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ACHSAH GUIBBORY

John Donne

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Donne's poems expressed a strong and independent spirit. For all their indebtedness to literary traditions and conventions, they took a sceptical stance toward many received ideas and seemed written in a 'new made Idiome'.[1] The importance of his innovation was recognized by Thomas Carew, who praised Donne as the monarch of wit who 'purg'd' 'The Muses garden', threw away 'the lazie seeds / Of Servile imitation ... And fresh invention planted'.[2]

Part of Donne's freshness comes from his intense analysis of important aspects of human experience – the desire for love, the desire to be purged of imperfection or sinfulness, and the longing to defeat mortality. He explores erotic love and human spirituality and the relation between them. Because his poetry speaks to needs and desires that seem to persist despite cultural and historical differences, Donne is accessible, compelling, and engaging. But his poetry is also difficult and complicated. Individual poems refuse to yield a single, unequivocal meaning, and his poetry exhibits considerable variety, defying readers' attempts to reduce it to a neat order. Whereas his contemporary Ben Jonson preferred to speak in a single, constant voice in his poems, avoiding masks as he praised virtue and castigated vice, Donne adopts different roles and postures – the libertine rake, the devoted and constant lover, the cynic who feels cheated by his experience in love, the despairing sinner fearing damnation, the bold suitor claiming his right to salvation. The poetry expresses radically contradictory views – of women, the body, and love.

One holy sonnet in particular provides insight into this quality of his poetry, for it suggests that contraries are Donne's distinguishing feature:

> Oh, to vex me, contraryes meete in one:
> Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott
> A constant habit; that when I would not
> I change in vowes, and in devotione.
> As humorous is my contritione

As my prophane Love, and as soone forgott:
As ridlingly distemperd, cold and hott,
As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.
I durst not view heaven yesterday; and to day
In prayers, and flattering speaches I court God:
To morrow' I quake with true feare of his rod.
So my devout fitts come and go away
Like a fantastic Ague: save that here
Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare.

In this undatable poem, the speaker complains that inconstancy seems to be, paradoxically, his essential, unchanging nature. It is an inconstancy born of the conflict of contraries. He is pulled between a painful awareness of his 'humorous', changeable disposition (which he seems to take a certain pride in) and a strong desire for constancy and stability. The 'contraryes' which 'meete' in him define his identity; but they create a sense not of wholeness but of conflict and dis-ease. It is appropriate that the state of being vexed by unresolved contraries would be expressed by paradox – long recognized as an important feature of Donne's poetry – since paradox is self-contradicting, asserting that mutually contradictory statements are simultaneously true.

If Donne felt vexed by contraries, it should not be surprising to find that his poetry is too. Although the canon of his poetry is of a piece – it has a consistency or identity that allows us to recognize a poem as Donne's – it is also varied, full of complex poems exploring his sense of the contradictions at the heart of human experience and desire.

The body of Donne's poetry is not very extensive. He wrote five formal verse satires, fewer than twenty love elegies, some short epigrams, the long, unfinished poem *Metempsychosis*, some occasional poems and verse letters (including three epithalamions and two *Anniversaries* on the death of Elizabeth Drury) many of which were addressed to actual or prospective patrons, and thirty-five divine poems (including twenty-one religious sonnets and three hymns). The *Songs and Sonets* constitute his largest group of poems. Few of Donne's poems appeared in print during his lifetime. Instead, they circulated in manuscript, read by a select audience with whom Donne could assume a greater intimacy than would be possible for a more public writer.[3] Only after his death was an edition of his *Poems* published (1633). The conditions of the circulation of Donne's poetry, whereby he neither kept it to himself nor published it in print, mediate between competing desires for privacy and for a public voice.

Donne's poetry proved influential in the seventeenth century, though afterwards it was neglected until the nineteenth and, especially, twentieth

centuries. The 'Cavalier' poets Thomas Carew, Richard Lovelace, and John Suckling were poetic sons of Jonson, but owed much to Donne in their treatment of erotic love. In the mid seventeenth century, we see Donne's influence in the funeral and valedictory poems of Henry King, possibly in the religious poet George Herbert, and markedly in the highly figurative poems of Abraham Cowley. Andrew Marvell's playful yet serious wit, his exploration of the relation of body and soul, and his fondness for arguing through images all suggest his reading of Donne. Donne's exalted descriptions of the union of lovers' souls were boldly adapted by Katherine Philips to celebrate 'female friendship'. Though by the end of the century Donne had gone out of fashion, the Restoration poets John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, and Aphra Behn still found kinship in Donne's witty scepticism, libertine spirit, and insistence on the importance of the body and sexuality in human experience. Donne thus proved a rich poetic resource for both secular and religious poets, but none of these poets shared Donne's special, intense conjunction of spirituality and sensuality.

Love and salvation are not only the two great subjects of his poetry; they were also preoccupations that gave dramatic shape to his life. Donne was born into a Roman Catholic family, whose ancestors included Sir Thomas More and which had suffered persecution as those in power sought to make England a thoroughly Protestant country. At some point, though we are not sure when, Donne left Roman Catholicism for the Church of England. Contradictory impulses probably motivated his conversion. Ambition as well as the desire to escape persecution – the desire to have a comfortable place in his society in more than one sense – may have influenced his conversion. Intellectual and spiritual conviction, however, were also surely important factors, for Donne tells us he had read extensively in contemporary theological disputes. Perhaps more dramatic than his religious conversion was his marriage and its consequences. Having studied law at the Inns of Court and travelled in expeditions to Cadiz and the Azores, in 1597 he became employed as secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, and subsequently fell in love with Egerton's young niece, Anne More. Though Donne's career until this point shows a practical concern with political advancement, Donne's eloping with Anne in December 1601 shows a romantic disposition careless, even contemptuous, of authority. Imprisoned briefly, Donne found himself barred from employment. Though for years he sought to attain a political position through influentiual patrons, he found secure employment only in 1615 when he took holy orders in the Church of England. His last years were spent as Dean of St Paul's, preaching powerful and dramatic sermons that applied personal experience to the public discussion of biblical texts, theological issues, and matters of faith.[4]

As even a brief sketch of his life suggests, Donne's poetry about love and about his relation to God invites connections with his personal life, yet it resists attempts to read it biographically. His seventeenth-century biographer, Izaak Walton, assigned the secular love poetry to the youthful Donne and the religious poetry to the mature priest. Embellishing on remarks Donne himself had made, Walton distinguished between Jack Donne, young-man-about-town, and Dr John Donne, the sober Dean of St Paul's, in effect simplifying Donne by constructing a conversion narrative in which Donne repented of his youthful errors.[5] But Walton's neat distinction between Donne's secular and sacred poetry was a misleading distortion, supporting his view of Donne's 'conversion' and effectively lessening the potential for complicated tensions between the sexual and the spiritual aspects of Donne. As Donne's Oxford editor Helen Gardner has argued, evidence indicates that a number of holy sonnets were probably written in 1609, and recently Dennis Flynn has suggested that an even earlier date is possible.[6] So Donne was writing religious poetry long before he took holy orders, perhaps even during the same period that he was writing 'secular' love poetry.

Moreover, the uncertainty of the dating and chronology of Donne's poetry compromises attempts to read his poetry biographically. In the case of most poems, we simply do not know when they were written. Probably most of the elegies and the five satires were written in the 1590s.[7] The two *Anniversaries* are datable by Donne's publication of them in 1611 and 1612, and the date of 'Goodfriday, 1613: Riding Westward' is identifiable by its title. But other religious poems cannot be dated with certainty. The *Songs and Sonets* pose the greatest difficulty in terms of dating but are also the most intriguing. The sheer variety and inconsistency of the attitudes toward love expressed in these poems entice readers to arrange them in some order that delineates a development from early to mature poems. But so long as our knowledge about the dating of Donne's poems, and about his life, remains limited and uncertain, any order we construct will be speculative. Indeed, to chart a progression in Donne's treatment of love risks minimizing, even erasing contradictions at the centre of his poetry.

For all the difficulty of discovering a clear development to Donne's poetry, and for all its variety, it is nevertheless characterized by a recognizable voice and 'personality', and by certain recurring preoccupations and stylistic features. Whether one is reading the *Elegies*, the *Satires*, the *Songs and Sonets*, or the *Divine Poems*, the poetry has an immediacy created by colloquial language and conversational tone and rhythms, but also heightened by its dramatic aspects. Many poems presume an occasion which has prompted the speaker's address, and some open with a dramatic

outburst. Others are meditative. But many, perhaps most, poems combine meditative and dramatic elements as the intellect is brought to bear on human emotional experiences, desires, and fears. Never complacent, Donne is always analyzing. His lyrics combine passionate, emotional intensity with keen and active intelligence displayed in logical analysis and verbal wit, especially the extensive use of puns, equivocation, and the 'conceit' or extended metaphor – all features which in some sense work on a principle of contraries. Samuel Johnson in the eighteenth century noted Donne's fondness for conceits, which he called *discordia concors*, the 'discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike'.[8] Sometimes 'conceits' or analogies bear the burden of conducting the poem's argument (as in 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' or 'The Ecstasy').

Many of Donne's lyrics use logical argument; yet logic and the use of reason are often revealed to be arbitrary, imperfect, implicated in the speaker's motives. Perhaps the most famous example is the seduction poem 'The Flea', where the speaker uses a series of dazzling, witty arguments to convince a reluctant woman to go to bed with him. The speaker displays control, elegance, and power through verbal wit and argument, though the poem attributes an interesting independence and intelligence to the mistress who repeatedly frustrates his desire for conquest. His ability, indeed eagerness to reverse or switch his argument in order to answer her implied responses shows a speaker willing to argue almost any position in order to achieve his end.[9]

A similar use of logic and witty argument, sometimes verging on blasphemy, appears in the holy sonnets. Because these poems address God rather than a mistress, they raise special problems in interpretation. In the poem 'What if this present were the world's last night?' the speaker begins introspectively, looking into his own heart, examining the picture of Christ he finds, trying to determine whether to draw assurance or despair. In the last six lines, or sestet, he turns to address Christ, drawing a startling analogy between his flattering, persuasive addresses to his prophane mistresses and his present address to God:

> as in my idolatrie
> I said to all my profane mistresses,
> Beauty, of pitty, foulnesse onely is
> A signe of rigour: so I say to thee,
> To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd,
> This beauteous forme assures a pitious minde.

Does Donne think God might appreciate his wit much as his 'prophane' mistresses did? Or is there anxiety and fear that this desire for verbal

control, the desire to win the argument, might itself be a sin, a mark of his damnation? Are we to see the speaker as close to Donne? Or is there satirical distance between poet and speaker? In so many of the holy sonnets, reason and intellect are as essential to the poem's very existence as Donne believed they were to human nature, and yet the poems' arguments expose the failure or inadequacy of reason either to penetrate the mysteries of faith or to assure Donne of his personal salvation. In the poetry as a whole, an obvious delight with the exercise of reason, wit, and wordplay is crossed by a profound distrust of reason.

Wit, logic, equivocation, and dramatic immediacy all contribute to the central concern of Donne's poetry – the exploration of the individual's experience of love, mortality, and the divine. For Donne, the process of examining emotional experience inevitably produces poetry of contradictions.

His commitment to experience and discovery is announced in a famous passage about truth in *Satire 3*. Concerned about the difficulty yet necessity of finding the 'true religion' and having surveyed the existing Christian religious institutions, Donne's speaker resolves to continue his search:

> aske thy father which is shee,
> Let him aske his; though truth and falsehood bee
> Neare twins, yet truth a little elder is;
> Be busie to seeke her, beleeve mee this,
> Hee's not of none, nor worst, that seekes the best.
> To'adore, or scorne an image, or protest,
> May all be bad; doubt wisely, in strange way
> To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;
> To sleepe, or runne wrong, is: on a huge hill,
> Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will
> Reach her, about must, and about must goe;
> And what the'hills suddennes resists, winne so;
> Yet strive so, that before age, deaths twilight,
> Thy Soule rest, for none can worke in that night. (lines 71–84)

The emphasis is on seeking, on process. Discovery is difficult yet necessary, and a sceptical mind plays an important part. 'Truth' is the goal, and life should be a journey toward it. It is perhaps impossible in this life fully to possess 'Truth', who stands on the summit of a 'huge hill'. Perhaps we will only experience an arduous, circuitous partial ascent of the hill as we 'about must, and about must goe' (line 81). Nevertheless, we must 'strive' now, inquire and make progressive discoveries. That it is possible to get pieces of truth is implied by the exhortation, 'Keepe the truth which thou has found' (line 89).

Though Donne is talking about religion and religious truth, his comments about the importance of discovery, process, and experience indicate the broad concern of his poetry.[10] Whether he is (as in the *Satires* and *Anniversaries*) anatomizing the corruption in his world, or (in the *Elegies* and *Songs and Sonets*) exploring the varieties and complexities of love, or (in the *Divine Poems*) meditating on sin, grace, and the anxious question of salvation, Donne is searching for a truth that will emerge from and fit his experience. His poems reveal a scepticism about social conventions and institutions, a sense that received opinions and beliefs may not fully accord with 'Truth' and must be tested against experience, and a conviction that the individual must seek truth for him- or herself.

Donne's interest in discovery links him with important concerns of his age. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a time of exploration, both scientific and geographical. The New World was being explored, and astronomical observations by Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo led to the discovery of a new order of the heavens. England also saw the emergence of modern, experimental science, which proposed to discover the true order of the physical world. Though Donne showed scepticism towards the new science in the *Anniversaries* and elsewhere, his poetry, with its emphasis on the process of active discovery, its sceptical stance towards received ideas and poetic conventions, and its sense of excitement at making fresh discoveries about human experience, is a poetic counterpart of the enquiry taking place in many fields in the seventeenth century.

Like *Satire 3*, Donne's poetry is as concerned with the process of seeking as it is with the attainment of truth. Donne often asks questions, many of which are never conclusively answered. 'Ends love in this, that my man, / Can be as happy'as I can; If he can / Endure the short scorne of a Bridegroomes play?' ('Love's Alchemy', lines 16–17). 'What if this present were the worlds last night?', 'Thou hast made me, And shall thy worke decay?' (holy sonnets). Moreover, the 'truths' the poems offer, though sometimes expressed definitely, often turn out to be provisional, partial – as they are either qualified by equivocations or hesitancies within the poem or contradicted by 'truths' offered in other poems. Taken individually, the poems enact an active process of discovery. Throughout a Donne poem there are shifts, changes of direction, reversals. Sometimes, as in 'The Flea', the speaker changes the tactics of argument. At other times, the audience addressed by the speaker changes. Some poems end at a very different place from their beginning, as speakers change their mind or reverse the views with which they started. The speaker in 'Air and Angels', for example, at first compares the woman he loves to an angelic presence ('So ... *Angells* affect us oft, and worship'd bee', lines 3–4) but concludes with a double

analogy that seems to contradict the first lines by comparing himself to an Angel and the woman to the less 'pure' air which provides the 'sphere' for his love (lines 23–5).

Donne's wit involves surprise, a desire to startle readers, to make them look at things in a new, unconventional way.[11] He offers analogies that seem both unexpected and remarkably appropriate. Part of the pleasure and challenge his poems afford the reader comes from discerning the path of his logic, its complicated, subtle progressive discoveries. If Donne's poems enact a process of exploration, they demand a similar response from the reader who is asked to struggle with their difficult, knotty syntax, the concise, often elliptical phrasing, the direction and indirection of their arguments, to probe the equivocations and puns that change and complicate the meanings of poems.

The 'truths' Donne's poetry discovers in its exploration of human experience will be various, sometimes even contradictory, because experience is always in flux. Donne's persistent concern with change – as both subject and process in his poems – is not only part of his commitment to the ongoing discovery of truth, which requires an openness to change; it also embodies his personal sense that the universe is profoundly mutable and unstable. Almost everything is in the process of changing. *The First Anniversary*, identifying mutability with decay, anatomizes the degenerative changes, both physical and moral, that he finds throughout his world. Human inconstancy is part of the general instability of the universe. In the holy sonnet 'Oh, to vex me, contraryes meete in one', Donne laments his 'inconstancy' as if it were extraordinary, yet poems such as 'Confined Love' or the elegy 'Change' present inconstancy as the human condition. As he says in *The Second Anniversary*:

> You are both fluid, chang'd since yesterday;
> Next day repaires, (but ill) last daies decay.
> Nor are, (although the river keepe the name)
> Yesterdaies waters, and to daies the same.
> So flowes her face, and thine eies, neither now
> That saint, nor Pilgrime, which your loving vow
> Concern'd, remaines; but whil'st you thinke you bee
> Constant, you'are howrely in inconstancee. (lines 393–400)

In a passage that strikingly anticipates Donne, the French essayist Michel Montaigne had similarly analyzed the human disposition to change: 'I find nothing more difficult to believe than man's consistency, and nothing more easy than his inconsistency ... What we have but now determined we presently alter, and soon again we retrace our steps; it is nothing but wavering and uncertainty ... We waver between different minds; we wish

nothing freely, nothing absolutely, nothing constantly.'[12] If inconstancy is our nature, then contradiction will be our natural expression.

So far, we have looked at characteristics of Donne's poetry as a whole, despite differences of genre or audience. The rest of this essay discusses special concerns and achievements of the different kinds of poetry Donne wrote, in the process further defining the contrary impulses his writing reveals.

The *Satires* express an overwhelming sense of the degeneracy of late-sixteenth-century English society. In attacking this 'Age of rusty iron' (*Satire 5*, line 35), Donne recalls Roman satirists Juvenal, Persius, and Horace who similarly exposed the corruption of Rome, but he also emulates the biblical prophets moved by religious zeal who criticized the sinfulness and idolatry of Israel.[13] For all his independent spirit, Donne is here quite conservative, upholding old truths and values in a world that seems to be crumbling. There is a sense of frustration, for the satirist is compelled to expose what is wrong, but feels helpless to 'cure these worne maladies' (*Satire 3*).

Coming under scrutiny are the frivolous, materialistic values of his society (1), the legal system (2), religious institutions (3), the court and courtiers (4, 1), and the judicial system and structure of rewards in late Elizabethan England (5). The speaker of the *Satires* embodies qualities that oppose the viciousness of society: he is constant and scholarly (1), devoted to God and spiritual values, earnest and searching rather than complacent (3), preferring the 'meane' to either extreme (2), filled with hatred for vice (2) and vicious people in power (5) but moved by pity for humanity (3, 5). He presents himself as virtually alone in condemning the vices of his time – as if he were the last good man in a totally corrupt society. He criticizes not only the vices of his society but also the corruption of its institutions and systems. This opposition to the political establishment reappears in the *Elegies* and *Songs and Sonets*; and the accompanying feeling of isolation is seen in much of Donne's poetry, where there is little sense of fitting into a community.

The *Satires*, however, suggest contrary impulses, both outrage at this corrupt society, and a certain attraction to it. This conflict is suggested in *Satire 1*, in which the scholarly speaker, introverted and virtuous, and his inconstant companion, the ambitious and comically sycophantic would-be courtier, seem to represent conflicting, contrary aspects of Donne.[14] The relation between the speaker and his friend itself enacts the conflict, for the speaker is pulled in two directions – to stay at home, 'consorted' only with his 'bookes' (line 3), and to accompany his friend on a walk about town. That he goes with his friend, against the dictates of his conscience, indicates how difficult it is to stay away from the corrupt social world that repels him.

Satire 3 reveals a special aspect of Donne's complex feeling about the public world. This poem about the difficulty – yet necessity – of finding the true church (described in the Bible as the Bride (or spouse) of Christ) suggests the anxiety and alienation that Donne, born and raised a Roman Catholic, felt in a Protestant society that persecuted Catholics. The speaker surveys the various Christian religions one could choose (Roman Catholic, Genevan, Anglican), comparing each to a different kind of woman and suggesting a sceptical attitude toward all of them as well as criticizing those who select a particular religion (or wife) for the wrong reasons. That the speaker does not openly embrace any of the churches may indicate that he has no place in this world where he fits in. The poem concludes recognizing the dilemma the virtuous person faces: earthly authorities judge the seeker of truth by 'man's lawes' not God's, but social conformity may entail spiritual death. The best one can do is 'dwell' at the 'head' of 'Power['s]' 'streames' (lines 103–4) with God, even though that may not protect one's body from earthly punishment for religious nonconformity. Within the poem, we thus see both the desire to be part of the community, to have a secure place in society, and Donne's sense of isolation in the pursuit of truth which is a lonely, individual enterprise.

The sense of being at odds with society and its institutions and conventions also pervades Donne's *Elegies*, most of which, like the *Satires*, were probably written in the 1590s. They defy established, conventional authority (of parents, fathers, husbands) by flaunting illicit or socially disapproved relationships – affairs with a young girl ('The Perfume') or a married woman ('Jealousy' and 'Nature's lay Idiot'), or lesbian love ('Sappho to Philænis'). Often the relations are described as secret, hidden from a dangerous public world.

In contrast to the *Satires*, with their public and political focus, the *Elegies* are concerned with the supposedly private sphere of love, but here, too, Donne's very choice of genre implies an oppositional stance to the court. In his *Elegies*, he turns to the example of the Roman poet Ovid, rather than imitating the Petrarchan, courtly love poetry popular during this period. Petrarch, adapting the conventions of courtly love which had flourished in the literature of the Middle Ages, had written a sonnet sequence in which an introspective speaker analyzed his fluctuating fortunes in love. Petrarch's poetry was enormously influential not only on the continent but in England. Particularly apt for expressing the complex relations between the superior, unattainable queen (source of all favour and rewards) and the subservient yet ambitious courtiers/suitors seeking rewards, courtly love became a 'dominant social and literary mode' of the Elizabethan court. Thus Donne's writing Ovidian elegies that mock courtly love suggests a critical, even

oppositional, attitude toward the court.[15] But even here we see Donne pulled by contrary impulses since by circulating these elegies in manuscript he was adopting the practice of aristocratic courtiers who disdained to publish their poetry.

Ovid in his elegies reacted against idealization of love, insisting instead on a supposedly more 'realistic' analysis of love, based on the notion that human beings were natural, bodily creatures, possessing much in common with the animals. Donne draws on Ovidian situations and attitudes to reject the conventions of courtly and Petrarchan love poetry, with its chaste, beautiful, unattainable women, desired and sought by admiring, subservient, faithful male suitors. In Donne's *Elegies*, as in Ovid, love is very much of the body. The male speakers in these poems often frankly admit their interest in money and sex, and are moved by practicalities, not ideals. 'Love's Progress', for example, humorously defines the 'right true end' (line 2) and means of love in terms that reject the conventional postures of courtly lovers. The goal is sexual intercourse, and the best way to attain it is to take the path of least resistance.

In contrast to the faithful courtly lover, the men of the *Elegies* view constancy as 'subjection' and instead desire 'variety' and 'change' (Elegies 'Variety' and 'Change'). Where the Petrarchan lover is submissive and subservient, these lovers refuse 'to serve' (Elegy 'Oh, let mee not serve so'). They assert their superiority and control in relations with women, though power is more often desired than achieved since poems like 'Nature's lay Idiot' or 'Change' describe situations where the mistress seems very much out of the man's control. In the *Elegies* political language and analogies link the private sphere of love with the public world of politics, suggesting a desire for greater power in both spheres.

Though the *Elegies* are more of a piece than the *Songs and Sonets*, they vary in their attitudes toward women and sexual love. Some elegies present women as objects of revulsion and nausea and, for all the Ovidian emphasis on the naturalness of sex, reveal a distaste for the activity. Where courtly love exalts and idealizes the mistress, 'The Anagram' and 'The Comparison' parody Petrarchan conventions of (praising) female beauty by focussing on the lower parts of the female body, described in terms of excretions and disease. The 'best lov'd part' of his rival's mistress is like 'the dread mouth of a fired gunne, / Or like hot liquid metalls newly runne' or like 'an invenom'd sore' ('The Comparison', lines 38, 39–40, 44). In some poems, women are debased by comparison with animals, water, and land ('Nature's lay Idiot', 'Change', 'Oh, let mee not serve so') – things which are inconstant, mutable, or passive, and considered in the Renaissance to be 'naturally' meant to be under man's dominion. In other elegies, however, women

and women's bodies are treated as immensely desirable. As 'Love's Progress' wittily and outrageously argues, her 'centrique part' is as infinite and worthy of love as the soul.

The best-known of the elegies, the witty seduction poem 'Going to Bed', celebrates sexual love and is less cynical than many of the other elegies. But even here we find conflicting valuations of woman and contrary impulses in love. As the male speaker urges his mistress to remove her clothes and inhibitions and asks her (like a monarch) to 'Licence' his 'roaving hands' (line 25) so he can explore her body (his 'America! my new-found-land', line 27), the poem moves between praising the mistress as source of all riches, joys, even 'grace' (line 42), and identifying her with land to be explored and possessed by man. Thus it expresses contradictory views of woman that were part of Renaissance culture in England, where the vogue of courtly love and the presence of a female monarch could glorify a woman as the source of all riches, favour, and grace, but political, legal, economic, and medical conventions and conditions defined woman as inferior and subordinate.[16] The poem's clever ending asserts the speaker's superiority as the master in love ('To teach thee I am naked first; why than / What needst thou have more covering then a man?' lines 47–8) and insists on what Petrarchan poetry, with its emphasis on the unattainable woman and unconsummated love, obscures – that the end of courtship is sexual intercourse. Sexual love itself, defined in this poem from the man's point of view as a process of seduction and conquest, engages and expresses his contrary desires for control and intimacy.

In insisting on the importance of sexual love, 'Going to Bed' not only counters Petrarchan poetry but also challenges Renaissance neo-Platonic ideas of love.[17] According to neo-Platonism, the object of love is properly the soul, and the body and senses must be left behind as the lover ascends to the spiritual in the process of loving. In contrast to this philosophy of love, Donne's glorifies the body and sexual love, which the speaker claims possesses spiritual significance: the unclothing of their bodies is analogous to the soul's divesting itself of the body in order to enjoy 'whole joyes' (line 35). This elegy's celebration of the private experience of sexual love as a supreme source of value marks what is one of the most important concerns of the *Songs and Sonets*.

The *Songs and Sonets* comprise Donne's most complicated exploration of love. Seemingly the most private of his poems, they are certainly the most varied, and were probably composed over a much greater period of time than the *Elegies* or *Satires*. The tensions and contradictions here are intense as Donne repeatedly attempts to define love by testing received ideas and conventions about love against the experience(s) of loving.

Like the *Elegies*, the *Songs and Sonets* often reject notions of love fostered by Petrarchan love poetry, even as they invoke conventions such as the aloof, distant mistress, or the suffering, submissive lover. In Petrarchan poetry, the mistress is chaste and remote (cool like ice, unmovable like a statue) and the male lover is constant in his devotion. But Donne sceptically challenges this formula of male/female relations. Sometimes he presents women as sexually inconstant, unfaithful, promiscuous ('Song. Goe, and catch a falling starre', 'A Jet Ring Sent'), and the male speakers often repudiate constancy, wanting to have all women ('Community'), refusing to be tied to 'dangerous constancie' ('The Indifferent', line 25; cf. 'Love's Diet'). But Donne challenges Petrarchan notions of male/female relations in yet another way, one that is at odds with his libertine emphasis on inconstancy. Many poems insist on the need for mutual love, finding unsatisfactory the frustrated longing and unreciprocated love that characterize Petrarchan formulations. As he writes in 'Love's Deity', 'It cannot bee / Love, till I love her, that loves mee' (lines 13–14). One of Donne's most important contributions to love poetry is thought to be his celebration of mutual, reciprocal love.

Donne praises mutual love as an experience of supreme value that opposes the transitory, material world and even transcends it. Whereas the *Elegies* in their political language and analogies often connect love and the political world, here there is a sharper opposition between the two spheres. The private little room of love (the microcosm) contrasts with the outside world of princes, explorers, lawyers, and merchants, who are all preoccupied with material concerns. The speaker of 'The Good-morrow' claims that his experience of mutual love gives him a new perspective from which the rest of the world looks insignificant:

> And now good morrow to our waking soules,
> Which watch not one another out of feare;
> For love, all love of other sights controules,
> And makes one little roome an every where,
> Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
> Let Maps to others, worlds on worlds have showne,
> Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.
>
> (lines 8–14)

The world of love contains everything of value; it is the only one worth exploring and possessing. Hence the microcosmic world of love becomes larger and more important than the macrocosm. As the speaker in 'The Sun Rising' says:

> Nothing else is.
> Princes doe but play us; compar'd to this,
> All honor's mimique; All wealth alchimie. (lines 22–4)

Since the lovers in their bedroom contract all the world's riches, the sun can 'Shine here to us, and thou art every where; / This bed thy center is, these walls, thy spheare' (lines 29–30).

'She'is all States, all Princes, I' (line 21). As this famous line from 'The Sun Rising' suggests, Donne's description of 'mutual' love often assumes a degree of inequality between the lovers. Some poems seem attracted to the idea that love might diminish inequities and differences between the sexes – 'So, to one neutrall thing both sexes fit' ('The Canonization', line 25); 'Difference of sex no more wee knew, / Then our Guardian Angells doe' ('The Relic', lines 25–6). That the two lovers together create a whole (the two 'hemispheares' of 'The Good-morrow', line 17) suggests a kind of parity – the incompleteness of each without the other as well as the perfection of the lovers united. But other celebrations of mutual love assume conventional Renaissance hierarchical thinking about gender. Even Donne's portrayal of 'ideal love' is marked by contrary emphases on mutuality and disparity.

'The Canonization' defends the private world of mutual love against the public world, whose values are represented by the ambitious, materialistic person addressed in the opening lines. Attributing religious significance to what is clearly a sexual love, the speaker wittily argues (with a sense of the outrageousness of some of his arguments) that he and his mistress deserve to be canonized as saints. They oppose worldly greed, they have miraculously died and risen 'the same' (line 26; that is, orgasm has not diminished their vigour), they will die as martyrs in a hostile world, and finally their love will provide a 'patterne' (line 45) for others. In drawing an extended analogy between religious experience and sexual love, is Donne being humorous? blasphemous? serious? Conflicting possibilities are all suggested in this poem, as Donne examines the potential of human love to provide a redeeming grace.

With its spiritual powers, love seems enduring, constant, and capable of transcending the physical, mutable world. The poems of mutual love suggest that love may counter the process of change and decay that characterizes his universe. 'The Anniversary' claims that, though the world and everything in it including 'Kings' and their 'favorites' (line 1) is older by a year, true love is impervious to decay:

> All other things, to their destruction draw,
> Only our love hath no decay;
> This, no to morrow hath, nor yesterday,
> Running it never runs from us away,
> But truly keepes his first, last, everlasting day. (lines 6–10)

Similarly, 'The Good-morrow' ends with the hope that their love will defy the ordinary processes of time.

Remarkably, transcendence of the physical world and mortality is accomplished not by denial of the body but through its fulfilment. Whereas neo-Platonism taught that the lover could ascend to spiritual love only by leaving behind the impure body, Donne's poems sometimes insist that transcendent, spiritual love is also sexual, indeed, that lovers transcend the physical through embracing the body.[18] The fullest argument for the interrelation of body and soul and for the importance of the body in love appears in 'The Ecstasy'. The first half of the poem emphasizes transcendence and the spiritual nature of love as it describes how the lovers' souls have left their bodies and experienced an 'extasie' illuminating the mystery of their love as a mixture of souls. But love that leaves behind the bodies turns out to be incomplete. So the second half of the poem argues for the need to return to the body. Rejecting neo-Platonic, dualistic assumptions about the relation of soul and body, the speaker insists that the bodies are not 'drosse' but 'allay' (that is, alloy, line 56), the element that, though inferior, strengthens a metal and makes it more durable. Bodies make spiritual love more lasting. They are also the only means whereby two souls can fully unite. Souls can only 'flow' (line 59) into each other through the body, that is, through sexual love:

> So must pure lovers soules descend,
> T'affections, and to faculties,
> Which sense may reach and apprehend,
> Else a great Prince in prison lies.
>
> To'our bodies turne wee then, that so
> Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
> Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
> But yet the body is his booke. (lines 65–72)

What a great stratagem for seduction. Perhaps 'The Ecstasy' is a seduction poem, and the speaker's seemingly high-minded arguments only a means to attain a carnal end. But, like many of Donne's poems. 'The Ecstasy' has built into it the potential for contradictory interpretations. Hence, it is entirely possible to read this poem as Donne's deeply serious attempt to define an integrative ideal of love and human nature that finds its ultimate sanction in the Incarnation of Christ.[19]

This kind of love cannot be experienced by many people. Donne presents his idealized lovers who embody wholeness and a spiritual grace as exceptional, unique, though also exemplary. As the analogy in 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' suggests, they are the clergy of love. Their love is a holy mystery either kept secret from the 'layetie' (line 8) or possibly 'reveal'd' to another special person who has been 'refin'd' by love ('The Ecstasy', lines 70, 21).

The poems of mutual love are probably Donne's most well-known and admired poems, but they hardly represent the range of the *Songs and Sonets*, since others offer very different valuations of love, women, sexuality, and the body. The emphasis in the 'mutual love' poems on the spiritual dimension of love, and on the woman's special value as she enables the man to apprehend something of the divine, contrasts with those *Songs and Sonets* where love is defined simply as bodily appetite, where women are interchangeable, insignificant commodities that serve men's physical needs, and inconstancy seems the basic principle of all human experience.

'Community' argues that women are merely 'things indifferent' (line 3) which 'all' men may 'use (line 12). They have no moral value, let alone spiritual, and thus sexual love becomes a matter of physical appetite, and not an urgent one at that:

> they are ours as fruits are ours,
> He that but tasts, he that devours,
> And he that leaves all, doth as well:
> Chang'd loves are but chang'd sorts of meat,
> And when hee hath the kernell eate,
> Who doth not fling away the shell? (lines 19–24)

The misogyny evident in this poem surfaces in others too, where a disparging attitude toward women is accompanied by revulsion from sexual intercourse. The speaker of 'Love's Alchemy' believes not only that love is purely physical and involves no marriage of 'mindes' ('Hope not for minde in women', lines 23, 19), but that even physical, sexual love is overrated. Going to bed with women is like having intercourse with a dead (though preserved) body – 'at their best, / Sweetness, and wit they'are, but, *Mummy*, possest' (lines 23–4)

Whereas the mutual love poems express longing for intimacy with another human being, the pull toward union that remedies 'defects of loneliness' ('The Ecstasy', line 44), these other poems exhibit a desire for emotional detachment, and for preserving a separate identity. 'The Indifferent' will love any woman so long as she is not interested in commitment. In 'Love's Diet' the speaker, trying to reduce the 'combersome unwieldinesse' (line 1) of his love and get it under control, thinks of love as a hunt, with women as his prey, where the goal is to enjoy the sport without emotional investment:

> Thus I reclaim'd my buzard love, to flye
> At what, and when, and how, and where I chuse;
> Now negligent of sport I lye,
> And now as other Fawkners use,
> I spring a mistresse, sweare, write, sigh and weepe:
> And the game kill'd, or lost, goe talke, and sleepe. (lines 25–30)

Both promiscuity and the devaluation of women and sexual pleasure are strategies in these poems for achieving detachment.

It is difficult to discuss Donne's various, contradictory explorations of the experience of love without implying some progression or development, such as from the cynical, libertine poems to the glorifications of a love that is both physical and spiritual. But one should be sceptical of assuming such a neat development – not only because of the uncertainty of dating but also because poems like 'Air and Angels' resist attempts to categorize them as either 'cynical' or 'celebratory'. Moreover, while 'Community' and 'The Indifferent' are often thought to be youthful poems exhibiting a cynicism that is the result of a limited range of experience, 'Farewell to Love' and 'Love's Alchemy' insist that disillusion has resulted from long experience. How can we say that 'Farewell to Love' and 'Love's Alchemy' were necessarily written before the celebrations of mutual love? Given what we know of Donne's unhappiness while living at Mitcham (1605–9), it is possible to imagine Donne writing cynical poems about love even after his marriage. Rather than constructing a progression in Donne's various treatments of love, perhaps we should see the variations and contradictions as expressing conflicting attitudes and contrary impulses that might characterize a full range of experience and desire.

That bitter disillusion may even accompany a continuing, intense, all-consuming experience of love is suggested by 'A Nocturnal upon St Lucy's Day', a poem sometimes associated with the death of his wife. As the speaker anatomizes his despair after the death of his beloved, who was like his soul, essential to his life, he explains with bitter, hyperbolic wit how he is 'every dead thing, / In whom love wrought new Alchimie' (lines 12–13). He is the 'quintessence' of 'nothingnesse' (line 15), the 'Elixer' of 'the first nothing' (line 29). Love 'ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot / Of absence, darknesse, death' (lines 17–18). Seen from one perspective, he is like the speakers for whom the experience of mutual love is all important, involving an exchange or union of souls, creating a private world that makes the external world unimportant. Seen from another perspective, his experience of despair, of being trapped in a state of living death now that his loved one has died, confirms the opinion of 'Love's Alchemy' and 'Farewell to Love' that love is the ultimate self-destructive experience. For all its obvious difference from those poems which devalue women as a group, 'A Nocturnal' shows the enormous cost of love, which is here paradoxically identified with death even as it survives the death of the beloved.

The *Songs and Sonets* explore man's relation with woman, seeing erotic love as one of the most important experiences of life – even, one could argue, in those poems that insist on its destructiveness. Donne's *Divine*

Poems explore man's relation with God, often describing it in terms of human love, and seeking to discover the true relation between man's love for woman and the love between God and man that promises salvation. Even in his *Divine Poems* exploring religious experience, Donne seeks to understand the relation between erotic and spiritual love.

Donne's *Anniversaries* on the death of Elizabeth Drury, daughter of his patron Sir Robert Drury, provide a link between the secular poems and the religious. As they eulogize the fifteen-year-old girl as the embodiment of virtue and see her death as having occasioned the death of the world, they recall 'A Nocturnal upon St Lucy's Day', which exalts the mistress as the soul of her lover and his world. But unlike those *Songs and Sonets* that suggest love integrates body and spirit as it transcends the physical, mortal world, the *Anniversaries* assume a dualistic division between body and soul. They exhort the reader to condemn the world, the body, and all earthly pleasures. The speaker counsels his soul to look upon his body as a poisonous 'small lump of flesh' that has 'infect[ed]' him 'with originall sinne' (*Second Anniversary*, lines 164–7) – a description that sharply contrasts with 'Air and Angels', where the body is necessary for the soul to function, or 'The Ecstasy' where sexual, bodily love becomes the way to touch the spirit. Focussing all our thoughts on heaven, we must 'forget this rotten world' (line 49) whose diseased state might be contagious (*First Anniversary*, lines 245–6).

The *Divine Poems* anatomize not the corruption in the outside world but corruption within. Like the love poems, these religious meditations are introspective, private, searching, always engaged in the process of discovery and revision. But their focus on sin, death, judgement, and resurrection, as well as their sense of the dualistic relation between body and soul, links them with the *Anniversaries*.

An overwhelming sense of sin and guilt leads to a deep uncertainty about salvation. The 'Hymn to God my God, in my sickness' is exceptional in its calm assurance that God is tuning him in the process of dying so he can join the 'Quire of Saints' (line 2) in heaven, and in its vision of being part of a community. More typically, Donne is disturbed by a painful awareness of his own sinfulness and inconstancy, which both isolate him (he is the worst of sinners) and make him part of the mutable world that he seeks to escape through love in some *Songs and Sonets*. His sins are so great that he asks God to delay Judgement Day so he can have enough time to repent ('At the round earths imagin'd corners').

Often the speaker feels helpless, passive, a pawn in the struggle between God and Satan. If he was created as God's 'Image', 'Why doth the devill then unsurpe' in mee? / Why doth he steale, nay ravish' what is God's 'right'

('As due by many titles', lines 7, 9–10)? Though he admits in this poem that he 'betray'd / My selfe' (lines 7–8), he emphasizes his passivity in the struggle between God and Satan for his soul. He may be responsible for his sins, but he is not responsible for his salvation. It is up to God to 'chuse' him (line 13), but so far he has no evidence that God has done so. Whatever Donne's actual theological views – and it is possible that the views in these poems are presented critically, with some distance between Donne and the speaker – these poems express a Calvinist sense of human depravity and the irresistible power of God's grace, which cannot be earned or merited.[20] They communicate what it feels like to be convinced of one's sin but also of the impossibility of doing anything to save oneself.

In Donne's *Divine Poems* the sense of sinfulness is so great that the speaker insists it will take extraordinary efforts on God's part to save him. Sin, which 'weigh[s]' him toward hell like a force of gravity, needs the irresistible power of God's 'Grace' which 'like Adamant' (the magnetic loadstone) alone can 'draw mine iron heart' away from the devil ('Thou hast made me, And shall thy worke decay?' lines 8, 13–14). It will take extreme 'Corrections' to discipline the proud 'I' and 'Restore' God's 'Image' ('Good-friday, 1613: Riding Westward', lines 38–41). Just as the speakers in the *Songs and Sonets* often claim exceptional status, so the speakers in Donne's religious meditations present themselves as the worst of sinners. Their sense of passivity and helplessness contrasts with their insistent demands on God, their efforts to tell him what to do.

The demands for an intense, intimate relation with God – for an infusion of saving grace – are often couched in erotic language. Perhaps the most startling poem is the sonnet 'Batter my heart, three person'd God', in which the speaker says he is like a woman who loves one man (God) but is betrothed to another (Satan), and wants to be rescued, even by force:

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

In this witty yet deadly serious plea for salvation, Donne highlights the unsettling implications that emerge when the biblical notion that Christ is the bridegroom (and the soul the bride) is conjoined to the Christian paradox that one is only free when bound to God. Metaphor and paradox are treated, for the moment, as if they were literally true, as Donne exploits analogies between sexual and religious love. Sometimes he tries to persuade

God to save him in much the same way as he addressed 'all my prophane mistresses' seeking their favours (as in 'What if this present were the worlds last night?'). In alternately adopting the conventionally 'feminine', passive role of bride and the aggressive 'masculine' role of suitor, Donne's religious poems exhibit contrary impulses that are curiously similar to those in his love poetry. For he both attempts to control God (thus preserving his individual separateness and autonomy) and seeks an intimate union with God that would erase his separate identity:

> Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
> Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
> That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.
> ('Goodfriday, 1613: Riding Westward', lines 40–2)

Repeatedly invoking analogies between human and divine love, Donne's *Divine Poems* suggest that erotic love is our only means, experientially, for apprehending our relation with God.

But if Donne draws an analogy between sexual and religious love, it is not without a sense of tension, for some poems suggest conflict or competition between human or 'prophane loves' and love of God. In 'A Hymn to Christ, at the Author's last going into Germany', the speaker claims that in leaving England he 'sacrifice[s] . . . all whom I lov'd there, and who lov'd mee' (lines 8–9) – as if the sacrifice is necessary for him to 'seeke God', 'the'Eternall root of true Love' (lines 12, 14). Though God does not 'controule, / The amorousness of an harmonious Soule' (lines 15–16), God places constraints on the object of man's love, demanding exclusive devotion. The allusion to God's commandment to Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac suggests both that God requires of us what is humanly impossible, and that the speaker's ties to earthly loves are still strong – which may be why finally he asks God to 'Seale then this bill of my Divorce to All' (line 22) so he will no longer be tempted.

The sonnet probably written on the occasion of his wife's death most painfully presents Donne's sense of anxiety and conflict about the value of human love:

> Since she whome I lovd hath payd her last debt
> To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead
> And her Soule early into heaven ravished,
> Wholly in heavenly things my mind is sett.
> Here the admyring her my mind did whett
> To seeke thee God; so streames do shew the head.
> But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,
> A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yett.
> But why should I begg more Love, when as thou

Dost woe my soule, for hers offring all thine:
And dost not only feare least I allow
My Love to Saints and Angels, things divine,
But in thy tender jealosy dost doubt
Least the World, fleshe, yea Devill putt thee out.

If he has 'found' God, who has 'fed' his 'thirst', why does he say that with Anne's death 'my good is dead'? He has 'found' God, yet still 'begg[s]' for 'more Love' – possibly a pun on Anne's maiden name, More, which suggests he still longs for her. Is God's love insufficient? Did God's jealousy cause her death? Loving this woman has led him to God ('so streames do shew the head'), yet toward the end of the poem she seems identified not only with forbidden objects of devotion ('Saints and Angels') but with 'the World, fleshe, yea Devill'. Does love for another person lead one to God, or is it yet another form of idolatry that leads to damnation and 'put[s]' God 'out'? The questions and contradictions are never finally resolved.

Perhaps the contrary impulses in Donne's poetry ultimately come from wanting to have it all. We see in the possible pun on his wife Anne's maiden name in the holy sonnet – in the desire to have 'more/More love' which is asserted even as it is denied – not only an admission of his continued longing for her but also a symbol of Donne's overwhelming desire to have it all, to possess the full range of love, not just part. He wants both human love and God's love, and though a number of the religious poems suggest a pressure to choose between them, they also suggest an unwillingness to give up those earthly ties, even a hope that those precious human loves will not be destroyed but actually included or contained in God, who is the 'root' or source of love ('Since she . . . ', 'Hymn to Christ'). Donne comes dangerously close to blasphemy in that holy sonnet on his wife by almost suggesting that God's love is, of itself, not sufficient to satisfy him. But that is what makes his poetry so humanly honest. Composed as he is of 'Elements' (the body) and 'an Angelike spright' ('I am a little world made cunningly'), he is pulled in different directions, yet is unwilling, perhaps by his very human nature unable, to give up the insistent demands of either body or soul.

Many of the tensions and contradictions in his poetry can be seen as deriving from wanting to satisfy conflicting human needs and desires. The demands of the body and sexuality are an important part of human nature, too important to 'forebeare' ('The Ecstasy', line 50), but the claims of the soul are equally insistent. Hence the coexistence of poems that see love as only sexual, poems that insist true love between people is a union of souls, and others that negotiate various interrelations of body and soul in human love. Some poems like 'The Indifferent' or 'Community' insist on male independence and autonomy in erotic relations. Others like 'The Sun Rising'

or 'The Canonization' show a strong desire for intimacy. The pull between these conflicting desires gives focus to the *Songs and Sonets* as a group – and is brilliantly displayed in the single poem 'Air and Angels' – but it also surfaces in the religious poems as he examines his difficult relation with God. This desire for both autonomy and intimacy is not unrelated to Donne's desire, evident not only in the *Satires* and *Elegies* but in so much of his poetry, both to preserve his individuality, uniqueness, and satiric distance and to have a secure place in the world, to be part of the community.

Donne is vitally attracted to 'change', the 'fruitful mother of our appetite' (Elegy 'Variety'), as his many poems about promiscuity and unconfined love suggest. But there is also a deep longing for stability and permanence, evident in lyrics that celebrate exclusive, monogamous, mutual love. The excitement of sexual conquest vies with the comfort felt in a secure relationship where each partner is 'inter-assured' of the other ('A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning'). Several poems bring together the attraction to change and the desire for stability, exploring whether it is possible to have both in love. For though Donne dislikes mutability as it is a sign of mortality, he also seems to dislike stasis, which he identifies with stagnation. Poems like 'Love's Growth', 'Lovers' Infiniteness', and 'Lecture upon the Shadow' ask if love can be constant and yet grow, if love can include change without necessarily involving decay. Both in the experience of passionate love and in his anticipation of heaven, Donne wants the 'kind of joy [that] doth every day admit / Degrees of grouth, but none of loosing it' (*Second Anniversary*, lines 495–6).

Donne's poetry thus expresses the instability and infinity of human desire. For all its various attitudes, his poetry articulates a persistent desire to have everything, to experience an ever increasing 'joy' and fulfilment. This poignantly human characteristic of always wanting more than we presently have causes pain since we live in a world of limitation which disappoints and frustrates our desires. But what is so wonderful about Donne is that, for all his realistic assessment of those limits, and for all the admissions of guilt about his immoderate desires, he never gives up wanting – and asking for – more.

NOTES

1 'Valediction of the Booke', line 21, in *The Complete Poetry of John Donne*, ed. John T. Shawcross (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967). All quotations from Donne's poems follow the text of this edition.

2 'An Elegy upon the death of the Dean of Pauls, Dr John Donne', lines 25–8, in *The Poems of Thomas Carew*, ed. Rhodes Dunlap (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949).

3 On the manuscript transmission of Donne's poetry and the conditions of 'coterie' verse, see Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), especially pp. 3–24.

4 On Donne's life, see R. C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford University Press, 1970). John Carey emphasizes what he calls Donne's 'apostasy' in *John Donne: Life, Mind, Art* (Oxford University Press, 1981). See, however, Dennis Flynn's more sympathetic understanding of Donne's relation to Catholicism: 'Donne the Survivor', in *The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), pp. 15–24; and 'Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility', *ELR* 19 (1989): 305–23.

5 Izaak Walton, *The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert, and Robert Sanderson*, intro. George Saintsbury (1927; repr. Oxford University Press, 1962), especially pp., 34, 47–8, 60–1.

6 Helen Gardner (ed.), *John Donne: The Divine Poems*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. xxxvii–lv. See also Dennis Flynn, 'Awry and Squint': The Dating of Donne's Holy Sonnets', *John Donne Journal* 7 (1988): 35–46.

7 Paul R. Sellin has argued for a much later date for *Satire 3*; see 'The Proper Dating of Donne's "Satyre III"', *HLQ* 43 (1979–80): 275–312.

8 Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets* (on Cowley), in *Selections from Samuel Johnson 1709–1784*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 373–4.

9 On this quality of Donne's wit, see Judith Scherer Herz, '"An Excellent Exercise of Wit that Speaks so well of Ill": Donne and the Poetics of Concealment', in *The Eagle and the Dove*, ed. Summers and Pebworth, pp. 3–14.

10 On Donne's concern with discovery and experience, see especially Joan Webber's book on Donne's prose, *Contrary Music* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963).

11 Donne's concern with provoking readers to see things differently may owe something to Mannerist art. See Murray Roston's *The Soul of Wit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974). Other valuable discussions of the qualities of Donne's poetry include J. B. Leishman, *The Monarch of Wit*, 5th rev. edn. (London, 1962), and Arnold Stein, *John Donne's Lyrics: The Eloquence of Action* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1962).

12 Michel Montaigne, 'Of the Inconsistency of our Actions', in *The Essays of Montaigne*, trans. E. J. Trechmann, into. J. M. Robertson, 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1927), vol. 1, pp. 321–2. Tilottama Rajan, '"Nothing Sooner Broke": Donne's *Songs and Sonets* as Self-Consuming Aritfacts', *ELH* 49 (1982): 805–28, sees both individual poems and the *Songs and Sonets* as a collection as self-consuming structures, grounded in assumptions about impermanence, inconstancy, and the insufficiency of human language to express truth.

13 See M. Thomas Hester, *Kinde Pitty and Brave Scorne: John Donne's Satyres* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982).

14 See Marotti's discussion of *Satire 1* (in *Donne*, pp. 39–40). On the tensions in Donne's relation with the courtly system, see also Heather Dubrow, '"Sun in Water": Donne's Somerset Epithalamium and the Poetics of Patronage', in *The Historical Renaissance*, ed. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 197–219. Carey, *Donne*, pp. 61–2, well observes that a

sense of separation or 'singularity' and a desire to overcome it, to become 'a part of the world' are 'contending features' of Donne's thought.

15 For an argument that Donne is writing within the Petrarchan tradition, see Donald Guss, *John Donne, Petrarchist* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966). But on the elegies as anti-Petrarchan and the political implications of his anti-Petrarchanism, see Marotti, *Donne*, pp. 44–66; and Achsah Guibbory, '"Oh, let mee not serve so": The Politics of Love in Donne's Elegies', *ELH* 57 (1990): 811–33.

16 See Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge University Press, 1980); Constance Jordan, 'Woman's Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Thought', *Renaissance Quarterly* 40 (1987): 421–51.

17 An important Renaissance statement of neo-Platonic ideas of love appears in Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*,. trans. Charles S. Singleton (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), The Fourth Book.

18 N. J. C. Andreasen, *John Donne, Conservative Revolutionary* (Princeton University Press, 1967), argues that Donne's idea of transcendent love is grounded in neo-Platonic philosophy; see especially pp. 19–20, 68–77, and 191–240.

19 See A. J. Smith's reading of 'The Ecstasy' in his *The Metaphysics of Love* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), chapter 3.

20 John Stachniewski, 'John Donne: The Despair of the "Holy Sonnets"', *ELH* 48 (1981): 677–705, argues for a Calvinist influence on these poems.

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THOMAS N. CORNS

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