

THE REDISCOVERY OF JOHN DONNE:  
A STUDY OF HIS POETRY AND REPUTATION IN THE LIGHT  
OF MODERN SCHOLARSHIP, WITH EMPHASIS ON THE  
CRITICAL APPROACHES OF SIR EDMUND GOSSE  
AND SIR HERBERT J.C. GRIERSON

---

A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of English  
University of Manitoba

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

---

by  
Clement Horatio Wyke

October 1964



THE REDISCOVERY OF JOHN DONNE:  
A STUDY OF HIS POETRY AND REPUTATION IN THE LIGHT  
OF MODERN SCHOLARSHIP, WITH EMPHASIS ON THE  
CRITICAL APPROACHES OF SIR EDMUND GOSSE  
AND SIR HERBERT J.C. GRIERSON

---

An Abstract of a Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of English  
University of Manitoba

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

---

by  
Clement Horatio Wyke

October 1964

As a wit and as the Dean of St. Paul's, John Donne was constantly recognized throughout the centuries, but as a poet he was acclaimed in his own century, condemned in the eighteenth century, partly neglected in the nineteenth century and rediscovered in the early twentieth century. It is the purpose of this thesis to account for this modern revival of interest in Donne. Accordingly, his rediscovery must be principally concerned with his reputation as a poet.

After artless imitators of Donne's wit had made metaphysical poetry undesirable and unpopular during the Restoration period, Dryden continued the reaction against Donne, but not without admiring his wit. For Dryden Donne was "the greatest wit, though not the best poet of our nation." He further claimed that "if we are not so great wits as Donne, yet certainly we are better poets." This questioning of Donne's position as a poet marked the beginning of neoclassical reaction against his poetry.

Eighteenth-century interest in satirical writing inevitably focussed on Donne's satires. They were found to be metrically rough though full of quality and substance, and consequently Pope applied his own versification to some of them. It was not long before Donne's satires were compared with Pope's version and criticized for falling short of the mark. But to this criticism of Donne's satires Dryden added the accusation: "He [Donne] affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses where nature should reign . . . ." This brought the term "metaphysical" into contemporary use in connection with the name of Donne.

Between the years 1777 and 1781, Johnson, in discussing Cowley in his Lives of the Poets, not only applied the term to Donne's poetry, but converted it into a literary title which had pejorative connotations. He stated that the Metaphysicals used poetry as a medium for displaying their learning. But this was not all; Donne and his school were to be brought into greater disrepute because of witty conceits.

"Wit" went through a series of meanings as a literary term and Donne's reputation was affected accordingly. Johnson dismissed Donne's wit as a kind of discordia concors and his verdict was the culmination of a century of adverse criticism of Donne and the other Metaphysicals which continued in the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth-century critics were influenced by Johnson's criticism in the Life of Cowley and were consequently prejudiced in their assessment of Donne as poet. Their disfavour and neglect left Donne's reputation under a cloud. However, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, De Quincey and Browning were among the few critics who spoke in Donne's favour but their significant comments on Donne were insufficient to reverse the tide of Johnsonian criticism.

In the Victorian period when critical taste was coloured more than usual by moral considerations, Donne's elegies and satires attracted further adverse comment from critics. However, an increasing interest in Donne as a subject of biography was shown by Edmund Gosse, who published his Life and Letters of John Donne in 1899.

Gosse's book was based on Walton's Life of Donne, which, since its first publication in 1640 with Donne's LXXX Sermons, had portrayed Donne as a gracious divine who, though his life was filled with unfortunate

circumstances, had died a saintly death. Walton's Life, by drawing favourable comment from critics who had little admiration for Donne as a poet, had served to preserve some interest in him. Although it was admired for its style and charm as a classic, Walton's biography of Donne was criticized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for its inaccuracy of detail. Gosse, ironically enough, was one of those who warned against Walton's errors, but drew similar adverse criticism for his own mistakes when he published his life of Donne.

The literary and critical interest which was stirred by Gosse's two-volume biography of Donne was indirectly a boost to Donne's position as poet. By presenting Donne to a scholarly and extensive literary audience, Gosse had accomplished in the field of biography what earlier critics of the nineteenth century had not done in the field of literary criticism.

However, it was in the early twentieth century that Donne's reputation was rehabilitated when in 1912 Grierson provided his contemporaries and their successors with a substantial edition of Donne's poetry: the Oxford English Text edition with appendixes and commentary. Thus 1912 may be suggested as the date of the Donne revival.

Previous editions of Donne's poetry proved unsubstantial and erroneous, and even when critical interest began, there was no truly reliable edition to provide the foundation for its continuance. The results of Grierson's valuable edition are still seen today, and are highly appreciated by Donne scholars.

Grierson succeeded not only in supplying a basis for future

textual study of Donne's poetry, but also in restoring recognition of Donne as a poet. He accomplished this by redefining the term "metaphysical" to allow for more fruitful and favourable treatment of Donne's poetry and by allowing Donne the freedom of diction which previous critics had denied him. In brief, he made a full re-evaluation of Donne.

Grierson's re-assessment of Donne was climaxed by his emphasis on passion in Donne's poetry, and on the successful combination of this passion with wit. These areas of emphasis escaped the eyes of critics who were either hindered by their own tools of criticism or by a pre-occupation with biographical fact-finding.

A representative selection of poems from each of the major sections of Donne's poetry is analysed to illustrate the inadequacy or error of the judgments of his earlier detractors and the soundness of Grierson's critical reassessment of his work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. DONNE IN ECLIPSE . . . . .	1
II. DONNE REVEALED THROUGH BIOGRAPHY . . . . .	23
The Walton Image of Donne . . . . .	23
Gosse and His Audience: A Study of Factors Influencing Opinion of Gosse's Life of Donne . . . . .	36
The Gosse Image of Donne and Contemporary Opinion . . . . .	44
Gosse's Image of Donne as Poet . . . . .	54
III. DONNE REDISCOVERED . . . . .	64
IV. DONNE RE-EVALUATED IN THE <u>SONGS AND SONNETS</u> . . . . .	90
Metaphysical Poems Reconsidered . . . . .	91
Biographical Poems Reconsidered . . . . .	102
Poems of Extraordinary Wit . . . . .	108
Poems with Wit and Passion . . . . .	115
V. DONNE RE-EVALUATED IN THE <u>ELEGIES</u> AND <u>SATYRES</u> . . . . .	128
The Elegies Reconsidered as Rhetorical Poetry . . . . .	129
The Role of Passion in the <u>Elegies</u> . . . . .	134
The Adverse Effects of Wit in the <u>Elegies</u> . . . . .	143
The Question of Indecency in the <u>Elegies</u> . . . . .	146
The Versification of the <u>Satyres</u> and Critical Opinion . . . . .	151
The Metrical Harshness of the <u>Satyres</u> . . . . .	155

CHAPTER	PAGE
Obscurity of Meaning in the <u>Satyres</u> . . . . .	156
Indecency in the <u>Satyres</u> . . . . .	158
Overwittiness in the <u>Satyres</u> . . . . .	159
The Third <u>Satyre</u> exempted from Overwittiness . . .	161
The Artless Imitation of Donne's Wit and the Effect on his Reputation . . . . .	163
VI. DONNE RE-EVALUATED IN THE <u>DIVINE POEMS</u> . . . . .	170
Critical Opinion of Donne's Type of Religious Poetry . . . . .	171
The Source of Passion in the <u>Divine Poems</u> . . . . .	175
Excessive Wit in the <u>Divine Poems</u> . . . . .	178
The "Perilious Balance" Between Wit and Passion . .	184
The Effective Combination of Wit and Passion in the <u>Holy Sonnets</u> and <u>Hymns</u> . . . . .	188
CONCLUSION . . . . .	198a
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	200



## CHAPTER I

### DONNE IN ECLIPSE

Donne's glorious reign as the "Monarch of Wit" was brought to an end in the eighteenth century by the abuses of his own subjects. His poetry was then exposed to severe criticism based on rules with which neither Donne nor his age had been greatly concerned. Dryden, Pope and Johnson, the greatest figures of the neoclassical age, disqualified Donne as a great poet and left to critics of the nineteenth century a most unfavourable impression of him. Fortunately, however, this impression was corrected in the early twentieth century when Donne's poetry was given a fairer assessment.

In the eighteenth century Donne was proclaimed as a metaphysical poet with all the unpleasant connotations which this title had at the time.<sup>1</sup> To the neoclassical critics, he was an offender against the accepted laws of poetic diction, a crude metrist, and an intellectual whose wit was excessively displayed.

In 1693 Dryden spoke of Donne's affecting the metaphysics and of his perplexing the minds of the fair sex with "nice speculations of philosophy when he should engage their hearts" ("Origin and Progress of Satire").

---

<sup>1</sup>R.L. Sharp, "The Pejorative Use of 'Metaphysical'," Modern Language Notes, XLIX (December 1934), 503-505. Sharp briefly discusses the pejorative use of "metaphysical" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Spence reported Pope as saying that Cowley borrowed his metaphysical style from Donne.<sup>2</sup> This would indicate that the term "metaphysical" had taken on special connotations in connection with the name of Donne. Johnson in his Life of Cowley (ca. 1781) offered the final verdict on the metaphysicals. He said:

The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour; but, unluckily resolving to shew it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry, they only wrote verses, and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables.<sup>3</sup>

Johnson, although having many words of praise for Cowley, criticised him for a fault which is characteristic of the metaphysicals:

The fault of Cowley, and perhaps of all the writers of the metaphysical race, is that of pursuing his thoughts to their last ramifications, by which he loses the grandeur of generality; for of the greatest things the parts are little; what is little can be but pretty, and by claiming dignity becomes ridiculous.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, Johnson offered his very vigorous criticism of metaphysical poets and their poetry; and his voice was the most influential of those of his age. It was not only heard with reverence during the eighteenth century but left its significant message as a challenge to the nineteenth century. It was Johnson's Lives of the Poets which became the popular source of reference for critics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Arthur Waugh in his introduction to Lives of

---

<sup>2</sup>Arthur H. Nethercot, "The Term 'Metaphysical Poets' before Johnson," Modern Language Notes, XXXVII (January 1922), 15.

<sup>3</sup>Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), I, 13.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

the English Poets summarizes Johnson's importance in his own age as follows:

Johnson was the literary dictator of his age: he dominated it as few men have dominated their time before or since: and he did so because he was the quint-essential representative of his generation, embodying its standards, its methods, even its prejudices and predilections. If, therefore, we want to understand what the culture of the eighteenth century thought of the poetry of its own age and of the ages that preceded it, we shall find that opinion nowhere so clearly nor so authoritatively set forth as in the pages of Johnson's Lives.<sup>5</sup>

Johnson's opinions influenced not only his own age but also the nineteenth century. H.D. Weaver has demonstrated how many important critics of the nineteenth century formed their opinion of Donne and the other metaphysical poets mainly from Johnson's Life of Cowley.<sup>6</sup> Among the leading critics named here, were Hazlitt and Macaulay. In some cases the very style and terminology of Johnson were adopted.

As defenders of eighteenth-century poetic diction Johnson and his contemporaries expressed critical opinions of Donne. To the neoclassicals, propriety of verbal expression was very important. As Swift put it, there should be "proper words in proper places." This correctness of language was not a significant concern to Donne who was rebelling against the Elizabethan mellifluous style and trying to replace it by his own rough masculine diction. In Johnson's time when periphrases were used to excess in order to elevate poetic diction, Donne's "shockingly crude" diction was outlawed.

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. xxii-xxiii.

<sup>6</sup> H.D. Weaver, "The Reputation of Donne and His School in the Nineteenth Century" (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Western Ontario, Ontario, 1949), pp. 15, 16, 18, 20, 22, 26.

However, Donne's transgressions against neo-classical poetic standards were greatest in the field of metrics. When Dryden extolled Donne as the greatest wit of the nation, in the same breath he deplored his "rough cadence." Pope showed his disapproval of Donne's metrical abuses by setting some of Donne's satires to a versification which met the standards of the neo-classical age. This alteration invited comparisons between Pope's versions of Donne and their originals.

As the eighteenth century was an age of satire, Donne's satirical writings were given a prominence which proved fatal to Donne's poetic reputation because his satires were metrically the roughest part of his work. Nethercot offers several brief, amusing comments made by eighteenth-century writers on Donne's satirical style:

Walter Harte, who was tutor to Lord Chesterfield's son and who predicted of Donne that although "Forgotten now; yet still his fame shall last", described the satires as "maim'd and bruis'd". William Mason apostrophized "rough Donne"; and the industrious cleric and historian Thomas Birch spoke of Donne's "most inharmonious versification".

.....  
David Hume, with his most unpoetical of souls, found in the satires "the hardest and most uncouth expression that is anywhere to be met with".<sup>7</sup>

These verdicts spell out Donne's failure to meet eighteenth-century standards of versification. But he was to be held in contempt for other failures as well.

Excessive wittiness, and elaborate conceits which are learned and abstruse, further discredited Donne before the eyes of eighteenth-century critics. Where Carew in the seventeenth century esteemed him

---

<sup>7</sup>Arthur H. Nethercot, "The Reputation of John Donne as a Metrist," The Sewanee Review, XXX (October, 1922), 465-466.

as ruler over the monarchy of wit, Johnson was to criticize Donne and his followers for yoking together heterogeneous images. It is the change which was made in the meaning of the term "wit" which finally brought Donne to disrepute as a poet. When Dryden praised Donne for his wittiness, he was commending his intellect and imagination, but later Addison was to make further distinctions about "wit" (See Spectator Papers No. 62) which declaimed against such superficialities as "Anagrams, Chronograms, Lipograms and Acrosticks," or puns and quibbles. These exemplify false wit. True wit, for Addison, consisted in the "Resemblance of Ideas." He also spoke of "mixt wit", which consisted partly in the "Resemblance of Ideas, and partly in the Resemblance of Words."<sup>8</sup> Cowley was mentioned as an example of this kind of wit. Addison offered an elaborate treatment of the word "wit" which was not the same as Dryden knew it or as Cowley described it in the seventeenth century (See "Ode of Wit"). Pope, at a later date, called wit "nature to advantage dressed, / What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed." Johnson found this definition to be a crude reduction of wit from strength of thought to mere "happiness of language." Johnson then proceeded to offer his own definition as that "which is at once natural and new, that which, though not obvious, is, upon its first production, acknowledged to be just...."<sup>9</sup> This evolution in the meaning and use of the word "wit" is enough to show why Donne, who was acclaimed in his own century on the strength of his wit, became

---

<sup>8</sup>James Harry Smith and Edd Winfield Parks (eds.), The Great Critics (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1951), p. 819.

<sup>9</sup>Johnson, Lives, p. 14.

an object of adverse criticism during the eighteenth century. This proves that wittiness or intellectual ingenuity was a weak basis for Donne's claim to permanent greatness as a poet.

Nethercot summarizes the effect on the reputation of the metaphysicals of these various interpretations of the term "wit":

The reason for the seventeenth century reaction [to the metaphysical poets] lies in the development of new and fresh poetical tastes, based on new conceptions of style, wit, etc. So long as the terms 'wit' and 'conceit' connoted primarily 'intellect and 'imagination,' respectively, the Metaphysicals were admired, for they possessed both of these qualities. When the terms began to mean the power of perceiving similarity in difference (as Hobbes and Locke defined 'wit'), and 'fancy' or 'ingenuity' (as 'conceit' came to denote), the same poets were still almost universally praised, because they possessed these qualities in a superlative degree also. But when, toward the end of the century, the emphasis began to shift from 'wit' to 'judgment' and 'reason,' and the device of the technical 'conceit' had become outworn in poetry, to be superseded by the 'turn,' the Metaphysicals commenced to suffer likewise.<sup>10</sup>

That Donne's reputation had reached its nadir in the eighteenth century is quite clear from the preceding discussion. It is evident that his eclipse was brought about by the eighteenth-century conception of what was called his metaphysical qualities, by his unusual and original poetic diction, his "roughness" as a metrist especially in his satires, and the significant change of meaning given to "wit" throughout the eighteenth century. To what extent Donne is guilty of these offences can be discovered by an examination of his poetry, an undertaking which belongs to later chapters of this work.

It is necessary here to trace some of the influence which

---

<sup>10</sup> Arthur H. Nethercot, "The Reputation of the Metaphysical Poets During the Seventeenth Century," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, XXIII (1924), 197.

eighteenth-century opinion of Donne had upon nineteenth-century critics, and in so doing to distinguish between those who held a negative opinion and those who held a favourable opinion of Donne as a poet. The first of these two types of opinion is greatly influenced by Johnson's Life of Cowley, and to a lesser extent by other eighteenth-century impressions of Donne. Nineteenth-century critics with a negative attitude to Donne were objecting to his metrics, his abstruseness and his indecency. The last of these three objections was more characteristic of the Victorians.

Nethercot offers a summary of nineteenth-century reaction to Donne as a metrist and reports Southey's witty remarks on Donne's abilities as a poet:

"Donne could never have become a poet, unless Apollo taking his ears under his divine care, would have wrought as miraculous a change in their internal structure, as of old he wrought in the external of those of Midas." <sup>11</sup>

Nethercot then lists the names of less important men like John Aikin, George Cunningham and Nathan Drake, who echoed Southey's opinion. Landor is reported as speaking of Donne's "frost-bitten", "guarded and knotty" satires. Norton, an editor of the 1895 Grolier Club edition of Donne's poetry, was said to have called Donne's "sins" against metrical laws "unpardonable and unaccountable." Even Augustus Jessopp is named among these unfavourable detractors, as is Leslie Stephen who remarked of Donne how "some strange discord in form and substance" always "sets my teeth on edge." These men's opinions helped to deepen the cloud of unpopularity which surrounded Donne. Hazlitt, who was influenced by

---

<sup>11</sup>Nethercot, "Reputation of Donne," p. 466.

Johnson's Life of Cowley,<sup>12</sup> was not at all tolerant of Donne's abstruseness of thought. He was describing Donne when he wrote that the metaphysicals "brought ideas together not the most, but the least like; and of which the collision produced not light, but obscurity--served not to strengthen, but to confound."<sup>13</sup> Hazlitt is here inveighing against what Johnson called the heterogeneous yoking together of images. It is almost certain that he had Johnson in mind when he wrote that unlike poetry of the imagination which attempted to raise or adorn one idea by another, metaphysical poetry purposed to link any kind of idea "for better or for worse." He said, the metaphysicals made it their

object ... to strain and distort the immediate feeling into some barely possible consequence or recondite analogy, in which it required the utmost stretch of misplaced ingenuity to trace the smallest connection with the original impression.<sup>14</sup>

There is no doubt here that Hazlitt is thoroughly against the same failures and abuses against which Johnson had declaimed in his Life of Cowley. He was undoubtedly negative in his approach to Donne and dismissed him except for a few sparing commendatory words about his love verses and epistles. Hazlitt, like the neoclassicals, based his judgment on classical dicta: he believed that according to Aristotle's definition of poetry as an imitative art, the metaphysical poets lose their right to the name of poets.<sup>15</sup> He was convinced that

---

<sup>12</sup> Weaver, "Reputation in the Nineteenth Century," p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> P.P. Howe (ed.), The Complete Works of William Hazlitt (J.M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1930), VI, 50.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 49.



The writers here referred to (such as Donne, Davies, Crashaw, and others) not merely mistook learning for poetry--they thought any thing was poetry that differed from ordinary prose and the natural impression of things, by being intricate, far-fetched, and improbable.<sup>16</sup>

Hazlitt seemed to have subscribed to the Longinian tradition of exalting emotion, passion and subjectivity as the criteria of good poetry. Certainly Donne's holy sonnets and many of his secular poems possess passion and emotion. This is what impressed Coleridge. Yet Hazlitt dislikes Donne's poetry although he is prepared to maintain: "That which lifts the spirit above the earth, which draws the soul out of itself with undescribable longings is poetry in kind, and generally fit to become so in name, by being married to immortal verse."<sup>17</sup> In condemning Donne's poetry Hazlitt is disregarding the passion and emotional conflict in the following few lines from the holy sonnet "I am a little world ...":

Drowne my world with my weeping earnestly,  
Or wash it, if it must be drown'd no more:  
But oh it must be burnt! alas the fire  
Of lust and envie have burnt it heretofore,  
And made it fouler; Let their flames retire,  
And burne me O Lord, with a fiery zeale  
Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heale.<sup>18</sup>  
( 8-14 )

The very lines scald the heart of poet and reader with their passion.

To take another example, "Batter my heart ..." shows Donne as a poet

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Howe, Complete Works, V, 13.

<sup>18</sup>Sir Herbert J.C. Grierson (ed.), The Poems of John Donne (London: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. 295. Referred to afterward as O.S.A. edition. All quotations from Donne's poems will be taken from this edition.

who is passionate to the point of violence. Hazlitt's requirement of having this kind of writing "married to immortal verse" makes it more difficult for Donne to meet the standard established here. For Hazlitt it would seem that this union is a desideratum of good poetry, but apparently there is no indication of an examination by Hazlitt of Donne's verses or of any significant statement showing where Donne's metrics failed to meet the demands of "immortal verse." Hazlitt's comments were always related to the thought of Donne's poems, and give the impression that reconditeness in Donne was more reprehensible than anything else. It is this which Hazlitt says takes precedence over imitation of nature in Donne's poetry. Perhaps for this reason one might suspect that Hazlitt read very little of Donne. He seems to be making an admission of this when he writes: "Of Donne I know nothing but some beautiful verses to his wife, dissuading her from accompanying him on his travels abroad, and some quaint riddles in verse, which the Sphinx could not unravel."<sup>19</sup> Thus it would seem that there was in Hazlitt a kind of negative bias against Donne. He did not offer the thoroughly impartial examination of Donne's poetry which De Quincey or Coleridge was willing to give. Hazlitt's dismissal of Donne is very hard to reconcile with his statement that poetry "is the language of the imagination and passions." Perhaps there is more wit in Donne than imagination, if Hazlitt made the distinction, but surely there is no lack of passion.

Hazlitt's statement about Donne's abstruseness in "his quaint riddles in verse" was re-echoed later in the century by Macaulay who

---

<sup>19</sup>Howe, Complete Works, V, 83.

adopted Johnson's idea of wit as that of discordia concors.<sup>20</sup> Macaulay said that in Donne's poetry there is a pattern of occult resemblances. This is an explicit condemnation of Donne's inability to convey his meaning with clarity.

Later in the nineteenth century, reaction against Donne centred around what critics called his "indecenty." This type of criticism occurred chiefly in the Victorian period. The reason for this reaction can be sought in the well-known attitude of Victorians to love and sex. Donne's elegies contain references to sex which would be condemned by the Victorian mind which felt obliged to employ a euphemism for piano legs.

Grosart, a Victorian editor of Donne, is said to have deplored the "uncleanliness" of some of Donne's poems.<sup>21</sup> A writer in the Temple Bar, 1861 was repelled by the fact that Donne wrote so "indecently" in his satires.<sup>22</sup>

All these adverse comments on Donne illustrate the effect of eighteenth-century opinion on nineteenth-century critics, as well as the negative approach which was taken by critics who apparently failed to recognize the element of greatness in Donne's poetry which was later rediscovered and emphasized in the twentieth century. But this re-discovery was preceded by a series of reactions to this negative treatment of Donne. It began strangely enough in the early nineteenth century and spasmodically progressed through the century until Gosse's

---

<sup>20</sup>Weaver, "Reputation in the Nineteenth Century," p. 20.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 67.

significant biography of Donne was published in 1899.

The literary situation in the early part of the nineteenth century favoured a more sympathetic attitude toward novelty and individualism in poetry than the more rigid, rule-observing eighteenth century. It is expected therefore that the more subjective and liberal-minded critics of the Romantic period would be willing to be more considerate to Donne, whose individualism became in itself an attraction to a kindred mind.

It must be remembered, however, that this liberal attitude would not necessitate unqualified acceptance of Donne. On the whole the major critics of the Romantic period, like Wordsworth and Coleridge, were occupied with something else. They were more concerned with leading a reaction against the literary practices of the neoclassical age than vindicating the poetry condemned by neoclassical aesthetic. Wordsworth was contending for a more natural and simple quality in poetic diction because of what seemed to him the pretentiousness of eighteenth-century diction with its abuse of language and its preoccupation with form. While Donne was not sufficiently significant a figure at that time to warrant positive and elaborate consideration by Wordsworth, Wordsworth's manner of writing with little care for ornamentation perhaps allows Donne's passion-filled poetry an easy place within his scheme of spontaneous poetry. For Wordsworth the poet "describes and imitates passions."<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Carlos Baker (ed.), The Prelude with a Selection from the Shorter Poems, The Sonnets, The Recluse and the Excursion (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 14. Elsewhere in the "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1800), Wordsworth states: "The poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society" (p. 18). He also states: "The poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions" (p. 21).

Donne's intellectualizing and rich metaphysical conceits were not as repulsive to Wordsworth as they were to his predecessors in the eighteenth century. To the leader of the Romantic poets, Donne's challenging intellectuality and his forbidding abstruseness became likeable qualities even though they discouraged some persons from exploring his work. In a letter written about April or May, 1830, to Dora Wordsworth, Wordsworth wrote: "I prefer this Writer [i.e., Donne] because he is so little likely to be explored by others; and is full of excellent matter, though difficult to manage for a modern audience."<sup>24</sup> Wordsworth seemed to be always aware of Donne's peculiarities and his quaintness to a contemporary audience, and was liberal and considerate enough to allow for some of Donne's freedoms. He wrote to the editor Alexander Dyce in the spring of 1833:

The tenth sonnet of Donne, beginning 'Death, be not proud,' is so eminently characteristic of his manner, and at the same time so weighty in thought, and vigorous in the expression, that I would entreat you to insert it, though to modern taste it may be repulsive, quaint, and laboured.<sup>25</sup>

These words reflect a favourable attitude toward Donne and reveal a mind that is free from the eighteenth-century prejudice against metaphysical poetry.

Coleridge, whose concept of poetry was much more systematic than Wordsworth's, leaves a very significant impression of Donne. His four-line verse on Donne's poetry revealed his perspicacity as a critic.

---

<sup>24</sup>Markham L. Peacock, Jr., The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1950), p. 244.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

It reads:

With Donne, whose muse on dromedary trots,  
Wreathe iron pokers into true-love knots;  
Rhyme's sturdy cripple, fancy's maze and clue,  
Wit's forge and fire-blast, meaning's press and screw.<sup>26</sup>

In this little poem Coleridge offers a vivid picture of Donne's poetry: his rugged metre (line 1), his cleverly-woven love poems (line 2), his unusual versification and ingenious intellectual subtleties (line 3), and his vigorous wit and passion (line 4). These are all the essential elements of Donne's poetry compressed into four lines of witty poetry. At the early part of the nineteenth century when much darkness surrounded the name of Donne, this accurate comment from the most sensitive mind of the age is noteworthy.

Coleridge, like Wordsworth, emphasized passion and emotion in poetry, for these elements were necessary parts of all romantic poetry. He therefore expressed his preference for Donne over the classical correctness of Dryden and Pope: "To read Dryden, Pope, etc., you need only count syllables; but to read Donne you must measure Time, and discover the Time of each word by the sense of Passion."<sup>27</sup> Coleridge was offering a clue to the study of Donne's poetry and to his greatness as a poet in these lines, but he was still speaking to an audience not yet favoured by as good an edition of Donne's poetry as Grierson was to offer in 1912. It is noticeable, however, that Coleridge was a glimmer of light in the darkness, a darkness thickened by misconceptions of

---

<sup>26</sup> Donald A. Stauffer (ed.), Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge (New York: Modern Library, 1951), p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Roberta F. Brinkley (ed.), Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century (Durham: Duke University Press, 1955), pp. 519-520.

Donne as portrayed by the eighteenth-century critics.

Coleridge also showed consideration for Donne's metrical patterns which had hitherto been condemned. He contended:

. . . all Donne's Poems are equally metrical (misprints allowed for) though smoothness (i.e., the metre necessitating the proper reading) he deemed appropriate to songs; but in poems where the writer thinks, and expects the reader to do so, the sense must be understood in order to ascertain the metre.<sup>28</sup>

This is a further attempt to illuminate the perplexed reader of Donne's verses at a time when there was a predominance of adverse criticism of Donne as a metrist. The odds were too great to restore Donne's lost reputation. There were still editions of Donne's poetry which left too much unexplained.

In his note-books Coleridge left other impressions of Donne, which, no doubt, were private. Coleridge devoted much space to a consideration of Donne's sermons and left on record marginalia which either upbraided Donne strongly or eulogized him rapturously. These comments, however, leave us more of an impression of the mind of Coleridge than of Donne. Much that is said by Coleridge arises from theological, Biblical or doctrinal considerations.

The final impression we receive from Coleridge is that he found in Donne the exaltation of passion and fervency of spirit which characterized romantic poetry as he and Wordsworth wished it. Oddly enough, however, Coleridge seemed to find these elements more abundant in Donne's prose. It would appear that his interest in Donne's poetry was a minor one. After expressing his admiration for one stanza

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 521.

of "Progress of the Soul," Coleridge stated that "the rest of the poem seemed the effusion of a man very drunk or very mad." This detracting comment does not say much for some parts of Donne's poetry. Coleridge's conclusion is that "Donne's poetry must be sought in his prose; yet some of his verses breathe an uncommon fervency of spirit, and when he looked in his heart and wrote, his manner is delightful."<sup>29</sup>

After Coleridge had said so much about Donne that was significant, Charles Lamb continued the trend of favourable comment. This was done in the midst of much criticism on the part of Lamb's friend and contemporary William Hazlitt. In Essay III, "On the Conversation of Authors," Hazlitt reported Lamb as describing his favourite authors as Donne or Sir Philip Sidney and as calling "their most crabbed passage delicious."<sup>30</sup> We are slightly puzzled by Lamb's attitude when we consider Hazlitt's account of a conversation held with Lamb and others. Hazlitt stated that Lamb mentioned Donne as a writer whose "meaning was often quite as un-  
comeatable, without a personal citation from the dead, as that of any of his contemporaries."<sup>31</sup> These words are taken from Hazlitt's essay on "Persons One Would Wish To Have Seen," and Hazlitt was sometimes rather facetious in his remarks in this essay. This fact would perhaps lighten the mystery of what appears to be a contradictory attitude held by Lamb toward Donne. It is unfortunate that most of the available evidence is

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 529.

<sup>30</sup> Howe, Complete Works, XII, 36.

<sup>31</sup> Howe, Complete Works, XVIII, 124.



given through the bitterly ironical voice of Hazlitt.

But when we leave Lamb and turn to De Quincey we meet one of the most conscious and explicit of nineteenth-century reactions to Johnsonian criticism of Donne. De Quincey offered a significant defence of Donne, one which Coleridge offered earlier, and which Grierson re-echoed in the early twentieth century: he urged the great importance of passion in Donne's poetry. Coleridge spoke of discovering the Time of each word by the sense of Passion in Donne's verse. De Quincey singled out Donne as the "first very eminent rhetorician in the English Literature" apart from Sir Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville. He also stressed that Donne was capable of combining "the last sublimation of dialectical subtlety and address with the most impassioned majesty."<sup>32</sup> In other words De Quincey was emphasizing the rhetoric of Donne and his ability to unite intellectual ingenuity with passion. De Quincey was arguing that as a rhetorician Donne was concerned with persuasion and ultimately with stirring passion. This criticism was later repeated by Grierson and other twentieth-century critics who valued this clever combination of two apparently disparate qualities in one poet.

De Quincey attacked Johnson for his caustic criticism of the metaphysical poets: "Dr. Johnson inconsiderately classes him [i.e., Donne] in company with Cowley, etc., under the title of Metaphysical Poets: metaphysical they were not; Rhetorical would have been a more

---

<sup>32</sup> David Masson (ed.), The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey (London: A. & C. Black, 1897), X, 101.

accurate designation."<sup>33</sup> De Quincey then makes it clear that he was using rhetoric in its original sense, and thus "laying the principal stress upon the management of the thoughts, and only a secondary one upon the ornaments of style."<sup>34</sup> De Quincey was clearly unlike the eighteenth-century critics in thus putting correctness of style in a minor and secondary position. He speaks very favourably about the "massy diamonds" which compose the substance of Donne's poem on the metempsychosis and then proceeds to attack Johnson's criticism: "No criticism was ever more unhappy than that of Dr. Johnson's which denounces all this artificial display as so much perversion of taste."<sup>35</sup> De Quincey claimed that "the artifice and machinery of rhetoric furnishes in its degree as legitimate a basis for intellectual pleasure as any other."<sup>36</sup> What Johnson was doing then was judging Donne according to the wrong genre: he was impeaching "the excellence of an epigram that it is not a tragedy." De Quincey argued:

Every species of composition is to be tried by its own laws; and, if Dr. Johnson had urged explicitly . . . that a metrical structure, by holding forth the promise of poetry, defrauds the mind of its just expectations, he would have said what is notoriously false. . . . Weak criticism, indeed, is that which condemns a copy of verses under the ideal of poetry, when the mere substitution of another name and classification suffices to evade the sentence, and to reinstate the composition in its rights as rhetoric.<sup>37</sup>

He is claiming then, that Johnson's accusations become false and

---

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

inapplicable if Donne's poetry is regarded as rhetorical. Later examination of the poems will show whether Donne's poetry suited this classification. What is distinctive at this point is that De Quincey had shown his awareness of Johnsonian influence on the appreciation of Donne's poetry and had sought to exonerate the seventeenth-century poet. He had effectively shown his torch in the darkness, although not achieving a rediscovery of Donne.

The last voice to be selected as a favourable supporter of Donne in the nineteenth century is that of Robert Browning. Again his contributions were only more glimmers in the darkness, but they were effective nevertheless. Browning's letters to Elizabeth Barrett Browning reveal that Donne was his treasured idol. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in her letter dated August 2, 1845, to Robert Browning referred to Donne as "your Donne."<sup>38</sup> This she did again in a letter dated May 1, 1846.<sup>39</sup> In a letter dated January 27, 1846, Browning referred to "Donne's pretty lines about seales" and then quoted from a Latin version of his model's poems.<sup>40</sup> Donne was so much a part of Browning that in conversation Browning would refer to some of his sayings. In a conversation with Carlyle he spoke of music enwrapping the thought as Donne said, "an amber drop enwraps a bee."<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning 1845-1846 (New York: Harper and Brothers, [n.d.]), II, 145.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., II, 115.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., I, 437.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 27

Browning wrote to Julia Wedgwood in 1864: "I remember I was a little lightheaded one long night, and fancied I had to go through a complete version of the Psalms by Donne, Psalm by Psalm! Fact!"<sup>42</sup> It seemed almost a habit with Browning to think of Donne when he sought for an analogy. In a letter which he wrote to George Barrett dated December 21, 1888, he spoke of his son Pen reminding him "of the mouse (in a poem of Donne's) who got into the trunk of an elephant--'wherein, as in a gallery, this mouse walked and surveyed the rooms of this vast house'."<sup>43</sup> Browning is referring to stanza XL, lines 391-392 of The Prose of the Soule.

Browning's interest in music was also linked to his fondness for Donne's poetry. D.A. Smalley in a letter to the editor of the Times Literary Supplement stated: "Before his sixteenth birthday Browning had set Donne's 'Go and Catch a Falling Star' to music, and there is considerable evidence that he knew Donne's poetry thoroughly before 1842."<sup>44</sup>

Not only was Browning an ardent admirer of Donne, but he wrote the same type of rugged, rough metres as Donne. Lounsbury, speaking of Browning's early literary career, warned of certain peculiarities of his

<sup>42</sup>Richard Curle (ed.), Robert Browning and Julia Wedgwood: A Broken Friendship as Revealed by Their Letters (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1937), p. 86.

<sup>43</sup>Paul Landis and Ronald E. Freeman (eds.), Letters of the Brownings to George Barrett (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), p. 318.

<sup>44</sup>Donald Arthur Smalley, "Browning and Donne," The Times Literary Supplement, XXXIV (October 10, 1935), 631.

Thomas N. Lounsbury, The Early Literary Career of Robert Browning (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), p. 10.

style which he believed would have damaged his reputation in much the same way as Donne's was damaged:

In the long run these intricacies and ambiguities of expression are certain to affect Browning's reputation injuriously. Indeed, there need be no hesitation in saying that from the very outset they have so affected it. But they will affect it far more in the future. When contemporary interest has disappeared, it is the artistic perfection of a work that will recommend it to the great body of readers. What is bizarre, what is grotesque, what is unnecessarily obscure will then find few apologists and fewer admirers. In our literature there is a marked illustration of this truth in the case of Donne. He was in his time, as Ben Jonson expressed it, the great lord of wit. So far as intellectual power is concerned, he could hardly reckon a superior among his contemporaries. He still retains a band of devoted admirers, and to me as one of the number he seems well worthy of the admiration they bestow. But he will always be caviare to the general. The crabbed diction, the rugged rhymes, the inharmonious versification, the obscure phraseology, all these frequently recurring as they do would continue to repel the multitude from attempting to crack the kernel of a nut even were it to contain meat more delicious than that which Donne's own writings afford.<sup>45</sup>

It is clear from these remarks that Browning had patterned himself so closely to his model that Lounsbury was ready to predict the same reaction to his poetry as Donne's had provoked. However, Gosse credited Browning with helping to stimulate interest in Donne whose poetical style had influenced Browning's poetry. Gosse claimed: "The modern appreciation of Donne seems to begin with Robert Browning, who met with the poems when he was still a boy (about 1827), and was greatly influenced by them."<sup>46</sup> Thus Browning had shown open admiration for Donne at a time when Donne was not yet completely reclaimed as a poet.

---

<sup>45</sup>Thomas R. Lounsbury, The Early Literary Career of Robert Browning (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), pp. 21-22.

<sup>46</sup>Edmund Gosse, The Life and Letters of John Donne (London: William Heinemann, 1899), II, 353.

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, De Quincey and Browning, all prominent figures in the nineteenth century, illuminated the path to rediscovery of Donne. It remained for Gosse to brighten the glow even more. Both he and Walton helped to preserve through their biographies an image of Donne which provoked great interest in the literary world.

## CHAPTER II

### DONNE REVEALED THROUGH BIOGRAPHY

Before Donne's complete rediscovery in the early twentieth century, he was more popular as man than as poet. Although his reputation as a poet went through various stages, his position as an ecclesiastic and scholar was never in question. This image of Donne was maintained principally by Izaak Walton, his biographer, whose portrait of his subject has attracted readers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and, to a lesser extent, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is Walton's Life of Donne which, though factually inaccurate, provided the basis for Gosse's Life and Letters of John Donne in 1899, and must be considered as a vital contribution to the popularization and final revival of Donne. Both Walton and Gosse were guided by their own conceptions of truth in writing their biographies of Donne, but the results they achieved were different. The explanation for this lies in the evaluation of the role of both biographers in helping the rediscovery of Donne.

#### I. THE WALTON IMAGE OF DONNE

The image of Donne which Walton projected depended to a great extent upon his skill and purpose as biographer. His Life of Donne must therefore be considered against the background of his literary career and the artful manner in which he used his biographical material. Moreover, an assessment of his capabilities must begin with a brief

consideration of his own personal background and private interests in Donne.

Izaak Walton (1593-1683) left little record of his life although he was always interested in the biography of other men. Details of his education are unknown. He lived within the parish of Dr. Donne and became acquainted with him mainly through religious connections with the Dean of St. Paul's. Walton received a dedication in 1619 from "an obscure clerical poet"<sup>1</sup> and this suggests that he was a friend of at least one poet and "dabbled a bit in poetry himself." His literary interest in Donne began his career as a biographer. Sir Henry Wotton, Provost of Eton College, had requested him to collect biographical material on Donne for him. When Wotton died in 1639 Walton heard that Donne's LXXX Sermons (1640) were to be published without any information on Donne's life. He decided to supply this. This work sparked his interest in further biographies and his career as biographer became distinguished by such literary accomplishments as the biographies of Wotton (1651), Hooker (1665), Herbert (1670) and Sanderson (1678), revised in 1681. In some cases Walton knew the men whose life he recounted but at other times (as in the case of Hooker and Herbert) he did not, and he had to collect information "from the available reports of friends."<sup>2</sup> From his easy method of acquiring information without complete verification and with unquestioning faith in the informant, it is easy to see the reason for Walton's getting a reputation for inaccuracy as a

---

<sup>1</sup> Helen White, Ruth Wallerstein and Ricardo Quintana (eds.), Seventeenth-Century Verse and Prose: 1600-1660 (New York: The Macmillan Company, [n.d.]), I, 279.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 280.



biographer. Yet he is not to be disparaged as unlearned and unread, because his Compleat Angler (1653) reveals his wide knowledge of the subject which he is handling. In this work he refers to "Aelian, and Pliny (Holland's translation), and Gesner, and Aldorsands, and all the rest of the piscatory pundits . . ." <sup>3</sup>

The fact that Walton's Lives was admired by such men as Dr. Johnson, <sup>4</sup> Boswell <sup>5</sup> and Wordsworth <sup>6</sup> suggests that at least Donne, as one of the subjects treated, was brought to their notice in an impressive manner. Johnson was considered the chief eighteenth-century protagonist of Walton's Lives. <sup>7</sup> This meant that to the leading eighteenth-century critic, whose voice influenced later critics against Donne as poet, Walton had presented, among other things, an impressive image of Donne as an ecclesiastic and scholar. Johnson influenced his well-known biographer, Boswell, to make Walton's Lives a subject of study. This interest in Walton, according to Novarr, was sentimental rather than critical, but is nevertheless an indication that Walton's biography of Donne was read and appreciated at a time when Donne's reputation as a poet was greatly damaged: an occurrence which helped to save him from complete obscurity.

In 1819 admiration for Walton's Lives led Wordsworth to make the statement:

There are no colors in the fairest sky  
So fair as these [The Lives]. The feather, whence the pen  
Was shaped that traced the lives of these good men,  
Dropped from an Angel's wing. <sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>David Novarr, The Making of Walton's Lives (New York: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>8</sup>Peacock, Critical Opinions of Wordsworth, p. 374.

This declaration once more establishes Walton's impact as a biographer on a leading nineteenth-century critic--an impact which may well have helped to sustain interest in Donne.

Later in the nineteenth century other commentators praised Walton's style and artistry but regretted his inaccuracies. Novarr records Gosse's and Stephen's opinions of Walton:

But Walton's winsome memory was no hindrance to Edmund Gosse, who found frequent frustration in the facts of Walton's Life of Donne. He called Walton immortal, yes, but he called him an "immortal piscatory linen-draper." "In the days of Walton," he said, "of course, what we now call conscientious biography was unknown." Walton's Lives were "too rose-coloured and too inexact for scientific uses." Leslie Stephen was even less kind to Walton in his review of Gosse's Life and Letters of John Donne. "There are two objections," he said, "to the life if taken as a record of facts. The first is that the facts are all wrong; and the second that the portraiture is palpably false."<sup>9</sup>

The attractive bubble of Walton's fame as a biographer had burst "only because of the combined weight of the opinions of Gosse and Stephen."<sup>10</sup>

We are not here concerned with the Walton tradition, but it must be argued that to the same degree in which Walton was considered as biographer, the image of Donne was affected.

In an age like that of Gosse and Stephen, factual accuracy and scholarship were important considerations, and Walton's Life of Donne failed to meet these demands. His biography was really written for a different age. Walton wrote when comeliness of phrase and charm of style atoned for other deficiencies, when experiment and invention were rife in literature. When he wrote his biography of Donne he conformed to

---

<sup>9</sup>Novarr, Walton's Lives, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

truth as he understood it, as an appeal to authority, even as verisimilitude. In his introduction to The Life of Donne originally prefixed to the LXXX Sermons in 1640, he "resolved the world should see the best plain picture of the Author's life, that [his] artless pencil, guided by the hand of truth, could present to it."<sup>11</sup> We have no reason to doubt Walton's good intentions. He thought it was enough to speak charitably and present a biography in a believable manner. He was a religious person and considered an appeal to the Bible sufficient for vindicating any verbal statement. He also referred to wise and prominent men as adequate proof of the veracity of his reports. He addresses the unbelieving reader with confidence in his Life of Donne when he urges:

But if the unbelieving will not allow the believing Reader of this story, a liberty to believe that it may be true; then, I wish him to consider, many Wise men have believed, that, the ghost of Julius Caesar did appear to Brutus, and that both St. Austin and Monica his mother, had visions in order to his Conversion.<sup>12</sup>

Sometimes it would seem that Walton entertained certain misgivings about the reliability of his authority: he referred to a "Person of Honour" whose testimony would have supported his own story of Donne's vision, but added, "and I think they told me the truth."<sup>13</sup> Walton goes a step further in urging his reader to believe by referring him

---

<sup>11</sup> Izaak Walton, The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert and Dr. Robert Sanderson (London: John Major, 1825), p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Izaak Walton, The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert and Robert Sanderson (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, [n.d.]), p. 41. Referred to afterwards as Lives (O.U.P. edition).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

to the Sacred Scriptures:

And, though these and many others (too many to name) have but the authority of humane story, yet, the incredible Reader may find in the Sacred story, that Samuel did appear to Saul even after his death. . . .<sup>14</sup>

He offers the reader further proof by proceeding to relate a series of instances in the Bible where ghosts and spirits appeared, or visions were seen. Walton did not even consider it necessary to comment; it was enough to make the biblical reference: "I will make no Comment, but, leave them [scilicet, the words of Scripture] to be considered by the incredulous Reader. . . ."<sup>15</sup>

Not only was Walton prepared to point the "incredulous reader" to Holy Scripture, but to offer him as near a representation to the actual incidents as possible. In other words he was prepared to use verisimilitude. For this reason many of Donne's words are presented to the reader in direct speech, and very often the details are contrived by Walton himself. He offers the "verbatim" reply of Donne to Dr. Henry King while Donne was in his sick bed in Mitcham:

To this, after a short pause, and raising himself upon his bed, he made this reply.

'My most dear friend, I most humbly thank you for your many favours, and this in particular: But, in my present condition, I shall not accept of your proposal; for doubtless there is such a Sin as Sacrilege. . . .'<sup>16</sup>

But Walton was not merely a benignant narrator who tried to recapture vivid scenes and offer false details to conceal the failings of his

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

friends; he was a careful biographer with a concern for truth as he saw it. If this image of truth did not conform to that of our modern age of scientific research, it is because his purpose and ours differ, not because he has maliciously misled us. R.E. Bennett agrees with George Herbert Palmer's statement concerning the Life of Herbert and this is equally true of the Life of Donne:

In spite of some petty accuracies . . . I believe that what Walton says is substantially true. But there is much which he does not say; and in general, his book, should be judged rather as a piece of art than as even-handed history. In painting a glowing picture an artist selects a point of view, and to what is visible from that point subordinates all else. So Walton works.<sup>17</sup>

Bennett added:

. . . Walton not only omitted freely, but . . . followed an unscientific and purely artistic method in the combination and interpretation of the details of his portrait. The portrait is remarkably accurate, but we must not try to break it down and re-employ its elements.<sup>18</sup>

This appropriate comment on Walton's technique as a biographer provides some help in interpreting his biographical treatment of Donne, which may now be considered.

John Butt has said that Walton emphasized "sanctity and

---

<sup>17</sup> The English Works of George Herbert (2nd. ed., Boston, 1907), I, 45f., cited by R.E. Bennett, "Walton's Use of Donne's Letters," Philological Quarterly, XVI (January, 1937), 34.

<sup>18</sup> Bennett, "Walton's Use of Donne's Letters," p. 34.

studiousness of life at the expense of other characteristics."<sup>19</sup> It is to these goals that he bent his purpose when he wrote the life of Donne. His revisions--another proof of his concern for accuracy<sup>20</sup>--very often revealed changes which defined more clearly Donne's character as a divine and scholar. Sometimes Walton chose to delineate other aspects of Donne's personality which suited his purpose as biographer.

In the process of fashioning his image of Donne, Walton made three revisions of his Life of Donne. His first edition was in 1640, and the three revisions were made in 1658, 1670 and 1675. It is amazing how these revisions reveal a change in biographer and subject.

In 1640 Walton spoke of drawing a picture of Donne with his "artless pencil." This modesty attracts the reader's sympathy for the biographer who presents himself as a humble devotee of Donne discharging a responsibility which exceeds his skill and ability. Walton here provides for the possibility of errors and liberties not normally granted to the accurate historian. He adopts the technique which Donne described in his "Advertisement to the Reader" of the Pseudo-Martyr.<sup>21</sup> Here Donne asks to be excused from citing authors incorrectly. He assures the reader, "I have no where made any Author, speake more or lesse, in sense, then hee intended, to that purpose, for which I cite him."<sup>22</sup>

Walton usually offered a scene or incident in a way which suited

---

<sup>19</sup> John Butt, "Izaak Walton's Methods in Biography," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, XIX (1933), 84.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 72. Butt claims that Walton "offered the usual apologies for errors and the promise to correct them in a Second edition."

<sup>21</sup> Novarr, Walton's Lives, p. 56.

<sup>22</sup> John Donne, Pseudo-Martyr (London, 1610), sig. n<sup>o</sup> 2<sup>r</sup> cited by Novarr, Walton's Lives, p. 57.

his purpose and not necessarily as it happened. For instance, he spoke of Donne's seeing the King and being commended by him for the arguments against Roman Catholics contained in the Pseudo-Martyr. The truth is that Donne had spoken figuratively of the King's condescending to converse with his subjects by way of books and of his ascending to the King's presence by the same means. Novarr appropriately comments on Walton's manipulation of these details: "By turning a figure of speech into a personal interview, Walton did not bind himself superstitiously to Donne's words, but even made Donne's words speak not Donne's sense but his own."<sup>23</sup> By these means Walton was forming his own image of Donne. He resolved to present a studious and learned man whose person and qualities attracted Royalty.

Walton fashioned his material to suit the desired image of Donne in his treatment of his secret marriage to Anne More and the complications attendant upon it. He gave the episode a delicate treatment making certain that he emphasized the strength and vigour of Donne's love. The anger of Sir George More and of other objectors to the match between Donne and Anne More could not kill or diminish the love of these two people: "the friends of both parties used much diligence, and many arguments to kill or cool their affections to each other: but in vain . . ."<sup>24</sup> Walton then spoke about an unwearied industry to attain what love prompts us to desire. He saw this industry in Donne and Anne, but refrained from interpreting the ways to which it was employed to bring the two lovers together: "And such an

---

<sup>23</sup>Novarr, Walton's Lives, p. 58.

<sup>24</sup>Walton, Lives (O.U.P. edition) p. 27.

Industry did, notwithstanding much watchfulness against it, bring them secretly together (I forbear to tell the manner how)."<sup>25</sup> In other words, Walton was speaking the truth in love by omitting the indelicate details of the secret plots of the two lovers.

But when Walton produced his second edition he had more cautious adjustments to make. He had done very much writing between the first and second edition and had become famous as a literary figure.<sup>26</sup> Novarr speaks of additions which were made when the 1658 Life appeared: these were "aphorisms and platitudes, bits of wisdom of which Walton was fond and which add a note of simple dignity to the Life."<sup>27</sup>

In the 1658 edition, using his usual deductive method of biography, Walton emphasized specific parts of Donne's religious career. For instance, he added a most dramatic account of Donne's method of delivery as a preacher, an account which accentuated Donne's sincerity and deliberateness. He tells us Donne preached

the Word so, as shewed his own heart was possest with those very thoughts and joys that he laboured to distill into others: A Preacher in earnest; weeping sometimes for his Auditory, sometimes with them . . . here picturing a vice so as to make it ugly to those that practised it; and a vertue so, as to make it be beloved even by those that lov'd it not; and all this with a most particular grace and an unexpressible addition of comeliness.<sup>28</sup>

A further addition by Walton was the very famous description of Donne in his winding sheet, an incident omitted in 1640, "because Walton

---

<sup>26</sup>Novarr, Walton's Lives, p. 68.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>28</sup>Walton, Lives (O.U.P. edition), p. 49.



could demonstrate Donne's deliberate preparations for death without it, and he did not want any possibility of vainglory to detract from the studied and pious death."<sup>29</sup> Walton's purpose changed when he made his first revision in 1658, and we get a rather macabre picture of Donne's closing moments of life. This impressed writers from his time until today.

Not only did Walton preserve this sepulchral image of Donne but in his next edition in 1670 he offered the portrait of a melancholic person "to create a pleasing verisimilitude."<sup>30</sup> Bennett supplies a good illustration of Walton's method of securing the desired image of Donne in this second revision of his Life. Walton selected eight passages from five letters which had been printed in 1651,<sup>31</sup> and did not preserve the accuracy of any of the texts from which these letters were selected. He was intent on projecting an image of the Donne of the Mitcham period and he achieved this by making the appropriate paraphrase from various letters. Actually Walton had no new information about Donne's life at that time but still made changes and modifications, adding different hues and touches to his portrait.

In the 1675 edition he was still adding to his final representation of Donne. Accordingly, he appended the words "John Donne, Anne Donne, Un-done" at the end of Donne's letters to his wife whom he was informing of his dismissal by Sir Thomas Egerton. These words offer a brief picture of Donne's wittiness in the midst of despair. Walton

---

<sup>29</sup>Novarr, Walton's Lives, p. 79.

<sup>30</sup>Bennett, "Walton's Use of Donne's Letters," p. 31.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

also told his readers for the first time in the 1675 edition about the stanza written with a coal on the wall of Donne's grave. Novarr tells us, "The source of these details is a puzzle, but they again demonstrate Walton's ability to heighten an impression by a small detail, to climax a mood in the relation of a short but vivid incident."<sup>32</sup>

From these instances of changes and additions made by Walton during his three revisions of the Life of Donne, we observe the difference in intention and method of biography between Walton and Gosse. Walton wrote as an admirer and convert of Donne; Gosse, as we shall see, wrote as a man of letters looking back objectively at Donne from two centuries later. Walton had a preconception of what Donne should look like and moulded his evidence to suit this image, which though touched with sentimentality, helped to preserve a memory of Donne throughout the centuries.

Walton, though having laid the foundation for subsequent biographies of Donne, has never really escaped the accusations of inaccuracy levelled against him. Very recent criticism has still pointed out Walton's inaccuracies. In 1964 R.C. Bald has observed: "It has to be confessed that Walton commits sins heinous enough to make the hair of a modern scholar bristle with horror. He had no respect for the sanctity of a quotation."<sup>33</sup> Among the many errors R.C. Bald points out in his essay are "the statements Walton makes about the dates

---

<sup>32</sup>Novarr, Walton's Lives, p. 118.

<sup>33</sup>R.C. Bald, "Historical Doubts Respecting Walton's Life of Donne," Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age: Presented to A.S.P. Woodhouse (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. 70.

of Donne's poems" which are "more serious for their effects on literary criticism in subsequent ages."<sup>34</sup> Walton had said that Donne "about the twentieth year of his age" had written "facetiously Composed" pieces and in his "declining age" had been responsible for "many Divine Sonnets, and other high, holy, and harmonious Composures."<sup>35</sup> This, though mentioned also by Jonson in a statement to Hawthornden, is said by Bald to be at variance with modern findings that Donne "after entering holy orders . . . composed not more than a handful of poems."<sup>36</sup> These and many more are the errors which Bald discovers in Walton's Life.

However, as Bald admits, he is probably measuring Walton "by standards which Walton never for a moment dreamt he was expected to maintain."<sup>37</sup> Notwithstanding these errors, we are still indebted to Walton for a beautiful classic which has held the interest of many readers and has helped to preserve an image of Donne which through earlier centuries was not maintained by Donne's performances as poet. Walton's biography helped to restore in the nineteenth century the favourable image of Donne which existed in the seventeenth century and which was destroyed in the eighteenth by criticisms of Donne's poetry. It seems that Walton made the first favourable remark of importance regarding Donne's other works, his "divine sonnets, and other high, holy harmonious composures."<sup>38</sup> Like Gosse, Walton presented a faulty biography of Donne but still managed to stimulate literary interest in his subject.

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>35</sup> Walton, Lives (O.U.P. edition), p. 61.

<sup>36</sup> Bald, Historical Doubts, p. 81.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 84

<sup>38</sup> Nethercot, "Reputation of Donne," p. 467.

Izaak Walton is still being reprehended for his errors. However, by projecting a favourable image of Donne as an ecclesiastic when he was most unpopular as a poet, he made a significant contribution to Donne's rediscovery although committing factual errors in the process. According to Gosse, from the very first appearance of Donne's LXXX Sermons in 1640 (Walton's Life of Donne was attached as an introduction), "the reputation of the celebrated divine, so long neglected, was avenged . . . ." <sup>39</sup>

Walton's revisions of his own biography of Donne served to brighten further the image already created. As John Butt has wisely stated:

Walton's abundant revisions and his reiterated assertions that he has made no wilful mistakes and that he lacks the skill to deceive, make it quite impossible to doubt either his good intentions or his strenuous efforts to perfect the Lives. But allowances have to be made for self-deception and the possibility of human errors. <sup>40</sup>

## II. GOSSE AND HIS AUDIENCE: A STUDY OF FACTORS

### INFLUENCING OPINION OF GOSSE'S LIFE OF DONNE

As biographer of Donne, Gosse's purpose differed from Walton's. The former wished to present Donne as "man and author," while the latter wished to present him principally as man. Gosse's popularization of Donne depended upon his literary abilities as biographer, the type of audience addressed, and the circumstances affecting the production and publication of his work.

In order to assess Edmund Gosse as biographer of Donne, some

---

<sup>39</sup> Gosse, Life and Letters, II, 310.

<sup>40</sup> Butt, Walton's Methods, p. 81.

brief consideration must be given to Gosse's personal background and his experience in the literary world, for the nature of his life of Donne was greatly affected by these factors. Born in 1849, he came from a very strict Puritan background and during his childhood was denied the ordinary secular literature suitable to his age. His very stern father always kept before him the terror of the Lord, the frightening details of the day of Judgment and the return of Christ. Gosse's religious training continued in the Plymouth Brethern Sunday School and other religious meetings which never seemed to absorb all his interest. After his public baptism, Gosse became conscious of the literary world of Shakespeare, Coleridge, Ben Jonson and Marlowe, who were "surreptitiously acquired and furtively read."<sup>41</sup> An inner conflict led him to the confession: "In my hot and silly brain Jesus and Pan held sway together."<sup>42</sup> By 1867 Gosse sought to publish a volume of poetry and was denied financial assistance and encouragement from his father.

In 1873 a decisive letter marked the break in relationship between Gosse and his strict Puritan father who as an eminent zoologist. Gosse then made it clear that he had a mind which was incapable of microscopic work but which can "compare one large body of facts with another, and form wide theories."<sup>43</sup> This was indeed an accurate self-portrayal, for Gosse's failure to take the pains of the scholar or of the scientific naturalists like his father or like Darwin and Huxley

---

<sup>41</sup> Evan Charteris, The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse (London: William Heinemann Limited, 1931), p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

led him into grave mistakes in his biography of Donne.

From 1874 to 1879 he progressed financially as Assistant Librarian at the British Museum and then as Translator to the Board of Trade, and in 1879 he was writing for the Academy, Athenaeum, Saturday Review, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Examiner and various magazines.<sup>44</sup> At this time Victorian criticism was at its peak, and Darwin's Origin of Species was traceable "in every branch of thought, even literary criticism."<sup>45</sup> Gosse's writings were no exception, as his treatment of Donne's poetry in 1928 illustrates.

At this stage it is necessary to establish the type of reputation Gosse acquired as biographer and critic, for his role in revealing Donne through biography must be examined with this in mind. During the period 1884 to 1890 Gosse held the position of Clark Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Cambridge, a position which extended his area of influence. Readers in this academic circle were likely to be affected by his publications on Donne.

In 1881 he made his first attempt at biography. This was his Life of Gray, which was finished in 1882. It was popular and was reprinted five times. In 1884 he followed this with a complete edition of Gray's works. But as a biographer Gosse's reputation was damaged, for on his authority "minor mistakes . . . crept into the Dictionary of National Biography and other works."<sup>46</sup> Gosse's biographer, Charteris, shows the proportions these errors had: "Error breeds error, and one office of the scholar, which Gosse did not always fulfil, is to prevent error from multiplying itself."<sup>47</sup> It may be seen from this that much

---

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

importance must be attached to the nature of Gosse's work as a literary personage in estimating the worth of his biography of Donne and its influence upon nineteenth-century readers.

In America Gosse had delivered a lecture series called "From Shakespeare to Pope" and in 1885 he published this in book form. A writer in the Academy published an unfavourable review of it and after some commendatory remarks exposed the blemishes of Gosse's work. In 1886 in the Quarterly Review, John Churton Collins, a friend of Gosse, an accurate scholar and expert in the same field of literature, revived the criticisms of the previous reviewer and completely exposed and humiliated Gosse. Charteris blames the act on the "jealousy of a successful man of letters." However, Gosse suffered serious setbacks in his prestige as a man of letters. Charteris says, "Gosse was hit hard, so hard that he carried the scar through the rest of his life."<sup>48</sup> Gosse became so unpopular that at one of the universities "it became a stock saying for anyone who made a 'howler,' that 'he had made a Gosse of himself'."<sup>49</sup>

Gosse was put to this humiliation partly because of his un-academic background and partly because his type of mind, as he had admitted, was not inclined to the microscopic accuracies of the careful scholar. Charteris explains that Gosse's failures were due to his double task of teaching and educating himself simultaneously. Gosse, in a letter to Hardy dated 17th October, 1886, admitted that the article in the Quarterly Review "felled," "flayed," "eviscerated," "pulverized"

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 196

and blew him to the winds.<sup>50</sup> Hoping that he would "live it down," Gosse resolved to be more careful in his criticisms and publications in the future, so that "the very fools and knaves that are hooting now shall be forced to listen to me with respect."<sup>51</sup> Despite his new resolution, Gosse's reputation as a writer who is prone to serious errors affected the acceptance of his biography of Donne. He undertook the formidable task of publishing his Life of Donne in 1899. The repercussions of this directly affected Donne's reputation at the turn of the century. To discover the extent of these repercussions we must consider the type of world to which Gosse appealed. His writings were many and his readers significant and sundry.

Gosse wrote about seventy-three books and essays, besides several minor articles. His books included several publications in verse. His interest in biography seemed to be a major one and he had written biographies of Gray (1882), Congreve (1888) and Philip Gosse (1890) his father. Connected with this he wrote a study of his father and himself in Father and Son (1907), which he later published and with which he was very pleased. He also wrote biographies of Jeremy Taylor (1904) and Swinburne (1917). Besides biographies, he was interested in biographical sketches or notes which he considered germane to a study of an author's writings. This urge to bring life and work together seemed to be characteristic of Gosse and led him into several difficulties with Donne.

Gosse was very influential in important circles and stimulated fresh interest in Donne within these circles. This interest was sparked

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 201.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 204.





not so much by revealing facts about Donne as a poet, as by details (partly inaccurate) of Donne as a man. Gosse's circle of friends comprised literary, professional and academic personalities and extended as far as France, Scandinavia (through his interest in Scandinavian authors, especially Ibsen), and America. Among Gosse's personal acquaintances were Charles Lamb, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Robert Browning, Thomas Hardy, Robert Louis Stevenson, William Morris, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Oscar Wilde, Max Beerbohm, Theodore de Banville, Emile Zola, Alphonse Daudet, Paul Verlaine, Paul Bourget, Henri de Regnier, Mancel Prévost, Maurice Barrés, André Gide and Walt Whitman. He was acquainted with several important academic personalities through his position at the British Museum and as a lecturer at Cambridge University. Besides these, he knew a large number of publishers and editors of journals, periodicals and newspapers. His position as Librarian of the House of Lords (1904-1914) also added to his circle of distinguished acquaintances. No doubt, the whole literary world was open to Gosse as a celebrated man of letters. His influence was commensurate with the extent of his circle of acquaintances. It was to such an audience that Gosse presented his Life and Letters of Donne.

A young generation of poets also formed part of Gosse's audience. What Gosse had to say about Donne was likely to affect these poets who submitted poems and other literary compositions for his opinions. Sometimes Gosse was full of praise for their compositions, and at other times he was politely reprimanding. His appreciation of versification was not always good, although in his first years at the British Museum he acquired "an extraordinary knowledge of old forms



of versification."<sup>52</sup> For instance, Charteris refers to a letter dated 17th July, 1919, which Gosse wrote to Robert Nichols warning him of "such rhymes as 'walk'--'mock'--'talk'" which "are disgraceful in 'the eminent poet'." In a note Charteris indicates this as "a good little instance of the hasty judgments into which Gosse was sometimes led by the alacrity of his mind."<sup>53</sup> Gosse was judging rhymes by sight, forgetting that the words "walk," "mock" and "talk" are mere variations of the same vowel sound--a device used by poets like Shelley and Rossetti. This further illustrates that Gosse, though considered an authority in literature, was not as accurate and authentic as he was thought to be. His fame and recognition were always in excess of his true capabilities --a situation which adversely affected any favourable acceptance of Donne as Gosse presented him.

But how could such a mind as Gosse's ever become interested in John Donne? The answer must be speculative, but it would seem that it lies in Gosse's method of gaining public recognition on literary subjects. In his early career he recalled to a Mr. A.L. Fisher some advice he received from R.H. Hutton, editor of the Spectator: "The reason why you get articles refused is because you write about the great familiar English classics. Choose something out of the way, Scandinavian literature for instance, and you will get a hearing."<sup>54</sup> Hutton then gave to Gosse the last work published by Ibsen.

Gosse with the help of a dictionary began at once to read the works of Ibsen--and through this accidental contact with the dramatist's writings became the first to introduce him to English readers.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Charteris, Life of Gosse, p. 30.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 454. n.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

This method need not have been employed by Gosse at all times, but it might have been a helpful boost during his climb to popularity on many an occasion. It might have been possible that an unrecognized poet, as Donne was at that time, attracted him by his mere obscurity and peculiarity as an English poet. His encounter with Augustus Jessopp, who was also engaged in a biographical study of Donne, was the fortuitous event which brought Gosse's intentions into actuality.

He was first impressed by Dr. Jessopp's work on Donne. Jessopp had reprinted Donne's Essays in Divinity in 1885 and after that had written what Gosse called "an excellent article" for the Dictionary of National Biography. Gosse and Jessopp then collaborated on a biography of Donne until Jessopp made the admission that he had "never been able to feel much enthusiasm for Donne as a poet."<sup>56</sup> This led him to place all his biographical collections in the hands of Gosse, who believed that "to his last seraphical hour in his bedchamber at St. Paul's, Donne [was] quintessentially a poet."<sup>57</sup> Thus Gosse was committed to a most significant and difficult task at a time when Donne needed recognition as poet.

It was as early as 1880 that Gosse announced his intention to "write the Life of Donne,"<sup>58</sup> only eight years after A.B. Grosart prefaced his editions of the poetical works of Donne with the words: "I do not hide from myself that it needs courage to edit and print the poetry of Dr. John Donne in our day." Gosse referred to this statement and commented: "His [Grosart's] own issue, though not the happiest of his adventures, increased our knowledge of the poet, and tended to explode any prejudice existing against him."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup>Gosse, Life and Letters, I, xi.      <sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. vii.      <sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

Gosse was aware of the prejudice against Donne, and also aware of the scarcity of good editions of his poetical works. But in 1896 E.K. Chambers edited the works in two volumes and Gosse thought that "for all practical purposes" these volumes left "nothing to be desired." In 1899 when he published his Life and Letters of Donne, Gosse was probably employing his usual method of exploring unknown fields for discoveries which would startle and attract his circle of readers. Before 1899 he was urged by Mandell, Lord Bishop of London, to prepare a life of Donne and this was the final encouragement he needed besides his own private interest. He summarized this situation in his dedicatory letter:

By a strange coincidence, I was already deeply concerned in composing these volumes, when you, unaware of the fact, urged upon me the preparation of a Life and Letters of Donne as a work which, above all others dealing with Elizabethan and Jacobean Literature, now required to be performed. This was a most encouraging incident to me, and a fortunate omen.<sup>60</sup>

To a very wide and reputable audience, Gosse was thus chosen to be the biographical explorer who must bring Donne from obscurity to light. He was to do what he said no biographer had previously done--"to unravel the knotted and twisted web" of biographical data (mainly letters) connected with John Donne. It remains to be seen how far Gosse succeeded, and this brings us to a brief assessment of Gosse's biography of Donne and contemporary critical reaction to its publication.

### III. THE GOSSE IMAGE OF DONNE AND CONTEMPORARY OPINION

Gosse decided to take the bull by the horns when he sought "to force Donne's correspondence to illustrate his biography."<sup>61</sup> The

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. v.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. xiv.

difficulty of having undated letters and erroneously dated documents was one which he had to face. In spite of the number of Donne's letters available to Gosse, he was "disappointed that so very little [was] still known about the incidents of Donne's early life." This was another difficulty in presenting a full biography which was accurate in detail. However, Gosse was committed to a dual role and he outlined it in the Preface to his Life and Letters of Donne:

My object has not been confined to the collection of all the documents which I could find which illustrated the biography of Donne. I have desired, also, to present a portrait of him as a man and an author. . . . In short, what I have essayed to present, is a biographical and critical monograph on Donne in his full complexity.<sup>62</sup>

The task of presenting Donne as "man and author" proved too difficult for Gosse and he eventually offered a more significant picture of Donne the man, than Donne the poet. Very often Donne the poet suffered in order to provide details for the portrait of Donne the man. This, too, is a good reason why Gosse cannot be credited with the true rediscovery of Donne as he is more popularly known today, that is as a poet.

As biographer of Donne the man, Gosse elaborated extensively on Walton's Life of Donne and frequently made reference to Walton's errors. After acknowledging that Walton was the "basis" of his book on Donne, Gosse went on to say:

Whatever the great Dean said, Walton joyfully accepted; it would take too long to illustrate here, what the

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. xvi.

Walton, Life and Letters, II, 290.

judicious reader will well understand, the necessity of treating Walton's narrative with the utmost sensitiveness, as a thread to be held tightly at some points and at others to be thrown resolutely away, in our progress through the labyrinth of Donne's career.<sup>63</sup>

Gosse therefore used Walton's Life cautiously and for the first time reprinted Donne's one hundred and twenty-nine letters published in 1651 to illustrate his main narrative. Volume I of the Life is divided into nine chapters, two of which (III and VIII) deal with Donne's lyrical and divine poems and his controversial prose works. Volume II is heavily illustrated with Donne's letters which are sometimes given more space than direct narration by Gosse.

In this method of leaving the reader to make his own interpretation of Donne's mind and character from his letters, Gosse was significantly different from Walton. The image of Donne which is derived from the letters is frequently one of a timid, maudlin and obsequious man whose very existence depended on the patronage of wealthy and influential friends whom he overpraised and flattered. Gosse himself seems to confirm this impression when he says:

We see, in his [Donne's] letters, indications of a certain personal timidity, a fluttering dread of results and future conditions, such as often accompanies an abnormal development of the imagination. Passion, with him, was a matter of extraordinary and exhausting intensity; we are always conscious of the leap and throb of "the naked thinking heart" which he presses beneath his trembling fingers.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>64</sup> Gosse, Life and Letters, II, 290.

As we shall see later, when this "passion" and emotion of "extraordinary and exhausting intensity" filled his poetry, Donne was at his best.

In several places Gosse used Donne's poetry to illustrate statements made concerning his life, and where the evidence was not clear was compelled to use intelligent speculation; at times he was led into difficulties in his identification of persons whose names were the same as those of others who had nothing to do with Donne. Gosse, like Walton, found Donne's life characterized by different significant points of interest, for example, his marriage (Chapter IV), his conversion (Chapter XI), his experiences at Mitcham (Chapter VI). In an attempt to maintain some structural division in Donne's career, Gosse was led to form his chapters around these occurrences. In doing this, Gosse was sometimes forced to defend himself against criticism. For instance, in the Athenaeum (December 9, 1899), p. 802, he had to reply to Mr. Beeching who contested the matter of Donne's conversion. But this is not Gosse's only difficulty; he made errors which were flagrant enough to cause a rash of criticism and adverse comment. He already had a skeleton in his cupboard since publishing From Shakespeare to Pope in 1885. Now Gosse had exposed himself to more criticism because of errors in presenting his biography of Donne.

Among some appreciative remarks made in the Athenaeum (November 11, 1899), there was a reference to the "little demon of inaccuracy, who occasionally takes his stand at Mr. Gosse's elbow." Almost every reviewer found it necessary to point out errors which Gosse made regarding his dating of Donne's letters. An anonymous

writer in Littell's Living Age, CCXXIII (1900), 727, commented:

. . . again he fails to name the provenance of two or three of the letters which he quotes for the first time; he mentions a letter in Lord Bath's collection which he does not print at all; and he had unaccountably omitted to include two letters already printed in Mr. Kempe's "Loseley Manuscripts," one, at least, of which would have enabled him to correct a paragraph in his text . . . . Of course Mr. Gosse does not invariably carry his critics with him. A certain number of his dates, both for letters and for poems, might be easily challenged.

Some writers had a word of praise for Gosse's Life of Donne, but this was not very often. In The Bookman, X (1899), 582, R. Garnett, in referring to Gosse's work, said: "As regards the external facts of Donne's life, it is probable that the last word has been spoken." He also added afterward: "Mr. Gosse's treatment of Donne's character is both entirely sympathetic and entirely scientific, and commands our full assent."

However, this praise was more than equalled by an extensive article in The Nation, LXX, (February 15, 1900), 134, which attacked Gosse's two volumes of biography for their gross inaccuracies. Concerning his treatment of Donne as a man whose letters portray his life, the writer said Mr. Gosse has done

good and useful work, but a good many obvious errors in the text of the letters formerly printed have been left uncorrected, while the text of the letters which are printed for the first time in these volumes shows too often that the editor is not highly skilled in the deciphering of the handwriting of the seventeenth century. Many of the letters stand greatly in need of extended annotation, but Mr. Gosse has shrunk from this duty.

The same writer then devoted several lines to a detailed illustration of Gosse's inaccuracies, inventions and unfortunate guesses at names and persons of Donne's acquaintance.

But in presenting Donne as poet, Gosse has committed errors which are perhaps more flagrant and need no elaborate illustration. The writer



in Littell's Living Age, already referred to, challenged Gosse's dating of Donne's Elegy on His Mistriss as 1606. The critic claimed that in the poem Donne speaks of "our long-hid love" and would not (as Gosse claimed) have applied this phrase to himself and Mrs. Donne in 1606, five years after their marriage.

The critic in The Nation, LXX (February 8, 1900), 112, offering further examples of drastic errors committed by Gosse in his assessment of Donne's poetry, referred to his comment on Donne's Third Satire:<sup>65</sup>

He gives it more than two pages, in which there is little but what, in the work of a writer of different reputation from that of Mr. Gosse, would be rightly called strange confusion and error.

Gosse's third chapter on the lyrics also provoked further caustic criticism from the same critic. After a series of very illustrative comments, the writer concluded (p. 113):

Mr. Gosse has framed out of some of Donne's lyrics and elegies an ugly elaborate story of what he calls "a deplorable but eventful liaison" with a married woman of some social position . . . . But the reader will now not be surprised to learn that the narrative, as woven by Mr. Gosse, is a pure chimera, the result simply of his method of misreading the contents of the poems.

In 1962 Leishman confirmed this criticism.<sup>66</sup> The rather harshly-worded article comes to a trenchant, but brilliantly-worded conclusion in

The Nation, LXX (February 15, 1900), 135:

To sum up the character of the book, a sentence from one

---

<sup>65</sup>Gosse, Life and Letters, I, 38ff.

<sup>66</sup>J.B. Leishman, The Monarch of Wit (London: Hutchinson and Company (Publishers) Limited, 1962), pp. 58, 148, 159.

of Donne's letters will suffice: "I will adventure to say to you, without inserting one unnecessary word, that the book is full of falsifications in word and sense, and of falsehoods in matter of fact, and of inconsequent and unscholarlike arguings, . . . and of letting slip some enormous advantages."

Thus Gosse had been severely attacked because of his errors.

As biographer, he had attempted too complex a task. He had sought to present Donne as man and poet and had presented an accurate picture of neither phases of Donne's character, although he left a more dominant impression of Donne as a man. It must be said, however, that although Gosse made embarrassing mistakes in his Life and Letters of John Donne, these mistakes stimulated a very wide interest in Donne and indirectly brought him closer to final rediscovery.

It was most ironical when Richard Garnett, in his article in The Bookman, X (1899), 584, entitled "Mr. Gosse's Life of Donne," wrote:

In spirit his [Gosse's] work perfectly corresponds to the aim he attributes to seventeenth-century biographers as a class, "to speak the truth in love." If it has a fault, it is perhaps too absolute a confidence in plausible solutions of some of the enigmas in Donne's career.

This perfectly summarizes Gosse's biography of Donne and draws a most striking parallel with Izaak Walton's. Gosse had said that his work was based upon Walton's,<sup>67</sup> but proceeded to draw a distinction between Walton's "energy of praise" and "beauty of style" and his "absolutely misleading" compendium of "facts about the career of the poet."<sup>68</sup> The irony is that Gosse found himself offering misleading facts despite his caution and care. It was even more unfortunate in his case because of the wide and learned audience he addressed.

If we probe much deeper than Gosse's distinction between himself and Walton, we may find a common trait which may explain the irony of

<sup>67</sup>Gosse, Life and Letters, I, xii.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. xiii.

which we have just spoken. In 1879 Gosse had written to Stevenson:

"I think I should make a good biographer, of any man, that is, whom I loved. For all the little fireside ways that distinguish men from one another are easily observed by my temperament, and go far to help me in building up a memory."<sup>69</sup>

This is not very far from an admission that, like seventeenth-century biographers, he "spoke the truth in love." The distinction, of course, is his conception of truth as opposed to theirs. Gosse was not a scholar or academic; he was a man of letters and a patron. His thinking was not the profound, pains-taking type which we associate with the trained researcher.

According to Charteris, Gosse

embarks on no metaphysical enquiries—we do not find him "seeking out of sight the ends of being," or involving himself in moral, political or religious speculations. He is content to read and point the way without analyzing too closely the materials of which the way is made. He is an artist rather than a thinker. The "reason of the thing" is a subordinate matter.<sup>70</sup>

Since he had such a mind, Gosse committed the blunders which exposed him to severe and embarrassing criticism. But he was not altogether a Walton. Between Gosse and Donne there was not the personal and religious link which existed between the earlier biographer and his subject. Gosse was concerned with Donne both as man and poet; Walton was dedicated to Donne as to a revered and respected Doctor of Divinity and Dean. Gosse, notwithstanding his errors, was most concerned with accuracy of detail, as can be proven by his desire to disregard bad editions of letters and to warn against full acceptance of Walton's biographical errors.

Gosse also had certain advantages over Walton. He was much

---

<sup>69</sup>Charteris, Life of Gosse, p. 444.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 443.

more experienced than his seventeenth-century counterpart. He had the benefit of Dr. Jessopp's biographical collections on Donne and could have had the advantage of Jessopp's careful revision had he asked for it. The writer, quoted before, who criticized Gosse's work in The Nation, LXX (February 15, 1900), 134, said:

In his preface Mr. Gosse states that Dr. Jessopp offered him "the inestimable advantage of his revision." He should have added that he had neglected to make use of this inestimable advantage. Had he submitted his pages to Dr. Jessopp's revision, he would at least have been saved from the exhibition of some of his humiliating errors . . . .

Gosse paid dearly for this neglect. However, he had, above all, the advantage of Walton's Life which provided him with some of its spirit of sympathy and its graphic narratives of such scenes as Donne's last moments before death. Gosse also had research facilities and sources which Walton did not have: various editions of Donne's work, his published letters (despite their problematic dating); he had letters which were to be found in "Cabola" (1651), and Sir Tobie Mathew's Collection, printed in 1660, and other published and unpublished documents from numerous sources.<sup>71</sup> Gosse also had the facilities of the British Museum at his immediate disposal. With all these advantages he was equipped to present to the literary world what is still perhaps the principal biographical work on Donne. Nevertheless, there is need for a more authentic Life of Donne. Some valuable biographical help has

---

<sup>71</sup> Gosse, Life and Letters, I, xiv-xv.

come from Evelyn Simpson, A Study of the Prose Works of John Donne (2nd edition, Oxford, 1948); K.W. Gransden, John Donne (Longmans, "Men and Books," London, 1954); and Frank Kermode, John Donne (British Council, "Writers and their Work," London, 1957).<sup>72</sup> No less significant contributions have been made by R.C. Bald, Roger E. Bennett, George Williamson, G.C. Moore Smith, W. Milgate and Evelyn Hardy.

Any twentieth-century biography of John Donne must begin with Walton and Gosse, despite their blunders. Gosse in particular presented Donne to a much wider contemporary audience of academic scholars than that which Walton addressed. He provoked scholarly argument and discussion about Donne's life and poetry; he offered to the scholars and critics of his day a much-needed source of reference for Donne's letters, although his dating of them was questionable; he published some of Donne's poems for the first time.<sup>73</sup> As a period when Browning's influence was still being felt, and his poetry was provoking interesting comparisons with Donne's, Gosse's Life and Letters of John Donne was a significant step closer to a revival of Donne.

---

<sup>72</sup> Helen Gardner (ed.), John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962), p. 183. Sources given are summarized by Gardner in this work.

<sup>73</sup> In Appendix C (pp. 364-379) to Volume II of the Life and Letters, Gosse prints for the first time the series of the "Holy Sonnets" in the Westmoreland M.S.

## IV. GOSSE'S IMAGE OF DONNE AS POET

While Walton and Gosse had made substantial contributions to public recognition of Donne as a man, there was still need for more emphasis to be placed upon Donne as poet. Gosse did not lose sight of this and gave some of his attention to an assessment of Donne's poetry. His efforts in this regard did not restore Donne to his former seventeenth-century position as a reputable poet, partly because his critical comments did not disclose some of the more important characteristics of Donne's poetry. It must be remembered that Gosse did not have the scholarly training and ability of a Grierson and was less likely to explore Donne's work with as much efficiency as his successor. Perhaps three different sources of criticism may be taken as frames of reference in defining Gosse's position as literary critic of Donne. His article "The Poetry of Donne" in The New Review IX, 1893, The Life and Letters, 1899, and Modern English Literature, 1928, provide a good cross-section of his career. In order to avoid repetition, reference to the second of these sources will be limited since it has been referred to before, and will be again, in a later chapter.

With reference to Gosse's criticism of Donne's poetry in 1893, comments in "The Poetry of Donne" reveal that Gosse saw Donne as a revolutionary poet introducing new trends in English literature:

In him the Jacobean spirit, as opposed to the Elizabethan, is paramount. His were the first poems which protested, in their form alike and tendency, against the pastoral sweetness of the Spenserians. Something new in English literature begins in Donne, something which proceeded, under his potent influence, to colour poetry for nearly

a hundred years. The exact mode in which that influence was immediately distributed is unknown to us, or very dimly perceived.<sup>74</sup>

Gosse further looked for certain similarities between Donne and the Elizabethans and found the Satires to be "wholly Elizabethan." He described them as being "brilliant and picturesque beyond any of their particular compeers, even beyond the best of Hall's satires."<sup>75</sup> He then criticized them for a "crabbed violence" and an "erroneous conception of the use of language." What is quite amazing is Gosse's pronouncement on the fourth Satire which is considered today to be one of Donne's worst.<sup>76</sup> Gosse stated, "The fourth is, doubtless, the best written, and may be taken as the best essay in this class of poetry existing in English literature before the middle-life of Dryden; its attraction for Pope is well known."<sup>77</sup> It is not too clear whether Gosse includes the versification of this piece in his praise, but no doubt he would experience some difficulty in justifying to a modern audience the selection of this satire above the third. His criticisms of Donne's elegies also differ from the modern opinion of them.

Gosse called Donne's Elegies some of the most extraordinary aberrations of fancy, some of the wildest contrasts of character and style to be observed in literature. Later he added, "Several of them,

---

<sup>74</sup> Edmund Gosse, "The Poetry of John Donne," The New Review, IX (1893), 236.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>76</sup> Leishman, Monarch, p. 118.

<sup>77</sup> Gosse, "Poetry of Donne," p. 238.

to be plain, were indeed too outspoken for the poet's own or for any decent age."<sup>78</sup> Shifts in taste have resulted in a freer treatment of sex in our times and this allows for more willing acceptance of Donne's elegies than is seen in Gosse's criticism. Gosse was, to an extent, unconsciously showing a contemporary Victorian reaction to Donne's work, one which was not favourable to Donne's reputation.

When Gosse examined the Songs and Sonnets he began with "The Flea" which he called a "gross and offensive piece of extravagance."<sup>79</sup> He then commented on the peculiarity of Donne's lyrics, and quoted at length one of "the prettiest of his stanza forms." This is the way in which Gosse wrote his criticism. He made a few general remarks about a poem, then quoted a stanza or two at full length. Abuse of this method illustrated in his Life and Letters of Donne (1899) provoked hostile comment. For instance, Gosse was criticized for misinterpreting "The Apparition," and then printing "the poem itself, as if he fancied that it justified his statement concerning it."<sup>80</sup>

Although Gosse was severely criticized for his errors in criticism, he was sensitive to some of the valuable qualities in Donne's poetry. He expressed an opinion of Donne even when it was opposing traditional views to do so. Gosse was willing to defend Donne from implied charges that he was ignorant of scansion. He offered his opinion

with regard to Donne's whole system of prosody. The terms "irregular," "unintelligible," and "viciously

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>80</sup> "Gosse's Life of Donne," The Nation, LXX (February 8, 1900), 113.



rugged" are commonly used in describing it, and it seems even to be supposed by some critics that Donne did not know how to scan. This last supposition may be rejected at once; what there was to know about poetry was known to Donne. But it seems certain that he intentionally introduced a revolution into English versification.<sup>81</sup>

Gosse was also full of praise for Donne when he stated that his poetry "possessed in no small degree that 'unusual and undefinable witchery'" which Dr. Jessopp had noted as characteristic of the man himself. Such commendatory language reveals a desire on Gosse's part to be kind toward Donne when to praise him was not a popular practice. Gosse touched briefly upon what later became a vital element of Donne's poetry: "passion." Gosse's praise was unrestrained:

For us the charm of Donne continues to rest in his occasional felicities, his bursts of melodious passion. If his song were not so tantalisingly fragmentary, we should call him the unquestioned nightingale of the Jacobean choir. No other poet of that time, few poets of any time, have equalled the concentrated passion, the delicate, long-drawn musical effects, the bold and ecstatic rapture of Donne at his best.<sup>82</sup>

When it came to the question of Donne's wittiness and ingenuity which led to the label "metaphysical," Gosse's praise became censure.

He claimed that Donne

is never daunted by the feeling that his wit is exercised 'on subjects where we have no right to expect it,' and where it is impossible for us to relish it. He pushes on with relentless logic . . . through briars and lianas that rend his garments and trip up his feet. He is not affected by the ruggedness of his road, nor by our un-

---

<sup>81</sup>Gosse, "Poetry of Donne," p. 244.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

willingness to follow him. He stumbles doggedly on until he has reached his singular goal.<sup>83</sup>

Gosse proceeded to link Donne with Browning for his "intellectual doggedness" and concluded that Donne's "obscurity is more dense." Thus praise and censure of Donne came from Gosse's pen at the earlier stage of his literary career. He made some valid judgments which were confirmed by later critics.

Toward the end of his second volume of the Life and Letters Gosse wrote about Donne's influence on the poets who succeeded him. He pointed out quite accurately that the young poets of the time "saw in Donne . . . the concentration of his intellectual personality." Literary history has revealed the truth of this statement and the abuses which followers of Donne committed in their attempt to pattern themselves after the "Monarch of Wit." Gosse rightly indicated that "wit" and "poetry" changed in meaning--an occurrence which affected Donne's reputation.

In 1928, the last year of his life, Gosse continued to examine Donne against the various periods of literature. In 1899 he had seen Donne as a strange and peculiar influence attempting to make "innovations" in English literature;<sup>84</sup> in 1928 when Grierson had already rediscovered Donne, and there was growing interest in him as a poet, Gosse adopted a less commendatory approach to Donne. Gosse's attitude seems very difficult to explain in the light of Grierson's favourable re-evaluation of Donne.

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp. 246-247.

<sup>84</sup> Gosse, Life and Letters, II, 337-342.

His judgments as literary critic and historian are revealing and partly put Donne in his former unpopular position. This is not to say that Gosse did not still recognize Donne as a greatly influential poet and prose writer. Perhaps Gosse's attitude is best explained by his personal theories as critic and literary historian. A brief glance at his aesthetic (that is, whatever system of opinions we may derive from his writings) should indicate his final attitude to, and assessment of Donne.

The first distinctive trait in Gosse's critical criteria is perhaps his view of literature as an organic whole with each writer as the product of the literary tradition which he inherited. Each poet is seen as part of a growing organism (i.e., the whole body of literature) to which he is linked. Darwinian evolution is involved in this concept. In 1928 Gosse wrote in his Modern English Literature:

I desire to state my convictions that the only way to approach the subject [i.e., features of literary expression in England] is to regard it as part of the history of a vast living organism, directed in its manifestations by a definite though obscure and even inscrutable law of growth.<sup>85</sup>

The element of determinism is implicit in this statement and seems to allow justification for all kinds of literary expression. Not only must Donne find a place in this growing literary organism, but, it seems, all who have thrown their literary bric-a-brac into the stream of English literature. This seems to put Gosse in a peculiar position. But he is here preoccupied with the argument against originality in his time and this leads him to extremism. He contends,

What we are in the habit of describing as "originality" in a great poet is largely an aggregation of elements

---

<sup>85</sup> Edmund Gosse, Modern English Literature (New York; D. Appleton and Company, 1928), p. 391.

which he has received by inheritance from those who have preceded him, and his "genius" consists of the faculty he possesses of selecting and rearranging as in a new pattern or harmony those elements from many predecessors which most admirably suit the only "new" thing about him, his unique set of personal characteristics.<sup>86</sup>

The language here is undoubtedly that of genetics and evolution. This law of the evolution of literature simply leaves a writer with a few "unique" personal characteristics. By this dictum Donne's originality and revolutionary spirit do not count for much unless he is perhaps a literary freak with a generation of malformed children who gradually lost the characteristics of the first genotype. It would seem that this is the kind of conclusion Gosse is led to, for he speaks of Donne's undesirable influence on his progeny and on the literature which followed his age: "For sixty years the evil taint of Donne rested on us, and our tradition is not free from it yet." He continues: "Donne is the father of all that is exasperating, affected, and metaphysical in English poetry . . . . He represented . . . that mania for an inflamed and eccentric extravagance of fancy which was racing over Europe like a hideous disease."<sup>87</sup> In spite of these far-reaching conclusions, Gosse is still able to justify Donne's place in English literature. He asserted that "the tumultuous brain of Donne had been created to counterpoise and correct the voluptuous sweetness of the School of Spenser."<sup>88</sup> This justification seems to be due almost entirely to the determinism underlying Gosse's aesthetic: there must be some logical justification for Donne which makes him an offspring

---

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., pp. 391-392.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 364.

of his predecessors.

Gosse is apparently using tools of criticism that control him more than he controls them. His aim is to apply Darwinian evolution to literature in order to elucidate and appreciate it more fully. This approach seems too scientific to be manageable. But Gosse is dedicated to his convictions:

I believe that a sensible observation of what Darwin and Mr. Herbert Spencer have demonstrated ought to aid us extremely in learning our trade as critics and in conducting it in a business-like manner.<sup>89</sup>

This methodological approach to criticism has its advantages and disadvantages. It robs an individual poet of much of his own originality (and Donne had much to lose), it overemphasizes the influence of early writers on their successors, and it is biased toward typology of literary personalities. Donne was distinctively original and revolutionary, as a later examination of his works will reveal. The advantages of Gosse's theory are perhaps not compensatory enough for these deficiencies. His theory has the advantage of looking at literature as a totality and this allows for wider terms of reference and less provincialism; but Donne, in Gosse's own words twenty-nine years earlier, had an attitude of "complete intellectual isolation in his youth and middle age."<sup>90</sup> Gosse's system puts the poet back into his own period, but in doing so minimizes the poet's individuality by invoking his literary progenitors.

It must be said in Gosse's favour, that he declaimed against setting up "a fixed aesthetic as a norm for all literary phenomena."<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 387.

<sup>90</sup> Gosse, Life and Letters, II, 329.

<sup>91</sup> Gosse, Modern Literature, p. 388.

This was the method of eighteenth-century criticism and Donne's reputation suffered because of it. Gosse rightly concluded that "Nothing can be more invertebrate than the criticism of the early eighteenth century."<sup>92</sup> The early nineteenth century also fell into some of these blunders by measuring past writers against great writers of the time or against the Ancients and with a complete unconcern for the purpose of the writers themselves.

We have seen here a different Gosse from that of the Life and Letters and he seems to have made this dichotomy consciously, for he stated that he was not concerned with biographical considerations when dealing with literary history or criticism. In his Preface to Modern English Literature 1928, he declared: "I have endeavoured to keep expression, form, technique, always before me as the central interest, rather than biography, or sociology, or mere unrelated criticism."<sup>93</sup> This reflects a change which may have come with growth and experience.

We may conclude from this consideration of Gosse's critical aesthetic (informal as it is) that Gosse made his public more aware of Donne and his influence upon the age in which he lived as well as upon the late nineteenth century. Gosse was forced to conclude that Donne's influence was undesirable, but he made it clear that it was a logical and necessary outcome of his Elizabethan and pre-Elizabethan literary heritage and to a lesser extent, his personality. The public which Gosse reached was wide, and this had a significant influence on Donne's reputation. Whatever deleterious effects still damaged Donne's reputation as a poet lingered until Herbert Grierson moved the emphasis

---

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

from a biographical account of Donne to a textual study of his works.

There was always in Donne's poetry that intrinsically valuable quality which received full recognition in the twentieth century. Grierson gave rightful prominence to this quality and in so doing rediscovered Donne.

## CHAPTER III

### DONNE REDISCOVERED

Although there was some interest in Donne's poetry following the publication of Gosse's Life and Letters of John Donne in 1899, Donne was not fully reclaimed as a great poet until 1912 when his poetry was published in Grierson's two-volume Oxford English Texts edition.<sup>1</sup> This edition distinguished Grierson from previous editors of Donne's poetry and substantially laid the foundation for a rediscovery of Donne as poet. To this great accomplishment Grierson added other noteworthy efforts. As professor, scholar and authority on the English literature of the seventeenth century, he exercised his influence within academic circles in a way which helped Donne's reputation. Favoured by the shifts of literary taste at the early part of the twentieth century, he employed his skill as a critic in defending Donne against the unfavourable criticism of the past centuries and emphasized what was intrinsically valuable in Donne's poetry. These achievements proclaim him as the re-discoverer of Donne.

Herbert Grierson (1866-1960) showed interest in John Donne and in the seventeenth century both in the classroom and in the public literary world. At Aberdeen University, from 1894 to 1915, he held the

---

<sup>1</sup> Herbert J.C. Grierson (ed.), The Poems of John Donne Edited from the Old Editions and Numerous Manuscripts with Introductions and Commentary. 2 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1912. Referred to afterward as the O.E.T. edition.



chair of Rhetoric and Literature, and as professor made himself familiar to thousands of pupils. Following his long stay at Aberdeen he headed the department of Rhetoric and English at the University of Edinburgh until he resigned in 1935. After this he continued to distinguish himself in the literary world by writing reviews, brief articles in periodicals, making contributions to encyclopedias and editing and writing scholarly books. He was knighted for his literary distinctions in 1936.

In 1906 he wrote The First Half of the Seventeenth Century, which was Volume VII of Periods of European Literature, edited by Professor Saintsbury; in 1909 he contributed an article on "John Donne" to The Cambridge History of English Literature, Volume IV. Three years afterwards Grierson published his incomparable edition of Donne's poems with introductions and commentary. Later he continued to publish various books and articles relating to the seventeenth century: Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century (1921), Cross Currents in English Literature of the XVIIth Century (1929), The Poems of John Donne (1929), "Donne's Satyres II, ll. 71-3," Times Literary Supplement (1930), a review of Donne the Craftsman by Pierre Legouis in the Review of English Studies Volume VI, 1930, and "Donne and the Roman Poets" in Times Literary Supplement, 1931. Grierson had displayed a breadth of experience and knowledge of literary history in such books as The Background of English Literature (1924), A Critical History of English Poetry (1947), Criticism and Creation (1949). However, the publication which is most pertinent to our purpose is Grierson's 1912 edition of Donne's poetry.

The appearance of editions of Donne's poems seems to coincide

with the rise and fall of his popularity. In the past, editions of his poetry did not necessarily cause Donne's ascendance to fame, but Grierson's 1912 O.E.T. edition contributed substantially to the subsequent interest in Donne. In considering the evidence of Donne's emergence to popularity in the twentieth century, we cannot but revert to Helen Gardner's claim: "The evidence for Donne's sudden rise to wide popularity in the twentieth century is the same as the evidence for his popularity in the thirty years after his death: the number of editions of his poems."<sup>2</sup> In Donne's age there were editions of his poems which appeared in 1633, 1635, 1639, 1649, 1650, 1654 and 1669. An absence of editions for more than one hundred years preceding Tonson's edition in 1819 was perhaps the result of Donne's unpopularity as a poet rather than the cause of it.

In the late nineteenth century the chief modern editions included those of Grosart (1872-3), Norton (1895), and Chambers (1896).<sup>3</sup> When Grierson, whose edition grew out of his lectures to Honours students at the university, published his edition, there was a substantial increase of interest displayed by outstanding scholars and critics. But what are the distinguishing qualities of Grierson's O.E.T. edition?

Grierson's aim in producing this edition was to offer elucidatory comments which would clarify difficult passages, and to correct certain errors perpetuated by preceding editors. The results he achieved illustrate the invaluable qualities of the O.E.T. edition. Volume I contains the text of the poems with appendixes. Variant readings of

---

<sup>2</sup>Gardner, John Donne, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup>Theodore Redpath (ed.), The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1959), p. xlix. For a list of twentieth-century editions of Donne's poetry see page 150 of this edition.

the poems are conveniently located at the bottom of the pages on which the poems appear. This information was carefully collated from "the original editions of 1633, 1635, 1639, 1649-50-54 (the text in these three is identical), and 1669."<sup>4</sup> The reader was thus offered a ready reference to assist him in establishing the history of the text of the poems. Punctuation of the poems was generally reproduced from the first edition of 1633 and any variations from this edition were arrived at from a careful consideration of the various editions and a sense of what Grierson thought to be the correct punctuation.<sup>5</sup> In doing this he was avoiding the errors of earlier editors who "had corrupted some passages" by "modernizing the punctuation, while preserving no record of the changes made."<sup>6</sup>

In Volume II of the O.E.T. edition is an introduction and a commentary on the poems. This fifty-five-page introduction offers the reader a valuable assessment of Donne's poetry. Here many new insights into Donne are displayed.<sup>7</sup> Following the discussion of Donne's poetry is a comprehensive treatment of the text and canon of Donne's poem and a scholarly commentary on the poems themselves. Such extensive aids to the study of Donne's poetry were not to be found in any of the earlier editions of Donne. Grierson had singularly shown the way to a fuller appreciation of Donne.

Valuable as the O.E.T. edition was, relatively few persons

---

<sup>4</sup>Grierson, O.E.T. edition, I, vi.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., ix.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., iv.

<sup>7</sup>Grierson's judgments are discussed in later chapters and need no illustration here.

could have afforded to buy it, and this limited the number of copies purchasable by readers interested in Donne's poetry. As The Times Literary Supplement, February 6, 1930, put it, Grierson's original edition of Donne's poems

was beyond the means of many people, and beyond the requirements of those who do not appreciate the intricacies of an apparatus criticus; and the absence of a reliable text in the cheaper and more manageable form must have preserved to some extent Donne's reputation as an exclusive and esoteric poet.  
(p. 96)

Thus the first impact of Grierson's great work was felt only among a small group of scholars. But this was nonetheless significant, for it ensured a more intelligent and knowledgeable examination of the Donne canon. The many "dark places" which had hitherto existed in Donne's poetry began to lose their obscurity and Donne's continued inclusion in the university curriculum was now more assured-- an indication of his increasing popularity.

In bringing Donne into the classroom Grierson had the opportunity of appealing to a young generation of literary enthusiasts. Such great admiration for Donne was displayed that later there was an increasing spirit of poetic experimentation, one which had been initiated by Browning much earlier. The experiments of these poets had a "root in the consciousness that the ugly and the beautiful are strangely blended in passionate experience."<sup>8</sup> In doing this they used Donne as their model and by their enthusiasm helped to bring about the burgeoning of his reputation in the early twentieth century. They appropriated Donne for their own, making "a particular study of him, and using his

---

<sup>8</sup>"The Oxford 'Donne'," The Times Literary Supplement (February 6, 1930), p. 96.

poetry."<sup>9</sup>

In addition to Grierson's good influence in stimulating interest in Donne through his O.E.T. edition, there was a famous review by T.S. Eliot of Grierson's anthology of metaphysical poetry in 1921 which added decidedly to the favourable impression of Donne during the years entre deux guerres.<sup>10</sup>

Not only did Grierson greatly influence students at university but he sparked interest in scholastic circles beyond the shores of his own country. In 1928 Pierre Legouis of France wrote in the preface to his book Donne the Craftsman:

As regards Professor Grierson, though I shall often mention him in the following pages, I must not pass over in this place my general indebtedness to him: not only has the text of his edition, which may well be called final, formed the basis of my acquaintance with Donne (I have reproduced it in all my quotations), not only have his notes opened to me the meaning of many perplexed passages; but without his successive probings of the poet's heart and brain, ever more deep-reaching, I could never have undertaken this work.<sup>11</sup>

Being aware that his O.E.T. edition of 1912 was denied a wide reading public because of its cost, Grierson published a one-volume Oxford Standard Authors edition (O.S.A.) in 1929.<sup>12</sup> The Times Literary Supplement described it as "a drastic fusion of two volumes into one."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> "The Donne Tradition," The Times Literary Supplement (July 31, 1930), p. 625.

<sup>10</sup> Gardner, John Donne, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Legouis, Donne The Craftsman (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> See page 9, n. 18.

<sup>13</sup> "The Oxford 'Donne'," p. 96.

The reviews of the O.S.A. edition regretted the loss of the commentary which left only a remnant "of the original apparatus criticus at the foot of each page." Grierson explained the reason for his changes in a reply to the reviewer in a later edition of The Times Literary Supplement: "It was my intention to add such, and I had prepared the greater part of a condensed commentary, but the authorities of the Press changed their minds and rejected it as out of keeping with the plan of the series."<sup>14</sup>

Grierson had now distinguished himself as an editor of Donne's poetry and was the first to make use "of the prose works as an important source of exposition, and no one before him or since [has] consulted more manuscripts and printed books in the preparation of his recension and in the solution of textual sources."<sup>15</sup> So reliable was Grierson's text and the establishment of manuscripts supporting it, that subsequent texts could not be wholly prepared without reference to Grierson's. Since his editions in 1912 and 1929 a new early manuscript version of Metempsychosis has been discovered, but this has only confirmed Grierson's emendations. In 1929 John Hayward edited the Nonesuch Library edition of Donne's work and by 1962 this had gone through nine impressions. Hayward acknowledged in his introduction the invaluable help he received from Grierson: "This edition owes more to Professor Grierson than to any other of Donne's editors. The present text of the poem is substantially his text, for the simple reason that it is well nigh impossible to improve on his recension."<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> H.J.C. Grierson, "The Oxford 'Donne'," The Times Literary Supplement, February, 1930, p. 142.

<sup>15</sup> "The Oxford Donne," p. 96

<sup>16</sup> John Hayward (ed.), John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's Complete Poetry and Selected Prose (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1962), p. xiv.

It is clear then that as editor, Grierson had made the truly decisive contribution toward the rediscovery of Donne as a poet. His O.S.A. edition, though not as comprehensive as its predecessor, the O.E.T. edition, had made Donne's poetical works available to the interested reader for six shillings, and Donne was firmly established within the circles where popularity meant further scholarly investigation and deepened interest. A writer in The Times Literary Supplement described this revival of interest in Donne in the following manner:

Donne's admission to the honourable company of "Oxford Poets" has long been overdue: [the fact that his poems are now available at a price within the range of most purses] is not only a sign of his increasing popularity, but also an admission that he is no longer regarded by the publisher as a poet whose appeal is limited.<sup>17</sup>

The writer thought it unsafe to fix the date of the revival of interest in Donne but stated, "It is safe to say that it was a little more than a quarter of a century ago. In 1912, at any rate, it received a stimulus in the publication of Professor Grierson's two-volume edition of the text of Donne's poetry with its learned commentary."<sup>18</sup>

Grierson had much scholarly training and experience, but his position as rediscoverer of Donne was enhanced by the timeliness of his work on Donne. He said that before 1907 he "had long been interested in Donne, and had given, while at work on the poetry of the seventeenth century, much thought to Donne's poetry as a centre of interest and influence."<sup>19</sup> However, when Grierson had published his O.E.T. edition in

---

<sup>17</sup>"The Oxford 'Donne'," p. 96.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Grierson, O.E.T. edition, I, iii.

1912 interest in Donne had begun to be renewed. Gosse's Life and Letters in 1899, as previously noted, had started a rash of criticism and the editions of Grosart and Chambers, though inadequate, had been still the popular texts. Grierson was put in the advantageous position of having much scholarship on Donne placed at his disposal. All the past editions of Donne's poetry, the available manuscripts and biographies, as well as the scholarly opinions of his contemporaries and colleagues at university, provided Grierson with advantages which Gosse possessed on a smaller scale. As Walton and the earlier editors were helpful to Gosse, Gosse and others were helpful to Grierson. In his Preface Grierson made his acknowledgments, among which he stated: "It will be seen that Mr. Gosse is a very material contributor to the completeness and interest of the present edition."<sup>20</sup> Above all, Grierson was a capable and experienced scholar and academic, qualifications which Gosse did not possess. This significant difference between both men reflected itself in the standard of work produced by them.

It was not only past scholarship and personal ability which gave Grierson the advantages he had as rediscoverer of Donne; it was also the change in taste and critical criteria which occurred in the literary world. There was, for instance, a freer attitude toward sex than had existed in the Victorian period and this allowed for more willing acceptance of the parts of Donne's elegies and satires which were then considered "indecent." During the early decades of the twentieth century Johnson's influence on critics of Donne was waning and the severe

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. xii.



criticism made in his Life of Cowley was not as influential as it was in the nineteenth century. There was a spirit of individuality and experimentation and a desire to establish new critical and poetic standards. Eliot is perhaps the figure who is most to be credited for the leadership of this new trend. This shift in sensitivity which began to favour things metaphysical in poetry made it easier for Grierson to establish Donne's poetic reputation in the twentieth century.

He sought to challenge and correct harsh and unjust criticisms of Donne and, in doing so, revealed his skill and efficiency as a literary critic. He believed that the critic should fight the invincible tendencies of prejudice and dogmatism. He held that there are two classes of prejudiced critics: the older class and the younger, which included those who re-evaluate literature without giving reasons for their "dogmatic findings." By resisting these misleading tendencies the critic is allowed more scope for rediscovering a poet who had been neglected by a past generation. It is immediately evident that this principle of criticism, proclaimed and practised by Grierson, allowed for a more impartial treatment of Donne's poetry. Grierson actually had Donne in mind when he warned against rash biases and dogmatisms in criticism:

If a poet has appealed in the past to judges whose worth is not to be set aside, it may be less useful to tell us that you personally do not like the poet than to discover what it was that made such an appeal and why his work has lost interest, for doing so one may recover a juster appreciation of some temporarily neglected poet, a Donne or a Crabbe.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> Herbert J.C. Grierson (ed.), Criticism and Creation (London: Chatto and Windus, 1947), pp. 29-30. This is the latest of five books which will be used as sources from which to form some conception of Grierson's critical aesthetic. The other sources cover a twenty-four-year period: Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth

The critical attitude which such words reflect was more favourable to Donne than was Gosse's. Gosse's final judgment about Donne, as we have seen, was influenced by a deterministic view of the literary tradition. According to him, it was necessary that Donne should appear when he did in order to counteract "the voluptuous sweetness of the school of Spenser." Gosse therefore had a tendency to deprive the poet of some of his individuality, and to overemphasize the literary tradition which he inherited. This led to erroneous conclusions in assessing a revolutionary poet like Donne. Grierson was not to be misdirected by such tendencies. He frankly declared his lack of faith in any approach to poetry which was too controlled by considerations of scientific or psychological principles. He made it clear that he did not hold that the critic was in part a poet himself describing poetically his reactions, but that he was prepared to accept this idea rather than a scientific method such as that of I.A. Richards, or, one might add, that of Gosse. Grierson much preferred the former idea of critic as poet than "that which affects to be scientific, dry and magisterial."<sup>22</sup>

For him the critic must have experience of the work he is criticizing and, like a connoisseur of wine, should know good art by its effect on his good palate. The critic could assess the worth of a "work of imagination" by his personal contact with and "response to

---

Century, 1921; The Background of English Literature, 1925; Rhetoric and English Composition, 1944; A Critical History of English Poetry, 1944 (in collaboration with J.C. Smith). This should be a sufficiently representative selection.

<sup>22</sup>Grierson, Criticism, p. 31.

it." The critics, for Grierson, are "the satellites which move around the poet, illuminating, transfiguring, distorting. But both poet and critic draw their light from the sun of beauty and truth, and we may be glad of both."<sup>23</sup>

We observe here then that Grierson insisted on a first-hand experience of the poet's work, as well as an unbiased desire to find the light of "beauty and truth." An approach of this kind opens up to the critic new vistas which escape the eyes of the critic bent on proving the validity of his own aesthetic. Grierson enjoyed the privilege of personally assessing the poet.

But what is the poet's aim? If the critic must evaluate him he should know this. Grierson placed the emphasis here on "communication." He claimed that the poet is most concerned to be rightly understood. But he "writes for those who have ears to hear; you must love him or leave him alone." Grierson was so convinced of this that he equated the desire to express oneself with the urge to communicate: "The desire to express oneself is the desire to communicate."<sup>24</sup>

It is with this belief in mind that Grierson approached Donne who had hitherto baffled his readers by his complexities and repelled all his enemies by his ruggedness and his "wrenching of the accent." It was clear to Grierson that Donne was not deliberately marring his poetry or else he would have had no claim to the name of poet—a name which even Ben Jonson ascribed to him. Therefore, instead of saying with Gosse that Donne "succeeded only in disturbing and dislocating

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Herbert J.C. Grierson, The Background of English Literature - Classical and Romantic (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), p. 1.

literature,"<sup>25</sup> Grierson was willing to argue that Donne was not deliberately trying to force and crack the accent. According to him, Donne was "trying to find a rhythm that will express the passionate fullness of his mind, the fluxes and refluxes of his moods."<sup>26</sup> In doing this, Grierson claimed, the "felicities" of Donne's verse were "as frequent and startling as those of phrasing."

Johnson, whose Life of Cowley influenced criticism for the greater part of the nineteenth century, claimed that poets of Donne's type had "as their whole endeavour" to show their learning and that they wrote verses instead of poetry and that these verses "stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear."<sup>27</sup> Grierson, on the other hand, maintained that Donne's aim was to communicate. While Hazlitt held that Donne wrote "in verse which the Sphinx could not unravel,"<sup>28</sup> Grierson opposed any such notion. He posed a logical question which was difficult to answer: Why, if the poet (in this case Donne) wrote only for his own ear and understanding, does he expend so much toil "to tell himself what he already knows?" The explanation had the ironic twist that perhaps Donne's critics did not have an ear to hear.

Besides stressing communication as part of the poet's intention, Grierson emphasized that there must be some common link between reader and poet, that this was provided by the traditional background known to both. He claimed: "A people is made one, less by community of blood

---

<sup>25</sup> Gosse, Modern Literature, p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> Herbert J.C. Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p. xxiii.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, Lives, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Howe, Complete Works, V, 83.

than by a common tradition." Accordingly it became clear that if the reader is unfamiliar with the traditional background of a poet he is put at a disadvantage which hinders proper and effective communication between himself and the poet. Here, attention to traditional background favoured Donne's position as a poet, for if considered in his own age, his poetry becomes more significant and understandable.

There is, however, a danger in Grierson's method. One can easily become so involved in an age and its various "cross currents" that the poet is either forced into a mould created by his background or abandoned as a misfit which deserves no recognition. Grierson seemed to be aware of this danger, for he stated in a prefatory note:

Considering, however, that poems are made not by influences or traditions but by men, we shall lay most stress on the second. No doubt every poet is the child of his age and the heir of a particular tradition: [cp. Gosse] but the great poet helps to create the spirit of his age and to mould the tradition he has inherited.<sup>29</sup>

From this statement it is evident that Grierson made a more distinct division between the poet and his background than Gosse did. Grierson saw Donne as "a learned poet" and argued that "without some attention to the philosophy and science underlying the conceits and his graver thought, it is impossible to understand or appreciate either aright."<sup>30</sup> In viewing Donne from this perspective, Grierson saw him against the background of a disintegrating system of the universe. In this sense he saw Donne as a metaphysical poet setting forth "no ordered system of the universe," like Lucretius and Dante, but often making a "frivolous" use of metaphysics.

---

<sup>29</sup> Herbert J.C. Grierson and J.C. Smith, A Critical History of English Poetry (second edition: London: Chatto and Windus, 1947), p. v.

<sup>30</sup> Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, 2.

In his second volume of the O.E.T. edition Grierson not only sets forth the fact that Donne is a "metaphysical poet" but begins a concerted effort to clarify the meaning of the word metaphysical as applied to poetry, and to Donne's poetry in particular. In this way he was seeking to clear the word of the unpleasant connotations applied to it by the eighteenth century and perpetuated in the nineteenth century. As Grierson continued to write later criticisms, his use of the word metaphysical broadened to allow fuller and richer appreciation of Donne's poetry.

In 1912 he offered the following comprehensive statement about metaphysical poets:

A metaphysical poet in the full sense of the word is a poet who finds his inspiration in learning; not in the world as his own and common sense reveal it, but in the world as science and philosophy report of it. The two greatest metaphysical poets of Europe are Lucretius and Dante. What the philosophy of Epicurus was to Lucretius, that of Thomas Aquinas was to Dante. Their poetry is the product of their learning, transfigured by the imagination, and it is not to be understood without some study of their thought and knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

This is a reversal of Johnson's statement that to "show their learning" was the "whole endeavour" of the metaphysical poets. Grierson emphasized that the true metaphysical poets like Lucretius and Dante made poetry the product of their learning, and not learning the result of their poetry. He was careful to maintain, however, that Donne was "not a metaphysical poet of the compass of Lucretius and Dante" since he did not set forth in his poetry an "ordered system of the universe."

But in 1921 Grierson was to make the case even stronger for metaphysical poetry. He stated then: "great poetry is always metaphysical,

---

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

born of men's passionate thinking about life and love and death."<sup>32</sup> This statement had even wider scope than his earlier one and included all of Donne's good poetry. No one would doubt the pre-eminence of the themes of "life, love and death" in Donne's poetry. Donne's "passionate thinking" is also easy to illustrate.

In his introduction to Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems (1921), Grierson stated that Butler rather than Cowley or Dryden wrote poetry which stands "as a reminder of the full significance of the word 'metaphysical' which has a wider connotation than poetry. The century was metaphysical and the great civil war was a metaphysical war."<sup>33</sup> Here Grierson was considering the whole of the seventeenth century as metaphysical and also the national event of war which occurred. The connotations of the word were now widened to imply a whole view or way of life conceived and followed by an individual or a nation. By this widened meaning Grierson provided a link between the great poet and his age.

In 1947 he followed through with a conclusion on the word "metaphysical," which was highly creditable to Donne:

A more important and luminous vista in the background of our literature is constituted by the philosophic and scientific conceptions current in the age in which this or that poet lived. All great poetry is in some measure metaphysical.<sup>34</sup>

Here, seen in a new perspective, is the word "metaphysical" which previously evoked anathemas against Donne and his followers. On this

---

<sup>32</sup>Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics, p. lviii.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Grierson, Background, p. 6.

new basis a bright aura surrounds the metaphysical poet and Donne can be seen treading close to luminaries like Lucretius, Dante, Milton and Goethe. Grierson had written in 1921 as part of his widening definition of metaphysical poetry:

Metaphysical poetry, in the full sense of the term, is a poetry which, like that of the Divina Commedia, the De Natura Rerum, perhaps Goethe's Faust, has been inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the rôle assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence.<sup>35</sup>

By this definition, Donne with his central themes of life, love and death and his vivid awareness of the clash between the older physics and metaphysics and the new science of Copernicus and Galileo, most certainly had every claim to the epithet "great." And Grierson bestowed it upon him when he claimed: "Donne is the great master of English poetry in the seventeenth century."<sup>36</sup>

It must be pointed out also that the "vistas" which Grierson indicated as constituting the background of English literature are all favourable to Donne's position as the leading poet of the seventeenth century. Grierson lists among the important "vistas" philosophy, science and literature in which the classics and the Bible play a very significant part. A mere glance at these influential factors will reveal that they play an important part in Donne's poetry.

Great credit must be given to Grierson for opposing Dryden and Johnson on their own grounds and by a proper classification of the term 'metaphysical,' elevating Donne to the status of a reputable poet. Grierson was aware of the source of the trouble and rectified it. In

---

<sup>35</sup>Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics, p. xiii.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. xvi.



1949 he maintained:

Donne was the father of what Johnson, following Dryden, called the metaphysical school of poets. Whatever Johnson meant, much of Donne's poetry may be called metaphysical in the ordinary sense of the word, if philosophy be what Plato called it, 'a practising for death'. Donne brooded much on death and on the relation of soul and body.<sup>37</sup>

The argument was not ended here either, for Grierson was determined to clear Donne's entire reputation. Earlier in the twentieth century Gosse had recorded the unfavourable impression that Donne had left a bad influence on English poetry which continued as far as the nineteenth century. This was because Donne was considered by Gosse and the earlier unfavourable critics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to be a haughty revolutionary who revolted against the renowned and acceptable type of poetry which had made Elizabethan England great. Grierson challenged this type of criticism of Donne, which began in the eighteenth century. He argued his case in such a way as to make Dryden, Johnson and their age appear as the heretics instead of Donne.

Grierson's contention was simply this: English poets were known for their easy disregard of rules which impede and stultify their creativity. They are unlike the French in this. Shakespeare's plays defy the classical rules and they still remain immortal. The seventeenth-century poets adopted a medley of images, a mixing of metaphors and a blending of passion and wit. They did these things without theorizing about them. They acted as the English do, as individuals unwilling to enslave themselves by rules. But with the eighteenth century there arose a "heresy" of diction and rule worship. The Romantics later on did their

---

<sup>98</sup> Grierson and Smith, Critical History, p. 98.

best to return to the norm.<sup>38</sup> Donne's individuality was preserved and respected by such an argument. He was shown to be well within the tradition of English poets while his early detractors in the eighteenth century found themselves within a foreign tradition.

The rigid rules of diction which were celebrated by the Augustan age and which Wordsworth opposed so strongly, were another source of concern to Grierson, since Donne had to be exonerated so far as his poetic diction was concerned. Grierson's views on poetic diction proved to be very accommodating to Donne.

In his Rhetoric and English Composition (1944), Grierson distinguished between two types of poetic diction. The first is the "bolder use of such language than is generally expected from the prose-writer." The poet may use metaphor, personification, hyperbole and make "striking departures from the normal in idiom and order of words, which we expect to find accompanied by the form or pattern of verse, or whatever in any language is accepted as the recognised pattern of poetry."<sup>39</sup> This allowed sufficient freedom for a poet like Donne to introduce strange metaphors and conceits - to compare two lovers to a pair of compasses. The second type of poetic diction is the more limited kind which is "a recurring phenomenon of poetry in some languages."

This involves

the use, namely, of certain words, phrases, grammatical forms, syntactical turns of expression, which are confined to verse-writing, used only along with what is accepted as the pattern of poetry--metre and rhyme, stress and alliteration, etc.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Grierson, Criticism, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Herbert J.C. Grierson, Rhetoric and English Composition (London: Oliver and Boyd Limited, 1945), p. 82.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

This two-fold definition of poetic diction incorporated both the rule-observer like Dryden, and the liberal, individualistic type of poet like Donne or Wordsworth. Donne is therefore not to be rejected because his choice of diction was contrary to that of the eighteenth-century poets. To carry the argument a step further, and to struggle with another of the Johnsonian criticisms of Donne and his school, the use of conceits becomes permissible if they are linked with passion. Grierson was here led into the area of rhetoric and is in harmony with De Quincey when he argues for Donne as a rhetorician. Grierson claimed that as a young poet, Donne was in revolt against the "sugared sonnets" of the Elizabethan tradition and substituted in their place "a more dramatic and passionate lyrical verse."<sup>41</sup> It would be better then, to assess Donne's poetry by its rhetorical pattern. De Quincey, who was one of a few during his day to recognize the good qualities of Donne's poetry, remarked: "The first very eminent rhetorician in the English Literature is Donne."<sup>42</sup> Compare with this, Grierson's remark: "Donne is perhaps our first great master of poetic rhetoric, of poetry used, as Dryden and Pope were to use it, for effects of oratory rather than of song..."<sup>43</sup> De Quincey further rejected Johnson's categorising Donne and his followers as metaphysical. "Metaphysical they were not," he contended. "Rhetorical would have been a more accurate designation."<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup>Grierson and Smith, Critical History, p. 97.

<sup>42</sup>Masson, De Quincey's Works, X, 100.

<sup>43</sup>Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics, p. xxv.

<sup>44</sup>Masson, De Quincey's Works, X, 101.

Grierson was following an argument similar to De Quincey's and in his usual way elevated Donne by linking him with a great and reputable writer; in this case, Shakespeare. Grierson argued that Donne, like Shakespeare in his tragedies, was always seeking to bend and crack the metrical pattern "to the rhetoric of direct and vehement utterance."<sup>45</sup> In Shakespeare thought and feeling tend to break through the pattern of blank verse, making it a rhythmical prose. Yet Donne's satires and lyrics which aimed at the same effect, were "rugged and harsh" to eighteenth-century ears attuned "to the clear and defined, if limited harmony of Waller and Dryden and Pope." These critics apparently did not have ears to hear; for, as Grierson claimed, "Donne's verse has a powerful and haunting harmony of its own." This statement was indeed a long step away from earlier criticism of Donne's metrics. Grierson proceeded to illustrate Donne's mastery of "the elaborate stanza or paragraph in which the discords of individual lines or phrases are resolved in the complex and rhetorically effective harmony of the whole group of lines."<sup>46</sup> He conceded that Donne's verse becomes harsh and rugged through a desire to startle,<sup>47</sup> and demonstrated that Donne's clever and artful use of rhetorical sound patterns is part of his attempt to play with rhythmical effects as with conceits and words.

We have seen that in considering Donne as a master of poetic rhetoric and in providing a definition of poetic diction that allowed

---

<sup>45</sup>Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics, p, xxiii.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. xxi.

for use of unusual conceits, Grierson had helped to clear the ground for acceptance of Donne as a great poet, an accomplishment which may have boosted the poet's reputation during the early twentieth century. Johnson had classified "metaphysical" conceits as objectionable and had termed what Grierson called "Donne's passionate thinking" "a kind of discordia concors" where "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together."<sup>48</sup> Grierson had ably combatted these adverse criticisms which had become traditional. In so doing he helped to clear Donne's reputation.

One final word concerning Grierson's appreciation of Donne, so far as he helped to re-establish his reputation in the early twentieth century. This is the emphasis which he placed on passion in Donne's poetry. Passion is perhaps the element which most redeems him as a poet. This intrinsic quality was missed by most of the critics of the nineteenth century. Strangely enough, Hazlitt considered passion as a desideratum of great poetry (Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions),<sup>49</sup> and yet he rejected Donne's poetry. Perhaps for Hazlitt, passion, if he discerned any in Donne's poetry, was not enough to redeem it.

In acclaiming Donne as the great master of English poetry in the seventeenth century, Grierson held that the truly distinctive quality in Donne's poetry was "the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination." He was forceful in his assertion:

Passionate thinking is always apt to become metaphysical, probing and investigating the experience from which it

---

<sup>48</sup> Johnson, Lives, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Howe, Complete Works, V.I.

takes its rise. All these qualities are in the poetry of Donne, and Donne is the great master of English poetry in the seventeenth century.<sup>50</sup>

Grierson classified some of Donne's poems as "directly and splendidly passionate"; in another case he described a group of poems as showing a pure and more concrete conception of love than the Petrarchan or Platonic, "compounded of passion and tenderness, mutual trust and entire affection." Elsewhere he referred to The Progresse of the Soule in which certain passages illustrate the poet's most "subtle and passionate thinking."

Grierson took up the question of conceits and was fully aware of the criticism of Donne's poetry on this ground. He claimed that Donne was not to be wholly exonerated, for his conceits often fail to "stir emotions deeper than mere surprise." Critics have, however, been too severe on him, for in the best of his love poems and divine poems, Grierson concluded, "wit and passion fuse in some electrifying phrase, and we are ready to declare with Ben Jonson that Donne is the first poet in the world 'for some things'."<sup>52</sup> It would seem by this argument that Donne's conceits are telling and effective when they are combined with strong emotion or passion. The unfortunate result of Donne's extravagances with conceits was the marring of parts of his poetry. If he himself was not always successful in fusing wit and passion together in his verses, the poets who tried to imitate him were open to even greater dangers. Grierson foresaw this possibility: "If his conceits are

---

<sup>50</sup> Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics, p. xvi.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. xxvi.

<sup>52</sup> Grierson and Smith, Critical History, p. 99.

extravagant, his vocabulary is simple. But for writers who had none of his passion and imagination no model could be worse, witness much of the poetry from Cleveland to Cowley."<sup>53</sup> We can conclude from this that those poets who imitated Donne's conceits without being capable of his passion left a very poor impression of themselves, which later affected the reputation of their model.

The reviewer of George Williamson's The Donne Tradition in The Times Literary Supplement dated July 31, 1930, thought that Donne's reputation suffered from the impressions left by poor Caroline imitators. He contended that the Caroline lyrists were capable of imitating those lyrists who wrote in the Donne manner, as the metaphysicals were capable of following their counterparts. There were offenders in both traditions, with the Donne tradition suffering most because its reputation was more considerable than that of the Cavalier poets. The reviewer wrote: "And so for centuries the offenders in the Donne tradition have been the cause of that tradition being regarded as an isolated and curious phenomenon in English poetry."<sup>54</sup> It is evident from the preceding observations that Donne's manner of writing had indirectly contributed to his own loss of popularity and that a significant distinction between him and his followers is his ability to inject into his conceits intense emotion while his imitators were often satisfied with affecting his wit alone.

Grierson had undoubtedly stressed a very important aspect of Donne's poetry when he stressed passion. Although he was not the only critic to do so, he did so when the consequences were most far-reaching.

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> "The Donne Tradition," p. 625.

The significant amount of passion in Donne's poetry puts some of his poetry within the Longinian tradition. Longinus himself declared that the second principal source of "elevated language" is "vehement and inspired passion." He confidently affirmed: "there is no tone so lofty as that of genuine passion in its right place."<sup>55</sup> It will be shown in later chapters how much the element of passion gives to Donne's poetry its inherent greatness.

To summarise Grierson's role in the rediscovery of Donne, it must be reiterated that, firstly, he made the decisive contribution to the revival of Donne as a poet by publishing his 1912 Oxford English Text edition with its considerable apparatus criticus; secondly, he helped Donne's poems to reach a wider group of readers by publishing in 1929 the Oxford Standard Authors edition at a cheaper price changing the seventeenth-century typography of past editions; thirdly, as professor, his performances in the classroom stimulated young minds to pursue a study of Donne's poetry. After 1914 enthusiasm among young poets who were patterning themselves after Donne might well have been augmented by Grierson and others like him. Fourthly, Grierson applied his scholarly knowledge toward the correction of several errors perpetuated by Gosse and other earlier critics. Again, he disagreed significantly with the Johnsonian approach to Donne, and added new meaning and scope to the word "metaphysical" in relation to Donne's poetry. Fifthly, and perhaps most important of all, Grierson emphasized Donne's rhetoric and masterly fusion of wit and passion in his best poetry, qualities germane to Donne's greatness as

---

<sup>55</sup>Smith and Parks, The Great Critics, p. 73.



a poet. That Grierson deserves the most credit for the rediscovery of Donne, on these grounds, is hardly contestable.

## CHAPTER IV

### DONNE RE-EVALUATED IN THE SONGS AND SONNETS

The Songs and Sonnets reveal characteristics which help us to interpret the shifts of critical opinion affecting Donne's eclipse and gradual re-emergence to popularity as a poet. The term "metaphysical" was applied pejoratively to Donne's poetry by Dryden, Johnson and others, but, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, Grierson in his re-assessment of Donne added new meaning to this term in a way which opened up new vistas into Donne's literary world, as can be shown by an analysis of Loves growth and The Extasie. Moreover, critics have misinterpreted Donne's genuineness of passion because they sought to identify personalities behind some of his poems and searched for biographical information deficient in other documentary sources. They have rifled the treasure house and in their haste left many valuable gems untouched. An examination of The Blossome, The Funerall and The Dampe will illustrate this claim.

The intrinsic worth of Donne's poetry is yet to be explored. Much of this worth depends upon the combination of wit and passion in his poetry. Donne's extraordinary wittiness without his passion has exposed him to the censure of his detractors. Womans constancy and The Flea illustrate this type of indulgence on Donne's part. However, when Donne successfully unites passion and intellectual subtlety, he writes some of his best poetry. This claim may be substantiated by a discussion of The Canonization, A Feaver and A Valediction: forbidding mourning.

## I. METAPHYSICAL POEMS RECONSIDERED

Before an analysis of Loves growth and The Extasie as an illustration of metaphysical qualities which Grierson claims to be desirable rather than detestable, the earlier discussion of the term "metaphysical" may be reduced to a succinct conclusion.

Grierson showed metaphysical poetry as the product of learning, as opposed to Johnson's declaration that the show of learning is the product of such poetry. Grierson put the emphasis on thought and background as opposed to Dryden's and Johnson's emphasis on imagery and diction. A richer examination may be had by following Grierson in widening the scope of the meaning of the word as much as possible. We may even broaden the connotations to include what Saintsbury called the tendency to "go behind" the first simple, obvious, natural thought and expression of thought: to go behind the physical and immediate to the abstract and supersensible.<sup>1</sup> For the fullest exploration of Donne's poetry, Grierson's and Saintsbury's conception of the word "metaphysical" may be adopted. With this in mind we may turn to an examination of Loves growth.

Loves growth is inspired by Donne's learning and draws much of its details from the world of science and philosophy. It illustrates that Donne is a metaphysical poet in a manner which is more praiseworthy than Johnson and others would have us believe. As such, it is metaphysical in Grierson's sense of the word, Donne analyses love in a most abstract and complex manner and employs analogies from nature and science to

---

<sup>1</sup>George Saintsbury, "The Metaphysical Poets," The Times Literary Supplement, October 27, 1921, p. 698.

explicate his theme. The seriousness of this treatment of love distinguishes the poem from the lighter and wittier compositions on the subject.

Before proceeding further, a word might be said about the asymmetrical form of the poem. Donne deliberately reverses the octave-sestet pattern of the Petrarchan love sonnet. Grierson's O.S.A. edition sets out the form more clearly than his original O.E.T. edition. The first sestet starts from line 1 and continues to line 6. The second begins at line 15 and ends at line 20, the octaves are contained by lines 7 - 14 and 21 - 28. This demonstrates that Donne is seeking to establish new poetical forms and inevitably singles himself out as a revolutionary whose actions attract adverse criticism.

Donne's analysis in the first sestet begins with a doubt which establishes a scientific approach to his investigation:

I Scarce beleeeve my love to be so pure  
 As I had thought it was,  
 Because it doth endure  
 Vicissitude, and season, as the grasse . . . .<sup>2</sup>  
 (1 - 4)

In the winter he was wrong to think love infinite because it still increased in the spring. Infinity is incapable of addition. Donne uses the "spring" motif of the courtly love tradition, but for his own purposes. As the critic Clay Hunt states: "He [Donne] was out to angle it [the Renaissance theme of springtime and sexual love] in his own way and to make of the relation between spring and love something different from what it had been to Shakespeare and the Elizabethan lyrists."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> All quotations from Donne's poems are taken from the O.S.A. edition.

<sup>3</sup> Clay Hunt, Donne's Poetry: Essays in Literary Analysis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 124.

Donne turns against the tradition by refuting the accepted belief of the infinity of love. In the octave (line 7 ff.) he continues to refute the concept that love is "pure and abstract." His argument this time is drawn from medicine. The teachings of homoeopathy provide the facts for Donne: a disease can be treated by administering drugs which cause symptoms of disease in the body similar to those already there. Thus,

. . . if this medicine, love, which cures all sorrow  
 With more, not onely bee no quintessence,  
 But mixt of all stuffes, paining soule, or sense,  
 And of the Sunne his working vigour borrow,  
 Love's not so pure, and abstract, as they use  
 To say . . . .

(7 - 12)

Involved in this argument is the concept of Paracelsus (outlined by Grierson)<sup>4</sup> that the quintessence was extracted in a pure state from all natural bodies and was distinct and separate from the four elements. On this ground love is "no quintessence" since it is "mixt of all stuffes, painting soule, or sense." It is therefore not pure and abstract, but elemented so that it would "sometimes contemplate, sometimes do." Here Donne focusses on the relationship between the life of contemplation and that of action, a relationship which recalls his earlier reference (line 9) to "soule" and "sense". Donne's use of scientific knowledge has helped his poetry in the sense that it provides him with metaphors which illustrate the thought and meaning of his poems.

In the remainder of the poem Donne resumes the imagery of nature and spring of his first sestet. This time, however, he seeks to show that the spring does not really make love greater (as suggested in line 6) but

---

<sup>4</sup>Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, 30.

"more eminent" (line 15). To elucidate the argument he introduces the simile of the stars and the sun:

And yet no greater, but more eminent,  
 Love by the spring is growne;  
 As, in the firmament,  
 Starres by the Sunne are not inlarg'd, but showne.  
 Gentle love deeds, as blossomes on a bough,  
 From loves awakened root do bud out now.  
 (15 - 20)

Just as the stars are illuminated, not made larger, by the sun's light, so love by the spring is made "more eminent," not greater. The spring blossoms are also a picture of love's deeds which grow from "loves awakened root." The image expands the idea of the life of action ("love in deeds") which was introduced in line 14. Here Donne treats what Stein describes as "the ancient war between the life of thought and the life of action."<sup>5</sup>

In the final octave (21 - 28) Donne moves on to another image which is linked with the "spring" motif of the earlier stanzas. This time he uses the simile of the concentric circles in water. This serves to develop further the meaning of his first statement about love's growth in the first sestet ("make it more"). Not only does "make it more" mean "more eminent" but it also suggests a circumferential expansion of love. This suggests a growth in intensity and inclusiveness. The image depicts the quality vividly:

If, as in water stir'd more circles bee  
 Produc'd by one, love such additions take,  
 Those like so many spheares, but one heaven make,  
 For, they are all concentrique unto thee . . . .  
 (21 - 24)

---

<sup>5</sup> Arnold Stein, John Donne's Lyrics (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 147.

The lady becomes the centre from which love grows in increasing and widening circles, like the Ptolemaic system. In Ptolemaic astronomy the spheres constitute only one heaven. In a similar fashion all the spheres of love centre on the lady, who is one heaven.

This leads Donne to a realistic image of the day-to-day world of politics. He seems to be concentrating more on the life of action than that of thought, so love must live in a world of war and peace and taxes:

And though each spring doe adde to Love new heate,  
 As princes doe in times of action get  
 New taxes, and remit them not in peace,  
 No winter shall abate the springs encrease.

(25 - 28)

Just as taxes imposed in war time ("times of action") are continued in times of peace, so love increased in spring, will continue unabated by the cold of winter.

Donne has simply expatiated upon what he means by love's growth, but he has done so in a manner which reveals his abilities as a metaphysical poet, one who, as Grierson claims, "finds his inspiration in learning: not in the world as his own common sense reveals it, but in the world, as science and philosophy report it." But Grierson goes on to state that the poet's learning is "transfigured by the imagination." By this process Donne's poetry is the product of his learning, and a failure to see this transfiguration has led to wrong conceptions of Donne as a metaphysical poet.

For qualities that reveal Donne at his best as a metaphysical poet we must turn to The Extasie. Grierson calls this poem "one of the most important of the lyrics as a statement of Donne's metaphysic of

love, of the interconnexion and mutual dependence of body and soul."<sup>6</sup>

In The Extasie Donne's intellect is very ingeniously engaged in the pursuit of the true experience of love which he had been exploring and had not completely found. In this, the longest of his Songs and Sonnets, he carefully explores and analyses the process and experience of love both spiritually and physically. In Aire and Angels the problem leads to a humorous conclusion. Here Donne pushes his way eagerly and passionately through all the psychic and spiritual experiences and onward to the most abstract levels of his subject. Paradoxically enough, the poem is as sensual as it is abstract, and Donne controls both worlds without employing the pictorial effects of Spenser or Shakespeare. This strange treatment has baffled critics.<sup>7</sup> What Donne is doing is utilizing all phases of his experience and his philosophy, and directing them toward the analysis and elucidation of the problem he is treating. Leishman is correct when he says of Donne,

all other experiences, all other universes of discourse, all his ingenious analogies, all his so-called metaphysics, are valuable to him only in so far as they help him to feel and comprehend more clearly and more intensely the essential this-ness of this experience.<sup>8</sup>

Donne starts The Extasie on a very physical and natural level and then becomes abstract and metaphysical for the greater part of the poem, finally returning to the physical at the end, thus giving a circular movement to the poem. The same movement occurs in Aire and

---

<sup>6</sup> Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, 41.

<sup>7</sup> Leishman, Monarch, p. 213.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 214.



Angels but with a different conclusion. A detailed analysis of The Extasie is not necessary for our purpose, and consequently, a brief treatment must suffice.

Physical feeling is very strong in the early lines of the poem. The words are carefully brought together for the purpose. "Pillow," "bed," "pregnant bank swel'd up," "sat we too," evoke the emotions of deep sensuality and offer explicit connotations of a sex relationship with its physical consequences. The passion of the lines finds very forceful expression through the poet's rhetoric. The reversed sentence structure, which allows the suspending of the main clause until the fourth line, is effective and was used with similar success by Milton. Compare the effective use which the two poets make of the periodic sentence, and De Quincey's and Grierson's claim that Donne is a master of poetical rhetoric will become clearer. First, observe Donne's lines with the adverbial clause of place which provides the natural setting of the poem:

Where, like a pillow on a bed,  
 A Pregnant banke swel'd up, to rest  
 The violets reclining head,  
 Sat we two, one anothers best.  
 (1 - 4)

Then notice Milton's more stately swelling lines with a similar suspension of main clause for emphasis of a different kind:

High on a throne of royal state, which far  
 Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,  
 Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand  
 Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,  
 Satan exalted sat . . . .<sup>9</sup>

(II. 1 - 5)

---

<sup>9</sup>Northrop Frye (ed.), Paradise Lost and Selected Poetry and Prose (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), p. 28.



had learnt during his early training at university. Here, according to Grierson's use of the word, Donne is within a smaller compass "metaphysical" in the manner of Lucretius whose philosophy is closely linked with his poetry. Donne states;

Wee then, who are this new soule, know,  
 Of what we are compos'd, and made,  
 For, th'Atomies of which we grow,  
 Are soules, whom no change can invade.  
 But O alas, so long, so farre  
 Our bodies why doe wee forbear?  
 They'are ours, though they'are not wee, Wee are  
 The intelligences, they the speare.

(45 - 52)

Here Donne is drawing upon the Ptolemaic astronomy which had been Christianized. In this philosophy "various orders of angels each ruled one of the spheres from the moon's (which was the first) sphere to the crystalline (or ninth) sphere."<sup>10</sup> Donne also makes corrections of commonly accepted philosophical errors:

On man heavens influence workes not so,  
 But that it first imprints the ayre,  
 Soe soule into the soule may flow,  
 Though it to body first repaire.

(57 - 60)

Donne shows here his familiarity with medieval astrology which taught that the planets had their influence on the air first and then on man. This doctrine is found in Pliny, Plutarch, Plato and Aristotle, whom Grierson names as possible influences on Donne.<sup>11</sup> All these characteristics constitute what Grierson calls the metaphysical quality of Donne's poetry, and it is necessary to be acquainted with this philosophical and scientific background in order to appreciate the true worth of Donne's metaphysical

<sup>10</sup> Redpath, Songs and Sonnets, p. 91.

<sup>11</sup> Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II 44-45.

poems.

Its treatment of the theme of love further entitles The Extasie to be called "metaphysical" as Grierson used the term. A close examination of the poem reveals that we are confronting one of Donne's lyrical masterpieces, but when we classify it as love-poetry we present a problem for critics. We have shown how, in The Extasie, Donne unites intellectual ingenuity and passion, or, to use De Quincey's term, "dialectical subtlety" and "impassioned majesty." To eighteenth-century critics this combination does not make for sincere love-poetry. Even to some nineteenth-century critics who were influenced by Johnson's Life of Cowley this type of intellectual ingenuity was undesirable in the poetry of those who had experienced love and written about it. Donne's poetry has been little appreciated because of the failure of many critics to be convinced that he can, or does, show genuine poetic passion together with "dialectical subtlety." This difficulty presents itself more especially to critics of Donne's love-poetry. Grierson was aware of this and once again sought to defend Donne from the objections of this class of critics:

Objections to admit the poetic worth and interest of Donne's love-poetry come . . . from those who are indisposed to admit that passion, and especially the passion of love, can ever speak so ingeniously (this was the eighteenth-century criticism). . . .<sup>12</sup>

Then he referred to Steele whose thoughts on the subject support the opinion of these critics. The gist of Steele's argument is this: anyone in love would write simply, unimpeded by "points of wit and fancy" which betray a mind too free from the passions of true love. Grierson is

---

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. xxxi.

convinced that this is not so:

But it is not true either that the thought and imagery of love-poetry must be of the simple, obvious kind which Steele supposes, that any display of dialectical subtlety, any scintillation of wit, must be fatal to the impression of sincerity and feeling, or on the other hand that love is always a beautiful emotion naturally expressing itself in delicate and beautiful language.<sup>13</sup>

Grierson contends that to some natures, like Donne's and Browning's for instance, "love comes as above all things a force quickening the mind, intensifying its purely intellectual energy, opening new vistas of thought abstract and subtle, making the soul 'intensely, wondrously alive'."<sup>14</sup>

This is quite just. If we are to judge the poet's work, we must consider not only the type of heart which guides his pen, but what kind of mind fits his feelings to his words. Donne's mind is naturally disposed to subtleties and paradoxes. He hardly thinks of one thing without proceeding almost immediately to its opposite. He is naturally inclined to perceive in everything "contraries met in one." Sensitive critics like De Quincey and Coleridge (who were mainly responsible for renewing interest in Donne at the first half of the nineteenth century) knew Donne's mind and had eyes to see the value of the poetry which revealed that mind. Grierson states that Coleridge is highly commendatory of The Extasie: "'I should never find any fault with metaphysical poems, . . . 'if they were all like this [i.e. The Extasie] or but half as excellent'."<sup>15</sup> Donne's uniqueness and greatness as a poet lie in his unusual ability to combine passion of soul with ingenuity of expression, and The

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. xxxiii.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. xlvi.

Anniversarie and Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day, though condemned by critics of Steele's convictions illustrate the truth of this, even as The Extasie has done.

From what has been said about the metaphysical qualities in the preceding selections of Donne's poetry, we may conclude that a new interpretation of the term "metaphysical" does reveal much that is important in Donne's work. We have noticed his use of learned and philosophical conceits, and his ability to use his knowledge of science and philosophy to elucidate rather than confuse his subject. His passion and ingenuity have been revealed in his purer metaphysical poetry. These all contribute to a fairer and more rewarding assessment of Donne as a poet. We shall now turn to the second category of poems.

## II. BIOGRAPHICAL POEMS RECONSIDERED

There are a group of poems in which Donne displays passionate feelings which do not necessarily arise from a specific incident or relationship, but which may have begun with an incident and developed in the heat of the poet's imagination and passion. That he knew Lady Bedford it is true; that he wrote poems to her is also true. That Donne admired Mrs. Herbert is undeniable, and that some of his poetry was written to her has been proven by critics. Donne himself as well as his kind biographer Walton has mentioned days of gallantry when Donne was "a great visitor of Ladies." It is possible that some of his poems record these experiences, but it is also possible that several of these compositions might be "spots of time" which are metamorphosed into passionate poetry which belong to the world of the creative imagination

and not the boudoir of a broken-hearted lover. Ronsard is known for writing impassioned sonnets to Cassandra whom he met, but who became an idea or symbol in his Amours. Grierson suggests that poems like The Primrose, The Blossome, The Dampe, The Funerall and The Relique (The Undertaking may be included here) have been compositions written in this vein,<sup>16</sup> though popularly interpreted for their biographical value.

From this group of poems we have chosen The Blossome, The Funerall and The Dampe to show the misconceptions caused by this biographical fallacy. These poems contain much more that is of literary than of biographical value, and The Blossome will first be examined to demonstrate this. Gosse's misleading conclusions about the poem may be relevant at this point. He should be given sympathetic consideration since he was writing biography, but his interpretation of The Blossome has been unfortunate, to say the least. Whether it was from being preoccupied with his hypothetical lady whom Donne loved and then despised, or from some other unknown factor, it is difficult to say; but he has mishandled the details of the poem apparently through a desire to identify a living person behind the poem. He wrote concerning The Blossome:

His [Donne's] sensitive heart is ingenious in self-torture, and to what extremities it still can fling him we read in "The Blossom." The lady of the moment has left him a week ago, and in three weeks more he is to meet her in London. In subtle, modulated verse his heart taunts and plagues him, for he no longer knows what he desires nor what he is. His previous adventures have made him cautious, even sceptical, and he will not frankly give way to this sweet, insidious hope. He apostrophises his own trembling heart, which knows not whether to bide with him or to follow the new and desired mistress.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. xxiv - xxv.

<sup>17</sup> Gosse, Life and Letters, I, 75.

Gosse then quotes part of the fourth stanza of the poem. He has misconstrued much here. The only evidence that Gosse may obtain from the poem to substantiate the claim that "the lady of the moment has left him a week ago" is the second line which states that the poet has watch'd the flower "six or seven days." Only on assumption can it be shown that this period represented the time during which "the lady of the moment" was absent. It can be equally conceived that Donne is merely drawing a lesson from a "blossom" (any object for that matter, which represents the transiency of love). He is not precise about the time—"six or seven days"; and this is not likely to be the case if, as Gosse implied, he was enduring the absence of the "lady of the moment." A lover in such a position would count the days to the precise minute.

Gosse further stated that the lady (the same one who left him) is to be met by the poet in three weeks time. The time reference may be construed from lines 34 and 35: "Meet mee at London then, / twenty dayes hence." But Donne is to give his heart there "to another friend" (line 39) and not to the "lady of the moment" as Gosse implied.

It is again claimed by Gosse that Donne "no longer knows what he desires nor what he is." From the poem the opposite seems quite clear. The poet assumes a tone which shows that he knows his heart. It is a foolish heart. The words "Little think'st thou" addressed to the heart, and repeated twice in the second stanza and "naked thinking heart" (line 27), suggest that the poet knows his heart to be an unthinking one. Is this not self-knowledge? The poet also knows what he desires. He desires a love that will satisfy body and mind. He reasons with his





For his faulty interpretation of this poem Gosse has been criticised but Donne's poetry received publicity by this means. However, we must leave Gosse and briefly consider the poem.

The first fact that becomes clear in The Blossome is its dramatic form. Its clever and impassioned dialogue explores Donne's own attitude more than it does the lady's. It is his reaction (soul and body) to the lady's platonic love. His conclusion is in favour of the love which makes provision for his body as well as his mind (line 40). He realizes that there is not much to be desired from an unyielding tree whose "stiffness by long siege" cannot be "bowed." He has learnt from careful observation of the growth of the flower of love that it "now dost laugh and triumph on this bough" and tomorrow "freeze" and "fall". Love is changeable and fleeting.

The interrogatory tone of the poem, and its juxtaposition of realistic and platonic love reveal a vivid picture of Donne's mental and emotional conflicts on the subject of love. Later we see this type of interior monologue in a much different form in George Herbert. The Blossome, then, instead of being the poetic account of a private love affair with a specific person, can with more profit, be considered a passionate self-dramatization concerning a subject which in his middle years was a serious concern to Donne.

The Funerall further illustrates that Donne's so-called occasional poems yield more that is of literary value than of biographical. Thematically, it recounts Donne's thoughts on the subject of Death. In this poem thoughts of death haunt the mind of Donne as he displays some of the morbidity which Walton dramatizes so well in his account of

Donne's last moments when he dressed in his winding sheet. Revealed in The Funerall is the mind which later conceived Death's Duell. This is illustrated in the lines:

Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harme  
Nor question much . . . .

and

When my grave is broke up againe . . . .

The "wreath of haire" in The Funerall is a "mystery" and a "signe," but since it may mean something destructive to him (a manacle for instance) he seeks to argue his way to a conclusion which favours burying the relic so that some vengeance will be had: "That since you would save none of mee, I bury some of you."

We find a continuation of the idea of death and the concern for relics and treasured possessions in other poems like The Relique, The Dissolution, The Token, A Jet Ring Sent. This is ample proof that at a certain stage in his career Donne's mind was occupied with a problem important enough to demand investigation.

The Dampe, which is said to be definitely connected with Mrs. Herbert, has another significant value as a revelation of the mind of the poet. "When I am dead" introduces a characteristic trait of Donne's mind which is seen in The Funerall and The Relique. This characteristic trait is Donne's concern for what happens after death so far as his lady's remembrance of him is concerned. In this poem her picture is the central object of remembrance, and in the other two companion poems, it is a "bracelet of haire."

His lady's picture will cause a sudden chilled depression or stupor (dampe) to fall upon his friends who dissect him. This misfortune

will be worse than killing him; it will be massacre. In the second stanza Donne uses the allegorical figures "Giant, Disdain" and "Honour" and later in stanza three, "Constancy" and "Secretnesse," and reveals his ability to adopt the language and methods of the courtly love tradition if he wishes.

Donne's mind is always alert for puns, ambiguities and paradoxes, and in stanza three he gives a rude twist to what seemed a serious and morbid subject. "Death" becomes "die" in the Elizabethan sense to mean the sex act. Then follows the stunning line which appears in all manuscripts but that of 1633, which Donne seemed to have amended: "Naked you've odds enough of any man." The Dampe, then, is a still picture of Donne's mind tortured by feelings of physical love and overwhelmed by macabre thoughts of death.

### III. POEMS OF EXTRAORDINARY WIT

Before beginning a discussion of Womans constancy and The Flea as examples of Donne's extraordinary wit, it is necessary to distinguish the seventeenth-century meaning of "wit" from its various meanings in the eighteenth century. For our purposes, "wit" in its seventeenth-century sense may be defined as the display of intellectual subtlety resulting in unusual combinations of ideas and expressions. When Donne indulged his wit to excess without combining it with passion very often he became vulnerable to criticism. Passion is to be understood here as the intense emotion of the poet concentrated into effective language which stirs the reader's feelings.

Womans constancy illustrates Donne's display of cynical wit without any of the passion which is always present in his better compositions. No doubt he is treating a subject which occurs frequently in his poems--the instability and changeableness of woman. His sarcastic tone strikes at the shallowness of Petrarchan female worship, an outworn feature of earlier love poetry. Very often Donne's scorn and rebelliousness against traditional forms express themselves through clever turns of phrase and sudden reversals in attitude. It is almost a game for him. He leads the reader through a dramatic performance to witness the indictment of an unfaithful mistress:

Now thou hast lov'd me one whole day,  
 To morrow when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say?  
 Wilt thou then Antedate some new made vow?  
 (1 - 3)

The quick succession of "w's" and "v's" produces the desired effect of a tedious, wearisome impatience. The poet pursues the interrogation with a quick, uninterrupted flow of alternatives to expose the frustrating attempts of the lady to cover her guilt:

Or say that now  
 We are not just those persons, which we were?  
 Or, that oathes made in reverentiall feare  
 Of Love, and his wrath, any may forswear?  
 Or, as true deaths, true maryages untie,  
 So lovers contracts, images of those,  
 Binde but till sleep, deaths image, them unloose?  
 Or, your owne end to Justifie,  
 For having purpos'd change, and falsehood; you  
 Can have no way but falsehood to be true?  
 (4 - 13)

The rhetorical effectiveness of the lines brings the reader to a point where he expects the guilty party to be utterly condemned while the accuser seeks to preserve himself from any future injustices of this

nature:

Vaine lunatique, against these scapes I could  
 Dispute, and conquer, if I would}. . . .  
 (14 - 15)

Then there is the sudden reversal which is so characteristic of Donne:

"For by to morrow, I may thinke so too."

Here, Donne's ingenuity and wittiness have led him into a position which Johnson declared to be plainly reprehensible. By neo-classical dicta, Donne is displaying "wit abstracted from its effects upon the hearer." For Johnson, Donne is one of the metaphysicals who are satisfied that "their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased."<sup>18</sup> Johnson is here applying his own critical norm to Donne's poetry. Poetry must please or it is not poetry. For him, "Poetry is the art of uniting pleasure with truth, by calling imagination to the aid of reason."<sup>19</sup>

But, is Johnson fair to Donne? He might be correct by eighteenth-century standards, but he is not just, for Donne was not writing for eighteenth-century readers. The ending of this poem, like that of The Indifferent, may be regarded today as a humorous admission of human changeableness. For Johnson, Donne and his followers

were wholly employed on something unexpected and surprising, they had no regard to that uniformity of sentiment which enables us to conceive and to excite the pains and the pleasure of other minds: they never enquired what, on any occasion, they should have said or done . . . .<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup>Johnson, Lives, p. 15.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. xvi.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

Though in Womans constancy the poet shows in the last three lines a devastating awareness of the complexity of his own humanity, the wittiness with which he does this leads him into a position which was harmful to his reputation as a poet.

While critics have strongly disapproved of Donne's innovations in metrics, they have generally admired and respected his wit. The application of this wit to poetry is quite another matter. Grierson correctly summarises the situation thus:

Donne's reputation as a poet has passed through many vicissitudes in the course of the last three centuries. With regard to his 'wit', its range and character, erudition and ingenuity, all generations of critics have been at one. It is as to the relation of this 'wit' to, and its effect on, his poetry that they have been at variance.<sup>21</sup>

Let us further observe this application of wit to poetry in what is perhaps Donne's wittiest piece, The Flea.

Grierson tells us that The Flea was placed at the beginning of all the Songs and Sonnets in 1635, the apparent reason being that it "was greatly admired as a masterpiece of wit."<sup>22</sup> This is an ideal example of the unrestricted use of the intellect where passion is either subdued or absent. The fact that there were those in the seventeenth century who admired this type of poetry, while one century later the same poetry was condemned as empty playfulness by critics, is enough proof that sheer wit (or "intellection," to use Johnson's term) was a poor basis for Donne's claim to constant popularity throughout the centuries. Poetic passion is no doubt a better basis for Donne's claim to greatness as a poet.

---

<sup>21</sup>Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, vi-vii.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

Let us examine The Flea and observe Donne's unrestricted use of wit. A mere flea bite becomes the subject of a closely-knit conceit extended into a consecutive argument of twenty-seven lines. The first stanza opens in the manner and tone of a laboratory demonstrator: "Marke but this flea." There is no emotion here at all. "How little," introduces the idea of a stinting donor. "Deny'st me" makes it more explicit that this is a friendship in which one partner is unyielding. By sheer ingenuity, Donne has brought all the objects of his poem together, and at the same time established the attitude of one to the other. His economy of narration is amazing. The words "suck'd" and "sucks" repeated for deliberate emphasis, and the following line with its image of "blood," lead Donne to the sensual and suggestive image of the first sexual experience in bed and the "losse of maidenhead." This liberal uninhibited treatment of sex has been another cause of Donne's unpopularity among a large number of Victorians.

But Donne is not unmindful of the moral reaction to the frank treatment of sex, and he reminds the lady cynically, "Thou know'st that this cannot be said/ A sinne, nor shame, nor losse of maidenhead." Donne naturally thinks by means of paradoxes and is always quick with a concessive clause or an adversative statement. Therefore in line 7, he begins with "Yet" and proceeds to a counter-argument to the preceding statement. The connotations of a sexual relationship underlie his images. "Enjoyes," "woos," "pampered" and "smells," are carefully scattered among the other words of lines 8 and 9 to project the image he wants--that of the impregnated female. The irony is that it is



applied to the flea. The lady who "denies" him has contributed to the pleasure of the flea, even before it has wooed her. The last line re-emphasizes the frustration of their relationship—"And this, alas, is more than we would doe." The ingenuity of Donne's wit is clear, but underlying it is a deeper problem, one which is subdued unconsciously or consciously. He is suffering the pangs of a male lover deprived of the sexual satisfaction. This does not have to be based on any real experience concerning his relationship with Anne More. These emotions may be indulged in vicariously. Donne's wit is often a clever screen for his deepest emotions.

The second stanza again directs the attention of the lady to the flea, but as we approach the end of line 16, we realize that the personal relationship with the lady is a serious underlying problem. Most critics do not recognize this because Donne has cleverly subdued his emotions and allowed the intellect full freedom. The conceit becomes intricate, although the logical structure is clear. Line 10 gives the final concern of the poet: "three lives spare." Then the following lines help to explicate this. We soon realize that the three lives are those of the flea, the lady, and the poet. The marriage relationship is made more complicated--the flea contains a union within itself, thus becoming marriage bed and temple. Once more Donne uses the concessive "though" (line 14) to direct attention to another serious problem--the animosity of parents and the "living walls of Jet" which isolate the two lovers. Another concessive statement is repeated with rhetorical emphasis, again for the purpose of underlining a serious consideration--this time it is the lady's attitude: "Though use make you apt to kill

me." The word "use" has the common meaning of "custom" and helps the ambiguity of the line. It may mean, custom in killing a flea if it bites you, may lead you to kill me whose blood is part of the flea; or it may mean, custom (the Petrarchan) would have you kill me with your coldness and denial of yourself to me. Then the conceit is cleverly knitted together and concluded: he warns her against committing suicide and sacrilege. If she does this, she will be guilty of three sins--murder, in killing him; suicide, in killing herself; and sacrilege, in killing the flea, their "marriage temple."

It is clear from Donne's superficial wit, that he is being "unserious," to use Leishman's term; but he carefully introduces ideas and innuendoes, which reveal a deeper issue. Donne has reason for introducing the moral question of sin and guilt in all his stanzas. But the issue becomes ludicrous because of the object concerned--a mere flea. The lady in stanza three is called "cruell and soddaine" and the flea is shown to be guilty only in so far as it has sucked a drop of the lady's blood. The pettiness of the "drop" and the "smallness" of the insect are now used for a very cynical and ironical purpose. The conceit comes to an end, and the rhetorical questions, so characteristic of Donne, put the lady before the tribunal. Her triumph is small since the drop of blood has weakened neither her nor her male partner. Then the triplet at the end of the poem sends home the thrust with clever and mischievous effectiveness. Here, once more, the underlying problem is uncovered--the honour which the lady seeks to protect by denying him sexual pleasure is as much as the drop of blood which the flea took from her. The words "death" and "life" then take on new proportions. The

characteristic surprise ending in Donne's witty poems is also here: "took life from thee" is no doubt sarcastic and ironical, for she has triumphed in her not being weaker (lines 23,24). The "flea's death," therefore, assumes greater significance, for in this final stanza it becomes the symbol of her harmless lover killed by her cold, unresponsive attitude.

It might be mere coincidence, but the expression "thou deny'st me" (line 2) and its opposite "thou yield'st to me" (line 20), symmetrically juxtaposed, can be loaded with deadly irony. "How little" in line 2 of stanza one is similarly echoed and underlined by "drop" and "just so much" which conclude the poem.

The Flea is characterized by an unrestricted display of wit without any passion or emotion. However, critics have too easily overlooked the underlying problem, which is perhaps contrived, but not without the basis of a real experience habitually encountered in the day-to-day world.

#### IV. POEMS WITH WIT AND PASSION

The final group of poems (The Canonization, A Feaver and A Valediction: forbidding mourning) illustrates Donne's successful combination of passion and intellectual subtlety. It is important to precede discussion of these poems by the reminder that passion rather than wit is the quality which helps these poems to withstand the critical condemnation of Donne's detractors in the eighteenth century.

Unlike these detractors Coleridge,<sup>23</sup> De Quincey<sup>24</sup> and Gosse<sup>25</sup> recognized the value of passion in Donne's poetry. Moreover, Grierson spoke of Donne's "passionate thinking," and this is another way of indicating Donne's harmony of heart and head, of his passion and wit. An illustration of Grierson's claim begins with The Canonization.

The Canonization has found (and justifiably so) a place in almost every Donne anthology and is undoubtedly one of the poems in which we find genuine poetic passion. Emotion and language are concentrated so intensely that critics have been side-tracked into the tightly-knitted patterns of thoughts and images, and have not shown sufficient concern about the currents of passion which underly the images. Leishman quotes Professor Crofts as stating, after a description of Donne's poetic technique, that

it [Donne's technique] is surely not the technique of a philosophical poet. It suggests rather a man who felt that in the last resort the structures of the intellect were useless, and that contact with ultimate reality could be found only in passion: the passion of love, or the passion of faith.<sup>26</sup>

Leishman queries the word "passion," but this is the right word. Remove this element from The Canonization and all that remains is a gay, frivolous display of wit. Donne's treatment of the theme of love and his bold reverence for the spiritual and physical union of two people who love in the midst of a hostile world reveal an attempt to recapture a

---

<sup>23</sup> Brinkley, Coleridge, pp. 519-520.

<sup>24</sup> Masson, De Quincey's Works, X, 101.

<sup>25</sup> Gosse, "Poetry of Donne," p. 246.

<sup>26</sup> Leishman, Monarch, p. 217.

real experience in a dramatic and passionate manner.

The opening lines of the poem are sudden and dramatic and are more easily appreciated for the rhetorical effect which they produce than for their metrical value as poetry. Coleridge's suggestion of reading Donne by "discovering the Time of each word by the sense of Passion" holds well for this poem. The first line, "For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love," is heavily loaded with passion. The words combine effectively to give the ejaculatory effect of an angry protest. While the second line is part of the angry opening, the sense of passion is not as great. Common images like "five gray haire," "the Kings reall, or his stamped face," reveal the lighter mood of the poet. But then, as we come to the conclusion of the stanza the language is filled with passion again. The vigour and vehemence of the word "contemplate" with its hard "c" and the defiant explosive sound of the consonants "t," and "p," help to convey the heated emotions which the poet feels. The stanza concludes on a note of angry impatience as the poet prepares for a fresh outburst in the following stanza.

The rhetorical pattern of stanza two further illustrates the truth of De Quincey's and Grierson's claims for Donne as a rhetorical poet. Donne uses an artful combination of initial and final consonants to great advantage. The four "wh's" of lines 11 to 14, not only reinforce the effect of the questions, but help the sibilants within the lines to convey the effect of derision and scorn. The succession of sibilant endings in lines 15 and 16 sharpens the scorn of the speaker with their hissing sounds. Observe the combination: "soldiers," "warres," "Lawyers," "Litigious," "which," "quarrels."

Anaphora is another characteristic rhetorical technique which Donne uses with success. He employs this to advantage in the third stanza:

Call us what you will, wee are made such by love;  
Call her one, mee another flye. . . .

In this stanza Donne's passion is linked with intellectual ingenuity and the conceit expands before our eyes with amazing skill. By his choice of images Donne supplies the appropriate atmosphere for his sacred concept of love, an idea implicit in the title of the poem. A religious atmosphere is created by the image of the tapers, and this merges with a sexual and metaphysical one. We have an architectonic pattern of images piled one upon the other:

1. The fly, suggesting lust;
2. The tapers, suggesting the idea of heat which has already been implied in the previous image, and evoking the atmosphere of a sacred temple.
3. The eagle and dove images providing elements of maleness and femaleness respectively.
4. The Phoenix image, suggesting death and resurrection.

The Phoenix image helps to blend all the previous images together both on the physical and spiritual level. The dying of the taper and the fly is now merged with that of the phoenix which consumes itself in flames. The cleverness of the image is seen in its ambiguity. Does the word "die" mean the sex act in the Elizabethan sense of the word, or does it mean death which is physical? Perhaps both are meant. Is the heat sensual passion or elemental heat? The ambiguity provides for either. Then there is the final idea of resurrection or rebirth suggested

by line 26-- "Wee dye and rise the same. . . ." This sets the stage for the final canonization of the two lovers.

This ingenuity is not without its surge of feelings and emotions. Donne's passion of heart is linked with that of his intellect, and the latter weaves image after image until the circular pattern of the poem is completed, and we are back to the secular world of "countries, towns, courts." At this stage Donne and his lover have triumphed over the perplexities of the secular world and have the pattern for ideal love.

That there are conceits in this poem is quite evident, but they are impassioned and carefully wrought and controlled. Each word is forged in the furnace of passion. Herein is the true worth of Donne's poetry. The successful fusion of thought and feeling for which Eliot admires Donne is clearly evident in The Canonization. He attempts the same thing in A Feaver, but not with the same success.

A poem like A Feaver is likely to antagonize the more conservative critic because of its non-conventional and original qualities. It contains none of the traditional images which are to be seen in Elizabethan love poetry--no gods and goddesses, no nymphs and fauns, no knights and ladies, no extended similes of fruits and flowers to which the lady is compared. In this poem Donne simply takes a central idea and constructs images around it centripetally. The lady is the world's soul (an idea elaborated to an excessive degree in the first and second Anniversaries) and her death has cosmic repercussions. This is the central idea to which all others point. In a less original sense Donne is using the Elizabethan idea of the microcosm and macrocosm. However, Donne makes his own witty and ingenious correspondences and analogies

between the lady and the world. Her breath is its "vapors" (line 8) her feaver is the fire that "shall burne this world" (line 14). The "wrangling schooles. . . had none the wit / Unto this knowledge to aspire." Her "burning fits but meteors bee" (line 21). Her "beauty, 'and all parts, . . . / are unchangeable firmament." (lines 23, 24). Compare this with the more traditional and pictorial imagery of Spenser's Epithalamion: His love is one who is adorned with beauty's grace and virtue's store,

Her goodly eyes lyke saphyres shining  
bright,  
Her forehead yvory white,  
Her cheekes lyke apples which the sun hath  
rudded,  
Her lips lyke cherryes charming men to  
byte,  
Her brest like to a bowle of creame uncrud-  
ded,  
Her paps lyke lyllies budded,  
Her snowie necke lyke to a marble towre,  
And all her body like a pallace fayre,  
Ascending uppe, with many a stately stayre,  
To honors seat and chastities sweet bowre.<sup>27</sup>  
(170 - 180)

The contrast between the two descriptions is too self-evident to comment upon.

In A Feaver Donne employs an elaborate chain of images, and thinks passionately. There is a dramatic intensity and a subjective earnestness that appeals to the reader. There is passionate feeling in the lines "Oh doe not die, for I shall hate / All women so, when thou art gone. . . ." We are convinced by the passion behind "I had rather owner bee / Of thee one houre, then all else ever." It is this characteristic

---

<sup>27</sup> Edmund Spenser, The Complete Works (Boston: Houghton Company, [n.d.]), p. 737.



in Donne that drew from Gosse the statement "No other poet of that time, few poets of any time, have equalled the concentrated passion, the delicate, long-drawn musical effects, the bold and ecstatic rapture of Donne at his best."<sup>28</sup> No doubt it is poetic passion which makes the difference between the Donne who is "the greatest poet for some things" and the Donne who should "be hanged."

Donne shows himself as a great poet in the last of our selections in this category---A Valediction: forbidding mourning. This poem beautifully illustrates the ability of Donne to combine genuine feeling and passion with ingenuity of expression. We have evidence from Walton's Life that Donne wrote this poem and gave it to his wife when he left her in 1611 to go to the continent with Robert Drury.<sup>29</sup> At this time his wife was expecting a child and the parting was painful to him. Donne's famous vision two days after in Paris, is an intensification of the unbearable experience of leaving his wife in a condition he knew to be most unhappy for her. This is helpful biographical information, not drawn from the poem, but helpful in elucidating it. These details offered by Walton are an indication of the genuineness of Donne's feelings when he wrote A Valediction: forbidding mourning. Yet in this very poem there exists the metaphysical conceit made famous by Johnson's criticism in his Life of Cowley. The unfairness of this criticism, which so gravely affected Donne's reputation, is evident when seen against the background of the

---

<sup>28</sup> Gosse, "Poetry of Donne," p. 246.

<sup>29</sup> Walton, Lives (O.U.P. edition), p. 42.

circumstances out of which the poem grew. Johnson, unconcerned with these details, wrote:

To the following comparison of a man that travels and his wife that stays at home, with a pair of compasses, it may be doubted whether absurdity or ingenuity has the better claim: . . . 30

He then quotes lines 21 - 35 of A Valediction: forbidding mourning and concludes with the statement:

In all these examples [of metaphysical conceits] it is apparent, that whatever is improper or vicious, is produced by a voluntary deviation from nature in pursuit of something new and strange; and that the writers fail to give delight, by their desire of exciting admiration.<sup>31</sup>

No doubt much has been missed from Donne's Valediction: forbidding mourning if his conceits are said to be "produced by a voluntary deviation from nature." Yet, in all fairness to Johnson, a difficult person to disagree with, he was reading Donne as a critic trained according to the rules of the neoclassical age. It is only unfortunate that unlike Grierson he failed to see Donne against the background of his own age. Donne wrote the conceit of the compass with as much "naturalness" as he wrote the moving simile which introduces his poem:

As virtuous men passe mildly away,  
And whisper to their soules, to goe,  
Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,  
The breath goes now, and some say, no:

So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move. . . .  
(1 - 6)

The dramatic appropriateness of the picture of agitated friends

30 Johnson, Lives, p. 28.

31 Ibid., p. 29.

whispering over their dying companion, whose faltering "breath goes now," sets the right atmosphere for the poem. This is done within the length of four lines, and the deepest passions and emotions are stirred. There is a rhetorical precision in the fourth line that demands more than a passing glance.

We have seen how the mind of Donne moves at a feverish pace which matches the passion of his own heart. This is what takes place between stanzas three to five. There is an upward movement toward the abstract or toward the wider proportions of the cosmos. At times Donne's mind even pushes beyond this level with hyperbolical conceits. Donne moves from the earth which "brings harmes and feares" associated with the world of "dull sublunary lovers (whose soule is sense)," to a world of superior love, a love

. . . so much refin'd,  
That our selves know not what it is,  
Inter-assured of the mind,  
Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse.  
(17 - 20)

The lovers reach a higher realm and this provides a step further to the super-sensible world of soul. The monosyllabic line with its flow of physical objects—"eyes," "lips," "hands"—in rapid succession, serves as stepping stones from the world of sense to that of spirit—the meta-physical world:

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

The vivid conceit of material become spirit ("gold" "beaten" "to ayery thinnesse") matches the thought at this part of the poem. The poem

maintains its feeling and sincerity, but only to a reader familiar with the way in which Donne's mind works. The last three stanzas follow logically upon the metaphysical images of stanza six. The picture of the two lovers merges into that of the "twin compasses." The conceit, despite Johnson's objections, is very appropriate to the theme and intention of the poem. The poem is a valediction, and the idea of departure and travelling is involved in the image of the foot that moves and the one that is "fixt." Donne carefully uses the right word for the purpose. The expression "the other far doth rome" subtly suggests Donne's departure for Paris. The yearning of his wife is like the "leaning" and "harkening" of the foot of the compass. The ambiguity of "comes home" in line 32 effectively speaks of Donne's return.

The last stanza also has its rich ambiguities which serve to describe the movement of the compass on one level and to press home the meaning it has in relation to Donne and his wife, on another level. "Foot" and "runne" tell their own message. "Thy firmness" applies equally to the compass as to Anne Donne's sturdy courage. "My circle" applies both to the figure traced by the compass and to Donne's trip's trip abroad and back. "Just" carries the weight of "correct" when referring to the circle made by the compass; it means "justifiable" when applied to Donne's venture abroad. The last line—"And makes me end, where I begunne"—completes the figure of the traced circle and also describes Donne's return journey.

No doubt there is an ingenuity here that seems to be studied, but Donne is not without the genuineness of feeling and passion that

nullifies any such impression. Perhaps it is offensive to eighteenth-century taste to indulge in the intellectual subtlety which is present in A Valediction: forbidding mourning, but we cannot deny that Grierson is right in insisting that Donne in some of his love poetry is "a poet whose passionate force redeems many errors of taste and art."<sup>32</sup>

This poem demonstrates that Donne's valedictory poems can yield greater results to the literary scholar than to the biographer and yet they have been traditionally used for biographical details. Consider, for instance, the elevation in "So, so break off this last lamenting kiss . . ." (The Expiration), which equals Drayton's passionate line "Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part." ~~(There is more than biography here.)~~ ~~than biography here.~~

It would seem that as long as there is convincing passion in Donne's love poetry, critics feel obligated to find some particular incident which provides an explanation for this expression of passion in verse. But passion is everywhere in Donne's good poetry and should be used to evaluate the poetry itself.

Grierson has rightly raised a question which affects the interpretation of passion in Donne's poetry: how far could a conventional passion inspire a strain in Donne's poetry?<sup>33</sup> The answer is clear-- far enough to allow the reader to be so convinced, that he will find it extremely difficult, even impossible, to distinguish between "conventional" passion and real spontaneous feeling which has arisen from a

---

<sup>32</sup> Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, xlii.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. xxiii.

particular experience in life. Grierson makes it clear that "No poet will sing of love convincingly who has never loved, but that experience will suffice him for many and diverse webs of song and drama."<sup>34</sup> The intention here is not to prove that Donne wrote no occasional poems. That would be wrong. What needs to be made clear again and again is that Donne has been unfairly (perhaps unconsciously so) interpreted, and too often his impassioned poems have been underestimated because they have been used as the means to an end which has not been effective in establishing his reputation as a poet. Where the poems have been studied for their intrinsic worth a step was made toward a true rediscovery of Donne. In this Grierson has distinguished himself. He has expressed his convictions about passion in poetry in unmistakable terms:

Poetry is the language of passion, but the passion which moves the poet most constantly is the delight of making poetry, and very little is sufficient to quicken the imagination to its congenial task. Our soberer minds are apt to think that there must be an actual, particular experience behind every sincere poem. But history refutes the idea of such a simple relation between experience and art.<sup>35</sup>

Donne's Songs and Sonnets allow for varying degrees of passion and wit. Sometimes one exceeds the other, sometimes they both combine effectively, as the last category of poems has illustrated.

The preceding analysis of some of Donne's poetry indicates that his metaphysical poems form part of his best poetry and contain qualities which go unnoticed if the term "metaphysical" is interpreted in its eighteenth-century sense. It has also been shown that several of Donne's occasional poems more richly reward literary analysis than speculative

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

biographical exploration. Moreover, in those poems where there is extraordinary display of wit, Donne has not always succeeded in convincing the reader of his passion or seriousness and has been condemned by critics for levity. However, where passion united with intellectual ingenuity, Donne's poetry was at its best. The examination of the poems selected from the Songs and Sonnets substantiates Grierson's claim, that "if we wish to estimate the poet simply in Donne, we must examine his love-poetry and his religious poetry. It is here that every one who cares for his unique and arresting genius will admit that he must stand or fall as a great poet."<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. xxx.

## CHAPTER V

### DONNE RE-EVALUATED IN THE ELEGIES AND SATYRES

Donne's Elegies and Satyres have been the source of much unfavourable criticism. However, the elegies vindicate the claim of De Quincey and Grierson that Donne is a rhetorical poet, and a re-evaluation of his elegies on this basis exempts him from much that is otherwise reprehensible. The rhetorical tradition gives considerable importance to passion, and this element appears in Donne's elegies in such a way as to redeem them from severe censure. On the other hand, the overwittiness of some of the elegies has been one of the causes of Donne's unpopularity. Added to this source of disfavour was what the Victorian age called Donne's "coarseness" and "indecenty" as an elegist. However, shifts in taste in the twentieth century have favoured easy acceptance of sex as a topic for free and open treatment in literature and this has allowed for a more favourable attitude to Donne in our time. It is part of the purpose of this chapter to illustrate these details from the Elegies.

The Satyres more than the Elegies have brought disrepute to Donne, and in the eighteenth century had attracted hostile criticism for their metrical roughness. The twentieth century, though more sympathetic to Donne, has not been able to justify all his irregularities. His metrical roughness, abstruseness, indecenty and his unimpassioned wittiness still remain inexcusable in some of his satires. Moreover, the wit which he displays in his satires has attracted much



artless imitation which has proven harmful to his reputation since the Restoration period. An analysis of some of the Satyres will demonstrate these observations.

First, brief consideration will be given to the Elegies, and after this, to some of the Satyres. Discussion of the Elegies will be restricted to questions of style and then to Donne's treatment of his theme. An attempt will be made to vindicate his position where he has been misjudged, and to show where he is vulnerable to criticism. While the Elegies and Satyres are not the basis of Donne's greatness or rediscovery as a poet, they contain some qualities which have helped the rediscovery of Donne.

#### I. THE ELEGIES RECONSIDERED AS RHETORICAL POETRY

In choosing the elegy as a poetic genre, Donne was influenced by Ovid whose elegiac style is characteristically rhetorical. However, while Donne's rhetorical style, his themes, and the tone of his elegies recall Ovid, he did not use the section of Ovid's works from which contemporary writers were drawing their themes and ideas. Leishman explains this originality on Donne's part:

Donne's predecessors had exploited classical mythology and classical legend and had drawn largely on the Ovid of the Metamorphoses; Donne, who despised such mere ornaments and childish fancies, proceeded to do something much more daring and original, something, too, which was the almost complete antithesis of that Petrarchan adoration and Platonic idealism of which, together with classical mythology and classical allusions, he and many of his contemporaries had

had more than enough: he proceeded to reproduce something of the tone, the situations and the cynical wit of Ovid's Amores.<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious from this explanation that Donne was consciously seeking to make innovations at a time when the Renaissance spirit was still felt in literature. However, to later centuries his marked departure from things Elizabethan singled him out for criticism. Gosse's reactions are pertinent at this point. He stated in 1928, that Donne began a new age, but that what he had done to the body of English literature was not a laudatory accomplishment.<sup>2</sup> This merely proves that as late as the early twentieth century, Donne's originality and unusualness influenced public opinion against him. The Elegies therefore, by their sheer originality of theme and intention, exposed Donne to discreditable comment.

Grierson, on the other hand, was prepared to acknowledge Donne's freedom from traditionalism and his essentially English attitude of defying restricting rules. Unlike Gosse's caustic comments on Donne's reaction to the Elizabethan tradition, Grierson's remarks are more considerate: "Donne's influence was powerful for good and for ill. He smashed the Petrarchan convention with its sugared diction, and brought love-poetry some way back to Nature."<sup>3</sup> Donne did not only display great originality in his selections from Ovid's work, but in his Elegies he adopted an outspokenness of style and manner which recalls Ovid. He also reveals a conception of love which is much like his Latin model. He

---

<sup>1</sup> Leishman, Monarch, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Gosse, Modern Literature, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> Grierson and Smith, Critical History, p. 99.

avoids Ovid's smoothness of style with its flashing epigrams. He introduces, instead, the dramatic manner and cynical wit of some of his Songs and Sonnets and a most striking realism accentuated by a very characteristic sense of logical structure and subtlety of argument. All these qualities distinguish Donne from Ovid and from his Elizabethan contemporaries. However, with regard to form, Donne shows a remarkable consciousness of the general characteristics of elegiac verse. Critics have not been entirely just in their criticism of Donne in this respect. He is shown to be too much of the rebel and careless practitioner whose muse, according to Coleridge's humorous line, "on dromedary trots."

We shall attempt to show Donne's consciousness of poetic form and style in his Elegies. It must be remembered at the start, that Donne is not slavishly following Ovid. He only shows an awareness of the Ovidian form of elegy which he adapts to his own purposes. Ovid and some of the other Latin poets used the word "elegy" to describe a love-poem written in elegiacs. However, the distinctive quality about elegiac verse is that it is mainly rhetorical, antithetical in word, phrase and thought, and vivid in such a way as to excite emotion.<sup>4</sup> Donne's elegies do not all reveal these qualities but some of them show similar characteristics. To illustrate this we shall select appropriate passages from the Elegies.

Donne achieves some of the rhetorical effect which is an essential part of the elegiac style, by employing parataxis, parenthesis,

---

<sup>4</sup>W.H.D. Rouse, Demonstrations in Latin Elegiac Verse (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), p. 1.

by using a careful balance of words and clauses (antithesis), and by repetition. The whole idea behind this technique is to avoid complex sentences and clauses by eliminating words of co-ordination and subordination. We shall note in succession examples of parataxis, parenthesis, antithesis and repetition, which indicate Donne's conscious use of elegiac techniques that are characteristic of Ovid.<sup>5</sup>

(i) Parataxis:

(a) Here let mee warr; in these armes lett mee lye . . . .  
(XX. 29)

(b) Thy hart thy ransome is; take myne for mee.  
(XX. 32)

(ii) Parenthesis:

(a) Themselves are mystic books, which only wee  
(Whom their imputed grace will dignifie)  
Must see reveal'd.  
(XIX. 41 - 43)

(b) . . . The falt was mine, impute it to me,  
Or rather to conspiring destinie,  
Which (since I lov'd for forme before) decreed,  
That I should suffer when I lov'd indeed . . . .  
(XII. 21 - 24)

(iii) Antithesis or balance of words and clauses:

(a) Those warrs the ignorant, these th'experienc'd love,  
There wee are always under, here above.  
(XX. 35 - 36)

He varies this method by sometimes using the same word in the two phrases:

(a) \*One woman first, and then one thing in her.<sup>6</sup>  
(XVIII. 10)

---

<sup>5</sup>Parallel examples can be easily found in Ovid's Heroides and Amores. Rouse offers a good selection of elegiac characteristics in Ovid on pp. 1 - 12 of his book Demonstrations in Latin Elegiac Verse.

<sup>6</sup>In the examples with asterisks the italics are mine.



(b) Full nakedness! All joyes are due to thee . . . .  
(XIX. 33)

(iii) Interrogation:

The questions asked in these constructions do not demand and answer and are of a rhetorical kind:

To make the doubt cleare, that no woman's true,  
Was it my fate to prove it strong in you?  
Thought I, but one had breathed purest aire,  
And must she needs be false because she's faire?  
Is it your beauties marked, or of your youth,  
Or your perfection, not to study truth?  
Or thinke you heaven is deafe, or hath no eyes?  
Or those it hath, smile at your perjuries?  
(XV. 1 - 8)

From these examples which reveal Donne as a conscious artist fully cognisant of the demands of elegiac verse, we more fully understand De Quincey's statement that "the first very eminent rhetorician in the English Literature is Donne." It should be evident to us that Donne's Elegies do not really suffer on the basis of their conformity with the poetic genre which they exemplify.

## II. THE ROLE OF PASSION IN THE ELEGIES

We shall apply another test to them. This time we shall consider the important qualification of "passion" and see whether by virtue of this quality, any of the elegies measure up to the standard of Donne's best poetry as we have shown in the Songs and Sonnets. Wallerstein, in discussing the poetic of the seventeenth century, clearly states: "That 'rhetorical' teaching of poetic, training the student to use the formulas of figure and patterns set forth in the rhetorical compendia was very widespread."<sup>7</sup> She also speaks of the common practice of imitating those who, among other things, had excelled as masters of rhetoric:

---

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Wallerstein, Studies in Seventeenth-Century Poetic ([n.p.]: University of Wisconsin Press, 1950), p. 12.

Meanwhile, in daily teaching and practice, under the influence of a pedantic humanism, of drilling by the little endowed, administered to the immature and prevaillingly less endowed, and of the theory of rhetoric as an art of ornament, imitation soon became a slavish imitation of themes or motives and of incidents and then of images and phrase patterns, made available not only in the poets but in florilegia and commonplace books. Presently not only classical examples, Petrarch, the Latin-writing humanists, but new writers such as Donne, became models and quarries.<sup>8</sup>

Wallerstein mentions with great emphasis, the role of passion in such imitation:

The delineation of passion is important both from the point of view of the imitation and from that of the reader's total aesthetic experience. In the imitation, the passions and the accidental causes which arouse them constitute those actualities in the life of man in which the ideal realities are embodied.<sup>9</sup>

Not only does Donne concentrate passion into his Elegies, but his whole concept of love is that it is a passion, and this influences his motivation and creativity as a poet. Grierson believes that this conception of love is an escape from the "ascetic idealism" of the Courtly love tradition:

The true escape from courtly or ascetic idealism was a poetry which should do justice to love as a passion in which body and soul alike have their part, and of which there is no reason to repent.<sup>10</sup>

It now remains to be shown from the Elegies that passion is an element which helps to give them a place of recognition among Donne's poetry. We shall take our first example from Elegie XII, His Parting from her.

---

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>10</sup>Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, xlvi.

Donne begins this elegy with an apostrophe to Night, and by this means secures the emotional effect which he desires. The passions and feelings displayed in these early lines give the impression that there is a real experience behind the poem, but this need not be the case. The images used in the poem are Spenserian and reveal a part of Donne which is very unusual. This, and other Elizabethan characteristics relating to the language and imagery of the poem, have led some to think that Shakespeare and not Donne had written parts of the elegy.<sup>11</sup> Donne's feelings are as keen as Job's (Job 3: 1-6) when he invokes the darkness of night to enclose him. He then proceeds to claim that his darkness is worse since he parted from his lady. Night is a shadow of that hell which he will suffer when his Love is gone:

Alas the darkest Magick cannot do it,  
 Thou and greate Hell to boot are shadows to it.  
 Should Cinthia quit thee, Venus, and each starre,  
 It would not forme one thought dark as mine are.  
 I could lend thee obscureness now, and say,  
 Out of my self, There should be no more Day,  
 Such is already my felt want of sight,  
 Did not the fires within me force a light.  
 (5 - 12)

Another apostrophe follows quickly on the one to Night, and this time Donne lets us know his conception of love as a fire (a burning passion). The paradox of darkness and light which brings the previous image and the present one together, reveals Donne's characteristic manner of thinking in opposites:

Oh Love, that fire and darkness should me mixt,  
 Or to thy Triumphs soe strange torments fixt?  
 Is't because thou thy self are blind, that wee  
 Thy Martyrs must no more each other see?  
 (13 - 16)

The poet answers his questions in the negative, then accuses Destiny

---

<sup>11</sup> Leishman, Monarch, p. 66. Leishman suggests lines 67-82 as a possible part of Shakespeare's comedies.



which "decreed" that he "should suffer" when he "lov'd indeed." Love is a consuming passion that brings pain to the lover. Donne returns later to his interrogation and this time he leaves off accusing "blinded Justice" and resumes his rhetorical questions to Love, and again the reader receives the impression that Donne conceives of love as a burning passion:

Was't not enough that thou didst dart thy fires  
 Into our blouds, inflaming our desires,  
 And made'st us sigh and glow, and pant, and burn,  
 And then thy self into our flame did'st turn?  
 (35 - 38)

We can feel the burning fervour and the intensity of feelings in the rhetoric and in the rhythm of the line. Donne is indeed writing effective poetry at this point. The rising rhythm and passionate vigour of line 37 would move any reader:

And made'st us sigh and glow, and pant, and burn. . . .

Of Donne's Anniversarie (lines 1 - 5), Grierson has very fittingly commented: "In Donne's poem one feels the quickening of the brain, the vision extending its range, the passion gathering sweep with the expanding rhythms . . . .<sup>12</sup> This statement applies quite appropriately to the language the poet uses at this point in his twelfth elegy.

It has been stated before that Donne employs rhetorical questions for vividness in much the same way as Ovid. He does this between lines 41 - 53 with great success. He is no doubt making use of the Ovidian idea of the lover who has a married mistress, the husband of whom is always a threat to the lover's successful exploits:

---

<sup>12</sup>Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, xlv.

And those so ambush'd round with household spies,  
 And over all, thy husbands towering eyes  
 That flam'd with oylie sweat of jealousy . . . .  
 (41 - 43)

Compare Donne's effective rhetoric with Ovid's light, mischievous contemptuous lines:

ante veni, quam vir--nec quid, si veneris ante,  
 possit agi video; sed tamen ante veni.  
 cum premet ille torum, vultu comes ipsa modesto  
 ibis, ut accumbas--clam mihi tange pedem!  
 me specta nutusque meos vultumque loquacem;  
 excipe furtivas et refer ipsa notas.  
 verba superciliis sine voce loquentia dicam;  
 verba leges digitis, verba notata mero.<sup>13</sup>  
 (Amores I. iv 13 - 20)

Grant Showerman offers the following English translation for these lines:

Arrive before your husband--and yet I do not see what  
 can be done if you do arrive before; and yet, arrive  
 before him. When he shall press the couch, you will  
 come yourself with modest mien to recline beside him--  
 in secret give my foot a touch! Keep your eyes on me,  
 to get my nods and the language of my eyes; and catch  
 my stealthy signs, and yourself return them. With my  
 brows I shall say to you words that speak without  
 sound; you will read words from my fingers, you will  
 read words traced in wine.<sup>14</sup>

Another apostrophe follows as Donne addresses Fortune who is not "worth" his "least exclaim." The remainder of the poem contains some of the most exquisite passages on love, and though some have questioned whether Donne wrote them, they are undoubtedly great proof of his ability to concentrate passion into sublime language and rise above the coarse sensuality that has often been associated with his Elegies. Notice in

---

<sup>13</sup>Grant Showerman(trans.), Ovid with an English Translation: Heroides and Amores (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1958), p. 328.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 329.

the following passage how Donne uses natural imagery. According to Gransden, "he is rarely interested in natural phenomena for their own sake":<sup>15</sup>

I will not look upon the quickning Sun,  
 But straight her beauty to my sense shall run;  
 The ayre shall note her soft, the fire most pure;  
 Water suggest her clear, and the earth sure.  
 Time shall not lose our passages; the Spring  
 How fresh our love was in the beginning;  
 The Summer how it ripened in the eare;  
 And Autumn, what our golden harvests were.  
 (XII. 73-80)

The conclusion of the elegy conveys much feeling and conviction and leaves little or no impression of artificiality:

And when I change my Love, I'll change my heart;  
 Nay, if I wax but cold in my desire,  
 Think, heaven hath motion lost, and the world, fire:  
 Much more I could, but many words have made  
 That, oft, suspected which men would perswade;  
 Take therefore all in this: I love so true,  
 As I will never look for less in you.  
 (98-104)

Grierson spoke with usual appropriateness of "the passion that rises superior to sensuality and wit, and takes wing into a more spiritual and ideal atmosphere of His parting from her."<sup>16</sup>

Donne reveals more of his passionate dignity in the Fifth Elegy, His Picture. He is more than anything else a dramatic poet in this poem.<sup>17</sup> He vividly portrays an experience with which he seemed so

<sup>15</sup>K.W. Gransden, John Donne (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1954), p. 98.

<sup>16</sup>Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, xli.

<sup>17</sup>Leishman, Monarch, p. 73.

familiar--the experience of departing from his lady. More often than not, he excels in his description of such scenes, imaginary or real, as his valedictory poems show. The language Donne uses in His Picture is impassioned but tender and reveals a side of his character which has escaped critics who were too willing to label him "metaphysical."

Observe the tender tones of:

That which in him was faire and delicate,  
Was but the milke, which in loves childish state  
Did nurse it: who now is growne strong enough  
To feed on that, which to disused tasts seemes tough.  
(17 - 20)

When the word "metaphysical" meant something objectionable, no doubt these good qualities of Donne's poetry escaped the notice of critics who were preoccupied with seeking out his faults. While Grierson has done much to recover Donne's poetry from this unjust treatment, the temptation has attracted some of our modern critics. Leishman has wisely commented on this rash treatment of Donne: "The affixing of the label 'metaphysical' to Donne has, I fear, saved far too many people the trouble and deprived them of the fascination of trying to discover what his poetry is really like."<sup>18</sup> Even in the midst of some of his most witty and cynical lines Donne can insert some of his most brilliant passages. In Elegy IV entitled The Perfume, with its exaggerated treatment of an amorous situation where the stealthy lover is discovered, we have the beautiful couplets:

Yet love these Sorceries did remove, and move  
Thee to gull thine owne mother for my love.  
Thy little brethren, which like Faiery Sprights  
Oft skipt into our chamber, those sweet nights,  
And kist, and ingled on thy fathers knee,

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

Were brib'd next day, to tell what they did see:  
 The grim eight-foot-high iron-bound serving-man,  
 That oft names God in oathes, and onely than,  
 He that to barre the first gate, doth as wide  
 As the great Rhodian Colossus stride,  
 Which, if in hell no other paines there were,  
 Makes mee feare hell, because he must be there:  
 Though by thy father he were hir'd to this,  
 Could never witsse any touch or kisse.

(25 - 38)

This ability to combine good poetry with playful exaggeration is a credit to Donne which few have granted.

We cannot do better than to conclude this discussion of the element of poetic passion in Donne's Elegies by referring to Elegie XVI, On His Mistris, which Grierson considers to be "beautiful, if not flawless."<sup>19</sup>

Passion and feeling and earnestness combine with elegance of diction in this poem. The effective use of repetition for rhetorical effect is seen in the opening lines as Donne swears:

By our first strange and fatall interview,  
 By all desires which thereof did ensue,  
 By our long starving hopes, by that remorse  
 Which my words masculine perswasive force  
 Begot in thee, and by the memory  
 Of hurts, which spies and rivals threatned me,  
 I calmly beg . . . .

(1 - 7)

Then in his usual hyperbolic fashion, finding that the cumulative prepositional phrases do not seem to convey enough potency of feeling and meaning, he reswears all of his vows: "Here I unsweare, and over-sweare them thus, / Thou shalt not love by wayes so dangerous." (11 - 12). Donne then shows his familiarity with Greek mythology and his skill in

---

<sup>19</sup>Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, xliii.

weaving it into his love poetry, a characteristic which is almost completely absent (perhaps by choice) from his Songs and Sonnets: In

Thy (else Almighty) beautie cannot move the test. But what  
Rage from the Seas, nor thy love teach them love,  
Nor tame wilde Boreas harshnesse; Thou hast reade  
How roughly hee in peeces shivered  
Faire Orithea, whom he swore he lov'd.  
(19 - 23)

The poet-lover continues his amorous protestations to the lady and introduces a striking combination of images. His lines then become studded with the "massy diamonds" of which De Quincey tells us:

It may be conceded that most of the elegies are witty and . . . O stay here, for, for thee  
England is onely a worthy Gallerie, element of playfulness  
To walke in expectation, till from thence  
Our greatest King call thee to his presence.  
When I am gone, dreame me some happinesse,  
Nor let thy lookes our long hid love confesse,  
Nor praise, nor dispraise me, nor blesse nor curse  
Openly loves force, nor in bed fright thy Nurses, and a  
With midnights startings, crying out, oh, oh  
Nurse, o my love is slaine, I saw him goe  
O'r the white Alpes alone; I saw him I,  
Assail'd, fight, taken, stabb'd, bleed, fall, and die.  
(43 - 54)

The heavy accents of the last line of this passage demonstrate Donne's reason why the Elegies are not placed in the category of Donne's Songs and Sonnets, or his religious poetry.<sup>20</sup> Each word reveals a new action

In his display of wittiness, Donne can be shocking and absurd, and vividly tells a story of a battle fought and concluded in the most fatal manner. The drama and rhetoric of the lines stir the deepest

And Sailing towards her India, in that way  
passions of the reader, who, like the lady, sees her loved here, "Assail'd,  
fight, taken, stabb'd, bleed, fall, and die." This is Donne at his best.  
or very bold in his manner of entreaty, as in Elegy XIX, Going to Bed:

<sup>20</sup>To teach thee, I am naked first; why then  
Donne makes equally effective use of asyndeton in Elegy XX,  
line 38: "Neere thrusts, pikes, stabs, yea bullets hurt not here."

<sup>21</sup>Leishman, Monarch, p. 90.

We have demonstrated sufficiently the fact that passion exists in Donne's Elegies and that they contain some of his best poetry. In this regard, then, the Elegies have in part stood the test. But what about Donne's wittiness, which as we have seen from our preceding chapter, has led him into embarrassing positions when it was not combined with poetic passion?

### III. THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF WIT IN THE ELEGIES

It may be conceded that most of the elegies are witty and reflect the tone and manner of Ovid, but "this element of playfulness and trifling is by no means incompatible with varying degrees of seriousness. . . ." <sup>21</sup> This wittiness and ingenuity show themselves through shocking statements, absurdities, paradox, impudent remarks, and a certain measure of argumentativeness. All these characteristics make for various reactions among critics from century to century and are not the qualities which represent greatness in Donne. This is probably the reason why the Elegies are not placed in the category of Donne's Songs and Sonnets, or his religious poetry.

In his display of wittiness, Donne can be shocking and absurd, as in Elegy XVIII, Loves Progress:

And Sailing towards her India, in that way  
Shall at her fair Atlantick Navell stay . . . .  
(65 - 66)

or very bold in his manner of entreaty, as in Elegy XIX, Going to Bed:

To teach thee, I am naked first; why than  
What needst thou have more covering then a man.  
(47 - 48)

---

<sup>21</sup>Leishman, Monarch, p. 90.

or he can add the greatest impropriety to intensify the effect of his shocks:

Had it beene some bad smell, he would have thought  
That his owne feet, or breath, that smell had wrought.  
(IV. 45 - 46)

He can be paradoxical in the extreme, as he is in The Perfume where thematically the idea of sweetness is introduced, but the suggestions of offensiveness are present. The previous quotation illustrates this fact. Donne's wit is not limited to brief shocks; he can descend to elaborate demonstrations of great absurdity and paradox. Who would think that perfume is the object which is described by the following lines?

Base excrement of earth, which dost confound  
Sense, from distinguishing the sicke from sound;  
By thee the seely Amorous sucks his death  
By drawing in a leprous harlots breath;  
By thee, the greatest staine to mans estate  
Falls on us, to be call'd effeminate;  
Though you be much lov'd in the Princes hall,  
There, things that seeme, exceed substantiall;  
Gods, when yee fum'd on altars, were pleas'd well,  
Because you'were burnt, not that they lik'd your smell;  
You'are loathsome all, being taken simply alone,  
Shall wee love ill things joyn'd, and hate each one?  
(IV. 57 - 68)

Donne's wit assumes an Ovidian impudence in

I love her well, and would, if need were, dye  
To doe her service. But followes it that I  
Must serve her onely, when I may have choice  
Of other beauties, and in change rejoice?  
The law is hard, and shall not have my voice.  
(XVII. 21 - 25)

Many of Donne's impudent remarks are witty by virtue of their tonal value, and do not need extensive illustration since so much of the tone in his Elegies is similar to the well-known tone of Ovid's Amores.



Donne's witty argumentativeness is demonstrated in The Anagram where he argues in favour of the hugest absurdities. For example, a small eye is a defect to be compensated for by a huge mouth:

Marry, and love thy Flavia, for, shee  
 Hath all things, whereby others beautious bee,  
 For, though her eyes be small, her mouth is great . . . .  
 (II. 1 - 3)

He pushes the argument ad absurdum by a series of concessive clauses introduced by a repetitive "though." In each case he defends the lady's deficiency in one respect by a deficiency considered as a good quality in another respect:

Though they be Ivory, yet her teeth be jeat,  
 Though they be dimme, yet she is light enough,  
 And though her harsh haire fall, her skinne is rough;  
 What though her cheeks be yellow, her haire's red,  
 Give her thine, and she hath a maydenhead.  
 (II. 4 - 8)

This Third Elegy, Change, is another witty argument which favours changefulness in women. He attempts a similar undertaking in his Paradoxes and Problems. This attempt in prose may be profitably compared with his witty, dialectical effort in verse. For example, compare Paradox I:

That Women are Inconstant, I with any man confess, but that Inconstancy is a bad quality, I against any man will maintain: For every thing as it is one better than another, so is it fuller of change; The Heavens themselves continually turn, the Stars move, the Moon changeth; Fire whirlleth, Aire flyeth, Water ebbs and flowes, the face of the Earth altereth her looks, time staies not; the Colour that is most light, will take most dyes: so in Men, they that have the most reason are the most alterable in their designes, and the darkest or most ignorant, do seldomest change; therefore Women changing more than Men, have also more Reason.<sup>22</sup>

with

Women are made for men, not him, nor mee.  
 Foxes and goats; all beasts change when they please,  
 Shall women, more hot, wily, wild then these,

<sup>22</sup> Hayward, Poetry and Prose, p. 335.

Be bound to one man, and did Nature then  
 Idly make them apter to'endure then men?  
 They'are our clogges, not their owne; if a man bee  
 Chain'd to a galley, yet the galley'is free;  
 Who hath a plow-land, casts all his seed corne there,  
 And yet allows his ground more corne should beare;  
 Though Danuby into the sea must flow,  
 The sea receives the Rhene, Volga, and Po.

(III. 10 - 20)

or with

More then thy hate, I hate'it, rather let mee  
 Allow her change, then change as oft as shee,  
 And soe not teach, but force my'opinion  
 To love not any one, nor every one.  
 To live in one land, is captivitie,  
 To runne all countries, a wild roguery;  
 Waters stincke soone, if in one place they bide,  
 And in the vast sea are mor putrifi'd:  
 But when they kisse one banke, and leaving this  
 Never looke backe, but the next banke doe kisse,  
 Then are they purest; Change'is the nursery  
 Of musicke, joy, life, and eternity.

(III. 25 - 36)

We have already seen what these various extravagances in Donne's witty poems have caused so far as his Songs and Sonnets were concerned. No doubt the elegies may have suffered on similar grounds in the eighteenth century. But there was a more sympathetic and intelligent approach to these poems when Grierson came to the scene and we find him remarking that there are "Elegies which seem to our taste most reprehensible [but] are aerated by a wit which makes us almost forget their indecency."<sup>23</sup> It is to this "indecency" which we will now turn our attention.

#### IV. THE QUESTION OF INDECENCY IN THE ELEGIES

The explanation for Donne's unpopularity in the Victorian period, before he was publicized by Gosse and rediscovered by Grierson,

---

<sup>23</sup>Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, xl.

lies in the attitude of that age to sex. Houghton informs us: "In the Victorian home swarming with children sex was a secret. It was the skeleton in the parental chamber. No one mentioned it."<sup>24</sup> The young boy was taught to idealize women, to consider them "as creatures more like angels than human beings—an image wonderfully calculated not only to dissociate love from sex, but to turn love into worship, and worship of purity."<sup>25</sup> Linked with the Victorian ethic of purity destroyed later by Freud and by the disrupting effects of the World War, is Victorian prudery, which according to Houghton,<sup>26</sup> and even his rustic works as a

whole? has come to be used loosely and broadly to cover all efforts to conceal the facts of life: the demand for expurgated editions of English classics, the drawing up of indexes of books or authors not to be read, especially by girls, the powerful condemnation (and hence in effect prohibition) of any candid treatment of sex in literature . . . .<sup>26</sup>

On audiences used to these restrictions, Donne's elegies had the worst impression. Even A.B. Grosart, a nineteenth-century editor of Donne's works, considered it necessary to "deplore that poetry, in every way so memorable and potential, should be stained to uncleanness in sorrowfully too many places."<sup>27</sup> He consequently selected parts of Donne which justified printing. Not only do we more fully understand the response by Victorians to the more sensual and outspoken elegies, but we find that Donne's levity concerning serious moral matters, and especially the love

<sup>24</sup> Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, [n.d.]), p. 353.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 355. <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 356.

<sup>27</sup> Weaver, "Reputation in the Nineteenth Century," p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> Houghton, Victorian Mind, p. 357.

relationship, was not a practice to be condoned by Victorians: "Levity is what Queen Victoria found 'not amusing.' It is light treatment of serious things, especially sexual evil."<sup>28</sup> Since the Victorian period the change in moral criteria has been influential on the ready acceptance of Donne. Sex and levity are matters which do not provoke the same frowns from a modern audience. These attitudes offer some explanation for the Victorian response to Donne and his treatment of sex in his Elegies. But what are the particular characteristics that have so affected acceptance of Donne's Elegies, and even his poetic works as a whole?

We shall demonstrate from a few selections, the type of characteristics which are likely to offend the Victorian taste and which were perfectly acceptable at Donne's time. We may take, first, Donne's deliberately blunt and coarse descriptions of the female person in Elegy VIII, entitled The Comparison.

In this Elegy he makes some crude, ridiculous comparisons between his mistress and another mistress. It is much in the manner of Ovid's preposterous, epigrammatic statements. Observe the overt references to the parts of the female that would shock the Victorian:

As the Almighty Balme of th<sup>e</sup>early East,  
Such are the sweat drops of my Mistris breast,  
And on her<brow> her skin such lustre sets,  
They seeme no sweat drops, but pearle coronets.

(3 - 6)

This nauseous image is expanded in the most painfully detailed manner:

Ranke sweaty froth thy Mistresse's brow defiles,  
Like spermatique issue of ripe menstruous boiles,  
Or like the skumme, which, by needs lawlesse law  
Enforc'd, Sanserra's starved men did draw  
From parboild shooes, and bootes, and all the rest

---

<sup>28</sup> Houghton, Victorian Mind, p. 357.

Which were with any soveraigne fatnes blest,  
 And like vile lying stones in saffrond tinne,  
 Or warts, or wheales, they hang upon her skinne.  
 (7 - 14)

Donne bluntly speaks of the lady's head as "a rough-hewne statue of jeat/  
 Where marks for eyes, nose, mouth are yet scarce set"; and the skin of  
 her breast appears to be "worme eaten" and to "stinke within." He is  
 almost like Swift in his repulsively sensuous images so crudely thrown  
 together: "Swolne fingers of thy gouty hand"; "kisses as filthy and  
 more, / As a worme sucking an invenom'd sore." He is not wrong when he  
 concludes that these "comparisons are odious." For fifty-three lines  
 he indulges in this Falstaffian buffoonery which merits the detestation  
 of both Victorian and modern readers.

Loves Progress (Elegy XVIII)--very Ovidian as far as its  
 impudent tone is concerned--is as detailed a description of the female  
 frame as any Elizabethan mind could imagine. The geographical imagery  
 of a voyage is so subtle that, as Grierson suggests, we almost forget  
 the "indecenty." By subtle images Donne progresses from the lady's hair  
 to her genital organs (centrique part) and after this he does the same  
 thing from the feet upward. This is as sensual a description of love's  
 progress as one can imagine. It must be admitted that Donne is playing  
 a lewd game. Whether it offers aesthetic satisfaction does not seem to  
 be his concern.

His nineteenth elegy, Going to Bed, which may have been inspired  
 by Ovid's description of his experience on the couch with Corinna in  
 Book I, Canto XIV, is not as shockingly impudent and indecent as Loves  
Progress. Hunt calls it "one of Donne's most intricate and exciting

pieces of intellectual virtuosity"<sup>29</sup> and speaks of the conclusion as being "something more than a piece of mere clever indecency."<sup>30</sup> Hunt is echoing Grierson's remark,<sup>31</sup> but in a more daring fashion. It is worthy of notice that this modern comment on one of Donne's most sensual and outspoken elegies is a perfect contrast to the Victorian critic. Hunt's discussion of the poem is very interesting. His remarks on lines 40 - 48 are a fitting comment on the change of attitude to Donne since the turn of the century. In speaking of the imagery of these lines he states:

This twist in the reference of the word is enforced also in the Victorian and even in the twentieth century. No doubt, the effect of these lines for the reader of a theologically religious age: they do nothing less than identify a woman's genitals with the Essence of God.<sup>32</sup>

Although Hunt's argument leads him to such conclusions as this, he is still prepared to see in Elegy XIX more than "a piece of mere clever indecency."

It may be claimed that the poem has in it that which would invite hostile reaction from a Victorian reader and would provoke a completely different response from a modern audience depending, of course, on the religious and moral susceptibilities of the individual involved.

<sup>29</sup> I shall now turn our attention to the Satyres, which may be called the "Achilles heel" of Donne. It is here that he is weakest.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II xl.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., O.E.T. edition, II, xlii.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. xli.

It might be said in concluding this discussion of the elegies, that according to Grierson, "The finest note in Donne's love-poetry is the note of joy, the joy of mutual and contented passion."<sup>33</sup> This passion exists in Donne's best elegies. Without doubt there is also a strong rhetorical sense and a pronounced consciousness of style in Donne's best elegiac pieces. It was shown, however, that with the predominance of wit manifested variously through shocking absurdities, excessive paradox, impudence and dialectical argument, Donne's elegies do not attract the most favourable critical comment. His open treatment of sex in some of the Elegies has been a cause of his unpopularity in the Victorian period, but Grierson has led the way to a more tolerant and even favourable attitude to this characteristic in his poetry. No doubt, changes in the attitude and tastes of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been consequential factors in the unpopularity and subsequent rediscovery of Donne.

A remark from Grierson will provide a fitting conclusion before we proceed to Donne's Satyres:

But however we may explain or palliate the tone of these poems [the Elegies] it is impossible to deny their power, the vivid and packed force with which they portray a variously mooded passion working through a swift and subtle brain.<sup>34</sup>

#### V. THE VERSIFICATION OF THE SATYRES AND CRITICAL OPINION

We shall now turn our attention to the Satyres, which may be called the "Achilles heel" of Donne. It is here that he is weakest.

---

<sup>33</sup>Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, xlii.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. xli.

To a great extent the Satyres have led to Donne's unpopularity during the eighteenth century and provide the true basis for adverse criticism. Since satire was popular in the eighteenth century, Donne's Satyres, though a negligible part of his works, were read and severely criticized for their failure to meet the requirements of the satirical writers of the day. Luckily this part of his poetry is small. Even modern poets have not been able to say anything very commendatory about Donne's Satyres (Satyre III excepted).

Grierson's comments are mainly biographical.<sup>35</sup> Saintsbury,<sup>36</sup> in his introduction to the Muses' Library edition of Donne's poems, states that Donne's metrical ruggedness was deliberate:

---

<sup>35</sup> Grierson, O.S.A. edition, pp. xxv-xxviii.

<sup>36</sup> Saintsbury writes more extensively on Donne's metrics in his History of English Prosody. London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1923, II, 159-166. He makes it quite clear that the mere Persian licence of satiric roughness will not cover the "enormous difference" between Donne's unrhythmical and rhythmical poetry. He cites lines from Chambers' edition of Donne's poetry (Satyre VII) to illustrate a part of Donne's "labyrinth of cacophonies."

He offers as a mere attractive temptation, the following speculation about Donne's metrics: "Sometimes I have been tempted to think that Donne and others thought themselves entitled to scazontics--that is to say, iambic lines with spondaic or trochaic endings, such as the ancient satirists who used the metre often preferred. But I am by no means sure that a bolder explanation, and one thoroughly in harmony with the general results of the inquiry on which this book is based, may not be applicable--to wit, that Donne, recognising the classic practice of equivalence and substitution, used it in experiment more freely than wisely, as upon the corpus, admittedly vile, of satire."

It is interesting to note that Saintsbury calls this section of his book "The anarchy of the Satires."

<sup>37</sup> Saintsbury, History of English Prosody, p. 166.

<sup>38</sup> Saintsbury, History of English Prosody, p. 166.

<sup>39</sup> Saintsbury, History of English Prosody, p. 166.

<sup>40</sup> Saintsbury, History of English Prosody, p. 166.



It is now, I believe, pretty well admitted by all competent judges that the astonishing roughness of the Satirists of the late sixteenth century was not due to any general ignoring of the principles of melodious English verse, but to a deliberate intention arising from the same sort of imperfect erudition which had in other ways, so much effect on the verse of the Renaissance generally.<sup>37</sup>

W.F. Melton (The Rhetoric of John Donne's verse, Baltimore: J.H. Furst Company, 1906) attempts as part of his strongly criticized dissertation to vindicate and explain the roughness of Donne's satires by the "arsis - thesis variation" theory. Pierre Legouis, among other critics who disagree with Melton, attempts another kind of explanation for Donne's metrics in the Satyres.<sup>38</sup> Leishman, later disagrees with Legouis and reiterates Saintsbury's explanation,<sup>39</sup> but is not very impressed by most of Donne's satires. Gransden states:

It is not surprising that Donne's satires are very uneven. One's mind is often taken by a fine and just observation, a clever example, a memorable phrase: and then one suddenly finds one has lost the thread of the often difficult argument, and is becoming bored.<sup>40</sup>

John Hayward, in his Nonesuch edition of Donne's poetry and prose, states that "DONNE'S SATIRES are the least appreciated, as they are also the most awkwardly constructed of any of the poems he wrote."<sup>41</sup>

All these twentieth-century opinions show that Donne's Satyres either are bad or require some defence before accepting. The main

---

<sup>37</sup> Leishman, Monarch, pp. 111-112.

<sup>38</sup> Legouis, The Craftsman, pp. 85-94.

<sup>39</sup> Leishman, Monarch, p. 121, n. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Gransden, John Donne, p. 102.

<sup>41</sup> Hayward, Poetry and Prose, p. 120.

accusations are metrical ruggedness, obscurity or unnecessary complexity of phrasing, and indecency. Gray's and Saintsbury's arguments about Donne's deliberate attempt to dislocate the metre in a conscious imitation of the harshness of the Roman hexameter of Horace, Persius and Juvenal, may be tenable. Donne was among the earliest Elizabethan satirists, his Satyres being written about 1593-1597. He may have been experimenting, but a strong case may have been made against him by critics who could have written and did write satires in smoother "numbers." The age of Pope, famed for its satirists, has accordingly condemned Donne by its standards. It must be conceded that in all but the third Satire, Donne offers little which compensates for his metrical excesses.

Certain facts become evident here and we shall state them, then discuss them briefly with suitable illustration from the Satyres: metrical harshness, obscurity of meaning, indecency and wittiness without passion are said to characterize most of the five satires. The last deficiency was made worse by the attempt on the part of later poets in the School of Donne to imitate his ingenuity devoid of its proper ballast, poetic passion. All this has damaged Donne's reputation. However, with Grierson's edition of the poems in 1912 there began a wider interest in Donne, so much so that many more valuable areas of his poetry received emphasis. The rediscovery of Donne had begun. It remained for other twentieth-century critics after Grierson to establish what was begun. But we must review the position from which Donne was retrieved. This begins with a consideration of his Satyres.

VI. THE METRICAL HARSHNESS OF THE SATYRES

An attempt to schematize the metre of Donne's satires led Melton, Legouis and others into difficulties. Melton tried to apply pure five-foot iambs to Donne's poetry and had to put heavy stresses on insignificant words like conjunctions and definite articles. Legouis tried to reduce the whole five-foot pattern to a tetrasyllabic one by a process of liaisons, slurs and elisions. In short, he was trying to fit Donne's unrestricted irregularities into a system.

The best suggestion seems to be to realize Donne's apparently deliberate roughness and observe that he is generally using a ten-syllable line which may accommodate any combination of feet including iambs, trochees, dactyls, pyrrhics or spondees. For example notice the heterogeneous combination of feet (iambs, trochees, pyrrhics, spondees) in these opening lines which may be scanned as follows:

<sup>\*</sup>Away|<sup>u</sup>thou fond|<sup>x</sup>ling mot|<sup>l</sup>ey hum|<sup>o</sup>rist,  
 Leave mee,| and in|this stand|ing wood|den chest,  
 Consor|ted with|these few|bookes, let me lye  
 In pri|son, and|here be|coffin'd,|when I dye . . . .  
 (Satyre I, 1 - 4)

When we turn to the Fourth Satyre, Donne's metrical roughness reaches its nadir. This is worsened by the tedious and confusing way in which he handles his subject. One would hardly feel obligated to decipher the abstruse statements which are thrown together in this piece, which is the longest of the five satires. Donne is narrating an incident which perhaps is contrived according to the manner and plot of Book I of Horace's Ninth Satire. He uses couplets which are not in any way close to the standard of Dryden's and Pope's. Notice the "rough

carelessness" of  
 He knows who'hath sold his land, and now doth beg  
 A licence, old iron, bootes, shooes, and egge-  
 shels to transport . . . .  
 (103 - 105)

This satire is against the court and courtiers, but there is such a  
 disjointed accumulation of details that the reader is bored and does not  
 think it worth the effort to push his way through all the details to get  
 the hidden meaning. Besides the fact that contemporary satire like this,  
 does not provide lasting interest to another age, Donne makes it even

more difficult for us to become interested at all in his subject. If  
 Donne is experimenting (and a case could be made for this) he has perhaps  
 allowed his revolutionary spirit to lead him too far.

#### VII. OBSCURITY OF MEANING IN THE SATYRES

Unfortunate Donne's lack of clarity is produced by such awkward parentheses

as:

Why should'st thou (that dost not onely approve,  
 But in ranke itchie lust, desire, and love  
 The nakednesse and barenesse to enjoy,  
 Of thy plumpe muddy whore, or prostitute boy)  
 Hate vertue, though shee be naked, and bare?  
 (Satyre I, 37 - 41)

or by his separation of personal pronouns from the nouns to which they  
 relate, as the "thou" in line 49 of the First Satyre. It takes very  
 great concentration and careful retracing of one's thoughts, to discover  
 that the pronoun refers to the "superstitious puritan" in line 27. In  
Satyre II a similar perplexity surrounds the pronoun "hee" in line 87.

He does not fail to introduce such complex and revolting images

as those which occur in Satyre V, lines 13 - 19:

Weaver, "Regulation in the Nineteenth Century," p. 61.

Then man is a world; in which, Officers  
 Are the vast ravishing seas; and Suiters,  
 Springs; now full, now shallow, now drye; which, to  
 That which drownes them, run: These selfe reasons do  
 Prove the world a man, in which, officers  
 Are the devouring stomacke, and Suiters  
 The excrements, which they voyd.

This repulsive picture is more confused by the involved construction of the lines which introduce it:

. . . If all things be in all,  
 As I thinke, since all, which were, are, and shall  
 Bee, be made of the same elements:  
 Each thing, each thing implyes or represents.  
 (9 - 12)

Donne is deliberately confusing his argument by throwing together the same words within close range of each other but with slightly different meaning and inflexion. The only justification, or rather excuse, that can be made for this obfuscation is the satiric intention of the poet. Unfortunately for Donne, there were critics who were too impatient with his technique to explore his intention. His imitators did not help the situation at all. Today, however, such abstruseness seems to be an accepted part of poetry.

Leaving the characteristics of metre and communication of meaning, we may turn to what was considered another reason for avoiding Donne's Satyres - the question of indecency. Weaver tells us of a writer in The Temple Bar, 1861, who found difficulty in selecting passages from the Satyres of Donne which were "both good and unobjectionable" because "Donne wrote so indecently."<sup>42</sup> Perhaps the fault here is in the Victorian age more than in Donne's Satyres, but the charge is not entirely

---

<sup>42</sup>Weaver, "Reputation in the Nineteenth Century," p. 67.

without substance.

### VIII. INDECENCY IN THE SATYRES

Donne's preoccupation with the habits and practices of whores and other morally loose livers was part of his purpose as a satirist and on this ground he can be exonerated from the charge of indecency. However, we can imagine how squeamish Victorians would react to such "revolting" lines as these already quoted:

But in ranke itchie lust, desire, and love  
The nakednesse and barenesse to enjoy,  
Of the plumpe muddy whore, or prostitute boy . . . .  
(Satyre I, 38 - 40)

or the suggestiveness of the following couplet:

At last his Love he in a window spies,  
And like light dew exhal'd, he flings from mee  
Violently ravish'd to his lechery.  
(Satyre I, 106 - 108)

or again such repulsive statements as:

For if one eate my meate, though it be knowne  
The meate was mine, th'excrement is his owne . . . .  
(Satyre II, 29 - 30)

or the Rabelaisian flavour of:

. . . And wiser then all us,  
He knowes what Ladie is not painted; Thus  
He with home-meats tries me; I belch, spue, spit,  
Looke pale, and sickly, like a Patient; Yet  
He thrusts on more . . . .  
(Satyre IV, 107 - 111)

Most of these passages no doubt have functional value, but they are the kind that damaged Donne's reputation in Victorian England.

VIII. OVERWITTINESS IN THE SATYRES

It remains to show that Donne's overwittiness without the mitigating effects of passion has been another cause of adverse reaction to his Satyres. At this point, however, we must state that he can succeed in combining wit and passion when he wants to do so-- Satyre III illustrates this fact.

Satyre III, undoubtedly the best of Donne's satires, is the only one of these compositions where we find true feeling and passion combined with dialectical subtlety. This piece provides a good contrast to the other overwitty compositions. Leishman's wise comment is germane to what has just been stated:

However, in his Third Satire, on the search for true religion, Donne is inspired by his subject in itself, and his wit and his similes never get out of hand. He is not merely witty, but passionately witty, or wittily passionate, and the poem gives an unforgettable picture of an eager mind at work . . . .<sup>43</sup>

Our main thesis could not be more accurately summarized. It is when wit and passion unite that Donne writes his best poetry. When this combination was broken through rash imitation by lesser poets, Donne became a neglected poet.

Much has been said about Donne's overwittiness in previous chapters, and there are several examples in the Satyres that may further demonstrate this. We will avoid tedious repetition by making a brief reference to some instances of excessive wit without passion, then show the difference when both are united in Satyre III.

---

<sup>43</sup>Leishman, Monarch, p. 116.

Donne may offer us a playful imitation of sounds and consonantal endings for mock effect, as

He, like to a high stretcht lute string squeakt, O Sir,  
'Tis sweet to talke of Kings.

(Satyre IV, 73 - 74)

or an awkward combination of words into forms which clash one with the other:

He speakes no language; If strange meats displease,  
Art can deceive, or hunger force my tast,  
But Pedants motley tongue, souldiers bumbast,  
Mountebankes drugtongue, nor the termes of law  
Are strong enough preparatives, to draw  
Me to beare this . . . .

(Satyre IV, 38 - 43)

The words "language," "strange," "hunger," "tongue," "drugtongue," "strong" and "enough" have an ingenious sameness of form and sound. The "ng" pattern is wittily employed in various combinations.

Donne can offer some "logic-splitting" arguments which move from a proposed premise to a witty conclusion--a device abused later in the seventeenth century. Take this simple example:

If Law be in the Judges heart, and hee  
Have no heart to resist letter, or fee,  
Where wilt thou appeale?

(Satyre V, 43 - 45)

This offers a thrust at the bribery of judges and Donne's wit is quite appropriately applied to that end, but it provides a temptation for those who adopted his wit without his purpose.

Sometimes we believe that Donne's preoccupation with his wit and word-play becomes an end rather than the means to an end. His subject is sometimes taken as an opportunity for playfulness and levity. He seems



to be fascinated by his own verbal ingenuity when he writes:

But these do mee no harme, nor they which use  
 To out-doe Dildoes, and out-usure Jewes;  
 To out-drinke the sea, to out-sweare the Letanie . . . .  
 (Satyre II, 31 - 33)

The words "out" and "do" are playfully juggled as much as Donne wishes. He then pushes on to another more extensive exaggeration bringing in Confessors, Schoolmen, and Canonists until we finally reach one of the main subjects of the poem—"lawyers," in line 43. Leishman, in discussing Satyre V, is convinced of Donne's abuses in this manner. He says, "here I feel continually that the particular abuse Donne professes to be satirizing is merely a topic for the display of his wit . . . ." <sup>44</sup>

#### IX. THE THIRD SATYRE EXEMPTED FROM OVERWITTINESS

In the Third Satyre, however, Donne is the sincere searcher for religious truth. Accordingly, Grierson links this poem with the years when he was seeking for the right religion and his Roman Catholic inclinations were no longer very strong. <sup>45</sup> Notice the vigour and passion of the opening lines of this satyre:

Kinde pittie chokes my spleene; brave scorn forbids  
 Those teares to issue which swell my eye-lids;  
 I must not laugh, nor weepe sinnes, and be wise,  
 Can railing then cure these worne maladies?  
 (Satyre III, 1 - 4)

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> Grierson, O.S.A. edition, pp. xxvii - xxviii.

Compare this with the opening of the Fourth Satyre written in the lighter tone of the argumentative scholar at law school. Satyre III convinces us of the poet's earnestness. Satyre IV does not do this. The rhetorical questions that unfold after the passage quoted above are passionate and meaningful in a way which the conversational and witty questions of the other satires are not. Apostrophes and personifications contribute to the final effect in Donne's Third Satyre, while they are often used indiscriminately in Satyres I, II, IV and V.

When Donne wishes to "taste joy" by finding the true religion, his soul asks, "O Where?" His intellect then explores the three sources - England, Rome or Geneva (lines 45 ff.). His conclusion is no less witty than conclusions made elsewhere. He employs a simile:

As women do in divers countries goe  
In divers habits, yet are still one kinde,  
So doth, so is Religion . . . .  
(66-68)

He then proceeds to his method of finding truth in a passage frequently quoted:

. . . though truth and falshood 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 . . . .  
(Satyre III, 72 - 81)

The image expands with a vigorous power as Donne describes the strenuous efforts of those who seek Truth:

Hard deeds, the bodies paines; hard knowledge too  
The mindes indeavours reach, and mysteries  
Are like the Sunne, dazzling, yet plaine to all eyes.  
(Satyre III, 86 - 88)

Donne's passion sometimes expresses itself through the most appropriate rhythms. For example, notice the long pondering effect of "To stand inquiring right, is not to stray." The poet's skill may also show itself by a manipulation and careful counter-balancing of words. This is altogether unlike his usual witty word-play: "and hee that will / Reach her, about must, and about must goe . . . ." (80 - 81). "About" and "must" offer a repetitive effect which give the appropriate feeling of a tedious and exhausting ascent.

All these admirable qualities are found in the Third Satyre. Here Donne is feeling an experience and putting it into inspired and passionate poetry. Here is what Eliot meant by saying that to Donne "a thought was an experience which modified his sensibility." While he is engaged in an intellectual search for truth, passion and feeling guide and inspire him. It is most unfortunate that later followers left this worthwhile quality in Donne to copy and prostitute his cleverness of wit. Carew proclaimed Donne as the ruler of a "Monarchy of Wit." It is regrettable that for the sake of all admirers of this monarch, his elegists did not declare him to be enthroned where passion and wit dwelt together in unity. Any other pedestal did not become such a monarch. Because Donne's monarchy was known to be one of wit only, it reached a stage of decadence brought about by the abuse of its Caroline subjects.

#### X. ARTLESS IMITATION OF DONNE'S WIT AND THE EFFECT ON HIS REPUTATION

Grierson and Williamson claimed that followers of Donne,

especially among the Caroline poets, were responsible to a great extent for the great neglect and subsequent unpopularity of Donne in the eighteenth century. This statement is strongly corroborated by Alvarez in his very stimulating book The School of Donne, (1961). In this work, Alvarez traces Donne's influence upon his coterie of followers until the eclipse of the Metaphysical School of poets during the Restoration period. The details which are discussed by Alvarez are very germane here.

The purpose of using these details is to elaborate upon the claim made in preceding chapters that excessive and absurd imitation of Donne's wit without his passion led to his eclipse. It is important to investigate this because the rediscovery of a poet presupposes a past period of neglect and obscurity. Some attempt will be made to show a few of the causes of this, so far as they relate to Donne's wittiness and ingenuity as shown in his satires, and other similarly ingenious parts of his poetic works.

Donne showed himself as such a celebrated wit that he was imitated and plagiarized by such men as Gilpin,<sup>46</sup> Cartwright, Suckling,<sup>47</sup> Vaughan,<sup>48</sup> Carew, Cleveland, John Hall and Samuel Austin.<sup>49</sup> According to Alvarez, there "were three main classes of poets who adapted Donne's style to their own ends: the courtiers, the divines and the University Wits."<sup>50</sup> It is the last of these three groups who really brought about the eclipse of the so-called Donne's School. What worsened the situation

---

<sup>46</sup>A. Alvarez, The School of Donne (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961), p. 37.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 122-123.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

during the decadence of the Metaphysical School is the fact that these imitators were copying and imitating one another and were like poor copyists of Donne getting from one another distorted and corrupted impressions of the original. The complete rejection of the School of Donne by the Restoration was effected without any discussion or consideration of his works. Alvarez summarizes the situation thus:

They [the metaphysicals] were not dignified by discussion, disapproval of even detailed abuse, which is the usual procedure when a new school of writers replaces an old. They were simply ignored or dismissed absolutely as not being worth discussion.<sup>51</sup>

He further offers an account of the decay of the Donne tradition and of those who caused it.

When the Restoration critics, headed by Dryden, attacked the School of Donne, and when Dr. Johnson a hundred-odd years later finished it off, they had plenty of bad verse to support them. Yet it was not the educated professional men of Donne's original circle, nor the writers of devotional poetry, nor the courtiers who, in the bad sense, 'affected the metaphysics'. The degradation of Donne's monarch of wit was brought about by men who most prided themselves on their command of it: the academics, such as Cleveland, John Hall and Samuel Austin, and private gentlemen with academic yearnings, like Benlowes, and London hacks like Robert Wild.<sup>52</sup>

In Elegy XVI line 4, Donne speaks of "my words masculine and persuasive force," and Carew in his Elegie Upon the Death of Dr. John Donne praises his master whose wit fascinates him:

... thou maist claime  
From so great disadvantage greater fame,  
Since to the awe of thy imperious wit

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 122.

Our stubborne language bends, made only fit  
 With her tough-thick-rib'd hoopes to gird about  
 Thy Giant phansie, which had prov'd too stout  
 For their soft melting Phrases. <sup>53</sup>

( 47 - 53)

Carew in the same elegy mentions Donne's "masculine expression" (line 39).

This gave to Donne a name of distinction among several of his bad imitators. They wished to emulate the monarch of wit and sought to perfect the "strong line." Cleveland was the leader in this regard. But Donne's satires reveal another aspect of his masculinity which, as we have seen, makes very rugged and unpleasant poetry. Take as an example the Fourth Satyre of which we have spoken. There is a plain unembellished type of masculinity in the following lines that would defy the best regular scansion:

. . . Mine? as you see,  
 I have but one Frenchman, looke, hee followes mee.  
 Certes they are neatly cloth'd; I, of this minde am,  
 Your only wearing is your Grogaram.  
 Not so Sir, I have more. Under this pitch  
 He would not flie; I chaff'd him . . . .

(Satyre IV, 83 - 88)

Cleveland, who became the "satirist of the Parliamentary cause," emulated Donne's conceits while adoring Ben Jonson. Donne's satires must have been his unfortunate model and inspiration as he battled the enemies of the King. It is difficult (if not impossible) to find Cleveland's imitations in extant anthologies and once more we must insert Alvarez' very appropriate comments on Cleveland's differences and disparities from Donne: Cleveland lacks Donne's ability "to give

---

<sup>53</sup>White, Wallerstein and Quintana, Seventeenth Century Verse, p. 309.

his experience an overall sense of structure."

Fundamentally, Cleveland was a writer of epigrams. His aim was always compression, the greatest amount of sense and allusion in the fewest possible words. He took over from Donne his point-making flair but dispensed with the machinery that justified it. . . . The only personal pressure behind Cleveland's verse is his desire to be clever with words; his subjects are merely excuses for this.<sup>54</sup>

What Cleveland was doing was imitating Donne in his weakest points.

Donne had spent much of his time in the Satyres (IV and V) giving full play to his wit and seemed to be unconcerned with his subject. In the Third Satyre when he shows personal feeling and passion he writes exceptionally well. When passion was dissociated from wit and ingenuity, Donne became a poor model. However, Donne's wittiness was imitated to an absurd degree by Samuel Austin who marked the lowest point of "Clevelandism," which for Dryden meant "wresting and torturing a word into another meaning."<sup>55</sup>

Alvarez offers the most grotesque example of Austin's conceits in his lines from "Upon my Mother's running Eyes":

. . . my Pen, which in your brine I sop,  
Which Dripping bast's your raw cheeks while they drop.<sup>56</sup>

Here, Austin is intrigued with such an absurdity as depicting his mother's tears as sour grease dripping from raw meat. Cleveland indulges in similar improprieties when he offers the incongruous image: "Tender as 'twere a jelly gloved." Edward Benlowes is quoted by Alvarez

<sup>54</sup> Alvarez, The School of Donne, pp. 125-126.

<sup>55</sup> George Watson (ed.), John Dryden of Dramatic Poesy (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1962), I, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Alvarez, The School of Donne, p. 127.

for his quasi-philosophic polysyllables in imitation of Donne and Cleveland. We must borrow again a quotation from Alvarez:

Cull metaphors well-weigh'd and clear,  
 Eucleate mysteries to th'ear.  
 Be wit stenographied, yet free;  
 'Tis largest in epitome.  
 Fly through Art's heptarchy, be clad  
 With wings to soar, but not to gad.<sup>57</sup>

It is these frivolities and extravagances that led to Johnson's remarks in his Life of Cowley. Cowley was a substantial critic and examined an author's works before he adopted them. He was a favourite of Johnson's, even though he too, "imitated Donne to a fault," to quote Dryden. The final impression left at the time of the decadence of the School of Donne is that of pedantry, an indulgence in "a game of wit, whose counters were words and whose rules were the frame of reference of University learning."<sup>58</sup>

This appalling situation was further criticized and outlawed by the new scientific school of thought led by Bacon and perpetuated by Hobbes. Sprat theorized later on what Bacon and Hobbes had done. All these men showed a distrust of the intellectuality that leads to useless word-play. Consequently, rhetoric and poetry derived from imagination or wit, was held suspect. Dialectical argument and logic-splitting, which became identifiable with the metaphysical school of poets, were condemned. The Royal Society established its firm dicta about clarity of language and systematisation of expression and this marked the dawn of a new age --the Augustan Age, the age of Pope and Johnson. Then, Johnson's Life of Cowley only became a literary culmination of a whole movement which

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 135.



began by the abuse of the Caroline poets who imitated Donne's wittiness to the point of absurdity.

Alvarez summarizes Donne's position very adequately when he writes:

Moreover, Donne's reputation itself as a wit was, in one sense, traditional. It was based on his masculine understanding, his command of complex, abstruse arguments and learning and on that intellectual independence which made him remould the style of poetry to suit his own individual intelligence. In fact his wit, as all his elegists said, was a matter of extraordinary personal brilliance. And this in itself became a mark against him.<sup>59</sup>

That in most of his satires Donne was abstruse, overwitty, passionless, in short, all that characterized the butt of ridicule at the end of the seventeenth century, is undeniably true. The result was that there was what Eliot called a "dissociation of sensibility" which took place about the Restoration period. Alvarez calls this phenomenon by various names-- "a change in the way of thinking,"<sup>60</sup> "the extroversion of the imagination" and other indefinite synonyms. However, it is evident from our thesis that the eclipse of Donne was simultaneous with a "dissociation of sensibility." This is because Donne's ingenuity and wittiness were emulated without any attempt to unite these with his poetic passion. This divorce or "dissociation" was not consciously brought about by Donne. However, he unfortunately made it possible by his frequent excesses which attracted too many indiscriminate imitators.

---

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

THE DIVINE POEMS OF DONNE  
CHAPTER VI  
TYPE OF INTELLECTUAL POETRY

DONNE RE-EVALUATED IN THE DIVINE POEMS

Since passion and wit played such an important role in Donne's poetry and drew varied comments from critics from century to century, it would be pertinent to examine the Divine Poems in such a way as to show how these two elements combined in them. This "perilous balance" between passion and ingenuity in some of the sacred poems has put them in the same category as the best of the Songs and Sonnets. It is with justification that Hayward comments: "With the 'SONGS AND SONNETS', the 'Divine Poems' must be counted as Donne's highest achievement in verse."<sup>1</sup>

The amount of passion or wit distinguishes the good religious poems from the bad. In referring to Donne's sacred poems, Johnson expressed his opinion. The combination of wit and passion in Donne's divine poems will be considered against the background of critical opinion of his type of sacred poetry in order to provide some explanation for reaction to his poems before and after his rediscovery by Grierson. After this we will investigate the source of passion in the Divine Poems, consider the poems where wit is excessive, and offer an example where there is an ineffective combination of wit and passion. Lastly, an examination will be made of the Holy Sonnets and Hymns where passion and intellectual subtlety are successfully united.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hayward, Poetry and Prose, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, Lives, p. 111.

I. CRITICAL OPINION OF DONNE'S  
TYPE OF RELIGIOUS POETRY

Donne seemed to have poured his poetic fervour into his best sacred poems and often wrote under the impulse of his passionate heart torn between the sense of guilt and a desire for forgiveness from God. This intense conflict in Donne's soul not only increased the passion of his sacred poetry but added a note of sincerity to what he wrote. In this sense he is a very personal poet in his Divine Poems, Donne can move from contrition to confession to jubilation and back to contrition, but the poetry which results from this gamut of moods was not held in esteem by Johnson, whose voice often represented eighteenth-century opinion.

In referring to Waller's sacred poems, Johnson expressed his opinion of religious poetry in general. He explained why "verse has been too little applied to the purposes of worship" and why, in spite of "many attempts . . . to animate devotion by pious poetry," these efforts "have miscarried." In his explanation it is clear that he had his usual "pleasure" dictum uppermost in his mind. According to him, poetry aims at pleasing and poetical devotion cannot do this: "Let no pious ear be offended if I advance, in opposition to many authorities, that poetical devotion cannot often please."<sup>2</sup> He further argues:

Contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical. Man admitted to implore the mercy of his Creator, and

---

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, Lives, p. 211.

plead the merits of his Redeemer, is already in a higher state than poetry can confer.<sup>3</sup>

He claimed that poetry is essentially invention which has delight as one of its ends. It must produce something unexpected. Since "the topicks of devotion are few, and being few are universally known . . . they can receive no grace from novelty of sentiment, and very little from novelty of expression." For Johnson, since poetry presents an idea "more grateful to the mind" in order to please, the poet is required to conceal the unattractive and to display the more pleasing qualities of a subject: . . . "but religion must be shewn as it is; suppression and addition equally corrupt it; and such as it is, it is known already."<sup>4</sup> If Johnson is correct in his claim at this point, the Psalmist of Holy Scripture would be considered very unpoetical when he exclaims, "O magnify the Lord," or Thomas Browne would feel no elevation of soul or even "pleasure"---and he claims that he does in Section XIX of Religio Medici---in an "O altitudo!" Though poetry may not literally add to the magnitude of a subject, it may please by an attempt to do so, or to explore the limitlessness of any theme which interests the poet. However, Johnson was convinced that poetry overreaches itself when it attempts divine subjects:

Of sentiments purely religious, it will be found that the most simple expression is the most sublime. Poetry loses its lustre and its power, because it is applied to the decoration of something more excellent than itself. . . . The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestick for ornament; to recommend them by tropes and figures, is to magnify by a concave mirror the sidereal hemisphere.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 212

A final word from Johnson will bring us much closer to Donne's type of religious poetry which is marked by thanksgiving, repentance, supplication and meditation. Of this kind of religious writing Johnson is no less intolerant:

The employments of pious meditation are Faith, Thanksgiving, Repentance, and Supplication. Faith, invariably uniform, cannot be invested by fancy with decorations. Thanksgiving, the most joyful of all holy effusions, yet addressed to a Being without passions, is confined to a few modes, and is to be felt rather than expressed. Repentance trembling in the presence of the judge, is not at leisure for cadences and epithets. Supplication of man to man may diffuse itself through many topicks of persuasion; but supplication to God can only cry for mercy.<sup>6</sup>

The very themes which Johnson lists here as unsuitable for the poet's pen are the ones which occupy Donne in his Divine Poems. It may be claimed here, though, that if Johnson read Donne's religious poetry-- and he may have done so-- he would have been unimpressed, especially by those poems where wit and ingenuity were exhibited to the point of impropriety. Johnson spoke of addressing a Being "without passions" and here he would certainly have found true basis for disqualifying Donne as a religious poet by citing some of his verses to prove his lack of passion and his indulgence in intellectual ingenuity. We know that Johnson would have been quite capable of making the proper selections for this purpose, as his Life of Cowley proves.

Not only were Donne's Divine Poems likely to be unacceptable poetry to Johnson and those who adopted his opinion of "poetical devotion," but they probably provoked an unfavourable attitude among

---

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

the Victorians because of Donne's manner of writing religious verse. Since Victorians detested levity in the handling of serious subjects, they did not tolerate the dialectical subtleties in some of Donne's religious poetry. Gosse who was writing in 1899 was expressing a very Victorian opinion when he said:

In form all the sacred poetry of Donne suffers from his determination to introduce Spanish effects into English prosody, and Spanish ingenuities into the expression of English thought. If Donne's early hymns and litanies do not move us, it is largely due to the fact that they did not move himself. They are frigid, they are stiffened with legal and medical phraseology, the heart of a sinner saved does not beat beneath their "cross and correct concupiscence of wit."<sup>7</sup>

This type of adverse criticism demonstrates how Donne's wit had brought harm to his poetic reputation, this time within the sacred precincts of his religious poetry.

In the twentieth century, since Donne's rediscovery by Grierson, much has been written about his religious works, both his poetry and prose. Helen Gardner (1952), Evelyn Simpson (1953) and Louis L. Martz (1954) are the outstanding specialists in this field. Reference to their opinions may be made in discussing the poems and therefore they will not occupy us any further here. T.S. Eliot claimed:

For the great majority of people who love poetry, 'religious poetry' is a variety of minor poetry: the religious poet is not a poet who is treating the whole subject matter of poetry in a religious spirit, but a poet who is dealing with a confined part of this subject matter: who is leaving out what men consider their major passions, and thereby confessing his ignorance of them.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Gosse, Life and Letters, I, 264.

<sup>8</sup>Smith and Parks, Great Critics, p. 723.

For this modern critic "'religious poetry' is a variety of minor poetry" though it is unsafe to conclude that he is dismissing all religious poetry as unimportant. Eliot's religious poems are enough proof of his estimation of sacred poetry. He seems to be making as one of his objections the omission by the religious poet of "what men consider their major passions" and the poet's treatment of a "confined part of his subject matter." Eliot is making the "major passions" an important consideration to the writer of religious verse, one which, if disregarded, lessens the significance of the poetic composition.

Eliot, as well as Johnson seems to insist on passion in one way or the other. With them there is more emphasis on the emotions than on the intellect, on the heart than on the head. Gosse disliked Donne's "concupiscence of wit." The reason in all likelihood, was that indulgence in cerebration destroys the effect of sincerity, a quality which is most desirable in religious poetry. If the critic is to be convinced of Donne's genuineness of attitude and purpose in his Divine Poems he must go beyond mere wittiness to an investigation of the passion of his poetry.

## II. THE SOURCE OF PASSION IN THE DIVINE POEMS

In the good Divine Poems, Donne's passion seems to be even more concentrated than in most of the Songs and Sonnets. A possible reason for this is in the intense feeling of personal guilt which motivates some of his poems, as well as the great conflict which arises from the poet's search for truth, a conflict which keeps tossing him to and fro between the two poles of doubt and faith. This vehement internal battle

was intensified and became an immense passion which filled his ministry for God when he took orders. His wife's death in 1617 served to augment Donne's passion even more. There was such a difference in his earnestness and sincerity after these experiences in his career, that Grierson divides the religious poetry into two groups belonging respectively to the period before and the period after he took Holy Orders.

Donne himself attests to the transfusion of his passionate love for his wife into his search for God which impassions so much of his sacred poetry. Sonnet XVII contains such an affirmation:

Wholly on heavenly things my mind is sett.  
Here the admyring her my mind did whett  
To seeke thee God . . . .

(4 - 6)

The passionate Donne of the Elegies and of the heated love sonnets had converted his love for secular things, for earthly, sensual pleasure into a love for God. His sermons, which, perhaps provide the consummation and climax of his passionate effusions, provide further proof of Donne's awareness of the sublimation of his worldly passion. In a sermon preached to Queen Anne on December 14, 1617, he explained the process thus:

A covetous person, who is now truly converted to God, he will exercise a spiritual covetousness still, he will desire to have him all, he will have good security, the seal and assurance of the holy Ghost . . . .

So will a voluptuous man, who is turned to God, find plenty and deliciousnes enough in him, to feed his soul, as with marrow, and with fatness, as David expresses it; and so an angry and passionate man, will find zeal enough in the house of God to eat him up.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson (eds.), The Sermons of John Donne (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953), I, 236-237.



Grierson accepts this testimony from Donne and is prepared to confirm the generally believed thesis of Donne's great transformation and its corresponding effect on his poetry: "But the general thesis, that it was a great experience which purified and elevated Donne's poetry, receives a striking confirmation from the better-known history of his devotional poetry."<sup>10</sup> But earlier in his career, Donne had always shown a passion for finding truth even if it was an intellectual battle, as in Satyre III.

The mind had as its task la recherche de la vérité:

. . . hard knowledge too  
The mindes indeavours reach, and mysteries  
Are like the Sunne, dazzling, yet plaine to all eyes.  
(86 - 88)

In his earlier witty manner Donne revealed the conflict which always seemed to divide his soul between certainty and doubt. In his lines to the Countess of Bedford on New Year's Day he described his own uncertainty as a picture of the perplexity of worldly affairs:

This twilight of two yeares, not past nor next,  
Some embleme is of mee, or I of this,  
Who Meteor-like, of stufte and forme perplext,  
Whose what, and where, in disputation is,  
If I should call mee any thing, should misse.

I summe the yeares, and mee, and finde mee not  
Debtor to th'old, nor Creditor to th'new . . . .  
(1 - 7)

It is out of this conflict, and struggle and anguish of soul that Donne's passion springs. Helen Gardner has rightly stated that "Donne's poems are the product of the conflict between his will and his temperament."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, xlix.

<sup>11</sup> Helen Gardner (ed.), John Donne: The Divine Poems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. xxxvi.

### III. EXCESSIVE WIT IN THE DIVINE POEMS

Preceding discussions reveal the source of passion in Donne's religious poetry. But wit also plays an important role in the assessment of the divine poems and should now receive attention. This quality has been a source of adverse criticism while passion has drawn laudatory comment. Helen Gardner, whose study of Donne's Divine Poems is well-known, offers her opinion about the proportion of wittiness in Donne's religious poetry, as compared with his secular poems. She contends that Donne "remains a wit in his divine as in his secular verse; but the 'fierce endeavour' of his wit is tamed: the outrageous element has disappeared."<sup>12</sup> While this is true to some extent, Donne's wittiness has certainly hampered some of his best religious poetic expression.

Hunt shows his impatience with this failing in Donne:

When one gets away from the three "Hymns," parts of "The Litany," and the "Holy Sonnets" into the rest of his religious poetry, one finds, for the most part, verse as coldly intellectualized and as dully ingenious as Donne's commendatory epistles to Noble Ladies.<sup>13</sup>

Hunt claims that

In these meditative poems [referred to in the preceding quotation] Donne's meditation tends to take the form of an intellectual fussing around with theological concepts, doctrinal paradoxes, and ambiguities on words.<sup>14</sup>

He believes that these "forced, pointless twitchings of the mind in a state of 'holy discontent'" produce lifeless poetry. Hunt carries his attack as far as Donne's sermons to which he compares these "spiritless

---

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. xvi.

<sup>13</sup>Hunt, Donne's Poetry, p. 134.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

ingenuities" where there is a ceaseless "analyzing and analyzing." This type of severe criticism unmistakably makes its point: Donne's wit can mar what his passion created.

But no one knows this better than Donne himself. In his own earnest petitions he admits his need of deliverance from the deleterious influence of his intellectual ingenuity:

Let not my minde be blinder by more light  
Nor Faith, by Reason added, lose her sight.  
(The Litanie VII, 62-63)

He petitions God in the same poem:

When wee are mov'd to seeme religious  
Only to vent wit, Lord deliver us.  
(The Litanie XXI, 188-189)

Donne in his more mature years had finally realized his need to be free from the excesses of the meddling intellect. Nowhere was it likely to cause more undesirable improprieties than in his Divine Poems. We shall first consider some of the religious poems where wittiness has had deleterious effects on the poetry and on Donne's reputation, and afterward, we shall examine some of the purely passionate sacred poems which reveal the true poet in Donne.

The Crosse is the first poem that fittingly illustrates Donne's indefensible wittiness. In this poem he indulges in intellectual word-play. The word "crosse" with all its sacred meaning as a symbol of Christianity is given different meanings by the use of puns on the word.

The first line of the poem describes the cross as the place where Christ died, but with the effective suggestion that "Christ

embrac'd" the cross. This recalls the Anglo-Saxon poem The Dream of the Rood where the cross says "Bifode ic p̄a mē se Beorn ymbceypt" - "I trembled when the Hero [Christ] embraced me." The idea of a self-sacrificing Redeemer is suggested here. But when Donne reaches line 11 of his poem his intellect seems to become more prominent as he commences his punning:

. . . for, the losse  
Of this Crosse, were to mee another Crosse;  
Better were worse, for, no affliction,  
No Crosse is so extreme, as to have none.  
(11 - 14)

He leaves the first meaning of cross as given in line one and goes on to its other meaning of "affliction" and in line 15 he enquires about "blotting out the Crosse" which leaves the suggestion of a written "X" being obliterated. In line 18 the word becomes the cross that must be born by the suffering disciple. In line 24, the word changes grammatical function and it is a verb meaning "to intersect." The poem continues in its subtle, involved manner by such complicated ingenuities as:

. . . therefore Crosse  
Your joy in crosses, else, 'tis double losse.  
And crosse thy senses, else, both they, and thou  
Must perish soone, and to destruction bowe.  
For if the'eye seeke good objects, and will take  
No crosse from bad, wee cannot scape a snake.  
So with harsh, hard, sowre, stinking, crosse the rest,  
Make them indifferent all; call nothing best.  
(41 - 48)

As we reach the concluding line Donne outdoes himself with the gravest improprieties where "sutures" which help to bind the damaged brain become an image showing the lattice work effect of crosses (lines 55, 56). In line 58 he talks of correcting "concupiscence of witt" and ironically

reveals his need to do so. The final lines speak for themselves as an illustration of ingenuity pushed to an absurd degree of impropriety:

Be covetous of Crosses, let none fall.  
 Crosse no man else, but crosse thy selfe in all.  
 Then doth the Crosse of Christ worke fruitfully  
 Within our hearts, when wee love harmlessly  
 That Crosses pictures much, and with more care  
 That Crosses children, which our Crosses are.  
 (59 - 64)

Such unbridled displays are somewhat distasteful, to say the least, and probably have done much harm to Donne's reputation since the eighteenth century.

In Resurrection, imperfect Donne opens the way to the censure of Gosse who speaks of his "painful artificiality" in this poem and states that in it "Donne's intellectual arrogance stood him in evil stead."<sup>15</sup> The opening lines of the poem are very close to the cynical opening of The Sunne Rising. The wittiness and cynicism are subdued but noticeable:

Sleep sleep old Sun, thou canst not have repast  
 As yet, the wound thou took'st on friday last . . . .  
 (Resurrection, imperfect 1 - 2)

Donne displays a further levity in his treatment of the Christian theme of the resurrection. The reaction by a Victorian audience to this indulgence is, no doubt, predictable. The mystical act of Christ's resurrection is likened to a chemical process:

Whose body having walk'd on earth, and now  
 Hasting to Heaven, would, that he might allow  
 Himselfe unto all stations, and fill all,  
 For these three daies become a minerall;  
 Hee was all gold when he lay downe, but rose  
 All tincture, and doth not alone dispose  
 Leaden and iron wills to good, but is  
 Of power to make even sinfull flesh like his.  
 (9 - 16)

---

<sup>21</sup>Gosse, Life and Letters, I, 264.

This would be considered by Victorians as an abuse of good art.

The Annunciation and Passion is written in a vein similar to that of the Resurrection, imperfect and speaks too wittily about the serious subject the poet professes to be treating. Donne's ingenuity leads him from conceit to conceit. He introduces a parenthetical simile about the map which meets at East and West and recalls a similar cartographical image in the Hymne to God my God, in my sicknesse (stanza 2), the great difference being that this hymn is inspired by greater feeling and passion. The conceit in the Annunciation poem also introduces the idea of East and West which Donne uses again in Goodfriday 1613, Riding Westward where he thinks of a journey from birth to death as being represented by the sun's journey from East to West. There is some genuine feeling in Goodfriday 1613 but not without occasional surprising flashes of wit. Gransden states what he considered to be the reaction of some critics to this poem:

. . . to a mind like Dr. Johnson's, well-trained in almost everything but medieval theology, or to a Victorian mind, disciplined against wit and conceits and against all but the simplest types of religious emotion, such lines [11 - 17] would seem to go beyond the bounds of taste and the orthodox function of poetic art.<sup>16</sup>

The reader nevertheless is moved by such passionate lines as:

Yet dare I'almost be glad, I do not see  
That spectacle of too much weight for mee.  
Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;  
What a death were it then to see God dye?

(15 - 18)

---

<sup>16</sup>Gransden, John Donne, p. 140.

The lines which follow these are called "odious" by Gosse who thought that "a spasm of [Donne's] disease of style" had caught him at this point in the poem. The image is cosmic:

It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke,  
It made his footstoole crack, and the Sunne winke.  
Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,  
And turne all speares at once, peirc'd with those holes?  
(19 - 22)

Gosse is obviously insensitive to the traditional power of these images and may be reflecting a Johnsonian reaction to "metaphysical" characteristics. Gosse claimed to be able to identify these characteristics in parts of Donne's sacred poems, the Litanie, for instance.<sup>17</sup> Gransden has aptly commented that "Such a judgment [as Gosse's] helps us to remember that until about thirty years ago [i.e. prior to 1954], the usual critical attitude to Donne was still, in essence, that of Johnson."<sup>18</sup> The imagery succeeds partly in evoking the cosmic atmosphere of Golgotha from the sixth to the ninth hour, but one cannot but feel a jarring note in Donne's use of the word "holes" in line 22. The cataclysmic movements are effectively suggested by the consonantal "t's" and "k's" in "Lieutenant," "shrinke," "crack," "winke," "at."

Of this poem Helen Gardner correctly states:

'Good Friday, Riding Westward' is a highly personal poem: a free, discursive meditation arising out of a particular situation. The elaborate preliminary conceit of the contrary motions of the heavenly bodies extends itself into astronomical images, until the recollection of the Passion sweeps away all thoughts but penitence.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup>Gosse, Life and Letters, I, 266.

<sup>18</sup>Gransden, John Donne, p. 141, n. 1.

<sup>19</sup>Gardner, Divine Poems, p. xxxiii.

## IV. THE "PERILOUS BALANCE"

## BETWEEN WIT AND PASSION

We need not belabour the point about Donne's misuse of wit in the Divine Poems. It should now be clear. In making a transition to the better poems we might consider one instance where Donne tried to achieve a "perilous balance" between wit and passion. In The Litanie his wit proved to be the more difficult of the two to control. His passion was spontaneous and convincing as, according to Helen Gardner, he attempts "to school himself to patience, not rejecting with scorn a world that has disappointed him, but praying that he may accept what life brings in a religious spirit."<sup>20</sup>

The true source of passion of The Litanie lies in the experience of the Mitcham period. A closer look at The Litanie would illustrate this. Donne's letter to Sir Henry Goodyer reveals certain important characteristics about The Litanie: (1) It was written during a period of severe illness and despondency.<sup>21</sup> (2) He was merely adapting the liturgical form to his purposes.<sup>22</sup> (3) He was seeking a conciliatory position which would allow for moderation between a Roman Catholic and

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. xxvi.

<sup>21</sup> Gosse, Life and Letters, I, 195. Donne tells Goodyer "my book and a grave are so near." He also states that "Since my imprisonment in my bed, I have made a meditation in verse, which I call a Litany . . . ."

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. He writes in his letter: "the word [i.e. "Litanie"] imports no other than supplication, but all Churches have one form of supplication by that name."



a Protestant attitude regarding his faith.<sup>23</sup>

The first characteristic, Donne's great despondency, explains why he pours out feeling and passion in such a supplicatory accent as:

Father of Heaven, and him, by whom  
 It, and us for it, and all else, for us  
 Thou madest, and govern'st ever, come  
 And re-create mee, now growne ruinous:  
     My heart is by dejection, clay,  
     And by selfe-murder, red.  
 From this red earth, O Father, purge away  
 All vicious tinctures, that new fashioned  
 I may rise up from death, before I'am dead.

(The Litanie I, The Father)

or such earnest, bitter petitioning as:

Heare us, O heare us Lord; to thee  
 A sinner is more musique, when he prayes,  
 Then spheares, or Angels praises bee,  
 In Panegyrique Allelujaes;  
     Heare us, for till thou heare us, Lord  
     We know not what to say;  
 Thine eare to'our sighes, teares, thoughts gives voice and  
 word.  
 O Thou who Satan heard'st in Jobs sicke day,  
 Heare thy selfe now, for thou in us dost pray.

(199 - 207)

This type of poetry would receive Johnson's anathema, for, to requote him, "Contemplative piety, or intercourse between God and the soul, cannot be poetical."

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 196. The letter states: "That by which it ["The Litanie"] will deserve best acceptation is, that neither the Roman Church need call it defective, because it abhors not the particular mention of the blessed triumphers in heaven, nor the Reformed can discreetly accuse it of attributing more than a rectified devotion ought to do."

When we proceed to the second characteristic of The Litanie, that is, its use of the liturgical form, we see Donne's conscious attempt at literary and intellectual discipline. The form in which he works is secondary to his other purpose of self-examination, confession and communion with God. The struggle to make the form and material supplement each other intensifies both the mental and emotional passion of the poet. As Helen Gardner has said, "The form has had to be too much twisted to fit the material, and the material has been moulded to the form rather than expressed by it."<sup>24</sup>

According to Cranmer's pattern of the Litany in 1544 there are six sections: (i) The introductory Kyrie eleison and invocation of the Trinity, (ii) the invocations of the saints, (iii) the deprecations or supplications with the response "Deliver us, O Lord", (iv) the obsecrations with the same response, (v) the intercessions, (vi) a closing invocation to Christ as Lamb of God.<sup>25</sup> Donne partly makes ostensible use of these divisions. He uses part (i) of the form and does not observe part (ii) very closely though ostensibly he does. We see some parts of the deprecations in his refrain "O Lord deliver us." The form of the intercessions is vaguely maintained on the surface. The sixth section invoking Christ as the Lamb of God is also there (Section XXVIII). This discipline helped to curb some of Donne's excesses and we do not get the uncharted freedom of some of his early secular poems.

The third characteristic manifests itself through a vigorous

<sup>24</sup> Helen Gardner, Divine Poems, p. xxviii.

<sup>25</sup> W.K. Lowther Clarke and Charles Harris, (eds.), Liturgy and Worship (London: S.P.C.K, 1959), p. 283.

intellectuality which sometimes oversteps its bounds or by an effusion of guilt over the fact "that wit, borne apt high good to doe" dwells "lazily / On Natures nothing." The poet's conflict also springs from a desire to find a mean between two extremes. He wishes to avoid the extreme formalism of merely offering material gifts to atone for wrong deeds -- "From bribing thee with Almes, to excuse / Some sinne more burdenous." He also wishes to avoid, on the other hand, the extreme pietism which severs itself from life and experience. He therefore prays to be delivered from "thinking us all soule, neglecting thus / Our mutual duties." He struggles against the pseudo-asceticism which Catholics have popularized by martyrdom--"Oh, to some / Not to be Martyrs, is a martyrdom." This is the spirit which motivated his Pseudo-Martyr. On the other hand, he prays to be delivered from the Protestant extremism of private judgment and excessive individual investigation of sacred truths. He wants to be saved from "that bitter agonie, / Which is still the agonie of pious wits, / Disputing what distorted thee." These querulous persons interrupt the "evennesse" which characterizes the moderate "via media" of religious faith. Donne's struggle to find the peace of mind and soul in the happy mean of the "via media" was not really accomplished. He seemed to be fighting his battles over and over again. The passion and fervour arising from these conflicts inspired much of his sacred poetry.

On the other hand, The Litanie is said to be characterized in parts by wittiness and ingenious subtlety. This has prompted severe condemnation from Gosse who thought the poem was "burdened with

ingenuity"<sup>26</sup> and was "a considerable flower" which was "choked by the weeds of pedantry and misplaced intelligence."<sup>27</sup> He even applied the epithet "metaphysical" to this poem in a pejorative sense.<sup>28</sup> Grierson thought the poem was "wire-drawn and tormented" and was a "characteristic example of Donne's imaginative wit employed on traditional topics of Catholic devotion to which no change of Church ever made him indifferent."<sup>29</sup> While one critic is severer than the other, both comment upon Donne's wittiness in The Litanie. Whenever wit failed to appear in proper equilibrium with passion in the religious poems the impression of sincerity was lost and one of artificiality prevailed. This is perhaps the reason for adverse criticism.

The impression of artificiality occasionally combines with one of impropriety in The Litanie and attracts even greater condemnation from critics. Stanza XXVI illustrates this type of failing. It seems to move from the sincere tone of a penitential supplication to the accusing tone of satire. Donne makes a subtle thrust at magistrates and preachers who make offences appear worse than they really are. This witty thrust in the midst of a liturgical prayer offends the laws of religious propriety and attracts unfavourable criticism.

#### V. THE EFFECTIVE COMBINATION OF WIT AND PASSION IN THE HOLY SONNETS AND HYMNS

The Holy Sonnets bring us to perhaps the best of the religious

---

<sup>26</sup>Gosse, Life and Letters, I, 265.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 266.      <sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Grierson, O.E.T. edition, II, lii.

poems. The hymns may probably equal but not surpass them. In them Donne does not only concentrate passion and feeling, but some of his best dramatic and rhetorical language. He is not without his intellectual cleverness and paradoxical manner in these sonnets. They combine excellently wit and passion in perfect distribution. In a sense we are back to the brilliant craftsmanship of the best Songs and Sonnets.

Grierson shows his usual critical insight when he says that in the Holy Sonnets, Donne's poetry

acquires something of the same unique character as his love songs and elegies by a similar combination of qualities, intensity of feeling, subtle turns of thought, and occasional Miltonic splendour of phrase.<sup>30</sup>

In the Holy Sonnets there are themes which provide the source of Donne's impassioned meditation. Such themes as death, judgment and the crucifixion move the poet to his most stirring language.

Helen Gardner has even grouped the poems according to thematic sequence, so convinced is she of Donne's sincerity of interest at the time of writing. She gives this idea precedence over Grierson's and Gosse's theory of the 1617 change in Donne.<sup>31</sup>

His dramatic openings quickly introduce his themes in one sweep of a line. The rhetorical flourish recalls the best of the Songs and Sonnets:

Thou hast made me, And shall thy worke decay?  
(I, 1)

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. xxxviii-xl.

Death occupies the poet's thoughts in the lines:

Repaire me now, for now mine end doth haste,  
I runne to death, and death meets me as fast . . . .  
(I. 2-3)

Notice the similarly dramatic opening of:

Oh my blacke Soule! now thou art summoned  
By sicknesse, deaths herald, and champion . . . .  
(IV. 1-2)

He turns our attention to the closing scene of life's drama by the gripping lines:

This is my playes last scene, here heavens appoint  
My pilgrimages last mile . . . .  
(VI. 1-2)

and judgment concerns the poet when he cries:

At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow  
Your trumpets, Angells . . . .  
(VII. 1-2)

Donne adopts the defiant tone of his love sonnets as he bravely declares:

"Death be not proud . . . ." If we should study the introductory lines of the Holy Sonnets we would no doubt be impressed by the rhetorical forcefulness and dramatic power which attracted De Quincey and other interested readers of Donne's poems, and escaped so many other critics whose concern seemed to be preservation of the image of Donne as a playfully witty metaphysical poet.

Sonnet V offers an appropriate example of the intense emotion which Donne concentrates into his best poetry:

Powre new seas in mine eyes, that so I might  
Drowne my world with my weeping earnestly,  
Or wash it, if it must be drown'd no more:  
But oh it must be burnt! alas the fire  
Of lust and envie have burnt it heretofore,  
And made it fouler; Let their flames retire,  
And burne me ô Lord, with a fiery zeale  
Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heale.  
(7 - 14)

This kind of writing is inspired by a deep sense of guilt and a desire for forgiveness and cleansing. Johnson's objection to this as poetry is not justifiable, for not only does Donne compress this forceful language into sonnet form, but writes with the rhetorical effectiveness of Shakespeare's best verse. The closing lines are inspired by Biblical language (Psalm 69.9) and are a true illustration of the religious fervour and zeal that underlies Biblical poetry.

Sometimes Donne's passion manifests itself through a desire for violence against his guilty soul:

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

The heat of his passion increases from one line to the other as verb follows verb with mounting intensity of meaning: "knocke" (line 2) becomes "breake" (line 4); "breathe" (line 2) becomes "blowe" (line 4); and "shine" (line 2) becomes "burn" (line 4). The vigour of Donne's passion for spiritual healing and restoration increases as he introduces the image of the "usurpt towne" (lines 6 ff.). "Labour to admit you" suggests the writhings of child labour. This reveals the Donne of the Elegies and the love sonnets with his sensual conception of love. He is indeed "a spirit in conflict" as he concludes the sonnet with the paradoxical prayer:

Divorce mee, 'untie, or breake that knot againe,  
 Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I  
 Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,  
 Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.  
 (XIV. 11 - 14)

Donne's intellect is at work in this sonnet and no doubt conjures up these antithetical images, which move the reader because of the violent passion of the language he uses. Donne's warm heart beats beneath our eyes. We feel the pulse of the poet. Nothing would be more disastrous to a sacred poem than to introduce the image of a rape in the midst of things; yet Donne brilliantly succeeds in doing this in the last line of this sonnet. We are tempted by this image to recall the sensual images of the Songs of Songs rather than the shocking conceits of some of Donne's coarser elegies. Helen Gardner emphasizes this when she says:

Donne was a man of strong passions, in whom an appetite for life was crossed by a deep distaste for it. He is satirist and elegist at the same period, and even in the same poem.<sup>32</sup>

She is also right when she states that

In his love poetry he [Donne] is not concerned with what he ought or ought not to feel, but with the expression of feeling itself. Passion is there its own justification, and so is disgust, or hatred or grief. In his divine poetry feeling and thought are judged by the standard of what a Christian should feel or think.<sup>33</sup>

This "feeling and thought," this struggle between heart and head underlies the fusion of passion and wit in all Donne's poetry. This conflict is everywhere in his best poetry. It adjusts itself to the very structure of his thought in the Holy Sonnets. He uses the division between octave and sestet in the conventional manner to indicate a reversal of opinions or states of feeling. Take, for instance, Sonnet VII where Donne cries out for the trumpets to sound "at the earths

---

<sup>32</sup>Gardner, Divine Poems, p. xxxv.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. xxxvi.



imagin'd corners" to call the sleeping dead to life. When he reaches the sestet he reverses his whole attitude:

But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne a space,  
 For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,  
 'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,  
 When wee are there; here on this lowly ground,  
 Teach mee how to repent; for that's as good  
 As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.  
 (9 - 14)

There is always a fresh thought of guilt which rekindles Donne's inner conflict. This helps to explain why violence and suddenness accompany the currents of passion in his divine poetry.

Donne's wit is subdued but still at work in Sonnet IX where there is something of the logical structure of some of his Songs and Sonnets. Notice the first premise which is introduced by a conditional "if":

If poysonous mineralls, and if that tree,  
 Whose fruit threw death on else immortall us,  
 If lecherous goats, if serpents envious  
 Cannot be damn'd . . . .  
 (1 - 4)

He then follows these premises with a question - "Alas; why should I bee?" Then he pursues his argument with a series of prying questions and becomes aware of the course which his feverish intellect leads him to take. So he halts at the end of the octave and reverses his attitude again:

But who am I, that dare dispute with thee  
 O God?

The succeeding lines reveal his repentant feelings.

In Sonnet X he has a cynical conversation with death, and we are quite aware that his intellect is at work as he analyses the manner in

which Death does its dreadful work on earth:

Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,  
 And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,  
 And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,  
 And better then thy stroake; why swell'st thou then:  
 One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,  
 And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.  
 (9 - 14)

But Donne maintains his effective rhetorical language which moves the emotions of his reader. The anaphora of lines 10 - 12 helps increase the cumulative effect of his catalogue of the functions of Death. Each conquest Death makes is nullified by a parallel achievement by man, and this leads to the final declaration: "death, thou shalt die." Donne's last line is as epigrammatic a conclusion as we can get, yet as religious poetry it is most fitting and artistic.

When Donne is witty in the Holy Sonnets, he is so with great justification. When he moves from the shockingly passionate opening of "Spit in my face you Jewes" to the imploring tones of "Show me deare Christ, thy spouse, so bright and clear," he provides us with every justification for such changes in feeling. The fascinating variety of attitudes and the varying combinations of intellectual ingenuity and passion make Donne a most interesting and challenging study for the critic. Grierson's rediscovery of Donne and his emphasis on passion have helped to bring all these intrinsically valuable qualities to light.

Donne's Hymns are also a most successful part of his religious poetry and unite passion with effective language. In Hymne to God my God in my sicknesse Donne's conceits are subtle enough to displease Johnson and some of the important Victorian critics. The complexity of the images seems to reflect intellectuality and ingenuity rather than intensity

of feeling and sorrow at a time of extreme sickness.

The first stanza recaptures a scene of heavenly harmony among the saintly choirs above:

Since I am comming to that Holy roome,  
 Where, with thy Quire of Saints for evermore,  
 I shall be made thy Musique; As I come  
 I tune the Instrument here at the dore,  
 And what I must doe then, thinke here before.  
 (1 - 5)

But the hymn continues with a series of images that suggest intellectual cleverness rather than sincerity of feeling: the physicists are cosmographers and Donne is their map. The meeting of west and east on the map suggests the contact of death and the resurrection. Then Donne introduces a series of geographical place names with symbolical meaning:

Is the Pacifique Sea my home? Or are  
 The Easterne riches? Is Jerusalem?  
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibaltare,  
 All streights, and none but streights, are wayes to them,  
 Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, of Sem. <sup>34</sup>  
 (16 - 20)

The subtle paradox of two objects becoming one is resumed in lines 21 to 25:

We thinke that Paradise and Calvarie,  
Christs Crosse, and Adams tree, stood in one place;  
 Looke Lord, and finde both Adams met in me;  
 As the first Adams sweat surrounds my face,  
 May the last Adams blood my soule embrace.

Adam's tree (the tree in Eden) is linked with Christ's cross, and Adam and Christ (the first and second Adams of 1 Corinthian 15:45) meet in Donne. This leads to the final lines which have the heroic and triumphant

---

<sup>34</sup>See Helen Gardner's commentary on the poem (The Divine Poems, p. 108) for symbolical meanings.

tone of a suffering martyr who accepts his fate. The final paradox is more a fitting comment on life, and no less meaningful than St. Paul's experience: "Cast down but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:9).

indeed. The Hymne to God the Father combines wit and passion, but more passion than wit. Donne's feeling of guilt is his greatest inspiration to speak to God. Each moment of penitence and forgiveness is followed by a fresh confession of guilt: an elaborate pattern into which he moulds its expression, resulting in a strange  
 When thou hast done, thou hast not done,  
 For, I have more.  
 The struggle continues to the end of the hymn with a more hopeful

conclusion: provide a fitting summary of Dr. Donne of the Divine Poems.

I have a sinne of feare, that when I have spunne  
 My last thred, I shall perish on the shore;  
 But sweare by thy selfe, that at my death thy sonne  
 Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;  
 And, having done that, Thou hast done,  
 I heare no more.

This beautiful hymn is similar in mood and thought to St. Paul's confession in Romans 7: "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not, but what I have, that do I" (verse 15). Donne's last verse reveals his victory through the Son of God — "thy sonne/ Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore." St. Paul also finds his victory over continual sin and failure, in Christ: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (verses 24-25).

Some critics have made much of the witty playfulness of Donne at this crucial period of his life, stating that he was punning on his name in the final lines of each stanza. Whether this is so or not the final impression is in no way destroyed. It may perhaps reflect Donne's

ability to be cheerful at a time of great physical distress. What is more important perhaps, is that it demonstrates his ability to bring together subtlety of intellect with sincerity of feeling, a rare accomplishment indeed. On this accomplishment, Grierson may have the final word:

Donne's work recaptures the peculiar charm of his early love verses at their best, the unique blend of passionate feeling and rapid subtle thinking, the strange sense that his verse gives of a certain conflict between the passionate thought and the varied and often elaborate pattern into which he moulds its expression, resulting in a strange blend of harshness and constraint with reverberating and penetrating harmony. No poems give more than the Holy Sonnets and the three hymns . . . the sense of conflict of soul, of faith and hope snatched and held desperately . . . .<sup>35</sup>

These words provide a fitting summary of Dr. Donne of the Divine Poems.

He did not always find sympathetic listeners in every century. Sometimes this was because of a dislike of "religious poetry"—a veritable contradiction of terms to Johnson in the eighteenth century; at other times it was due to a dislike of levity in treating sacred topics, as was the case among the Victorians. In the twentieth century this levity, recognized as an inappropriate display of wit and subtlety in some of the Divine Poems, was condemned by Hunt. These criticisms show the ineffectiveness of wit without passion in securing approval of Donne's religious poetry. Passion is without doubt a better basis for attracting favourable critical opinion.

In revealing Donne's ability to combine wit and passion in his best verse Grierson uncovered much that had been hid to earlier critics. This accomplishment, which was made easier by his very comprehensive

---

<sup>35</sup> Grierson, O.S.A. edition, pp. xli-xlii.

editions of Donne's poetry, has introduced to the modern literary world a great poet whose mysterious personality still fascinates us.

## CONCLUSION

Donne's rediscovery meant the introduction to a new world of poetic experimentation, a world which may have been lost to us if critics continued to view Donne as Johnson and his century viewed him. We have learnt that metaphysical poetry may still be great poetry, that poetry which recaptures a passionate experience may have an aesthetic value as literature which supersedes the speculations of the biographical explorer, that the wit used by Donne need not have been an unsuccessful fusion of heterogeneous ideas, but a masterful combination of miscellaneous material in a manner which is characteristic of the best poetic craftsmanship.

Through Grierson's emphasis on Donne's passion and on the poet's ability to unite this with intellectual subtlety, Donne can be re-evaluated from a new perspective. We can see in him the unique ability to think passionately, to be as passionate with the mind as he is with the heart. This uncommon characteristic in Donne led T.S. Eliot to the conclusion that "A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility."<sup>36</sup> A new look at the metaphysical poets had to be taken. According to Eliot, "without prejudicing their case by the adjective 'metaphysical'," it became necessary to "consider whether their virtue was not something permanently valuable, which subsequently disappeared, but ought not to have disappeared."<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1961), p. 287.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

Eliot, the most influential critic of modern times, by making this statement in 1921, helped to continue the Donne revival until it had enveloped our modern age. Eliot's famous essay on "The Metaphysical Poets," from which the previous quotations were taken, has been one of the most significant and influential pieces of literary criticism to be written in the twentieth century. Its far-reaching results are all traceable to Grierson's delightful anthology Metaphysical Poetry, Donne to Butler (1921), by which it was inspired.

After Eliot had given prominence to the metaphysical poets and to Donne's expert use of heterogeneous images, the use of paradox and ambiguity, the employment of learned and unusual images, and of abstruse phrases became significant characteristics in modern poetry. Such influential critics as Cleanth Brooks, John Crowe Ransome, and Allen Tate have stressed the metaphysical elements of poetry,<sup>38</sup> and have made them an essential consideration in modern criticism.

The terms "paradox," "ambiguity," "dissociation of sensibility" and "metaphysical conceit" are now common-places in twentieth-century criticism. This is the result of the Donne revival. Indeed, the great vogue for Donne has greatly affected the Anglo-American experimental movement in modern poetry, and the afterglow still brightens our literary horizon.

<sup>38</sup> Helen (ed.), John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays, New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962.  
Leonard Unger, Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. ix.  
"The Athenaeum," December 9, 1899, p. 802.

The Life and Letters of John Donne, 2 vols. London: William Heinemann, 1899.

"The Poetry of John Donne," The New Review, IX (1893), 236-247.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### I. WORKS BY DONNE

- Fausset, Hugh I'anson (ed.). John Donne's Poems. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1960.
- Gardner, Helen (ed.). John Donne: The Divine Poems. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
- Grierson, Herbert J.C. (ed.). The Poems of John Donne Edited from the Old Editions and Numerous Manuscripts with Introduction and Commentary. 2 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1912.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Poems of John Donne. London: Oxford University Press, 1942.
- Hayward, John (ed.). John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's Complete Poetry and Selected Prose. London: The Nonesuch Press, 1962.
- Potter, George R., and Evelyn M. Simpson (eds.). The Sermons of John Donne 10 vols. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953.
- Redpath, Theodore (ed.). The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1959.

### II. BOOKS AND ARTICLES ON DONNE

- Bryan, Robert Armistead. "The Reputation of John Donne in England from 1600-1832: A Study in the History of Literary Criticism." Unpublished Doctoral thesis, The University of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1956.
- Coffin, Charles Monroe. John Donne and the New Philosophy. New York: The Humanities Press, 1958.
- Gardner, Helen (ed.). John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1962.
- Gosse, Edmund W. "The Life of Donne," The Athenaeum, December 9, 1899, p. 802.
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Life and Letters of John Donne. 2 vols. London: William Heinemann, 1899.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Poetry of John Donne," The New Review, IX (1893), 236-247.

- Gransden, K.W. John Donne. London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1954.
- Grierson, Herbert J.C. "John Donne and the Via Media," The Times Literary Supplement, XLIII (July, 1948), 305-314.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Donne's Satires, II, ll. 71-3," The Times Literary Supplement, XXXIX (March 6, 1930), 190.
- Hunt, Clay. Donne's Poetry: Essays in Literary Analysis. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956.
- Jessopp, Augustus. "Donne, John (1573-1631)," Dictionary of National Biography, V. 1128-1139. London: Smith, Elder and Company, 1908.
- Legouis, Emile. Donne the Craftsman. New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962.
- Leishman, J.B. The Monarch of Wit. London: Hutchinson and Company (Publishers) Limited, 1962.
- Nethercot, Arthur H. "The Reputation of John Donne as a Metrist," The Sewanee Review, XXX (October, 1922), 463-474.
- Spencer, Theodore (ed.). A Garland for John Donne 1631-1931. Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1958.
- Stein, Arnold. "Donne's Prosody," Publications of the Modern Languages Association, LIX (June, 1944), 373-397.
- \_\_\_\_\_. John Donne's Lyrics. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962.
- Walton, Izaak. The Lives of John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert and Robert Sanderson. London: Humphrey Milford Oxford University Press, [n.d.]
- \_\_\_\_\_. The Lives of Dr. John Donne, Sir Henry Wotton, Mr. Richard Hooker, Mr. George Herbert and Dr. Robert Sanderson. London: John Major, 1825.
- Weaver, H.D. "The Reputation of Donne and His School in the Nineteenth Century," Unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Western Ontario, Ontario, 1949.

## III. MISCELLANEOUS BOOKS AND ARTICLES

- Abrams, M.H. A Glossary of Literary Terms. New York: Rinehart and Company Inc., 1959.
- Ainger, Alfred (ed.). The Letters of Charles Lamb. 2 vols. London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1904.
- Alvarez, A. The School of Donne. London: Chatto and Windus, 1961.
- Ault, Norman (ed.). Seventeenth Century Lyrics. London: Longmans, Green and Company, Limited, 1928.
- Baker, Carlos (ed.). The Prelude with a Selection from the Shorter Poems, The Sonnets, The Recluse and The Excursion. New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1961.
- Bennett, Joan. Four Metaphysical Poets. Cambridge: University Press, 1934.
- Bennett, R.E. "Walton's Use of Donne's Letters," Philological Quarterly, XVI (January, 1937), 30-34.
- Bredvold, Louis I, Alan D. McKillop, and Lois Whitney (eds.). Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1956.
- Brinkley, Roberta Florence (ed.). Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century. [n.p.] : Duke University Press, 1955.
- Butt, John. "Izaak Walton's Methods in Biography," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, XIX (1933), 67-84.
- Charteris, Evan. The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse. London: William Heinemann Limited, 1931.
- Clarke, W.K. Lowther, and Charles Harris (eds.). Liturgy and Worship. London: S.P.C.K., 1959.
- Craig, Hardin (ed.). The Complete Works of Shakespeare. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1961.
- Coffin, Robert P. Tristram, and Alexander M. Witherspoon (eds.). Seventeenth Century Prose and Poetry. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. The Literary Remains. London: W. Pickering, 1836-8.

- Curle, Richard (ed.). Robert Browning and Julia Wedgwood: A Broken Friendship as Revealed by Their Letters. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1937.
- "The Donne Tradition." The Times Literary Supplement, XXIX (July 31, 1930), 625.
- Eliot, T.S. Selected Essays. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Metaphysical Poets," The Times Literary Supplement, XX (October 20, 1921), 669-670.
- Frye, Northrop (ed.). Paradise Lost and Selected Poetry and Prose. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962.
- Garnett, Richard. "Mr. Gosse's Life of Donne," The Bookman, X (1899), 582-584.
- Gosse, Edmund W. Modern English Literature. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1928.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Books on the Table. London: William Heinemann, 1921.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Gossip in a Library. New York: Lovell, Coryell and Company, 1891.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Selected Essays (second series). London: William Heinemann Limited, 1928.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Seventeenth Century Studies. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1897.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Some Diversions of a Man of Letters. London: William Heinemann 1920.
- "Gosse's Life of Donne - I," The Nation, LXX (February, 1900), 111-113; 133-135.
- "Mr. Gosse's Life of Donne," Littell's Living Age. CCXXIII (1900), 726-731.
- Grierson, Sir Herbert J.C. The Background of English Literature - Classical and Romantic. London: Chatto and Windus, 1960.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Criticism and Creation. London: Chatto and Windus, 1947.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century. London: Chatto and Windus, 1948.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936.
- Grierson, Sir Herbert J.C., and J.C. Smith. A Critical History of English Poetry. Second edition. London: Chatto and Windus, 1947.

- Grierson, Sir Herbert J.C. "Bacon's poem 'The World': its Date and Relation to Certain Other Poems," Modern Language Review, VI (April, 1911), 145-156.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Oxford 'Donne'," The Times Literary Supplement, XXIX (February 20, 1930), 142.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Spirit in Conflict," The Spectator, March 26, 1943, p. 293.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Rhetoric and English Composition. London: Oliver and Boyd Limited, 1945.
- Grierson, Sir Herbert J.C., and Sandys Wason. The Personal Note or First and Last Words from Prefaces, Introductions, Dedications, Epilogues. London: Chatto and Windus, 1946.
- Hazlitt, William. Lectures on the English Comic Writers. London: Oxford University Press, 1907.
- Hinman, Robert B. Abraham Cowley's World of Order. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.
- Houghton, Walter E. The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870. New Haven: Yale University Press, [n.d.].
- Howe, P.P. (ed.). The Complete Works of William Hazlitt. 21 vols. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1930.
- Humphries, Rolphe. (trans.). Ovid: The Art of Love. Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1962.
- Johnson, Samuel. Lives of the English Poets. 2 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1938.
- Keast, William R. Seventeenth-Century English Poetry: Modern Essays in Criticism. New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- Keynes, Geoffrey. A Bibliography of Dr. John Donne Dean of St. Paul's. Cambridge: University Press, 1958.
- Landis, Paul, and Ronald E. Freeman (eds.). Letters of the Brownings to George Barrett. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958.
- Legouis, Emile, Louis Cazamian, and Raymond Las Vergnas. A History of English Literature. [n.p.]: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1964.
- Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning 1845-1846. New York: Harper and Brothers (Publishers) [n.d.].
- Leishman, J.B. The Metaphysical Poets. New York: Russell and Russell Inc., 1963.

- Lounsbury, Thomas R. The Early Literary Career of Robert Browning. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911.
- Lucas, E.V. The Life of Charles Lamb. 2 vols. New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1905.
- MacLure Millar, and F.W. Watt (eds.). Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age: Presented to A.S.P. Woodhouse. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964.
- Martz, Louis L. The Poetry of Meditation. London: Yale University Press, 1962.
- Masson, David (ed.). The Collected Writings of Thomas De Quincey. 14 vols. London: A. and C. Black, 1897.
- Nethercot, Arthur H. "The Reputation of the Metaphysical Poets During the Seventeenth Century," Journal of English and Germanic Philology, XXIII (1924), 173-198.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Term 'Metaphysical Poets' Before Johnson," Modern Language Notes, XXXVII (January, 1922), 11-17.
- Novarr, David. The Making of Walton's Lives. New York: Cornell University Press, 1958.
- Peacock, Markham L. (Jr.). The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth. Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1950.
- Pottle, Frederick A. The Idiom of Poetry. New York: Cornell University Press, 1946.
- Rouse, W.H.D. Demonstration in Latin Elegiac Verse. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899.
- Saintsbury, George. "The Metaphysical Poets," The Times Literary Supplement, XX (October 27), 1921), 734.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Metaphysical Poets," The Times Literary Supplement, XX (November 10, 1921), 734.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A History of English Prosody. 3 vols. London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1923.
- Seventeenth Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert Grierson. Oxford: Press, 1938.

- Sharp, R.L. "The Pejorative Use of Metaphysical," Modern Language Notes, XLIX (December, 1934), 503-505.
- Showerman, Grant (trans.). Ovid with an English Translation: Heroides and Amores. London: William Heinemann Limited, 1958.
- Smalley, Donald Arthur. "Browning and Donne," The Times Literary Supplement, XXXIV (October 10, 1935), 631.
- Smith, James Harry, and Edd Winfield Parks (eds.). The Great Critics New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., Publishers, 1951.
- Spencer, Theodore, and Mark Van Doren. Studies in Metaphysical Poetry: Two Essays and a Bibliography. New York: Columbia University Press, 1939.
- Spenser, Edmund. The Complete Poetical Works. Cambridge edition. Boston: Houghton Company, [n.d.].
- Stauffer, Donald A. Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge. New York: Modern Library, 1951.
- "The Oxford Donne," The Times Literary Supplement, XXIX (February 6, 1930), 96.
- Tillyard, E.M.W. The Metaphysicals and Milton. London: Chatto and Windus, 1960.
- Unger, Leonard. Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962.
- Wallerstein, Ruth. Studies in Seventeenth-Century Poetic. [n.p.]: University of Wisconsin Press, 1950.
- Watson, George (ed.). Dryden of Dramatic Poesy. 2 vols. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Limited, 1962.
- Weber, Alfred. History of Philosophy. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925.
- White, Helen, Ruth C. Wallerstein and Ricardo Quintana (eds.). Seventeenth-Century Verse and Prose: 1600-1660. 2 vols. New York: The Macmillan Company, [n.d.].
- White, William. John Donne since 1900: A Bibliography of Periodical Articles. Boston: The F.W. Faxon Company, 1942.
- Who was Who, 1916-1928, (Adam and Charles Black), II, 423.

Williamson, George. Seventeenth Century Contexts. London: Faber and Faber, 1960.

\_\_\_\_\_. The Donne Tradition. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930.