificant number of poems. My *replique* is that if some of the verse is lighthearted and jocular, there are nonetheless real concerns which lie beneath the surface that are indicative of a sustained coalescence of ideas. Literature can, indeed, does frequently aim at once to entertain and provoke reflection. These are not mutually exclusive intents, seeing that many will not read unless the volume at hand promises amusement. Sometimes, in the case of Donne's love poetry, bits of humour and intentional ironies may serve to cheer the intended recipient of a poem whilst its more grand claims assure her of the magnificence and lastingness of their union. Andrew Hadfield addresses the tension between 'seriousness and irony' of Donne's amorous verse (60), suggesting that the irony is aimed at the poetic conventions which had hitherto depicted love (Petrarchism and Neoplatonism) rather than at love itself:

> Although Donne's poems can appear as cynical and dismissive reflections on the nature of love, this would be a superficial reaction to them. Donne makes use of a series of precursors, styles, types, and literary examples, often treating the material at his command in a sardonic or ironic way. It does not follow that he refuses to take the literature of love seriously. On the contrary, 'Songs and Sonets' is often an extremely serious volume, putting all previous love poetry in its place and suggesting that the earthly love of John and Anne Donne was one of the few constants in a chaotic and changeable world. (63)

Playful, deliberate ironies, many of which play with literary convention, do not rule out deeper fixations which have root in ideational commitments. The reader will have to forgive me for frequently overlooking alternative readings which are less than sombre; I do so to maintain focus on what I believe to be the primary concern in Donne's *oeuvres* and to give this thesis a recognisable shape.

Finally, I anticipate the objection that the bliss of mutual love is not the only depiction of romance in *The Songs and Sonnets.* For example, C.S. Lewis ascribes to Donne the 'mediaeval sense of the sinfulness of sexuality' (90). Contrary to my argument, he contends that 'Donne contributes… little' to the 'conversion of courtly love into romantic monogamous love' which was 'so largely the work of English, and even of Puritan, poets' (92). Lewis grounds his assessment of Donne's rejection of love's delight in the 'grim' themes which he says 'describe the prevailing tone' of Donne's love poetry (93-94). My answer to what Lewis sees as cynicism is that the great misery which Donne tells us romance induces (and for which his predecessor Petrarch distinguishes himself) is the consequence of a *practical* failing to attain harmony in love, and not a negation of the ideal of reciprocal love itself. Yes, the poet vividly portrays love's pitiless shattering of the heart in poems like 'The Broken Heart', in which he bemoans, 'Ah, what a trifle is a heart / If once into Love's hands it come!' (9-10). There Donne's speaker complains of love's totalising tyranny, for whereas, 'All other griefs allow a part / To other griefs, and ask themselves but some', Love is the worst, for he 'swallows us, and never chaws; / By him, as by chain-shot, whole ranks do die; / He is the tyrant pike, our hearts the fry' (11-12, 14-16). But love is totalising in its felicity as well. In 'The Good Morrow', Donne tells us, 'love all love of other sights controls, / And makes a little room an everywhere' (10-11). The contrary expressions are two sides of the same coin: love's supreme sway. If the greatness of romantic, monogamous love was not a superlative ideal for Donne, then its obstruction would not cause him any pain, either. I am therefore obliged to agree with the tenor of Helen Gardner's valuation, though it may be overstated:

> No poet has made greater poetry than Donne has on the theme of mutual love. He has no predecessors here and virtually no successors of any stature. The poems which Donne wrote on the subject of love as the union of equals…are his most beautiful and original contribution to the poetry of human love; for poets have written very little of love as the fulness of joy…. He was very deeply moved by the conception of love as union. (256-257)

Donne's theme of union through love, so often remarked upon, is a function of the greater ideal of the perfection of unity, which he pursued in the substance and expression of virtually all his art. I will examine that claim more thoroughly through a closer reading of the poems, beginning with those self-evidently about the unity of reciprocated, romantic love.

Songs and Sonnets

The clarion call of the love poems in the *Songs and Sonnets* is the delight of union through mutual love. Beyond being thoroughly biblical,[11] the reciprocity of love connects to unity for two reasons which can be demonstrated from poetic works outside the *Songs and Sonnets*. The first reason is that the notion of reciprocity carries within itself the symmetry, proportion, balance, accord and circularity which comprise oneness. Unity consists not only of joining, but also agreement. The terms are largely interchangeable and point to Donne's ultimate ideal—aesthetically, philosophically, experientially—of harmony, the antithesis of which is dissention. As he states categorically in an elegy, 'perfection is in unity' ('Love's Progress' 9). This ideal is especially evident from the language Donne uses to describe Elizabeth Drury in the *First Anniversary*, a long, contemplative, commemorative poem in which Donne traces the disorder of the world to the death of the teenage girl 'by whose lines proportion should be / Examined, measure of all symmetry' (309). After her departure, the speaker says, 'beauty's best, proportion, is dead' (306). The hyperbolic assertions may tell us little about the actual Miss Drury, but they tell much about Donne. Donne imaginatively attributes to Elizabeth his own highest aspiration, unity: 'That harmony was she', 'She, after whom, what form soe'er we see / Is discord and rude incongruity' (313, 323-324). Donne says something similar in *The First Anniversary* about the paradigm-shattering Copernican theory, a 'new philosophy [which] calls all in doubt' (205). With the earth removed from the centre (a nodular term in Donne's poetic vocabulary), he bemoans how the universe 'Is crumbled out again t'his atomies. / Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone, / All supply, and all relation' (*The First Anniversary* 205, 212-214). Donne's depiction of the mutuality of love relates to the more comprehensive ideal of perfection in proportionate, symmetrical unity.

The second reason that amorous reciprocity relates to unity is that Donne believed on the interpersonal plane that love creates union, and that love is not realised unless it is reciprocal. As to the first part of the equation, it is Donne's persistent claim that love creates unity between sundry persons and their diverse elements. In a marriage song, he writes that as 'Fire ever doth aspire, / And makes all like itself, turns all to fire,' so it is with love: 'This is joy's bonfire, then, where love's strong arts / Make of so noble individual parts / One fire of four inflaming eyes and of two loving hearts' (*Eclogue and Epithalamion* 219-220, 223-225). Regarding the second part of the formula, that Donne considered true love to be categorically mutual in nature, he states: 'it cannot be / Love, til I love her that loves me' ('Love's Deity' 13-

[11] E.g. Col. 3:14; Jn. 17:23; 1 Pt. 3:8; 1 Jn. 4:12.

14). Donne even frames the unity of the cosmos in terms of mutual giving and taking, as when he exposes the resultant discord of the world after Elizabeth Drury's death by personifying heaven and earth as stingy and rebuffing, respectively: 'The art is lost, and correspondence too. / For heaven gives little, and the earth takes less' (*First Anniversary* 396-397). The principle of correspondence is the same on a personal plane as it is on the celestial. Only love which is shared, at once conferring and receiving, is true love, and only true love enables the consummate ideal of oneness between persons.

I ought to point out, parenthetically, that Donne did not conceive of mutual love as something which could only exist between lovers or with God. His verse letters, for example, frequently have as their aim an elicitation in a male friend of an expression of love toward Donne. One could argue, in fact, that the expression of love and the desire for it to be returned is the principal theme of the verse letters. The instances are numerous, but one sees this when Donne asks Thomas Woodward to 'bestow that love on me' which he says he gave, and when Donne tells his friend Rowland Woodward (Thomas's brother), 't'know that I love thee, and would be loved' ('To Mr. T.W: At once from hence' 14; 'To Mr. R.W: Like one who in her third widowhood' 36). Since I am limited in space, I must be selective in what I analyse. I therefore choose the most boldly articulated expressions of requited love, and it is the amorous verse which conveys the most fervent and persistent passion for unifying reciprocity between people.

Moreover, though I will not examine the *Elegies* in depth, I believe my argument about mutuality pertains as much to them as to the *Songs and Sonnets*. Donne's *Elegies*, though sometimes crass, reject the courtly, Petrarchan notion of love as that which dotes on the mistress without receiving returned affection. The speaker of 'Love's Recusant' is adamant that he will not be 'As those idol'trous flatterers, which still / Their princes styles with many realms fulfil / Whence they no tribute have, and where no sway' (5-7). He is discontented with the pretence of compliment when there is no reward. The love he gives is also the love he desires: 'I love you so true, / As I will never look for less in you' ('His Parting from her' 103-104). Hence, what Donne passionately disliked about the Petrarchan literary tradition, as William Kerrigan states, is that 'Petrarchan love demands, as a generic rule, the idealization of an unconsummated love counter to self-interest' (11).[12] 'Oh let not me serve so' cries Donne in 'Love's Recusant' (1). The disavowal of sycophancy applies as much

[12] Grierson similarly observes that, according to convention, 'the relation of the "servant" to his lady must always be one of reverent and unrewarded service' (24).

to the realm of love as to the world of court politics, for the traditional Petrarchan stance was one of worship and reverence for the lady without serious expectation of anything in return—a coincidentally apt generic code for Elizabethan poets of the court who wished to express their subservience and gratitude to the Queen (Marotti 89-90; Andrew Hadfield 57; Guibbory 96-97). That did not suit Donne. 'Such services I offer as shall pay / Themselves', he writes ('Love's Recusant' 8-9). Thus, the *Elegies,* by emphasising physical union and requited passion, underline that for Donne love is reciprocal.[13] It is an idea even more vividly presented in the *Songs and Sonnets*.

The World Contracted

What sets apart the first set of poems I shall examine is the conceit that the whole world can be reduced to the intimate sphere of the lovers, demonstrating the reason for which Anthony Low may say with some justice, 'Donne was a chief actor and influence in what may be called the "reinvention of love," from something essentially social and feudal to something essentially private and modern' (466). These poems display Donne's fixation with unity on two counts. First, like the other love poems, they emphasise that symmetrical affection joins individuals together and that this experience is equivalent to a world of perfect bliss. Second, they showcase Donne's fondness for reducing everything to a simplified point. Bringing all within the compass of a single point is a habit of mind that reflects Donne's larger concern for unity. That the love relationship is the epitome of the world says much about Donne's metaphysics and the close relation between love and unity. In these poems, the private world of love grants an order—or unity—to life which can withstand the vicissitudes of external realities.

'The Anniversary' celebrates the first year of love between speaker and addressee through the development of a theme common enough in Donne's love poetry: the all-sufficiency and centrality of the amorous relationship.[14] Donne's persona addresses the young woman directly with celebratory confidence, marking the first year of their acquaintance with a poem which inscribes the preciousness of their new-budded romance permanently, thus literally granting their love the eternity of which the speaker boasts. For Donne's speaker, the

[13] There are other indications that unity is important to Donne in the *Elegies,* of course. E.g., 'The Anagram', makes fun of his comrade's mistress who has all the right pieces, but not in the right places: 'Though all her parts be not in the'usual place, / She hath yet an anagram of a good face' (15-16).

[14] The poem is quite possibly addressed to Anne More, which means it would have been written ca. 1598-99, a year from when he most likely met the girl in late 1597, as Robbin Robbins notes (126-127).

private, perpetual, imperturbable world of the lovers is the point around which all other worlds revolve and by which they are defined:

> All kings and all their favourites,
>
> All glory of honours, beauties, wits,
>
> The sun itself, which makes times, as they pass,
>
> Is elder by a year now than it was
>
> When thou and I first one another saw.
>
> All other things to their destruction draw:
>
> Only our love hath no decay.
>
> This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday;
>
> Running, it never runs from us away,
>
> But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day. (1-10)

What is immediately striking in the opening of the poem is the drawn-out deferral of the clause's predicate until the fifth line. What is in view, in fact, is not 'kings' and their royal train, but the anniversary of the couple's meeting. Donne holds in abeyance the sense of his introductory lines because such a tactic holds the attention, and because it emphasises the centrality of the deferred subject which, being last, is the more prominent. This reaffirms Mario Praz's observation that, 'There is hardly a line in Donne's poem which makes sense by itself' (65). The point at which Donne finally lets the reader know what he means in the middle of the stanza aligns with his claim that the romantic relationship is at the centre of the universe; the first day the lovers beheld one another is the reference point by which all other things age just as this claim is the semantic hinge upon which the meaning of the sentence depends. The speaker contrasts the grandness and security of the couple's love for one another against the passage of time and the decay of the world, making the day they 'saw' the other the pivotal juncture, and replacing the sun with their 'love' as the axis on which the cosmos turns.

In this poem, Donne dons the *contemptus mundi* stance of Christian tradition (a trope most eminent in his *Anniversaries*; Marotti 237) but transforms it so that while the world and its decaying material constitution are held in contempt, the gaze is not, at first, lifted up to the

eternity of heaven as convention demanded, but to the avowed 'everlasting' relationship between the lovers which miraculously resists the 'decay' to which 'All other things' are subject (5). It is typical of Donne to clothe romantic verse in religious symbolism, thereby elevating amatory love to the highest known sphere of human inquiry; but what makes this poem more complex is that in the following stanzas Donne shows he is interested in theological precision, and not merely its illustrative usage: it is not merely a reference by which he may speak of the profundity and holiness of earthly love. Eileen Sperry notes that the idea of an eternal love is also a Platonic commonplace, according to which the perfected spiritual form outlasts the imperfect physical world (50-51). That view does not square entirely with Donne's own presuppositions. He therefore proceeds to confess surprisingly, and honestly, in the remaining stanzas that romantic love will not perpetuate in a purer, spiritual form, and he thereby exposes the opening stanza's claims as overstatements. In so doing, the poet demonstrates not only his theological commitments, but also his willingness to challenge the Neoplatonic trope of deathless love which had become a poetic cliché.

The second stanza is a kind of shocking *volta*, declaring in its first line: 'Two graves must hide thine and my corse' (11), thus overturning with its morbid image the triumphalism of the supposed undying love of the man and woman established in the first stanza.[15] 'Alas', cries the speaker, 'as well as other princes, we / (Who prince enough in one another be) / Must leave at last in death these eyes and tears' (13-15). Donne's great fear of separation pertains not only to the division of his body and soul which death entails—for, 'When bodies to their graves, souls from their graves remove' (20)—but to the 'divorce' which 'death' forces upon the lovers, ending their union and consigning them to separate graves (12). The abhorrence for parting is what makes the prospect of a resurrection the more appealing to Donne, a point which Targoff has made convincingly (6). Donne, therefore, wishing to bridge the fissure which death opens between the speaker and the beloved, alludes to their reunion in heaven. He temporarily imagines the continuity of their love via the rapture of their souls to paradise where they will enjoy 'a love increasèd, there above', presumably by virtue of their moral perfection there (19). In this way, the lovers may enjoy union in this life and the next.

The final stanza would seem to continue this line of optimism by beginning, 'And then we shall be thoroughly blessed,' but adds the somewhat troubling phrase, 'But we no more than all the rest', thus asserting that romantic love does not abide beyond the grave, even if

[15] Robbin Robbins points out that 'two graves' would indicate the couple is not married, further potential evidence that the poem was probably written by Donne to Anne during their courtship (128).

the lovers will share in the same fellowship as other resurrected souls (21-22). And yet, in his remaining eight lines the speaker will not give up the tone of joy and satisfaction in their mutual love, notwithstanding its ephemeral nature: 'Here upon earth, we're kings, and none but we / Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be' (23-24). There is an essential goodness to the relationship between the lovers so that, though it cannot transcend this 'earth', yet it is wholly worth their devotion to one another as long as they draw breath, just as the speaker exhorts the beloved in the final lines: 'Let us love nobly and live, and add again / Years and years unto years, till we attain / To write threescore. This is the second of our reign' (28-29). The reason is that all the grandeur of the world is found in the unity of their relationship. The repeated monarchic diction—'kings', 'nobly', 'reign'—emphasises the splendour, bliss and supremacy of their love. It also carries the general idea of the poem: that the lovers' relationship is beyond the purview of the sovereignty of kings, their own kingship in one another being all that is of import. Imaginatively, the speaker reduces the world to the love between himself and the woman: 'Who is so safe as we? Where none can do / Treason to us, except one of us two' (25-26). Their mutual fidelity and unity are thus a shield against treachery of the world, an orderly refuge from the ununiform dealings of humankind. The final consolation, then, is that though their relationship will not outlast the sepulchre in any unique or romantic sense, it may live gloriously by earthly standards. Donne thus replaces the hyperbolic assertions about the eternity of the utter set-apartness of the lovers which commenced the poem with a more realistic expectation of the security and satisfaction of romance within a temporal frame, the key point being, plainly put, that when in love, nothing else matters in the world except the two who are of one will and mind.

Some commentators find Donne's odd shifts of argument to be perplexing. They deem Donne's bold assertion and subsequent retraction of the endurance of romantic love to be a problematic element which undercuts the value of what Donne wishes to celebrate. John Carey, for example, claims the poem primarily voices Donne's anxiety and doubt about death. According to Carey, Donne 'pitted love's kings against unkinging death, so that the poem's certitude should be tempered by doubt, its ambition by anxiety' (112). I see no anxiety in this poem. On the contrary, I hold that Donne speaks only in accord with the certainty of his metaphysical principles, simultaneously celebrating romantic love and acknowledging its inevitable brevity in accordance with the tenets of his religion. He is a realist. He once preached a wedding sermon—perhaps to the chagrin of the congregants—on the words of Jesus: 'For, in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the

angels of God in heaven' (Matt. 22:30; *Sermons* 8: 95). The special love between the sexes is momentary, and Donne will not ultimately pretend otherwise. What this tells us is that for all his embellished peregrinations of feeling, Donne is serious about the core of his ideas. His poetry flows out of his deeply held metaphysical principles. I concur with Targoff, who writes, 'There is no early modern poet for whom theology and philosophy were more important to the creative process, and we do Donne a disservice when we fail to recognize how much his learning penetrated his writing' (6). The fleetingness of amorous relations, the hoped-for threescore years, is not a cause for mourning in this poem, as its momentariness is part of the divine design. Rather, in 'The Anniversary' Donne shows us the draw of mutual, intimate relationship, and its superiority over all other aspects of human experience, by making the lovers their own world and kingdom on earth.

Two other poems which exhibit the same theme in similar terms are 'The Good-morrow' and 'The Sun Rising'. 'The Sun Rising', which for its defensive stance Marotti places sometime shortly after the revelation of Donne's scandalous marriage, when he lived 'in virtual social exile in the country' at the residence of a friend at Pyrford (156), is another poem about the pre-eminence of the private world of love over the raucous public sphere. The reference to 'the King' and his 'Court-huntsmen' is a possible allusion to the newly crowned James I (1603-1625) who had a known fondness for wild game, which makes the aforementioned dating highly plausible (7). The argument, addressed to the sun, is that the relationship between the lovers is as great as all the world. Like 'The Anniversary', it is composed of three stanzas of ten lines each. Numbers hold symbolic significance for Donne, three being the number of the persons in the Trinity, and ten being the number of circularity and eternity, a trait which renders it divine since 'God is a circle himself' as Donne preaches in a Christmas sermon (6: 175; pointed out by Robbin Robbins 158, 580).[16] The number of stanzas and the lines therein point to the circular wholeness and completion which Donne sees as the fulfilment of the love relationship. The choice of three stanzas alludes to inter-relational personhood of the Godhead which human beings mirror in their own social interaction, and ten lines point to the supreme perfection of such relations. In its form, the poem reflects the internal unity of the Deity applied to the loving union between human beings.

Like 'The Anniversary', the poem undergoes a change of argument between the first and second stanza. Shifts in argument are not at all atypical for Donne. It is a tactic which

[16] This is because 'all its powers, 10^2, 10^3, etc., [start] with itself' (Robbins 158).

gives his poems energy and a sense of movement. The demand in the first stanza is that the sun cease bothering the couple. Irritatingly, the sun calls the lovers to duty through ushering in the new day with his piercing beams, and therefore the speaker rebukes him: 'Busy old fool, unruly Sun, / Why dost thou thus / Through windows and through curtains call on us?' (1-3). The speaker grounds his chiding remonstration in his claim that 'Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime, / Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time' (9-10). The idea is that couple's mutual love is cloistered in its own world and is not obliged to follow the dictates even of time.

In the second and third stanza, however, the speaker makes a different argument, albeit with the same confidence in the absoluteness of the lover's relationship. The speaker proceeds to boast that the sun's 'beams so reverend and strong' are not so, for the speaker 'could eclipse and cloud them with a wink, / But that I would not lose her sight so long' (11, 13-14). There is an awareness in the speaker in the very change of argument that he does not possess the power of which he boasts. He cannot stop the sun from rising, so he asserts that it is his will that the sun rise. Now he wishes the sun to remain to shine upon his paramour, and the sun may do so with good conscience because, as the poem concludes, 'To warm the world, that's done in warming us. / Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere: / This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere' (28-30). 'The world's contracted thus' in the couple (26), but Donne is here only thinking of all that is valuable and noble in the world, the 'India's of spice and mine', 'Kings', 'all states, and all princes', 'all honour… all wealth' (17, 19, 21, 24). The speaker thus justifies his rejection of worldly ambition and pleasures, as the entire world can supposedly be found in the relationship of the lovers.

Marotti sees the triumphalism of the poem and its bold claims for the self-sufficiency and omnipotence of the speaker's love as imaginative compensation for Donne's real loss of prospects and wealth following his disastrous marriage (156). Certainly, there is a defiant defensiveness which the poem never shakes off and which permeates the hyperbolic epitomising. That is not to suggest that Donne cannot see through the irony of his exaggerations. The speaker's inability to shut out the sun is one clue that Donne recognises the presumptuousness of grandiose statements that the couple is the whole world and 'Nothing else is. / Princes do but play us: compared to this, / All honour's mimic, all wealth alchemy' (22-24). But the poem does evince where Donne found lasting value irrespective of circumstances—in the love relationship. One should not imagine in this case that the truth to which poetic hyperbole points is found in a polar opposite proposition; it is an emphatic

device which magnifies rather than reverses the poet's claim. The irony that the shunned couple who possess each other and nothing else should contain all the riches of the known world is perhaps a playful, self-deprecating nod to the deprivation of their ostracised reality, the humorous recognition of which attenuates some of the gloom of material loss. Yet even if, in reality, romance is not all that matters, it is deeply fulfilling, being something which cannot be removed as long as both persons choose to find in the other true nobility. In this way, 'The Sun Rising' also displays the poet's tendency to make all things one, to which love is inextricably related: 'Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday, / And thou shalt hear, "All here in one bed lay"' (19-20). The lovers' unity brings together all the best parts of the world because love is the greatest thing in the world, something which must be felt the more keenly by a man who, materially speaking, had nothing else of which to boast.

'The Good Morrow' makes a similar claim, and we need not dwell on it except to notice some of its difference. Likely also written in the context of his courtship and marriage to Ann More, the poem plays with the same conceit of the lovers being the world to each other. Marotti says it is 'the most famous example of Donne's depiction of the microcosm of love' (143). The central metaphor of this poem is of waking from a lesser life of 'childish' naiveté to a world of mature joy found in the new relationship of mutual love (3). Until the lovers found one another they 'slumbered' ignorantly as infants, oblivious to the true pleasures which awaited them in the waking world of one another's affection (4). Donne again renounces the world for the all-sufficient embrace of his beloved. Love 'makes a little room an everywhere' (11), says the speaker, 'Let sea-discov'rers to new worlds have gone; / Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown; / Let us possess our world: each hath one, and is one' (11, 12-14).

While the poem emphasises the contraction of the world in the microcosm of the lovers, it also lays stress upon their difference, which is another facet of Donne's concept of unity. The lovers are perfectly reflected to one another in their eyes, at once standing apart from and being in the other person: 'My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears' (15). That is a poetic image of the ideal of distinction within union also found in 'A Valediction: Of my Name in the Window', where the 'palimpsestic icon of intimacy', the reflective glass on which the speaker's name is etched, simultaneously permits the mistress to see herself and the speaker (Sperry 57). Targoff remarks that although Donne seeks to join himself with his lover, he also has 'an overarching desire to maintain his personal integrity' (65). We witness this again in 'The Good Morrow', as the lovers together are said to comprise

‘two…hemispheres’, that is, two distinct parts which constitute a whole globe (17). In the final lines the speaker warns that, ‘What ever dies, is not mixed equally’, and therefore calls them both to make their individual ‘loves…one’, but the foregoing images obviate the idea that he desired to totally lose his identity for the sake of union (19-20). The couple’s oneness is predicated both upon their individuality and their mutual desire to amalgamate.

‘The Good Morrow’ is likely remembered and loved because of the gentler tone it takes in addressing the woman. It does not take on the restive posture of ‘Sun Rising’ nor deal seriously with the prospect of morbidity as ‘The Anniversary’, and the numerical structure of the poem reflects this. I shall address more fully at a later point the interest in the symbolism of numbers which Donne shared with other Renaissance thinkers, but I will press the point here that Donne was acquainted with the ancient idea, espoused since at least ‘Antiquity and… the early Church Fathers’, as Maren-Sofie Røstvig tells us, that art, not least poetry, ‘can convey a hidden sense through the proportions imposed on the chief structural units’ (112, 4). The idea originates in Pythagorean and Platonic cosmology, later appropriated by the church, according to which ‘arithmetical proportions’ undergird the structure of the universe and ‘all sciences, including that of music’ (Røstvig 6, 7). Christians who applied the theory to the arts understood themselves to be ‘imitating God by creating according to a preconceived numerical pattern’ (6). Poets in particular might consider how the numerical constitution of a poem, the number of its stanzas, lines, syllables, rhymes, etc., could carry ‘a symbolism very much in keeping with the contents’ (27). I do acknowledge the danger of speculation inherent in this kind of numerical approach to verse, since one might read into a poem details which are only fortuitous. Røstvig prefaces her own analysis of Milton, Chapman, Spenser and Henry More by saying, ‘the long arm of coincidence cannot be quite ruled out. I can think of no other topic where a scholar may trip himself up more thoroughly or get more completely lost in the mazy wilderness of pure conjecture’ (17). On the other hand, the frequency with which Donne speaks of symbolic numeracy in his sermons, the small handful of his poems such as ‘The Primrose’ which overtly play with a deeper meaning of numerical figures, and the reality that Donne read the Renaissance’s primary proponents of the science of numbers, Pico and Giorgio (Røstvig 28), ought to prevent us from being remiss about the precise numeric composition of his poems. In any case, my argument is not primarily dependent on this more cryptic interpretation of the poetry, but on its contents. The presence of numerical allegory only lends further weight to what the poet actually says.

Structurally, ‘The Good Morrow’ is only slightly different than the previous two poems in that it is composed of three stanzas with *seven* lines each rather then ten. Seven is a significant biblical figure, the seventh day being the day on which God rested from his creation, the day of sabbath-rest; it is also the figure of holiness and perfection—God’s word is ‘as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times’ (Ps. 12:6)—and of the Holy Spirit (Rev. 1:4). The figure also stands for infinity. In several of his sermons Donne proclaims, that ‘seven is infinite’ (5: 271; 7: 411). It is for the symbolic resonance of divine rest, completion and endlessness that Donne likely chooses to compose his stanzas with seven lines each. The connotations which the numbers shadow forth suit the tone of ‘The Good Morrow’, which is not nearly as concerned with the urgency of temporality, the absence of which contributes to the atmosphere of quietness and satisfaction that saturates the poem. Specifically, it is satisfaction in the security of fully reciprocated love, as the poet emphasises in the final lines, permitting himself to indulge in the notion of love’s deathlessness to drive home the need for perfect reciprocity: ‘If both our loves be one, or thou and I / Love just alike in all, none of these loves can die’ (20-21). There is ever a concern in Donne that love be of the same calibre and force from both parties and a belief that, once achieved, it yields lasting union and peace. The symmetry of desire constitutes the unity of couple which outlasts the deterioration of the physical world, as they become their own world. Their love not only makes them one but shrinks vast reality and subsumes it within their union.

Infinite Love

The poems heretofore surveyed emphasise the unity found in the condensation of the world in the lovers and in the reciprocity of love, a reciprocity which Donne underlines by imagining that the amorous couple are literally worlds unto each other. It is a small matter if the world rejects them, or if they have no station in it, because the greatest thing in the world is loving and receiving the love of the beloved. There is another variety of love poem that highlights a different aspect of Donne’s thinking on the unity of intimate relationship. These poems reveal some of Donne’s fascination with infiniteness as it is applied to amorous relations. Donne is an ‘all’ or ‘nothing’ poet. These two words summarise a good deal of his verse. I attribute his proclivity to frame a feeling or thought in these terms in part to his desire to write with intensity. When he feels at his lowest, as upon the bereavement of the beloved, he writes of being a ‘nothing’, a non-creation (‘A Nocturnal on St. Lucy’s Day’ 22). When he feels most ecstatic, as he is when in love, he writes of possessing and being ‘all’, as the previous three poems illustrate. ‘She’s all states, and all princes I; / Nothing else is’, he cries in ‘The Sun Rising’ (21-22). The other explanation for favouring these terms is that they

contract everything into one; both annihilation and totality are singularities which appeal to the poet's desire for unity. Donne, Carey notes, had a 'need to imagine absolutes and infinites, which surmounted his own fragmented being' (240).

The problem for the poet is whether one can ever have all if 'all' is always expanding, and therefore related to the dichotomy of all and nothing is Donne's penchant for playing with the infinite. Infinitude is an appealing prospect for Donne because it prohibits disunity. As he writes in an epithalamion, 'separation / Falls not on such things as are infinite' ('On the Lady Elizabeth and Frederick, Count Palatine' 47-48). Paradoxically, infinity is an all-encompassing unity which at once contains everything and continuously arrogates to itself its growing immensity. It thus satisfies Donne's need to singularise, and his need to experience increasing levels of lived intensity. It clearly connects to the mystery of divinity, in that Donne considers the Deity to be infinite, and that like triunity, infinity is another paradox within the nature of God which the mind can imagine but not fully grasp. In 'Love's Infiniteness', 'Love's Growth', and 'A Lecture upon a Shadow' Donne imagines the experience of loving union stretching out to infinity. The central conundrum of these poems is whether 'love can be constant and yet grow', as Guibbory (85) puts it. Guibbory argues that Donne's attraction to the notion of infinity reveals his 'persistent desire to have everything, to experience an ever-increasing "joy" and fulfilment' (Guibbory 86). I am arguing that it is specifically infinitely expanding 'joy and fulfilment' on the relational plane that Donne is after. He wants what he ascribes to Elizabeth Drury in the *Second Anniversary*: 'She, who by making full perfection grow, / Pieces a circle, and still keeps it so', which is the impossibility of increasing perfection whilst keeping it as it was (507-508). If Donne can figure out how to conceptualise infinite love, he can ensure indivisible union which never grows outworn.

'Love's Infiniteness' (which Robbins retitles 'Love's All', believing it to be a more apt description of the poem) is another lyric divided in three stanzas, each one taking a different line of argument with the mistress to ensure her affection to him. The first stanza asserts that the woman's affection to him must be total, because he himself spares nothing, nor has anything left to give to earn more of her love. He is desirous of full reciprocity and fears lest she fail to fulfil her part of 'the bargain' (8). It is unsurprising that Donne frames the issue in contractual terms. Donne trained to be a lawyer in his days at Lincoln's Inn in the 1590s, although he never practiced law nor expressed any serious desire to do so. The Inns of Court where Donne studied contained a great many gentlemen, Donne among them, who saw legal work as below their status, attending merely to establish personal connections or to

pursue assorted intellectual interests, which John Stubbs notes (38). Though Donne rejected a juridical career as beneath him, the legal jargon of his education nonetheless pervades much of his verse. Moreover, not only did he pick up the lingo, but his argumentative style and his 'way of often expressing things in the most farfetched manner conceivable' reflect the students' practice of '[s]howing one's ingenuity in the handling of a case', of mock-trials and oral defences staged before professors and fellow students (Stubbs 37). In his poetry as much as in legal training, Donne attempts to see every angle of an idea, examining a topic through change in metaphor or argument. The varying perspectives from which he approaches a subject—positing and then retracting his own statements—suggest the value of playfulness and amusement which Donne perceived poetry offers, but it also indicates a more serious attraction to complexity and nuance befitting a learned man of letters whose desired to think with precision as well as grace.

In the first stanza of 'Love's Infiniteness', then, the speaker makes the case that, 'If yet I have not all thy love, / Dear, I shall never have it all' because he has done everything he can to kindle it (1-2). He claims he has emptied his treasury of '[s]ighs, tears, oaths, letters', and worries whether she meant it when she pledged him all her love, having no more resources to win the rest if she deems what he has offered insufficient (6). In the second stanza, he considers the love-contract from another perspective: 'Or if then thou gav'st me all, / All was but all which thou had'st then' (12-13). Now he doubts not whether she was truthful when she first pledged her love to him, but whether 'in thy heart since, there be or shall / New love created be by other men' (14-15). This possibility momentarily unsettles him until he soundly refutes it on the legal grounds that her gift of love to him was 'general' (20), which Robbins glosses as 'without specific exception' (210). For the poem's speaker this means he is entitled to whatever is in her heart, since this is what she legally pledged to him: 'The ground, thy heart, is mine: whatever shall / Grow there, dear, I should have it all' (22-23).

However, in the final stanza the speaker confidently overturns the previous two expressions of fear that the woman has not given him her whole heart and that she may since have given it to other suitors. He asserts in another twist, 'Yet I would not have all yet', seeing that

> He that hath all can have no more,
>
> And since my love doth every day admit
>
> New growth, thou shouldst have new rewards in store.

Thou canst not every day give me thy heart:

If thou canst give it, then thou never gav'st it:

Love's riddles are that, though thy heart depart,

It stays at home, and thou with losing sav'st it.

But we will have a way more liberal

Than changing hearts: to join them; so we shall

Be one, and one another's all. (23-33)

In an unexpected turn, Donne's speaker claims he does not desire all the woman's love, not because he does not want her love, but because he wants more (lines 23-24). This is reminiscent of his assertion in his *Ecologue*, 'Let no man think, because he is full he hath all' ('On the Marriage of the Earl of Somerset' 43). It is an issue of a finite 'capacity' which must be 'englarg[ed] to make 'narrow men to feel and see' (44). In the same way, the speaker of 'Love's Infiniteness' is discontent to think that the current levels of love are all he will know. He feels his love grow by the day and expects that the woman's will expand correspondingly (25-26). In this way, Donne dovetails his speculation on the possibility of infinity with his fantasy of ever-increasing felicity and passion between two individuals.

Echoing the words of Christ that 'whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it', Donne assures the beloved paradoxically that giving away her heart is the only way to keep it, a characteristically Donnean reminder that love consists of giving in order to receive (lines 27-30; Matt. 16:25). Yet even this is an unsatisfactory concluding note for the poet. '[C]hanging hearts', which so far has been the entire premise of the poem, is not the way to pursue love to its fullest. No, the lovers must rather 'join' hearts so that the two do not merely possess the other, but become one another, and so are made 'one, and one another's all' (32, 33). The speaker pronounces joining hearts 'a way more liberal' (31). This is a more apposite metaphor to convey the intensity of mutual affection than exchanging because it is intuitively a more generous and unrestrained dedication to tie the whole of oneself to the other person than merely to give up a piece (Robbins 211). The conceit is consonant with the rest of the stanza, the overriding concern of which is that love must be totally reciprocal in order to be totally satisfying and lasting, but 'to join hearts' rephrases the issue slightly to underline that it is the total commitment and oneness of the lovers which finally attains the growing 'all'

which has evaded the speaker. Infiniteness—that elusive concept—is the fruit of wholehearted, unreserved devotion between two people who consequently become one.

'Love's Growth' (which Robbins retitles 'Spring') similarly tackles the issue of the possibility of love's perpetual increase. The point which it makes is that unity between persons does not preclude new extensions, rather, perfect unity entails them. Donne begins:

I scarce believe my love to be so pure

As I had thought it was,

Because it doth endure

Vicissitude and season as the grass;

Methinks I lied all Winter, when I swore

My love was infinite, if Spring make't more. (1-6)

In these opening lines the speaker suggests that perhaps his love was not 'infinite' since addition was made to it in the spring, germinating as much as vegetation after the dormancy of winter. The introduction is playful. A few clever changes of meaning in the space between lines necessitate that one read to the end of the segment before Donne's purpose is clear. First his love is not 'so pure'. Sanguinely, he next states that his love 'doth endure', but this becomes 'doth endure / vicissitude', the opposite of enduring. Then, what begins as another confession of moral failure, namely, that he 'lied all Winter' that his 'love was infinite'—implying his love has died off—becomes a virtue when at the last word he indicates his love has actually increased, the change of season making it 'more'. This is perhaps a pun on his wife's maiden name, but more importantly it introduces what Donne sees as the dizzying philosophical problem of whether perfection can admit addition to itself. Wilbur Sanders calls the lines 'richly anti-climatic' in their enjambed turnarounds (32), but the light-hearted tone does not veil Donne's sincere search for an adequate theory and expression of amorous relations. The enjambment of lines three and four and the addition of crucial words enact the 'additions' which love allows and mirror the unpredictable yet incessant growth of the vegetable world (22).

In the second and final stanza Donne gives his answer to the question of perfection and infinity by elucidating what he means by increase of love. It is not an increase by the addition of that which is a foreign body, so to speak, but of an organic growth out of the main organism of love, so that the speaker may justly say that he loved perfectly in the winter

whilst still admitting new heights in the spring: ‘Gentle love-deeds, as blossoms on a bough, / From love’s awakened root do bud out now’ (19-20). The substance of the love was there before in root form, making it constant, unchanged, and yet able to bloom in ever-new expressions. Donne then employs two other analogies: ‘If as in water stirred more circles be / Produced by one, love such additions take; / Those, like to many spheres, but one heaven make’ (21-23). The idea is the same in both figures: growth does not preclude unity and vice versa, as new layers are only ‘concentric unto’ a first cause (24). Likewise, the speaker imagines that new levels of passion can arise from one original singularity, and thus the poet weds compact unity and vast infinity. Donne overcomes fears of stagnation and disunity with an infinitely increasing unity which ushers fresh growth conforming to the greater whole.

Donne envisions something similar in his *Second Anniversary* when he writes of heaven’s joy that ‘This kind of joy doth every day admit / Degrees of growth but losing none of it’ (495-96). It is unfathomable to the mind that love and joy could increase *ad infinitum* while never wanting in course of their expansion, but Donne would like to stretch the imagination in order to convey the supreme satisfaction he believes and feels is found in the mutual affection of two persons. Cheekily, but fondly, he concludes ‘Love’s Growth’ with a political parallel to convey his optimism in the perennial intensity of his love: ‘As princes do in times of action get / New taxes, and remit them not in peace— / No winter shall abate the spring’s increase’ (26-28). Consummate love does not preclude its growth, in fact it necessitates it, being consummate at any given moment though always capable of increased zeal and joy.

A final poem which showcases Donne’s preoccupation with the intersection of love and infinity is ‘A Lecture Upon the Shadow’. It is ‘less buoyantly optimistic than the other lyrics concerning love’s development’, as Marotti observes, though the philosophy of fully committed, mutual devotion as the substance and prerequisite of loving union is the same (147-148). The speaker addresses the woman directly, exhorting her as well as himself to keep up the intensity of their dedication to one another, lest their ‘love decay’ (24). The running metaphor of the poem is that love is a twenty-four hour day which must struggle against the natural decline of time: ‘Love is a growing or full constant light, / And his first minute after noon is night’ (25-26). The shadows of secrecy and deceit work against the purity of reciprocal affection, and therefore the lovers must be true to each other, each keeping their love at perfect ‘noon’ in the plain light of mutual honesty, devotion and agreement when ‘to brave clearness all things are reduced’ (8). Some of the typical Donnean

motifs are here: the decay of time, daybreak and nightfall, faithfulness and falseness in love, the previous 'infant' immaturity of less-than-perfect love, even the image of the sun (9). What marks this lyric as different from the previous love poems is the underlying fear that the endurance of romance is not assured, even if it is evidently desired. In its fulness, love is infinite day, 'But oh, love's day is short if love decay!' says the Donne in the twenty-fourth line, thus highlighting the conceit of romance as a twenty-four hour burst, and emphasising artistically his consciousness of time and hence the urgency, and fear, of a potentially shortened mutual passion.

The poem makes clear the necessity of shared commitment in love, but expresses concern when the speaker states, 'Love is a growing or full constant light' (25). As the previous two poems expressed, love ideally grows and remains constant. Here, Donne evinces hesitation of simultaneous growth and constancy by use of the possibly mutual exclusive 'or', and by the subsequent line which portends the 'night' that will follow 'noon' should their love slacken (26). Secrecy threatens mutual passion, for if, 'To me thou falsely thine, / And I to thee mine actions shall disguise' then shadows will once again eclipse love's day (20-21). Thus, a shroud of worry hangs over the possibility of love's infinitude. Its infinity, the poem suggests, is contingent upon candour, or *integrity*, which is literally oneness of person. The forswearing of imposture and double-mindedness, as much as reciprocal fervour, is a prerequisite for lasting unity between lovers. The individual must be one collected person if he or she is to achieve similar union with the beloved, and both must agree upon this principle. Love's infinity holds forth the promise of indissoluble yet expanding union, but it is an ideal well-nigh impossible to sustain because of human foibles, the divisions and irregularities in one's being.

Inexpressible Love

I shall examine a third set of poems to tease out a different angle of Donne's view of amorous mutuality. What connects these poems, in my view, is the way they reveal the impotence of theory and human expression to capture the essence of romantic love. The infinite and the inexpressible are both facets of Donne's belief in God, as Cruickshank notes: 'Donne puts God outside the linguistic system of correspondence between sign and signified. The semiotics of nomenclature fail to accommodate knowledge of God, which can only be apprehended wholly and indirectly' (49). We see this in a poem commending the metrical translation of the Psalms by Philip Sidney and his sister the Countess of Pembroke. There,

Donne conveys his humility at the inadequacy of human language and thought when he exclaims:

> Eternal God (for whom whoever dare
>
> Seek new expressions, do the circle square,
>
> And thrust into strait corners of poor wit
>
> Thee who art cornerless and infinite),
>
> I would but bless thy name, not name thee now;
>
> (And thy gifts are as infinite as thou). ('Upon the Translation of the Psalms' 1-6)

Cruickshank comments that Donne recognises analogy as a conventional way to gesture to what God is, but that even these are 'bootless': 'The physical improbabilities inherent in the [circle] analogy are themselves illustrative of the impossibility of defining God' (48). Rather than analogize, Donne, therefore, frequently turns to the trope of inexpression to communicate what he maintains cannot be imagined. One of God's 'infinite' 'gifts' is human love, and therefore Donne justifies applying the same idea of speechlessness to romance as he does to God. Nonetheless, Donne approaches as near a comprehension of love as he can, and it is always with the assumption that love is something magnificent, reciprocal, and unifying.

The poem 'Air and Angels' is an exercise in the metaphysics of love. As with most of Donne's poetic philosophising, the ideas and illustrations are not native to Donne, but borrowed from avid reading habits. In this case, the conceits are plucked from Neoplatonist renaissance theories of love and scholastic arguments about angels (Robbins 123; Smith, 'New Bearings in Donne' 177; *John Donne* 353-354). A.J. Smith writes perceptively that it is not the 'novelty of its attitude or insights that makes the poem worthwhile. They are stock—there is no direct enlargement of perception or addition to knowledge' ('New Bearings' 178). What is striking about the poem, Smith continues, is rather

> [t]he clean precision and intermittent splendour of the diction; the subtle modulations of its rhythms and phrasing, ripe for musical setting; its controlled mastery of expression, so complete that the intricate stanza-pattern appears to reproduce the exact structure of the complex idea—there is a fineness, a pungent elegance about all this, that holds the imagination like good fugue. ('New Bearings' 178)

In a sense, this is merely to acknowledge that it is poetry and not a prose dissertation, but it does lay out what Donne valued in literary art: beauty, feeling, and power. For Donne, poetry is a rhetorical tour-de-force that overwhelms the addressee with the potency of its exquisite composition. The argumentation of 'Air and Angels' may not stand up to scrutiny, but its vagueness underlines the transcendent, incomprehensible idea that lovers become one through reciprocal affection while retaining individual distinction.

In straightforward terms, the poem is about a man who comes to understand that he needs the woman to love him in return, her love for him being the only true 'sphere' in which his love can move as neither her body nor her mind will serve as adequate centres for the full might of his concentration and affection (line 25). The necessary mutuality of their desire for one another is the poem's chief theme and the conclusion towards which it works. The speaker's back-and-forth argumentation underlines the elusiveness of understanding the experience of love and the subtlety required to express some of its feeling. In the first stanza, the speaker contemplates the dissatisfaction of mere ethereal love, even though the woman is compared to 'angels' because of her supposed ability to 'affect' him invisibly before he has met her, which is Donne's attempt to express the platonic sense of having loved someone for a lifetime one no longer remembers (4). When he tells the woman, 'Twice or thrice had I loved thee / Before I knew thy face or name', he also flatteringly conveys the sense that she was destined to be the unique receptacle of his love (1-2). Yet he swiftly abandons the angelic analogy because he is not content to court 'Some lovely glorious nothing' (6). Since his 'soul, whose child Love is, / Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do,' it follows that 'More subtle than the parent is / Love must not be, but take a body too', a familiar note on the essential corporeal dimension of love, the dual necessity of body and soul (7-8, 9-10). So it is best if the woman is not like an angel after all.

But in the second half of the poem, the speaker relates that he also discovered the woman's physical beauty to be an improper assignment of his love: 'I saw, I had Love's pinnace overfraught: / Ev'ry thy hair for Love to work upon / Is much too much: some fitter must be sought' (18-20). Courteously, the speaker explains that the woman is too beautiful for him to focus his love only on her body. A third option must open itself, the speaker having exhausted both the spiritual and physical outlets, 'For nor in nothing nor in things / Extreme and scatt'ring bright can Love inhere' (21-22). He thus returns to the angelic analogue, claiming: 'Then, as an angel face and wings / Of air, not pure as it, yet pure, doth wear, / So thy love may be my love's sphere' (22-24). Her love for him is like his love yet distinct, just

as, according to Thomas Aquinas' theory, angels 'assum[e] bodies made of air sufficiently condensed by divine power' (Robbins 125). United but separate is Donne's philosophy of relationality. Two persons who are one, and one which is two. As Targoff writes, Donne 'regards the individual lovers in their ideal state of union as essential to each other's existence *and* as inherently distinct' (51). Donne says the same in 'The Storm', a verse letter written to his friend Christopher Brook whilst on a naval campaign against the Spanish in 1597: 'Thou which art I—'tis nothing to be so: / Thou which art still thyself' (1-2). It is his view of the trinity, three distinct persons who constitute one God. And it is the essence of this poem, that the man and woman's love, similar though different like an angel and its aery cloak, form one complementary unit. I do not take Donne concluding triple-rhyming lines, 'Just such disparity / As is 'twixt air and angels' purity / 'Twixt women's love and men's will ever be' to be intentionally disparaging toward women on Donne's part. The point does not appear to be that women's love is a little less pure, being the air to the angel. Rather, it is the language of complement and distinction, of matching actives with passives, derived from Renaissance love theorists, as well as from biblical passages (Smith 'New Bearings', 177; Marotti 221). For example, in another love lyric, 'Love's Deity,' Donne tells us it was once Love's 'office' to match 'Actives to passives; correspondency / Only his subject was: it cannot be / Love, till I love her that loves me' (11, 12-14). For love to be realised, the poet believes two persons must equally desire and fit one another, for which reason they must also be different, distinct.

As Carey observes more generally of Donne's inclination toward angels in his poetry, 'He uses their divine mysteriousness to adumbrate mysteries in human love…. Research into the divine enlightens Donne's vision of the human' (42). Though the poet's vision of the balance of mutuality is a fairly precise definition of the proper end of love, there is an intangible cloud of vagueness which envelops the atmosphere of the poem, hinted at in the line, 'So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame, / Angels affect us oft, and worshipped be' (2-3). There is a curiousness to the angelic simile that Donne uses to elevate human love, for that elevation entails a somewhat nebulous perception of the thing compared. Likewise, Donne's conclusion that the suitable domain of the man's love should be the woman's love is not as lucid a concept as loving the mind or loving the body, the typical dichotomy on which so much of Donne's verse turns. The main point is clear—that love must be reciprocated, consisting neither of mind nor body in isolation—but how Donne arrives at this point is less so. His argument relies, apparently arbitrarily, on scholastic angel lore and analogies to the relationship of body and soul. In short, Donne argues by comparison without questioning

whether his analogies hold water in the real world. It is for this reason I think the poem aims not so much to provide a credible defence of his philosophy of love as to champion the power of mutuality through the fineness of his writing and the clever connotations of his similes. 'Donne's use of Aquinas here enhances the seriousness of the poem', writes Carey (42). The magnitude of mutual relationship is beyond the exactness of expression or theory, a feeling which the otherworldly undertones of the poet's source material enhance but cannot pinpoint.

'Negative Love' is a poem which shares with 'Air and Angels' its scholastic speculation to probe the ontology of human love. It commences in much the same way as the previous—by disavowing the love of the body and of the mind as adequate vehicles for the speaker's affection:

> I never stooped so low as they
>
> Which on an eye, cheek, lip, can prey;
>
> Seldom to them which soar no higher
>
> Than virtue or the mind t'admire (1-4)

The lines contain overt resonances of 'Air and Angels', noticeably the monosyllabic list of body parts where the speaker says his love attaches itself to the woman's 'lip, eye, and brow' ('Air and Angels' 14). But 'Negative Love' sums up briefly what took the majority of the previous poem to express: love does not inhere purely in either the body or the soul. Furthermore, its metre is the shorter tetrameter rather than the (unreliable) pentameter of the previous poem, and the poem is ten lines shorter. The poem in its form and matter, therefore, is direct and brief, which matches the poet's loathness to abide the nonsense of those who simplistically dote on the mind or the body of the mistress.

Instead, the speaker prefers to conceive of his love as that which is inexpressible and mysterious. He therefore resorts to defining his love by negatives, that is, by what it is not: 'If that be simply perfectest / Which can by no way be expressed / But negatives, mine is so' (10-12). This was the approach of some theologians, notably Aquinas, in their attempt to imagine the divine. Hence, as Robbins illuminates, God is 'infinite, immutable, immortal, invisible, incomparable, ineffable, unknowable, impassible, indivisible, indeterminate, unorginate (224). Applying deific terminology to the realm of human love, Donne elevates love and proves again his dissatisfaction with mundane and conventional expression. And it is not bizarre to speak of love in theological terms, given that for Donne, 'God is love' (*Sermons* 6:

170). Donne values what is full and intense; only the absolute will suffice to convey his sense of love's power, especially since love is a divine origination. In keeping with the terseness of the form, he does not elucidate negative love any further except to tell us that, 'This / As yet my ease and comfort is, / Though I speed not, I cannot miss' (17-18). In other words, not knowing love's substance is better than erroneously settling for something less, just as categorizing the Deity too specifically in positive terms threatens heresy. Though the poet approaches the undefinable with language, he acknowledges language's inadequacy. Yet in doing so he points to the wonder, gravity and greatness of the thing deferred—in this case, love itself. By postponing the act of delineating love, Donne preserves the purity of its wholeness, or oneness.

Donne's displays his fondness for mingling the religious and the romantic again in 'The Relic'. The poem is best known for that alliterative and arresting line, 'A bracelet of bright hair about the bone' (6), referring to the love token which once belonged to the mistress of the deceased speaker. Because of Donne's firm belief in corporeal resurrection, in which the atomised pieces of the body are recollected and recomposed on the day of Christ's return, he imagines the strand of hair as a 'device [which] might be some way / To make [the lovers'] souls at the last, busy day, / Meet at this grave, and make a little stay' before entering eternity (9-11).[17] As well as evidencing the spectre of death and prospect of unifying resurrection which permeate so much of Donne's poetry, the lyric demonstrates the way in which Donne turned to the language of inexpression to communicate the greatness and indivisibility of mutual love.

The premise of the poem is that future generations will idolatrously look to the exhumed remains of the lovers, who were marvels of love in their time, as relics. The poem itself is putatively the 'paper' which documents 'What miracles we harmless lovers wrought' (21, 22). In framing the relic-making of the lovers as 'mis-devotion', Donne distances himself from the Catholic faith of his younger years (13), but he also more seriously enshrouds the experience of love with a mystic aura. Carey writes that, 'If we were to try and explain the poems in terms of Donne's psychology we might say that his rejection of Catholic superstition (relics, miracles) had left his hunger for holiness without a focus, so he invents a version of human love elevated enough to satisfy it. Love fills the crater left by apostasy' (45). On the contrary, Donne may have left behind 'superstition', but a high view of human

[17] Sometimes the notion of reintigration is not eschatological, but merely figurative: 'Till my return repair / And recompact my scattered body so' ('A Valediction: Of my Name in the Window' 31-32).

love is hardly at odds with serious metaphysics, and it is certainly commensurate with a full-orbed Christianity. The remnants of the Catholic symbolism with which he clothes his philosophy of love serve to express the mysteriousness of love because of the supernatural essence which such artifacts connote.

It turns out that the 'miracles [the] harmless lovers wrought' are not of the sensational kind sought by fanatic devotees; rather, they are the subtle, inexpressible acts of bliss which flow from a state of union in love. The speaker elaborates:

> First, we loved well and faithfully,
>
> Yet knew not what we loved, nor why:
>
> Diff'rence of sex no more we knew,
>
> Than our guardian angels do;
>
> Coming and going, we
>
> Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals;
>
> Our hands ne'er touched those seals
>
> Which Nature, injured by late law, sets free.
>
> These miracles we did; but now, alas,
>
> All measure and all language I should pass,
>
> Should I tell what a miracle she was. (23-33)

The speaker indicates that the primary miracle accomplished is that the relationship between the lovers endures in spite of various ruptures: ignorance of the reason for which they loved one another, the constraints of human custom, absence of touch, and even death, percolating as it does in the minds of imagined mis-devotees. Their love surpasses the relation of man and woman, as they, like angels, do not know 'Diff'rence of sex' (25), which suggests the intimate oneness of their connection despite their physical deprivation. The statement does not annul Donne's lifelong entrancement with the necessity of the body for the completion of love. Rather, it speaks to the transcendence of their love, which is careless of their differing gender because of their unity. Donne portrays amorous affection as that which is beyond knowing or

expressing.[18] He contends that the beloved herself is beyond '[a]ll measure and all language', 'measure' intimating that even verse does not have the capacity to convey the wonder he feels when in her presence (32; Robbins 243). The purported purpose of the poem to catalogue the miracle of the unique love between the two is thus defeated by the limits of language, and as such the poem gestures toward, rather than explains the mystery of romance by employing the trope of inexpression. Donne therefore relates love to the grandeur of God by ascribing to it the same ineffable characteristic. Conceptualisation of love, like God, is diminished if not swallowed wholly, perfectly, and therefore it is better not to try to define it than it is to do so and founder.

Metaphors of Love

At other times, however, Donne does attempt indirect expressions of the unknowable. The more predominant facet of Donne's desire to seek for adequate articulation for what seems indefinable is his tendency to employ comparisons as an attempt to approach the referent itself. The concatenation of figures is one of the hallmarks of Donne's poetic style and is what Terry G. Sherwood calls, 'Donne's habitual insistence…on setting analogical comparisons…through a logic of likeness' (27). When ratiocination falls short, Donne resorts to often startling analogies to carry out his arguments. Though it is a function of Donne's wit and his desire to surprise and entertain that he shows us similarities in everything, there are deeper reasons for this practice. Guibbory observes 'Donne's drive to figure out the meaning of experience through creating "figures"' and remarks that this habit is partly explained by his belief in 'an actual, discoverable order created by God' (3, 5). Donne's analogic thinking is in part a product of his providential view of the cosmos, in which similarities in the world are not mere coincidence, but part of a divinely shaped framework. James Winny adds, 'The sense of correspondence and relationship between objects entirely different in form and species encouraged the natural impulse of the poet to discover likenesses in things apparently dissimilar and unconnected' (79). For Donne, the world is one entity, intricately woven together, in which all things are connected and interrelated because all is made by one creator. Cruickshank further explains how the belief in the unified design of the world made finding metaphors in everything natural:

[18] 'It is a Neoplatonic commonplace that perfect lovers do not know what it is they love', says Gardner ('The Argument About the Ecstasy' 252). Donne says the same in 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning': 'But we, by a love so much refined / That our selves know not what it is' (17-18). See also 'The Ecstasy' lines 31-32.

> Influenced by the residual legibility of the medieval universe... the educated early modern mind leapt naturally to analogical interpretation and tended to perceive the world in terms of this duality or complexity of meaning: everything from the natural environment to the accidents of history was capable of emplotment within a theological scheme. Figuration was part of the central mechanics of meaning-making in collective consciousness. (42)

The scholastic view is that there exists nothing which is arbitrary. Thus, one can infer that Donne's attraction to unity relates to his theological perspective on the order and unity of the *uni*verse, and that the sense of wholeness which the poet derives from connection—of persons, things, images—is of a piece with his understanding of the natural completeness of the Deity's creative design. Donne held a truly relational view of the world.

An additional explanation for Donne's metaphor-making is his desire to pattern his writing after God's own written word as revealed in the Bible, a point which Barbara Lewalski makes in her *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*. She observes that Donne legitimises his at-times excessive use of analogies in his conviction that 'the Holy Spirit is a magnificent poet' who employs 'glorious excess of figurative language, the proliferation of metaphor that pervades the texture of God's literal Word' (Lewalski 85). In Donne's own words, though God is 'a direct God', he is 'a metaphorical God too; A God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extentions, such spreadings, such curtains of Allegories, such third heavens of hyperboles' (from *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* qtd. in Lewalski 85). God himself sanctions, and encourages, the use of figures. Part of the telos of metaphor, as Donne sees it, is its power to match form and matter, just as 'The Holy Spirit chooses this method in order to represent divine things with a complexity and majesty appropriate to the subject' (Lewalski 86). As Donne puts it in a sermon, 'There is an infinite sweetnesse, and infinite latitude in every Metaphor, in every elegancy of the Scripture' (2: 130).

The basic impulse of Donne's metaphor-making is not tethered to divine subjects, however. He also seeks out resemblances to convey the profundity and mystery of mutual human relations. In 'The Canonization', Donne unleashes a flurry of metaphors to express the unity of persons in love. The poem represents the sum of the themes of the poems of reciprocal love, and it is therefore suitable to round off my analysis with a kind of epitome of what has been said before. The work is best known for its New Criticism analysis by Cleanth

Brooks titled ‘The Language of Paradox’. To summarise, Brooks aims to prove the broader principles of New Criticism in the ‘concrete case’ of Donne’s poem, particularly the unique status of poetry and poetic devices (100). The larger agenda of the essay is a defence of the literary arts against the supposed encroachments of bald science, which was a general theme among apologists for poetry in the first half of the twentieth century (Roston 3-4). Observing that ‘the language of religion’ must employ paradox to convey great concepts, such as ‘He who would save his life, must lose it’ and ‘The last shall be first’, Brooks applies the same law to poetry: ‘[A]lmost any insight important enough to warrant a great poem apparently has to be stated in such terms. Deprived of the character of paradox…the matter of Donne’s poem unravels into “facts,” biological, sociological, and economic’ (106). Brooks holds that forensic science cannot convey what poetry can because in poetry, and especially in poetic paradox, there is communicated something ethereal and mysterious which defeats reason. To say that poetry is not simply about the matter, but the manner (i.e. its ability to articulate facts beautifully) is to miss Brooks’ point. Though he does acknowledge that the idiosyncratic expression of the satisfaction and sufficiency of love is one aspect of the poem’s excellence, ‘it contains a great deal more’ (105). When Brooks asserts that ‘the only way by which the poet could say what “The Canonization” says is by paradox’, he does not mean that the poetry merely decorates facts with fine words, but that what the poem conveys is ultimately impenetrable, and thus sublime (106).

Although the poem contains several paradoxes, the main paradox Brooks perceives ties into the poem’s central conceit of the lovers as canonized saints and martyrs, in which their willing death stands for their status as pariahs, having given up all worldly honour for love—only to regain it through the fame of their imagined canonization. The paradox of this conceit, as Brooks sees it, is that ‘the poet daringly treats profane love as if it were divine love’, while he still ‘takes both love and religion seriously’ (101-102). Underneath this lies another paradox which connects the religious and the profane: that of unity in difference, whether it be ‘the sense in which lovers become one’, ‘the sense in which the soul is united with God’, or ‘the union which the creative imagination itself enacts’ (106). Whatever the instance, ‘that fusion is not logical; it apparently violates science and common sense; it welds together the discordant and the contradictory’ because ‘[t]he nature is single, one, unified. But the name is double…. If the poet is to be true to his poetry, he must call it neither two nor one: the paradox is his only solution’ (106-107).

There may be problems with Brooks' reasoning. No matter how much Brooks may disavow the distillment of the poem into mere 'facts', he cannot avoid deducing his own facts from the poem. William J. Rooney observes that just as 'it is of the essence of the Biblical language to unravel into facts, not biological or sociological or economic facts, it is true, but theological facts', so 'in [Brooks'] interpretation the poem unravels into facts of another kind—humanistic facts, statements about an ultimate unity which can only be expressed with "dignity" and "precision" through paradox' (44, 45). Still, Brooks correctly highlights what is essential to Donne and his sense of wonder: the mystery of unity, of sameness and difference. And the wonder of unity is a consequence of Donne's theological axioms. Sherwood elucidates again: 'A world view like Donne's that discovers *vestigii Dei* in creatures conceives likeness between physical and spiritual, temporal and eternal, creature and Creator; but it denies absolute identity, hence also announces difference' (27). Differentiation within unity is a notion which can be understood, at least on the surface, but it pushes the limits of human reason, which is the case with all paradox: 'Reason's need for both analogy and paradox readily admits that paradox confirms reason's own limitations' (Sherwood 27).

My own point is that what Brooks says about paradox can also be said of the metaphors in 'The Canonization': that in them Donne aims to convey a truth that cannot be otherwise expressed; that only comparisons can do justice to an indescribable referent: unity in love. Cruickshank remarks that George Hebert's poem, 'Prayer', 'is predicated on the impossibility of doctrinal definition and the necessity of approach by suggestion, image, picture and even fancy. Its very structure is antithetical to formal definition or reasoned analysis' so that 'there no understanding outside of metaphor' (59, 60). This is precisely Brooks' argument about 'The Canonization', only Brooks treats paradox rather than metaphor. The idea that 'there are some truths which poetry alone can convey, which have no cognitive correlative', as Cruickshank says (59), is contingent on the theological presupposition of the limits of the human mind, the permeance of the transcendent and the infinitude of God. In metaphor, correspondingly, Donne argues that union in love is supreme yet incomprehensible.

The tone which the poet assumes is defensive and adversarial, and as such Marotti surmises that the lyric was written in the wake of the revelation of Donne's clandestine marriage to Anne More (157). Donne's characteristically dramatic opening line, 'For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love!' reveals his attitude early on. Dayton Haskin, in agreement with Marotti, notes that though it is common sense to read the poem as 'the poet's

defence of his marriage', this reading was suppressed until the late nineteenth century because Donne's first biographer, Isaac Walton, had apologetically suggested that poetry was for Donne a pastime of his youth and that Donne finished composing the bulk of his secular verse before he was twenty (18-19). Having married at the age of twenty-nine, to read into 'The Canonization' any biographical details concerning the fallout of his marriage to More would therefore be untenable, and such a theory was not positively asserted in print until Edmund Gosse's 1899 biography (Haskin 29). There is no external evidence one way or the other, as Haskin recognises (19), and I would stress that the poem informs us more assuredly of the poet's mind than of his immediate circumstances.

The lyric draws together the themes of the other poems of mutual delight. It is like the poems which condense the earth to the smaller sphere of the couple's love in that the speaker says the lovers 'did the whole world's soul contract' so that they 'epitomize' to each other all 'Countries, towns, courts' (40, 43, 44). Like the poems of religious inexpression and wonder, Donne draws metaphors from Catholic custom to emphasise the otherworldliness and transcendence of romantic connection. The central conceit is that the lovers are martyrs who will be 'canonized for love' (36). The speaker also hints at the infinity of their love which shall live on through 'verse' (30), 'a well-wrought urn' which contains the history of the couple's love, which in turn contains the world (30, 33). That the poem is paradigmatic of Donne's love poetry, and that it further demonstrates an interest in epitome, points to Donne's proclivity to singularise in one sharpened spear-tip the vastness of experience.

The poem is remarkable for its plethora of religious metaphors which are also paradoxical. The speaker likens the lovers' retreat from the public sphere to a spiritual cloistering in one another in the closing stanza: 'You whom reverend love / Made one another's hermitage' (37-38). This is one of those paradoxes which Brooks noted, as hermitage is a singular venture incompatible with amorous love which here the speaker nonetheless contends consists of two individuals made one by their affection for each other and their mutual abandonment of earthly pleasures for the greater delight of requited romance. There is another paradox in that though they forsake worldly renown and 'die' because of their commitment to one another, they gain greater honour through their canonization as martyrs, and live on in their 'legend' preserved not in a 'piece of chronicle' but in the 'pretty rooms' of 'sonnets' (28, 30-32, 35-36). 'And by those hymns', the speaker says gallantly, 'all shall approve / Us canonized for love' (35-36). In short, the poem argues through religious metaphor that their daring romance is on a par with the highest of spiritual attainments. One

need not assume Donne means this literally; extravagant hyperbole is a well-established implement in Donne's poetic repertoire. His anniversaries turn on the conceit that because the daughter of his patron has died, the whole world has died with her and is now but a 'carcass' and a 'ghost' (*The First Anniversary* 75, 370). Similarly, in 'A Fever', he writes to another woman, 'when thou from this world wilt go, / The whole world vapours with thy breath' (7-8), or at least, 'if, when thou, the world's soul, go'st, / It stay, 'tis but thy carcass then' (9-10). The honour conferred by these words is evidently not a joke, but neither are the words literal. Donne's poetic exaggerations are well-intended, and even if they are meant to evoke a quiet chuckle through their sheer brazenness, they still serve primarily to communicate the intensity of the sentiment.

I would like to focus on the middle and third stanza (not an insignificant detail) in which the poet introduces a litany of metaphors for the two-in-one union of the lovers. In it the speaker turns the derisive name-calling of the objector to his advantage by acknowledging the appositeness of various comparisons—a technique of inversion which suits the greater, paradoxical theme of death becoming life, ill-repute renown, and loss gain, which itself is a play on Christian paradox of losing once life to gain it. I quote the stanza in full:

> Call us what you will, we're made such by love;
>
> Call her one, me another fly,
>
> We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,
>
> And we in us find th'eagle and the dove;
>
> The phoenix riddle hath more wit
>
> By us: we two, being one, are it.
>
> So to one neutral thing both sexes fit,
>
> We die and rise the same, and prove
>
> Mysterious by this love. (19-27)

Marotti asserts that the 'multivalence' of the symbols employed makes them 'fundamentally *resistant* to interpretation' and serve rather to overpower the listener with the poet's 'intellectual authority' than to communicate anything of substance (163). Certainly, the rapid shift in metaphors aids the persuasiveness of the poet's self-vindication. But if there is any

ambiguity in the images themselves it does not undermine the central contention that there is a preciousness to the lovers' pre-eminent desire for their own unity, even if it is at the cost of all else.

Of the symbolism of the fly A.B. Chambers has written an entire article. It was an 'amorous emblem' in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance because of its 'notorious sexual habits', signifying 'impudence' (Chambers, 'The Fly' 254, 257). There are other resonances that suit the neighbouring analogies, such its alleged ability to die and rise again and its hermaphroditic nature, both of which are more perfectly represented later in the phoenix (255). Holding to the connotation of sexual impudence, then, the idea is that the couple boldly pursues their own pleasure without regard to the price, much like a moth attracted to the fatal flame. The burning 'taper' of line 21 is self-explanatory insofar as the flame of their passion is the means of their death: the more they love, the more they dwindle and melt. The fly and the taper thus convey the lovers' blind infatuation with the other and their willingness to perish if need be. It is this passion which the speaker at pains to justify upon several grounds within the poem. The idea is that they harm only each other and should therefore be left well enough alone. As he remonstrates in the second stanza, 'Alas, alas! Who's injured by my love? / What merchants' ships have my sighs drowned? / Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?' (10-12). Taken this way, the fly may also signify their insignificance (Chambers 258), which would bolster the speaker's contention for the innocence of their romance.

The 'eagle and the dove' adumbrate numerous connotations. By itself, the dove may be 'conjugal love' and 'peace'; the eagle 'resurrection' (Chambers, 'The Fly' 253). Taken together, they signify 'masculinity and femininity', 'action and passion', 'strength and gentleness', 'Venus' and 'Jove' (Marotti 163). Most likely, Donne gestures toward the compatible and complementary nature of the birds when placed together. Donne need not have one sense in mind, though, as the idea he aims to get across is that whatever the interlocutor teasingly calls them, so they are, and more. Metaphors effectively express the mystery of their love which cannot be pinned down. The analogies may fall short of perfect precision, but they are nonetheless handmaidens of truth, deepening our grasp of the reality of the state towards which they gesture.

The metaphor of the phoenix is by far the most significant, if only by the magnificence of the figure compared to the preceding ones. Chambers notes that it is 'prominently placed in the central line of the poem's central stanza' ('The Fly' 259). Brooks astutely observes that the phoenix 'gathers up' the previous metaphors: 'the phoenix is a bird, and like the tapers, it

burns' (104). It also self-resurrects, and 'because there is but one representative of its kind, it is perforce a hermaphroditic or "neutral" thing' (Chambers 252). The phoenix, then, epitomises the previous figures, just as it does the lovers, who give 'The phoenix riddle …more wit', or as Robbins glosses, lend 'further ingenious applicability' to the figure (153). From the phoenix Donne draws two paradoxical likenesses with the lovers: that they are one despite being two (line 24), and that in their death they find life (26). The oneness and neutrality of the bird thus express the unity of the lovers, and death and resurrection their perpetuity. To 'die' can of course refer to 'the consummation of the act of love' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as Brooks tells us, and thus the poet's claim is that their love is not depleted in the act of lovemaking (105); but it also applies to the poem's parodic-religious line of argument in which dying to the world, or forfeiting everything but each other, does not decrease their beatitude. As Brooks explicates, '"Because [their] love is not mundane, [they] can give up the world"' (105). In that sense, to 'die and rise the same' means that their happiness in their relationship is unaffected by their loss of all else.

The phoenix ultimately inverts the protestation that the couple has 'ruined' their 'fortune' (3) through the claim of resurrection. The bird is a microcosm of the poem itself, which argues, parodying religious dogma, that sacrifice will be rewarded with life. What begins in the first two stanzas as an argument for naysayers simply to leave him alone ends with the justification of their eternal commemoration. The *volta* from defence to offence, as it were, occurs precisely in the centre of the poem with the figure of the phoenix. Thereafter, the final two stanzas contend for their canonization as saints of love and the poem concludes with a confidence that all will venerate the 'pattern' of their devotion to one another (45). It is typically Donnean that he achieves this through the wit of metaphor. Donne's figures for love, both those within the third stanza and the larger conceit of religious martyrdom, demonstrate that the metaphysics of the union of two persons eludes perfect comprehension. This is why he has to change metaphor so frequently, each figure motioning incompletely to the thing itself. The speaker concedes this fuzziness when he states that in dying and rising the same the lovers 'prove / mysterious by this love' (26-7). To describe connection between persons in love is an impossible task. It is nonetheless 'reason that apprehends that…lovers can "dye and rise the same" is incomprehensible' (Sherwood 27). Much like the trope of inexpression and the unknown, Donne seeks to cast light on the greatness of the simultaneous plurality and unity of romantic relationship for which he found the ultimate pattern in the triune God and

the order of his creation. In sum, metaphor conveys much, but not all, about the inexplicable grandeur of his metaphysics which insists that multiples can be one.

Poems of Unrequited Love

It might be stated at this point that the evidence I have adduced about Donne's unified, relational view of the world is unfairly pulled from the poems of mutual love. For there are many love poems, of course, which seem to despair of mutuality in human relationships, and express downright cynicism towards romantic bliss. However, I counter that the downtrodden poems only prove the point in the negative, that Donne desired reciprocity so fully that any rejection, coldness and faithlessness on the part of the woman gave rise to poems which articulate a sense of total hopelessness. They are, in other words, expressions of the thwarting of the realisation of Donne's ideal, not a refutation of the ideal itself. They are the natural overflow of the experience of a man who hated to be alone, and who saw mutual love as the uniting force which 'defects of loneliness controls' ('The Ecstasy' 44).

In 'Go and Catch a Falling Star', for example, the speaker tells us that it were easier to tell 'who cleft the Devil's foot' or 'to hear mermaids singing' than to find 'a woman true and fair' (4, 5, 18). Even if 'thou find'st one' the speaker says,

> I would not go,
>
> Though at next door we might meet:
>
> Though she were true when you met her,
>
> And last till you write your letter,
>
> Yet she
>
> Will be
>
> False, ere I come, to two or three. (19, 21-27)

The lyric emphasises his hopelessness at the supposed inconstancy of womankind, as the one woman on earth who is still miraculously true will be so swift to unfaithfulness that she will manage to break her vows to more than one man before the speaker is able to meet her. The poem's form reinforces the sense of gloom. The elongated conclusion with two lines of monometer closes with a sudden and crushing weight on the enjambed word 'False'. Moreover, the serrated break-up of this stanza solely into disconnected monosyllables (apart from 'letter') and short metric feet highlights his loneliness and isolation, and it mimics the

speech of a person perturbed, unable to string together polysyllabic words. The poem was most likely composed for a pre-existing melody, as at least one manuscript tells us (Robbins 194; Smith 399), and the theory gains support in the fact of the lyric's frequent end-stopping. It is perhaps one of those poems whose creation Donne lamented in 'The Triple Fool'. In that lyric, he states he is 'two fools, I know, / For loving and for saying so / In whining poetry' but becomes a three-times fool when, 'Some man, his art and voice to show, / Doth set and sing my pain' (1-3, 13-14). While 'Go and Catch a Falling Star' may be an utterance responding to an actual autobiographic experience of heartbreak, the main idea is far from literal. The ostensible dearth of faithful women is a Donnean hyperbole which carries the intensity of his forlorn state of mind. The poem's opening litany of impossibilities, combined with the potentially trivialising melodic arrangement, tips the reader off to the figurative nature of the poet's central contention about the faithlessness of the female sex. The speaker's sense of inability to find a partner who will reciprocate his monogamous devotion gives birth to a melancholic poem, but it is not a renouncement of the ideal of mutual love. It is about the pain of severance from human sympathy.

'The Legacy' is another poem of heartbreak. It begins with a sweet address to the beloved in which Donne equates departure with death: 'When I died last (and, dear, I die / As often as from thee I go)' (1-2). Donne equates a great many things with death. We have seen him liken parting to death; in other places of his poetic corpus he says rejection is death ('Twickenham Garden' 82), love is death (e.g. 'The Paradox' 20), sighing is death ('A Valediction: of Weeping' 27), death is sleep ('Holy Sonnet 10: Death be not proud' 5) and in 'Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day', Donne is rendered worse than dead by the bereavement of the beloved, for he says he is 'nothing' (29). In 'The Apparition', the mistress is a 'murd'ress' whose 'scorn' kills him (1). His impulse to use death as metaphor for the pain of love is Petrarchan (Guss, *John Donne: Petrarchan* 50). It also derives from the urgency of his feeling, death being the monumental and eclipsing capstone upon human life, the most extreme of consequences. The mention of death makes him feel more alive, reminding him that he stills possesses life in the moment of writing and filling him with passion, as it does in 'The Legacy'. Yet Donne does not romanticise death as a poet like John Keats would later do, because death is the breach of unity with the living and between soul and body (Targoff 1). Ironically, when the speaker of 'The Legacy' states that leaving the beloved causes him to die, it is to emphasise the tremendous pain of absence, not the absence of pain, which death would

entail. In likening his parting from the beloved to death, the speaker announces his profound attachment to the woman, whose corresponding attachment to him he desires.

Donne juggles several conceits in the lyric: departure as death, the exchange of hearts, and the shared identity with the mistress. In addition to these, the difficult syntax and play of pronouns throughout makes this 'an exasperating poem' (Carey 189). Yet 'that's the point,' Carey assures us, 'We're made to share the speaker's disorientation, not just hear about it. The man's puzzlement… is mirrored in the puzzling grammar' (189). A growing perplexity troubles the sweetness with which the speaker began his address. His initial wish was to bequeath a legacy to the mistress, though he 'be dead' from his taking leave of her, namely, his 'heart' (7, 12). His desire to 'bestow' (6) that gift is thwarted, however:

> But I, alas, could there find none
>
> When I had ripped and searched where hearts should lie.
>
> It killed me again, that I who still was true
>
> In life, in my last will should cozen you. (12-16)

The fault appears to be the man's, but it is a failure committed unwittingly and discovered with an air of bafflement. He fears lest *he* should be the one to commit the deception of not truly giving his heart to the beloved. The very thought, he says, 'kill[s] me again', making him doubly dead: a deserving stroke for the violation of Donne's passionate ideal of mutuality.

A series of exciting turns occurs in the final stanza, as the speaker declares quizzically that within the cavity of his chest he does find 'something like a heart, / But colours it, and corners had; It was not good, it was not bad' (17-19). What he finds is an artificial heart, a false one, 'As good as could be made by art' (21). It is neither good nor bad because it is not real and thus contains no moral agency. But to make up 'for our losses sad', the speaker therefore purposes to 'send that heart', only to discover that as a man he cannot 'hold it' because, as is revealed in the terminal line, it actually belongs to the mistress who gives it to no man (22-24). In one fell swoop the speaker therefore uncovers that the lady is (literally) heartless and disloyal, the heart which she gave him being a false one, 'entire to none' (20). The poem is evidently no celebration of mutual romance. And yet, the tenderness of the opening lines, 'dear, I die / As often as from thee I go' suggests that Donne grasps the potential pleasure of requited love, and as such the poem might have taken an entirely

different path, had only the woman been true to him. Indeed, the lyric is reminiscent of the endearing poems of valediction in which lovers say goodbye, especially 'The Expiration' and 'Sweetest Love', and might have been one had it not turned sour in the end. As in those poems, the speaker of 'The Legacy' is willing and sincere, if naïve, which in the unexpected case of spurned affection makes his heartbreak—or heart-loss—the more painful. His tone, which is open, gentle, hopeful, non-accusatory, self-effacing, militates against reading the poem as a sardonic statement of anti-romance. Marotti says it is a work of 'satiric accusation'(314), but this is untrue because the speaker puts all the focus upon himself, thinking that he is to blame until the revelation in the last line and word that it is the woman who is deceptive. The reader is not privy to the speaker's subsequent emotional reaction, which must be imagined, but the sincerity of the speaker contrasted with the disingenuousness of the woman makes his imagined heartbreak palpable, and ultimately suggests the stock which Donne put in the reciprocity of romance, not his rejection of it, otherwise he would not be affected.

One other poem of unrequited love will have to suffice to prove the assertion that Donne longed for shared relational commitment despite his frequent failure to attain it. 'The Will' is a marvellously entertaining, witty poem to which strangely few critics give attention. It is another example of the dejected lovesickness Donne was capable of articulating in verse at once comic and earnest. As in 'The Legacy', Donne's speaker imagines himself bestowing his will, although this time it is in anticipation of his death and not after the fact. Donne's fixation with the details of his death and the perpetuation of his legacy, whether it is bodily remains, relics, love trinkets or a testament, fundamentally speak to his desire to be involved in the world as long as possible, to be a connecting piece in its affairs even after his own passage into the next. Here, it is his slighted affections that cause him to consider a speedy death, death being the only course by which to spite the woman and to 'annihilate' his sorrow (54). The speaker addresses the anthropomorphised god of 'Love', as he often does in the poems of romantic rejection or renouncement, the more to convey that his romantic attachments lie outside his power, whose inexorableness therefore heighten his despair. The premise of the poem is that Love has made him adore a woman who will not have him. Each stanza expresses a different angle on the ill-suited match which Love has made by listing the possessions and qualities which the speaker bequeaths in imitation of Love's own ill-matched choice of girl for him. Each stanza commences by listing the items of the will bestowed on evidently unsuitable recipients and concludes with berating Love for his similar poor choice

in matchmaking. The nature of the relation between the thing given and the recipient is withheld until the final line of each stanza, which leaves the reader to guess until that point. In its bleak portrait of discrepancy, the poem enshrines correspondence.

In the first stanza the principle of giving is wasteful surplus. The speaker says he gives his 'eyes to Argus', a giant of Greek myth whose body was covered in eyes. Should the speaker's eyes be blind at the point of death, then he will give them to the proverbially blind Love (3-4). Furthermore, he says he donates 'My tongue to Fame, t'ambassadors mine ears, / To women or the sea, my tears' (5-6). In the stanza's conclusion, he reveals that he copies the pattern of gift-giving which Love has taught him and unveils the correlation between gift and recipient. He tells Love, 'Thou, Love, hast taught me heretofore / By making me serve her who'd twenty more, / That I should give to none but such as had too much before' (7-9). The implication is that the speaker pours out his love to a lady who already possessed oceans of love in other lovers, which renders the speaker superfluously disposable.

The remaining five stanzas follow the same pattern. In the second stanza the speaker 'Only give[s] to such as have an incapacity', such as 'constancy…to the planets' and 'truth to them who at the Court do live', just as the woman he loves has not the capacity to receive his affection (18, 10-11). The poetic paradigm, clearly, suits satire well, and Donne pulls no punches. Many of the items in the will contrast the speaker's virtues with the recipients' vices, as the one about the court evinces. Donne satirizes religion as well as politics when he states that he bequeaths 'Mine ingenuity and openness / To Jesuits' (12-13), against whom Donne wrote two polemical works.[19] Donne's satiric edge suits the poem's simultaneous playful and serious nature. As a genre, satire has the capacity to be humorous and trenchant, and Donne makes full use of it in a piece that more broadly aims both to amuse through its artistic form and wit and to communicate something deep about romantic rejection.

Donne's speaker metes out donations 'to those that count [his] gifts indignity' in the third stanza, among them 'faith…to Roman Catholics', who denied salvation by faith alone at the Council of Trent, his 'good works unto the schismatics', meaning English protestants who dissented from the State church and maintained that salvation is by faith alone, his 'modesty' to 'soldiers' and his 'patience' to 'gamesters' (27, 19, 20, 23-24). In the fourth stanza he returns items to the original owners, and who thus inspired the same trait in himself, such as 'doubtfulness' to 'Schoolmen', 'sickness to physicians', and his 'industry to foes',

[19] The two prose works are *Pseudo-martyr* and *Ignatius His Conclave* (Stubbs 260).

presumably because his enemies weary themselves in machinations against him (30-31, 29; Robbins 279). The fifth stanza lays out vastly incongruent gifts like 'physic books' to 'him for whom the passing-bell next tolls', or 'brazen medals unto them which live / In want of bread', as well as his 'English tongue' for 'them which pass among / foreigners' (37-38, 40-41, 41-42). The principle which the speaker finds in the god of Love's own matching in this stanza is that of 'disproportion' (45). In the final stanza, Donne's persona relinquishes all gift-giving and claims he will 'undo / The world by dying, because love dies too' (46-47), a feat which will make the woman's 'beauties' and 'graces' as unappreciated as 'gold in mines where none doth draw it forth' and as useless as 'a sun-dial in a grave', since no one will remain to admire her (48, 50, 49, 51). He tells Love that his reason for that spectacular departure is that, 'Thou, Love, taugh'st me, by making me / Love her who doth neglect both me and thee, / T'invent and practise this one way t'annihilate all three' (52-54). Donne's persona will neglect Love and the lady and put a dramatic end to their tangled triangle through his death just as they neglected and killed him through disproportionate matchmaking and unreturned affection. It is a melodramatic, witty and sometimes dark poem, but it in no way denounces the delight of mutual love. Rather, it affirms the ideal by proving the argument in the negative: the salient point of the poem is that to love someone who does not return one's devotion is miserable, and that death were preferable to such a painful condition. If he cannot obtain the unity between himself, the woman and love, then he will choose the singularity that is annihilation. A lack of symmetrical desire is death, so he chooses the equally murderous valediction to the world.

Poems of Non-exclusive Love

That is not to say there are not some poems which do appear to renounce monogamy and for which the youthful Donne acquired the moniker of 'rake' among early twentieth-century critics (Roston 1; Targoff 3). However, I contend that the irreverence of these poems is a mask for the pain and vulnerability which Donne's more candid lyrics about love reveal. For all their indifference, these 'libertine' poems do not persuasively overthrow Donne's intuition of the fitness of requited love (Marotti 71-72). Instead, they highlight Donne's perennial angst over division with the paramour and within himself. One such cynical poem, 'Woman's Constancy', plays on Donne's enduring fear of faithlessness and inconstancy: 'Now thou hast loved me one whole day, / Tomorrow when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say?' (1-2). The speaker proceeds to question the woman's commitment by pre-emptively listing possible justifications of her hypothetical unfaithfulness. Anxiously, he asks whether she will

say that now

We are not just those persons which we were?

Or that oaths made in reverential fear

Of Love and his wrath any may forswear?

Or, as true deaths true marriages untie,

So lover's contracts, images of those,

Bind but till sleep, death's image, them unloose?

Or, your own end to justify,

For having purposed to change and falsehood, you

Can have no way but falsehood to be true? (4-13)

Paranoid, Donne's speaker rapidly enumerates clever arguments against faithfulness that sound more like his own invention than anything the mistress would produce. And the speaker knows them to be indefensible pretexts, as he calls them 'scapes', or evasions, against which he 'could / Dispute, and conquer, if [he] would' (14-15). One can apply what Michael McCanles says of Donne's use of paradox to the poet's absurd though forceful reasoning. Paradox illustrates how 'the mind is capable of making arguments which have a certain self-consistency but which yet reach conclusions manifestly violating common-sense reality' (McCanles 221). Similarly, the speaker's fantastic arguments demonstrate the kind of wit which are clever for the sheer genius of their formation, yet which lack true argumentative substance. For instance, death resembles sleep, but is not sleep, and any reasoning which is contingent upon sleep being death is faulty from the start. Likewise, the contradiction of being false in order that one might be true to one's purpose of being false is an ingenious, if convoluted, invention which is nevertheless an immoral inversion of the virtue of truthfulness, which admits no falsehood whatsoever.

And yet the speaker will not overthrow the specious arguments because to do so would work against him. He reveals in the final line, startlingly, that he will not interrogate the mistress's hypothetical justifications for being untrue, 'For by tomorrow I may think so too', which leaves open the possibility of his own inconstancy (17). There is little reason to suppose, however, that the conclusion of the poem is meant seriously as a renouncement of

amorous fidelity. The poem's epigrammatic wit, its surprise ending, the cunningness of its patently false argumentation, its self-satirising of Donne's fears concerning his own fickleness, alert the reader to the flaw of the libertine attitude which the speaker supposedly espouses. The combination of wit and absurdity makes the arguments humorous, yet it does not remove the sting of the human condition which struggles to be faithful. Therefore, the sheer preposterousness of the argumentation, which the speaker acknowledges, compounded by the humour of the poem's form, reveals that Donne knows non-monogamy to be unsatisfactory and without valid rational or moral grounds despite his open-ended conclusion. Donne's own pronouncement on the purpose of his prose paradoxes in his letter to his friend Sir Henry Wotton is revealing: 'if they make you to find better reasons against them they do their office: for they are but swaggerers,… they are rather alarums to truth to arme her then enemies' (qtd. in McCanles 220). The same can be said of the mischievousness of the libertine poems. Donne means for the reader to overthrow the blatantly false line of reasoning. 'Woman's Constancy' is a comedic diversion which attempts to conceal the wounds of non-commitment.

Marotti makes a similar case about the undermining of libertinism in the poem 'Communitie' which, he says, 'bluntly exposes the moral insensitivity behind smug libertinism in proving, with false logic, the legitimacy of exploiting women sexually. The poem's wit rests on the willingness of the reader to appreciate the outrageous execution of a false argument' (73). In general, the few libertine lyrics which Donne penned are so absurd in their reasoning, and so playful, that they undermine their own claims. Another of these poems, 'Confined Love', for example, attempts to overthrow the legitimacy of monogamy by drawing illustrations from nature which are in no way obviously suited to the philosophical and legal question at hand. 'Are sun, moon, or stars by law forbidden / To smile where they list, or lend away their light?' inquires the speaker (8-9). 'Whoe'er rigged fair ship to lie in harbours, / And not to seek new lands, or not to deal [trade] withal?', as if insentient celestial bodies or sea-faring had much to do with the moral and social institution of marriage (15-16). But that is how Donne writes. Though Donne self-mockingly says, 'comparisons are odious' in the conclusion of his elegy 'The Comparison' (54), his regular recourse to them says otherwise. He tends to analogise with the most incongruous concepts, whether for the force of rhetoric, for the sake of wit, ofttimes for the startling truth of the comparison, and frequently for the pleasure and entertainment which the reader finds in the surprise of two vastly dissimilar things drawn together in a unified metaphor. In the case of the libertine poems,

specious argument through simile is for the sake of amusement in order to deter serious thoughts about the vulnerability of seeking union with another person.

'The Indifferent' is another of the putatively rakish poems presumably, though not manifestly, composed in Donne's youth. In it the poet employs no conceit, metaphor nor any kind of surprising comparison. Rather, the wit rests upon the inversion of the ideal of amorous consistency in favour of Ovidian libertinism. I argue, however, that there lurks an attraction to monogamy which quietly mitigates the apparent meaning of the poem. To start, the speaker announces, 'I can love both fair and brown, / Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want betrays, / Her who loves loneness best, and her who masques and plays' (1-3). Donne's persona, then, is willing to love women of any sort, no matter their appearance, wherewithal or disposition; in other words, he 'can love any' (9). The caveat, as he reveals in the stanza's terminal words, is that he can only love a woman so long as 'she be not true', a statement which turns on its head the ideal of truthfulness and fidelity espoused in the poems of mutual love (9). In the following stanza, Donne's speaker addresses womankind directly, inquiring accusatorily, 'Will no other vice content you? / Will it not serve your turn to do as did your mothers? / Have you old vices spent, and now would find out others? (10-12). The lines are humorous because the speaker willingly confuses virtue and vice, for by 'vice' he means the received virtue of faithfulness, and by his exasperated appeal that contemporary women do not do as their 'mothers' he implies that past generations of women were virtuous in their contentment to practice infidelity, all of which is an ironic antithesis of what one would expect a love poet to proffer. As he begs the god of Love in another libidinous poem, 'Love, let my body reign, and let / Me travel, sojourn, snatch, plot, have, forget', so here he refuses to be bound to any one woman and implores women to adopt the same roaming disposition as himself ('Love's Usury' 5-6).

The poem's erotic bravado undergoes a ripple of doubt, however, by the end of the second stanza. The indeterminacy of the pronoun 'you' (Donne might have used 'thou' or 'ye' to be unambiguous about whether he speaks to one or multiple women) opens for the possibility that Donne is addressing a particular woman, which he appears to do in the stanza's closing lines, suggesting a more personal, vulnerable conversation: 'Must I, which came to travail thorough you, / Grow your fixed subject because you are true?' (17-18; pointed out by Marotti 77). To 'travail' has several implications, either that the speaker made love to her, that he experienced trouble because of her (Smith 380), or, as Robbins suggests, that he 'was doomed to labour because of Eve's disobedience' (203). Regardless, the man's

indictment of the woman is defensive and reveals an anxiety which a pure libertine could not possess. Marotti puts it best: 'The logic here is not that of the libertine but of the emotionally and morally sensitive individual who recognises the need for reciprocity in love. The speaker's earlier smug libertinism is threatened by the experience of actually falling in love with a particular woman' (78). It is precisely the speaker's inability to shrug off his guilt and move on—addressing the woman personally, getting defensive—that suggests he intuits the dissatisfaction of a life of unrestrained sexual desire.

The closing stanza cements this reading. It astonishes by redefining the previous two stanzas as a separate unit, distancing itself by referring to the preceding stanzas as a 'song' which 'Venus heard me sigh' sometime in the past (19). What is significant is that the speaker frames all he hitherto had said as a 'sigh' and a 'song', which intimates that he had felt the effects of love after all. The majority of the stanza is put in the mouth of the Venus, whom Donne presents as the champion of the unrestricted libido:

> "Alas, some two or three
>
> Poor heretics in love there be
>
> Which think t'establish dang'rous constancy,
>
> But I have told them, 'Since you will be true,
>
> You shall be true to them who're false to you.'" (23-27)

The goddess thus sides with the speaker's earlier approval of the inversion of faithfulness as virtue and faithlessness as vice, calling 'heretics' those who desire to be true to one partner. But her final mocking statement on the hopelessness of finding a likeminded lover, 'You shall be true to them who're false to you' rings hallow. It is too callous, and coming from the mouth of a god it underlines the sad inexorableness of human fate. That the pronouncement is enclosed within three layers of dialogue—the speaker says that Venus said she had said—further distances it from the poet's own viewpoint. The declaration serves, rather, to reveal the sensitivities of the poet who hints that he wishes the goddess' cruel law could be otherwise. Therefore, there is enough ambiguity and ambivalence in the poem to suggest it is not in agreement with its own conclusion. Given the many other poems which recount the pain of betrayal, we should not imagine that Donne's mind was seriously immune to the agony of lying duplicity or to the draw of exclusive, reciprocated love. Donne was always concerned with unity of mutual love, even when he brazenly asserts differently. Intellectually as well as

experientially, monogamy was the more attractive option because it entails multiplicity within simplicity—forming oneness between persons—and because it focuses one's affections on a single object—attaining oneness of mind within oneself.

Body and Soul in the Union of Love

Finally, there remains one facet of Donne's poetic depiction of human love, as it concerns unity, which has yet to be placed under the microscope: the requisite union of body and soul. Though Donne occasionally intimates the sufficiency of spiritual love, it is usually to comfort the beloved in the less-than-ideal state of separation. Taking leave of one another is an event which must be eased by envisaging that the couple's union endures despite physical removal, which makes it exceptional, unlike that of common folk:

> Dull sublunary lovers' love
>
> (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
>
> Absence, because it doth remove
>
> Those things which elemented it. ('A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' 13-16).

More frequently, however, the estrangement of lovers assumes a more terrifying prospect: nothingness or death. 'So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore' ('A Valediction: of Weeping' 11); 'Ease me with death, by bidding me go too' ('The Expiration' 8). Donne abhorred absence, and so he sought to represent its opposite—presence—with the utmost fullness and cohesiveness: the absorption of the whole person, body and soul, with the body and soul of the beloved, which is the most comprehensive unity of persons.

Herbert J.C. Grierson has advanced the idea that there are two literary-historical streams that inform Donne's notion of love, and that it is Donne's synchronisation of them which makes his love poetry uniquely appealing. These two influences correspond to the idealisation of the soul and the celebration of the body. Grierson clarifies his categories by calling the two kinds of love the 'Christian' and 'the pagan', 'asceticism' and 'sensuality', 'courtly idealism' and 'exaggerated cynicism' (32). He argues that it is Donne's ability to weld together lofty idealism and passionate realism in his depiction of love that makes his poetry so powerful, for in so doing he eliminates the weaknesses of both: the 'passionless…idealism' of the Medieval Christian view and the 'cynical flippancy' of Classical, Renaissance neo-Paganism (34). The result of this fusion of two extremes, according to Grierson, moves beyond Renaissance poetry's reactionary response to monkish

austerity with its *carpe diem*, 'Epicurean' sensuality (26). The outcome is 'a justification of love as a natural passion in the human heart the meaning and end of which is marriage' (32), which leads Grierson to conclude: 'This justification of natural love as fullness of joy and life is the deepest thought in Donne's love-poems' (33).

Essentially, Grierson argues that Donne masters the lower passions by yoking them to higher virtues and thereby creates something new in English love poetry, surpassing its best sonneteers, Sidney and Spenser, who had largely appropriated the love belonging to chivalric asceticism (25, 34). Another way to frame this dichotomy is to say that Donne was torn between Petrarch and Ovid (25-29). As Kerrigan puts it, 'the ideal love of the famous lyrics is of course "Petrarchan"—an exclusive devotion. But this is a Petrarchism fused with Ovid, and enjoying full fruition' (12).[20] That is also Grierson's point, of course. Donne borrows the corporeal sensuality of Ovid' verse and melds it with Petrarch's high-flown ideal of loving dedication. He wanted love to be mutually enjoyed, body and soul.

In 'The Ecstasy', the argument is that though love intertwines the lovers' souls, it ought to make their bodies one, too, in order for love to be fully consummate:

> But oh, alas! So long, so far,
>
> Our bodies why do we forbear?
>
> They're ours, though they are not 'we': we are
>
> Th'intelligences, they the sphere.
>
> We owe them thanks, because they thus
>
> Did us to us at first convey,
>
> Yielded their forces, sense, to us,
>
> Nor are dross to us, but allay. (49-56)

There is tremendous appreciation for the body in these lines. The body is not a necessary evil, but an essential good, an 'allay' to meld their beings. I therefore disagree with Gardner who

[20] Of Donne's connection to Petrarch Donald L. Guss has written extensively in his monograph, *John Donne, Petrarchan*. In addition to his subject—love— Donne's use of 'wit, of hyperbole, complication, and conceit', as well as his 'themes' and 'images' mark him as an heir of Petrarch (19, 49).

makes bodily love a footnote (‘The Argument About the Ecstasy’ 242). She acknowledges that ‘the poem implies the lawfulness and value of physical love’ as a ‘corollary’, but maintains that the poem’s primary purpose is ‘to illuminate the conception of love as a union by which two become one’ (243, 244). Oneness in love is the larger point, but surely, the lovers’ bodies as much as their souls enable their two-in-oneness. The speaker tells the woman, ‘So must pure lovers’ souls descend / T’affections and to faculties / Which sense may reach and apprehend’, and thus, ‘T’our our bodies turn we, then’, ‘Else a great prince in prison lies’ (65-67, 69, 68). The argument of ‘The Ecstasy’ is that the body is necessary to achieve unity in love because human beings are dependent on their bodies; they are inherently dualistic creatures whose interpersonal unity is contingent upon their attention to spirit and matter. The poem disavows the remote devotion of Petrarch at the same time as it eschews the purely erotic indulgence of Ovid by proposing that soul and body are integral for mutual love.

I do not adopt the claims represented primarily by Grierson about Donne’s fusion of Petrarch and Ovid uncritically, however. I have misgivings about Grierson’s designation of the fleshly side of love to the revival of classicism in the Renaissance, given that the Renaissance also saw the explosion of Neoplatonism, in which the spiritual aspect of love was touted as love’s true and ideal essence. Ramie Targoff observes that ‘the general consensus among Renaissance humanists’ was ‘that love should ultimately move, as Plato describes in the *Symposium*, from the physical to the spiritual as if ascending a staircase’ (59).[21] That does not ring true of Donne, who desires a love incarnate, as when he writes that, as his ‘soul’ must assume ‘limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do’, so, ‘More subtle than the parent…/ Love must not be, but take a body too’ (‘Air and Angels’ 7-8). In fact, ‘The Ecstasy’ follows just the opposite movement of Platonic love, as it progresses from soul to body, ‘descend[ing]’ to the senses (65). One idea which Donne does share with Italian Neoplatonists, as A.R. Cirillo argues, is that ‘[t]hrough mutual love, two lovers achieve that perfect fusion of souls that makes them one—neither he nor she, but both he and she in one spiritual union’, which is a ‘theory...propounded in the writings of Ficino, Ebreo, Speroni, Dolce, and the *trattati d’amore*’ (81). Nonetheless, though Donne borrows images of oneness from Renaissance love theorists and poets, he jettisons the non-corporeal nature of the concept. Targoff is therefore correct when she asserts that though ‘Donne learned from Neoplatonism, and…deployed it for

[21] Targoff lays the caveat that not all Neoplatonists give ‘deprecatory accounts of physical love’, however (58-59).

his own purposes in the poems', he 'was not a Neoplatonist at heart… and he rejects the central Neoplatonic tenets that love should move…from bodies to souls' (59).

There is a related and more serious oversight to Grierson's argument: to wit, the effect of Donne's Christianity upon his philosophy of love. Grierson assumes that Donne's insistence on romantic 'realism' comes mainly from classicism, and that his romantic reverence comes from the middle ages. However, there is good reason to believe that Donne's theology leads him to celebrate the place of the body in love as much as it leads him to embrace its spiritual aspect. The innate goodness of materiality is a markedly Christian tenet.[22] Helen Gardner writes:

> Anyone who is familiar with Donne's religious writings knows how deeply he meditated the doctrine of Creation. It is the stress on this distinctively Judeo-Christian doctrine—that the High and Holy One Himself loves the world which He made… [that] mak[es] him give the material universe and the body a greater dignity. ('The Argument About the Ecstasy' 258)

Donne's belief in the goodness of the material world, which God himself declared 'good' and 'very good' upon the completion of his creative act, deters him from embracing cynicism toward the body (Ge. 1:25, 31). I would add to Gardner's insight, not insignificantly, that the doctrine of the physical condescension of Christ in taking the form of humanity adds further propriety to the body. [23] I concede that Donne's theory of love shares some similarity with Ovid because of its emphasis on the sensate. And I concede that Donne shares with Petrarch a high estimation of the loving devotion of the mind. But what scholars like Grierson and Kerrigan fail to account for is *why* Donne blends the two. I suggest that it is the value he places on the perfection of unity. What is particularly Donnean is the precise unity of body and soul necessary for union in love. The premise is theological: 'God loves couples; he

[22] One can make a good case that the application of the doctrine received revived attention in the wake of the Reformation, as C.S. Lewis does, for 'the rigorism was on the Roman side. On many questions, and specially in their view of the marriage bed, the Puritans were the indulgent party…' (91). Protestants permitted clergy to marry and absolved celibate orders. This explains in part why Donne departs substantially from the celibate aloofness of Petrarch, a Roman Catholic poet, in his portrayals of love's delight.

[23] An additional point can be made that the metaphoric language which communicates the physicality of love, especially prevalent in the *Elegies,* takes a page out of the biblical *Song of Songs*. Donne's speaker's demand, couched in martial language, that the woman 'Unpin that spangled breastplate, which you wear / That th'eyes of busy fools may be stopped there!', or, 'Off with that girdle, like Heav'n's zone glist'ring / But a far fairer world encompassing' ('To his Mistress Going to Bed' 7-8, 5-6) are not so unlike the many veiled metaphors which express Solomon's desire for his betrothed's body: 'This thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes. I said, "I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof' (Song. 7:7-8a).

suffers not our body to be alone, nor our soul alone, but he marries them together' (*Sermons* 5: 117).[24] Since God created a body and a soul, both must be employed equally to makes lovers one.

[24] Donne's theological grounding for the unity of body and soul is well-documented in his sermons; many other citations might be drawn, for example: 'In the constitution and making of a natural man, the body is not the man, nor the soul is not the man, but the union of these two makes up the man'; 'in our natural persons, the body and soul do not make a perfect man except they be united' (7: 448; 6: 128).

Form and Unity

For Donne, unity is divinely wrought perfection, and disunity is manmade sin. He expounds in a sermon, 'God made the first Marriage, and man made the first Divorce; God married the Body and Soule in the Creation, and man divorced the Body and Soule by death through sinne, in his fall' (7: 257). Disunity is an iniquity which Donne seeks to restore in his art. Before I progress to an analysis of Donne's religious verse, permit me to make some explicit remarks on Donne's use of form in a kind of transitional intermission. For there is a style of criticism which seems to forget that it analyses art at all, reducing great works of literature to a bag of ideas. If I desired merely to produce a theory about the underlying beliefs of Donne then I would have done better to concentrate upon his sermons, epistles and polemical writings, and used his poems simply as illustrative examples of a philosophy more perspicuous in prose. But Donne prized something about poetry, as it was the frequent medium for the conveyance of his thought. The connection between the literary arts and his vision of unity—the substance of his philosophy—is vital. Donne chose poetry as the medium of his self-expression. What he tells us about his reason for that choice is scarce, and his poems contain relatively little self-reflexive comment upon the medium. That said, one can draw strong inferences. I contend that we can deduce at least a few reasons for which Donne was attracted to verse, and that they relate to his need for unity.

Unity of Verse

The first reason that Donne was drawn to verse is because of the way it matches substance to condensed expression. He writes of the psalmist that 'twas a double power by which he sung / The highest matter in the noblest form', that is, divine truth couched in Hebrew verse ('Upon the translation of the Psalms' 10-11). If the word of God is 'the highest matter', then it follows that verse is 'the noblest form'. Donne thus understood poetry to be the paragon of literary expression. Part of the uniqueness of poetry is its succinctness, which ties in to Donne's tendency to shrink ideas into pithy figures which contain the full immensity of the concept. Poetry can be brief, and at the very least the measurement of its lines is short, which makes the unity of the thought express and immediate, unlike longer forms which must be mined for the connection of ideas to become apparent. Nowhere does Donne play with the punchiness of verse as clearly as in the *Epigrams.* Several of them are wily two-line poems which condense an idea into a single, humorous, paradoxical statement. For example, in 'Disinherited' Donne jests, 'Thy father all from thee, by his last will, / Gave to the poor: thou hast good title still'. The surprising joke is that the disowned heir may still have a share in his father's estate because he suddenly finds himself among the poor. In 'A Licentious Person',

Donne, ‘unexpectedly corroborating’ the contrite prayer of the Psalmist—‘[My sins] are more than the hairs of mine head’—quips: ‘Thy sins and thy hairs may no man equal call, / For, as thy sins increase, thy hairs do fall’ (Robbins 14; Ps. 40:12). The poet thus satirises those who become bald through syphilis, making his point as succinctly as possible in unified expression. Poetry permits him to abbreviate—unite succinctly—with flair and power.

In one of his poems of romantic rejection Donne hints that a further alluring quality of the poetic form is the demand of its metric regularity and rhyme, a process which he says enchains rebellious feelings:

> Then, as th’earth’s inward narrow, crooked lanes
>
> Do purge sea-water’s fretful salt away,
>
> I thought, if I could draw my pains
>
> Through rhyme’s vexation, I should them allay:
>
> Grief brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,
>
> For he tames it that fetters it in verse. (‘The Triple Fool’ 8-11)

There is a unique value to verse in the strict concentration of its lines, which here Donne sees as an instrument to dispel lovesickness, likening its purgative and refining force to the alleged filtering process of rivers. Both ‘rhyme’s vexation’ and ‘numbers’ require a rigorous focus the end of which is a catharsis of his otherwise inextinguishable emotions. The skilful attention poetry demands in its concision, measure and sound allows Donne to process, finalise and then oust troubling thoughts. His frequent recourse to verse illustrates his confidence in the form into which he might pour the most vehement feelings or thoughts and seal them off. The completeness and containment of the feeling within a poem, its ‘fetteredness’, permitted Donne to move on, and so both the process of writing and the finality of the articulation rid him of gnawing feeling of mental disarray.

More generally in his life Donne consciously struggles to achieve full focus and acute intensity of being, a point he laments when preaching on the subject of prayer:

> But when we consider with a religious seriousnesse the manifold weaknesses of the strongest devotion in time of Prayer, it is a sad consideration. I throw my selfe downe in my Chamber, and I call in, and invite God and his Angels thither, and when they are there, I neglect God and his Angels, for the noise of a Flie, for the ratling of a

> Coach, for the whining of a doore; I talke on, in the same posture of praying; Eyes lifted up; knees bowed downe; as though I prayed to God; and, if God, or his Angels should aske me, when I thought last of God in in that prayer, I cannot tell: Sometimes I finde that I had forgot what I was about, but when I began to forget it, I cannot tell. A memory of yesterdays pleasures, a fear of to morrows dangers, a straw under my knee, a noise in mine eare, a light in mine eye, an any thing, a nothing, a fancy, a Chimera in my braine, troubles me in my prayer. (*Sermons* 7: 265-265)

The sermon demonstrates the urgency of his yearning for total concentration as well as the eloquence and rhetorical beauty Donne was capable of realising in prose. Note that Donne did not believe in preaching extemporaneously; for him a sermon required the full labour and forethought of his mental faculties (Stubbs 428). Yet in the citation above Donne also exploits the difference of oral prose from verse in his slower pace, his stringing together of longwinded sentences and lists. Evelyn Simpson remarks that Donne's prose 'lacks something of the concentrated intensity of his verse' as '[p]rose by its very nature tends to be more diffuse than poetry' (137). In the poetry, it often feels as though Donne never has enough time; in the sermons he has too much time. Though there is artistry to Donne's sermons, oration was for Donne evidently a different medium which required different artistic emphasises.

The lack of concentration in himself which Donne bemoans in the sermon finds a vent in his artistic expression. The second, related reason Donne landed on poetry, then, is because its pithiness and stringent regularity was to Donne a precious means by which to achieve full focus. It requires an attentiveness of mind which linear prose does not. Precision is never won easily, Donne insists in his 'Satyre III':

> On a huge hill,
>
> Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
>
> Reach her, about must, and about go,
>
> And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so. (79-82)

Writing on 'Satyre III', Rebecca Rush says that 'Donne makes the case that it is the task of poetry to reproduce rather than restrain the disorderly effort involved in the "mindes endeavors"' to come to a knowledge of religious truth (459; 'Satyre III' 87). But the form also more generally reproduces all mental process. Donne's convoluted style, his disarranged

syntax, often coarse and twisted, mirror the strenuous obstacles strewn in the way of putting thought into order. Contradictorily, the syntactic disorder of his lines is neatly ordered in rhyme scheme and meter, with only occasional violations: it only has the façade of disorder, the purpose being to represent the mind's chaos before it is put to paper and the elusiveness of truth. Donne thus invests his verse with the appearance of the struggle to achieve unified intensity in the labyrinthian corridors of the brain and the difficulty of the act of composition itself. The reader struggles to draw out the meaning in Donne's poetry as much as Donne struggles to think it through and articulate it. Though Donne calls his love 'a cumbersome unwieldiness', the phrase applies equally to the sentence structure in many of his poems ('Love's Diet' 1). Therefore, Donne was drawn to poetry because by nature it requires a focusing of the mind, both in reading and writing—an appealing feature to a man who loathed distraction and who considered that to 'slacken' in zeal was to 'die' ('The Good Morrow' 21).

The need for matching white-hot truth with a contained, condensed expression, and the need for order and concentration of mind explain two aspects of Donne's attraction to verse. A third is a person's proclivity to remember verse, and verse's ability to preserve persons. Preservation is a way in which to maintain wholeness and prevent discordant decay. The trope of poetry's embalming power is relatively uncommon in Donne compared to other poets of his age like Jonson and Shakespeare, especially compared to the latter's sonnets. Guibbory says that 'The Renaissance belief in the poet's ability to immortalize the people he praises is admittedly rare in Donne' (52). Still, it creeps into Donne's lines now and then, as in 'The Canonization' when the speaker declares that instead of preserving the lovers' 'legend' in 'tomb', 'hearse', or 'piece of chronicle', they will 'build in sonnets pretty rooms— / As well as a well-wrought urn becomes / The greatest ashes as half-acre tombs—' (30, 29, 31, 32-34). He expresses the same desire in 'The Relic': 'I would that age were by this paper taught / What miracles we harmless lovers wrought' (21-22). And he is most unequivocal—if grovelling—about the idea in a poem of praise written to one of his patronesses, Lucy the Countess of Bedford:

> In recompense, I would show future times
>
> What you were, and teach them to urge towards such.
>
> Verse embalms virtue, and tombs or thrones of rhymes
>
> Preserve frail, transitory fame, as much

> As spice doth bodies from corrupt airs' touch. ('To the Countess of Bedford at New Years Tide' 11-15)

Achsah Guibbory asserts that these instances 'suggest that Donne at times wanted an influence greater than the circle of the present could afford. So he prophetically looked towards the future for his largest audience, hoping to find there the satisfaction of more public acclaim' (50). It is quite possible that Donne harboured that wish. However, Donne never makes explicit the desire for fame as a poet. It is the fame of his patrons or the fame of the woman or of the couple's love which poetry crystallises, not his own renown, contra Guibbory's assertion. When he writes in *The First Anniversary*, 'Verse hath a middle nature: Heaven keeps souls, / The grave keeps bodies, verse the fame enrols', he is commemorating the teenage girl of whom it was written, not himself (473-474). Even so, his verse has preserved his name, and his poetic fame lives on for postmodern people just as it did, irritatingly enough for Donne, in his own day.[25] One cannot discount the possibility that Donne wished it so. Rhyme has a keeping power which Donne values.

Not only does poetry remember us, but we remember poetry. Donne avers that the reason God gave Moses a song of thanksgiving to sing after the exodus of the Israelites was 'because he knew they would let fall / The Law, the Prophets, and the History, / But keep the song still in their memory' (*The First Anniversary* 464-466). Donne's view of memory is principally theological in nature. Guibbory makes the argument that, in Donne's view, human memory is an antidote to the decay and dissolution that stems from the Fall and is thus able to lead one closer to God and the original wholeness of Eden (36-46). Donne derives his belief in the reliability and usefulness of the memory from Augustine, who presents memory as the most reliable of the faculties with which God endued the human soul (Guibbory 37). The other two parts of the soul, the understanding (or reason) and the will, are more tainted from original sin. In the Holy Sonnet 'Batter my heart', Donne bewails the undependability of his reason: 'Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend, / But is captive, and proves weak or untrue' (8-9). He is likewise suspicious of his will in 'Oh, to vex me': 'Inconstancy

[25] Poetry was regarded by many in Renaissance England as the idle playthings of boys compared to the active and manly political life (Marotti 'Social Context' 38). Naturally, Donne feared the repercussions the untoward moniker 'poet' would have upon his career. Therefore, for rather 'pragmatic as well as artistic reasons', Donne rejected the role of public poet with its attachments of fame and infamy (Stubbs 30). Practically, this meant he attempted to restrict his audience, pursued a political career, and shunned publication. To his consternation, many of his poems escaped their intended sphere of circulation. By his late twenties, at which point he had begun to throw himself into his career more seriously, Donne feared 'the damage [his poems] were doing to the more sober reputation he was…trying to cultivate' (Stubbs 35-36).

unnaturally hath begot / A constant habit, that when I would not / I change in vows and in devotion' (2-4). Memory, on the other hand, as Donne orates, is 'so familiar, and so present, and so ready a faculty, as will always answer, if we will but speak to it, and aske it, *what God hath done for us, or for others*' (*Sermons* 2: 73). Donne preaches to himself in another Holy Sonnet: 'Wilt thou love God as he thee? Then digest, / My soul, this wholesome meditation' ('Wilt thou love God' 1-2). The 'wholesome meditation'—that which makes whole, unites—is a consideration of the historical favours which God has done for him, the pinnacle of which is that 'The Son of glory came down and was slain / Us, whom he'd made and Satan stol'n, to unbind' (11-12). Recollection thus helps restore 'original harmony with God', if imperfectly (Guibbory 42).

Though Guibbory is correct in asserting that memory, for Donne, leads to unity with God (41, 52), I argue that it also leads to a more heightened unity of self. Donne's theory of human memory flows from his theological convictions, but it also explains his attraction to poetry. Donne is always memorializing and commemorating specific occasions with poetry: he writes funeral elegies, anniversary poems, and marriage songs; he versifies first meetings and miserable partings; he sets apart his experience at sea with 'The Storm' and the subsequent 'The Calm'; he marks specific days with poetry as is the case with 'Good Friday, 1613: Riding Westward', 'Upon the Annunciation and Passion Falling Upon One Day, 1608', and 'A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day'. One reason for Donne's insistence on demarcating certain days and occasions with monuments of poetry is poetry's unique aptitude for calling to remembrance. As the lines from *The First Anniversary* cited in the previous paragraph attest, Donne believed that although the Jews might forget the prose works of 'The Law, the Prophets, and the History', they would not let Moses' poetic song fall by the wayside (465). Donne was likely aware of the words of Sir Philip Sidney (whose work he praised), that 'verse far exeedeth prose in the knitting up of memory' and that

> the words (besides their delight, which hath a great affinity to memory) being so set as one cannot be lost but the whole work fails; which accusing itself, calleth the remembrance back to itself, and so most strongly confirmeth it. Besides, one word so, as it were, begetting another as, be it in rhyme or measured verse, by the former a man shall have near guess to the follower. (qtd. in Guibbory 52)

Rhyme and meter are natural aids to recollection. For a man who longed for single-minded concentration and unity of being, poetry was no doubt appealing. If one loses one's memory, one loses oneself. Verse coincided with his desire to recollect and focus all the parts of

himself, the many days, moments and dearly missed people which shaped him. Through its memorial capacity, poetry can help restore the 'original wholeness' or 'integrity' of the soul that was fragmented as a result of the Fall (Guibbory 43). The human mind remembers poetry more readily than other forms, and it is thus able to unite the scattered pieces of one's being.

Donne chose poetry as a vent for artistic expression because of the powerful density of its form, the concentration required for its composition and for its reading, and because he saw its potential to gather stray bits of his life and the lives of others through an easily rememberable shape. All these reasons point to his desire for intense unity of the self, to feel and react fully and sensibly to the world. I furthermore contend that Donne saw verse as capable of reflecting the pre-destined design God laid upon the world and the unity of God himself: 'Almighty God ever loved unity, but he never loved singularity; God was always alone in heaven, there were no other gods, but he; but he was never singular, there was never any time, when there were not three persons in heaven' (*Sermons* 5:113). Poetry is mimetic insofar as it reflects the same principle of 'unity' without 'singularity', the obligatory involvement of distinct elements in a greater order. There are strengths to poetry in representing that truth which prose cannot replicate because of the diligent design of verse, the need for all its parts to conform and settle themselves neatly. Whereas prose is unnumbered, poetry is numerically delineated; and if prose is vast and open-ended, poetry is contained because of its necessary correspondence to a prescribed rhyming and metrical pattern which give its conclusions finality. The tight structure of the poem reflects the purposed structure of the heavens and the earth and the unity of God.

One of the attractive features of verse to a mind which loves unity is its capacity to reflect in its numerical constitution the greater harmony of the universe. The idea that numbers underlie the ordering of the cosmos was an idea 'which enticed poets and philosophers as well as theologians' from Plato and Augustine to Boethius and Francesco Giorgio, whose work *De Harmonia Mundi Totius Cantica Tria* (1525) describes 'the great harmony of the world' by 'the science of numbers' (Røstvig 13, 27). Though first expressed by the Greek philosophers, churchmen felt numeric symbolism to be a biblical concept given the valency accorded to certain repeated numbers in the Bible. It seemed a small leap to postulate that God himself employed the science in the structuring the world, an extrapolation which was bolstered by the verse from the *Wisdom of Solomon*: '*omnia in mensura et numero et pondere disposuisti*' (Røstvig 8). Many Renaissance thinkers like Giorgio concluded 'that if God created the world according to a preconceived archetypical pattern, then the artist can do

no better than imitate the creative procedure of the Deity' (Røstvig 4). Applied across a spectrum of arts and sciences, such numerology flourished in the Renaissance and was embraced by Donne's dearest friend and frequently epistolary addressee Sir Henry Wotton in his work *The Elements of Architecture* (1624), which advances the idea that 'harmony in sight is related to harmony in sound' (Røstvig 21). It is but a short step from architecture and music to verse. 'Since the whole world is made according to number, measure, and weight…so must poetry' (Røstvig 23).

That Donne was influenced by the notion that 'the use of certain pregnant numbers' could serve as an 'allegorical device' seems indisputable considering his numerous references to the meanings of special figures in his sermons (Røstvig 6). In this respect, he seems to be following Augustine, who not only 'devoted much time to explaining the numbers in the Bible' but who 'adopted a numerical method of composition' for many of his prose works (Røstvig 8). It is not apparent, however, that Donne attributed to numerology the mystical quality which Neoplatonist Renaissance men did:

> [I]f the highest mystery of all is the mystery of number, then the structural use of symbolic numbers in poetry would invest it with the highest possible significance, perhaps even with the magic potency of the numbers selected. It is impossible to doubt that Pico and Giorgio believed in this sort of magic, but I suspect that the poets adopted the technique largely because of its symbolic value. It was esthetically pleasing that form and content should be co-ordinated, thus investing the poem with an extra semantic dimension. (36)

At the very least, Donne must have perceived that symbolic numerical composition could add another layer of design which might contribute to the artistry of the poem. Chosen numbers, by virtue of their allegorical meaning, could harmonise with the poem's contents and thus contribute to the *unity* of manner and matter. And Donne need not have espoused magical notions about the hidden potency of numbers to see that composing according to predetermined numbers is in some sense, as Giorgio believed, an imitation of 'God who first conceived an archetypical pattern in his mind before he realised it in the act of creation' (Røstvig 28). Numerical symbolism aside, numerical patterns are a vital component of formal verse which reflect skillfully designed structure, and skillfully designed structure was supposed to reflect the magnificent harmony of God's own creation.

Indeed, early modern Christian poets like Donne and Herbert saw a clear parallel between the divine creation of the world and the poet's artistic design (Cruickshank 115). The evidence that Donne saw this creative equivalence is found, for example, in Donne's verse letters where he calls himself his verse's 'Creator' and in the several instances in which he refers to himself as his poems' 'father' who can cause them to return dust and ashes, as in a verse letter to Magdellan Herbert where he enjoins his poetic missive: 'Mad paper, stay, and grudge not here to burn / With all those sons whom my brain did create' ('To Mr. Thomas Woodward: Haste thee harsh verse' 6; 'To Mr. Beaupre Bell 2' 11; 'Mad Paper Stay' 1-2).[26] The poet is as God to his lines. The main parallel between God's creation of the world and the poet's creation of rhymes is that both are linguistic fiats. The act of poesis endues extant materials with purpose, which mirrors both celestial creation and 'the most fundamental of human impulses', that is, making meaning of the material world, as Cruickshank expounds:

> As an imitation of divine creativity, operating on the existing materials which were made ex nihilo, making—framing, forming, poiesis—was the highest, perhaps the noblest, of human capacities. It is both the starting point (naming begins all interaction) and the pinnacle of being in the world and being in relation. To make meaning out of experience, to organize reality, to invest objective matter with subjective purpose, is the basis of all human enterprise... (115)

Thus, Donne saw the literary arts as the loftiest form of human expression because they come nearest to God's original work of creation via verbal command and reflect the most immediate of human perceptual activities by which raw reality is made intelligible. Poesis creates order out of chaos and imposes unity on the unformed.

Individuality

Balancing Donne's metaphysically derived need for unity and structure in his verse is the stalwart individualism of his style, which lays bare his dislike of stolid uniformity. Though all poets aim to craft their own unique voice, Donne was peculiarly different from other poets. J.B. Leishman writes, 'Donne's style and manner are not only individual, but, in comparison with Horace's or Jonson's, eccentrically and unclassically individual' (122). This is evident, among other traits, in the variety of intricate stanza forms and rhyme schemes which Donne employed, and which he only very rarely repeats. According to Carey, among his lyrics, Donne 'uses forty-six different forms in all, and only two of them more than once'

[26] Donne also calls his 'rhymes' his 'children' in 'To Mr. Beaupre Bell', further mirroring God's creative fatherhood (23, 27).

(191). Robbins tells us that forty-two of them are original to Donne (xxi). In so doing, Donne intended to shun slavish imitation in favour of innovation, as so many scholars have noted (e.g. James Winny 99, 126; Josef Lederer 108; Beatrice Johnson 86-87; Michael F. Maloney 172; Murray Roston 175; Marotti 35). J.E.V. Crofts maintains that the inventiveness and complexity of Donne's formal schemas are a function of his wit: the poet's aim is 'to create a difficulty for his art to surmount' which only his own cleverness can overcome (86). In the main, I agree. Donne preferred inventing his own stanza structure, rather than assimilating conventional forms, in order to demonstrate his individuality.

Donne displays some of his pluck in his choice of rhyme pattern. Many of his early poems are comprised of heroic couplets, an unpopular device before 1600. The name is anachronistic insofar as couplets were not yet 'heroic' in Donne's early days of writing poetry, being associated with lighter, fantastical works like the *Canterbury Tales* and therefore supposedly unsuitable for grave subjects, as Rebecca M. Rush explains (529). The use of couplets in the verse Donne composed in the early 1590s, that is, the *Satires* and *Elegies*, is an artistic choice which Rush argues was an iconoclastic statement of the youthful Donne's rebellion against the constraints of proper, courtly love poetry (529, 533), which he especially disliked for its obsequious theme of giving without receiving, as we have noted. But much of Donne's religious verse is also composed in decasyllabic couplets, such as 'The Cross', 'Upon the Annunciation and Passion Falling upon one day', Resurrection, Imperfect' and 'Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward', which demonstrate a willingness to appropriate the device for serious themes in a time when it was only just beginning to gain wider respect through poets such as 'Ben Jonson and his literary progeny' who 'converted the pentameter couplet into a form congenial to neo-classical restraint and balance' (Rush 529). Arguably, Jonson borrowed the practice from Donne, who first blazed the trail.

Donne also broke away from the pack in his selection of genre. The *Satires*, composed entirely of decasyllabic couplets, have no antecedent in English, and the verse letters, which contain diverse rhyme schemes—including reviled couplets—are virtually the first of their kind in the vernacular, both genres having their origin in the Latin poets, along with the *Epigrams* (A.J. Smith 516; Annabel Patterson 118). His *Elegies* were also relatively ground-breaking in English. Robbins observes that 'Donne was…in the forefront of fashion in writing original Ovidian elegies' as they do not assume the doleful, lamenting attitude with which elegies had come to be associated, but rather sensual impudence and wit set forth in elegiac

couplets (287).[27] The sheer variety and innovation in Donne's choice of genres, rhymes patterns and stanza structures, uncommon in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, indicate his desire to break traditional moulds. Though it is generally considered the role of the poet to give fresh expression to old ideas, Donne appears to have given special emphasis to invention, a trait which caught the attention of his peers. As Jonson said, 'He was the first poet of the world in some things', and as Thomas Carew wrote for Donne's funeral:

> The Muses' garden, with pedantic weeds
>
> O'erspread, was purg'd by thee; the lazy seeds
>
> Of servile imitation thrown away,
>
> And fresh invention planted….
>
> ('An Elegy upon the Death of the Dean of Paul's, Dr. John Donne' 25-28)

It is true that Donne fixated on the concept of unity in manner and matter. But he did not like sameness. His multiplication of forms yet to be tried in the English tongue and the variety of his poetic structures signify his need for distinction and individuality without which true unity is impossible. The powerful assertion of his personality is a function of the larger premise that relational union does not mitigate individual personhood.

There are therefore diverse reasons for which Donne saw verse as an ideal expression of unity. It is a compacted form, it requires a focussed mind, it singles out moments in time and unifies one's memory, it enforces order on disorder, it mirrors the harmony of God's design and it is the carrier of individuality without isolating the poet through unintelligibility (being composed within a shared system of language and socio-literary convention). Far from boring him, formal unity excited Donne because of the mass of diversity which the mind is challenged to harness within a single system. The practice of poesis was the mimetic offshoot of what to him was the most foundational mystery of all: the nature of God, the Three-in-One and One-in-Three. '[I]t is the foundation, the summe, it is all the Christian religion, to believe aright of the Trinity…. There is not so fulfilling, so accomplishing, so abundant an Article as that of the Trinity, for it is all Christianity' (*Sermons* 6: 139). Poetry echoes the unity, self-fulfilment and aseity which Donne saw in God himself.

[27] Marlowe in the forerunner in his translations of Ovid; however, like Donne, his Ovidian work was only circulated in copied manuscripts, so it is difficult to know whether Donne had encountered it (Robbins 287).

The Religious Verse

'There is considerable overlap between his "secular" and "sacred" poetry', writes Guibbory (203). Donne's evolution from amorous poet to devotional poet is less surprising than it sounds, and he himself perceived a continuity between the genres. Donne believed in the inherent similarity between the romantic and the divine, for which he found an analogue in Solomon:

> *Salomon*, whose disposition was amorous, and excessive in love of women, when he turn'd to God, he departed not utterly from his old phrase and language, but having put a new, and spiritual tincture, and form and habit into all his thoughts, and words, he conveyes all his loving approaches and applications to God, and all Gods gracious answers to his amorous soul, into songs, and Epithalamions, and meditations upon contracts…and between God and his soul. (*Sermons* 1: 237)

In the love poems, Donne expresses his desire for union with the beloved, accomplished through intense, exclusive mutual love. In the poems of religion, he conveys his desire to love God totally, accomplished through the exclusive zeal of his devotion, and to receive the love of God. Hence, it is unity through love which connects the two great bodies of Donne's work.

Nonetheless, there are some discernible shifts in Donne's emphasis in religious verse. For example, though he always wrote of death and employed images and metaphors from religion in *The Songs and Sonnets*, he becomes more fixated upon his mortality and the promises of the gospel in the divine poems. Before, love killed him, metaphorically speaking, whereas in the religious verse the circumstances of his inevitable expiry are cause for grave thought. Before, it was 'sacrilege' for the woman he attempted to seduce to kill the fly which symbolised that they were 'two' ('The Flea' 18); in the devotional poems, he fears lest he should genuinely offend God with the sacrilege of 'flattering speeches' ('Oh to vex me' 10). The shift from amorous to devotional poet no doubt reflects the natural growth into maturity that comes with age, marriage, and children (Donne's wife bore him a dozen), as well as the unique circumstances of Donne's biography such as his foiled ambition, death of family members, and change in vocation. Yet I would still lay stress upon the continuity of Donne's abiding instincts and metaphysical presuppositions, which remain essentially unchanged. In the transition from love poet to divine poet, what changes is the emphasis and subject, and not the ideas, of Donne's poetry. Donne is as concerned with the mutual exchange of love and the union it entails in the religious verse as in the amorous verse.

'La Corona'

Excepting 'The Cross', for which scholars cannot ascertain any exact date, *La Corona* appears to be the earliest of Donne's divine poems (Gardner, 'The Religious Poetry of John Donne' 123; Lewalski 254). The sonnets of which *La Corona* is composed are likely the 'hymns, to his dear name addressed' which Donne attached to a letter and verse letter written to Magdalen Herbert in July of 1607 ('To Mrs Magdalen Herbert: of St. Mary Magdalen'; Smith 618-619; Robbins 475). The work, which consists of seven poems, is exquisitely wrought, though it has received neither the attention nor the praise which the *Holy Sonnets* and the hymns have garnered. In *La Corona*, Donne demonstrates his artistry through delivering 'striking and memorable expressions of the commonplaces of Christian belief' in one of the strictest forms (Gardner 124). Gardner notes that 'unlike the majority of Elizabethan sonneteers, Donne has chosen the more difficult form of the sonnet. He follows Sidney in limiting the rhymes of the octave to two, and employs Sidney's most favored arrangement of those rhymes in two closed quatrains. He alternates between two arrangements of the rhymes of the sestet between sonnets' (124). The difficulty of the sonnet form speaks to Donne's desire to present a suitable libation to the Lord, one which requires the full exertion of his faculties to produce. In its careful decorousness, it resembles the devotional poetry of George Herbert. Yet *La Corona* differs from Herbert's verse in its lack of personal, internal contemplation or perspective, which also distinguishes the poem from that other collection of Donne's sacred sonnets, the *Holy Sonnets*. Gardner suggests that unlike the *Holy Sonnets*, which are deeply personal, the '*La Corona* sonnets are inspired by liturgical prayer and praise—oral prayer; not by private mediation and the tradition of mental prayer' (124). She surmises that Donne 'chose to use the sonnet…because he wished to write formally and impersonally: to create an offering of beauty and dignity' (124). Targoff similarly states, '*La Corona* is largely impersonal in tone, and is not primarily concerned with the poet's spiritual life' (108). Although the sonnet series is self-evidently highly contrived and comparatively detached, it marvellously reflects both Donne's belief in the beauty of unity and his desire to return God's love to him with his own labour of love.

One of the requirements of intimate interpersonal union is speech, of which poetry is a most succinct expression. Donne's is a 'logocentric' religion, as Helen Wilcox states (149). By divine speech the Father creates the world, with the refrain, 'And God said' followed repeatedly by the authoritative injunction, 'Let there be' throughout Genesis 1. Moreover, Jesus Christ is 'The Word of God' (Jn. 1:1), and the Holy Spirit 'moved' men to write the scriptures (2 Pet. 1:21). Donne's lifelong fascination with language as both a poet and a

preacher reflects his belief that language comes from God, that God speaks, that God wrote, and that language is woven into the fabric of human reality—a tenet literary poststructuralists must appreciate on some level. *La Corona* aims to represent speech in its most heightened form: it is a 'crown of prayer and praise' which Donne hopes his God will 'deign' to receive ('Sonnet 1' 1). 'Crown' denotes the gift which is the poem, but also the very best, *la crème de la crème* of utterances. The poem is truly clever in its use of language, its paradoxes and double meanings, but it is clever in a reverential, rather than mischievous, sense, evoking wonder at the miracle and mystery of the incarnation of God the Son.

The poem, then, presents itself as a gift to Christ, celebrating his earthly life. It consists of an introductory sonnet followed by a depiction of the sequence of events in the life of Christ from his 'temporal beginning' to his 'temporal end' (A.B. Chambers, 'The Meaning of the Temple in Donne's *La Corona*' 349). Each individual sonnet portrays and acclaims one aspect of the incarnate life, which strung together paint a full picture of Christ's ministerial work. Much of the unity of the poem rests upon the organic bond between sonnets. The last line of each individual poem is repeated in the first line of the one which ensues. The form is not original to Donne. It is based upon the 'Italian poetic form *Corona di sonnetti*, a sequence of sonnets linked by last and first lines', a form imitated in English before Donne by Gascoigne, Chapman, and Sidney (Robbins 475). Donne contributes by transforming the sonnet sequence into a means of spiritual devotion, whereas before it had, in keeping with conventional use, been primarily romantic in theme (Guibbory 206).

What he exploits so well in the form is its circularity, fusing it with the concept of the eternity of God and heaven. The entire sequence loops in on itself, ending upon the same line which with it begins, 'Deign at my hands this crown of prayer and praise', enacting its worship endlessly. *La Corona* means 'the crown', and the poem is as circular as the physical 'crown' it purports to be, pointing to the eternality of God and his praise. Other devices point to the theme of unity and continuity as well. The meter is decasyllabic, ten being a circular number, and there are seven sonnets, each made up of the traditional fourteen lines—conveniently twice seven, the number of eternity. Gardner argues that Donne draws his thematic inspiration for the poem from Catholic practices of meditation, such as 'the Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary' and 'the language of collects and office hymns, which expound the doctrines of the Catholic Faith' (123-124), a thesis with which Targoff agrees (108), and which may well be. A more direct and foundational source, however, based on the numeric

symbolism, is the Lord's Prayer as it is relayed in the Gospels. Donne preached upon the infinitude and numeracy of the Lord's Prayer, declaiming:

> As that Prayer which our Saviour gave us,…consists of seven petitions, and seven is infinite, so by being at first begun with power and acknowledgement of his reigning in heaven, and then shut up in the same manner, with acclamations of power and glory, it is made a circle of praise, and a circle is infinite too, The Prayer, and the Praise is equally infinite. (5: 271; pointed out by Robbins 475)

In the formal details of its sevenfold structure and circularity and in its theme of 'prayer and praise' Donne models his poem on the Our Father. This is in keeping with the aspirations of mimesis. Lewalski informs us 'that the divine poet not only may but must imitate God's own method of creation…both in nature and in scripture' (282). In this instance, he imitates the written word of God, recorded in the gospels, and the spoken word, because the prayer was orally conveyed. The aspect Donne desires to imitate most is the circularity, or infinitude, of Christ's prayer, because it is thereby complete and therefore worthy to be prayed to the infinite God.

Beyond the numeric symbolism, Lewalski notes, 'the poetic devices used in the construction of this corona are subtle rhetorical figures of poetic interlinking and interweaving…. [T]he constant use of ploce, repetition, and antithesis weaves lines and half-lines together' (259), as when the speaker marvels at the nature of Christ: 'That All, which always is all everywhere; / Which cannot sin, and yet all sins must bear; / Which cannot die, yet cannot choose but die' ('Sonnet 2' 2-4). Through the various repetitions and statements of thesis and antithesis, the poet connects the sundry words and phrases as one weaves a wreath: this is Donne's plan, for the poem is the diadem he proffers to the Deity.

In addition to forms of repetition, other wordplays abound. For example, Donne's play with the variations of the word 'end': 'The ends crown our works, but thou crown'st our ends, / For at our end begins our endless rest; / This first last end…' ('Sonnet 1' 9-11). 'End(s)' signifies results, aims, death, and heaven. Taken together, the knotted phrase implies that a Christian's death is the first and only death which opens the way to perpetual bliss. Donne creates an oxymoron with his mention of one's 'first last end', which is also tautological because an 'end' is by definition 'last'. This sort of double and triple significance of words which blend often contrary meanings runs through the whole sequence. The multiple senses enhance the sense of perfect cohesion the poet aims to achieve, as the several denotations all

fit together in the logic of the poem despite their difference. The multivalence of words throughout the poem also enriches it, imbuing it with manifold layers and thereby increasing the delight of reading, and the value of the gift offering that is the poem.

More than echoing the circular, and thus unified beauty of God's nature, words and works, *La Corona* illustrates Donne's 'spiritual longing for God' (Guibbory 203). The poet expresses this yearning in his request that God would receive his humble wreath of praise in exchange for assurance of God's forgiveness, and in more direct expressions of desire for God, which he calls 'a strong, sober thirst' which rises from within in his 'starved' and 'dry soul' ('Sonnet 1' 12; 'Sonnet 6' 1, 4). What the speaker chiefly desires is that the redemption which Christ accomplished might be applied to him: 'But do not with a vile crown of frail bays, / Reward my Muse's white sincerity, / But what thy thorny crown gained, that give me' ('Sonnet 1' 5-7). Donne again plays on the word 'crown': in giving God a crown he hopes to receive a crown, not an evanescent wreath of 'frail bays' like those rewarded in athletic contests, but the salvation Christ realised in undergoing the pain of wearing the crown of thorns, which is metonymic of his entire suffering. The constant reference to crowns and crowning is self-referential. It highlights that the poem itself is the good work which Donne extends in gratitude for the love of Christ toward him. In this way, through poetry, the love between poet and Deity can be reciprocal, each giving and receiving in a circular transaction.

Paradox is the device by which Donne seeks to evoke wonder at the miracles of redemption and describe the ineffable mysteries unveiled in God's plan of salvation. It is meant to elicit amazement in the reader and express earnest gratitude to the redeemer. The speaker exclaims that Christ's executioners 'do unto th'immaculate, / Whose creature Fate is, now prescribe a fate, / Measuring self-life's eternity to a span' ('Sonnet 5' 6-8). Fate's master becomes its subject; the non-contingent, self-existing life is reduced to a dying man. 'Immensity,' the speaker informs Mary, is 'cloistered in thy dear womb' ('Sonnet 3' 1). Christ, who 'fills all place, yet none holds him doth lie' in a manger ('Sonnet 3' 10). In the episode in which the boy Jesus teaches the learned 'doctors' at the temple, the speaker remarks,

> The Word but lately could not speak, and lo,
>
> It suddenly speaks wonders. Whence comes it
>
> That all which was and all which should be writ

A shallow-seeming child should deeply know? (‘Sonnet 4’ 4, 5-8)

Donne conjoins opposites seemingly as frequently as he can to convey wonder. The seeming self-contradictions bely human reason in order that reason, which Donne so mistrusts, might bend to faith and submit to God. Donne clothes the doctrines of the Christian religion in paradoxical language to overwhelm self-assured human beings of their rational limits and so they may be swallowed up in awe, gratitude and worship—in short, love—for God.

Though the poem expresses gratefulness, it also makes petitions to the Deity. The speaker signals the dual purpose of the poem by terming it a ‘crown of *prayer* and *praise*’ in the opening line (my emphasis). Though the alliteration of the terms might imply synonymic equivalence, Donne’s sermon on the Lord’s Prayer suggests that he distinguished between the two, for ‘Prayer…, consists of petitions’ and ‘praise’ of ‘accalamations of power and glory’ (5: 271). The requests of *La Corona* are primarily loaded toward the end of the sequence as the speaker approaches the conclusion of his narrative: the climactic crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Christ. In addition to the petition to receive the poem itself, the main entreaty is that Christ would confirm the application of his blood to the speaker’s soul, thereby granting him remission of sins, resurrection and eternal life. ‘Moist, with one drop of thy blood, my dry soul’ he implores, ‘Oh, with thine own blood quench thine own just wrath’ (‘Sonnet 5’ 14; ‘Sonnet 7’ 12). The atoning blood of Christ, once applied to the speaker, shall give him ‘life’ which ‘shall control Death, whom [Christ’s] death slew’, and wake him from ‘sin’s sleep, and death’s’ to rise and ‘Salute the last and everlasting day’ (‘Sonnet 6’ 5, 6, 12, 13). The speaker thus desires the salvific benefits of the sacrificial work of Christ. But he also desires union with Christ himself: ‘Now thou art lifted up, draw me to thee’ (‘Sonnet 5’ 12). Since Donne is a poet of persons with a penchant for the dramatic, he addresses Christ personally: ‘O strong ram which hast battered Heaven for me, / Mild lamb, which with thy blood hast marked the path’ (‘Sonnet 7’ 9-10). It is the same direct address of which Donne makes use in the love poems. The voice, like that of the amorous verse which scorned aloof worship of the mistress, is not content to praise from a distance, but dares to lay forth supplications by which the speaker indicates he wants to receive as well as give.

La Corona expresses desire for the continuity of the self beyond the grave as well as for God. It is a desire which Donne’s speaker sincerely believes that God, and only God, can satisfy. He asks, ‘May then sin’s sleep, and death’s, soon from me pass, / That, waked from both, I, again risen, may / Salute the last and everlasting day’ (‘Sonnet 6’ 13-15). He fears lest the grave should be his end yet expresses confidence that God will deliver him by inscribing

his name in heaven's book: 'nor shall to me / Fear of first or last death bring misery, / If in thy life-book my name thou enrol' ('Sonnet 6' 6-8). Continuity of the individual, note, is guaranteed by God *writing* one's name in heaven's scroll. It is another hint that the act of writing was for Donne a means to unite the loose pieces of himself. The sonnet sequence itself appears to be the medium by which he invokes all his inward piety, unleashing it on paper and producing a permanent, circular testament of his affection for God, to whom he is thankful for life eternal. In written prayer, Donne finds assurance that he will be granted the perpetuity which characterises God through the resurrection which will reconstitute his disparate elements and end death's awful rupture of the self, the gifts of God's love for which the poet desires to make some return.

'Holy Sonnets'

If *La Corona* is a contained expression of praise and thankfulness, *The Holy Sonnets* are a maelstrom of emotion, fraught with passion. They are, of course, still artistically contained, being sonnets, but the fervency and variety of the speaker's feelings seem barely to be restrained by the strictness of the form. Whereas the sonnets of *La Corona* primarily evoke wonder at Christian orthodoxies through paradox, the *Holy Sonnets* enact the spiritual trial of the soul. They are replete with honest expressions of doubt, despair and anxiety. Yet they also express appreciation for God's redemptive work and hope for his intervention. Whether the sonnets are autobiographical is debatable, but they certainly 'ring of a living voice' (Gardner, 'The Religious Poetry' 131). Moreover, irrespective of the realism of the emotion, there is a strong biographical slant in the poems' details. The sonnets record the death of Donne's wife ('Since she whom I loved'), depict the presence of his father's soul in heaven (Donne's father died when he was a boy; Stubbs 459; 'If faithful souls'), and regret his womanizing (Donne was known as 'a great visitor of ladies' as a young man; Richard Baker qtd. in Smith, *Critical Heritage* 126; 'I am a little world'; 'What if this present'). What is most important, however, is that the ideas which the sonnets communicate, and the way in which they are communicated, are truly Donnean and reflect thoughts which saturate all his writings. At the core, they are poems which communicate the need for reciprocity, for love to and from God. There are three ways in which Donne demonstrates concern for unity in the *Holy Sonnets*: the desire for a united heart, the unity of form, and the desire for reciprocated love.

Though rife with feeling, the sonnets also demonstrate the sorrow of not feeling *enough.* In 'I am a little world' the speaker beseeches God, 'Pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might / Drown my world with my weeping earnestly' (7-8). In another sonnet he asks

God to delay judgement day so that he may find time to 'mourn a space' ('At the round Earth's imagined corners' 9). John Carey writes, 'The unfitness of what he can find to say to God repeatedly afflicts Donne in the "Holy Sonnets"…. Nor is it just that he feels unworthy…. What worries him is that he can't feel unworthy enough. Something inside him is numb or crippled' (48). Carey adds, 'this petition for tears… [is] a vast gesture of despair at his own aridity and unresponsiveness' (50).[28] The poems thus demonstrate a 'holy discontent' with the intensity and shallowness of the poet's own feeling ('Oh might those sighs and tears' 3).

The fear of insensitivity relates to Donne's dissatisfaction with being scattered-minded and divided in devotion:

> No word in the Scriptures [is] so often added to the heart, as that of intireness…Do this with *all thine heart*, with a *whole heart*, with a *full heart*: for whatsoever is indivisible, is therefore immovable….And…against this…there are many impediments:…First there is…Heartlessness, no Heart at all, Incogitancy, Inconsideration: and then there is…a doubtful, a distracted Heart…Perplexity and Irresolution: and lastly…a wandring, a wayfaring, a weary Heart; which is neither Inconsideration, nor Irresolution, but Inconstancie. (*Sermons* 9: 175)

Donne wants to respond to God and the world with an undivided zeal. Thus, the need to feel adequate degrees of contrition in the *Holy Sonnets* connects to the larger desire to overcome his sense of internal fragmentation. The Psalmist's request, 'unite my heart to fear thy name', is the quintessence of the *Holy Sonnets* (Ps. 86:11). The unity of godly fear is precisely why Donne says he hopes to quake with holy dread: 'So my devout fits come and go away / Like a fantastic ague, save that here / Those are my best days when I shake with fear' ('Oh, to vex me' 12-14). All the hindrances to 'intireness' which Donne lists in the sermon—inconsideration, doubt, inconstancy—he treats in the sonnets, or rather, through the sonnets, as the poems are the means by which Donne deals with the deleterious feelings of disunity and inconsistency and rouses himself to feel more fully as he ought. They are practices in meditation to fully engage the heart so that he can be a whole person. For by 'heart', 'God means, the whole man…The heart is the man' (9: 175).

[28] Gary Kuchar makes a similar point in his article, 'Petrarchism and Repentance in John Donne's Holy Sonnets', though his argument is that Donne appears partly to *like* his alienation from God.

Donne's speaker regrets that whereas is in the past he put his full heart into idolatrous pursuits, in the present he finds himself unable to summon the same calibre of concern for that which he now regards as sin:

> Oh might those sighs and tears return again
>
> Into my breast and eyes, which I have spent,
>
> That I might in this holy discontent
>
> Mourn with some fruit, as I have mourned in vain:
>
> In mine idolatry, what showers of rain
>
> Mine eyes did waste! What griefs my heart did rent! ('Oh might those sighs and tears' 1-6)

If one had had to surmise to which autobiographical details 'idolatry' refers, dead-end romantic flings and frustrated career designs have to be near the top of the pile. Yet amorous pursuits are likely the vanity which Donne most has in mind, since 'sighs and tears' are Petrarchan shorthand for romantic grief (Guss, *John Donne* 23). Donne had little difficulty giving himself over to weeping over break-ups and snubbed affection but discovers a paucity of penitence in his new relationship to romantic infatuation as sin. The transformation of the sonnet into a devotional genre marks his new disposition. Donne exploits the form's long tradition as love poetry to emphasise his renunciation of amorousness—his 'profane mistresses'—in exchange for concentrated love for God ('What if this present' 10; Guibbory 206; Marotti 258). He makes this contrast between lover of women and lover of God one of the vital *topoi* of the poems. The sonnet form itself, despite his protestations of discontent, signposts his resolve to love God with unified resolve by conspicuously displacing the love of women which is the resonant idea of the sonnet tradition.

To emphasise that the sonnets attempt to summon a pious frame of mind is nothing new. Louis Martz has argued that the *Holy Sonnets,* and Donne's religious verse in the main, aim to follow the meditative structure recommended by the Jesuit Ignatius Loyola in order to evoke a suitable response to spiritual realities ('Donne and the Meditative Tradition' 144).[29] Martz's insistence on the precise division of the *Holy Sonnets* into the tripartite mediations

[29] This is the same Loyola whom Donne lampooned in *Ignatius His Conclave*, which perhaps diminishes the likelihood that Donne consciously borrowed the structure of his religious exercises.

proposed by Loyola—which call forth sequentially the memory, understanding and will to lead one to greater to commitment to God—has been challenged by the likes of Archer Stanley (137) and Patrick Grant (555-556), but the sonnets are nonetheless still broadly meditative, and Donne himself does not shy away from using the term 'meditation' ('Wilt thou love God' 2). The elicitation of zealous concentration is not owing purely to the sonnets' meditative pattern and substance, however. Tina Skouen has stressed Donne's employment of rhetoric to induce and control an array of passions and sees the poetic form as particularly conducive to this purpose (186). For example, it is one of Donne's persistent habits to insert twists in his poetry, but it is a technique which receives particular usage in *The Holy Sonnets*: 'Donne's sonnets seem built upon ruptures, breaks, turns' which do not limit themselves to the conventional *volta* of the ninth line (Targoff 110). These lend the poems a kinetic energy and stir the poet from the torpor of indifference toward God. Hence, the *Holy Sonnets* not only present the need to stir up one's spiritual fervour, but as meditations, exhortations and 'tiny orations' as Skouen describes them (185), also attempt to accomplish what they call for.

The poet pleads more than he preaches, however. Rather than pontificating, he mourns his sin and seeks forgiveness from his God with ever-increasing degrees of zeal:

> Pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
>
> Drown my world with my weeping earnestly,
>
> Or wash it, if it must be drowned no more.
>
> But oh, it must be burnt! Alas, the fire
>
> Of lust and envy have burnt it heretofore,
>
> And made it fouler: let those flames retire,
>
> And burn me, O God, with a fiery zeal
>
> Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heal. ('I am a little world' 7-14)

The sonnet illustrates the poet's remorse for past sins (amorousness and careerism—'lust and envy') and his present dissatisfaction with the smallness of his love to God. He borrows the Petrarchan conceit of flooding the world with tears (Guss, *John Donne* 50)—one which Donne uses frequently in the love poetry to communicate sorrow over parting—and weds it to the biblical notion of the deluge as judgement on and cleansing for sin, applying the diluvian waters to the microcosm of himself. Then, restless, the poet changes metaphor by insisting

that God purify him through burning, since he realises that God has promised to flood the world 'no more', but only to consume with fire (Ge. 9:11; 2 Pet. 3:7). The flood and fire imagery communicate two things. First, that the speaker desires to be cleansed of the transgressions of his youth, as fire and water purify. Second, that the speaker desires to feel as he ought, as the metaphoric flood of *weeping* and fire of *zeal* suggest. He longs for a greater sorrow for sin and burning for righteousness. Thus, Donne reorients the metaphoric coordinates of fire and water—once sinful excess—to mean pardon and passion. These two themes, the need for both forgiveness and fervency, constitute the warp and woof of the *Holy Sonnets*. I will come back to the idea of forgiveness, but for now I stress that fervent intensity, 'weeping earnestly' and possessing 'a fiery zeal', is the mark of one whose heart is united in love for God.

Donne also manifests his concern for unity in the poise of his themes and of his form. Thematically, scholars often overstress either the sonnets' despair or their consolation, when the emotional and artistic poignancy actually balances between both extremes: what they shun is the fixed state of complacency.[30] Donne always loved the middling way. Jokingly, he announces his preference for a middle-aged woman in his elegy 'Autumnal': 'No spring, nor summer beauty hath such grace, / As I have seen in one autumnal face', concluding with the statement, 'I hate extremes' (1-2, 45). This is true in many of the details of his life as well. He was, for example, neither a Roman Catholic nor a Puritan, but a middle-of-the-road Anglican. And while he was a two-time Member of Parliament, yet he was also a stalwart supporter of the English monarchy, as his relationship to the king and so many of his sermons show (Stubbs 142, 297-298). Balance connects to his need for symmetry. Correspondingly, there is a thematic balance as well as formal unity which Donne aims for in the *Holy Sonnets*.

Donne hated extremes, yet he loved them, too. Extremities elicit intensity in his poetry: 'all' and 'nothing', 'love' and 'hate', 'east and west', 'body' and 'soul,' 'life' and 'death'. What he truly hated were unconnected extremes, maverick motions, poles which cannot be unified, as when he laments in *The First Anniversary* that, 'She that should all parts to reunion bow, / She that had all magnetic force alone / To draw and fasten sundered parts in

[30] See John Stachniewski, 'John Donne: The Despair of the "Holy Sonnets"' for an argument about their utter despair, and for an argument about their consolation see Douglas L. Peterson, 'John Donne's "Holy Sonnets" and the Anglican Doctrine of Contrition'.

one', i.e. Elizabeth Drury, is dead, and all hope for a unified world gone with her (220-222).[31] This dislike of isolated parts is why Donne so frequently returns to the notion of a 'centre' in his poems (e.g. 'A Valediction: Forbidden Mourning' 29; 'The Sun Rising' 30). In bringing opposite points together in his poetry, he eliminates the deficiencies of their excess but preserves their passion. As he says in a love lyric, 'Yet, love and hate me too, / So, these extremes shall neither's office do' ('The Prohibition' 17-18). In the *Holy Sonnets* Donne demonstrates attention to thematic balance by taming the doubt of despair and enlivening the placidity of faith. He will neither write as he knows a pious man ought ideally to feel nor give free reign to the chaos of anarchic unbelief. Thus, he circumvents the poetic dullness of much devotional verse, avoiding the trap of which Murray Roston warns: 'Religious poetry is intrinsically a more treacherous vehicle than secular verse. It can too easily collapse into self-righteous sentimentality or theological cliché…. That desire for original ideas or lively images which animates the secular poet tends to be replaced in hymnal writing by a need…to attest to the orthodoxy of his beliefs' (152). Donne manages to be both orthodox and interesting, the key being, as Roston observes, 'Christian *humility*… the poet's sense of failure, his yearning for redemption, or his near despair' (153). Candour and a low estimation of oneself together with hope in the power and benevolence of God assimilate the extremes of faith and despair in a balanced portrayal of the Christian experience.

Formally, there is less apparent unity between the *Holy Sonnets* compared to the sequenced sonnets of *La Corona*. As individual poems, they lack 'continuous spiritual narrative' and 'definitive ordering' (Targoff 108). While there is no apparent linear connection between the poems of the *Holy Sonnets*, many arguments have still been made, following Gardner, for their proper arrangement and grouping according to progression of theme (e.g. Don M. Ricks, Stephenie Yearwood, Douglas L. Peterson, Antony F. Bellette; Lewalski 264). Part of the problem of arriving at an agreed-upon sequence, apart from the want of clear interstanzaic links, is that there is varying ordering of the sonnets in the manuscripts. The two main manuscripts each contain twelve sonnets, eight of which they share with four unique to each themselves (Lewalski 264; Targoff 108-109). These sixteen were most likely composed in 1608-1610 and circulated immediately (Carey 46; Targoff 108). The final three sonnets only appear in the 'Westmoreland' manuscript and were almost certainly written after the original sixteen (Gardner, 'The Religious Poetry of John Donne'

[31] Similarly, the speaker says the 'world's beauty is decayed or gone' due to 'eccentric' planetary orbits which 'disproportion…pure form' because they no longer revolve around the earth as once thought (*The First Anniversary* 249, 255, 257).

129; Lewalski 264). There is therefore no overt evidence which would suggest that the *Holy Sonnets* are narratively arranged in similar fashion to *La Corona*. And yet, they are not entirely disconnected, as both their common form and theme suggest. Furthermore, they were never distributed individually, as Ernest W. Sullivan comments: 'A remarkable feature of the manuscript transmission of the "Holy Sonnets" is that none has a history of individual circulation. However variously ordered, these sonnets invariably travelled in groups, a fact suggesting that the concept of sequence was integral to Donne's understanding of the genre and poetic intention from the beginning' (194). The last point about 'sequence' is conjecture, but the main point is taken: although we are unsure of whether there is any precise connection between the sonnets, they are clearly not so disconnected that their author was willing to issue them in isolation.

Even if they do lack the self-evident formal unison of *La Corona*, the sonnet form itself serves to satisfy Donne's need for artistic unity, each individual poem conforming to a pre-set scheme and working out its own tensions. One of the brilliant uses of the English sonnet is its telos of resolution. Anthony F. Bellette informs us that, 'The English sonnet has built into it a sense of purpose, a development through complication to resolution. The more daring the complication, the more suspense attends upon the resolution…' (136). The octet, with two rhymes (*abbaabba*), poses the problem to which the sestet, typically with three rhymes (*cdcdee*, *cddcee* or *cddccc)* gives closure, the transition signalled by a '*volta* in line 9 that characterizes the standard Petrarchan sonnet' (Targoff 110). The conventional form thus permits Donne to voice artistically the troubles of spiritual struggle whilst offering himself a unified answer to the particular problem which each separate poem raises. That the sonnets stand alone and solve their own thematic pressures—a process mirrored in the schematic progression of rhyme—suits Donne's need for compactness and finality.

Finally, the *Holy Sonnets* display Donne's aspiration for unity in their stress upon reciprocal love between the speaker and God. I maintain that the underlying concern for mutual love is further correlated to the sonnets' Augustinian soteriology, or at least 'Augustine as interpreted by the Reformation' (Lewalski 14)—the paradigm of salvation also known as Calvinism. The poems generally emphasise Donne's likeness to Augustine, particularly Augustine's prayer–autobiography *The Confessions*, which lays forth 'the competition…between divine love and profane love…plus the power of remembered sins and tenacious habit' in the soul of the convert (Sherwood 144). Like Donne, Augustine's primary sin, prior to his conversion, is 'idolatrous sexual love' (Sherwood 144). The underlying

theology of the *Holy Sonnets*, however, is a more contentious subject, and the presence and effect of Calvinism is the most disputed point. We may define Calvinism broadly, as Lewalski does, as the belief in 'man's radical sinfulness and God's overpowering grace', and more narrowly as the doctrines formulated 'in the five points of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619): total depravity, unmerited election, limited atonement (for the elect only), irresistible grace (admitting no element of human cooperation or free response), final perseverance of the saints' (14, 20). In short, I take Calvinism to be the belief that the will of God determines who is and who is not saved, and that this ineluctable determination was made without regard for human will because human beings, owing the total degeneracy of their volition, are ultimately unable to decide to call upon God and be saved. The tenet is important to the poems because Donne's knowledge that God's choice is absolute further underlines his ever-present anxiety about the possibility of rejection and the foiling of mutual love.

What is primarily contested among those who see the sonnets as displaying Calvin's theology is whether the doctrines of predestination, God's total sovereignty, and man's total depravity furnish Donne with comfort or despair (e.g. Stachniewski 699; Richard Strier 364; Paul Cefalu 71-2). Though I acknowledge Paul Celafu and Richard Strier's point that Calvinism aims to comfort rather than terrorize the Christian (because it assures the believer that one cannot lose one's salvation), and reject Carey's characterization of Calvin's God as 'the most hideous that Christianity had yet evolved', 'a monster in the sky' (239, 241), I believe that the Calvinism in the sonnets does not concern the question of comfort so much as it provides the framework for the kinds of desperate utterances the speaker issues before God. The chief fear is that love will not be mutual between the poet and God. Since God alone can accomplish this, Donne can only pray that God will establish reciprocity between himself and Donne by creating in Donne the requisite mourning and repentance and by sovereignly remitting his sins. Salvation is unilaterally enacted by God, but once rendered, it guarantees mutual love which can never be forfeited.

Not all accept that Donne espoused these doctrines, of course. That Donne was a 'moderate Calvinist' is probably the most common view among Donne scholars, but many, such as Guibbory, object (171).[32] Buttressing my reading of the sonnets' soteriology is the

[32] For an argument for evidence of Donne's moderate Calvinism in *The Holy Sonnets*, see Catherine Gimilli Martin's article, 'Experimental Predestination in Donne's Holy Sonnets: Self-Ministry and the Early Seventeenth-Century "Via Media."' For an argument for the sonnets' Arminianism, see John N. Wall Jr.'s article, 'Donne's Wit of Redemption: The Drama of Prayer in the "Holy Sonnets."'

fact that Calvinism was standard theology in the Anglican church until it was challenged by William Laud and other Arminians in the ecclesial furore of the 1620s and 30s, and it was not convincingly displaced from within the Church of England until after the Restoration (Lewalski 13-14; Guibbory 176-177). The majority of the *Holy Sonnets* were most likely written in the early 1610s, before significant dissent from Calvinism was voiced and the rift within the Church opened. We also have the testimony of Donne's sermons, in which Donne does not shy from regular use of words like 'predestination' and 'election': 'before that [one's baptism and confession of faith], hee had elected thee, in that election which S. *Augustine* speaks of… God hath elected certaine men, whom he intends to create, that he may elect them….God had thee, before he made thee; He loved thee first, and then created thee' (7: 62-63). In line with the sermons and the general leaning of the early seventeenth-century Church of England, as well as internal evidence, I am going to contend that the *Holy Sonnets* are indeed Calvinistic in the sense which Lewalski gives: 'The sonnet sequence as a whole reflects the Calvinistic sense of man's utter helplessness in his corruption, and total dependence upon God in every phase of his spiritual life' (25). There are more precise differentiations which might be made within this theological camp—Donne, it is well known, abjures the doctrine of 'double predestination' according to which God has unconditionally predetermined to consign sinners to hell (Lewalski 16)—but it seems apparent that Calvinism gives a defined direction to Donne's expression in the *Holy Sonnets*.

Donne essentially views himself as unable to effect the required changes in his heart unless God does it for him. He frequently characterises parts of himself as 'black', as in his 'black soul' and 'black memory' ('O my black soul!' 1; 'If poisonous minerals' 12). This is perhaps a pun on his name, 'Dun', and suggests that his very nature is corrupt, underlining Calvinism's doctrine of 'total depravity' (Lewalski 20). He therefore repeatedly begs that God would intervene to save him, since not only are his own efforts impotent and worthless and his heart too hard, but his very being is debased. The speaker's active pursuit of God's favour through prayer does not nullify the Calvinist sense of God's determining will, for the sinner's awakening to the reality of his helpless state and his consequent pleadings for mercy are themselves the result of God's working in the Calvinist schema. Catherine Gimelli Martin provides an answer to the age-old quandary:

> 'If God's Holy Spirit does all the work of election, how can any kind of human effort actually matter? The official answer—both Calvin's and [William] Perkins's—is that in eternity absolute choice belongs to God alone, who at once issues his call and

> knows its outcome. But in time, the medium of human action and experience, the status of the elect must always appear as conditional, not absolutely certain, since they can know neither the mind of God nor the true condition of their own hearts. (354)

From the perspective of the penitent seeking clemency, repentance does not look passive; they do not know they are elect until they act. Because the penitent must exercise their will, salvation appears to be contingent on their response to God, yet, according to Calvinism, that very exertion was provided for and decided by God in eternity past. As Lewalski further elucidates, the 'process is wholly of God's causation' (16). That is to say, 'Effective repentance and saving faith' themselves are 'gifts' from God (16).

Perceiving the uselessness of his faculties to rescue himself, the speaker therefore implores God, 'Except thou rise and for thine own work fight, / Oh, I shall soon despair' ('As due by many titles' 11-12). The powerlessness of the speaker and the necessary interposition of God in the soul of the sinner is most clear-cut in the sestet of 'Thou hast made me':

> Only thou art above, and when towards thee
>
> By thy leave I can look, I rise again.
>
> But our old subtle foe so tempteth me
>
> That not one hour I can myself sustain:
>
> Thy grace may wing me to prevent his art,
>
> And thou like ad'mant draw mine iron heart. (9-14)

As he places no merit in his own ability, the only recourse which the speaker has is to entreat God to work on his behalf. He cannot even so much as 'look' to God for help unless God first enables him (10). The speaker's heart is iron, being too obstinate and heavy for him to give it to the Deity who alone has the power to pull it to himself as by magnetic force. Yet Donne's speaker feels no assurance that God will, only that he 'may' (13). The speaker highlights the same tension between holy aspiration, depraved impotence and the determinacy of God's will when he addresses himself in 'O my black soul!': 'Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lack, / But who shall give thee that grace to begin?' (9-10). His only hope is that God will 'impute [him] righteous' ('This is my play's last scene' 13).[33] Donne's Calvinistic sense of

[33]Donne's speaker places no confidence in his obedience to the law of God to grant him entrance into God's 'kingdom'; God's estate must be freely bequeathed as by will and testament, not earned: 'Yet such are thy laws

inability, inner-decadence, and God's determining will undergirds the desperation with which he speaks, the root of which is the acknowledgement that he is beholden to the sovereign mercy of God to be able to love God and be loved by him.

Donne's problem, then, is that he would like to set his affections on God but feels limited by his own incapacity to act or feel, as he bemoans in 'Batter my heart': 'Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain, / But am betrothed unto your enemy' (9-10). He attempts to vitalise his love by considering what God has done for him in 'Wilt thou love God, as He thee?' and stirs himself in 'Spit in my face': 'O let me, then, his strange love still admire: / Kings pardon, but he bore our punishment' (9-10). Unfortunately, the intensity of his zeal does not last, for, 'As humorous is my contrition / As my profane love, and as soon forgot: / As riddlingly distempered, cold and hot' ('Oh to vex me' 5-7). Donne's concern for his own shortcoming in loving God stems from his belief in the *mutuality* of love. Christ, who committed no sin, died for him, while Donne, whose sins are beyond count, is offered pardon: 'For I have sinned and sinned, and only he, / Who could do no iniquity hath died' ('Spit in my face' 3-4). At other times, the situation is reversed as he entertains doubt that God loves him enough to choose him for salvation. 'Oh, I shall soon despair, when I do see / That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt not choose me' ('As due by many titles' 12-13). Calvinism emphasises both sides: that Donne, as a totally depraved sinner, is unable to respond to the love of God in his natural, corrupt state and that God, unless he elects Donne, does not love him in any unique sense. It is therefore Calvinism which best explains the tension which permeates the poems, and it reveals that fear of rejection is the source of that tension, whether it is Donne's rejection of God or God's rejection of Donne—both which would indicate that God has not chosen Donne. The awareness that the other party might not choose to love him, or that his own feelings may falter, was always Donne's anxiety in verse divine and amorous.

Yet the *Holy Sonnets* acquire an additional degree of terror because of the poet's belief that being forsaken by God leads to an infinitely worse perdition than a woman's spurning. Rejection by God results in the worst solitariness imaginable: hell. The fear of eternal, isolated torment must be recognized as one of the doctrinal beliefs which make the *Holy Sonnets* as emotionally convincing and riveting as they are: 'Despair behind, and death before, doth cast / Such terror; and my feebled flesh doth waste / By sin in it, which towards hell doth weigh' ('Thou has made me' 6-8). When preaching on hell, Donne emphasises

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that men argue yet / Whether a man those statutes can fulfil: / None doth…' ('Father, part of his double interest' 2, 9-11).

solitariness as its most intolerable anguish, which also says much about his fears and desires on earth. The section is too long to cite in full, but the following will give the reader a taste of Donne's loathing for aloneness which is the lot of the damned:

> 'when all is done, the hell of hels, the torment of torments is the everlasting absence of God, and the everlasting impossibility of returning to his presence…, *it is a fearful thing, to fall into the hands of the living God*, but to fall out of the hands of the living God is a horror beyond our expression, beyond our imagination….That God should let my soule fall out of his hand, into a bottomlesse pit, and roll an unremovable stone upon it…and never think more of that soule, never have more to do with it….That that God should leave me, and cast me away…and that then this soule…must lie in darknesse…What Brimstone is not an Amber, what gnashing is not a comfort, what gnawing of the worme is not a tickling, what torment is not a marriage bed to this damnation, to be secluded eternally, eternally, eternally from the sight of God? (5: 266-267)

The dreadfulness of hell for Donne lies not so much in the inferno, which is perhaps the more conventional element of terror which preachers urge upon their hearers, as in its utter seclusion from God. This, the poet fears, will be his plight unless he can come to know that he genuinely loves God and *vice versa*.

The solution to this fear in the sonnets lies in locating the visible evidence of salvation. The proof of Donne's love to God is his repentance. He therefore wants repentance to be visceral, felt in the body, just as he accentuates the importance of the body in making the ethereal material in 'The Ecstasy': 'Love's mysteries in souls do grow, / But yet the body is his book' (71-72). The physical realm pictures the underlying spiritual nature and renders it accessible to human perception (Cruickshank 13-14).[34] Thus, Donne's speaker expresses a desire to be punctured: 'Spit in my face, you Jews, and pierce my side; / Buffet and scoff, scourge and crucify me' ('Spit in my face' 1). He wants to tremble, stating it is best to 'quake with true fear of his rod' and that he would prefer to 'shake with fear' ('Oh, to vex me' 10, 14). Most frequently, he invokes tears to demonstrate a palpable repentance in his countenance. He hopes to 'Mourn with some fruit' ('Oh might those sighs and tears' 4), and to 'make [himself] with holy mourning black, / And red with blushing...' ('O my black soul!'

[34] Cruickshank argues that this was the general project of poetry and metaphor for Donne and Herbert (10-14).

11-12).[35] The physicality of repentance marks the speaker's longing for an unmistakable, perceptible sign of his own contrite love in the flesh.

The proof of God's love for Donne, paradoxically, is chastisement and beating, also intensely visceral. The speaker tells God that God does not employ sufficient force in 'Batter my heart'. 'You', the speaker protests, 'As yet but knock, breathe, shine and seek to mend; / That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me and bend / Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new' (1, 2-4). The language of feeling repentance and chastisement in the body points to Donne's desire for irrefutable proof of his own sincerity and divine clemency. Carey chalks up Donne's 'clamorously explicit' 'hunger for pain' and 'suffering' to his apostasy from Catholicism (48). Donne, the argument goes, was weighed down by the guilt of fleeing the persecution which made his brother Henry, his great-grand-uncle Thomas More, and numerous members of his extended family martyrs, prisoners or exiles. While Carey argues that Donne's 'ecstatic masochism' can be traced to his 'lingering guilt' and concomitant desire to share in the averted glory of his kinsmen's sufferings (48-49), I take a different view. For Donne, his suffering is a proof of God's love, that the love he bears to God is returned, a principle he reaffirms in the conclusion of 'Good Friday': 'O think me worth thine anger: punish me, / Burn off my rusts and my deformity' (39-40). The notion has biblical precedence and was common among English protestant poets especially (Lewalski 23). The writer to the Hebrews says, '"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement…then are ye bastards, and not sons' (Heb. 12:6-8). The precept suits Donne's poetic attraction to the bodily and to the paradoxical. Contrarily, to feel no pain is the worst condition because it implies that God has left one hardened and dead in one's sins. But divine discipline ensures the breaking of Donne's unruliness and assures him of the reality of God's forgiveness. God must make feel Donne divine displeasure, otherwise he will remain impenitent and unforgiven, having neither true love for God nor from God, and therefore bereft of the reciprocity in love which is a facet of his utmost ideal of unity, and destined for eternal loneliness.

The *Holy Sonnets* plead for fervour and forgiveness, passion and pardon. The end of the speaker's impassioned entreaties is mutual love: love to God and from God. The means, in addition to the verbalised prayer and the grace of God, is the poetry. It exacts feeling from the

[35] For another argument about the relation of the body to salvation, see Kimberly Ann Coles' article, 'The Matter of Belief in John Donne's "Holy Sonnets."'

speaker's soul to love God, stirring him up to respond to God's grace, gathering in the disparate emotions and unleashing them in regimented, heartfelt pleading. God extended the hand of mercy 'in Christ's blood, which hath this might: / That, being red, it dyes red souls to white' ('O my black soul!' 13-14). The thought that God should love the speaker without receiving love in return is abhorrent to Donne because of its asymmetry; he will not abide anything so lopsided. At the same time, this universal offer of forgiveness is offset by Donne's Calvinistic believe that, unless the Deity grants it, he cannot satisfactorily repent unto salvation and experience the longed-for union with God. The unity and proportionality of mutual love alone achieves satisfying wholeness in divine matters as well as human, but it cannot be attained unless God wills, which unsettles Donne. In a sense, this is the core fear of all Donne's amorous verse. The feeling of helplessness to control the inconstancy of his own affections or to guarantee the affections of the beloved gave rise to poems of romantic heartbreak. In the *Holy Sonnets,* we witness the same angst of ending up alone applied to his relationship to the divine. And yet, the recognition on the part of the poet that salvation is not of his own doing lends a disposition of gratitude to some of the quieter sonnets. Donne's statement, 'I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed' ('Since she whom I loved' 7), contains echoes of Augustine's: 'Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee'. Union with God through shared love is the unity of the highest sort.

The Hymns

The religious verse penned in the latter years of Donne's life is some of his most beautiful and moving material. It is not without passion, but it does assume a calmer, more assured state of mind than the *Holy Sonnets*. The change in tone likely reflects the more settled circumstances of Donne's mature years. In 1615 he finally decided upon a career in the church. A stable income and vocational purpose, apparently, work wonders. He was, moreover, awarded the deanship of St. Paul's cathedral in London in 1621, the crown jewel of London's churches: 'St. Paul's was in all but name the Cathedral of London, the capital's chief place of worship…. [N]o other church had greater involvement in the city's life, or greater popular influence beyond it' (Stubbs 371). Donne's succession through the ranks of the Anglican hierarchy, owing in no small part to his abilities, was no doubt pleasing to him, but perhaps most so because he finally had the full involvement in the world which he so vehemently desired. Donne was not, as Carey states, a poet of the 'English countryside' (9). He did not care for the alienation he felt when he lived there, nor does he make its landscape the focus of descriptive poems (Stubbs 229). Donne is a poet of persons: 'He needed to be

needed—involved, employed, absorbed, but also distinguished' writes Stubbs (229). His fascination with interconnectedness is reflected in his frequent use of the prefix 'inter', with which he creates neologisms: 'intergraft', 'interinanimate', 'inter-assured', 'intertouch'd', 'interbring' ('The Ecstasy' 9, 42; 'A Valediction: Forbidden Mourning' 19; *Metempsychosis* 225; *Ecologue* 171; pointed out by Carey 270). He is always noticing resemblances between words and making unlikely comparisons. It is all one impulse: to unify. As such, he relished his tangible connection to the world in London. There, as the city's preeminent preacher, he was able to fulfil his own distinct role in the grand design and divine orchestration of many parts.

The hymns, which were composed between 1619 and 1631, the year of his death, have an air of quiet resignation to them. They possess an artful gracefulness and tranquil satisfaction. They express love to God as well as confidence in the love of God to him. All of them, because of the hymnic style, suggest a design for a more public readership, yet they are also deeply personal, arising from immediate circumstances in Donne's life such as an ambassadorial mission and debilitating sickness, and they contain blatant references to his and his wife's names. The combination of their biographical, occasional nature together with the generality of their Christian themes and congregational psalmody, and a 'more extensive (manuscript) transmission', suggest his increasing openness 'to be known to an extended manuscript audience as a minister-poet' (Marotti 281). Donne no longer attempted to hide all the painful details of his life as he had with the love poetry, which had been dispersed to a fortunate few, but perhaps saw his experiences, poeticised, as suitable for his public role as minister of the word, and possibly as an opportunity to encourage fellow travellers.[36]

'A Hymn to Christ, at the Author's Last going into Germany', Lewalski remarks, is a deeply felt, and very great poem' (280).[37] She tells us the attachment of 'Hymn' to the title 'is appropriate in that the stanzaic regularity and refrain-like close of each stanza are suggestive of the simple congregational hymn or anthem, though there is no record or setting for it' (280). It is as occasional poem, composed, as the title suggests, when Donne travelled to the European continent on a diplomatic mission as a chaplain to the Lord Doncaster (Stubbs 340-341). The mission involved conference with the protestant Frederick, King of Bohemia and Ferdinand, Holy Roman emperor. The intention of James I was to establish peace in Bohemia

[36] Roman Dubinski observes that Donne sent copies of his *Holy Sonnets* to friends for devotional purposes. The even greater distribution of the Hymns suggests he probably had a similar thought in mind.
[37] Robbins re-titles the poem, 'At the Seaside, going over with the Lord Doncaster into Germany, 1619'.

in light of the looming successorship conflict between Protestants and Catholics in the region and Donne, though he had previously expressed the desire for ambassadorship, feared that the hostilities, combined with general perils of travel and a personal case of consumption, would lead to the forfeiture of his life (Stubbs 339-346; Carey 216). He used this occasion of his hazardous departure to the European mainland as a subject for 'one of his very greatest poems' (Stubbs 341). In the hymn, he embraces the possibility that the venture will be the end of him, literally speaking, but he also interprets the journey symbolically as a means to detach himself from the world and devote himself wholly to God (Roston 217; Stubbs 342). His persistent fascination with the ideas of saying goodbye, dying, divorcing (e.g. 'Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again'; 'Batter My Heart' 11) and flooding, all of which permeated the *Holy Sonnets* especially, resurface in the hymn as a final renunciation, farewell, death, divorce and cleansing *vis à vis* the world.

The sense in which Donne forsakes the world does not belie that other great emphasis upon being involved in the world. The world which he disowns here is the sphere of scattered sinful pursuits, whilst the world of which he loves to be a part and which he so frequently expresses his desire to benefit is the realm of beloved persons. Yet Donne felt he needed full concentration if he was to be of useful service to God and humanity. He had to flee the world to help the world. It was not in the literal sense of hermitage: he was departing on a diplomatic errand, after all, and hoped to return thereafter to his post as father to his 'scattered flock of wretched children' (qtd. in Marotti 280). Rather, what the poem expresses is the same as so much of his poetry, the desire for intense focus. In this case, the object of his concentrated love is Christ. The poet may be a tad dramatic in his estimation of personal peril, yet it is this feeling which 'has produced something so fraught with power that it would be absurd to demand, in its stead, a more realistic estimate of the risks involved', as Carey says (217).[38] Ultimately, it communicates Donne's need for unity of himself and union with God through the condensation of his affections.

Unsurprisingly, Donne commemorates his decision to summon the full intensity of his thoughts and centre them upon God in a poem, that pithy and unified form. The speaker

[38] Carey records the immense luxury in which Doncaster and his party travelled, having received 14,000 pounds from the Crown for their expenses. Carey adds, 'Donne could hardly have travelled in greater comfort or security. Against this background his doom-laden leave-takings acquire a theatrical appearance' (217). Still, considering Donne's own poor health, military tensions on the continent, and real risks in sixteenth-century seafaring (and we may add to this his recent bereavement and his constant concern for the welfare of his brood of motherless children at home), the chaplain was clearly experiencing some serious psychological strains. One can excuse him for thinking about his death.

begins by declaring his willingness to interpret the most adverse circumstances as evidences of God's salvific love towards him:

> In what torn ship soever I embark,
>
> That ship shall be my emblem of thy Ark;
>
> What sea soever swallow me, that flood
>
> Shall be to me an emblem of thy blood;
>
> Though thou with clouds of anger do disguise
>
> Thy face, yet through that mask I know those eyes,
>
> Which, though they turn away sometimes,
>
> They never will despise. (1-8)[39]

The speaker makes known his confidence that whatever God purposes is for his salvation. He transforms the dangers of rickety ship and overwhelming billows into signs, or 'emblems' of God's deliverance. The 'ark' saved Noah from the deluge, and the 'blood' of Christ saves humankind from sin. But the images of flood and blood also connote cleansing, that is, divine forgiveness, and the ship and the ark suggest Donne's sense of isolation from the world, which has the salutary effect of removing him from sinful diversions. As Lewalski summarises of the world which the speaker leaves behind, 'it is full of distractions from the love of God—fame wit, other loves, other hopes. By sacrificing the world, divorcing it through this sea voyage, the speaker can center his love on God only, and so be more surely saved' (280). The speaker is certain that the love between him and Christ is mutual, that though from the circumstances it appears that 'anger' beclouds God's watchful eyes, nevertheless he does not 'despise' Donne.

Assured that Christ loves him, Donne, in turn, expresses his love to Christ in the second stanza by offering to him all that he holds dear:

> I sacrifice this island unto thee,
>
> And all whom I loved there, and who loved me;

[39] I do not use Robbins' line breaks and layout of the stanzas for this poem, though I preserve his punctuation and spelling. I follow A.J. Smith's edition, which gives the poem 32 lines by dividing the final line of each stanza into two.

When I have put our seas ‘twixt them and me,

Put thou thy sea betwixt my sins and thee. (9-12)

Donne’s sacrificial present to Christ is at once figurative and literal. He takes leave of the British Isles and those he loves there for the sake of his chaplaincy with the possibility in mind that death will prevent his return. He also means that he surrenders his attachment to the things of the earth, worldly preoccupations which inhibit his total devotion to Christ. His one request is that Christ remove the sins which separate him from Christ by sealing them off with the ‘sea’ of his blood, just as Donne cut himself off from England with the ‘seas’ of the English Channel (10-11). Paradoxically, poetically, it is by separation (‘Put thou thy sea betwixt my sins and thee’) that Donne hopes to attain union with his God. All in his life which does not conform must dispelled. We see the allure of unity even in the imaginative equation of nautical departure with the separate notions of death and worldly abandonment. The dual sacrifice of his life in missionary seafaring and the greater renunciation of earthly pleasures is the central premise of the poem, and it is not entirely dissimilar to the conceits of the love poetry in which Donne imbues an ordinary object with transcendent meaning, like the lady’s ‘subtle wreath of hair which crowns my arm’ that supposedly ‘Can tie those parts, and make me one of all’ (‘The Funeral’ 3, 11). It is the same coalescing, singularising imagination at work which gives to a physical journey multiple meanings.

The final two stanzas reinforce the themes of the singlemindedness of devotion and the attendant ‘divorce to all’ else, though they emphasise to a greater extent that it is chiefly the love of God and love for God which galvanises the speaker:

But thou wouldst have that love thyself: as thou

Art jealous, Lord, so am I jealous now:

Thou lov’st not till from loving more, thou free

My soul: whoever gives, takes liberty.

Oh, if thou car’st not whom I love,

Alas thou lov’st not me. (19-24)

This is a recapitulation of the idea, displayed prominently in the *Holy Sonnets* and ‘Good Friday, 1613: Riding Westward’, that the removal of temporal joys and the application of pain is proof of the love of God. Contradictorily, the more freedom God ‘gives’ Donne to love

whom and what he will, the more 'liberty' Donne forfeits. If God does not care to strip away the objects and people Donne loves, then Donne feels that surely God does not love him, as much as a husband who is not 'jealous' about the wayward affections of his wife cannot truly love her. Resolute jealousy is evidence of intense love; freedom to love whom one wishes is slavery. When the speaker asks Christ to free his soul 'from loving *more*', it is surely a pun on Donne's lately deceased wife, Ann More. Donne thus makes lingering grief over the loss of his wife 'an obstacle in the way of a wholehearted commitment' (Marotti 279). It may sound 'cruel' of Donne to associate the departed Ann with the world he now rejects, as Marotti submits (279), but seen another way, it is a method which enables the poet to overcome paralysing anguish, not do injustice to her memory. Besides, as the word would literally denote, to free Donne 'from loving *more*' does not limit itself to 'More': there are many other possible objects of his love which he hopes to rein in. He wants to cut loose his desire for everything but Christ. That is the main thrust.

The final segment underlines Donne's need for total attentiveness and singleness of mind through a nuptial metaphor:

> Seal, then, this bill of divorce to all
>
> On whom those fainter beams of love did fall;
>
> Marry those loves, which in youth scattered be
>
> On fame, wit, hopes (false mistresses), to thee. (25-28)

It is entirely fitting that marriage is the metaphor for the unity of devotion for which the speaker yearns. Monogamous love, as we recall from the *Songs and Sonnets*, was the means to make two souls one; here, it symbolises the assemblage of disparate interests into one scorching beam of consecration to God. Marriage itself, in Donne's view, is a divinely designed metaphor for the union of believers with Christ, according to Ephesians 5 (on which Donne preached): '"For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh." This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church' (31-32; *Sermons* 5: 113). Donne only redirects the original, divine metaphor of marriage to its actual referent, the unifying love between Christ and Christians, which 'scattered' affections preclude. Furthermore, the reference to 'divorce' may also be a nod to the 'divorce' which death makes of married couples, and thus conveys a last expression of complete dedication to God in the wake of Donne's marital bereavement.

It may appear contrary to Donne's usual emphasis on binding together that he characterises his commitment to Christ as a vehement finalisation of his divorce of world, but it is simply an extension of the many paradoxes of Christianity, such as losing one's life to gain it, of becoming a servant in order to achieve greatness, of dying in order to live anew. Donne is highly conscious of the paradox of divorcing in order to marry (also present in 'Batter my heart'), and he signals his cognisance of the fact by creating further paradoxes in the stanza's final lines:

> Churches are best for prayer that have least light:
>
> To see God only, I go out of sight,
>
> And, to scape stormy days, I choose
>
> An everlasting night. (29-32)

Carey understands these lines as referring to a wished-for death (218-219). This leads him to assert, 'It is totally un-Christian. What Donne, with sublime inconsistency, manages to do is to arrogate to himself, at the poem's end, both the majestic finality of pagan suicide and the Christian martyr's thirst for union with God' (219). Donne's death is perhaps implied, in keeping with the general suspicion of his impending demise, but what Carey fails to acknowledge is the lines' figurative and biblical expression. These final lines present paradoxical analogies which point to the need to lose one's sight to acquire true sight. They are a restatement of the principle of humility and self-sacrifice that only those who admit their blindness find light. '"If ye were blind"', says Christ, '"ye should have no sin: but now ye say, 'We see'; therefore your sin remaineth"' (Jn. 9:41). It is non-coincidental that the lines play with the idea of sight and that Donne speaks of his desire to 'see God only', as seeing God is one of the beatitudes bestowed on those whose hearts are *refined*: 'Blessed are the *pure* in heart, for they shall see God' (Mt. 5:8; my emphasis). Donne wishes to distil the affections of his heart into purer focus by giving up the sight of things he once loved in order to behold God solely. Darkness allows for a different kind of unity: concentrated vision.

The terminal lines may refer to Donne's literal death, as Carey raises. That is one resonance of the phrase 'everlasting night'. And Donne does not preclude the real possibility of dying abroad, but, far from articulating a wish for 'pagan suicide', the poet is primarily conveying the spiritual principle that he is now ready to humble himself and surrender all to be with God and 'see him only'. Death is the most drastic of possible forfeitures and the full

embodiment of what it means to renounce oneself, but the poet also announces his willingness to endure any abasement short of death, such as the loss of country, goods and kindred, for the sake of greater focus on Christ. In brief, Donne embraces the humiliation of death, or, if death should escape him, anything less than death, in order to know the bliss of seeing God. He joins his urgent longing for concentration—unity of the self—with his intense longing for God—unity of persons—by making his own collected focus directly proportional to his closeness to the Deity. Donne discoursed, 'It is true, this contracting of our affections is a burden, it is a submitting of ourselves'; but, as the poem shows, dispersedness is the greater evil (*Sermons* 5: 117).

Another of Donne's late hymns, the 'Hymn to God my God, in my Sickness' combines the familiar themes of death, oneness and intensity of faith in the face of wretched circumstance. Marotti pronounces it 'one of Donne's finest lyrics' (285); Lewalski says it 'is perhaps Donne's most brilliant and most moving religious poem' (280-281). Most likely the poet wrote it during his illness of 1623, during which he also penned his prose *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, though there is a very slight chance he composed it in his final illness of 1631, to which he ultimately succumbed, as his first biographer Isaac Walton claims (Marotti 285; Lewalski 281).[40] Donne makes the occasion of his serious illness an opportunity to meditate on what seemed to him to be his imminent death. The poem is not, as Lewalski tells us, an actual hymn. She says the 'title "Hymne" is a deliberate misnomer' and says it aims to redefine musical praise as something more than song (281). Indeed, the poem self-consciously plays with the slipperiness of its own genre: first it is a hymn, then a meditation, then an emblem, then a sermon, as Lewalski outlines (281-282). The purpose, I argue, is to demonstrate the numerous ways Donne can interpret malaise as blessing: sickness becomes a song, misery a meditation, humiliation an emblem, suffering a sermon.

It is Donne's constant habit to see deeper significance hidden in ordinary objects. This poetic predilection for 'figures' and argument through 'images', Guibbory elaborates, flows from Donne's belief that 'God has created a world that is figurative, and it is meant to be figured out—both in the sense of discovering the figures God has already written and in the sense of metaphorically describing a reality that is inherently metaphorically [sic]' (11). All which exists, Donne imagines, cannot but reflect something higher, since all that is was given

[40] The reason scholars do not believe Walton is, as A.J. Smith helpfully explains, that one 'judge Sir Julius Caesar' marked on a manuscript copy of the 'Hymn' that the verses were made in Donne's sickness of 1623, ('The Complete Poems' 347). Walton's account, moreover, is known for its plethora of confusions with dating.

existence by a creator. The origin of the creation in the mind of God gives the creation inherent meaning; existence derives its meaning from the creator who has the power of being and gives being to what he creates. God, as it were, speaks through objects. The world and all it contains is a metaphor, and Donne merely imitates God in his own creative discovery and articulation of resemblances. Consequently, Donne saw poetic figuration as an inherently spiritual practice (Cruickshank 43). In a word, what Donne's emphasises in the poem at hand, perhaps more self-consciously than any other, is the *uniformity* of seemingly disparate strands of experience.

In the opening stanza the speaker announces that his deathbed grants him the opportunity to prepare himself for heaven through meditation. He tells God, in a surprising twist of the usual convention, that he will not simply *sing* in the 'choir of saints' but rather 'be *made* thy music', becoming the melody of praise itself (2, 3; my emphasis). The speaker therefore announces, 'I tune the instrument here at the door, / And what I must do then, think now before' (4-5). The way in which he will raise himself to lofty heights whilst still on earth is through thought, or meditation, which is the resulting poem. Donne equates poetry with meditation, both having the capacity to hone thoughts into fine, concise articulation, only poetry is especially beautiful and detailed discourse, like the music the speaker says he is. The poet thus makes poetry the meditation and the music: intensely thoughtful, and intensely beautiful, fitting for the heavenly lays of which the speaker will imminently be made a part.

In the second stanza the speaker likens his himself to a 'map', his 'physicians' to 'cosmographers', and his illness to the topographical 'straits' of the 'south-west discovery' by which he shall 'die' (6-7, 10). A.J. Smith provides the commentary that 'the south is the zone of heat, or fever, the west the region of decline. He sees his death of fever as the discovery of passage to a new world' (*John Donne* 665). Then in the third stanza, the speaker reveals the comfort found in his dire situation, conveyed in a cartographic metaphor:

> I joy that in these straits I see my West,
>
> For, though their currents yield return to none,
>
> What shall my West hurt me? As West and East
>
> In all flat maps (and I am one) are one;
>
> So death doth touch the Resurrection. (11-15)

The lines reveal Donne's fondness for abridgement and epitome. The poet must always singularise concepts to an inescapable point by which he hopes to give his verse penetrating intensity. Beyond its poetic power, metaphoric abridgement also deflates the fear of real disjuncture, which in this case is the ultimate rupture, namely death. Donne belittles death's significance by suggesting death and resurrection are one event. As the meeting of East and West on a map are one by virtue of the circularity of the globe, so he has faith that resurrection follows mortal expiry. The comparison is more apt because West signifies death and East signifies birth, a pair of connotations borrowed from the course of the sun. The end is only the beginning, as Donne's *La Corona* argued.

Map as metaphor for oneness is an image also deployed in the poem 'Upon the Annunciation and Passion falling upon one day', where Donne writes that the coincidence of the celebration of the birth and death of Christ on one holy day is 'Th'abridgement of Christ's story, which makes one / (As in plain maps the furthest west is east) / Of th'angel's *Ave* and *Consummatum est*' (20-22). Maps, Carey observes, 'were devices for making contraries meet' (264). The concept of east and west's spherical connection illustrates Donne's knack for finding pictures of greater spiritual truths, a talent for which he found great use in his sermons. For some, Donne's argument through metaphor will be unconvincing. The kind of comparative argument Donne undertakes is reminiscent of 'Death be not proud', where the speaker likens death to sleep in order to diminished death's terror (5-6). In response, one can acknowledge that taken alone, argument through comparison does not suffice to overthrow the very real threat death poses to one's being. However, logical argument is not really the point: 'poeticness', or rhetorical effect, is ('A Litany' 72). In the sonnet as well as the hymn, Donne simply assumes the truthfulness of the doctrine of resurrection and aims to meditate upon it with poetic force, wit and beauty to furnish himself with courage and comfort. That is a perfectly suitable end of a poem which purports to be the means of 'tuning' its author for the melodious refrains of heaven's high courts.

In the fourth stanza the speaker continues the cartographic conceit which communicates the interconnectedness of the earth's geography and by extension that pain is the entry point to paradise. One cannot attain 'The Eastern riches' (17) without passing through 'straits': 'Anian and Magellan Gibraltar, / All, straights, and none but straits, are ways to them' (19-20). In the fifth stanza the speaker jettisons the image of the map but not the idea of overlap and oneness:

We think that Paradise and Calvary,

Christ's cross and Adam's tree, stood in one place:

Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me:

As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,

May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace' (21-25).

There is a complex fusion of ideas in this stanza which combine to convey one vital point: that Donne's oneness with Christ overrides the death which is the penalty for his sin. Overlapping symbolic timbres arise from the pairing of 'Paradise and Calvary', 'Christ's cross and Adam's tree', which according to legend shared a location (Lewalski 281). 'Paradise' implies perfect bliss and by that connection it connotes the heaven Donne awaits, but it also signifies the sinful misery following Adam's eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden. 'Calvary', likewise, suggests the gruesome payment for humankind's disobedience which Christ undertook at the same time as it signifies the bliss of heaven which Christ's sacrifice made available to Adam's descendants. Donne presents the two trees, Christ's and Adam's, as a kind of chiasma (or *cross*ing) in which paradise leads to death, and then Christ's death leads again to paradise.[41] Furthermore, both Adams, the sinful Adam and progenitor of the human race whose curse for disobedience was 'to eat bread' by 'the sweat of [his] face' (Ge. 3:19) and the perfect, 'last Adam', Christ (1 Cor. 15: 45), are 'met' in Donne, who is at once sinful via his inheritance from Adam and righteous via Christ's imputation (Lewalski 17).[42] Donne simultaneously recognises the due punishment for his iniquity and the forgiveness granted by the 'blood' of the 'last Adam'. The principle artistic device is the interweaving of diverse doctrines—of the fall, of atonement, of creation, of the incarnation, of sin, of forgiveness—as well as images which represent those doctrines—the rood of Christ and the tree of Eden, sweat and blood, the first Adam (or 'man') and the last Adam—to abridge pithily in a few lines the full weight of the Christian hope that death is not the end of life, but its beginning. This, Donne was convinced, is the power of poetry. It is concentrated speech.

The poet wraps up his preparatory meditation in a final stanza which enacts similar exchanges, interweaving and wordplay that connect suffering and death with glory. He asks

[41] The use of chiasma as a verbal cross is hardly incidental. Donne plays with the many meanings, images and connotations of the word 'cross' in his poem 'The Cross'.

[42] This fifth stanza is essentially a recapitulation of Pauline paradigm of salvation, especially as it is understood by Protestants, drawn from Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 (Lewalski 13-27).

God, ‘So, in his purple wrapped receive me, Lord; / By these his thorns give me his other crown’ (26-27). Purple is the colour of royalty and, Robbins glosses, of ‘Jesus’s blood’ (614). By the mention of ‘his thorns’ Donne appropriates the suffering of Christ to his own deathbed aches. He hopes by means of association to obtain Christ’s ‘other crown’, not a crown of thorns but the crown of exaltation. Thus, he is asking for resurrection and exaltation just as Christ was resurrected and exalted to glory after his suffering. Again, Donne equates himself with Christ, and death with life, as he has done throughout the poem. Significantly, the ‘purple’ garment and the crown are both royal emblems. Pain is the pathway to glory, Donne insists. Donne ensures the unity of his poetic images through their imaginative equation via double meanings—spilt, purple blood *is* kingship, a crown of thorns *is* the crown of splendour—mirroring the religious truths to which they point, to wit, that out of suffering comes salvation and that Christ and the believer are one. The central device, crossing, emphasises the central image of Christianity, the cross, which epitomises all doctrines and is the focal point of redemption by which human beings are made one with God and each other. (e.g. Eph. 2:13-16).

The whole poem is encapsulated in the final lines which transform it into a sermon: ‘Be this my text, my sermon to mine own: / “Therefore, that he may raise, the Lord throws down”’ (29-30). The principle is conglomeration of various scriptural texts (Robbins 578), and it is paradoxical, as are many Christian absolutes. But paradox is a device that delighted Donne because it unified contrary truths—death and life, suffering and liberation. Paradoxes are articles which must be received by faith; the mind cannot comprehend their internal consistency. How throwing down results in raising up, or how chastisement can be love, or how debilitating and terminal illness leads to joy everlasting is mysterious. The unison of conflicting elements is simply true according to God’s pronouncement as it articulated in the scriptural text. Drawing from the Bible, Donne thus devises a paradox in these lines which unifies his physical deprivation with his belief in the love of God. Donne’s desire for unity stems from the belief that the world and all experience have to make sense. Paradox permits him to suspend his own judgement concerning matters which his own mind cannot reconcile and defer to God’s declaration that opposites can be unified. In his poetry and life, the axiom to which Donne clung most tightly was that unity is perfection, because God is a unity and, consequently, all that he purposes must be coherent.

‘A Hymn to God the Father’ brings together those core themes which constitute Donne’s vision of art and life: the mutuality, exclusivity, intensity, unity, evenness, focus and

fullness of love between persons. The poem is delicately written, being one of his 'sparest' yet 'finest' compositions (Stubbs 409). The hymn merges the private and the congregational, as it is at once intensely personal in its subtle autobiographic details and general in its anthemic form and paradigmatic presentation of the Christian life (Lewalski 260). The latter point gains currency in that it was apparently set to music and frequently sung by the church at St. Paul's in Donne's presence (Stubbs 406; Lewalski 263). The poem also appears in a multitude of manuscripts, a fact which 'attests to its author's allowing it to travel beyond his usual coterie readership', further suggesting the publicity Donne intended the hymn to have (Marotti 281).

Looking at the poem, what is key is the speaker's need to belong completely to God through remission of sins. Carey, commenting on 'Donne's insistence…that anyone who takes him must take all of him', writes that, 'In order to get Donne, God has to promise…that he will forgive the sins of every period of Donne's life, from conception to death-bed. Until then, "thou hast not done." Nothing less than all Donnes is Donne.' (225). My own point is that full forgiveness corresponds to full unity of self and complete unity with God. The 'deceptively simple yet brilliantly witty and withal profoundly moving' poem (Lewalski 263) stands quoting in full:

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,

Which is my sin, though it were done before?

Wilt thou forgive those sins through which I run,

And do them still though still I do deplore?

When thou hast done, thou hast not Donne,

For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I've won

Others to sin, and made my sin their door?

Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun

A year or two, but wallowed in a score?

When thou hast done, thou hast not Donne,

For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I've spun

My last thread, I shall perish on the shore:

Swear by thyself that at my death this Sun

Shall shine as it shines now and heretofore;

And, having done that, thou hast done,

I have no more. (1-18)[43]

The same need to chase away the shadows of secrecy and the falseness of lacklustre commitment in a love poem like 'A Lecture upon the Shadow' resurfaces here in religious form. Donne demonstrates his total commitment to God, as he did to erstwhile mistresses, by refusing to hide anything from God, wherefore he seeks pardon. For love to be mutual between the speaker and God, therefore, the speaker must confess, and God must forgive.

Some critics have asserted that the poem turns on the same problem as was presented in the holy sonnet 'Since she whom I loved' and 'A Hymn to Christ', namely, that Donne's grief over and attachment to his deceased wife seems to foil his love for God (Guibbory 151; Marotti 28; Robbins 575). That this is the sin for which Donne mourns and seeks forgiveness is intimated in the repeated punning on the couple's names, 'done' and 'more'. I shall not dispute that this is one sin for which Donne is sorry, but I will add that the iniquity for which Donne seeks God's forgiveness does not limit itself to the sin of distracted grief. The first reason that reading is unconvincing is because Donne's speaker asks God to 'forgive *those sins* through which I run' (3; my emphasis), indicating that there is more than one sin which Donne worries will separate him from God. The second reason is his pronoun usage. Donne seems to have varying, specific sins in mind when he repeats, 'Wilt thou forgive *that sin*', 'Wilt thou forgive *those* sins', and '*my* sin', and then gives each sin a different characterisation (1, 3, 7, 8, 9). Third, the only sin Donne specifically names is not the sin of

[43] Note that Robbins titles the hymn 'To Christ', and makes Donne's pun on his name in lines 5 and 11 explicit, after 'the printed texts' (576). Other editions retain the more authorial 'A Hymn to God the Father' and leave the implicit pun spelt 'done' throughout (e.g. A.J. Smith, 'The Complete Works' 348-349). It is strange to title the poem 'To Christ' when the speaker refers to 'thy son' in some manuscripts, or 'this Sun' in the one which Robbins collates, referring to Christ in the third person.

grief or overmuch love to his departed wife, but, as he says, 'a sin of fear' that he 'shall perish' (13, 14). Fourth and last, Donne declares in the second stanza that his sin 'won / Others to sin' (7-8). It is difficult to conceive of how loving Ann excessively could lead others to sin. If he is thinking of tempting Anne to sin, he ought to have said 'the sin by which I won *one* other to sin' or '*the* other to sin', not 'Others'.[44] I press the point about the multitudinous nature of Donne's sin because it undermines the depths of the poem theme to reduce it to mere renouncement of sorrow for and over-attachment to his dead wife. He speaks of the whole rottenness of his life, sinfulness without end, which separates him from his God, and which he hopes God will pardon.

The theme, repeatedly borne out in the refrain, 'Wilt thou forgive', is that God does not have all of Donne until he is done forgiving Donne for every sin. This touches on Donne's need for completeness: Donne will not allow parts of himself to remain far off because of their moral impropriety, they must assume a state of accord with the rest of his being by being absolved. His fearful insistence that he has 'more' sin, that God may be overlooking something, reflects his anxiety that some stray bit of himself will not be subsumed within the grace of God. It is thus the desire for integrity, both in the sense of truthfulness or uprightness, and in the etymological sense of oneness (Guibbory 24) that animates the speaker's pedantic pleadings for all-encompassing pardon. Donne cannot be one united being, nor be one with God, unless he is thoroughly cleansed of iniquity. The poet has an intense desire for God and himself to agree unanimously upon the state of his acceptance, which is why he implores God to swear by his own name, there being no higher object by which to vow.

Donne's theme of total, unsparing cleansing reveals that he is a detail-oriented purist, and it is therefore fitting that poetry, in which every word is weighted for sense and sound, is the means of his expression. The particularities of the hymn's form underline this scrupulousness. The poet impressively alternates between just two end-rhymes ('un' and 'or') throughout the entire poem in an *ababab* scheme. The rhyming alternation between two sounds emphasises the two persons, God and Donne, whom the poet wishes to intertwine, while the choice of three rhyming words per stanza emphasises the number of members within God's being. There are, moreover, three stanzas, which triple the already thrice-stated end-rhymes of each individual unit—*aaa* and *bbb*. Both two (the number of types of rhymes)

[44] There is also the consideration that while he laments that he 'did shun' his 'sin' for 'A year or two', he 'wallowed in [it] a score' (9-10). Donne and Anne were married approximately sixteen years, not twenty—though I recognise it could be rounded up to preserve the rhyme.

and three (the number of stanzas and end-rhymes per stanza) are plural figures, but Donne wants to make them one, a feat which he accomplishes symbolically through interweaving the rhymes in self-contained blocks of six lines, which in turn are contained within a single poem. Each detail of the poem must be assiduously arranged to give the poem the integrity which Donne also desires in himself.

The poem reaches a satisfying, single resolution of spirit and united frame of mind through its triumph over the fear of perishing. The solace which the poet finds is in the shining of the 'Sun' upon his 'death', a characteristically Donnean double play on the 'sun/son' homonym, and another linguistic device which emphasises two-in-oneness. Though Donne does not elaborate within the poem how the Son of God shining upon him guarantees him life in the world to come, the metaphor touches upon a few of his lifelong concerns. The first is constancy or faithfulness, the assurance that God will be as true to him at his death as 'now and heretofore'. The sun rises consistently each day, and so the poet hopes Christ will extend his fidelity to him into the future. Donne has met enough inconstancy in himself and others—'She that, oh, broke her faith, would soon break thee' ('To a Jet Ring Sent to Me' 12)—that he adjures God to swear an oath by himself that he will save Donne at the last. Another concern the sun connotes is resurrection. The sun was once Donne's antagonist, calling him to rise with its own rising, and to whom Donne gave daring riposte: 'Saucy, pedantic wretch! God chide / Late schoolboys, and sour prentices' ('The Sun Rising 5-6). Now, however, the prospect of a greater rising—from the dead—is irresistible to Donne. A final connotation is the life-begetting force of the sun. As 'the Sun's hot, masculine flame / Begets strange creatures on Nile's dirty slime', so Donne hopes God's 'Son' will one day infuse new life into the mangled matter of his body ('To my Lord of Derby' 1-2). Constancy, re-assemblage and perpetuity, represented in the figure of the Sun, are the divinely conferred unity which quells Donne's fear of being cut off from his God.

The poem in its form and theme indirectly reflects at least three principles of metaphysical unity. One, that singularity and plurality stem from the triune nature of the God with whom Donne desires fellowship. The verse, in its play with ones, twos, and threes, embodies the simplicity and multiplicity which is displayed in God's three-in-one nature. Two, that the union Donne desires to attain with God does not entail him losing his own identity. There remain distinctions between persons; Donne belongs to God yet remains 'Donne', as he consistently reiterates. Three, that Donne desires forgiveness because it entails the unity of himself and unity with God. Writing poetry, moreover, enacts the same diligent

distillation and careful concentration which Donne hoped God would perform on the poet by meticulously eradicating every one of his sins. The composed conclusion, in which the poet mollifies himself that God will not forsake him and in which he wraps up the formal requirements of the poem, indicates that Donne found in poetic expression, accordingly, a foretaste of the consummate wholeness of heaven, a satisfactory settling of his mind prior to the inauguration of the glorious *eschaton*.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued the general point that Donne's poetry flows from a sustained metaphysics. The specific claim has been that it is the notion of unity, which Donne believed was reflected in the divine nature, together with a concomitant detestation of solitary singleness, that most propelled him in the particulars of the substance and expression of his poetry. Donne's interest in conjunctions which maintain distinction between their individual parts is the heart of his poetics and mirrors the Christian articulation of the Trinity, the doctrine Donne heralded with more vigor, fire and frequency than perhaps any other.[45] A corollary of the inspiration of Godlike unity is that Donne believed symmetrical love between persons to be the primary way in which human beings achieve satisfying wholeness, since God himself consists of multiple persons who dwell eternally in love for one another. A further corollary is that language, tersely expressed in poetry, is a tool which, beyond being imitative of the divinely bestowed harmony of the world through the coordination of its parts and its ordering of experience, also has the capacity to achieve the desired unity and love through rhetorical, persuasive communication of the self, what Donne calls in an elegy, 'my words' masculine, persuasive force' ('To His Mistress Going Abroad' 4). And not only does the poet aim to ensure the love of the interlocutor through poetic utterances, whether through exhorting the mistress or praying to God, but he gathers himself—his thoughts and emotions—in the act of writing so that he may be one united person. 'Form itself,' Cruickshank states concerning Donne's poetics, 'redeems chaos, organizes perception and... performs wholeness' (1-2).

In tracing a single theme through Donne's verse, I concede I have necessarily marginalised other readings. Not every poetic utterance will fit snugly within the concept of unity. Varying circumstances and moods at times gave rise to different emphasises within the poetry. Additionally, by marking the link between his theology and his poetry, I have often made it sound as if Donne was serious-minded all the time, when there are many instances of Donne the rascal, Donne the entertainer. Still, it seems indubitable that a desire to bring things together is the most predominant and persistent feature of John Donne's collected *oeuvres.* This is evident from the poetic unions for which the poet is distinguished—conceits, similes, paradoxes—as well his tenaciously asserted antipathy for separation and converse attraction

[45] Donne took interest in spiritual conjunctions other than the Trinity which I have not touched upon, though the Trinity is primary. For example, the hypostatic union, the virgin conception, and faith and reason. 'Saint Bernard spend his consideration upon three remarkable conjunctions….First, a Conjunction of God and Man in one person, Christ Jesus; Then a conjunction of the incompatible Titles, Maid and Mother, in one blessed woman, the blessed Virgin *Mary*: And thirdly a conjunction of Faith, and the Reason of man' (*Sermons 6:* 168).

to genres of poetry which both represent and engender fellowship (verse letters, love poetry, prayer, etc.). The type of unity which most engaged him and which is the main tenor of his work is a most serious one, for it is the union between persons, wherefore the poet generated so much material on romantic love and divine love, not to mention the many eulogies that lament the breach of the unity of persons—a genre which this thesis has barely touched. I believe the kind of overarching argument which I have attempted is necessary, even though such projects tend to sweep discrepancies and nuances to the side. The practice of fixing one's attention only on the minutiae of poetry, the isolated iterations of a poet's imagination, though often enlightening, can give muddled and short-sighted views of what a poet was attempting to achieve in the larger scheme of things. We need a grander view, as well as a microscopic one, if the poet is to be fully appreciated. Furthermore, clear, bold arguments are the most interesting and readable, and they seem to lodge themselves with greater alacrity in our memory, being thus salutary to the maintenance and promulgation of the humanities.

One of the implicit aims of this thesis is to demonstrate that ideas have consequences. Surely, not every historical development is attributable solely to material causes, though material causes surely matter. Rather, there is a historical dialectic between the ideational and the material, each informing and transforming the other. In recent decades in literary studies, the pendulum has probably swung too far to the side of materialist readings which, not inaccurately, stress the interests of politics and power in the production of literature we too frequently take to be perfectly insulated in the realm of the aesthetic. I appreciate the historical and cultural details those studies have unearthed, and the way they often train the mind to think outside the text in order to consider that which is unstated or assumed in the text. That said, in order for literary studies to survive in the academy, literature must remain its own unique discipline, and therefore an appreciation for the literary text and what it says must remain the focal point of *literary* studies. Moreover, political readings tend not to take into consideration the reasons many of us read literature in the first place because they discard any notion of the pre-political. Though there are numerous reasons we turn to literature, many of us do so because we desire to enrich our lives, to learn from the insights peculiar to the author, to admire the beauty of choice words and the inventiveness of the imagination, to experience the world afresh, to understand what moved the writers of old to see if we in turn may be moved by the same. Writers should be read honestly for the ideas their works purvey and the concepts which mattered most to them. Given a fair reading, Donne's verse exhibits the same desires to which the greater part of humanity is subject, expressed in his own way, in

line with his own theological principles: to seize one's life and live it with utmost concentration, to understand its greater purpose, and to love and be loved, all of which are a function of a deeper desire for unity, coherence, wholeness.

If we reduce Donne's poetry to a single theme, which his own habit of condensing gives us licence to do, they are about unity, and secondarily, they are about love. Donne gave fresh expression to an old idea (as poets do): that love unites. For Donne, both themes have their origin in the ontology of God: God is a unity of persons, and God is love. Definitionally, Donne conceived of love as the giving and exchanging of oneself for the beloved in order that the two may be conjoined. Thus, love should not only *be* mutual but *is* mutual, both persons giving themselves and both persons receiving the other, which makes them possess, indeed, become one another. Hence the oft-repeated conceit of joining or exchanging hearts: 'Thy heart thy ransom is: take mine for me' ('Love's War' 32). On the one hand, this is a medieval and Neoplatonic trope (Targoff 61). On the other hand, Donne distances himself from the cliché first, as Targoff notes and as I have argued, by refusing to see the spiritual exchange of souls as an adequate substitute for physical presence (61-65), and second, by imbuing the trade with a vulnerability which the often glib Neoplatonic transfer downplays; hence Donne's proclivity to worry about unreturned or widely-dispersed affection, by which the fitness of love's mutual proportion is rendered askew.

Furthermore, though love's exchange echoes the commonplace of Neoplatonic love poetry, there is a clear parallel between the exchange enacted in romantic love and the relationship between God and his people which Donne believed marriage foreshadowed. I believe the poet found the supreme model for mutual exchange in Christ's giving of himself to the church to receive the church, a spiritual reality which matrimony is said to betoken. Christ's giving and receiving is a topic on which Donne preaches often enough: 'But the inexpressible and inconceivable love of Christ is in this, that there was in him a willingnesse, a propensenesse, a forwardnesse to give himself....We are come now to his exchange; what Christ had for himself when he gave himself; and he had a church' (*Sermons* 5: 122).[46] As Christ gave his life for the church in exchange for the church herself, so lovers give themselves up to the beloved in order to gain the beloved. This pursuit of joy and satisfaction in another person entails the possibility of rejection, but Donne sees vulnerability and self-

[46] Further: 'we may behold our Saviour, in the Act of his liberality…*Giving himselfe*; and in the poor exchange that he took, a few *Contrite hearts*, a few *broken spirits*, a few lame, and blind, and leprous sinners, to make to himself…a Church' (5: 121; emphasis in the original).

sacrifice as essential to meaningful relationship, and it is why he does not only poeticise the bliss of love. He also articulates the attendant woes in pursuing profound connection to and oneness with another.

The same principle of giving and exchanging is at work in the individual believer's relationship to God as well. It explains why the chief theme of Donne's religious verse is the surrender of himself to God, the total devotion and sacrifice of his being and all his faculties to the Almighty. Often, it is true, the poet is filled with doubt, fearing that God will abandon him just as he fears his own affections will falter and that his sins will open a gaping chasm between him and the Deity. This why Donne writes his love poetry and divine verse with such intensity: he needed to assure himself that he was not slackening in zeal, that his love remained concentrated and his heart vigilant—just as he always exhorted the beloved to do, and as he pleaded for God to vouchsafe to him. But Donne yearns to give himself fully to God, as much as to the woman, in hopes of receiving; it is not a practice in meaningless masochism. In return, he hopes to gain greater unity: forgiveness, —the pruning away of pieces which do not fit—resurrection—the reunion of body and soul—and eternal life—the infinite continuity of himself. Though what he longs for most of all is the union which those graces make possible, that is, union with God himself, for whose love he says, 'I beg' ('Since she whom I loved' 9).

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