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JOHN DONNE'S SONGS AND SONET'S: THE INTRACTABLE "I"

by

Wladyslaw Konieczny

B.A.(phil.) Sir Wilfred Laurier University, 1973

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department
of
English

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the way in which Donne responds to the threats of time, mutability and death in the *Songs and Sonnets*. Donne is seen as being in conflict with himself. On the one hand, he thirsts for immortality; on the other, he doubts of its possibility. He is obsessed with time and death, and his obsession leads him to concentrate on himself, obliterating other considerations in the process.

The study groups the poems according to the themes of love, time and death and discusses Donne's obsession with each. The scope of the thesis is limited to a selection of the *Songs and Sonnets*, one that represents the main themes. Chapter one examines Donne's seeming indifference to the visual and his apparent contradictory attitudes toward love. Chapter two focusses on his treatment of the theme of time and mutability, and Chapter Three discusses his concern with the relationship between love and death.

As an interpretative reading of the poems, the essay avoids any identification of the biography of the poet with his work. The voice in the poems is seen as a lyric protagonist who, for the sake of convenience, is referred to as Donne. The thesis refers to the traditional background against which Donne wrote as a way of illuminating the ideas discussed.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. Alan Rudrum and Dr. Paul Budra for their invaluable comments, and Dr. Thomas Grieve for his criticism and support. I owe a great debt to Dr. Harvey DeRoo whose advice helped me clarify my own ideas, and to Dr. Terry G. Sherwood for his reading of the final manuscript. Above all, I am grateful to Dr. Frederick Candelaria for his patience and wisdom.
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INTRODUCTION

In this study, I will argue that John Donne is torn between what is given—time and death and their effects on love—and the desired: the infinite. Recognizing the inevitability of time's passage and death's omnipotence, Donne ostensibly seeks immortality through love, a literary commonplace to which his poetry gives added meaning and presence. In his analysis of love, Donne creates a poetic world he relentlessly dominates. The landscape is barren, and woman is featureless; indeed, love itself is often but a shadow. Donne, however, is omnipresent, overpoweringly so, as we see in his manipulation of the language, in his attempts to control space and time, and in his obsession with death. He speaks with voices that betray his longing for and revulsion to love, his fear of death, and his desire to transcend it. Each voice is distinctive, each is convincing. The tone ranges from the cynical to the sincere, from the bitter to the hopeful, from the humorous to the sombre. The combined effect, nonetheless, leaves the impression that Donne remains detached, aloof, his view of things ironic, his control masterful. In what is the final ironic twist, he achieves immortality, not so much through love as through art. The focus of my thesis is limited to those aspects of the poems that show this controlling, manipulative quality.

I do not propose to give a Marxist, feminist, deconstructivist, or new historicist reading of the poems. I am fully aware of the importance these theoretical positions have had to the study of literature. Indeed, if nothing else, a critic like Stephen Greenblatt, for example, has shown just how complex the whole issue of the relationship between a writer and his work can be, how writers create themselves through improvisation and role-
Other critics such as Thomas Docherty and William Zunder also ground Donne's work in its historical context. The former argues well the difficulty involved in attempting to demystify the text; the latter, examines the themes in Donne's poetry against their historical background. Arthur F. Marotti, too, in his recent study of Donne as coterie poet, argues in detail the variety of forces that shaped Donne's work.

My approach to the poems is eclectic, one that incorporates an attentive reading of the selected poems with reference to the traditional background against which Donne wrote whenever such reference will help elucidate the poem under discussion, for to ignore entirely that background would be to short-change the reader of the poems. My reading of the poems is informed by my knowledge of the period, the author and the philosophical and social milieu within which these poems were written. Donne drew extensively on his rhetorical training and talent, Petrarchan conventions, neo-Platonism, and the cross-currents of thought characteristic of his time. His manipulation of conventions is artful, the effect it produces, disturbing. To be aware of his variations on certain themes is to appreciate even more the extent of his control over his analyses of love and the reader's experience of those dissections as he listens to Donne's intriguing, persuasive voice.

It is a commonplace of much twentieth century criticism of Donne's *Songs and Sonets* that the voice, the speaker, the persona, the dramatic presence in the poems, is that of the 'I' who, as A.J. Smith argues, "...speaks not only as a distinctive personality but also, whatever the inconsistencies, [as] recognizably the same persona." Frank J. Warnke suggests that metaphysical poets spoke through "...a dramatic persona as lyric protagonist." For some,
this voice is that of Donne himself. J.E.V. Crofts argues that "Every line is resonant with his voice; every line seems to bear the stamp of his peculiar personality." J.B. Leishman counsels that "What is really important is to attend carefully to the tone of voice, the inner vibration: that, ultimately, is the only means of determining the degree to which what I may call Donne himself is present in any poem." In a similar vein, Wilbur Sanders refers to the voice which "...effortlessly transforms the kind of attention we are prompted to give it, so that (as Leavis has it) 'we read on as we read the living.'"

In discussing the voice, Crofts, Leishman, and Sanders, as well as others, appear to equate the voice with Donne himself, making of the speaker in the poems the direct representation of John Donne the poet. There is an implicit, if not outright, linking of Donne's art with Donne's life. In fact, John Carey attempts to establish a direct relationship between Donne's life and his poetry, drawing on several biographical turning points as catalysts for the poetry. John Shawcross, however, while admitting the value of autobiography in understanding a poet's works, argues that poetry should first be viewed as literature then as autobiography.

We may draw two conclusions from standard criticism of Donne's poetry: there is general agreement that there is a dramatic speaker in the lyrics, and there is a tendency to turn from paying attention to the speaker to paying attention to Donne the man. My intent in this study is to consider the speaker as "lyric protagonist," to use Warnke's phrase, and thus, as I have stated above, to reveal his manipulative qualities and his obsessions. However, to avoid the repetition and syntactical awkwardness of constantly
referring to 'the speaker of Donne's poem,' 'the voice in the poem,' 'the persona of the poem,' or 'the lyric protagonist,' I should like to stress that I use the proper name, with the understanding that I do not equate the voice in the poems with that of Donne the man.

My essay is limited by several factors. I make no attempt to identify life with art, Donne's poems with Donne. Biographical details of Donne's life, while they provide me with much to think about, do not predicate my analysis of the poems. Donne's supposed apostasy, his Augustine-like turn-about, his marriage and the ensuing hardship it caused—all these are indeed the background to my reading of the poems, but what influence all these forces had on his writing is well beyond the scope of this study.

If we may make any claim about the Songs and Sonets, it is that they are replete with paradox, irony, contradiction and ambivalence. Their themes of death, time, mutability, and their effects on love are those that, while not unique to Baroque poetry, certainly are characteristic of it in their intensity.14 Patrick Cruttwell points out that for Donne and other poets of the period:

Incongruities—a taste for incongruities, and a need to express and, if possible, reconcile them—lie at the centre of the new style. The cynical and the idealistic, the realistic and the fantastic, the homely and the exotic, the grotesque and the beautiful, the mortality of the graveyard and the sensuality of the living body—these are some of them; and the deepest is that of love and death.15

In the Songs and Sonets, we find the expression of incongruity in the attitudes to love, and we sense an attempt at reconciliation of love and its adversaries—time and death. Like the "gold to ayery thinesse beate,"16 of which he writes in "A Valediction forbidding mourning," Donne reaches out to grasp infinity, but in a typically contradictory fashion doubts the possibility of attaining it, for Donne is incapable of not thinking in two opposite
directions at once. He attempts the impossible, to stop time, freeze movement, control change, and defeat death in voices that ironically imply the impossibility of doing so.

In arguing from this particular perspective, I take the risk of stressing certain aspects of the poems to the exclusion of others. The poems, however, can be read on a number of levels. They can be read naively as simple positive and negative expressions of love, several of which are in Leishman's words: "...simply ingenious, outrageous paradoxes, disquisitions, or what Donne himself called 'evaporations' on the subject of love."17 One can also read them as skillful manipulations of Petrarchan conventions which Donne both uses and abuses. At still another level, we can begin to ask ourselves what the overall effect these poems have on the reader's experience of them. It is this last level that concerns me. I wish to suggest that one of these effects is to leave the reader with the sense that Donne obliterates everything but himself from view: setting, woman and indeed love itself; that they are a drama in which he stands centre stage, wearing different masks, lending the atmosphere a dramatic quality. To suggest this, is not to imply that readings by those to whom I refer are invalid. Where my readings differ, I believe, is in my emphasis on the serious, controlling aspect of Donne, an aspect which I intend to show lends a measure of coherence to the Songs and Sonets. My sense is that these are poems as much about power and superiority as they are about love. Carey makes similar points in his study of Donne's life and art. But while I draw support from his insights, I do not rely on biographical details to support my thesis.
I should state too, that I restrict my discussion exclusively to the *Songs and Sonets*, a heterogeneous collection of poems about love. As a group, they are distinguished by their use of the themes of time, mutability and death. But perhaps of even more importance for my study, they reveal, through the treatment of these themes, a variety of attitudes towards love, and it is in those shifting attitudes that we begin to sense the control and manipulation that characterize our experience of the poems. By shifting attitudes, I do not mean to imply a change in attitude through time because the chronology of the poems has not been established. Rather, I am suggesting that the variations in attitude and tone exhibited in the *Songs and Sonets* are part of Donne's rhetorical strategy and evidence of his obsession with the self. On the assumption that they are a set, and that there are subsets within the set (subsets that group poems according to their different attitudes towards love), poems from each subset taken together will adequately represent the whole.

I should add, as well, that given the external limits placed upon this study, limits to do with length, it would be, if not impossible, then certainly impractical to discuss each poem in detail. According to John T. Shawcross, for example, the *Songs and Sonets* comprise fifty-eight poems, although Helen Gardner includes only fifty-four, while Theodore Redpath lists fifty-five. Within the scope of this study it would not be possible to do them all justice. Instead, as I have suggested, I study a selection of poems that represents the themes and attitudes in the entire collection.

With regard to grouping, I acknowledge that several critics, Theodore Redpath and Helen Gardner among them, have tried to group the poems by
their attitudes towards love and have to some extent influenced my selection and arrangement of the poems. In my grouping of the poems, I have been aided primarily by Redpath and Gardner; however, I have used their groupings only as guides to my own. In Chapter One, I examine several general characteristics of the poems: their lack of the visual, their manipulation of place, and their tendency towards abstraction of woman and love. In that section I have subdivided the poems into those that deal with the inconstancy and constancy of lovers and treat love either as lust, as something to be quantified, or as a union of mutual lovers. In Chapter Two, I discuss poems presenting contradictory attitudes towards the effects of time and change on love. In Chapter Three, I examine poems that reveal Donne's obsession with death and how it informs the poetry.

This study resulted from the chance reading of T.S. Eliot's essay, "Donne in Our Time," published in 1931. In it, Eliot claims, "We may say even with some confidence that we probably understand sympathetically Donne today better than poets and critics fifty years hence will understand him." I believe Eliot's statement has much merit, for Donne, to borrow a much repeated term, lived in an age of "transition," one in which man's place in the scheme of things was increasingly questioned. The seventeenth century saw a shift in world view. Donne's age experienced the gradual breakdown of the established order of things. The hierarchical medieval view of the world was being questioned. Reason, once the able handmaiden of faith increasingly became the dominant partner. Religious dissension and political turmoil were characteristic of the age. The age is characterized by doubt and self-analysis, caused by "...fundamental and developing change,"
a state not unfamiliar to Eliot and his contemporaries. Donne's poems could be described in the same words Patrick Crutwell used to characterize the last years of the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries as a period exhibiting, "...a new mentality, critical, dramatic, satirical, complex, and uncertain."24

Thematically, the Songs and Sonets have to do with time, mutability and death and their effects on love. In the shifting attitudes toward love, in the obsession with time and death, in Donne's attempts to control both, we gain a sense of the unease and doubt which colour much of the poetry. In the pages that follow I shall show that the sense of control over the discussion of love, the sense of superiority displayed by Donne, the doubt that filters through even some of the more optimistic poems—that these lend a measure of coherence to the Songs and Sonets.
NOTES

1 While Stephen J. Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980) does not discuss Donne, except to mention him once in passing, his thesis could certainly be applicable to a study of Donne that attempted to analyze the cultural codes that influence the behaviour and consciousness of authors, and how Donne has responded to those codes, that is, how and to what extent Donne shaped himself—a process which Greenblatt suggests is manipulable and artful. For a criticism of Greenblatt see William Kerrigan, "Individualism, Historicism, and New Styles of Overreaching," Philosophy and Literature 31, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 115-126.


5 Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 44, in his discussion of New Critics and close reading states that in close reading one necessarily pays attention "...to this rather than to something else." Although I am not a New Critic, I appreciate that in reading attentively, I, too, may stress certain aspects of the poems and not others.


J.B. Leishman, *The Monarch of Wit* (London: Hutchinson, 1951; 6th edn. 1962, reprinted 1965), 166. See also Chapter One in which Leishman discusses the dramatic nature of Donne's poetry and his description of this as the "dialectical expression of personal drama."


See John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind & Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), for a biographical reading that makes much of two facts of Donne's life: that he was born a Catholic and that he was an apostate. The reader will recognize my debt to Carey, particularly as I develop my thesis that Donne is a controlling figure in the *Songs and Sonnets*, one who dictates the nature of the discussion of love and the reader's experience of the lyrics. However, Carey draws parallels between Donne's life and his art, whereas I do not. For a rather negative comment on Carey's book, see William Kerrigan, "What Was Donne Doing?", *South Central Review: The Journal of the South Central Modern Language Association* 4, no.2 (Summer 1987): 2-15. Kerrigan suggests that Carey's book is "...baldly calculated to appeal...to our age-old sense of integrity...and to our newly acquired sense of female oppression." 2.
12 John T. Shawcross, "Poetry, Personal and Impersonal" in The Eagle and the Dove: Reassessing John Donne, eds. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 53-66. Shawcross argues that too often poems are read from one of two approaches: biographical or philosophical and that this leads to misinterpretation. He does not suggest that biography and philosophy are unimportant; however, he stresses that we should attend to other elements as well, including the speaker and the tone.

13 I have suggested that there is a tendency to discuss the voice in the poems as a private spokesman for Donne the man, to equate what the speaker says with the thoughts and feelings of the historical Donne. Those who disagree with this position include Donald Guss, John Donne, Petrarchist, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966), 108, and Thomas Docherty, 93.

14 In using the term Baroque, I heed Warnke's suggestion that the term Baroque denotes "...not a precisely definable style but a period complex made up of a whole cluster of more or less related styles." (Versions of Baroque, 1). For Warnke, metaphysical poetry is one of these styles. See also Wylie Sypher, Four Stages of Renaissance Style: Transformations in Art and Literature 1400-1700 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1955) 100-179 and passim. Sypher describes in detail what he considers to be characteristics of the Mannerist style in art and how we experience them in Donne's poetry. In particular, he refers to the intellectual ambiguity, dramatic self-awareness, and tortured thoughts as characteristics that make Donne a Mannerist. These, he argues, are in direct contrast to the harmony, proportion and unity which, in his view, characterize Renaissance art. See also David Evatt, "Donne's Poems and the Five Styles of Renaissance Art," John Donne Journal 5, no.1 (1986): 101-131; L. Elaine Hoover, xi-xxix; Louis L. Martz, The Wit of Love (University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), 114-131.


Leishman's important study of Donne's poetry is still cited by contemporary critics such as John Carey, William Kerrigan, Terry Sherwood, Thomas Docherty, Patricia Pinka and many others. Leishman devotes over one third of his text to a study of the Songs and Sonnets and takes great care to distinguish between poems that in his opinion are outrageous, paradoxical, or cynical and those that are serious poems about love.

William Kerrigan, describes the poems as "...a posthumous book of largely undatable poems spanning perhaps twenty-five years or more of the author's life, its editor unknown and the authority of its order uncertain." ("What was Donne Doing?" 3). See also his comments on the difficulty of treating Donne comprehensively.

Several scholars have grouped the poems according to what they perceive are general statements of love and/or their dates of composition. Herbert J.C. Grierson, ed. The Poems of John Donne: Edited From the Old Editions and Numerous Manuscripts With Introductions and Commentary (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1912), 8-10. Grierson begins by quoting Chambers then presents his groupings of the love poems beginning with the poems in which inconstancy is the main theme. In his second group Grierson places poems in which Donne's wit takes second place to the voice of the lover singing about the joys of love and the grief of parting. In the third and final group he places poems in which we find the Petrarchan lover who rails against his mistress's coldness or who bemoans the fact that her scorn has murdered him. Theodore Redpath in his edition of The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne (London: Methuen, 1964), xxii-xxvii, divides them into two main classes: those that are negative toward love and toward women; those that are positive toward love and toward women. He further subdivides them into subsets which contain poems that express hostility specifically and generally; poems that express satisfaction in a love relationship; poems that deal with inconstancy. Indeed, almost every variation of mood is accounted for in his classification. J.B. Leishman, 177-179, groups them according to moods, attitudes, degree of seriousness, and biography. Leishman refines each category with a number of qualifications. Helen Gardner in her edition of The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) divides them thematically into poems that are essentially realistic, those that are about unrequited love, and poems of mutual love. N.J.C. Andreasen, 16-20, while discussing their attitudes does so by focussing on the Ovidian/Petrarchan/ Neo-Platonic influences and groups them accordingly. Jean Gerber, "Time, Death, and Mutability: A Study of Themes in Some
Poetry of the Renaissance: Spenser, Shakespeare, and Donne" (M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1968), arranges them under the themes of time, mutability and death, and further sub-divides within each group. John Carey, 190-191, suggests that the whole issue of grouping either by general statements about love or by chronology is suspect, claiming that we have no truly reliable information for dating, and attempts at "...knocking Donne's poems into shape by grouping them on the basis of some general statement about love is wrong-headed."


24 Patrick Cruttwell, 39.
CHAPTER ONE
THE SOLITARY LOVER

To read the *Songs and Sonets* is to experience a series of dramatic encounters\(^1\) in which Donne confronts time, death and love and betrays his longing for the infinite. Much like an actor occupying centre stage during a soliloquy,\(^2\) he focusses our attention on himself, arguing different points of view with equal conviction but without reaching a resolution.

Donne is solipsistic.\(^3\) His attempts to manipulate place, woman, and the discussion of love contribute to our sense that we are under the spell of a dominating figure, one who occupies the foreground while everything else recedes into the background. In the first two sections of this chapter, I talk about Donne's lack of interest in the visual, be it setting or his mistress, and how this, in effect, serves to manipulate our experience of the poems. In the remaining sections, I discuss poems that reveal Donne's contradictory attitudes toward love and how they hint at a consciousness that wants love but is unwilling to be its victim; that in the analysis of love Donne believes himself to be in control of whatever situation he is in, the *bon vivant* arguing in favour of carnal love, the "sport"\(^4\) as A.J. Smith describes it, or the neo-platonist intent on combining the spiritual and physical elements of love. Donne obliterates everything from our view but himself. The landscape is barren, woman is more idea than substance, love itself is a shadow. He remains the solitary lover, absorbed in his monologues, frequently oblivious to everything around him.
The Barren Landscape

In his discussion of the dramatic effects of metaphysical poetry, Earl Miner suggests that Donne develops either time or place but not both at the same time.5 I will concern myself with time in Chapter Two. Here, since place is the least important element Donne develops in the *Songs and Sonets*, I mention only in passing his handling of the all but invisible settings in his poems before going on to discuss his more compelling subjects, women, love, time, and death. It is my view that Donne does not develop place, if by *develop* we mean describe in sufficient detail so that the reader can have a clear impression of it. He sets his dramatic monologues in places and then ignores the setting.

First, and perhaps most noticeable, is the absence of description of the external world. To enter his world is to enter a landscape in which we see only shadows of places. As J.E.V. Crofts has suggested, if we turn to Donne for a description of the visible world, we are bound to be disappointed.6 True, places do exist: a room in "The Sunne Rising," a river bank in "The Extasie," a bedroom in "The Dream," a garden in "Twicknam garden," a death bed in "The Funerall," and the grave in "The Relique." With the exception perhaps of "Twicknam garden" and the first stanza of "The Extasie," what all the poems have in common is a lack of description. Thus, while they may claim our attention for many reasons, description of the physical world is not one of them.

Second, within those settings, Donne tends to make himself the centre of our attention, arguing frequently that wherever he is, that, indeed, is the world. In a poem such as "The Sunne Rising," the voice is arrogant as it
draws our attention from the external world to the bedroom, then turns inward, as the closing lines suggest: "Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere" he commands the sun; [and if you do,] "This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere." In commanding the sun to shine on him and his beloved, Donne makes the very spot where they lie an every place and himself the center of our attention, because, of course, we do not see his beloved, just as we do not see the room.

Third, he uses the visible world as a springboard to an internal world of self-analysis. At times, he perceives the external world as hostile and dangerous. During these moments, his voice betrays uncertainty, its tone suggesting fear and anxiety. In "The Baite," for example, a cynically humorous and light-hearted lyric, we hear echoes of Marlowe but only briefly because Donne parodies the pastoral lyric. The lines read easily. They have the lilt of "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," but the world of the poem quickly turns sinister as lovers become like fish caught "With strangling snare, or windowie net." Here, the pastoral setting, or what we assume to be the pastoral setting even though he does not describe it, rapidly turns from a lover's refuge to a lover's trap. The world is a dark, dangerous place, and Donne, in warning us of this, stands above it, seeing it as it really is.

At other times, the most benign object serves to trigger a leap into self-analysis as, for example, in "The Blossme," in which Donne addresses a flower, only to ignore it and concentrate on himself. Similarly, in "The Primrose," he presents us with a colourless flower while he mulls over the number of petals he prefers. In both cases, we may be left wondering about its colour, its odour, its texture, but we are left disappointed because Donne
ignores the visible world and enters a world of abstraction. The external world is a shadow at best, a prop used to prompt a soliloquy and then be quickly discarded. The net effect is two-fold: we quickly realize that this is an internal conflict externalized, and we sense a desire for control manifested in Donne's need to be at the centre of our attention.

Admittedly, the lack of description can be partly explained by the fact that these are poems in which the focus on the lovers is of primary interest. Yet, the poems themselves appear to deny this because Donne seems as uninterested in describing the object of his love as he is in presenting the settings in which he finds himself with her.

**Woman as Object**

Woman does not fare well in the *Songs and Sonnets*. In some poems, she is lectured at and in others scorned. Even in those poems in which Donne treats her tenderly, lovingly, he often presents himself as her superior. In his treatment of her, Donne exhibits similar tendencies to those evidenced in his treatment of place. He tends to push her aside, thereby controlling our perception of her and keeping himself in the foreground. This is as true of his tender glorifications of love in which he explores the concept of the unifying power of love as it is of his cynical, hostile poems.

It would be tempting to argue that Donne responds to woman, shows empathy with her, as Ilona Bell suggests, but the evidence is slim. Donne responds to types, uses them to fuel his argument but basically seems uninterested in clearly defining the character of woman. True, as we shall see in later chapters, he can be tender and loving but, inevitably, he turns inward.
to his own concerns that have to do with time and death, leaving us
wondering about his mistress as much as we wonder about place.

In reading the poems, we are struck by the fact that the woman is
featureless and formless, just as the landscape is barren. We do experience
women through Donne's perceptions and attitudes, but we are not given the
visual basis for seeing women in the poems. If we turn to Donne for a
description of the sensual allure of woman, we will be disappointed. In
"Woman's Constancy" she is a "vain lunatique," while in "Aire and Angels"
she is "some lovely glorious nothing." Her face appears in the speaker's eye
in "The good-morrow," but we never see her. "The Primrose" reduces her to
a cipher, and "The Sunne Rising" elevates her to "all States." "The
Apparition" reduces her to a "feigned vestal," but in "Image of her whom I
love," she is a "faire impression" in the speaker's "faithful heart," although
how "faire" she might be remains a mystery.

Indeed, the harder we try to picture her, the more she eludes us, for we
are completely dominated by Donne, just as she is. Thus, while an actual
woman seems to be the focal point in the poems, in reality she is only a
shadow, more the "Idea of Woman" than a creature of flesh and blood. Yet,
it is not unreasonable to wonder why someone who can provoke Donne to
outbursts of passionate eloquence, outbursts of tenderness, and expressions of
rage, anger, and scorn, remains hidden from our view. Certainly it is neither
a lack of ability with language nor indifference to the body that prevents him
from describing the object of his love or wrath, as the case may be. Consider a
few lines from the "The Apparition:"
And then poore Aspen wretch, neglected thou
Bath'd in a cold quicksilver sweat wilt lye
A veryer ghost then I...

With few words, Donne paints a striking image, his words hinting at the extent of his hate and frustration, but in the end the woman is formless, featureless, more thought than substance, a "veryer ghost" indeed.

Donne seems as uninterested in any particular woman, as he is uninterested in any particular place. Just as he turns place into every place, so too, does he universalize woman. It is not one woman who concerns him, but all women, and in claiming all women as his own, he claims no one in particular. He wishes to possess woman but not be possessed by her as we can see in poems such as "The Indifferent" and "Communitie."

As J.B. Leishman suggests, "The Indifferent" blends the satiric wit of Ovid with scholastic argument. The poem affects a worldly tone, audacious in its abruptness and youthfully comic in its cynicism. The argument focusses on the virtues of inconstancy:

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

From the start, Donne takes charge, the lines a series of abrupt statements signifying power and confidence. If there be a listener, then she must be overwhelmed, as Donne through his blunt statements keeps himself and the woman separate, grammatically and notionally making her object and himself subject. In the first stanza, the constant repetition of the feminine, third person singular "her" juxtaposed against the first person
singular "I" serves to relegate woman to the background and bring Donne to the centre stage. The repetition of "her" convinces us that he speaks rhetorically, that he is not speaking to any woman in particular. The sudden shift from "her" to the repeated "you" creates ambiguity. Is he speaking to specific women, or does he use "you" in the same sense as "her," i.e. rhetorically? Is he speaking to and about all women? The resolution in the last lines offers no clue. He can love "any" as long as "she be not true." This touch of bravado surely treats woman as a commodity, as something interchangeable with any other woman.

Stanza two carries on the bravado through a series of quick, rhetorical questions, which allow for no response. The use of "you" and the slip to "your mothers" in line 11, suggesting he refers to more than one woman, indicates further the confusion between woman and women and raises the same questions. In stanza three, he invokes Venus, and in an ironic twist claims that she will punish those who are true in love by having them be true "to them who are false to you." He turns the goddess of love against true lovers.

As a brash statement of indifference, the poem entertains with its exuberant, comic hyperbole. Yet, perhaps he is not so indifferent after all, for the poem suggests a desire to treat all women as objects, an aversion to being possessed by them, and the need to control them. In objectifying women, he gains distance from them, and perhaps satisfies himself that he will not become their "fixt subject." He wants their sexual favours with no attachments:
Through intercourse, woman robs him of life, but as long as she does not "binde" him, he will remain free from the strictures of a relationship. The tone here is an imperative one as he commands woman to "let me go," reminding her, and us, that love for him is merely sport and that is the way he intends to keep it.

The desire to possess but not be possessed, the wish to possess all women and not be possessed by any woman in particular is also wittily suggested in "Communitie," in which Donne slyly reasons that women, since they are neither good nor bad, are therefore fair game. In his defense of promiscuity, Donne, in effect, levels all women: they share, as the title suggests, a common characteristic: they are neither good nor bad.

While in this poem we encounter the same attitude as in "The Indifferent," we find none of the confusion of pronouns, the shifting between "her" and "you," which characterize that poem. Instead, we read a series of seemingly irrefutable statements about the nature of woman. Stanza one sets out his thesis in abstract terms. Donne states the simple truth that we must seek good and avoid evil:

Good we must love, and must hate ill,  
For ill is ill, and good good still,  
But there are things indifferent  
Which wee may neither hate, nor love,  
But one, and then another prove,  
As wee shall finde our fancy bent.

The poem ends with another irrefutable statement. A man always throws away the shell after he has eaten the nut. In between these two statements, Donne constructs an argument in which we learn that the "things
indifferent" are women. Stanzas two and three rely on the conditional, the "if this then that" form of argument here predicated on an irrefutable opening premise. The central point of these two stanzas is that when it comes to women, "All, all may use." Stanza four presents the resolution:

Chang'd loves are but chang'd sorts of meat,
And when he hath the kernell eate,
Who doth not fling away the shell?

If we accept his argument to this point, then we must accept its conclusion as valid. On the one hand we are prepared to play along because the argument is witty, but on the other hand, it serves to show how eager Donne is to objectify woman.

In "Communitie," Donne does not even pretend to address the woman, offering instead his analysis of her essence and a justification for inconstancy. Woman is not responsible for herself. She belongs to man. The poem ends with a rhetorical question because for Donne the idea of not casting off woman is unthinkable.

Woman in these two poems is truly featureless, an object whose function is to serve as an idea through which Donne examines a particular attitude toward women. The poems read like the cavalier philosophy of a man of the world. It is a tone we hear in several other poems as well. "Love's Alchymie," "Womans constancy," "Loves Usury"—these are characterized by a certain sneering tone, a cynical stance toward women and toward love. Always, woman in these poems is featureless. Donne casts her aside in favour of expounding his point of view and drawing our attention away from woman to himself. This is as true of poems that speak favorably of women and love as it is of poems that are cynical but ironically humorous. In
poems such as "The Anniversaire," "The Sunne Rising," "The goodmorrow," and "The Extasie," we hear Donne extolling the virtues of love, the constancy of lovers, but once again, the object of love takes second place to Donne. Woman is hidden from our view. Who is she? We are not to know. In fact, in "The Curse" he warns that "Whoever guesses, thinks, or dreames he knowes/Who is my mistriss, wither by this curse."

Place, objects, women—these prompt Donne to flights of fancy, but they are not of themselves important. He has created a world that he dominates. In this world he concerns himself with love. In the next section I argue that love, like woman, is an idea. In Donne's disquisitions on love, we find more evidence supporting the argument that Donne dominates the discussion much as he manipulates place and woman; that even in poems that praise love, there is still an element of superiority.

The Idea of Love

What are Donne's ideas about love in the Songs and Sonets? If we agree with C.S. Lewis, then we are forced to admit that his discussion of love is plagued by a Catholic sense of guilt. If we accept the argument of J.E.V. Crofts, then we have to conclude that Donne in these poems was primarily a "defeated coxcomb" who often wrote "plug ugly verse." Donald Guss suggests that Donne indeed had a philosophy of love, one that drew on Renaissance neo-platonism to exalt love, and that Donne's lovers are a complete microcosm who want nothing but each other. Donne blends the
courtly and the neo-platonic, but he never forgets the threats of time and death. His ideas of love and his attitudes toward love—these are coloured by his desire for transcendence and his recognition of love's mercurial nature. Donne shares none of the Petrachan illusions about love. He refuses to be a victim of unrequited love. His expression of his ideas and of his attitude toward love is not as simple as C.S. Lewis, for example, would have us believe when he writes:

Paradoxical as it may seem, Donne's poetry is too simple to satisfy. Its complexity is all on the surface—an intellectual and fully conscious complexity that we soon come to the end of.16

Were there nothing more to these poems than surface complexity, then, of course, Lewis would be correct. Once we look deeper, however, we sense the anxiety that shades even some of his optimistic poems and the deep hostility and fear that fuel his most cynical works.

Donne is obsessed with the idea of love. He pursues love's "hidden mystery" relentlessly, but seems frustrated in his search. It is ironic that in his anatomy of love he more often than not ignores everything and everyone but himself, that in poems in which he strikes the pose of victim he somehow comes out the victor, and in poems in which he writes of love's glories he appears to be more interested in superiority than in love.

Love as Lust

I take as my starting point one of the best known poems in the group, "The Flea," a marvelously witty poem in which Donne through an ingenious conceit tries to seduce a woman, one who, we assume, is already his in mind,
if not in body. In fact Donne seduces us as easily as he seduces her, charming us with his wit even though we know he is being lustful and clever. In choosing the flea as his symbol of the lovers' union, he displays his virtuosity and his confidence. From the opening command to "Marke but this flea," to the closing lines, "Just so much honour, when thou yeeld'st to mee,/Will wast, as this flea's death tooke life from thee," Donne pursues his argument and the woman with unbroken intensity.

The poem moves on at least two levels: the carnal and the sacred. Together, they create a sense of ambiguity and tension, despite the feeling of playful seduction. It is informed by a sense of urgency, balanced by a sense of light-heartedness, untouched by sentimentality. Donne wastes no time, but gets straight to the point and attacks her virginity. He reasons that giving up her "honor" would amount to as much, or as little, as the drop of blood the flea sucked from her. He is convincing. He makes the outrageous appear perfectly reasonable. We infer that love here is a game. Although Donne does not use either word, we sense he equates love with lust. Although never stated explicitly, we hear echoes of the carpe diem theme in the urgency of the voice and the intricacy of the argument. Donne wants her now.

Although there is a feeling of playfulness in the poem, it leaves us somewhat uneasy. His reference to the mingling of the lovers' blood with that of the flea suggests the Trinity. In the second stanza his allusion to the "marriage temple" hints at something sacred in contrast to the obvious treatment of love as sport, as a game of seduction. The tension is further heightened, for the poem suggests cruelty as well. The reference to blood, the hyperbolic use of the word "kill," and such imagery as 'Purpl'd thy nail, in
blood of innocence)—all make us a touch squeamish, lending a slight edginess to the humour. The conceit aside, Donne is unrelenting in his argument. Mesmerized by his masterful control of the words, and the web of plausibility they spin, we quickly forget the woman. There is a double message here in the tension between playful seduction and the thinly disguised intent to dominate. Woman is under his spell, but so is love, or rather lust. The grotesqueness of the conceit and the allusions to the sacred hint that he is mocking love, parodying true love and lovers. Despite the ambivalence of the poem, however, Donne refrains from overt hostility and sarcasm toward love.

A playful tone, too, permeates "Womans constancy," a poem to which I return in more detail in the next chapter. In a cynical but humorous voice, Donne mocks the oaths of true lovers. Contrasting the lovers with those whom "true marriages" unite, he finds their love a sham. Here, woman is a "vain lunatique," love is inconstant, unrequited, reduced to lust. Affecting a tone of indifference, he claims that he, too, will be untrue, thus assuring himself, if not us, that he is in control of the situation. We, however, pause to consider why, if this be true, he bothers to argue in the first place. Once again we sense a tension between Donne as cynical, indifferent lover and a Donne who protests too much. Still, the overall effect is to make us think that he is beyond the snare of carnal love because he sees through it and will play his own game.

In "The Flea" and "Womans constancy," love is two-dimensional. It is equated with the carnal, and is doomed to disappoint, even though the expression of this knowledge may be witty and cynically humorous.
Recognizing this, Donne implies he will not be its victim. Echoes of "The Indifferent" reverberate throughout. The mask is one of the philanderer who can love all women. Love is defined as a game, and in the game of love, Donne intends to win.

"The Apparition, "Loves Usury," and "Loves Deitie" are further instances of Donne's reduction of love to lust, of equating love with the carnal. In "Loves Usury" and "Loves Deitie," Donne tackles the god of love himself. In "Loves Usury," he bargains with the god of love, a humorous, if arrogant, touch. In return for a youth free from love's shackle, he will give up his old age to the god of love. His desire for control shows up clearly in that he is the one who draws up the conditions of the contract, "This bargain's good; if when I'm old, I bee/Inflame'd by thee."

Whereas in "Loves Usury" Donne bargains with the god of love, in "Loves Deitie" he complains about him. He compares the present with the past and finds the former wanting. He claims that the god has reduced love to lust, whereas in times past, he exercised his power wisely: love was reciprocated or it was not love, "It cannot bee/Love, till I love her, that loves mee." Now, things are quite different. Love has been degraded. The god of Love has made inconstancy the norm. In a typical twist, Donne fears that love may once again become constant, a "deeper plague:"

Rebell and Atheist too, why murmer I,
   As though I felt the worst that love could doe?
Love might make me leave loving, or might trie
   A deeper plague, to make her love me too,
Which since she loves before, I'm loath to see;
Falsehood is worse than hate; and that must bee,
   If shee whom I love, should love me.
Donne is lost in thought. He seems to be saying that love is never true while implying he wishes it were. But then he shifts and states he does not want a constant love because the woman would most likely have to be false to the one she loves now, a principled position perhaps, but obviously a frustrating one.

In "The Apparition," one of Donne's most frequently anthologized poems, again we hear Donne claiming one thing but implying another. Critics generally agree that it is a negative poem, one that is hostile to woman and love, although there is some dispute as to whether the primary theme is one of revenge or one of seduction. The poem turns on the Petrarchan death-by-scorn motif:

When by thy scorne, O murdresse, I am dead,
    And that thou thinkst thee free
From all solicitation from mee,
Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,
And thee, fain'd vestal, in worse armes shall see;
Then thy sick taper will begin to winke,
And he, whose thou art then, being tyr'd before,
Will, if thou stirre, or pinch to wake him, thinke
    Thou call'st for more,
And in false sleepe will from thee shrinke,
And then poore Aspen wretch, neglected thou
Bath'd in a cold quicksilver sweat wilt lye
    A veryer ghost than I;
    What I will say, I will not tell thee now,
Lest that preserve thee; and since my love is spent,
I'had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,
Then by my threatenings rest still innocent.

The first thirteen lines paint a bleak picture as he threatens to come back to haunt his former mistress. He makes no attempt at argument; instead, he overwhelms his mistress with one long torrent of words, accusing her of killing him with scorn and threatening to come back to haunt her bed in which she will be lying terrified, her reluctant lover at her side. We are in
the realm of the purely carnal once again. Love here is love of the flesh. The statements are ones of fact which brook no disagreement. He will haunt her and make her pay for killing him with her "scorne."

Yet, Donne seems to undercut himself, since in the last four lines he displays none of the certainty and confidence that characterize the first twelve lines. He refuses to reveal what he will say to his mistress when he comes back to haunt her because he wants her to dread the future, or so we assume. Yet, by admitting that his "love is spent," with its double connotation, he makes us wonder why the diatribe, why the desire for revenge. After all, if he no longer wants her then why threaten her? Perhaps because he cannot help himself. Having equated love with the carnal, he betrays a longing for something more. If he were truly indifferent, if he truly did not love her, Donne would not care what his former lover did. The refusal to be a victim of unrequited love takes a decidedly interesting twist here as we begin to suspect that Donne, while defining love as purely carnal, at the same time longs to find a lasting love. The armor of indifference is momentarily pierced by the arrow of doubt. Love, that is, lust, is a worthy adversary. Initially, Donne convinces us that he will gain revenge, that he will torment his mistress. As the poem progresses however, he reveals his own anxiety, making us wonder whether he is as much in control as his words would lead us to believe.

"The Funerall" presents us with a remarkable instance of Donne's quickly shifting thought and evidence of his ability to manipulate our expectations. While reading the first stanza, we believe that the relic is a symbol of constancy, a love token given to the dying lover. We are prepared
for a poem in praise of love. The "subtle wreath of haire" in line 3, a lock of his beloved's hair which he wears on his arm, is his "outward Soule" that will prevent the dissolution of his body. The image reminds us of "the bracelet of bright hair about the bone" in "The Relique," a poem about the transcending power of love. The stress on "mystery" and "sign" in line 4 implies something other than the profane. As we move to stanza two, we are prepared for a poem that will praise lovers' unity:

For if the sinewie thread my braine lets fall,
   Through every part,
Can tye those parts, and make mee one of all;
These haires which upward grew, and strength and art
   Have from a better braine,
Can better do'it; Except she meant that I
   By this should know my pain,
As prisoners then are manacled, when they'are condemn'd to die.

The opening lines of stanza two are positive toward the mistress as Donne discusses the miraculous power of her hair to keep his body intact, but soon we encounter a rude twist as Donne begins to question his beloved's motivation for giving him the lock of hair, no longer regarding it as protection against the ravages of death. The "subtle wreath of haire" is not a relic in the usual sense of the word. Although we tend to associate a relic with the spiritual, here it represents "manacles." The lover's mistress intends that he suffer. Love in this poem is not mystery, even though a word such as "Reliques" in line 24 makes us momentarily pause and wonder. Love is short and disappointing. In the ambiguity of the opening, we have been set up for the rude punch line. If we think love is mystery, if we believe love lasts, then we are bound to be disappointed. Donne, the sardonic lover, has tricked us to make his point, his mood changing from the optimism of the first stanza to
the pessimism and sarcasm of the last: "So,'tis some bravery,/That since you could save none of mee, I bury some of you."

The aforementioned poems are not entirely without humour, cynical though it may be. In tackling the god of love, for example, Donne's arrogance is at once disturbing and amusing. In seducing a virgin through the conceit of the flea, his ingeniousness and wit make us want to tell her to give in. Whether as love's martyr who has died and is now warning us of love's dangers, or the young bon vivant seducing the mistress (and us) through his words, he attempts to take charge, although not always with complete success. That the poems also have a darker side, revealing hostility and uncertainty, has, I think, been shown. Still, although cynical, humorous, and controlling, these poems are not the darkest of the Songs and Sonets. Several others present this attitude toward love in far more sinister terms. It is these to which I now turn as examples not only of his extreme cynicism, but as examples of his ability to dominate his listener.

'Tis Imposture All

The following two poems, in particular, serve to show Donne's hostility toward love and woman and his ability to make his position believable. In "Loves Diet," love takes on the appearance of Eros, a fat Cupid who needs to be placed on a forced diet in order to be dominated into submission:

To what a combersome unwieldinesse
And burdensome corpulence my love had growne,
But that I did, to make it lesse,
And keepe it in proportion,
Give it a diet, made it feed upon
That which love worst endures, discretion.
Not content simply to control woman, Donne here moves to dominate love itself. The poem exudes power. Love is a bloated and repulsive thing, which, if left unchecked, will strangle with its oppressive weight. Love must be tamed, shrugged off so that Donne will be set free. The words speak of dissatisfaction with love that is not genuinely requited. He will fast, and thus keep love manageable. The language, especially the inclusion of words such as "Suck'd," "sweat," "shame," "feast," "counterfeit," and "meat," conspires to create the impression that love itself is a glutton: slow, fat and oppressive. In the last stanza, Donne claims to have freed himself. His love is now a "Buzzard love," rapacious and lean, ready like the falcon to hunt. Not for Donne the typical lot of the unrequited lover who languishes while the woman enjoys herself with others. No, he will "goe talke, and sleepe" once the "game [is] killed." Love for one woman tamed, he now will let his

...Buzzard love, to flye
At what, and when, and how, and where I chuse;
Now negligent of sport I lye,
And now as other Falconers use,
I spring a mistresse, sweare, write, sigh and weepe:
And the game kill'd, or lost, goe talke, and sleepe.

The hyperbole, the victorious tone of the last lines, remind us of a heart-free gallant who enjoys the process of moving from one mistress to the next without any thought to constancy. Here again we encounter a double message. On the one hand, we have a gay-hearted lover for whom love is merely sport, while on the other hand, we infer from the last two lines that the whole business of seduction is rather cruel. The last line especially, perhaps suggests the bitterness of the lover as he turns from his mistress, his commodity, forgetting her instantly.
While Donne at the end of "Loves Diet" sounds both humourous and cynical, in "Loves Alchymie," he appears mostly bitter. The bitterness, however, is hidden beneath a veneer of logic. Woman is obliterated and love is severely chastened:

Some that have deeper digg'd loves Myne then I,  
Say where his centrique happiness doth lie:  
I'have lov'd, and got, and told,  
But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,  
I should not finde that hidden mysterie;  
Oh, 'tis imposture all;  
And as no chymique yet the Eixer got,  
But glorifies his pregnant pot,  
If by the way to him befall  
Some odoriferous thing, or medicinall,  
So, lovers dreame a rich and long delight,  
But get a winter-seeming summers night.

Our ease, our thrift, our honor, and our day,  
Shall we, for this vaine Bubles shadow pay?  
Ends love in this, that my man,  
Can be as happy as I can; If he can  
Endure the short scorne of a Bridesgromes play?  
That loving wretch that sweares,  
'Tis not the bodies marry, but the mindes,  
Which he in her Angelique findes,  
Would sweare as justly, that he heares,  
In that dayes rude hoarse minstralsey, the sphare.  
Hope not for minde in woman; at their best,  
Sweetnesse, and wit they'are, but, Mummy, possest.

What is immediately striking is Donne's earnest, rational tone of voice contrasted with the snide allusions to love. Donne nods to the authority of those who have "deeper digg'd loves Myne," who know where his "centrique happiness doth lie." His gesture, however, smacks of false modesty, for he quickly claims vast experience in searching for that "hidden mystery," underscorirng his knowledge with a series of blunt verbs in the third and fourth lines that completely negate any authority but his own. The profusion of first person singular pronouns draws all the more attention to himself and
his thorough search, the results of which we suspect he will soon reveal. He does. There is no mystery. Love is like the futile quest of the alchemists for the all-powerful elixir. Here, it is not the long-sought quintessence, the distillation of lovers' souls, but a phony "medicinall", the seventeenth century's equivalent of snake oil, that fools lovers into expecting a lasting union, but instead produces only a short-lived night of passion. Still, in claiming that "'tis imposture all" he overstates his case, for the love he is describing is carnal love. In stanza two, however, Donne informs us that just as alchemists are doomed to find "some odoriferous thing," in their search for the elixir, so too are idealists who look for a purely spiritual union, a union of two souls without the body.

As we follow Donne through to his insulting conclusion, we feel the full effect of his cynicism. Love at best is a "vain Bubles shadow pay" that satisfies only the body, if even that, but not the soul. Woman is but a "Mummy," a lump of flesh that entices but that does not satisfy anything but carnal craving. There seems to be no hope, no optimism in this poem. Love here has no redeeming qualities.

Donne's intensity and conviction are convincing, so much so that we momentarily forget that he has shifted from the "I" of the first stanza to "Our" in the opening line of stanza two, thus including us in his argument, assuming that we must agree with him. His ease with words makes the unreasonable seem reasonable. He, after all, has "lov'd, and got, and told," and who are we to argue with such experience or with such a meticulous search? Once again, though, in protesting so strongly, he arouses our suspicions that he longs for something more in love. The poem's shifting
between the purely sexual and the allusion to the spiritual, the "mystery," while resolved in favour of the former, suggests a desire for the latter. And even though Donne argues convincingly that there is no possibility of attaining it through love of woman, we sense a niggling doubt eating away at his conviction, a doubt here more implied than stated outright. In equating love with the alchemist's search for essence, he points at once to the futility of the endeavor and the hope that drives it. Still, the force of his words, the seeming logic of his argument, the methodical search for love's hidden mystery—all overwhelm the reader with their force and hostility and lend the poem a degree of authenticity. We may disagree with his conclusion, but we cannot help but acknowledge the power with which he moves toward it.

In these poems, Donne demonstrates that he can accept the inconstancy of love with cynical grace. Now I wish to discuss three poems which present a somewhat different attitude toward love, providing further evidence of Donne's tendency to dwell on the extremes. Whereas the aforementioned works tend to reduce love, "The Computation," "Loves infiniteness," and "Negative love" tend to quantify love, to push it in the opposite direction as something all-encompassing and, ironically, beyond quantification.
Love Quantified

In "The Computation," Donne sets himself an impossible task: to calculate love's intensities and their effect on the lovers who are separated. We learn immediately that the lovers have been separated only "since yesterday," but separation prolongs love's agonies, so that hours seem like years. The hyperbole lends a comic touch, as in stanza two Donne plays with Petrarchan language:

Teares drown'd one hundred, and sighes blew out two,
A thousand, I did neither thinke, nor doe,
Or not divide, all being one thought of you;
Or in a thousand more, forget that too.

His message, however, is serious. Love can not be quantified, even though he tries to do precisely that. In playing with numbers, he points to the futility of doing so.

"Loves infinitness" is a particularly good example of "...Donne's effort to quantify love and his impluse to make it exceed all quantity." His manipulation of the argument suggests he is ironically detached, more interested in the argument than in love, but his tortuous reasoning implies that he is genuinely struggling with the problem. The title suggests that he is concerned with a love that is boundless. Yet, in attempting to quantify it, he implies the opposite.

We meet a lover wrestling with the question of whether he has all the woman's love, using Petrarchan conventions to convince us of his sincerity, at the same time undercutting that sincerity through hyperbole. The stanza opens with a false premise: "If yet I have not all thy love,/Deare, I shall never have it all." He assumes love is quantifiable, the key word "all," appearing eleven times in the poem and ending each stanza. Positing the idea that her
love might only be "partiall," that she might love others as well, he reasons that he will never have "All" her love. Stanza one ends on a logical note. We can appreciate Donne's problem. If his beloved loves others, then she does not love him as much as she could if she did not love others. Donne, however, adds a further complication in stanza two, in which he reasons that even if she had given him all her love in the past, it was all that she had then. In the interim, however, if other men have created new love in her, then she owes it to him as well. The hint at promiscuity makes us wonder whether he is not simply referring to carnal love.

Stanza three seems to undercut what he has said to this point:

Yet, I would not have all yet,
He that hath all can have no more,
And since my love doth every day admit
New growth, thou shouldst have new rewards in store;
Thou canst not every day give me thy heart,
If thou canst give it, then thou never gavest it;
Loves riddles are, that though thy heart depart,
It stays at home, and thou with losing savest it:
But wee will have a way more liberal,
Then changing hearts, to joine them, so we shall,
   Be one, and one anothers All.

He does not want all her love because "He that hath all can have no more," and his love grows each day. Obviously he cannot have more since she cannot give more, either because she has given some of it to others or because she has given him all of it. Having argued himself into a corner, Donne offers a solution to his dilemma where reason and logic dictate there is none: He proposes that they join hearts and thus become "one anothers All."25

Whether it is a satisfying solution for the reader remains in question. Donne creates tension in the poem primarily through paradox. If love is infinite then he cannot have it all. If he can, then it is not infinite. In
attempting to quantify love, he paradoxically betrays his desire for a love that exceeds all quantity, a miraculous love. The last lines illustrate yet again his mastery of the situation. He provides a solution to what seems insoluble. In doing so, however, he seems to dodge the issue altogether. Throughout the poem, he has referred to "all" the woman's "love," leading us to believe that he is discussing more than simple sexual love, even though in his allusions to commerce, his use of words such as "purchase" and "bargaine," he has implied that the sexual is certainly a part of the whole of which he speaks. In the final lines, he no longer refers to love; instead, he substitutes the word "heart," thus creating ambiguity. In claiming that he has found a "way more liberall," with its connotation of the carnal, he implies that his solution to the paradox is purely sexual. While Donne creates a vibrant tension between his desire to quantify love and his mania to make it surpass all quantity, the poem ultimately breaks down because it points to the fact that love is not quantifiable, even though Donne attempts to construct a seemingly plausible argument.

"Negative love" is another instance of Donne's desire to express the ineffable. It, too, is characterized by a tendency toward argument and abstraction, but the argument ultimately points to the futility of the task, a striking example of what Fish calls the self-consuming artifact:

I never stoop'd so low, as they
Which on an eye, cheek, lip can prey,
    Seldom to them, which soar no higher
    Then vertue or the minde to admire,
For sense, and understanding may
    Know, what gives fuel to their fire:
My love, though silly, is more brave,
For may I misse, when ere I crave,
If I know yet, what I would have.
Separating himself from the common run of men, those who love only the body and from Platonists who love only the mind, Donne claims his love, though more humble, is also more brave. Having elevated himself above the sensualist and the idealist and ridiculed them in the process, he naturally sets up our expectations, leading us to believe that we are to learn of what this humble but brave love consists. Our expectations, however, are thwarted since Donne admits that he does not know what he loves, only what he does not know:

If that be simply perfectest  
Which can by no way be exprest  
But Negatives, my love is so.  
To All, which all love, I say no.  
If any who deciphers best,  
What we know not, our selves, can know,  
Let him teach mee that nothing; This  
As yet my ease, and comfort is,  
Though I speed not, I cannot misse.

Here, we have an admission of sorts. He cannot define love. He can only tell us what it is not. He admits that the "All" that others love, is not what he loves. We must ask, then, what else is there? His use of the words "no," "know not," "Negatives," and "nothing" underscores the futility of attempting to define love. In the final two lines he expresses satisfaction with his situation: while he will not succeed in love, he cannot fail either because he wants nothing. Love is an abstraction that leaves language behind. Words are not enough to express it. Words are all Donne has, but words are finite things yet his desire is infinite.28

His urge to capture the infinite, to express the inexpressible, is evident in these poems. In his quest to do so, he concentrates on himself, on his definition, on his feelings. All else is secondary. Thus, while the poems may
express a positive attitude toward love, their effect in some ways is the same as the poems I discussed earlier. Woman, landscape—these are cast aside. Indeed, love itself becomes a thing to be analyzed, but it eludes definition.

In reading the *Songs and Sonets*, we sense Donne’s contrariety throughout. On the one hand, he equates love with lust, and ultimately finds it unsatisfactory. On the other hand, he pushes to the other extreme by attempting to make his love surpass all quantity. Neither position is particularly convincing. Both points of view suggest deep anxiety and dissatisfaction manifested in his desire to force his presence to the foreground and manipulate the discussion of love.²⁹ I turn now to three poems which present yet another view of love, poems in which contrariness seems to be resolved, yet which reveal the same characteristics that I have discussed to this point.

**Love as Union**

Love in "Aire and Angels" takes place in the realm of the ethereal. It is as insubstantial, as incapable of being grasped as is the love in "Negative love." Donne evokes the cosmology of angels as he introduces us to a vision. The poem is one of precise definition as Donne relies on abstruse scholastic distinctions between air and angels in his attempt to define the exact nature of his love:

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Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
Before I knew thy face or name;
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame,
Angells affect us oft, and worship'd bee;
Still when, to where thou wert, I came,
Some lovely glorious nothing I did see
    But since, my soule, whose childe love is,
Takes limmes of flesh, and else could nothing doe,
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More subtile then the parent is,
Love must not be, but take a body too,
And therefore what thou wert, and who
I bid Love aske, and now
That it assume thy body, I allow
And fixe it selfe in thy lip, eye, and brow.

The love discussed here seems to be more than ordinary human love. His vision is spiritual, the woman an idealized object of contemplation similar to Dante's Beatrice. Donne then moves from the abstract to the seemingly concrete. Since his soul has "limmes of flesh," so too must love assume a bodily form. His love will assume her body and reside in her face. The placing of the word "doe," with its connotations of the sexual, momentarily disrupts the mood of quiet contemplation.

Donne flatters the woman to this point as he tells her she is the body his love has chosen. However, he soon admits that she is too intensely physical, "scattering bright," has "overfraught" his "pinnace" and so

...some fitter must be sought;
For, nor in nothing, nor in things
Extreme, and scattering bright, can love inhere;

Donne here seeks a compromise between the spiritual and the physical, a reconciliation between body and soul. The tone is measured, earnest, rational. We recognize the desire for a realized love, one that is balanced between the real and the ideal. Yet, the poem ends on a dissonant chord, as if to preclude the possibility of our reading the poem sentimentally:

Then as an Angell, face and wings
Of aire, not pure as it, yet pure doth weare,
So thy love may be my love's sphære;
Just such disparitie
As is twixt Aire and Angells puritie,
'Twixt women's love, and mens will ever be.

Relying on the distinction between air and angels, Donne points at once to the difficulty of the subject matter and hints at man's superiority. His love will
take, not her body, but her love as its sphere, thereby emphasizing that her love is the lesser of the two purities. He elevates the lovers, presents a wonderful picture of their love, one that blends the physical and the spiritual, but is quick to suggest that man's love is qualitatively superior to woman's love. Thus, even in a poem as positive as this one, his view of love is hierarchical. We marvel at the sensitivity of the mental scales required to weigh the difference between the purity of men's and women's love and realize that here we have yet another expression of Donne's desire to stretch thought beyond the knowable and thus reach the infinite.31

Perhaps of no other poem do we want to ask the question: what is Donne doing? as readily as we do of "The Extasie." The poem contains several ambiguities which makes a definitive reading of it difficult and which serve as examples of Donne's ability to keep the reader guessing as to his intent.32 The poem breaks down into two sections. Section one, the first twenty-eight lines, is a narrative prelude to section two, which Legouis has described as a speech.33 In the first twenty eight lines, we enter a pastoral setting loaded with erotic meaning, implied by Donne's reference to "pillow" and "Pregnant banke," and "The violet's reclining head," suggesting languor. Yet, the lovers, who are "one anothers best" do not make love; instead they sit inert, their hands "firmly cimented," and entergrafted. Even the sexual connotation of "propagation" in line 11 is attenuated, for it is their eyes which propagate "pictures," an ingenious conceit that at once hints at the sexual, yet points away from it as well. Interestingly, while we first encounter the lovers sitting on the bank, by line 19, we find them lying like "sepulchrall statues." How they got that way we are not told.
The tension in this section is created in part by the erotic imagery on one hand, and the apparent lack of sexual interplay between the lovers, on the other. As well, the form the narrative takes creates further tension between what Donne says and what he implies. The stanzas are quatrains, each presenting a concise image delivered in a calm, rational tone of voice. Yet, the lines themselves are in irregular iambic and hint at an inner agitation, compounded by the repetitious use of enjambment, which encourages us to read quickly through the stanzas.

Section two begins with an explanation of Platonic love. We find in the first part of this section the same preoccupation with the mixture of mind and body that we saw in "Aire and Angels", but here the mixture is equal. Donne exalts Platonic love and wants to dissolve himself into a union with his beloved and make of the two, one:

This Extasie doth unperplex
(We said) and tell us what we love,
Wee see by this, it was not sexe,
Wee see, we saw not what did move:

A single violet transplant,
The strength, the colour, and the size,
(All which before was poore, and scant,)  
Redoubles still, and multiplies,

Donne argues that it was not sex alone that they loved. The egalitarianism of this section almost makes us forget the claim to superiority in "Aire and Angels." We find here a claim to love that makes of the two a perfect one, suggested by the "redoubled" violet perfect in every detail. Reference to the violet, however, makes us think back to the eroticism of stanza one.

He does not allow us to remain in this realm for long. Gradually withdrawing himself from the ethereal, he reveals his more practical side as
well. The concluding part of section two is an elaborate argument meant to convince the woman of the importance of the body to love. Donne now stresses the physical as earnestly as earlier he argued for the union of the souls. He presents in the final stanzas what may amount to an argument intended to make her consent, beginning with the reminder that they have been suspended in ecstasy, far from their bodies: "But O alas, so long, so farre/Our bodies why doe we forbeare?" He then proceeds to try to convince her with arguments that draw first on astrological comparison, "On man heavens influence workes not so,/But that it first imprints the ayre," and then on physiological analogy, "As our blood labours to beget/Spirits, as like soules as it can." Earlier, we saw Donne using intellectual argument to exalt the union of two souls. Here the purpose of his intellection appears to be the union of two bodies. Love must sooner or later acknowledge the importance of the body, the earthly realm. The soul is to air as the body is to heavenly influences. Love, no matter how pure, cannot survive outside the body for very long. Prolonged ecstasy may lead, in fact, to death. It is this that the lovers and we must understand.

A cynic might interpret this as a subtly disguised attempt at seduction, one that relies on an ingeniously elaborate argument. If we were to interpret the poem in this way, a further question, minor, but interesting nonetheless, presents itself. If Donne is indeed seducing the woman, why then does he posit a third party, the listener in line 21 who is "so by love refin'd/That he soules language understood?" Surely, he does not intend to seduce her in front of a witness. As well, for a poem of seduction, "The Extasie" contains remarkably few references to the woman herself. In fact, Donne refers to her
in line 16, and then only in the third person. And not once does he address her directly as "you."

On the other hand, a credulous reader could balk at interpreting this as a seduction poem, preferring to believe that in "The Extasie" Donne expresses his desire for a union in which he is finally eclipsed, in which he loses, even if only momentarily, his awareness of himself. Both interpretations need not be mutually exclusive. In fact, allowing for the two makes the poem even more powerful. That Donne longs for an all-eclipsing love seems to me to be clearly evident here. The subtle ambiguity in the poem also adds a tension that keeps the reader guessing. Is he simply seducing her, or is he truly expressing a deeply felt conviction?

Where "The Extasie" is a subtle approach to the idea of love, "The Canonization" is a full frontal assault. The former presents its message, double-edged though it may be, in a cool, reasoned voice; the latter badgers, hecters and demands. The tone of the first two stanzas is frustrated, defensive and sarcastic. They are in a sense but a prelude to the rest of the poem. Using the language of commerce and court, mixed with Petrarchan hyperbole, Donne defensively claims that the lovers have hurt no one, implying, of course, that they may hurt themselves if they want to. He satirizes the external world as one of "warres," "quarrels," and "Litigious men," and prepares to turn his back on it. In stanza three the jump from the earthly realm to the world of the lovers is complete, as Donne divorces himself and his beloved from the world of men. It is here, in the third stanza that we encounter multiple possibilities in meaning:
Call us what you will, wee're made such by love;
    Call her one, mee another flye,
We're Tapers too, and at our owne cost die,
    And wee in us finde the'Eagle and the dove.
The Phoenix riddle hath more wit
    By us, we two being one, are it.
So, to one neutrall thing both sexes fit.
Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

The stanza's tension is created by language that is at once profane and sacred. The "flye" may represent unrestrained sexual activity. Taken together with the taper image in the third line, the fly, like a moth that flies toward a flame, toward its own destruction, may represent self-destructive sexual activity. But, here, the lovers who destroy themselves, who "dye," with its sexual connotation, will perhaps "rise the same and prove/Mysterious by this love." Against this image, we must place the eagle and the dove, which here may be an emblem of the powerful and the meek. The underlying tone of mystery is further symbolized by the phoenix rising, the supreme mystery of which evokes images of the crucifixion and the resurrection. The comparison of the lovers to flies, suggesting intense, frenzied sexuality ending in self-consumption and then resurrection must be juxtaposed against the idea of purification through fire, symbolized by the phoenix, and the consequent triumphant rising from the ashes. The lovers, in this case represent all that is earthly, but they transcend earthly love. In dying, then rising like the phoenix, they renounce the world and become not only saints but martyrs to love as well. Their love, they themselves, are now "mysterious," a word with loaded meaning, connoting both the mystery of religion and the ecstasy of love. The final effect of stanza three is to leave us at Donne's mercy as he now takes them from the world of ordinary lovers, seemingly transforming himself and his beloved into saints in stanzas four and five. The "well
wrought urn" is the reliquary for their ashes and they are now "canoniz'd for Love." He has transformed the two of them into eternal symbols of love's power to transcend. Generations of lovers will now look to their love as the model of an ideal love, will, in fact, "Beg from above/A patterne of your love."

While we must surely be moved by the force with which Donne presents his argument, we should not overlook the arrogance of his position and the ambiguity of his images. He speaks positively of love, that much is true, but at the same time he elevates himself, his love, above that of anyone else. The poem is not so much a description of ideal love as it is a command to recognize his ideal love. It is not so much a paean to love or to his beloved, as it is a command to pay obeisance to his love. He wants our attention. In short, he boasts. His desire for the infinite here supersedes all else. The audacity, some might say blasphemy, inherent in the poem only serves to underscore his determination to control all. We witness a figurative battle, one that Donne dominates through sheer will. Love and lust conjoin, the sacred and profane become one.

In his examination of love in these three poems, Donne presents plausible arguments for the idea that love need not necessarily be solely equated with lust. In fact, love in "Aire and Angels," "The Extasie," and "The Canonization" is far removed from the love in "The Apparition" or "Loves Alchymie." Nor does he, in these poems, attempt the kind of quantification that we saw in "Loves infinitness." Instead, he argues that lovers can enter into a love that conjoins both the body and the soul, the profane and the sacred. While he undoubtedly exalts love in these poems, their tone must be
set against that of the cynical though humorous poems such as "Womans constancy" and the "The Indifferent." Taken together, the poems reveal Donne's complex attitude toward love, suggesting his attraction and aversion to it. Indeed, his discussion of love itself has overtones of an intellectual exercise, as if in analyzing love he hopes to capture its essence and thus control it.

My point in this chapter is to suggest that Donne's analysis of love tends to obliterate all other considerations, thus necessarily concentrating our attention on him. Throughout the poems there is the undeniable sense that Donne is engaged in self-analysis, that he holds command of centre stage. The focus on the self is manifested in several ways. In all the poems there is lack of concern with the visual world. In poems such as "The Apparition" and "Loves Alchymie," we find his refusal to be love's victim. In "Loves infinitness," "Negative love," and "The Computation" we sense his desire to reach beyond the knowable and express it in words, while ironically implying the impossibility of doing so. In the last three poems we hear him argue for a love that fuses the sacred and the profane into union. Together, these poems imply a controlling figure, one intent on imposing his point of view on the reader even though that view is often contradictory. They also raise the question as to why Donne seems to force himself to the foreground, as if to show he is superior to other lovers and to his beloved as well. Certainly, we may conclude that he is a powerful personality, incapable of not standing centre stage. However, we might also conclude that the sheer determination
with which he pushes aside everything but himself might suggest that he fears being out of control, a victim of love's vagaries. In the next two chapters I will show that Donne's deeper obsessions, those with time and death, and his handling of these themes, reveal his fear of their effects, and his desire to transcend them through love.
NOTES

1 In addition to those whom I have already mentioned in my introduction in regard to the dramatic quality of the poems, see also R.G. Cox, "The Poems of John Donne," From Donne to Marvell, ed. Boris Ford 1956 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 98-107, who discusses the dramatic tone of voice in the poems, and draws parallels between the poetry and the dramatist, especially the mature Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and Jacobean tragedians. See also Pierre Legouis, Donne the Craftsman An Essay Upon the Structure of the Songs and Sonets (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 47-61.


3 Douglas Bush, English Literature In the Earlier Seventeenth Century 1600-1660, 140. Bush suggests that in both the Holy Sonnets and the love poems Donne "...focuses on himself, on a particular moment, and the rest of life and the world is blacked out, does not exist." See also Arnold Stein, John Donne's Lyrics: The Eloquence of Action (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), 166, who in his comment that "Certainly no other lyric poet has used the subject of his own mind so consistently as an object, as an end of art" alludes to Donne's solipsism. A.J. Smith, Donne: Songs and Sonets, 66, writes that "...one distinction of the Songs and Sonets is the superior mental life they display." See, also, Scott Wilson, "Process and Product: Reconstructing Donne's Personae," Studies in English Literature 20 (Winter 1980): 91-103.

4 A.J. Smith, 47.


7 While an analysis of Donne's prosody is well beyond the scope of this study, I will make reference to it whenever such reference is particularly pertinent. For a thorough discussion of Donne's prosody see Pierre Legouis, 9-47.


9 See Ilona Bell, "The Role of the Lady in Donne's Songs and Sonets," Studies in English Literature 23, no. 1 (Winter 1983): 113-129, for a point of view that differs from mine. Bell argues that in fact Donne responds to the lady's point of view, implying, of course, that he does not ignore her as I have suggested.

10 Whether or not Donne's love poems were prompted by a particular woman or women will most probably remain a matter of conjecture among critics. Donne, in reference to his Anniversary, told Ben Jonson that he had described the "idea of Woman, and not as she was." Ben Jonson, "Conversations with Drummond," in vol. 1 (The Man and His Work) of Ben Jonson, ed., C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson, (Oxford, 1925),133. Admittedly, he made no such comment regarding the women or woman in the Songs and Sonets, yet it seems to me that we could do worse than use his comment to Jonson as a guide to discussing woman in the love poems. See also William J. Zunder, 37, who repeats the suggestion that "The Canonization" and "Aire and Angels" have to be considered in light of Donne's relationship with Anne More.

11 See J. B. Leishman, 149-150, for a discussion of what he calls the "outrageous" characteristics of this poem. See also John Carey, 212, who suggests that in this poem "...Donne proclaims that the object of his desire


14 J.E.V. Crofts, 86.

15 Donald Guss, 139-154. For other discussions about his attitudes toward love we may turn to J. B. Leishman, Helen Gardner, Wilbur Sanders, and more recently to John Carey, Terry G. Sherwood, and Patricia Pinka, among others. Much of the analysis by these scholars focusses on Donne's manipulation of Petrarchan conventions and motifs, and his philosophy of love. That Donne is deeply immersed in the literary tradition of his time has been amply demonstrated by them.

16 C.S. Lewis, 96.

17 See N. J. C. Andreasen, 137, to whom I am indebted for her reading of this poem.

18 See Wilbur Sanders, John Donne's Poetry, 48, for a particularly negative assessment of this poem.

19 See Laurence Perrine, "On Donne's 'The Apparition'," Concerning Poetry 9, no.1 (Spring 1976): 21-24. Perrine argues that this this poem is one of seduction and not revenge. The main point is, however, that Donne takes
action, either revenge or seduction, and does not simply languish like a poor unrequited lover.

20 For a particularly critical reading of this poem see Patricia Garland Pinka, 60-62.


22 N.J.C. Andreasen, 78-129, discusses how Donne plays with the notion that promiscuity is a virtue and the apparent inconsistency he demonstrates towards that idea.

23 See Patricia Garland Pinka, 30-31, for a reading of this poem that sees it as a parody of the Petrarchan lover.

24 John Carey, 126. Carey also groups "Loves infinitness" with "The Computation" and "Negative love" but uses them as examples of Donne's ambition manifested in his urge to "...express the inexpressible"(125). The notion of quantification in these poems, of course, is not new. See M.M. Mahood, 95-96, for her comments on Donne's desire to treat love comprehensively. Louis L. Martz, 52, remarks on the "...sense of the painful unlikelihood that this All will ever really be found." Frank J. Warnke, 61, makes a similar point. See, as well, Arthur Marotti, 144, to whom I am indebted for the idea that Donne opens "Loves infinitness" with a false premise.

25 Arnold Stein, 158, argues that Donne sidesteps the paradox, not by reconciling opposites, but by rejecting the dilemma "...in favour of a more fundamental human feeling. The familiar pain of impossibility."


This poem can be read as a satire on platonic love in which Donne pokes fun at Platonists. See, for example, Wilbur Sanders, 107. For a reading that sees this poem as an expression of anxiety and insecurity see Patricia Pinka, 72-75.

Many scholars have remarked on the feeling of anxiety and tension present in Donne's poetry. See Patrick Cruttwell, 39-106, for a discussion of the extremes in Donne's poems and the resultant tension, and for a discussion which suggests that the changes taking place during the last decade of the sixteenth century are reflected in Donne's work. For a similar discussion, refer to William Zunder, 4-5, and George Williamson, "Mutability, Decay and Jacobean Melancholy" in Seventeenth Century Contexts (The University of Chicago Press, no date), 9-41, who argues that Donne's poetry reminds us of the changing astronomical views which created feelings of anxiety in seventeenth-century society.


See John Dean, "The Two Arguments of Donne's 'Air and Angels',' Massachusetts Studies in English 3, no.4 (Fall 1972): 84-89. Dean argues that there are at least two levels in the poem; one sexual; the other, spiritual. Dean concludes that the poem seems incomplete, primarily because the two levels create a tension that leads to "irreconcilable incongruities."

For a thorough examination of the controversy surrounding this poem see Austin Warren, "Donne's 'Extasie',' Studies in Philology 55, no.1
(January 1958): 427-480. See also Jean Gerber, 86-90, who follows Helen Gardner's reading and argues against an interpretation that would suggest this is a poem of seduction. For a reading that stresses the phallocentric nature of the poem, see Janel Mueller, "'This Dialogue of One': A Feminist Reading of Donne's Extasie," Association of Departments of English 81 (Fall 1985): 39-41.

33 Pierre Legouis, 62-68, suggests that the poem breaks down into these two sections.

34 Readers interested in a discussion of the theories of love on which Donne drew for this poem should consult A.J. Smith, "The Metaphysics of Love," Review of English Studies new series IX (1958): 362-375. Smith argues that the poem, while witty, is not particularly original, does not contain an "individual" metaphysics of love, and is not a seduction poem. He traces Donne's indebtedness to Ficino, Speroni and Ebreo and their various theories of love.

CHAPTER TWO
LOVE IN THE SHADOWS OF TIME

Discord and Rude Incongruities

In her study of Donne and Quevedo, L. Elaine Hoover notes that Baroque writers were tormented by contemporary social, political and religious changes, and claims that "Man's painful temporality and time's savage destruction of his life, his aspirations, and his love become major Baroque themes."1 Frank J. Warnke suggests the following assumptions as definitive of the Baroque: "...the illusory nature of the phenomenal world, the insuperable mutability of an experience always in a state of flux, and the consequent vanity of all human desires."2 In the Songs and Sonets, Donne's discomfort with uncertainty is evident in his obsession with time and mutability and their effects on love. Donne hopes but often doubts that love will last, the resultant tension adding to the intensity of his dialogue. Louis L. Martz writes of "...the constant pressure of Donne's awareness of the shadow of time and death,"3 and Frank Manley notes "Almost all of the lyrics in the Songs and Sonets are obsessed with the problem of time and the mutability of human experience."4 Anne Ferry, too, argues that Donne is "'all in war with Time' to preserve his love in a world threatened by change and loss."5

Donne is only too aware of time's inexorable movement. The poems are rooted in the present, yet he seems always aware of "other temporal vistas" encroaching on the moment, to borrow Earl Miner's phrase.6 Change,
we sense, is the only constant for Donne who, nevertheless, longs for permanence and certainty, the mere thought of change prompting him to withdraw into self-contemplation. In so many poems we witness Donne trying to capture the moment, isolate it, freeze it as he fantasizes about transcending time through love and poetry. In "The Canonization," the lovers become saints, their love immortalized:

We'll build in sonnets pretty roomes;
As well a well wrought urne becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombes,
And by these hymnes, all shall approve
Us Canoniz'd for Love.

In other poems, he takes a poetic snapshot of a particular moment as if to suggest that by doing so he can hold that instant forever, whether it is of the sun shining through a curtain into the lover's room, or of his beloved's tear dropping from her cheek, or the moment when two lips break apart from a prolonged kiss, or that brief second between love's glory and its decline. Donne's attitudes towards time and its effects on love change from poem to poem. In "The good-morrow," the solitary lover revels in love's power, "For love, all love of other sights controules,/ And makes one little roome, an everywhere;" while in "Loves exchange," he bemoans the lover's powerlessness: "Love, any devill else but you,/ Would for a given Soule give something too." He boldly freezes a moment in "Woman's constancy," "Now that thou hast lov'd me one whole day," then immediately wonders, "To morrow when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say?" In "Loves growth," love is not only possible, but like the stars in the heavens, grows "more eminent" with time, a view soundly contradicted in "The broken heart."
In the *Songs and Sonets*, time is present, not as a character, except perhaps in a poem like "The Sunne Rising," but as an off-stage force, prompting Donne to doubt. He measures its power by its effects on love; we measure its power by its effects on him. Love and time are linked. Both alter Donne, who ends up contemplating himself.

Time's threat to love results in many poems that have change as their predominant theme. In "The Message," for example, we find Donne unable to make up his mind in the first two stanzas, although the remarkable symmetry of the poem suggests that his thinking is clear and logical. He makes requests of his mistress that she "Send home my long strayed eyes to mee," and "Send home my harmless heart againe," and immediately retracts them, his quickly changing mind reflected in the shortening of the lines from eight syllables to three. In stanza three he changes his mind again, reconciling the contradictions and threatening revenge against his mistress:

Yet send me back my heart and eyes,
That I may know, and see thy lyes,
And may laugh and joy, when thou
Art in anguish
And dost languish
For some one
That will none,
Or prove as false as thou art now.

The threat, however, rings hollow, for while vengeful, Donne seems to ignore the irony that in loving her he has become as corrupt as she is. He has changed and the change has been all one-sided.

Whereas in "The Message" Donne appears confident, in "The Blossome" he is contemplative and withdrawn, metaphorically dissecting himself and engaging in a dialogue with his "naked thinking heart." We find him pondering a "poore flower" at that instant before time brings change
leading to decay and warning it that, although it is now in its glory, tomorrow it will "freeze" and die.

The tight, repetitive structure of "The Message" here gives way to a more discursive dialogue. Donne speaks in a plaintive voice as he reminds the flower and himself of time's swift passage. Quickly, the flower becomes irrelevant. We might have expected at least a brief description of it, but the flower's beauty only reminds Donne of the brevity of its life and prompts him to self-analysis. Turning inward, he addresses his heart with words that parallel the opening of stanza one. His heart, we infer, is as fragile as the blossom:

Little thinks't thou poore heart
That labour'st yet to nestle thee,
And think'st by hovering here to get a part
In a forbidden or forbidding tree,
And hop'st her stiffness by long seige to bow:
Little think'st thou,
That thou to morrow, ere that Sunne doth wake,
Must with this Sunne, and mee a journey take.

Donne is under no illusion that the woman will return his love as he warns his heart of the hopelessness of the situation in language that is at once hyperbolic and affecting, alluding to woman as an unyielding force of nature, "the forbidding tree" against which he must "seige," that is, make war, even if to no avail. In referring to her as the "Sunne," he points at once to what she must have meant to him and to the passage of time and implies that to stay is to perish, for woman in her "stiffness" is the cause of the lover's mutability.

In the remaining stanzas, Donne undertakes a remarkable dialogue with his heart, the latter arguing against leaving, and Donne counselling against staying. Ironically, it is his "naked thinking heart" that is as much the enemy as the woman, for his heart, we learn in stanza three, "...lov'st to
bee/Subtile to plague thy selfe...." Demanding to stay behind despite the body's warning, the heart prompts Donne to caution it further:

Well then, stay here; but know,  
When thou hast stay'd and done thy most;  
A naked thinking heart, that makes no show,  
Is to a woman but a kinde of Ghost;  
How shall shee know my heart; or having none,  
Know thee for one?  
Practise may make her know some other part,  
But take my word, shee doth not know a Heart.

Donne and his heart have reached an impasse. The heart without the body is "but a kinde of Ghost," one the woman, who is presented in a most unflattering light, will not recognize; although she may recognize some "other part," a snide allusion to his penis. Donne's language is hostile as he tries and convicts the woman in her absence. Unrequited love brings grief, but unlike almost all Petrarchan lovers who would stay and suffer the woman's scorn, Donne would rather leave. In the final stanza, Donne offers a solution to the standoff, encouraging his heart to meet him in London in "twenty dayes hence," where his heart will find him "Fresher and more fat, by being with men." At the end of this journey, he will find someone else, someone to whom he will give his heart, someone "as glad to have my body, as my minde."

We find in "The Blossome" several characteristics of Donne: the desire for love, the refusal to be the victim of unrequited love, the recognition that love can be both of the body and of the mind at the same time, and the concern with the self. The contemplation of the external world, coupled with the recognition of its mutability, drives Donne to examine the self, to dissociate himself from his surroundings. In the dialogue with his heart, we sense his obsessive nature, and gain a glimpse not only of his very real fear of
time's effects on corporal love, but also of his desire for transcendence through a love that unites body and "minde," the seat of his affection represented by the "heart." Interestingly, Donne does not use the word "heart" in the final line, substituting instead the word "body." We wonder if he refers perhaps only to the corporal in which case the whole process would likely repeat itself again and again, i.e. he will never find a love that combines the physical and spiritual into one.

In refusing to be a victim of unrequited love, Donne retains some measure of control. Yet, he is self-divided, a figure intent on escaping love and time's negative effects, but doubtful of his ability to do so. The concluding lines sound more like pleas to his heart than like commands. Time presents as definite a threat to the heart as it does to the flower. Recognizing this, Donne turns his attention, and ours, to himself, his readiness to turn inward an indication not only of his egoism, but of his real fear of the external world, bound as it is to time and mutability.

While "The Blossom" hints at Donne's anxiety as he withdraws from the external world of time to the inner world of self-contemplation, a poem such as "The Dreame" is evidence of his manipulation of the relationship between the world of dreams and the real world. Donne presents a tightly controlled exploration of the two states and leaves us momentarily uncertain about our ability to differentiate between the two.

Upon entering the poem, we are initially lulled by his quiet tone of voice. We quickly sense, however, a certain aloofness on Donne's part, revealed by his rational and perhaps calculating language.
Deare love, for nothing less then thee
Would I have broke this happy dreame,
It was a theame
For reason, much too strong for phantasie,
Therefore thou wakdst me wisely; yet
My Dreame thou broke'st not, but continued'st it,
Thou art so truth, that thoughts of thee suffice,
To make dreames truths; and fables histories;
Enter these armes, for since thou thoughtst it best,
Not to dreame all my dreames, let's act the rest.

The beloved awakens him from his dream, a word he repeats five times in the first stanza. He tells her that thoughts of her suffice "To make dreams truths, and fables histories," as if she were some idealized love, a perfect being like Petrarch's Laura, a vision that appears only in dreams. Indeed, we are tempted momentarily to think that she is a vision and not a real presence, but then we remember that Donne has stated that she "Wakd'st" him. In lines nine and ten, the intrusion of the profane further suggests that this may be more than a dream, that in fact she is there in his presence. The statement "...let's act the rest," with its play on the sexual implies that the woman is real and that now he wants to make love to her in actuality, to carry on with what he was already doing in his dream.

In the first seven lines of stanza two, however, he again speaks of her as if she were the ideal woman, and again make us wonder whether perhaps this is a vision. Donne compares the woman to an angel but concludes that she is "...beyond an Angels art" because she can read his thoughts, whereas angels cannot, and, therefore, she knew to come "...when/Excess of joy would wake me, and cams't then."

In stanza three, Donne's language changes and becomes even more obviously sexual in connotation, the words "Comming" and "rising" implying that this is not a dream, that the woman was there and will leave to
return again to "kindle" his passion. The final words, "Then I/Will dreame
that hope againe, but else would die" suggest that he now will have to dream
to keep the hope that she will make love with him in actuality, but he would
rather have sexual intercourse now than dream again.

Fantasy and reality seem indistinguishable as Donne controls the
shifting between real time and dream time. Time, itself, is like a powerful
dream, leaving the reader unsure where fantasy ends and reality begins.
Love, too, may be a blend of the real and unreal, moving between dream time
and actuality.

These three poems are obviously quite different in their tone and
effect, but they do reveal an obsession with time and mutability and Donne's
different responses to them which range from the vengeful to the self-
absorbed.

**Time Free From Love: A Plea for Inconstancy**

In any number of poems time inexorably moves forward, sweeping
love out of its path, leaving behind the residue of spent emotion, "the ragges
of heart" in "The broken heart," the hostility in "The Apparition" and "Loves
Alchymie," the disappointment in "Womans constancy." Certainly, Donne
celebrates inconstancy in many of the poems, even affecting a woman's voice
in "Confined Love" and arguing for inconstancy on behalf of the fair sex. One
cannot help but wonder, however, how much of this is ironic posturing, a
response to the realization that time brings change, uncertainty, doubt; that
love, like the body, decays as we are reminded by his references to the body in
"The Canonization," in lines like: "Or chide my palsy, or my gout./My five
grey haires, or ruin'd fortune flout." Perhaps because he doubts the possibility of a love that outwits time, he argues all the harder in favour of promiscuity, implying that if love cannot last, one is better off simply pursuing woman for the sex.

In "Loves Usury" Donne presents an interesting perspective on time and love as he attempts to strike a Faustian bargain with the "Usurious God of Love," offering to give up his old age to love in exchange for youth spent pursuing woman without any emotional involvement. Donne portrays himself as a veritable Don Juan who will bed even "last year's relict." Love here is strictly frenetic sexual experience, Donne's passion reflected in the poem's quick, youthful energy, its language blunt and aggressive as he begs the god of love to let "Me travell, sojourne, snatch, plot, have, forget." His desire to lose himself in lust is overwhelming, so much so, in fact, that he bargains to trade his life at a ratio of twenty hours to one for the privilege. Stanza two further develops the desire for promiscuity as Donne mocks love and lovers:

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Let mee thinke any rivalls letter mine,
   And at next nine
Keepe midnights promise; mistake by the way
The maid, and tell the Lady'of that delay;
Only let mee love none, no not the sport;
From country grasse, to comfitures of Court,
Of cities quelque choses, let report
   My mind transport.
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He underscores his thirst for sex and at the same time warns that he does not want to love woman or the game, the "sport," merely the physical act. He is not warring here to preserve his love against the ravages of time. Instead, he wants to lose himself in lust; but this is perhaps an admission that he doubts lasting love is possible.
Stanza three clinches the argument, or should we say, seals the bargain:

This bargains good; if when I'm old, I bee
Inflam'd by thee,
If thine owne honour, or my shame, or paine,
Thou covet, most at that age thou shalt gaine,
Doe thy will then, then subject and degree
And fruit of love, Love I submit to thee,
Spare mee till then, I'll beare it, though she bee
One that loves mee.

We have here a remarkably self-serving statement as Donne focuses attention on himself. Woman, love—these do not matter. What does matter is that he gets what he claims to want. In exchange for time that is free from the bonds of love, he will give up his old age to love, offering to suffer a woman, even one who "...bee/One that loves mee." But, while, hyperbolic, the bargain in this poem suggests something deeper. The word "Inflam'd" connotes the sexual passion and energy of youth; at the same time, juxtaposed with "old," it suggests disease and pain. His passing reference to the "shame" and "paine" of loving is a disturbing, sobering thought, fleeting to be sure, but there, nevertheless, midst the assertions for libertine freedom. He seems to imply that the shame and pain of loving are not essentially different in old age than in youth, only perhaps exacerbated. For that reason, he asks the god of love to delay as long as possible what he knows is the inevitable and constant condition of love.

Throughout the poem's swift movement we get the sense that time worries Donne as he juxtaposes youth and old age, his "gray haires" a symbol of inevitable change and decay. The poem opens in the present, moves briefly to the past, to "last year's relic," whom he will "forget" and bed again then concludes with his promise in some future time. Donne brags like the bon vivant who pursues woman for the sport, but his words, by their very
intensity, suggest a certain desperation, as if he suspects that he will never avoid the pain. To strike such a bargain, the lover has to be somewhat disillusioned, unwilling to believe in any redemptive power of love. If love cannot last, better to lose oneself in lust, but to lose oneself means to lose control, something Donne seems unwilling to do, for it is he who strikes the bargain, just as it is he who insults the god of love.

In "Loves Usury" Donne argues with the gods, in "Womans constancy," he quarrels with woman,\textsuperscript{11} he emphasis again on inconstancy, which is a function of time. We enter the poem in \textit{media res}, overhearing Donne precisely during that moment between the glory of love and its decay as he second guesses the future and poses the question, "Now that thou hast lov'd me one whole day,/Tomorrow when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say?"

If we are to believe Donne, then their affair will certainly end, or perhaps it has already ended and all that is left is to justify abandonment. The poem reads like a self-fulfilling prophecy, the thought once thought must inevitably come to pass. In fact, lines three to thirteen offer a series of hypothetical excuses framed as questions which allow for no response and end with the paradoxical accusation that the woman has "...no way but falsehood to be true?" The words seem harsh and bitter in these lines. Love is shortened to one day, making a mockery of constant love. When comparing their love to that of "true marriages," which last until death, Donne points to the trivial nature of their love and hints at the possibility of a lasting love that is not subject to time's passing. Their love, however, mocks true love, and binds them only until "death," i.e. until they fall asleep.

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In framing his argument in the form of questions, Donne implies there is an answer, but in refusing to pause long enough for one, he indicates that he does not want to hear it. Instead, he shrugs off the whole matter in the final four lines, which are an example of what Stein calls epigrammatic reversal:

\[
\text{Vain lunatique, against these scapes I could} \\
\text{Dispute, and conquer, If would,} \\
\text{Which I abstaine to doe,} \\
\text{For by tomorrow, I may thinke so too.}
\]

The poem rests on the assumption that love is inconstant. In effect, Donne begs the question, but instead of following through and rebutting his pseudo-argument, he merely hints that he could if he wanted to, leading us to suspect that he cannot. Donne manipulates the discussion throughout, even to the extent that he mimics a woman's voice for most of it, and portrays her as fickle and changing like the moon, and himself as indifferent. At the beginning, Donne is completely wrapped up in the moment, then he quickly projects that moment to the future. Change, in this instance, is inevitable and it is not for the better. Assuming that love will die, he feigns an indifferent pose, but indifference here quickly turns to cynicism, and one cannot be indifferent if one is cynical.

In Song: "Goe, and catch a falling star" we also find Donne disillusioned with love as he focusses on the self and reveals his awareness of time's passing. It begins harmlessly enough, more like a nursery rhyme than anything else. Donne throws out a series of challenges, a catalogue of impossibilities and brooks no disagreement. He assumes the reader will journey hither and yon only to come back and confirm what he has been told. He scorns woman here, although his language is not as vituperative as that of
"Loves Alchymie." In stanza two, the motif of the journey involves time's passing, the reference to "snow white hairs," imaging the decay of the one who spends his life in vain searching for the wonders of the world and by implication the lover who spends his life in vain searching for love. Nowhere, he proclaims, "Lives a woman true, and faire." The line is ambiguous and somewhat amusing, for we are left to wonder whether ugly women are true. More telling is his use of the word "Pilgrimage" in the third and final stanza:

If thou findst one, let mee know
Such a Pilgrimage were sweet,
Yet doe not, I would not goe,
Though at next doore we might meet,
Though shee were true, when you met her,
And last, till you write your letter,
Yet shee
Will bee
False, ere I come, to two, or three.

While the poem as a whole has a decidedly sarcastic tone to it, the religious connotations of the word "Pilgrimage" momentarily suggest that Donne allows for the possibility of a "true woman," and for a lasting love. We are tempted to conclude that he speaks plaintively, but he uses the word ironically; the confident, hostile stance of the first two stanzas is unshaken. The ending of the poem is also revealing: in allowing that there might exist a woman who is true, but that she will be untrue by the time he finds her, he suggests that time ultimately defeats love. Furthermore, while the poem begins with the impersonal "you," the repetition of "me," and the final shift to "I," serves increasingly to focus our attention on Donne. It ends with our concentrating on the poor lover whose argument lacks substance but is powerful just the same. His belief that love cannot defeat time, that there is
no constancy in love, is clearly stated; his desire for control clearly evident in
the imperiousness with which he dispatches the listener. Love cannot defeat
time, and man cannot combat time because man is too weak, as he states in
Song: "Sweetest love I doe not goe":

Oh how feeble is mans power,
That if good fortune fall,
Cannot add another houre,
Nor a lost houre recall.

"The broken heart," too, has time as its theme, love again short and
disappointing. Opening with the kind of explosive outburst that we heard
earlier in the "Canonization," Donne shocks his listeners to attention with
hyperbolic statements about the nature of love. The poem is in two parts,
each addressing a different audience. In stanzas one and two, the language is
at once comic and corrosive as Donne likens love to sickness, and even worse,
to the "Plague," suggesting his fear of love's power while undercutting his
fear through hyperbole. Images of war serve to accent the combative aspect of
love, its predatory nature captured in the comparison with the "tyrant Pike,
and lovers the "Frye." Love here is as greedy as the love in "Loves Diet," and
lasts but an instant. Having established the nature of love, Donne turns his
attention to the changes that are so quickly wrought in the lover. Up to this
point, we assume that he is speaking to the world at large, yet, now we find
him addressing his mistress, the strategically placed "thee" at the end of the
second line ensuring that we are aware of her presence:

If 'twere not so, what did become
Of my heart, when I first saw thee?
I brought a heart into the roome,
But from the roome, I carried none with mee;
If it had gone to thee, I know
Mine would have taught thine heart to show
More pity unto mee; but love, alas
At one first blow did shiver it as glasse.

This stanza captures a past moment in the lovers' relationship, a moment that transformed the lover. In that interval before love's bloom and love's decline, here a split second, the lover loses his heart, time working its changes in no time at all. In the final stanza, we learn that the lover has small consolation, for although he survives the encounter, he will never love again because his "...ragges of heart can like, wish, and adore,/ But after one such love, can love no more." Love is short and cruel, leaving its victim a spent, unfeeling shell who may admire women, even "adore" them, but who will never love again.

The poem's ambiguity lies in the tug between the comic hyperbole and the acid tone of voice evidenced by his unflattering comparisons. We get the sense that Donne is at once trying to save face and expressing deep disappointment in the instability of the relationship and the changes it has wrought in him.

The aforementioned poems are united in their focus on time and its negative effects on love and the lover. Their tone ranges from the hostile to the contemplative. They reveal one facet of Donne's experience with time and love, but there is another side to Donne's attitude toward love that, while not entirely optimistic, does present love in a slightly more favourable relationship to time.

Time and Constancy: One Hour of Love

Several poems explore the idea that love, although constant, will inevitably decay and die, unable to withstand the changes wrought by time.
In "A Fever", for example, we find Donne at his beloved's bedside as she lies dying, his exhortations sounding remarkably self-serving and tactless, placing the onus on her for his subsequent feelings about women:

Oh doe not die, for I shall hate
All women so, when thou art gone,
That thee I shall not celebrate,
When I remember, thou wast one.
But yet thou canst not die, I know;
To leave this world behinde is death,
But when thou from this world wilt goe,
The whole world vapors with thy breath.

Simply put, Donne wants total possession of her. If she dies, the whole world will "vapor with her breath" and we assume he will die, too. For him she is not only the world's soul, she is the "fairest" of women as well, so pure that she cannot fuel a fever because she does not have the necessary "corruption," (dross) to fuel the fire. The poem is a blend of emotion and hyperbole, representing extreme adoration of the beloved, who, as symbol of the world's soul is a miraculous figure indeed. Although the love here discussed is constant, Donne realizes in the final stanza that love will not outwit time and thus settles for one hour of love, "For I had rather owner bee/Of thee one houre, then all else ever," implying that his beloved has the power to turn an hour into eternity.

Although the poem speaks of a constant, mutual love, we sense in it Donne's obsession with time and change. The occasion of the beloved's illness provokes Donne to respond inappropriately: rather than soothe her, he worries about himself and what will happen to him if she dies. His callous response implies both that he does truly love her and that he has lost control of the situation. He wants to possess her, to own her and thus freeze the moment, even while he admits that he cannot.
In "A Fever" we sense Donne is consumed by the intensity of his love, his incessant tone of voice betraying his anxiety as he broods over time's threat to love. Other poems also display his preoccupation with time and constancy. In these, however, he is more restrained in his treatment of the subject; although the voice is still in the foreground, more subdued, perhaps even reflective, its effect just as powerful. In "The Expiration" and Song: Sweetest love, I do not goe," he worries that his soul is in jeopardy. In "The Expiration," for example, Donne is acutely aware that even true love will die in time. Using the Petrarchan conceit of the soul's being drawn out of the body through a kiss, he draws attention to love's subjection to time, their farewell kiss transforming each of them into a "Ghost." And again in Song: "Sweetest love, I do not goe," he brings to the fore the fragility of lovers, warning his beloved that if she sighs or weeps she will "waste" his life, the brief concern with his own well-being blemishing only momentarily a touching poem of mutual love.

A "Lecture upon the Shadow" is a poem which also explores the relationship between time and constancy, but one in which Donne strives after a precision not found in any other poem discussed in this section. The portrait of time and love is precisely etched. Love, though it may be constant, is nevertheless bound to time:

Stand still, and I will read to thee
A Lecture, Love, in loves philosophy.
These three hours that we have spent,
Walking here, Two shadows went
Along with us, which we ourselves produc'd;
But, now the Sunne is just above our head,
We doe those shadowes tread:
And to brave clearness all things are reduc'd.

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So whilst our infant loves did grow,
Disguises did, and shadowes flow,
From us, and our care; but, now 'tis not so.

The arresting opening rings with confidence as Donne addresses his love. The stress on time is evident from the very beginning, as, in measured tones, Donne describes the beginning and growth of their love, using the analogy of morning and afternoon shadows and the shortness of love. At the moment he starts speaking in stanza one, it is noon, all things to "brave clearness are reduc'd." Up until noon, doubt about love disappears like the morning shadows that keep getting shorter and shorter. Love grows till noon, but what then?

Except our love at this noone stay,
We shall new shadowes make the other way.
As the first were made to blinde
Others; these which come behind
Will worke upon ourselves, and blind our eyes.

Love cannot stay still any more than time can. The lovers cannot remain fixed in shadowless noon:

The morning shadows wear away,
But these grow longer all the day,

And as the sun begins its descent, the shadows grow longer and longer until they become a part of the dark:

But oh, loves day is short, if love decay.
Love is a growing, or full constant light;
And his first minute after noon, is night.

Donne expresses the poignant longing that love at "this noone stay," his use of "except" precluding any such thought that it might. Unlike the day which draws slowly to night, love knows no such leisurely decline, for even though love may grow, it dies in a flash. The ending of the poem reminds us of the
first line, now full of irony. "Stand still," he commands his beloved so he can
tell her that that is precisely what love cannot do.

"Lecture upon the Shadow" suggests that ultimately time defeats love.
Time is like the shadow: we can see it, but we cannot grasp it. Its effects on
love, however, are real. Yet, the poem is not entirely negative, for Donne
does not scorn women or love. He believes love can be constant, indeed, love
is requited—at least we have no reason to suspect that it is not. Even requited
love, however, may succumb to time.

There is no sense in this poem of any of Donne's often evident
attempts at manipulation, of turning our attention on himself. More than
anything, this poem seems to be a straightforward statement, wittily couched
in a simple analogy, a seemingly mature discussion of time and love, and the
recognition that one hour of love may be all that he will get, for time will
permit no more. In fact, time, ironically, is merciful in not permitting this
love to decay, but rather to die in a flash. Love jumps from "noone to
"night," from full light into darkness, inevitably yielding to the ravages of
time, even though for its short duration it may be a constant, mutual love.

Although Donne's attitude toward love is positive in these poems, he
is obviously doubtful of its ability to transcend time. There are, however,
poems in which Donne argues just the opposite, but that also reveal through
their cracks many of the same doubts that plague him in the works discussed
to this point.
Love Free of Time

To admit to the inevitability of change wrought by time is one thing, to succumb to it is another. I stated at the beginning that Donne is torn between time and death and their effects on love, and the desired—the infinite. On the one hand, Donne recognizes the inevitability of change; on the other, he longs for a lasting love, one that will not succumb to time. The poems I have discussed suggest that time defeats love, and that the changes it causes lead to love's decay. Yet, several poems seem to be instances of his optimistic feeling that lovers can conquer time. Three in particular present perhaps the most optimistic attitude in the entire group: "The Sunne Rising," "The good-morrow," and "The Anniversarie." All three are difficult poems, for they reveal not only his optimism, but at the same time they hint at his extreme egotism and his feelings of doubt.

In "The Sunne Rising," we find two lovers who appear to have outwitted time by discovering the eternal nature of their love. Donne's language is brave, arrogant and ironic as he chastises the sun and degrades it to the status of a "busie old foole, unruly Sunne." The sun, that is time, is indeed uncontrollable, bending to the will of no man or woman. In lines five to eight, Donne orders the sun to go and bother others and in cataloguing them he indicates that time rules everybody—the entire world. He does, however, except himself and his beloved because their "Love, all alike, no season knowes, nor clyme,/Nor houres, dayes, moneths, which are the rags of time." In his arrogance, Donne has turned upside down the hierarchical view of things: he has placed his relationship above, or outside, time.
Donne carries the bravado further in stanza two, relying increasingly on outrageous exaggeration as he warns the sun that he could "cloud" his "beams" with a "winke." The hyperbole raises suspicions since bravado often masks a fear of the very thing it pretends not to fear. The final stanza draws the reader to its conclusion still keeping with the tone of the first two stanzas as he boasts about his love. His beloved is "All States," and he is "all Princes." Nothing exists but the two lovers. They are the world.

A supreme expression of confidence in their love is found in this poem, for these are not ordinary lovers. Donne has universalized the particular. What is obvious here is that we have encountered a Donne who excels at bravado, at boasting, yet at the same time we do believe in the confidence behind the hyperbole. Or do we?

Closer reading suggests that there may be a certain desperation behind the exaggeration. In admonishing time, Donne is at once denying its power and drawing attention to it. After all is said and done, where do we end up in this poem but in an isolated room in which a voice demands that time notice the lovers, that it stop still and shine on them because the lover commands it. He wants to stop time, to freeze movement, to defeat those hours and days which are the "rags of time," and momentarily, perhaps, he is convinced that he can, even though in his desire to transcend time he seems to remain rooted in the real world, obviously aware of its existence and the fact that it goes about its business. The hectoring tone of voice implies impatience with time's indifference and fear of its power. The tone changes from the arrogance of stanza one in which Donne dismisses the sun with an imperious "goe," to one of supplication and conciliation:
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties bee
To warme the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art every where;
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphære.

Perhaps, but the change in tone suggests a momentary insecurity not quite dispelled by the hyperbole of what came earlier. The final two lines sound somewhat subdued as we leave the poem waiting time's reply, as indeed do the lovers. Donne has made a powerful case for the possibility of eternal love, but he has not quite transcended time. The poem, while boasting of the glory of their love, also hints at Donne's desire for the infinite; moreover, it shows his powerful ego at work. In "Aire and Angels," while praising love and the beloved, Donne considers man's love to be superior to that of woman. Here, too, the sense of superiority is evident. In admonishing time, he displays his arrogance and in claiming to be "Prince" he suggests his superiority over woman who is "all States," a complimentary image to be sure, but one that makes her his subject. Furthermore, in effectively isolating the lovers, he indicates his desire to stand apart from the world, but in commanding the sun to shine on them, he betrays his need to be the centre of attention, his façade of bravado momentarily cracked.

"The good-morrow," too, sings of the glories of love, but in different tones:

I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the'seaven sleepers den?
T'was so; but this, all pleasures fancies bee.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dreame of thee.

The lovers awake to love, marvelling, wondering what they had done till they loved. They express a feeling not unfamiliar to all lovers who have
shared in the delight of realizing their love: the past does not exist, or existed only to anticipate the present, and the present seems suspended. The second stanza only strengthens our feeling that we are witnessing a love that "...all love of other sights controules/And makes one little roome an everywhere." These are lovers who are sufficient unto themselves and have no need of the world. Stanza three develops this idea further, the microcosm/macrocosm analogy suggestive of the lovers' solipsism:

My face in thine eyes, thine in mine appears,
And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest,
Where can we finde two better hemispheres
Without sharpe North, without declining West?
Whatever dies, was not mixt equally;

Were the poem to end here, we could leave satisfied that for once Donne has found what he seems to be looking for: a timeless love. In the mutual reflection of their faces in each other's eyes, they of two worlds make one timeless world, without the cold, the despair that the decline of love brings. We assume that their love will not die, for unlike that of other lovers it is mixed equally. From the opening lines, Donne seems truly to marvel at his good fortune, the hyperbole indicating the extent of his joy. He does not demonstrate here any of the arrogance of "The Sunne Rising," although obviously the lovers seem to have no need of the world. He speaks calmly and rationally of his optimism and delight in their love.

Yet, while he exudes optimism in his desire for the infinite, he, nevertheless, imposes limits, ones we do not see until the final two lines, where, momentarily, the optimism is darkened by a cloud of doubt, brief but powerful in its message: "If our two loves be one, or thou and I/Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die." The use of the conditional "If" jars us
into awareness of the detached observer. Donne implies that all is well and good if the above is the case. Love, he suggests, depends on all things being perfect, all conditions being met exactly. Love must be "mixt equally" else it may succumb to time and may decay. Granted this is rather a tiny peg on which to hang a doubt, but it is there. The observer, Donne, has slipped it in, perhaps in spite of himself and in so doing has briefly cast a shadow over his glorification of love.19

To balance the foregoing, we should remember that in "The good-morrow" we hear Donne at his most gentle, his voice exhibiting none of the posturing, the claim to superiority evident in "The Sunne Rising." He is a truly grateful lover, happy in his love, even though he momentarily slips on another mask at the end and becomes the observer, warning of the dangers of complacency.

The desire for the infinite takes a decidedly interesting twist in "The Anniversarie." The sentiment expressed, that their love exists eternally in the present, is moving:

All Kings, and all their favorites,
All glory of honors, beauties, wits,
The Sun its self, which makes times, as they passe,
Is elder by a yeare, now, then it was
When thou and I first one another saw:
All other things, to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay;
This, no to morrow hath, nor yesterday,
Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keepes his first, last, everlasting day.

The lovers reign supreme while time leads all else to "destruction." The confident opening, touched though it is by hyperbole, retains the sense of decorum used for important occasions. The words themselves force a slow, ponderous reading, the key word "all" repeated four times to underline
time's omnipotence, and to give added significance to the fact that their love is excluded from "All other things..." destroyed by time. The voice seems to be that of a mature lover, one who is untouched by doubt as he describes their love as immutable. Stanza two carries on expressing confidence in their love and the belief that their love will not change with death:

But soules where nothing dwells but love
(All other thoughts being inmates) then shall prove
This, or a love increased thee above
When bodies to their graves, soules from their graves remove.

Donne describes a love that transcends the corporal, for even though their bodies may decay, their mutual love will not. Time here has no meaning for the lovers. To this point, the poem has unfolded straightforwardly with Donne telling of a glorious love, one that outwits time; indeed, he presents a love that shows his desire for the infinite and his belief that he has it. The final stanza, however, is a vexing one:

And then wee shall be thoroughly blest,
But wee no more, then all the rest.
Here upon earth, we'are Kings, and none but wee
Can be such Kings, nor of subjects bee;
Who is so safe as wee? where none can doe
Treason to us, except one of us two.

Having scaled the heights to the heavens, Donne seems to argue for descent to earth, an unexpected turnabout that leads us to suspect he is more interested in supremacy on earth than he is in infinity. He claims that on earth he and the beloved are "kings" subject to no one, whereas in heaven, they will be just like everyone else, no longer sovereigns in their kingdom of love. The sense behind these lines is difficult. I have argued from the beginning that Donne desires the infinite, yet here, just when he imagines his love as being eternal, he seems unwilling to forego the sovereignty of their
earthly kingdom of love. Perhaps he fears that in heaven, which they will share with so many other souls, their love will not reign supreme. Furthermore, in the final lines quoted above he instills doubt in their love. Doubt, it seems, is never far from his mind. Even here, it slips out, although he tries to soften the blow immediately by suggesting in the final four lines that they refrain from fears of all kinds:

True and false fears, let us refrain
Let us live nobly, and live, and add and again
Yeares and yeares unto yeares, till we attaine
To write threescore, this is the second of our raigne.

The entire last stanza is in fact a confusion of thought and feeling, a jumble of desire for the infinite, a need for supremacy, a profusion of love, and a momentary voicing of doubt. The poem points to the contrariety that is ever present in Donne. While he longs for transcendence, he also longs for power and recognition. He wants love that, as he says in "The Canonization," establishes a "pattern," elevates him to the status of a saint, even while claiming in "The undertaking" that the most worthy thing he has done is to keep his love "hid." Of course, in the very telling of what he has done, he ironically undercut his claim to anonymity.

I have suggested from the outset that Donne controls the scene, creating a barren landscape populated with featureless women, and filled with arguments of his own making for which there are no rebuttals. He examines love in all its guises and often does so with the detachment of a clinician. While he may long for love, he cannot help but turn the expression of that longing into an intellectual argument that reveals his obsession with time and mutability. He is only too well aware of time and mutability, but he also seems to believe that love, true love, a love of body and soul, is perhaps the
way to outwit time. In a poem such as "Lecture upon a Shadow," he argues about the brevity of love, but does not doubt that love can be constant, even if it must eventually yield to time. In "The good-morrow," he writes of a love that appears eternal, yet the skeptic momentarily cautions that the lovers must be heedful. In "The Anniversarie," the stately, dignified tones praise the constancy of their love and hint at his desire for supremacy.

The poems I have discussed in these two chapters reveal a many-sided Donne, one who is arrogant, brave, timid, cold, and passionate. In the next chapter, I shall discuss Donne's obsession with death. In his songs of love, there is an unusual awareness of death. His fear of death may explain in part the force with which he presents himself in these poems, a force which I have stated from the outset, obliterates everything from our view but Donne himself.
NOTES

1 L. Elaine Hoover, 33.

2 Frank J. Warnke, 205.


6 Earl Miner, 53. For other discussions of the importance of time in Donne's poetry see also Terry G. Sherwood, Fulfilling the Circle: A Study of John Donne's Thought (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 23-62.

7 John Carey, 167-197, discusses the attitudes towards change at the end of the sixteenth century, and for his analysis of Donne's reactions to change and his obsession with his own changeability. See also William Zunder, 1-7, 21-46.

8 Patrica Pinka, 39-42, interprets this as a poem of seduction.

9 For a discussion of Donne's obsession with the body refer to John Carey, 131-166. See, as well, Terry G. Sherwood, 63-101, on the importance of the body in Donne's thought.

11 There is some controversy as to whether the speaker in this poem is a man or a woman. Wilbur Sanders, 47, sees the speaker as a man and calls the woman a whore. John T. Shawcross, "Poetry, Personal and Impersonal," 59, argues that the speaker is female. In some sense, the gender of the speaker is irrelevant to the general tone of the poem, the mocking, sardonic voice that parodies the promises made by lovers. For a discussion of mockery and parody through contradiction as they apply to several of Donne's poems, including "Womans constancy" see Douglas L. Peterson, The English Lyric From Wyatt to Donne: A History of the Plain and Eloquent Styles (Princeton University Press, 1967), 296-301. See also Maria Cornelia, 40-42, for a discussion of how Donne thwarts the reader's expectations by providing a surprise ending.

12 Arnold Stein, 102.

13 J.B, Leishman, 178, for example, cautions that this poem is one in which Donne is mainly concerned with displaying his wit to gain the admiration of his readers. However, for a more serious reading, see William Zunder, 34, for whom the poem hints at Donne's fear of his own instability.

14 I group "The Fever" with "The Expiration," Song: "Sweetest love I do not goe," and "Lecture upon the Shadow," for although love may die, these are, nevertheless, what Redpath calls positive poems, ones in which we sense a mutual love even though it is threatened by time. Others who have grouped them together include Jean Gerber, 71-77, although her argument and focus are different from mine.

15 For a discussion of the lady as the World's Soul in "The Fever" see N.J.C. Andreasen 230-231. See also "The First Anniversarie." Refer to Donald Guss, 90, for the comment that the poem expresses "...an adoration so extreme as to deny its own occasion, the lady's illness."
16 I am indebted in part for my reading of this poem to John Carey, 99-101. However, Carey's reading ties the poem to Donne's ambition and stresses Donne's selfishness much more than I do.


18 Alfred W. Satterwaite, "Donne's 'The Good-morrow'," Explicator 34: Item 50, 1976, suggests that Donne is implying that to awake to love is as miraculous as it was for Christians to have awakened to find themselves in a Christian world.

19 John Bernard, "Orthodoxia Epidemica: Donne's Poetics and 'A Valediction: Of My Name in the Window',' South Atlanta Quarterly 71, no.3 (Summer 1972): 377-89, argues that in poems like "The Good-morrow" Donne may thirst for the infinite, but he imposes "...rational limits on it." See Anne Ferry, 77-78, for her reading of the last lines of the poem.

20 For similar conclusions see L. Elaine Hoover, 82, who draws much more attention to the fact that the bodies decay than I do. See also Dennis J. McKevlin, A Lecture in Love's Philosophy: Donne's Vision of the World of Human Love in the Songs and Sonets (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 46; John Carey, 112; and Frank Manley, 21.
CHAPTER THREE
A TOMB WITH A VIEW

Literature in the closing years of the sixteenth century and the opening of the seventeenth reflects a mentality increasingly more self-conscious and uncertain. George Williamson has written about the idea of the decay of the world in relation to the intensity of feeling in Donne, what he calls the "metaphysical shudder." Frank J. Warnke discusses the sense of disillusionment characteristic of Baroque literature, and Douglas Bush writes that "...men are haunted by the spectres of devouring time and change, the brevity, misery and vanity of life, the littleness of man in the cosmic panorama." Although belief in death's omnipotence is not unique to the period when these poems were written, we cannot help but notice the intensity with which Donne expresses that belief in the Songs and Sonets, thoughts of the ultimate end darkening even his more optimistic poems.

Indeed, more than half of the poems refer to death somehow. Sighs, parting, kisses—all cause Donne to dwell on life's end point. Donne also makes considerable use of the conventional euphemism equating dying with orgasm, the effect sometimes ironic, yet serving to remind us that sex and death are linked metaphorically and "scientifically."

Still, amidst the discussion of man's final destination, Donne remains amazingly alive, imagining himself the centre of life, even as he lies dead, waiting for his shroud, observing the world observing him:

Who ever comes to shroud me, do not harme
Nor question much
That subtile wreath of haire, which crowns my arme;

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Death, of course, is ineffable, yet Donne imagines with great care the physical experience of it. Thoughts of life's cessation seem to heighten his powers of observation, at times lending his images a particularly striking quality, catching us unawares with their startling intensity. In "The Relique," for example, he lies in his grave, his body disinterred, "A bracelet of bright haire about the bone." Nowhere in the poems do we find such descriptive passages when he speaks of his beloved. The awareness of his own mortality results in an ever-present tension in the poetry, his desire for the infinite, and his awareness of himself, of his emotions and of his body coming to the fore. In death, he imagines himself thinking, observing and talking, the centre of the world's attention, much as in his discussions of love he remains our focal point. As in "The Legacie," for example, in which the rapid repetition of "I" in the first two lines ensures we do not forget who is speaking.

**Love's Denial**

In several poems Donne is denied love and that denial is equated with death. Unrequited love, however, elicits different responses from Donne. We have seen already that in "The Apparition," for example, he is not content simply to lie dead, threatening instead to take revenge, warning his mistress that he will haunt her from the grave, "Then shall my ghost come to thy bed." Love may cease, but Donne will survive because he is not the typical Petrarchan lover, genuflecting before the altar of love. While he may be doomed to waste away because his mistress scorns him, if he expires, he will have his pound of flesh.
In contrast to "The Apparition," we find a poem such as "Twicknam garden" in which we find a subdued Donne who behaves much like a Petrarchan lover, pining away for his mistress who is killing him because she is true to her own lover. Donne stills claims our attention, but he does so through self-pity as he laments in language that evokes our sympathy as he describes his bitter tears:

Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with tears,
Hither I come to seek the spring,
And at mine eyes, and at mine ears,
Receive such balmes, as else cure everything
But O, false traitor, I do bring
The spider love, which transubstantiates all,
And can convert Manna to gall,
And that this place may thoroughly be thought
True Paradise, I have the serpent brought.

The setting, a garden, offers Donne no solace despite its pastoral charms. Initially, as we read, the rhyme makes us want to skip rapidly through the poem, a feeling increased by the occasional enjambment of lines. Quickly, however, we find ourselves bogging down, for the lines refuse to trip lightly across the tongue, their subject matter precluding a rapid reading and creating an unresolved tension between form and content as Donne's language shifts from the Petrarchan hyperbole of the opening line to the bitter images associated with poisonous "spider love," which transforms love from something sweet to something bitter and harmful, placing at risk his spiritual well-being. The hyperbole of the opening lines underscores Donne's passivity, his helplessness in the face of unrequited love. We sense Donne's inner turmoil as he finds himself in the Edenic garden complete with the "serpent." The allusion here to "True Paradise" is ironic and bitter, for Donne
admits that with him he has brought the "serpent," the tempter, implying perhaps that what he wants is sinful.

In the second stanza, the images further heighten the sense of dread and finality as Donne, paradoxically, longs for winter, a time of coldness and barrenness and not for spring, the season of rebirth and love. The anxiety and uncertainty so evident in the first stanza is carried throughout the second. His use of words like "grave," "senseless," and "stone" further accent his feelings of heaviness, helplessness and self-pity, his despair clearly evident as he asks love to render him insensate so he can no longer feel his pain. Stanza two ends with Donne's imagined metamorphoses as he fantasizes that he is a stone fountain, whose "teares," we learn in stanza three, will provide a litmus test for a woman's fidelity. The transformation lasts only briefly, however, as in the final stanza, Donne turns his attention to woman directly for the first time. Up to this point, he has spoken only about himself, the constant repetition of the pronouns "I," "mee," and "my," serving to focus attention on him. Now, he continues to speak in plaintive tones as he accuses her of killing him, ironically, because she is constant, her fidelity evidence of her scorn, "O perverse sex, where none is true but shee,/Who's therefore true, because her truth kills mee."

In "Twicknam garden," we find Donne perhaps at his weakest, for although he focuses attention on himself, he demonstrates none of that tendency to take charge that we have seen in other poems. Love here is inimical, and Donne is self-pitying and fearful, a victim of unrequited love who appears doomed. 6
In "Twicknam garden" it is the mistress's constancy to her lover that can destroy Donne. In "Loves exchange" it is love itself that has the power to end his life. Here, however, Donne is neither a passive victim nor a vengeful lover. Instead, he challenges love itself to destroy him. He startles us by equating love with a "devill," one who drives a hard bargain: "Love, any devill else but you/Would for a given Soule give something too." The poem begins with his admission that love has disappointed him, has given him nothing in return, as if he had entered a business deal and been cheated, the allusions to law, politics and commerce suggesting that love is a mercenary transaction, one that has caused him nothing but unhappiness.

Donne builds to a climax as he first reveals in stanza three that he had stood up to love, much as a town "stands stiffe" against an attacker, and in so doing he forced love to reveal its true "face." In describing love as warfare he hints at his great courage in standing up to love and sets the stage for the final confrontation in the last stanza:

For this, Love is enrag'd with me,
Yet kills not. If I must example bee
To future Rebells; If th'unborne
Must learn, by my being cut up, and torne;
Kill, and dissect me, Love; for this
Torture against thine owne end is,
Rack't carcasses make ill Anatomies.

Donne portrays himself as a rebel and dares love to kill him rather than torture him, for tortured bodies are not good for dissection. The language is double-edged, at once implying comic posturing and cynicism, the lines abrupt, their preponderance of internal stops and tortuous syntax, reflecting his frustration and anger while flaunting his ability to argue. The words "kill," "cut up," "torn," "dissect," and "Rack't carcasses" lend a negative,
hostile tone to the poem. The two conditionals delay and make more forceful the command to "Kill, and dissect me, Love," suggesting Donne's desire to retain control of the situation as he challenges love to kill him. Yet, as we read them, we are aware that love, itself, drove him to this state, that perhaps Donne really is not in charge here, that love is impervious to his taunts and barbs. Since his love is unrequited, he wants it to die along with himself, but in dying he wants to be a negative example to the world, one to be avoided. He desires to remain the centre of attention even in death. Thus, in dying for unrequited love he will gain some kind of immortality.

In these poems love is denied. In "Twicknam garden" Donne imagines himself as the poor, rejected lover whose mistress's constancy is killing him, and in "Loves exchange," he challenges love to kill him. Whereas in both poems we see the dangers of love's denial, in others Donne presents the consequences ensuing from its consummation, real or imagined. Three of these poems form the basis of the discussion in the next section.

Eros and Thanatos: Love's Consummation

Donne is always aware of the precariousness of love and the lover. In poems such as "The Paradox," "The Dampe," and "Farewell to love," we find different manifestations of his concern about sexual union and its possible effects on the lover. "The Paradox," for example, is witty, but its message is deadly serious. We see a lover who dies for love:

No lover saith I love, nor any other
Can judge a perfect Lover;
Hee thinkes that else none can, nor will agree,
That any loves but hee:
I cannot say I lov'd, for who can say
He was kill'd yesterday?
Love with excess of heat, more yong than old,
Death kills with too much cold;
Wee dye but once, and who lov'd last did die,
He that saith twice, doth lye.

Through a carefully structured argument using the Elizabethean conceit of sexual death, Donne instructs us in the dangers of consummated love, calling into question anything that anyone else may say about love, for no one can love and tell. Dead men tell no tales; therefore, love cannot be described. It seems the lover cannot win. We learned in "The Apparition" that the iciness of scorn equals metaphorical destruction of the lover. Now we see that "heat" of lust does, too. The lover is doomed, for while his life may linger for a short time, inevitably, like the embers of a fire, he, too, will die, only his epitaph remaining:

Or like the heat, which fire in solid matter
Leaves behind, two hours after.
Once I lov'd and dy'd; and now become
Mine own Epitaph and Tombe.
Here dead men speake their last, and so do I;
Love-slaine, loe, here I lye.

"Love-slaine" indeed, but it should not be overlooked that it is the lover who has the last word, who turns himself into his own epitaph, who through his art draws and holds our attention. The poem points to the belief that lust and death are conjoined, the one inevitably leading to the other, and that with the dying of love the lover may survive, though only briefly. It is the lover's epitaph that we read, that evokes our sympathy, for here lies one whose passing away is a reminder to future generations.

"The Dampe" differs considerably from "The Paradox" in that it is a variation on the Petrarchan death by scorn theme and as such it could easily have been included in the previous section. I choose to discuss it here, however, because Donne refers to two kinds of dying: that of the Petrarchan
lover who atrophies in the face of unrequited love, and that resulting from sexual union, here more imagined than real. Donne's movement in his discussion from the former to the latter lends the poem its interest and power.

In the opening stanza, Donne anticipates his demise and perhaps that of his friends and postmortem examiners, such is the woman's power over life. She is a true Petrarchan mistress as we learn in stanza two, in which Donne employs images of war as he challenges the beloved to lay down her Petrarchan arms: "First kill th'enormous Gyant, your Disdaine,/And let th'enchantresse Honor, next be slaine." In the final stanza Donne argues that he could play the role of the Petrarchan lover who relies on "constancy" and Secretnesse," but would rather not, "But these I neyther looke for, nor professe."

What is of particular interest to us in the last stanza is the abrupt transition as Donne moves from a discussion of Petrarchan to sexual love in the final four lines:

Kill mee as Woman, let me die
As meere man; doe you but try
Your passive valor, and you shall finde than,
In that you have odds enough of any man.

Punning on the sexual connotation of "Kill" and "die," Donne argues that the beloved does not have to do anything to destroy him, that her "passive valor" alone can do so. The suggestion here of seduction adds a touch of humour to the poem without at all diminishing its seriousness. In effect, Donne supplicates himself in the final lines, asking to die as a consequence of sexual union.
In "The Paradox" and "The Dampe," sex can annihilate the lover. Neither poem, however, is as powerful as "Farewell to love," perhaps the most pessimistic expression of Donne's recognition that love grounded purely in the physical is ultimately unsatisfying and will die, taking with it the soul of the lover:

Whilest yet to prove,
I thought there was some Deitie in love
So did I reverence, and gave
Worship, as Atheists at their dying houre
Call, what they cannot name, an unknown powere,
As ignorantly did I crave:
    Thus when
Things not yet known are coveted by men,
    Our desires give them fashion, and so
As they waxe lesser, fall, as they rise, grow.

Like atheists on their death bed who grasp desperately at the infinite, at the absolute, the lover clutches at the hope that love will be lasting. The lover, and perhaps the atheist, is doomed to be disappointed. Donne's reference to "Dietie" with its implications of the spiritual element in love is ironic, for, as we soon discover, he speaks solely of carnal love in this poem. And lust, we learn, is subject to decay and change:

Being had, enjoying it decayes:
    And thence,
What before please'd them all, takes but one sense,
    And that so lamely, as it leaves behinde,
A kind of sorrowing dullnesse to the minde.

Physical love he admits, once satisfied, loses its initial appeal. We quickly forget just how determinedly we pursued it. Indeed, like children referred to in line 14 who are uninterested in some prince sitting in a "golden Chaire," lovers after a few days are bored with love. Donne implies in these lines the paradoxical nature of passion: the very act of fulfilling it leads to its decay. Love of the body, pleasurable though it may be, lasts but an instant, only a
"dullnesse to the minde" remaining, a melancholy feeling accompanying the realization that the act is futile. In fact, these lines reveal the depth of Donne's disillusionment and his realization that to attain what one wants is to destroy it. But does it have to be this way? In stanza three, Donne raises this very question:

Ah cannot wee,
As well as cocks and Lyons jocund bee,
After such pleasures, unless wise
Nature decreed (since each Act, they say,
Diminisheth the length of life a day)
This; as shee would man should despise
The sport,
Because that other course of being short,
And only for a minute made to be
Eager, desires to raise posterity

Unlike man, cocks and lions are "jocund" after coitus. Donne, in thinking on this, now considers the more destructive characteristics of love-making. One implication seems to be that to pursue sex is, in effect, to conspire in one's own destruction. Lines 23-30 are notoriously difficult, their very ambiguity perhaps suggestive of Donne's disillusioned state of mind as he explores the negative effects of sexual love. The lines allow for a multiplicity of meaning. They suggest that because life is already short, and made even shorter by sex, man places himself in jeopardy through his wish to produce offspring; therefore, he should despise sex. The lines also imply that man should despise sex because it lasts but a few moments and leaves the lover weak. In the final stanza Donne offers his cynical solution to the dilemma:

Since so, my minde
Shall not desire what no man else can finde,
I'll no more dote and runne
To pursue things which had, indammage me.
And when I come where moving beauties be,
As men doe when the summers Sunne
Growes great,
Though I admire their greatness, shun their heat;
Each place can afford shadowes. If all faile
'Tis but appyling worme-seed to the Tail.

He admits that in the pursuit of worldly love he has, in effect, chased after his own death, and thus he denounces the very pleasures after which he has lusted, promising to stop himself from fulfilling his desire, rather than subjecting himself to the despair that follows immediately after gratification. The final lines stress the fear and revulsion that permeate the poem. Love in the material world offers no hope of infinity, for it is bound up in the corporeal. Carnal love dies as quickly as it grows. Better, then, to observe from afar, to forego satisfaction. The poem argues a powerful case against worldly love, revealing a profound disappointment with love that is more than the usual post-coital sadness. There is little here to balance the pessimism inherent in it. Donne offers nothing to give us hope; instead, he counsels aloofness. Having equated carnal love with death, he dismisses love and removes himself from the game.

"Farewell to love" is a pessimistic statement, at least on one level. Yet, despite its pessimism, Donne exerts a remarkable degree of influence over his destiny. He is not about to give in to the same end as those lovers who succumb to lust; instead, he wills himself to be different from other men, thus escaping their fate. He does not tell us what he will replace desire with, except to suggest that he will "admire" from afar. Whether or not he will succeed is a matter for conjecture. What is important is his determination, and that Donne, in speaking so bluntly about the consequences of love yet again betrays his obsession with them, implying in his disappointment that he yearns for something greater.
The argument is well-wrought and disarming. In his reflection on the nature of lust, he ignores woman and concentrates on himself, stressing that carnal love has "indamauge'd" him. The title itself is ironic, for Donne is not bidding farewell to love; rather, he claims to refuse to yield to lust, something altogether different. The poem is powerful, but it seems mechanical and rigid because Donne is truly convinced that love and death are linked and cannot possibly conceive of anything else.

The poems discussed in the first two sections of this chapter reveal Donne's alternating responses to love's denial and love's consummation. We find Donne passive, vengeful, aloof, or challenging, his tone ranging from bitter lament in "Twicknam garden" to the boastfulness and daring of "Loves exchange" In "The Paradox," The Dampe," and "Farewell to Love," Donne is much like an actor wrapped up in a soliloquy seeming very much disengaged from the subject matter, refusing even to allude to the woman, or women, who prompted these speeches. The effect is disarming, for on the one hand the topic is unsettling, yet on the other it appears overshadowed by the coolness of reason. The tension created between Donne's obvious obsession with death and his, at times, clinical examination of its relationship to love is an intriguing aspect of these poems, and is also evident in several poems in which he dwells on parting and absence.

Love, Parting and Death

Love appears to have Donne at its mercy, for both its denial and its consummation are potentially harmful to him. Donne, however, also reveals similar anxieties in poems that present a mutual love, one that is
constant although still subject to mutability and decay. In these poems, Donne ponders the effects of parting and absence on love and the lovers. Parting or preparation for parting forces Donne to examine love and his relationship with the beloved.

In a poem such as Song: "sweetest love I do not goe," Donne wittily practises dying by parting from his loved one, but his claim that he is playing acting fails to mask his very real anxiety:

Sweetest love, I do not goe,
For weariness of thee,
Nor in hope the world can show
A fitter Love for mee,
But since that I
Must dye at last, 'tis best,
To use my selfe in jest
Thus by fain'd deaths to dye;

To "jest" perhaps, for the word does tend to soften the idea, but by the end of the poem we almost forget that this is "jest." The tone is poignant, almost sweet, delicate and sombre as Donne both assures the beloved of his love and reveals his fear of the harm that parting can cause. Time, we learn in stanza two, is indifferent, it "hath no desire" nor "sense," and Donne, like the sun which symbolizes time, will leave and return unharmed, steadfast in his love. Yet, his comment lacks conviction, for he informs us in stanza three that man is too feeble to combat time and "ill chance" and by extension to outwit death. The practising of death by parting becomes a subtle admission of fallibility, all the more powerful because Donne is obviously in love with the mistress and keenly feels her absence. Will love survive? Will the lover survive absence?

In the fourth stanza, Donne further explores mutual love, the beloved's every sigh and every tear affecting him:
When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not winde
   But sigh'st my soule away;
When thou weep'st, unkindly kind,
My life's blood doth decay,
      It cannot bee
That thou lov'st mee, as thou say'st
If in thine my life thou waste
   Thou art the best of me,

The stock Petrarchan conventions bordering on hyperbole add a touch of immediacy to the poem. Parting from the loved one can kill, Donne tenderly reminds his beloved. Because she and he are as one in their love, her sighs and tears are his, and will kill him. Donne momentarily cautions his beloved and points out that in being "unkindly kind" she is showing her kindness in such a way as to harm him. In the final stanza we move from images of death to the image of sleep. Donne attempts to resolve the problem by telling his lover to

   But thinke that wee
   Are but turn'd aside to sleepe;
   They who one another keepe
   Alive ne'er parted bee.

The resolution, however, is more apparent than real. He asks her to "thinke" them asleep to avoid having her fears of harm to him fulfilled. Even in the glory of their love, he cannot forget the threat of death, for love, a fully requited love, is still subject to its power. This is a moving poem because of the fear Donne expresses, leaving the reader uncomfortable precisely because of Donne's anxiety that parting may alter the relationship, may in fact be the death of love. Of course, he tries to find a way to resolve the dilemma. While reminding his lover of the presence of death, he asks her to think of parting as sleep, which ironically, is itself a kind of dying. It would seem that not even in the graceful and witty resolution is Donne able
to set aside his anxiety, even though in the beginning he hints that he is joking.

It is in three of Donne's valedictory poems that we perhaps find his most moving expression of his concerns with love and absence. In "A Valediction of my name, in the window," "A Valediction of weeping," and "A Valediction forbidding mourning," he bids farewell to his beloved, the very act of doing so spurring him to an examination of the effects of parting and absence on love and the lovers. In each, however, we find a somewhat different attitude and focus. In the first valediction, especially, we sense that Donne is primarily concerned with himself and the beloved secondarily; whereas in the third poem, "A Valediction forbidding mourning" he treats us to a touching expression of mutual love unmarred by any hint of the kind of manipulative attention seeking we have witnessed in other works.

In "A Valediction of my name, in the window," Donne betrays his fear of being forgotten by his loved one. Although he speaks directly to her, it is really he who is the focus of the poem. In the first three stanzas, his engraved name, here a charm, symbolizes constancy and confidence in their union. In stanza three, Donne claims that his name will weather the "showers and tempests" of time, suggesting that he, too, will remain steadfast in his love.

In the following two stanzas, however, Donne brings in the idea of dying, now calling his name a "deaths head" in stanza four and a "ruinous Anatomy" in stanza five as if to momentarily frighten his mistress. Yet quickly, however, he assures her, and perhaps himself, that he will return:

    Then as all my soules bee,  
    Emparadis'd in you, (in whom alone  
    I understand, and grow and see,)
The rafters of my body grow, bone
Being still with you, the Muscle, Sinew, and Veine,
Which tile this house, will come againe.

His soul, as well as his body, the "ragged bony name" of stanza four, will remain with her when he leaves. In stanza six he pleads with her to keep their love immortal after his departure:

Till my returne, repaire
And recompact my scatter'd body so.
As all the vertuos powers which are
Fix'd in the starres, are said to flow
Into such characters as graved bee
When these starres have supremacie.

He admits that his immortality is dependent upon his lover's constancy. He cannot let go of the idea that parting from his beloved may be the end of their love and the end of him. The analogy to astrology here serves a duel purpose, at once imputing magical charm to his name while serving to remind him that perhaps unknown and uncontrollable forces will determine the fate of their love.

Love and death continue to be the subjects of stanza seven. The parting of lovers brings grief, made all the more painful by their mutual love and reminding them of love's mutability. The analogy of his engraved name to the symbols used by astrologers to call down heavenly influences now has added weight as he tells his beloved that since his name was cut when "love and grief their exaltation had," she should not resist the influences of love and grief but daily "mourn" for him.

The poem, shifting between certainty and uncertainty, becomes a cry of doubt as well as an admission of love. In stanzas eight and nine, Donne, cautioning his beloved against a possible assault by some potential lover during his absence, begs her to remain true to him, thus admitting, therefore,
that his love, his life, is in her hands. His name will remind her of his love; in absence there is presence. The final stanza attempts a return to certainty but does not quite dispel the sense of doubt:

But glasse, and lines must bee,
No means our firme substantial love to keep;
Neere death inflicts this lethargie,
And this I murmur in my sleepe;
Impute this idle talk, to that I go
For dying men talke often so.

The talk has been anything but idle. The final stanza draws together love, death, parting and sleep and creates an unresolved tension between Donne's certainty of their love and his nagging doubt that their love will survive his absence. There exists a delicate tension between his desire to hold her in his power during his absence—a hold symbolized by his engraved name, which like a charm will keep her spellbound, his name superimposed on her reflection, he in the superior position, so to speak—and his doubt of the efficacy of such a charm. As if to soothe himself, he argues in the last stanza that they should not rely on such charms because their love can survive without them. Yet, while he tries to return to certainty, the poem ends on a note of resignation, one that underscores Donne's doubt. The final lines, which one could conceivably read as being meant to shrug off his earlier musings (the "idle talk" of inconstancy) are perhaps a resigned admission that he cannot shake his uncertainty, the words "idle talk" calling into doubt any certainty shown in the poem.

Here, we encounter a Donne who enjoys a requited love, but who recognizes that love may not last, that it may turn to indifference when he leaves, and thus will die. Even in doubt, however, he attempts to exert some measure of influence. His name superimposed on her face reminds her of
him during his absence. In absence he wills himself into her consciousness, his tone of voice moving from the philosophical to the scolding, and then to the apologetic. What distinguishes "A Valediction of weeping" from the preceding poem is the sense that we have here a mutual love untainted by even the slightest hint of inconstancy or questions of fidelity. Yet, in the bidding of farewell Donne betrays his profound concern with death and parting, his anxiety evident throughout. Although the love discussed is constant, we soon learn that it is subject to mutability. Indeed, the controlling image of tears is the common term in three conceits, each expanding in size: tears/coins; tears/globe/world; tears/cosmos. Tears, while physical manifestations of grief, here also symbolize change and its instability, which may lead to the end of love and the lover.9

Let me powre forth
My teares before thy face, whil'st I stay here,
For thy face coines them, and thy stampe they beare,
And by this Mintage they ar something worth,
For thus they bee
Pregnant of thee;
Fruits of much griefe they are, emblemes of more,
When a teare falls, that thou fails which it bore,
So thou and I are nothing then, when on divers shore.

Our attention is immediately centered on Donne as he weeps at having to part from his loved one. His tears are caused by her, and reflect her and hold her image. They are "pregnant" with her and with the "fruits," the offspring, of their grief. In attempting to tell his beloved how much she means to him as he is about to leave, Donne points to the deep-felt quality of their final moments together. The final lines of the stanza convey the sense that he realizes this may be the last time he sees her. When a tear bearing her image drops, it symbolizes his parting. Apart they are "nothing."
In stanza two, Donne metaphorically expands their microcosm to include the entire world, and in doing so, he reminds us of "The Sunne Rising," in which he manipulates space by reducing the world to the lovers' bedroom:

On a round ball
A workman that hath copies by, can lay
An Europe, Afrique, and an Asia,
And quickly make that, which was nothing, All,
   So doth each teare,
   Which thee doth weare,
A globe, yea world by that impression grow,
Till thy teares mixt with mine do overflow
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

Donne contrasts the "nothing" of stanza one with "All," employing the image of mapmaking in his metaphorical expansion of their world, suggesting his desire to have the lovers' experience represent a whole world. He compares tears to a globe that is blank until a "workman" lays copies of continents on it. The globe is nothing until her image is pasted on it. So, too, the blank tears are nothing until her image is reflected in them, at which point they become "all" the world. Together, the tears will cause a flood. He intensifies his expansion from tear, to globe, to world in the last line of the stanza: his mistress is now his "heaven."

The final stanza is disturbing, its language suggesting misfortune:

O more then Moone,
Draw not up seas to drowne me in thy sphere,
Weepe me not dead, in thine armes, but forbeare
   Let not the winde
   Example finde,
   To do me more harme, then it purposeth;
Since thou and I sigh one anothers breath,
Who e'r sighes most, is cruellest, and hast the others death

Donne begs the mistress not to drown him, for like the moon, her tears can cause a flood. Indeed, she is "more then Moone," for she can control the
wind and sea. The lovers in this poem are each other's "All." Their love is obviously mutual and constant, but Donne finds cause for concern even in this love. In comparing her to the moon he also implies that she, like the moon, can change, for the moon is of the world, a world subject to mutability, decay and death. He fears separation from her because he suspects that absence may mean the death of love. Donne is keenly aware of love's powerlessness in the face of time and change. The final two lines underscore the possibility that love and the lover may die. Time inevitably leads to death, and separation from her symbolizes that death for him.

In the preceding two valedictory poems, there is no unqualified sense of optimism that love can withstand separation. In "A Valediction forbidding mourning," however, we find precisely that feeling of faith that love can withstand the parting of lovers. The poem's subject is a relationship that will survive absence. Paradoxically, Donne, in alluding to death, implies that their love may survive absence. Although the poem opens with the startling reference to a virtuous man on his deathbed, there is neither the anxiety evident in "A Valediction of weeping" nor the doubts about fidelity that emerge in "A Valediction of my name in the window." Virtuous men leave this life quietly, with no fear of the unknown. In the first two stanzas, Donne explores death and parting, his voice betraying no sense of urgency as he advises his beloved that they should "melt" apart in silence with no "tear-floodes," or hyperbolic expressions that other lovers may demonstrate. His use of "melt" in line five is particularly suggestive, for while it means to part, to dissolve, it conveys a feeling of gentleness and peacefulness.
The sense that their love is unique is heightened in stanzas three, four and five in which Donne distinguishes it from the love of the "Dull sublunary lovers" of line 13. Referring to the spheres of the universe in stanza three, he underscores that their separation will be harmless, just as the motion of the spheres is "innocent," i.e. harmless. In alluding to the heavens, Donne also suggests the spiritual nature of their love, thus setting them apart from those for whom love is purely physical:

But we by'a love, so much refined
That ourselves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind
Carelesse, eyes, lips and hands to misse.

In contrast to these lovers, Donne and his beloved enjoy a love so "rein'd," they themselves cannot tell what it is. The sense here is not that they are Platonic lovers, but rather that it is not necessary for their bodies to be close for their love to continue. Donne now expands the discussion of their love in stanza six and increases our appreciation of the bond that exists between them:

Our two soules therefore, which are one
Though I must goe, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to ayery thinesse beate.

The image of gold is particularly apt, for gold conveys a sense of extensibility and malleability. It is pure, incorruptible, scarce and valuable. Their love, therefore, contains all of these qualities. Separation is painful, but their love, pure as gold, links them spiritually, even though they may separate physically.

The final three stanzas develop further the unique aspects of their love, employing the famous compass image, itself paradoxical, for the compass is
material, yet Donne transforms it into a symbol of the immaterial, of their two souls which are one:

If they be two, they are two so
As stiffe twin compasses are two,
Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the'other doe.

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth rome,
It leans and hearkens after it,
And growes erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt though be to mee, who must
Like th'other foot, obliquely runne,
Thy firmnes makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begunne.

His beloved, who stays behind, is nevertheless joined to him and moves with him in harmony, leaning as he roams, always providing him with a fixed centre. Each affects the other. The word "just" in the next to final line conveys a sense of moral uprightness to their love. Donne has transformed the metaphor of parting and death into an affirmation of the constancy of their love through the perfection of the unbroken circle, which represents the unity of the lovers who may be separated physically but not spiritually. Absence, here, is not really a separation but an expansion. Donne links love, parting and death, but the poem speaks of hope, not pessimism and expresses a profoundly moving belief in the immutability and mutuality of their love.

In "A Valediction of my name, in the window," and "A Valediction of weeping," as in Song: "sweetest love I do not goe," Donne demonstrates that he is only too well aware of the dangers involved in parting and absence, the act of bidding farewell evoking from him responses that reveal not only his love for the mistress but his anxieties as well. Yet, he also shows his
optimism, particularly in "A Valediction forbidding mourning," which is a moving poem of hope. As such, it leads to the temptation to suggest that Donne moves from doubt to certainty because no one wants to believe that love is ephemeral. To argue, however, that Donne has arrived at a final position in any poem, that this or that particular work represents his final statement would be misleading, because on the face of it, there is no conclusive evidence that any one poem came before any other, and therefore it would be presumptuous to imply some kind of progression in attitude. What we may say about the poems discussed to this point in the study is that, together, they present the complexity of attitudes revealed by Donne. In this imaginative construct, this tension-filled world of his poetic imagination, all points of view, are valid. Nothing is simple in his poetic world. When he speaks of love and parting his thoughts are coloured by thoughts of death, when he speaks of love, his desire for the infinite is obvious, but so is his doubt of its possibility.

The Intractable "I"

In many of these poems, there is the sense of a consciousness controlling events. The threats to undo the world by dying, the worrying about death, the affected poses of the unrequited lover, the touching songs about requited love—all seem equally intense, as if Donne is a lawyer capable of arguing any position with equal conviction. It is this element of control that is a crucial feature of the poems. In the midst of the turmoil, we find the still centre, and herein stands the intractable "I," the Donne who is incapable of being led, the Donne who does the leading, focussing attention on himself,
subtly at times, at other times, blatantly, but always on himself. The barren landscape, the woman as idea, the worrying over time and death—all lead inexorably to Donne. Whether in the depths of despair or at the height of passion, he stands at the centre. It is his "fire of passion," his arm wreathed with hair, his death, his love, his "ruinous anatomy," his "ragged heart," his soul, his joy and despair that inform the poems.

It would be absurd to point out the shifts from third to first person, the constant references to me, mine, my, and I that occur in the poems; absurd because there are so many. One poem, however, stands out as a powerful example of how Donne turns our attention on himself to the exclusion of all else, of how he obliterates everything but himself from our view. In "A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day," we encounter Donne in the depths of grief. The poem is possibly the strongest expression of the effects of death on love and lover in the Songs and Sonets. Arnold Stein, for example, claims it is "...one of a kind, and cannot be classified or briefly described." Here, we find Donne’s anxiety overpowering, his obsession with thoughts of nothingness plainly evident, his fear fueled by the possibility of his beloved’s death and the thought of being left alone. The opening lines are among the bleakest in the poems, with the exception perhaps of the first stanza of "The Dissolution," which, permeated by thoughts of death though it be, offers hope at the end:

And so my soule more earnestly releas’d  
Will outstrip hers; As bullets flown before  
A latter bullet may o’take, the pouder being more.

"Nocturnal" offers no such hope. The language is stark, the varying line lengths creating a halting rhythm unrelieved by the rhyme scheme, the
preponderance of sibilants creating a hissing sound, evoking images of exhaustion and death, as if the speaker is exhaling his last dying breath as the world also slowly expires:

'Tis the yeares midnight, and it is the dayes,
Lucies, who scarce seaven houres herself unmaskes,
The Sunne is spent, and now his flasks
Send forth light squibs, no constant rayes;
The worlds whole sap is sunke:
The generall balme th'hydroptique earth is shrunke,
Whither, as to the beds-feet, life is shrunke,
Dead and enterr'd; yet all these seeme to laugh
Compar'd with mee, who am their Epitaph.

The poem moves from the external world, one characterized here by images of desolation and darkness. Donne's poetic snapshot is starkly black and white. We embark upon a journey through a world in which the "sunne is spent," in which life is "Dead and enterr'd," the world contracted, drained of "sap." S. Lucies Day is the shortest day of the year, suggesting the brief span of man's life. Donne draws us away from contemplation of the barren landscape to contemplation of himself, for here he sits, inviting us to compare him to the desolation that surrounds him. There is no comparison because his despair is greater than the eternal darkness that envelops him, a darkness feebly broken by the "squibs" of light. In his isolation, he invites us to focus on him. Quickly forgetting us, he carries on with his story:

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee
At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:
For I am every dead thing,
In whom love wrought new Alchemie.
For his art did expresse
A quintessence even from nothingness,
From dull privations, and leane emptinesse:
He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot
Of absence, darkness, death; things which are not.
We are still not quite sure just why Donne is so despondent. Obviously, it has something to do with love. Donne, perhaps, is looking back on an unsatisfactory relationship. Love, in the second stanza is like an alchemist, in this case working his magic by extracting a quintessence from "nothingness," that serves to underline the total identification Donne feels with death. He is "every dead thing," dying to be reborn as something negative, the quintessence of nothing.

To this point there is a subtle tension between our wondering about the cause of this misery and our concentrating on Donne, almost to the point of ignoring the fact that someone has caused him so much grief. Indeed, the poem reads like a mystery. The lover is dead, but who killed him? We must wait still, for the third stanza carries on the despair as Donne indulges in nostalgic talk of the lovers' arguments and separations in language reminiscent of "Valediction of weeping," with its motifs of tear floods and drowning:

All others, from all things, draw all that's good,
Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have;
I, by lovers limbecke, am the grave
Of all, that's nothing. Oft a flood
Have wee two wept, and so
Drowned the whole world, us two; oft did we grow
To be two Chaoses, when we did show
Care to ought else; and often absences
Withdraw our soules, and made us carcasses

The language in this stanza further paints a picture of grief and isolation, the rapid succession of the word "all" serving to highlight Donne's isolation from the world of ordinary lovers. Not until its final lines is the beloved mentioned directly. The reference to chaos, absence, carcasses, all negative words, serves to link love and death. In their love, the lovers
"drowned the world," such was their love. Absence was like death, withdrawing their souls. Donne describes a mutual love made unbearable by her absence, by her "death," he reveals in the fourth stanza, and upon the death of the beloved, requited love leads to the death of love and to the death of the lover.

These tortured lines serve to illustrate Donne's hopeless state. He is reduced to nothing, not even an ordinary nothing like a "shadow," for he is less than nothing. Yet, in his constant dwelling on his nothingness, he paradoxically manages to assert himself in our consciousness and to separate himself from ordinary mortal lovers, for here again, his despair, as his nothingness, is greater than that of anyone else. His beloved, mentioned briefly, fades from view as he stands centre stage and makes his despair our own, the beloved's death triggering this opportunity for self-absorption. The sombre mood extends to the final stanza where his despair grows darker, tainted with bitterness and cynicism:

But I am None; nor will my Sunne renew.  
You lovers, for whose sake, the lesser Sunne  
At this time to the Goat is runne  
To fetch new lust, and give it you  
Enjoy your summer all;  
Since shee enjoys her long nights festivall.  
Let mee prepare towards her, and let mee call  
This houre her Vigil, and her Eve, since this  
Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is.

The pessimism is unrelenting as Donne prepares "towards her," towards death, claiming that he is nothing. With her death, love has died and there is no hope that it might survive. Donne, too, will die, his bitterness preventing him from envisioning any others enjoying a mutual love. New lovers in spring will know only sexual love, "new lust."
The images in this poem are sterile, the landscape barren, the woman's death prompting for self-pity. The beloved, with whom he once shared love and pain, is important not for herself, but as Elaine Hoover puts it, for "...the emotions she evokes in the lover and the opportunity she thereby gives him for self-analysis."\textsuperscript{15} Donne is trapped in a living tomb, a hell partly created by himself, his inability to speak of the joys of his love caused by his profound grief at the loss of his beloved. We should remember that her death has spurred this expression of grief, but in the expression of grief he seems to all but forget her.

In a mere forty-five lines, Donne refers to himself directly sixteen times, taking us down with him into a place of profound isolation. He removes himself from the world, for that world (if one invests it with faith and hope) is certain to destroy one. Still, we cannot ignore the fact that in his despair, in his living death, Donne exerts some of power over his audience. It is he who has taken us on this journey through the barren landscape; it is he who even in despair implies his despair is greater that of anyone else; it is he who, unwilling to remain in this world where love has died, will "prepare" himself towards her, will will his own death. In the process, Donne, the masked speaker described at the outset, has created a work whose theme is death, and whose power in expressing it has resulted in an immortal work of art.
NOTES

1 George Williamson, 9. See also William Zunder, 1-7, 21-45, and 71-72, for discussions of uncertainty, and Patrick Crutwell, 39-72 and passim. For a succinct summary of the idea of the decay of nature and for competing schools of thought, see Victor Harris, All Coherence Gone (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1966), 1-7 and passim.

2 Frank J. Warnke, 21-65.

3 Douglas Bush, 293.

4 A general discussion of death in Donne's work would take the thesis far afield because it is in his other poetry that Donne deals most dramatically and in greater detail with Death as one of the Four Last Things (Holy Sonnets), and with Death as a philosophical question mark hanging over all existence (The Anniversaries). That Donne was a death-obsessed poet has been long acknowledged by many scholars. Indeed, Donne had himself painted in his shroud. See John Carey, 198-230, for a particularly thorough discussion of Donne's fascination with death, especially as it pertains to his religious poetry, and of its relevance to the Songs and Sonnets. D.W. Harding, "Coherence of Theme in Donne's Poetry," The Kenyon Review 13, no.3 (Summer, 1951): 429-444, argues that the main theme in Donne's poetry is the fear of death. For further discussion of the theme of death see also Donald L Guss, 70-71, 116-117, 134-135 and passim; Jean Gerber, 77-81; M.M. Mahood, 87 for her reference to Donne's earliest portrait and its motto, "Antes muerto que mudado;" and L. Elaine Hoover, xix and passim. Although my focus is different from Hoover's, I am indebted to her discussion of the theme of death, particularly as it applies to poems such as the "Nocturnall," "The Paradox," "A Valediction of weeping," and "A Valediction of my name, in the window." See, also, Terry G. Sherwood, 17-18, 30-34 and passim, for discussions of death. Thomas Docherty, 76-77, and passim, also recognizes the importance of death to Donne's thought and poetry.

5 John Carey, 201, claims that thirty-two of the poems "...find some means of fitting death in."
6 Patricia Garland Pinka, 98, views this as bitter poem. See, also, N.J.C. Andreasen, 151; and Earl Miner, 55-56, who suggests that "...the speaker is his own tempter."

7 Theodore Redpath, 113, provides what he describes as a "bolder" reading of the final line. His version, "Naked you've odds enough of any man," seems to me to suggest even more strongly the sexual connotation of the last four lines.

8 My reading of these lines follows that of Jean Gerber, 68, who relies on Grierson. In fact, lines 23-30 have long caused debate amongst scholars. For a detailed discussion of this passage see Theodore Redpath, 145-149. D.F. Rauber, "Donne's 'Farewell to Love: A Crux Revisited," Concerning Poetry 3, no.2 (Fall 1970): 51-63, also provides a detailed analysis of the entire poem and concentrates especially on the crux in stanza three. For a particularly lucid reading of the passage see also N.J.C. Andreasen, 127, who relies on George Williamson, and who comments that "...the controversy has little relevance to the total meaning of the poem."

9 M. M. Mahood, Poetry and Humanism (New Haven: Yale University, 1950), 94-95, discusses Donne's use of these conceits. John Carey, 175, analyzes the image of tears in the context of change. See also Anne Ferry 86-91; Jean Gerber, 76; Patricia Pinka, 34-37; Dennis J. McKeveilin, 70-71; and Terry G. Sherwood, 133-142. For a particularly helpful discussion of this poem, one to which I am indebted, refer to J. B. Leishman, 176.

10 See Thomas Docherty, 40, for his comment of Donne's manipulation of space.

11 Arnold Stein, 178. I should note here, as well, that "A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day," and "The Dissolution," are frequently mentioned together. See, for example, J. B. Leishman, 176; Donald Guss, 101;

12 I am indebted to William Zunder, 46 for the idea that in lines 14-17 and again in lines 22-27 Donne is discussing a relationship that was an unhappy one.
13 See Terry G. Sherwood, 136-137, for his discussion of the abject state of the speaker. A. Alvarez, The School of Donne (New York: Random House, 1961),18, suggests "The theme is a depression so deep as to verge on annihilation."

14 Douglas L. Peterson, 329, argues that the lovers "...may perhaps again be reunited."

15 L. Elaine Hoover, 133.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

Certainly, as Martz, Pinka, and Leishman, among others, have suggested, the *Songs and Sonets* are poems about love, a word that in Donne's poems \(^1\) stands for a variety of "amatory experience," to borrow Andreasen's phrase.\(^2\) Theodore Redpath perhaps puts it best when he notes that they "cover a very wide range of feeling from flippant cynicism to the most tender and even idealistic love."\(^3\) From the moment we enter the *Songs and Sonets*, regardless of the order in which we read them and irrespective of the way we may choose to group them, we are under the spell of the intractable "I," whether that "I" is urbane and witty, vengeful and sarcastic, or challenging and boastful. Indeed, Donne's is a powerful voice that seems to argue with equal conviction for varying and often contradictory points of view.

The themes of love, time and death are so tightly interwoven in these poems that one is hard pressed to separate them. Love, ideas of love, the beloved as miracle, seductress, or slut—all are catalysts for Donne's flights of imagination which reveal a profound obsession with time's passing and death's omnipotence. In discussing love, he tends towards self-analysis, dwelling in his monologues on his anxieties. Donne's grappling with the dilemmas posed by time and death point to the manipulative aspects of his poetry, his responses to love, to woman and to the external world frequently suggesting that he is a controlling figure, obliterating everything but himself

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from our view. He desires to defeat death as much as he refuses to be a victim of love.

The Donne of these poems is a realist, one who may long for transcendence through love, yet who recognizes the omnipotence of time and death. The threat of death adds urgency to the poetry, for love is fraught with too many difficulties, the lover often anxious and uncertain, even though he may present a confident face. We have seen, for example, how in "The Apparition" his threatening stance is as much an indication of his anxiety as it is of his confidence, implying that he is out of control even though he appears to be fully in charge. On occasion, Donne seems genuinely to believe that lovers can outwit time, yet, frequently, he undercuts that optimism with an allusion to death, or a caution to be vigilant else love will die, even as he sings of its glories as, for example, in "The good-morrow." At times, he appears to argue completely contradictory points of view. In "The Indifferent," for example, he promotes promiscuity, but in "Valediction of my name in the window" he worries about inconstancy. In "A Valediction forbidding mourning" we hear him sing of the union of two lovers, as he does in "The good-morrow," "The Sunne Rising," and "The Anniversarie," while arguing as vehemently in "Loves Alchemie" and "The broken heart" that any such union is impossible. In other poems, he seems more interested in superiority than in love, arguing subtle distinctions between man's and woman's love in "Aire and Angels," for instance, or presenting his relationship as a model for future generations in "The Canonization."

Donne seeks immortality. He pushes his arguments to their limit, all but ignores the visible world, and treats woman as an idea. His obsession
with time and death is evident throughout the entire group of poems. In exploring love and its relationship to time and death, he gains his immortality, not through love, but through his art. He creates a poetic world, one in which he reigns supreme, but at the same time he reveals his profound fears and in so doing he writes poetry that speaks to us today, for it is concerned with the themes that haunt us all: love, time, change, and death.
NOTES

1 As Patricia Pinka, 166, has noted, in only two of the poems does Donne use the word lust, and even then it is not in reference to sex. "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day, being the shortest day," l. 40 and "Loves dietie," l. 17.

2 N.J.C. Andreasen, 21.

3 Theodore Redpath, xvi.
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