

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENT

IN

THE SONGS AND SONETS

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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENT
IN THE SONGS AND SONETS
OF JOHN DONNE

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I

INTRODUCTION

One of the most difficult, if not unanswerable, questions in Donne scholarship is the autobiographical element in the Songs and Sonets. Before considering the actual problem, one faces the equally difficult task of defining for his purposes the term "autobiographical". In its most elementary form, the problem could be answered by a very factual study linking events, people, and perhaps dates with certain poems. However, this would obviously be a very limited study focusing on the most pragmatic elements in the poetry which are not only few, but also questionable. Even the most recent life of Donne by Edward S. Le Comte offers no new answers to the old autobiographical questions.

Our overall conclusion should be that the most successful of the poems have the ring of authenticity, that we are hearing the many-mooded voice of experience, but that, unfortunately for the biographer, it is a hopeless task to extract from such nebulous, volatile, and mercurial matter lost facts, specific episodes, faceless and nameless mistresses.¹

Or again, if the autobiographical element is defined as incidents, experiences, and people actually part of Donne's

¹Edward S. Le Comte, Grace to a Witty Sinner: A Life of John Donne (London, 1965), p. 53.

life, this definition negates ideas which, if not actually part of the poet's experience, are, nevertheless, psychologically true or form part of inherited literary traditions. It is almost impossible to establish with any certainty parallels between the poetry and actual events or persons in the poet's life. A number of poems have been linked with female acquaintances of Donne for various reasons. However this technique answers only the most elementary aspect of the autobiographical problem. Even if all the poems could be linked with various women of Donne's acquaintance, the true nature of each relationship might still remain for the most part unknown. The autobiographical question cannot be confined to people or events in the poet's life, but must be enlarged to a consideration of the thoughts in the poet's mind which found expression in the Songs and Sonets. The goal of this study is to determine the relationship between Donne and his poetry.

Unfortunately the Songs and Sonets considered as a totality have received very little critical attention. The uniqueness of the poems lies in the element of wit, the range in tone, the element of drama, and the variety in point of view--if not subject matter. One must attempt to explain their great diversity, but explain it in relation to Donne. Perhaps a more important relationship which one must establish is that between the "more serious" and the

"less serious" poems--if such a meaningful distinction exists. An unfortunate judgment critics often make--and yet consider it too naïve to discuss--is that the difference between a less serious and a more serious poem is also a difference in quality and worth. At times critics have been overly anxious to dismiss the so-called "less serious" poems largely because of their content. Perhaps the best known characteristic of the Songs and Sonets is the wit; Donne's ingenuity with images, hyperbole, conceit--or the likeness in things unlike. And while the importance of this aspect of the poetry cannot be under-emphasized, it has, unfortunately, been used at times to minimize the significance of Donne's "less serious" poems. J.B. Leishman, whose critical insights are a highpoint in Donne scholarship, is unfortunately too anxious to dismiss a large number of these particular poems. He groups poems as "deliberately outrageous" and attempts to explain their content with the comment that Donne was "mainly concerned to excite admiration and astonishment by a display of wit."² Or again, he notes a group of "merely witty and ingenious poems about love..."³ With all due respect to Mr. Leishman, even if he is correct this should not discourage an investigation into the nature of these

²J.B. Leishman, The Monarch of Wit (London, 1962), p. 178.

³Loc. cit.

poems which will determine their relationship to the more numerous and perhaps "more serious" Songs and Sonets.

One must approach the autobiographical problem with a number of definite aims. First, it is important that the Songs and Sonets be considered a body of poetry even though one must divide them into groups in order to determine the significance of each, and its relationship to the poems as a whole. However, in order to achieve this comprehensive, unified view of the poems, one must become aware of the traditions, both literary and philosophical, which one finds often in modified form in Donne's poetry. The themes most commonly found in the Songs and Sonets are love and religion. Yet before one can define and appreciate the significance of these themes, the relationship between them and their development as literary traditions must be discussed. The element of religion in both the philosophical and literary concepts of love must be noted. Conversely, the element of love in religion must be examined. The philosophical concept of love can be traced from the dialogues of Plato through the Enneads of Plotinus to the Theologia of Marsillio Ficino. Once this tradition has been examined, the relationship between Platonic and Christian ideas must be determined. Tracing the literary tradition of love, one must look to the poetry of Ovid, the cult of Courtly Love, and the Petrarchan conventions noting the evolution of this concept.

Here it must be clearly stated that the ideas introduced in the survey of literary and philosophical traditions leading up to Donne do not represent a unified body of thought incorporated into the Songs and Sonets. This survey is designed to provide a context for the poetry. And while Donne has modified and incorporated these ideas into his poems, the poetry is not a poetic exposition of various literary and philosophical traditions. One will find traces of ideas which vary in form for different purposes, and suggest varying degrees of personal involvement. And while a knowledge of these ideas is necessary for a more complete appreciation of the poetry, they must be subordinated to a study of the poetry, itself. Once the philosophical and literary traditions of love have been determined, the content of the poems and the personal relationships described must be seen in this context. It is through this basic method of approach that we will attempt to answer the problems of the autobiographical question. First, what is the significance of the "less serious", more consciously sexual poems? Secondly, what is the relationship between the physical and the spiritual aspects of the poetry? In the "more serious" poems, the mutual love of the lovers is essentially spiritual and yet paradoxically it proceeds from, and often includes a strong sexual relationship. Thirdly, what is the relationship between Donne the poet and Donne the man in love? And

finally the all-encompassing problem will be to determine the constantly changing relationship between Donne and his poetry. For the final answer to the autobiographical question can never be a catalogue of facts, names, and largely unknown personal associations, but some understanding of the thought and use of traditional concepts by Donne. The autobiographical problem must cease to be one of people and become one of ideas. It is only then that one can begin to comment upon the thoughts in his mind if not the events in his life.

The problems which this study considers can be answered to some extent through the same approach. If one wishes a comprehensive view of the Songs and Sonets, this is perhaps best achieved through a grouping of the poems which share certain characteristics and a similar point of view on specific themes. Then, one will be able to note the similarities and differences between these groups. The discussion of themes will, of course, be in the context of the traditions inherited by Donne and found throughout the Songs and Sonets. One, then, can achieve a comprehensive view of the poetry seen within the framework of the literary and philosophical traditions in which Donne consciously or unconsciously found himself. However, one must be careful about the conclusions drawn from this form of approach. For while one may be able to note the traditions apparent in Donne's poetry, one cannot with any assurance state that

these ideas represent the poet's beliefs.

Here it should be stated that it is not within the scope of this thesis to investigate all the sources and trace every stage in the evolution of the literary and philosophical traditions previously mentioned. The ideas of various philosophers included in this survey does not represent their complete and unified concepts. The validity or credibility of their ideas will not be questioned or defended. Only concepts and literary traditions which for the purposes of this thesis have particular relevance to the Songs and Sonets will be presented.

II

PRELIMINARY

A Consideration of the Literary and Philosophical Concepts of Love which have Particular Relevance to the "Songs and Sonets".

The so-called Platonic concept of love is found in the dialogues of Socrates which were recorded by Plato. However besides Socrates' concept of love, one must note a number of relevant ideas found in the dialogues. Two basic concepts of Plato are the existence of a world above our world of the senses, and the existence of Absolute Beauty or Forms. In the Phaedo, Socrates states that Forms both cause and confer identity on earthly copies of these perfect Forms. As an example, he cites the idea of Beauty.

'It seems to me that if there is anything else beautiful besides the Beautiful Itself, it is so purely and simply because it partakes of that "Beautiful". The same is true, in my opinion, of every kind of thing.'⁴

As we shall see, these ideas are important for a more complete understanding of Socrates' theory of love.

The basic ideas of the so-called Platonic theory of love are stated in the Symposium. Before Socrates discusses the ideas of Diotima of Mantinea, a number of speakers present their theories of love; theories which often com-

⁴Plato, Phaedo, trans. R.S. Bluck, (London, 1955), p. 114.

plement those of Socrates and have remained part of the Platonic tradition. Aristophanes states that there were originally three sexes; man, woman, and a union of the two. The male was the child of the sun; the female, the child of the earth; and the unity of male and female, a child of the moon which is itself a union of sun and earth. When this unity of male and female conspired against the gods, Zeus decided to teach them a lesson in humility and cut the unity in two. Aristophanes suggests the desire for physical union with the aim of procreation is a largely unconscious desire to re-establish the original unity. He further suggests that the ostensibly physical union of the lovers is motivated by a desire of the soul rather than the body. The physical union of the bodies represents an "ancient need" to achieve unity.

'And the reason is that human nature was originally one and we were a whole, and the desire and pursuit of the whole is called love.'⁵

Aristophanes believes that man can only be truly happy, and love truly fulfilled when each has found his true love and returned to the original state. It is only through love, or according to Aristophanes the God of Love, that man can regain the original union, and happiness. A number of con-

⁵Plato, "Symposium", The Dialogues of Plato, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford, 1875), II, 43-44.

clusions can be drawn from Aristophanes' theory. First, one sees the deep rooted need to re-establish the original unity which is achieved primarily through a union of the bodies. Secondly, there is importance given to love, and the God of Love who is responsible for bringing man back to his own nature. As we shall see, the concept of the lovers' unity--both physical and spiritual--becomes the essence of the love described in Donne's most personal poetry. One of the central images found in these poems is the sun--the symbol of the intensity and creative energy of their love--which Aristophanes states is the father of man. And while Aristophanes' speech is a minor part of the dialogue, the concepts he introduces have become to some extent part of the Platonic tradition.

The principle theory of love is introduced by Socrates who relates the dialogue between ^{himself} ^ and Diotima of Mantinea. She defines love as

'...only birth in beauty, whether of body or soul.'⁶

Her explanation of this statement is that at a certain age all men desire to create new life which

'...must be in beauty and not in deformity; and this procreation is the union of man and woman, and is a divine thing....'⁷

⁶Ibid., p. 57.

⁷Loc. cit.

Beauty presides at birth allowing conception only in beauty and not ugliness. Love, then, "'is of engendering and begetting upon the beautiful.'"⁸ It is through procreation that mortal man achieves a form of immortality. While discussing the cause of love and desire Diotima notes

'...how all animals, birds as well as beasts, in their desire of procreation, are in agony when they take the infection of love, which begins with the desire of union....'⁹

While explaining the procreation of animals she suggests that the main reason is immortality of the species. A parallel is drawn to some extent between man and the animals. Both seek, consciously or unconsciously, immortality through procreation. This is the more physical aspect of regeneration carried on by those who are concerned primarily with the immortality of their own image--those who can create only through their physical selves. Donne also draws a parallel between man and the animals. In his more consciously physical poems he argues that man should be allowed the sexual freedom which one finds in nature. However another form of creation is achieved through ideas born in the soul. He whose soul is filled with wisdom and virtue also wishes to create--but in a different form from physical procreation.

⁸Plato, "Symposium", Plato, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (London, 1925), p. 193.

⁹Jowett, op. cit., p. 58.

He also seeks beauty in human form, and

'...when he finds a fair and noble and well-nurtured soul, he embraces the two in one person, and to such an one he is full of speech about virtue and the nature and pursuits of a good man....'¹⁰

These two lesser forms of love lead eventually to the ultimate form when man realizes that

'...the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then if beauty of form in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is one and the same!'¹¹

It is then he will realize the beauty of the mind rather than the beauty of outward forms. It is only when man sees the beauty in all creations of the mind and realizes the insignificance of all things which appeal to self-satisfaction that he will understand the idea of Beauty.

'...a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning...but beauty only, absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. He who under the influence of true love rising upward from these begins to see that beauty, is not far from the end.'¹²

Diotima suggests that the movement towards the vision of

¹⁰Ibid., p. 60.

¹¹Ibid., p. 61.

¹²Ibid., pp. 61-62.

Absolute Beauty is upwards through the contemplation of earthly beauty. In one sense it is a movement from a physical to a spiritual consciousness of life. Once this has been realized, man has reached the ultimate stage of contemplation.

'This, my dear Socrates,' said the stranger of Mantinea, 'is that life above all others which man should live, in the contemplation of beauty absolute....'¹³

It is in this ultimate state that man will achieve a knowledge of virtue, God, and immortality.

A number of theories found in Plato's dialogues were restated and enlarged into a unified system of thought by the philosopher Plotinus who was born in Egypt about 205 A.D. While the basic ideas in the Enneads remain the same, it is worthwhile to note the evolution and clarification of various concepts. Again, one finds the idea of a universe above ours and the concept of perfect Forms.

Since in our view this universe stands to that as copy to original, the living total must exist There beforehand; that is the realm of complete Being and everything must exist There.¹⁴ (VI. 7: 12)

According to Plotinus, all Forms come from the Divinity and continually strive to return There. The Divinity is a form of trinity composed of The One, The Divine Mind or The

¹³Ibid., p. 62.

¹⁴Plotinus, Enneads of Plotinus, trans. Stephen Mackenna (Boston, 1956), II, 177.

Intellectual-Principle, and the All-Soul. The One or The Good is unknowable. It does not create and yet without it, nothing would exist. This paradox is explained by the manifestation of The One in the Divine-Thought or The Intellectual-Principle. This is the realm of Forms or Ideas; the realm where all things on earth exist in ideal Form. The "movement" of the Intellectual-Principle is both upward and downward. Upward, it contemplates the One; while downward, it creates forms in its own image. The image of the Intellectual-Principle is the All-Soul

...whose operation it is to generate or fashion the lower, the material Universe upon the model of the Divine-Thoughts, the "Ideas" laid up within the Divine-Mind....¹⁵

The All-Soul, then, is the creative energy of the Divinity. The conclusion is, of course, that the Trinity or Divinity is a Unity which contains all things.

The central concept of Plotinus is the relationship between Multiplicity and Unity. The One is described at once as both a Multiplicity and a Unity. As the prime source of all existence it contains all Forms, Divine Thoughts, and Ideas within a Unity which is its essential characteristic. As we have noted, the Intellectual-Principle is The One, manifest. Plotinus calls the Intellectual-Principle

¹⁵Stephen Mackenna, "Bibliography and Explanatory Matter", op. cit., I, 120.

That archetypal world....for here is
 contained all that is immortal: nothing
 here but is Divine Mind; all is God;
 this is the place of every soul.¹⁶ (V. 1. 4)

This archetypal world is, of course, the source of all forms
 in the material world. It is a world of multiple forms
 which seeks Unity.

Any manifold, anything beneath The
 Unity, is dependent: combined from various
 constituents, its essential nature goes
 in need of unity....¹⁷ (VI. 9. 6)

Plotinus states that beings are beings in virtue of their
 unity. Without it, they lose their identity. This constant
 search for unity is in reality the desire to comprehend The
 One. Stephen Mackenna sums-up Plotinus' concept when he says:

...a principle of Unity makes them what
 they are, and this principle in them is
 an image, a distant reflection, of the
 Unity that is the essence of all-trans-
 cending One.¹⁸

Unity is achieved through the Soul which, as we have noted,
 is the Intellectual-Principle manifest in the material world.
 The Intellectual-Principle is at once the source and element
 of divine presence within the soul. Plotinus believes that
 the soul is a microcosm containing all the Reason-Principles
 in the Kosmos and not only bestows unity, but is itself unity.

¹⁶Plotinus, op. cit., II, 5.

¹⁷Ibid., II, 245.

¹⁸Stephen Mackenna, op. cit., I, 141.

However, without the body, the soul would not be able to enter the material world.

When the soul enters the material universe for the first time, it must create an earthly body in which to dwell.

In the absence of body, soul could not have gone forth, since there is no other place to which its nature would allow it to descend. Since go forth it must, it will generate a place for itself; at once body, also, exists.¹⁹ (IV. 3. 9)

The body, then, is formed by the creative energy of the soul. The union of soul and body is according to Plotinus a union of Form and Matter. Matter is without shape until the soul--which possesses the Divine Forms or Ideas--imposes shape upon it. The entry of the Ideal-Form brings unity to the material form "...for the Idea is a unity and what it moulds must come to unity as far as multiplicity may."²⁰ (I. 6. 2) Once this unity is achieved, Beauty enters. Plotinus states that "...all the loveliness of this world comes by communion in Ideal-Form."²¹ (I. 6. 2) Thus material things are beautiful only when they partake in the Beauty of the Divine. For as both Beauty and the Soul come from the Divine, when the Soul enters the body, the latter partakes of the divine quality of the Soul, and can only be beautiful. Therefore,

¹⁹Plotinus, op. cit., II, 19.

²⁰Ibid., I, 80.

²¹Loc. cit.

when we admire a material object which is beautiful, and realize that it is beautiful only because of its communion with the Divine, we are in reality admiring the source of all creation and Beauty. Hence all things considered beautiful on earth are beautiful only as copies of an ideal. Once this concept of Beauty has been determined, one must come to an understanding of the related concept of Love.

According to Plotinus, Love "...rises in souls aspiring to be knit in the closest union with some beautiful object...."²² (III. 5. 1) One, of course, realizes that the object of love is not the material body (Matter), but the Soul which partakes of the divine Form. The desire to achieve union with a beautiful object can be, according to Plotinus, either the desire for the contemplation of Beauty, or the desire for physical consummation. The desire inherent in Love is the movement of the soul towards pure Beauty. Plotinus states that the Soul is stirred to love by the Supreme Good. And although often unaware of this love, it is continually desirous to return, realizing that earthly beauty is merely an imitation. In other words, while love may be either spiritual or physical, the underlying desire remains the vision of Beauty. Those who desire only procreation seek physical beauty with which to consummate the sexual act. They

²²Plotinus, op. cit., I, 53.

love the earthly image of Beauty. Pure Love, on the other hand, desires the contemplation of Beauty for its own sake. Yet even Pure Love can have its physical element which is the desire for a form of immortality through beauty.

The less the desire for procreation, the greater is the contentment with beauty alone, yet procreation aims at the engendering of beauty....²³ (III. 5. 1)

However according to Plotinus, this desire indicates a person who, realizing a deficiency in himself, wishes to create beauty through a beautiful earthly form. Here again it is extremely important to note that both the physical and non-physical love of beauty in a woman is in reality a desire to realize Absolute Beauty, the Unity. Plotinus states:

...so long as the attention is upon the visible form, love has not entered: when from that outward form the lover elaborates within himself, in his own partless soul, an immaterial image, then it is that love is born, then the lover longs for the sight of the beloved to make that fading image live again. If he could but learn to look elsewhere, to the more nearly formless, his longing would be for that: his first experience was loving a great luminary by way of some thin gleam from it.²⁴
(VI. 7. 33)

Those who desire only physical beauty can know beauty in earthly form and remain ignorant of the reality which lies behind it. On the other hand, the love of beauty in a

²³Ibid., I, 54.

²⁴Ibid., II, 201.

person without physical desire is love for the sake of Beauty alone. It is through earthly beauty that one begins to comprehend Absolute Beauty. Plotinus continually states that the archetypal quest of man is his desire to re-establish the original Unity with his source. The inherent movement of the soul towards its source is described by the image of a circle.

Every soul that knows its history is aware, also, that its movement, unthwarted, is not that of an outgoing line; its natural course may be likened to that in which a circle turns not upon some external but on its own centre, the point to which it owes its rise. The soul's movement will be about its source; to this it will hold, poised intent towards that unity to which all souls should move and the divine souls always move, divine in virtue of that movement; for to be a god²⁵ is to be integral with the Supreme....²⁵
(VI. 9. 8)

However, while this is the basic quest of the soul, it is important to note how this desire can be realized. Plotinus suggests that we can come to some understanding of the Unity through the self, "...to find ourselves is to know our source."²⁶ (VI. 9. 7) One must come to a knowledge of his own self as a microcosm of the Divine Principles before he can comprehend the ultimate macrocosm, the Ultimate Unity.

At this point, one must note the ideas of Plotinus which Donne, consciously or unconsciously, incorporated

²⁵Ibid., II, 247.

²⁶Ibid., II, 247.

into his own concept of love. The idea that man must come to some knowledge of himself suggests the variety in the attitudes towards love which one finds in the Songs and Sonets. At times, one feels the poems are a mirror in which Donne looks to discover his emotional and personal sincerity. In his most personal love poems, the Platonic concept of unity underlies the lovers' relationship. Initially they are brought together by the attraction of physical beauty and the desire for sexual fulfilment. However once this physical union is achieved, the lovers realize the unity and harmony which exists between their souls. The image which Donne uses to characterize their unity is the circle--the essential Platonic image. Once this unity between the lovers has been realized, there is a rejection of the material world and their initial, more consciously sexual attitude towards love--but not a rejection of physical love, itself. In conclusion, then, the initial attraction towards beauty in woman--the manifestation of Ideal Beauty--and the subsequent union of the lovers symbolizes the quest for ultimate union with the Divine.

A slight variation on^a Platonic idea is found in the Theologia of the Renaissance Christian Platonist Marsillio Ficino. He states that the soul, before descending from heaven, conceives the idea of forming an earthly body in which it will dwell. If the soul is able to create an earthly

body similar to its ideal form, then the earthly body is beautiful. In the fifth book of the Theologia, Ficino emphasizes the idea that the soul is not an attribute of the body, and that its natural tendency is upwards towards the ideal.

Consequently the body is not the origin of the Soul; for the farther the Soul goes away from it, the more perfect is its state. And if the mind decreases more in perfection the more it merges into this body and increases in perfection the more it goes away from it, the mind will then be most perfect at the time when it flies away entirely from this body.²⁷

Ficino's concept of love and the relationship between the lovers stems from his concept of the soul. He believes that mutual love is not accidental, but is brought about by the likeness between the lovers' souls. Ficino states that when two souls leave heaven at the same time they are infused with the same idea. When the lover sees his beloved, he sees a form which corresponds to the idea within his own soul.

Paul Kristeller states:

For Ficino the love for a person...is a simple preparation, more-or-less conscious, for the love of God, which is the true and real content of human desire and is only deflected toward persons and things by the reflected splendor of divine beauty and goodness in them.²⁸

²⁷Marsillio Ficino, Theologia, cited in Paul Kristeller, The Philosophy of Marsillio Ficino, trans. Virginia Conant (New York, 1943), p. 214.

²⁸Paul Kristeller, op. cit., p. 276.

This love or harmony of the lovers' souls results in a union which, according to Ficino, exists even when they are physically parted. Here we have the theme for two of Donne's most personal poems, "A Valediction: forbidding mourning", and "Song" "Sweetest love, I do not goe,/ For wearinesse of thee". Ficino's main point, of course, is that true mutual love is symbolic of a common love for God. He states that

...a true and stable union between several persons cannot be established except through the eternal unity itself. But the true and eternal unity is God Himself.²⁹

The idea of God as the "eternal unity" must be stressed. The lovers, then, first through the union of their physical bodies and later through the union of their souls, are a microcosm of the Ultimate Unity. True love is not just an acknowledgment of God's existence, but a conscious seeking after God through the soul. Therefore, this theory of love which was often expressed in terms of physical passion in poetry, was, as we shall see, more concerned with a union of the lovers' souls, and a desire for knowledge of the Ideal Beauty. One final point must be made. Ficino is credited with the introduction of the term "Platonic love", and so says Paul Kristeller,

..."Platonic love" in Ficino has its clear and precise meaning: it is intellectual love between friends; love which unites the members of the Academy into a community, which

²⁹Marsillio Ficino, op. cit., p. 280.

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is based on the individual's love for God....³⁰

The full significance of this definition will become more apparent when the relationship between Christian love and Platonic ideas is discussed. Suffice to say that this Platonic concept is approaching the basic Christian belief "love thy neighbour".

The evolution of the concept of Love is graphically illustrated by the influence of Christian love upon ideas found in the writings of Plato, Plotinus, and Ficino. While these concepts are usually referred to in the philosophic sense as Platonic love, the same basic ideas in the pre-Christian sense are known as Eros. While describing the origin of Eros, Plotinus indicates the relationship between Kronos and Aphrodite, the mother of Eros. Kronos is equated with the Intellectual-Principle, and so his daughter Aphrodite "...must be the Soul at its divinest...."³¹ (III. 5. 2) The Soul looks towards the Intellectual-Principle and in its contemplation or love "...brings forth Eros through whom it continues to look towards him."³² (III. 5. 2) From this example, Plotinus draws the conclusion that

Love, thus, is ever intent upon that other loveliness, and exists to be the medium between desire and that object of desire.

³⁰Marsillio Ficino, op. cit., p. 286

³¹Plotinus, op. cit., I, 56.

³²Loc. cit.

It is the eye of the desirer; by its power what loves is enabled to see the loved thing.³³ (III. 5. 2)

One recalls Donne's most personal love poems where the lovers not only see themselves reflected, but can also epitomize the rejected material world in each other's eyes. The macrocosm is the Soul contemplating the object of its desire, the Intellectual-Principle and ultimately The One. The microcosm is, of course, the individual who contemplating the object of his desire creates his own Eros. Plotinus' conclusion suggests the physical and spiritual aspects of love, and points to its goal.

Thus Love is at once, in some degree a thing of Matter and at the same time a Celestial, sprung of the Soul; for Love lacks its Good but, from its very birth, strives towards It.³⁴ (III. 5. 10)

Again we must note that the concept of Love expressed in Donne's most serious love poems suggests a complete integration of, and harmony between, its physical and spiritual aspects. The primitive religious element is emphasized in Denis de Rougemont's definition of Eros.

Eros is complete Desire, luminous Aspiration, the primitive religious soaring carried to its loftiest pitch, to the extreme exigency of purity which is

³³Plotinus, op. cit., I, 56-57.

³⁴Plotinus, op. cit., I, 67.

also the extreme exigency of Unity. But absolute unity must be the negation of the present human being in his suffering multiplicity.³⁵

It is important to note the motivating religious element in de Rougemont's definition. Eros is the Platonic concept of Love, a denial of the physical self and an inherent movement towards Unity. Any union formed on earth by the individual is not a personal relationship, but one symbolizing union with the Divine. Eros is, to some extent, a denial of the human being's significance in the material universe. For man desires an ultimate union from which there is no return to his physical self. Eros is a state which begins with desire and love in the human being and ends with a rejection of the physical self when desire is fulfilled in union with the Divine. This primitive form of religion--Eros--considers the physical body a bridge leading towards the ultimate Unity. When man is within the human body he is furthest away from Unity and consequently life is a woeful state. Taken to its logical extreme, it is only through death--the final denial of the physical self--that the Soul can return to its Source.

³⁵Denis de Rougemont, Love in the Western World, trans. Montgomery Belgion, (New York, 1956), p. 61: de Rougemont is concerned primarily with the relationship between marriage and the attraction of an adulterous love which is both socially and legally condemned. And while the unifying subject is the legend of Tristan and Isolde--and the study is without reference to the poetry of John Donne--his book is invaluable to any student wishing to understand the various aspects of love in western society. The comments on the relationship between Platonic ideas and Christian love are based upon the concepts just presented after considering

Eros, then, when described as an earthly state of love, is love which is primarily interested in the individual self even though the actual love will be a relationship between the desire of the self and the object of that desire. Love and desire are not personal emotions in the sense of physical satisfaction, but part of an inherent desire to realize Unity. De Rougemont comments:

Eros, object of our supreme Desire, intensifies all our desires only in order to offer them up in sacrifice. The fulfilment of Love is the denial of any particular terrestrial love, and its Bliss of any particular terrestrial bliss. From the standpoint of life, it is this Love which is absolute woe.³⁶

Eros is always concerned primarily with the self, and all relationships are subordinated to that end. Human love is for procreation and physical satisfaction. The concept of Eros appears in modified form in the Songs and Sonets. The desire for satisfaction of the physical self is found in poems where there is no spiritual or emotional union between the lovers. In his most personal love poems, the physical and spiritual unity of the lovers does not bring a rejection of the lovers as human beings even though they fuse to become one. And while they reject the original motivating sexual element of their love, their union is deeply personal and

de Rougemont, op. cit., pp. 61-75, and Wallace Fowlie, Love in Literature (Bloomington, 1965), pp. 22-29.

³⁶Denis de Rougemont, op. cit., p. 66.

has its existence in the physical world.

In direct contrast to Eros, which is a strict focus on the physical self but ultimately a denial of physical existence, is Christian love or Agape. However, here the concept of human love and the attitude towards the physical self have undergone a significant change. As we have noted with Eros, the ultimate desire--a return to our original Source--is finally achieved only through the death of the physical self. With Christian love, man can find salvation here on earth without negating the physical self. Wallace Fowlie states:

It is not union with God that the Christian seeks, it is communion with Him.³⁷

With the birth of Christ, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us...."³⁸ It is through Christ's teachings that the will of God is made known to man. One finds two basic Christian commands in The Gospel according to St. Matthew.

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.³⁹

³⁷Wallace Fowlie, op. cit., p. 27.

³⁸The Bible, John I: 14.

³⁹The Bible, Matt. 22: 37-39.

Now man can find a higher existence here on earth by obeying the will of God. With this affirmation of man and his existence in the material world there arises a new concept of human love and life. In the Platonic context, love was an awareness of the reality which lay behind the beautiful earthly form. The object of love was important only as a copy of the ideal and so there was no personal emotion involved. However in the Christian context, love assumes a new importance.

Thereupon to love is no longer to flee
and persistently to reject the act of love.
Love now still begins beyond death, but
from that beyond it returns to life. And,
in being thus converted, love brings forth
our neighbour.⁴⁰

Love, in terms of Eros, had sublimated human love into a love for the realities which lie beyond this life. Christian love, on the other hand, gives new importance to love in this world. The Christian concept of loving one's neighbour emphasizes the Christian ideal of selflessness. The "death" of the self brings man new life once he has received the spirit of God. As we shall see in the discussion of the Songs and Sonets, the concepts of love expressed range from the purely physical, self-centered view in which the attitudes are specifically non-Christian to the physical and spiritual union of the lovers in which the individual self is subsumed

⁴⁰Denis de Rougemont, op. cit., p. 68.

in the union.

Human love, then, was given new significance in the sacrament of marriage. Apart from the obvious union of man and woman within marriage, any idea of ultimate union with the Divine comes after physical death when we are united with God. In comparison, then, Eros desires union beyond the material world while Agape seeks communion which is symbolized by marriage. The true fulfilment of Christian love is here on earth when man obeys the will of God. By loving his neighbour, he denies the interests of the self. However, this is love and marriage in ideal form. The commandment which forbade adultery imposed constancy within marriage which for a number of reasons man's pagan spirit revolted against.

So it was that passionate love--a terrestrial form of the cult of Eros--came to invade the psyche of those members of the leading caste who had only simulated conversion and felt the marriage rule as a restriction.⁴¹

The mediaeval world with its marriages of political convenience and economic gain gave birth to a cult wherein marriage and love were judged incompatible. Marriage was despised and passion outside marriage glorified. It is Denis de Rougemont's conclusion that

The cultivation of passionate love began

⁴¹Ibid., p. 73.

in Europe as a reaction to Christianity
(and in particular to its doctrine of
marriage) by people whose spirit, whether
naturally or by inheritance, was still
pagan. 42

This cult of passionate love outside the sacrament of marriage is known as courtly love.

The courtly love separation of love and marriage, and its inherent adoration of woman radically altered the concept of love in western society. Before the advent of courtly love, the most celebrated love poet was Ovid who generally considered love in terms of physical satisfaction. The Amores describe the poet's love for Corinna and according to J.B. Leishman

...are distinguished by their impudence,
 their insolence, and a certain witty
 depravity.⁴³

The poet advocates the use of any means necessary to win the affections of the lady. One poem suggests how she can deceive her husband at a banquet they attend. Yet even in the words of caution he gives her, his own sexual desire is evident.

Bring not thigh near thigh, nor press
 with the limb, nor touch rough feet
 with tender ones. There are many things
 I wretchedly fear, because there are
 many I have wantonly wrought, and I am
 in torment, see! from fear of my own

⁴²Ibid., p. 74.

⁴³J.B. Leishman, op. cit., p. 55.

example. Oft have my lady-love and I
 stolen in haste our sweet delights with
 her robe to cover us.⁴⁴

Or again, one finds more erotic passages with obvious sexual overtones. Ovid projects himself into a ring he has given the lady.

Then would I wish you, my lady, both
 to touch your breasts, and lay your
 left hand within your tunic--I would
 slip from your finger, however tight
 and close; I would grow loose with
 wondrous art and fall into your bosom.⁴⁵

Perhaps his most influential work on love is the ostensibly serious poem on the arts of seduction Ars Amatoria, which describes how to find, win, and keep a woman. Again, he recommends the use of any means necessary to win the lady, jealousy, pleading, bribery, or deceit. The poet also points to the effects of love upon the lover whose lack of sleep, loss of appetite, fears at the thought of failure, and pale complexion can bring madness or death. It is in the Ars Amatoria, says C.S. Lewis,

...Ovid naturally introduces the god Amor with an affectation of religious awe....Love thus becomes a great and jealous god, his service an arduous militia: offend him who dares, Ovid is his trembling captive.⁴⁶

⁴⁴Ovid, "Amores, I. iv", Heroides and Amores, trans. Grant Showerman (London, 1925), p. 331.

⁴⁵Ovid, "Amores, II. xv", op. cit., p. 427.

⁴⁶C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (New York, 1958), p. 6.

Mr. Lewis points to the irony of the poem suggesting that the contemporary audience would be fully aware of the mock-didactic treatment of the subject. And yet as he points out, the rules which Ovid recommends became, in modified form, part of the courtly love tradition.

Ovid has little direct influence on the Songs and Sonets other than his concept of love and implied attitude towards woman. Generally, he looks upon woman as the object of his sexual desire without indicating any spiritual element in their relationship. And not only is the love he describes often adulterous, but he never frowns upon loving more than one woman whenever possible. In the group of consciously physical Songs and Sonets, one finds the poet advocating sexual freedom and woman considered purely as the object of sexual desire. Ovid, then, represents the consciously physical, sexual attitude towards love. His influence on the courtly love tradition is difficult to evaluate considering the varied sources of this phenomena.

The almost paradoxical nature of courtly love can be seen in a description of its characteristics. First, there is a definite emphasis given to the human body as the relationship described in the poetry is ostensibly between lovers and suggests an underlying desire for sexual fulfilment. Yet paradoxically, it is a love which ideally is never physically consummated. On one hand, courtly love

is considered simply the sublimation of sexual desire. Yet on the other hand, the adoration of woman--with as we shall see its religious connotations--suggests a form of religious communion with the poet's denial of sexual fulfilment a symbolic transcending of the physical self. Yet in both instances, the ostensibly unhappy nature of this relationship underlines the lover's inability to realize the object of his desire. A group of Songs and Sonets often connected with Mrs. Magdalen Herbert and Lucy, Countess of Bedford reveal a rejected lover who can only establish a non-physical relationship with the lady. Yet one can detect an underlying desire for sexual fulfilment in these poems. Secondly, courtly love has connotations of adultery as the lady is often married. As we have noted, marriage during the middle ages was seldom a close personal union between man and woman. C.S. Lewis states:

All matches were matches of interest, and, worse still, of an interest that was continually changing. When the alliance which had answered would answer no longer, the husband's object was to get rid of the lady as quickly as possible. Marriages were frequently dissolved.⁴⁷

Love, then, became a passion alien to marriage with the lady an object of adoration rather than conscious sexual desire. And yet the poet was subject not only to the lady's slightest

⁴⁷C.S. Lewis, op. cit., p. 13

wish but also her constant rejection. D.W. Robertson cites a number of rules from Andreas Capellanus' De amore which determine the behaviour of the courtly lover.

He must (15) regularly turn pale when he is with his beloved, and (16) his heart must palpitate when he sees her. He must (23) eat and sleep very little, always be apprehensive (20), think always of his beloved (24, 30), and (27) never tire of her solaces.⁴⁸

These rules underline the elements of Humility and Courtesy which C.S. Lewis states are an inherent part of the lover's attitude towards his beloved. For while courtly love is adulterous in the sense that it involves a married woman, her social position and the non-sexual nature of the relationship determine the lover's actions. And while Ovid encouraged promiscuity, the rules of courtly love demanded strict fidelity.

Perhaps the most revolutionary theory tracing the origins of courtly love is presented by Denis de Rougemont who suggests that the lyric poetry of courtly love was inspired by the heretical Catharist religion.

An entirely new kind of poetry sprang up in the South of France, the birthplace of Catharism. It extolled the Lady of Thoughts, the Platonic Idea of a feminine principle, and the encouragement of Love contrary to marriage, and at the same time of chastity.⁴⁹

⁴⁸D.W. Robertson, "Some Medieval Doctrines of Love", A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton, 1963), p. 446.

⁴⁹Denis de Rougemont, op. cit., p. 110.

Yet while the Catharist Church and courtly love poetry developed simultaneously in the same area, the poets denied all association with the heretical religion. However, certain parallels can be noted. Both the courtly love poets and the Cathars seek to transcend sexual desire avoiding marriage and considering chastity a virtue. De Rougemont states that the Cathars "...undertook to renounce the world and solemnly promised to devote themselves to God alone..."⁵⁰ Their system of belief was essentially dualistic holding that while God is love, the world is evil. Similarly there was a dualistic attitude towards woman. On one hand, Satan had tempted souls to leave heaven by showing them a beautiful woman. Led by their own desire, the souls left heaven and became trapped in material bodies. On the other hand, "...Maria, symbol of the pure saving Light, intact (immaterial) Mother of Jesus...."⁵¹ was the mother of Christ, mans' salvation.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of courtly love is the new esteem in which woman is held. While Ovid considered woman the object of his sexual desire, the courtly love poets looked on her with "religious" adoration. James

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 80.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 81.

Kreuzer writes:

...one source of the exalted position assigned to the lady may well have been the veneration in which the Virgin Mary was held.⁵²

The position of woman is ambiguous as she symbolizes both the Fall and salvation for man. Eve tempts man to disobey the will of God; yet Mary will give birth to Christ who redeems him. In courtly love poetry, then, woman represents both the physical and spiritual yearning in man. As a physical being she embodies all that man sexually desires and can physically possess. Yet as an object of adoration, she is consciously, deliberately placed beyond actual physical possession. She remains beyond the reach of man; adored at a distance symbolizing perhaps the embodiment of the Ideal which is forever unattainable. The courtly lady--like the vision of ideal Beauty and Love--is forever sought after, yet never realized. This seemingly paradoxical dualism of the flesh and the spirit is what C.S. Lewis calls the Religion of Love.

...this erotic religion arises as a rival or a parody of the real religion and emphasizes the antagonism of the two ideals.⁵³

His views are shared by Maurice Evans who notes the parallels

⁵²James R. Kreuzer, "Courtly Love", Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, trans. James L. Rosenberg (New York, 1962), p. lxiv.

⁵³C.S. Lewis, op. cit., p. 18.

between courtly love and religious adoration.

The Courtly lover had to adore his profane mistress with all the fervour which the Christian offered to the Virgin Mary and to show in her service the loyalty which the feudal man offered to his overlord. He had to devote the Christian virtues of patience, humility and constancy to the service of a love which was carnal, unprocreative and in most cases adulterous.⁵⁴

Courtly love is not a personal, physically consummated union but an ideal which is symbolized by a detached non-personal God, Love. And while the sentiment is evident in courtly love poetry, the underlying emotion of love has become an abstraction.

However if courtly love poetry is a sincere--if somewhat stylized--expression of adoration, Petrarchan love poetry becomes an extremely stylized expression of the poet's plight. One again finds the unattainable lady and her unrequited lover whose unstable emotional state is suggested by his ecstatic hopes for success and his abysmal fears of rejection. The influence of Platonism is also apparent, the lady remaining the embodiment of an Ideal.

Who will in fairest book of Nature know
How virtue may best lodged in beauty be,
Let him but learn of love to read in thee,
Stella, those fair lines which true goodness show.⁵⁵
(ll. 1-4.)

⁵⁴Maurice Evans, English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century (London, 1955), p. 11.

⁵⁵Sir Philip Sidney, "Sonnet 71", Astrophel and Stella, Renaissance Poetry, ed. Leonard Dean (Englewood Cliffs, 1957), p. 49.

But while she remains the object of the poet's desire, the lover's dejected state becomes the central focus of attention.

So am not I, whom love, alas, doth wring,
 Bringing before my face the great increase
 Of my desires, whereat I weep and sing,
 In joy and woe, as in a doubtful ease:
 For my sweet thoughts sometime do pleasure bring;
 But by and by, the cause of my disease
 Gives me a pang, that inwardly doth sting,
 When that I think what grief it is again,
 To live and lack the thing should rid my pain.⁵⁶
 (ll. 6-14)

Or again the Earl of Surrey writes:

Hers will I be; and only with this thought
 Content myself, although my chance be nought.⁵⁷
 (ll. 13-14)

Here it is obvious that while Petrarchan love poetry is a strict focus on the physical self, the purpose is not to relate the poet's sexual desire. And while the poetry stems from a dejected, unrequited lover, the poet is attempting to analyse and objectify this conventional emotional state through simile and metaphor.

However returning to the concept of love in society, the medieval Church's attitude towards sexual relations also hindered love from becoming a close personal relationship within marriage. The Church's problem of reconciling the

⁵⁶Earl of Surrey, "A complaint by Night of the Lover not Beloved", Elizabethan Lyrics, ed. Norman Ault (London, 1949), p. 19.

⁵⁷Earl of Surrey, "Vow to Love Faithfully, Howsoever He be Rewarded", Ibid., p. 21.

flesh and the spirit is evident from the number of contradictions in which it found itself. The central paradox--from a religious point of view--is that marriage represents both the fulfilment of physical desire and the sacrament of a Church which advocates chastity. The Middle Ages, perhaps more than any other period, was more consciously aware of sin, especially Original Sin. The Church sought to control not only the soul, but also the body of man which led him into sin. Yet while the Church preached virginity, it blessed the sacrament of marriage. Maurice Evans states:

Sexual love was at once a necessary thing which the Church had to accept and sanctify, and at the same time something so fraught with temptation that even marriage could lapse into sin if its object became pleasure rather than the extension of God's kingdom.⁵⁸

The sexual act within marriage, then, was often justified by the necessity of procreation, a justification also found in Plato and Plotinus. However, the important distinction which the medieval Church made was between carnal desire and the actual sexual act. C.S. Lewis states:

On the one hand, nobody ever asserted that the act was intrinsically sinful. On the other hand, all were agreed that some evil element was present in every concrete instance of this act since the Fall....the concrete sexual act, that is, the act plus its unavoidable efficient cause, remains guilty.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Maurice Evans, op. cit., p. 10.

⁵⁹C.S. Lewis, op. cit., p. 14.

If sexual love within marriage was almost frowned upon by the Church, it was certainly condemned outside marriage or in passionate love poetry. However during the Renaissance, man's attitude towards his universe changed from where he had been burdened by Original Sin to a new realization about the capacity of his own intellect and the importance of physical existence. Or again, the world which was once considered a prison was now seen as a manifestation of God's love. Needless to say, the synthesis of Platonic ideas and man's new attitude towards the human body and human love found expression in poetry. John Harrison comments:

The appeal which Platonism made to the English poets in its doctrine of a heavenly love was through its power to stir the minds with a deep sense of that beauty which God was understood to possess....The sight of God in His absolute beauty is considered by these poets as the end of the soul's endeavor.⁶⁰

The basic doctrine of Christianity is, of course, that God is love. With a synthesis of the basic ideas of Platonism and Christianity, absolute Beauty was identified with God. Yet while the ultimate goal of love was the vision of ideal Beauty--or in Christian terms, God--the love experienced by the poets was the physical union of man and woman. Maurice Evans comments:

Beauty was the divine Idea in the material

⁶⁰John Harrison, Platonism in English Poetry (New York, 1903), pp. 85-86.

object; love, the perception of that Idea. Where then could a lover find the ideal truth more immanent than in the beauty of his mistress, and by what better means could he ascend to higher things than by his love for her?⁶¹

In other words, Platonism explained the seeming paradox by the idea that the source for the enjoyment of physical love was the desire to realize ultimate Beauty in a union with the soul of the beloved. The emphasis placed upon the soul rather than physical desire brought about a new concept of the relationship between man and woman. While the lovers' relationship was essentially physical, they were able to transcend their physical selves and achieve a symbolic union of souls. Mr. Harrison states:

The first way by which this elevation of a purely sensuous passion into a higher region was effected was through the Platonic conception of the "idea." Plato had taught that in love the mind should pass from a sight of the objects of beauty through ever widening circles of abstraction to the contemplation of absolute beauty in its idea. This can be known only by the soul, and is the only real beauty.⁶²

Finally, a number of conclusions can be drawn from the general concepts of Christian Platonism which, as we shall see, characterize the love between Donne and his wife. First, there is a very real physical relationship between the lovers.

⁶¹Maurice Evans, op. cit., p. 14.

⁶²John Harrison, op. cit., p. 95.

Yet to some extent there is a rejection of the material aspects of the physical world in favour of the more spiritual world of the ideal. The lovers, who are always pictured in a physical world, are able to transcend their physical limitations through a union of souls. Even though they may be parted, this harmony of souls will continue to exist. Finally, praising the beauty of the beloved is, in reality, praising the copy of an ideal which is ultimately God. It is through the soul that man seeks to realize God in his Absolute Beauty.

Here, then, is a discussion of the concepts of, and attitudes towards love, woman, and the physical self which have specific relevance to the Songs and Sonets. It is an attempt to provide a context for the poetry which will enable one to discover the relationship between Donne and his poetry. Yet the poems are not conscious examples of these attitudes we have just noted, but Donne's use of traditional concepts to describe certain love relationships. And while we may never discover the true nature of his supposed love relationships, we can, at least, come to some understanding of the poet's relationship to his poetry.

III

THE SONGS AND SONETS

As we noted in the introduction, the goal of this study will be to determine the autobiographical element in the Songs and Sonets by discovering the constantly changing relationship between Donne and his poetry. First, however, a number of points must be made which will provide an outline for the discussion. The poetry will be examined in light of the literary and philosophical traditions which we have just noted to determine Donne's place in these traditions. To what extent do the Songs and Sonets reflect the various concepts of, and attitudes towards love which Donne as a poet inherited? Or again, to what extent have these ideas been modified to become part of Donne's concept of love? And finally, what does Donne's use of these various attitudes towards woman and concepts of love tell us about the nature of the relationship he describes?

The relationship between Donne and his poetry is largely determined by the nature of the poetry, itself. The relationship between Donne the man, Donne the poet, the sentiment or concept of love expressed, and the attitude towards woman, all determine the relationship between Donne and his poetry. The groups of poems in this discussion are

so arranged that one can trace three simultaneous movements within the poetry. First there is a movement from a complete separation, to a complete integration of Donne the man and Donne the poet. The more physical and sexual the poetry, the more detached is Donne. In the first group of consciously sexual poems, Donne assumes an objective stance outside the poetry. He is not looking at himself in love, but rather is looking at himself posing in a specific attitude towards love. The truth of these poems is psychological rather than genuinely emotional. From here, one notes a steady integration of Donne the man and Donne the poet although the former still remains to a large extent objective. Often Donne is looking at himself in love or discussing the nature of love, itself, attempting to analyse his feelings. Finally in his most personal love poems there is complete fusion of Donne the man and Donne the poet. The second movement is from the conscious use of ideas, concepts of, and attitudes towards love to where certain concepts become an essential part of his expression of love and characterize the love between him and his wife. One must also note the concepts of love which are rejected by Donne. The third movement is from the concept of woman purely as the object of sexual desire to the realization of woman as the subject of Donne's love. It is obvious that these three movements are distinct yet complementary. However

in his most personal love poems they are fused inseparably with Donne describing the love between him and his wife.

The first group of poems to be considered includes: "Song" "Goe, and catche a falling starre", "Womans constancy", "The Indifferent", "Loves Vsury", "Communitie", "Confined Love", "Loves Alchymie", "The Flea", "The Message", "Loves Deitie", and "The Apparition". With a number of exceptions, these poems correspond to a group selected by J.B. Leishman which he characterizes as

deliberately outrageous, paradoxical or cynical poems, in which, [he is] sure, Donne is mainly concerned to excite admiration and astonishment by a display of wit....About most of these poems there is something so energetic and dramatically convincing that many, perhaps most, modern readers have been taken in by them.⁶³

While attempting to minimize the attention given to these poems by suggesting that they could never be part of Donne's actual experience, Mr. Leishman almost convinces the reader to dismiss them entirely. And while his comments have a certain validity, he dismisses the poems without fully realizing their significance. The idea that Donne's primary aim was to astonish the reader and display his wit is surely a surface generalization. Basically, Leishman objects to the content of the poems which he suggests is a fitting

⁶³J.B. Leishman, op. cit., p. 178.

subject for Donne's wit.

This, then, is one of the elements in Donne's wit--exaggeration: in spirit (the flouting of traditional ideals and morals in sexual relationships) rather like Fletcher's....⁶⁴

And while Mr. Leishman notes Donne's purpose, he fails to realize the full significance of the poems. The words "deliberately outrageous" suggest a moral judgment on the content of the poems designed to emphasize the element of wit rather than the "outrageous" ideas. This is obvious in his statement,

Most readers, I think, will agree with me that it is only possible to enjoy this so long as one is not persuaded to take it seriously, so long as one is able to regard it as the witty and outrageous exaggeration appropriate to a kind of moral holiday.⁶⁵

While one cannot argue with Mr. Leishman's comments about Donne's wit, the question which must be answered is the "seriousness" of the poems. What is the point of view which these poems express? What is the relationship between Donne and this point of view? The answers to these questions can only be determined by first discovering the significance of the poems.

When one considers the poems as a group, a number of related general characteristics can be determined. First,

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 155.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 154.

the point of view is more consciously physical or sexual than the other Songs and Sonets. This point of view places man on an instinctual, self-centered level more interested in physical satisfaction than any spiritual or involved emotional relationship. Three poems, "The Indifferent", "Communitie", and "Confined Love" argue for complete sexual freedom while belittling the idea of constancy by a mock-attack on the courtly love and Petrarchan adoration of woman.

I can love her, and her, and you and you,
I can love any, so she be not true.⁶⁶ (ll. 8-9)

The poems stem from, and direct their appeal towards the sexual instincts in man. The first stanza of "The Indifferent" is the poet's uninhibited boast 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. (ll. 1-9)

Similarly in "Loves Vsury", the poet's point of view, ideas, and desires are closely related to the satisfaction of the physical self. Yet here again there is a mock seriousness

⁶⁶John Donne, "The Indifferent", Songs and Sonets, The Poems of John Donne, ed. Sir Herbert Grierson (London, 1960), p. 12: all lines quoted are from this edition of the Songs and Sonets. The title of the poem and the lines quoted will be stated in the text of the thesis.

about the lines which makes any moral condemnation as ridiculous as the poet's request.

Till then, Love, let my body raigne, and let
Mee travell, sojourne, snatch, plot, have, forget,
Resume my last yeares relict: thinke that yet
We'had never met. (ll. 4-7)

Finally in "Communitie", the poet argues that Nature made woman neither good nor bad, but indifferent. And since we must love good and hate bad--and women are neither--then "Onely this rests, All, all may use." While the poet's logic is perhaps questionable, he has at least justified sexual freedom within his own mind. Yet here again, any sexual relationship with woman is purely for his own physical satisfaction.

And when hee hath the kernell eate,
Who doth not fling away the shell? (ll. 23-24)

Two points must be made about these poems. First, the mock-serious quality of the logic and the content of the poems is obvious. One serves as a foil for the other. And while it would be ridiculous to consider them serious poems, it would be equally ridiculous to dismiss them entirely. For as we have noted, the poems represent a specific point of view about love which is important when considered in relation to the other Songs and Sonets. It is the unstated implications which are an inherent part of this consciously sexual point of view that must be examined.

The artistic technique found in these poems is the

oblique presentation of a certain attitude towards woman. While the physical desire of the poet is obvious, it often falls upon the reader to determine the significance of the largely unstated implications of his attitude. Donne is writing the poems from an objective, detached stance which is not necessarily his own. He is not looking at himself in love; rather, he is looking at himself as a poet writing with a specific attitude towards love. This artistic separation of Donne and the poet can be detected by the consistency of, and unity within the concept of love these poems express. One soon realizes that love is not a personal emotion, and there is no relationship between the poet and love. This has already been suggested by the consciously physical attitude of the poet who is more intent upon physical satisfaction than establishing a close personal union with the object of his desire. The physical act of love has subordinated any emotional relationship until love becomes a God who defends inconstancy. The sublimation of love into a God detached from any love relationship underlines the deliberate avoidance of any personal involvement by the poet. In "The Indifferent", the poet's final argument for inconstancy is an appeal to Venus for condemnation of "constancie."

She went, examin'd, and return'd ere long,
And said, alas, Some two or three
Poore Heretiques in love there bee,
Which thinke to stablish dangerous constancie.

But I have told them, since you will be true,
 You shall be true to them, who'are false to you.
 (ll. 22-27)

The element of wit again underlines the mock-serious nature of Venus' decree which demands inconstancy as the highest form of "constancie." Similarly in "Loves Vsury", the poet borrows one hour of love from the "Usurious God of Love" promising to re-pay him twenty-fold when he is old.

Till then, Love, let my body raigne, and let
 Mee travell, sojourne, snatch, plot, have, forget,
 Resume my last yeares relict: thinke that yet
 We'had never met. (ll. 4-7)

The paradox of this one-sided bargain is, of course, that as the poet increases in age, the time he spends on love will also increase. The conventional idea that as the body loses its interest in physical pleasure the spiritual man will come to the fore is deliberately inverted revealing the poet's desire for physical satisfaction. Again, the final line points to the mock-serious nature of the poem. The poet humbly submits to one hour of "constancie" to gain hours of inconstancy in later life.

Love I submit to thee,
 Spare mee till then, I'll beare it, though she bee
 One that loves mee. (ll. 22-24)

Love, then, has ceased to be a personal emotion and has become a rational God detached from the human being who decrees sexual liberty and justifies man's desire to satisfy the physical self.

The ironic elevation of love to the position of a

God is subtly underlined by a religious language of love. Words and phrases usually associated with the Christian religion have been incorporated into the defence of inconstancy. In "The Indifferent", Venus states,

Some two or three
Poore Heretiques in love there bee,
Which thinke to stablish dangerous constancie.
(ll. 23-25)

The doctrine of love is inconstancy so consequently those who oppose it are "Heretiques". Similarly in "Womans constancy", the poet speaks of those who make oaths "in reverentiall feare / Of Love". Or again in "Song" "Goe, and catche a falling starre," the search for a true woman is described as a form of religious quest.

If thou findst one, let mee know,
Such a Pilgrimage were sweet;...(ll. 19-20)

The impossible tasks usually associated with a quest which are stated in the first stanza are used ironically to suggest the impossibility of finding a true woman. Here, the mock-cynical attitude towards woman suggests the poet considers woman little more than a physical being incapable of forming any relationship other than a sexual one--a complete reversal of the courtly love and Petrarchan adoration of woman. In "The Apparition", the woman who kills the poet with her scorn is called a "fain'd vestall" suggesting she has been false. Finally, religious language is used ironically for the purposes of seduction in "The Flea". When

the lady attempts to kill the flea which contains the blood from both, the poet states,

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where wee almost, yea more then maryed are,
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;

* * * * *
Let not to that, selfe murder added bee,
And sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three.
(ll. 10-13, 17-18)

Both the application and purpose of religious language by the poet is ironic. The sacrament of marriage has been reduced to the mixing of blood within an insect. And although it may be fitting to use religious language now that love has become a God, there has been a deliberate misapplication of the language. The main theme of these poems is sexual liberty which is directly opposed to the Christian concept of fidelity within marriage. Here, then, the language of fidelity is used to encourage infidelity and describe women whom the poet considers faithless.

Needless to say, once man is free from the personal involvement of love he will look at woman strictly from the point of view of sexual desire. The poet looks upon woman as a faithless creature guided by instinct and incapable of forming any relationship other than for physical gratification. However, as one often finds in the Songs and Sonets, the poet's attitude towards woman reveals his own sexual nature rather than hers. In the first stanza of "The Indifferent", he disguises his sexual desire to some extent by suggesting

the sexual element in woman.

I can love both faire and browne,
Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want betraies,
Her who loves lonenesse best, and her who maskes
and plaies,
Her whom the country form'd, and whom the town,...
(11. 1-4)

Similarly in the second stanza, fidelity has become a vice in the poet's mind. Yet his attempt to rid woman of the vice of constancy and the idea that men are true only reveals his own desire.

Oh we are not, be not you so,
Let mee, and doe you, twenty know.
Rob mee, but binde me not, and let me goe.
Must I, who came to travaile thorow you,
Grow your fift subject, because you are true?
(11. 14-18)

The final two lines suggest that even when the poet thinks of constancy, he sees such a relationship in terms of the sexual act. The poem, then, reveals man's physical desire for woman, but attempts to make it less obvious by pointing to her sexual nature. In this group of poems woman is considered a faithless creature.

Though shee were true, when you met her,
And last, till you write your letter,
Yet shee
Will bee
Falfe, ere I come, to two, or three. (ll. 23-27)

Yet to some extent the cynical attitude towards woman's supposed inconstancy is often the poet's sublimated desire for them to be faithless. Or again, one often feels this opinion of woman reveals the poet's inability to retain the affections

of his mistress. In both "The Message" and "The Apparition" the poet seeks revenge upon his mistress only when he has been rejected. In "The Apparition", the desire to gain revenge on his mistress and his attempt to emphasize her sexual nature only reveal his own lack of feeling and suggest that no close personal relationship ever existed between them. Similarly in "The Message", the poet wishes to have his eyes and heart returned uncorrupted from his false mistress. Yet his protestations about his "harmlesse heart.../ Which no unworthy thought could staine" are revealed as false in the final stanza where the poet is unable to control his desire for revenge.

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. (ll. 17-24)

In both poems, the reader's final impression is contrary to that intended by the poet. He, rather than his mistress, is cruel and lacking in feeling. However, even while woman is considered faithless, as the object of man's desire she is little more than the means of sexual gratification.

But they are ours as fruits are ours,
He that but tastes, he that devours,
 And he that leaves all, doth as well:
Chang'd loves are but chang'd sorts of meat,
And when hee hath the kernell eate,
 Who doth not fling away the shell?
("Communitie" ll. 19-24)

As this passage indicates, the strong sexual element in the poems is reiterated by the imagery which has a direct appeal to the satisfaction of the physical self. In "Loves Vsury", the framework of the poem, with its commercial implications, suggests the poet's attitude towards love relations. Or again in "Confined Love", one finds commercial overtones in the language of his argument for sexual licence.

Who e'r rigg'd faire ship to lie in harbors,
And not to seeke new lands, or not to deale withall?
Or build faire houses, set trees, and arbors,
Only to lock up, or else to let them fall? (ll. 15-18)

True, one finds similar images in Donne's most serious poems. However, in these poems there is a close personal relationship between the lovers and a rejection of worldly interests which one does not find here. The poet is too consciously rooted in the physical world to reject it.

In this group of poems woman is often associated with the bounty of Nature. Similarly, the actions of birds and animals free from any social restrictions are used as an argument for sexual liberty. As we noted in "Communitie", women are considered "sorts of meat". Or again, the poet says, "they are ours as fruits are ours". In "Confined Love", he argues for a return to the sexual freedom of Nature.

Are birds divorc'd, or are they chidden
If they leave their mate, or lie abroad a night?
Beasts doe no joyntures lose
Though they new lovers choose,
But we are made worse then those.
(ll. 10-14)

In his article on the naturalism of Donne, Louis Bredvold states:

...his appeal is ever to Nature for the justification of a frankly sensual conception of love. He draws a frequent parallel between love and the other appetites, or between the habits of mankind and beasts--of nature....His appeal to Nature as a guide and norm is a substitute, as he himself makes very clear, for the authority of society and its accepted code of morality, which he calls "Custom" and "Opinion."⁶⁷

Another tradition which Mr. Bredvold notes is that of a Golden Age; the ideal existence where man and the animals lived in harmony according to the will of God. When man fell from grace, the society which developed formulated laws to govern his life. Man, then, desires to regain this ideal existence which is free from restrictions imposed by society. However, here again it must be pointed out that the poet's desire to return man to his natural, unfettered state is in reality a desire to return to complete sexual liberty. He is advocating the return to a world guided largely by instinct.

Another example of the poet's attitude towards love is his belittling of Platonic love from a purely physical point of view. There is a complete rejection of woman as the embodiment of Ideal Beauty and consequently a denial of the spiritual aspects in a love relationship. The courtly

⁶⁷Louis I. Bredvold, "The Naturalism of Donne in Relation to Some Renaissance Traditions", JEGP, XXII (1923), 474-475.

love and Petrarchan reverence of woman is cast aside. Here, she is a physical body designed for man's sexual gratification. In "Loves Alchymie", the poet attempts to find love's "hidden mysterie" asking anyone "where his centrique happinesse doth lie". The idea of finding the centre of love suggests the Platonic concept of The One which is the centre of all things. His initial conclusion that "'tis imposture all" foreshadows the completely rational view of the Platonic, non-physical concept of love.

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 spheares.
 Hope not for minde in women; at their best
 Sweetnesse and wit, they'are but Mummy, possest.
(ll. 18-24)

Taken to its rational extreme, this non-physical concept of love will occasionally attempt to ascribe an angelic, spiritual nature to "rude hoarse". However even the poet's attempt to make jest of Platonic love reveals his own attitude towards love. The pun on the word whore, "hoarse", which is repeated in "Loves Vsury", "For every houre that thou wilt spare mee now," reveals his strictly physical view of love--again with commercial overtones. In these poems, the Platonic, non-physical concept of love is rejected in favour of satisfying the physical self. As we shall see in Donne's most personal love poems the opposite is true. The physical world with all its commercial and material implications--although not

physical relations between man and woman--is rejected in favour of a more spiritual relationship between the lovers.

It is obvious from Mr. Leishman's comment on an element of Donne's wit, from Mr. Bredvold's comments on the poet's appeal to Nature, and from the discussion of the poetry that the poet argues for sexual licence which is both morally and socially objectionable according to Christian moral standards. The poems thrive on the largely unstated conflict between the Christian concept of morality and man's desire to follow his instincts. One finds a direct reversal of attitudes and ideas which are specifically Christian--ideas which are found in what are considered Donne's most sincere and emotionally involved poems. The conventional idea of love for one woman within marriage is cast aside in favour of sexual liberty without any emotional or personal attachment. As we have noted, the content of these poems, the attitude towards woman, and the reaction against Christian moral values suggest the poet is deliberately reacting against conventional standards and the Petrarchan adoration of woman. Yet perhaps the question is why should the poems be judged from the standpoint of Christian morality? Admittedly the society in which they were written and are read is essentially Christian. Yet strictly within the context of the poems, the adoration of a God of Love suggests a morality which is non-Christian. To judge these consciously physical

poems by the standards of Christian morality is to deny their psychological truth, an element perhaps inherent considering the point of view. While determining the autobiographical element in the poetry it is too easy to make a rigid distinction between incidents actually experienced by the poet and ideas or statements found in the poems which are psychologically true yet not part of the poet's actual experience. The attitude towards woman and personal love relationships is psychologically true if only at a self-centered, sexual level. The poet's desires in the first stanza of "The Indifferent" are an inherent part of the point of view expressed in these poems. It is only natural that the thoughts expressed will have a direct link with the poet's relationship with a woman. An example of psychological truth at this sexual level is found in "Loves Vsury."

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;...

(11. 9-12)

J.B. Leishman is certainly correct when he says,

Surely we are being rather dull-witted and literal-minded if we insist on reading [these lines] as a serious description of Donne's actual behaviour...⁶⁸

⁶⁸J.B. Leishman, op. cit., p. 152.

And while the comment is true, it is perhaps a too literal reading of the lines. Can one deny that the thoughts which are in Donne's mind--even when they are not his actual beliefs and practices--are, nevertheless, part of the poet? Another example is found in "Womans constancy" where the psychological truth of the final line turns a poem up-braiding a faithless mistress into a comment on both the poet and the nature of their relationship. His catalogue of excuses she might use to end their transitory affair is concluded with the thought,

Vaine lunatique, against these scapes I could
 Dispute, and conquer, if I would,
 Which I abstaine to doe,
 For by to morrow, I may thinke so too. (ll. 14-17)

The realization of his own inconstancy and lack of willingness to establish any personal relationship underlines the transitory nature of their union. Here, then, are examples of psychological truth from the poems which obviously were never meant to be considered serious expressions of Donne's beliefs and practices. In the most personal poems, as we shall see, the thoughts expressed by Donne are not only psychologically true, but also emotionally true as part of his actual relationship with his wife.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this discussion. First, one must determine the exact nature of the relationship between Donne and the poet who ostensibly writes the poems. When seen through the eyes of the poet, the

poems represent a specific and genuine attitude towards love which, as we have seen, is not necessarily that of Donne. If this distinction is valid, it is not difficult to discern Donne, the artist, behind the poet. For Donne is consciously using the poet's genuine attitude towards woman to oppose not only Christian moral standards, but also the courtly love and Petrarchan adoration of woman. Here we have Donne disassociated from the content if not the spirit and purpose of the poems. The obviously sexual attitude towards woman, the creation of a God of Love, and the constant suggestions of inconstancy recall the love poetry of Ovid. It is a completely self-centered desire for sexual gratification. This attitude is, of course, a direct reversal of the courtly love and Petrarchan ideals which determine the relationship between the lover and his beloved. Instead of an object of reverence, woman is simply an object of physical desire. The lover is primarily interested in his own satisfaction rather than that of the lady. Or again, the focus on the physical self is a direct contradiction of the Christian concept, "love thy neighbour". There is also a complete rejection of the Platonic concept of woman as the embodiment of Ideal Beauty. Woman is considered a faithless creature devoid of any spiritual nature and guided by sexual instinct. The poet rejects the spiritual aspects of a love relationship. Significantly the poems are completely void of the

Platonic images of unity and oneness. The only time the poet introduces Platonic love is to reject it. As we shall see in Donne's most personal love poems, the Platonic images of unity characterize the love. The complete rejection of the Petrarchan ideals suggests that these poems were written between 1590 and 1595. Here we have the young Jack Donne who defies convention by an assertion of youthful masculinity. And yet this rejection is made through a persona from whom Donne wishes to remain distinct. On one level, the poet's arguments are destroyed by self-contradiction. The poet's desire for sexual liberty is balanced by his attacks on woman's supposed inconstancy, revealing his own self-centered physical desire. It is through this revelation of the poet's nature that Donne disassociates himself from the ostensible writer of the poems.

The poems examined in this section of the thesis provide a transition from the sexual attitude towards love to the deeply personal involvement in love and fall into two distinct groups. The first group is a natural extension of the Ovidian, physical consideration of love where one finds a conscious analysis of love--but from a physical point of view. The poems chosen for discussion include: "Loves diet", "The broken heart", "Loves exchange", and

"Farewell to love." These poems do not convey the motivating desire for sexual fulfilment which we noted in the previous group. Here we have a transitional stage where love is an emotional state--not a personal emotion--from which the poet wishes to remain detached, and occasionally rejects. This emotional state has certain similarities with Petrarchan love which underline the separation between the poet and love. In these poems, the poet's heart symbolizes the impulsive desire for emotional involvement which suggests the Petrarchan adoration of woman. The poet, on the other hand, becomes the rational, analytic man who denies both the impulses of his heart, and the attraction of woman. Woman, then, attracts the heart yet is not adored and at times not specifically mentioned by the poet. He never reaches the state of Petrarchan adoration, but attempts to analyse and finally reject this form of love. The separation between the poet and his heart is found in "Loves diet."

To what a combersome unwieldinesse
 And burdenous corpulence my love had growne,
 But that I did, to make it lesse,
 And keepe it in proportion,
 Gave it a diet, made it feed upon
 That which love worst endures, discretion. (ll. 1-6)

The very awkwardness of the diction underlines the almost unmanageable love which threatens the poet. Yet his ability to control his heart, and therefore love, is in direct

contrast to the Petrarchan lover who is governed by his heart, and the moods of the lady. Or again, while the Petrarchan lover adores his unattainable lady, the poet denies the sighs of his "mistresse", rationalizing his heart's infatuation until he controls love.

Above one sigh a day I'll allow'd him not,
Of which my fortune, and my faults had part;
And if sometimes by stealth he got
A she sigh from my mistresse heart,
And thought to feast on that, I let him see
'Twas neither very sound, nor meant to mee.
(ll. 7-12)

In direct contrast, the Petrarchan lover seeks even the slightest acknowledgment from the lady.

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,
That she, dear she, might take some pleasure
of my pain,
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might
make her know,
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,--69
(ll. 1-4)

The contrasting attitudes reveal Donne reacting against the traditional adoration of woman. This reaction is carried to the ultimate step where the emotion of love becomes desire for sexual satisfaction.

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

⁶⁹Sir Philip Sidney, "Sonnet 1", Astrophel and Stella, Renaissance Poetry, ed. Leonard Dean (Englewood Cliffs, 1957), p. 43.

Here, the traditions associated with Petrarchan love, "write, sigh and weepe", are used ironically to characterize the poet's sexual desire. Woman is still the "mistresse", and the attitude towards woman and love is strictly physical, "sport". The choice of imagery, falconry, underlines the physical quest for love with the "sport", the desired goal. In "Loves diet", then, the personal emotion of love, personal relationships, and the adoration of woman have been rejected.

A modification of Petrarchan adoration is found in "The broken heart" where love is distinct from, yet governs the poet and his heart. Again, love describes a state of captive adoration rather than a personal emotion.

Ah, what a trifle is a heart,
 If once into loves hands it come!
 All other griefs allow a part
 To other griefs, and aske themselves but some;
 They come to us, but us Love draws,
 Hee swallows us, and never chawes: (ll. 9-14)

The third stanza suggests the fatal attraction of the poet who loses his heart to the lady. The lines reveal the modification of the Petrarchan idea that she will not extend pity to the lover.

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 pittie unto mee: but Love, alas,
 At one first blow did shiver it as glasse.
 (ll. 19-24)

Or again, the concluding lines of the final stanza echo

the plaint of the adoring Petrarchan lover who will never love again.

My ragges of heart can like, wish, and adore,
But after one such love, can love no more.
(ll. 31-32)

And while the poem does not contain the traditional sleepless Petrarchan lover characterized by his changing moods, one finds obvious modifications of Petrarchan ideas which lessen the personal involvement in, and conventionalize the sentiment of the poem.

Or again in "Loves exchange", one finds the determining power of love which denies man any return for his submission to this state. The opening lines indicate the Petrarchan sonnet tradition, especially among those at Court.

At Court your fellowes every day,
Give th'art of Riming, Huntsmanship, or Play,
For them which were their owne before;...
(ll. 3-5)

Yet the poet denies the Petrarchan conventions with which to express his state.

I aske no dispensation now
To falsifie a teare, or sigh, or vow,...
(ll. 8-9)

And finally, he requests that others never know that the lady realizes his suffering.

Love, let me never know that this
Is love, or, that love childish is;
Let me not know that others know
That she knowes my paines, least that so
A tender shame make me mine owne new woe.
(ll. 17-21)

These poems reveal love disassociated from the poet suggesting that no personal relationship forms the basis for the attitudes expressed. The language and conventions of Petrarchan love poetry are modified and incorporated into the poems lessening any personal sincerity.

Finally in "Farewell to love", one notes a certain paradox in the poet's rejection, yet conscious awareness of physical love. The underlying theme of the poem is the difference between the desire for, and the actual knowledge of sexual love. The opening lines which describe the poet's original ignorance imply the ignorance of Petrarchan adoration.

Whilst 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 unknowne power,
As ignorantly did I crave:
Thus when
Things not yet knowne are coveted by men,
Our desires give them fashion, and so
As they waxe lesser, fall, as they sise, grow.
(ll. 1-10)

And yet according to the poet, the irony of this ignorant adoration is that once experienced, the desire for sexual relations with woman lessens.

...the thing which lovers so
Blindly admire, and with such worship woove;
Being had, enjoying it decays: (ll. 14-16)

In these lines, the poet is attempting to distinguish an idealization of love and woman from a realistic knowledge

of physical love.

These poems, then, represent the varied use of modified Petrarchan ideas. Love is not a personal emotion, but a state describing man's non-physical adoration of woman. This Petrarchan worship of woman is rejected both as a largely ignorant state, and a hindrance to the sexual desire of the poet. In this light, woman is still the object of man's physical quest who must never be allowed to control him. Consequently the relationships described in these poems do not involve the personal emotions of the poet.

The second group foreshadows the unity of souls idea which one finds in Donne's most serious love poetry. However, here Platonic ideas are connected with Donne's theme of parting as a form of death. Three poems which illustrate this theme are "The Expiration", "The Dissolution", and "A Feaver." One other poem, "Lovers infinitenesse" indicates Donne's use of paradox which ends with the Platonic idea of unity. In "The Expiration", the final kiss of the parting lovers withdraws and "vapors" or dissipates both souls suggesting a finality to their physical relationship. The poem provides a contrast to the more personal "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" where the lovers remain united through their souls even though physically parted. However in "The Expiration", the idea of parting enables the poet to display his wit which is obvious from the argumentative nature of

the poem.

So, so breake off this last lamenting kisse,
Which sucks two soules, and vapors Both away,
Turne thou ghost that way, and let mee turne this,
And let our selves benight our happiest day,
We ask'd none leave to love; nor will we owe
Any, so cheape a death, as saying, Goe;...
(ll. 1-6)

Similarly in "A Feaver", the lady's death symbolizes the death of the world.

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.
(ll. 5-8)

She is described as "the worlds soule," the unchanging universe.

Thy beauty, and all parts, which are thee,
Are unchangeable firmament. (ll. 23-24)

In both "The Expiration" and "A Feaver", the wit and argumentative qualities lessen the personal sincerity of the poet. Similarly, the imagery which describes the lovers is not an integral part of their relationship, but consciously applied. In these poems, the possibility of being physically parted appears to be more important than the unity of lovers even when parted which one finds in the most personal poetry. In "The Dissolution", the death of the lady brings not personal grief but an examination of the Platonic unity of all created things.

Shee'is dead; And all which die
To their first Elements resolve;
And wee were mutuall Elements to us,

And made of one another.
 My body then doth hers involve,
 In me abundant grow, and burdensome,
 And nourish not, but smother.
 (ll. 1-8)

And while the lines suggest a form of unity between the lovers, it is at a non-personal, non-emotional level.

The poems of parting as a form of death, then, foreshadow Donne's most personal poems of parting, "A Valediction: forbidding mourning", and "Song" "Sweetest love, I doe not goe, / For wearinesse of thee" but obviously do not convey the sincerity and depth of emotion which one finds in the latter. Or again in "Lovers infinitenesse", the variations on the theme,

If yet I have not all thy love,
 end with the Platonic idea of unity.

Be one, and one anothers All. ^{so wee shall} (ll. 32-33)

Here again, while the idea foreshadows the image which Donne describes as the essential nature of their union, one feels it is out of context in this poem. In "Loves infinitenesse", the image is consciously applied to, rather than extracted from the lovers' union.

The next group of poems under consideration includes: "The Funerall", "The Blossome", "The Primrose",

"The Relique", "The Dampe", "Twicknam garden", and "A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day." These poems have traditionally been linked together appearing to be addressed not to his wife, but to either Lucy, Countess of Bedford, the Countess of Huntingdon, or Mrs. Magdalen Herbert. However, if Donne was inspired by a lady other than his wife, she, and the true nature of their relationship, remain shrouded in mystery. For while Donne is still describing a relationship, and at times looking at himself in love, the nature of the love and presumably the person addressed have changed. The nature of the relationship, which is essentially Platonic in the sense that it is non-physical, differs from the more obvious physical and spiritual union of the lovers usually celebrated in poems addressed to Anne Donne. The tone of the poems--which is characteristically their own, and which separates them from the other Songs and Sonets--is difficult to describe. For while the wit, the unique imagery, the themes of love, religion, and death, and at times the flippancy of the other poems remain, there is a suggested seriousness about these poems which one soon discovers is only a surface characteristic. One cannot ignore Sir Herbert Grierson when he says,

...I am disposed to argue that the change of tone in this group of poems represents a difference in the social status of the persons addressed, that he is here, like

other poets, adopting the Petrarchian convention to pay compliments to the noble ladies of his acquaintance.⁷⁰

To some extent Donne has adopted the conventional pose as the unrequited Petrarchan lover. However, the poems are free from stylization and suggest more than just a lover's plaint. These poems reveal the character of the rejected lover with a subtlety which is not found in Petrarchan love poetry. To understand this change in tone and Donne's pose as the rejected lover, one must realize the underlying moods of frustration and at times flippancy.

The poems are characterized by their irony and an underlying sense of frustration. There is an irony in the treatment of love, woman, and death which is heightened by the wit and argumentative quality of each poem. Symbols of physical love are used to describe a spiritual relationship while the symbols, language, and rites of the Church are used to suggest an ostensibly physical relationship. Yet this ironic fusion of the physical and the spiritual is found in the context of what is essentially Platonic love poetry. J.B. Leishman states that in these poems

Donne either celebrates his Platonic affection for a woman or else complains that such affection is all she will give him.⁷¹

⁷⁰Sir Herbert Grierson, "Introduction", The Poems of John Donne, ed. Sir Herbert Grierson (London, 1960), p. xx.

⁷¹J.B. Leishman, op. cit., p. 167.

And while this statement is basically correct, it is only a surface consideration of the poems and does not indicate any of their underlying tensions or conflicts. The sense of frustration is evident from the conscious rejection or negation of the physical aspects of love usually after the lover, himself, has been rejected. The frustration of the Petrarchan lover is sublimated into adoration only increasing her unattainability. In these poems, however, once the lover has been rejected he vents his frustrations by commenting on the falsehood and infidelity of woman. The frustration, consequently, often arises from the lover's desire, and his inability to fulfil that desire.

There is also an air of unreality about the poems. When considered from an objective point of view, what appear to be serious poems describing a personal relationship include elements of the highly ingenious, if not the ridiculous. Yet perhaps it is this fusion of the serious with the ingenious which allows Donne to express how he feels without indicating a specific and obvious relationship.

Mr. Leishman states,

What, in spite of the less than half-serious argument, is characteristic of these poems is a certain tender playfulness, or playful tenderness, which differs, on the one hand, from that sheer wit and deliberate outrageousness, and, on the other, from that celebration

of contented love, which, as regards spirit and content, are the two chief characteristics of the earlier and more numerous Songs and Sonets.⁷²

While Mr. Leishman describes the spirit and tone of the poems, he fails in his discussion to note their source, namely the frustration of the poet, and also their irony. It is obvious that these poems differ from many of the Songs and Sonets since Donne is not describing an already established relationship in his usual logically argued manner. The poems do not even attempt to describe the exact nature of the presumably non-physical, Platonic relationship which the reader imagines is their source. Donne, perhaps consciously, often avoids this by shifting the point of view from himself, to friends, or to people in years to come who attempt to determine the nature of their relationship. The poems have what appears in retrospect to be a logical, but seldom predictable progression. The structure of the poems, with different people commenting on their relationship, allows Donne to consider its effect upon others rather than describing a specific relationship and examining it. Consequently, it falls upon the reader to realize the poet's attitude towards the lady, and the nature of their relationship.

⁷²Ibid., p. 168.

In "The Funerall", the poet imagines himself dead and about to be shrouded when a "subtile wreath of haire" is discovered on his arm. The poet then attempts to determine why it was given and its function, with only a vague reference to his relationship with the lady. The hair, a traditional sexual symbol, has become a religious symbol associated with the soul. The "wreath of haire" is his outward soul which will preserve his body from decay. The actual soul of the poet--which presumably left the body at death--is all but ignored as the reader's attention is focused on the body. Yet while the outward soul represents the soul after death, there is no specific reason for the body to be preserved. In the second stanza there is a contrast between the ability of the "braine" and the soul to achieve unity of the body. The "braine", which is human and mortal, brings about unity here on earth suggested by the downward motion of the phrase "lets fall / Through every part". On the other hand, the soul's movement is "upward" and presumably directs the interests of the body towards heaven, and immortality. The contrast, then, is between the physical and the spiritual, perhaps suggesting his physical and her spiritual nature. This contrast is carried into the second half of the stanza where he wonders why she wished his body preserved. Perhaps he is to know the pain of physical confinement on earth after his soul has left the body? The

poet's more earthly love, which is contrasted throughout these poems with the lady's more spiritual love, would be in its natural element here on earth. The simile of the "manacled" prisoners--which suggests confinement before death, but not actual death--foreshadows the frustration and inevitable failure of the poet's earthly love. He is unable to enter into a spiritual relationship, and must remain "manacled" to his own body. The final stanza is a mixture of resignation and grim humour. The near flippancy tone of the stanza is accompanied by a lack of concern about death; the poet being more concerned that the "wreath of hair" will fall into strange hands and result in "idolatrie". He poses, almost too obviously, as "Loves martyr" pointing to his humility for equating the hair with the soul. And the final gesture,

That since you would save none of mee, I bury
some of you,

appears to stem from his confusion rather than his spite. The poem does not describe love, not even non-physical Platonic love. Instead, there is a suggestion that the poet has been rejected by the lady. Seen in this light, the religious language becomes ironic revealing the poet's failure. He is "Loves martyr" only in the sense that he failed to win the lady. And the idea of the hair as a relique which might breed "idolatrie" suggests not only the incomplete knowledge of people discovering the "wreath", but underlines

the poet's lack of knowledge about his relationship with the lady. There is an air of unreality about the poem with such a willing suspension of disbelief achieved that one forgets the actuality of death and attempts to discover the nature and function of the "subtile wreath of haire". The element of death suggests that the poetic treatment will be essentially serious. Yet if one looks at the poem from an objective point of view, it nears the ridiculous. The poet has imagined his own death and an imaginary, mysterious "wreath of haire," yet is unable to state its function. The language and phrasing,

What ere shee meant by't, bury it with me,

suggests a flippant, almost jocular corpse who appears unconcerned about his own lack of comprehension. The poem ends on a note of rejection which like the "wreath" is never explained. And yet perhaps the poet is intentionally ambiguous. Because the "love" relationship is never explained and the poet is primarily concerned that the nature of it will be misinterpreted, one is led to believe that the lady is someone other than his wife, and the relationship could not be made explicit in the poem.

A probable companion piece to "The Funerall" is "The Relique" wherein the poet imagines his grave being opened and the "bracelet of bright haire" discovered. Whoever dug up the grave imagines that the function of the "bracelet"

was to bring the souls together at the Day of Judgment. Here, of course, we have the Platonic idea of the lovers' souls joined after death suggesting an original physical unity. However the poet is not specific, and his description of their relationship does not indicate any sense of unity. The poem then shifts from the personal judgment of one person in stanza one to an age where "mis-devotion doth command". In this age where "miracles are sought," the lovers' bones will be brought before "the Bishop, and the King," considered reliques and by implication, those of saints. Yet there is no indication that anyone understands the nature of their relationship. Their love was not sexual but "harmes-lesse", and apparently undefinable. It is difficult to say if the second stanza is even slightly satiric. There is the suggestion that people need reliques and saints to fill a vacuum in their lives. The lines

Thou shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I
 A something else thereby;...(ll. 17-18)

are almost mocking in tone, the flippancy belittling the idea of sainthood. Or perhaps Mary Magdalen is an oblique reference to Magdalen Herbert? Part of a letter from Donne to Mrs. Herbert which is quoted in Appendix A indicates that he was aware of the link between the two names. However, the relationship hinted at in the poem is kept perhaps deliberately ambiguous, and no positive identification with an autobiographical source can be made. The irony of the

stanza lies in the canonization of two "harmelesse lovers". There is also a direct contrast with "The Canonization" where the lovers are canonized because of their deeply spiritual love, not the ignorance of those around them. Once the lovers have become saints, the idea that "All women shall adore" them is possibly a satiric comment on the romantic notions of women who idealize a relationship without knowing its true nature. The irony of the language lies, of course, in the use of religious terms to describe what is essentially a worldly relationship.

The third stanza provides an indirect contrast to the second. For while future generations will canonize the "harmelesse lovers", the poet is unable to describe what they loved, or why. In the final stanza, he can only suggest the nature of their relationship through negatives. Yet while their love appears to be completely spiritual or non-physical, there is a conscious negation of the physical aspects of love as if they were longed for but like the lady, unattainable. The pun, or to be more precise, the variant meanings of the word "miracles" underline, to some extent, the conflict between the physical and the spiritual. In line twenty, the word suggests that people are looking for some form of religious miracle. However in line thirty-one after describing their love as a rejection of its physical aspects, the poet suggests that the miracle performed was

not allowing the physical to overshadow the spiritual. The final play on the word, "what a miracle shee was", hints at the perfection of the lady--presumably both physical and spiritual. To describe her, he would have to go beyond reason and language. The poem, then, presents three views of one relationship with one perhaps no more valid than the others. By employing this technique Donne, perhaps intentionally, avoids having to indicate the lady addressed, and describe their relationship. And yet--as he fully realizes and points out in the second stanza--by the ambiguous nature of the "love" he describes, people will presume, or attempt to determine a relationship--as we have just done. If the poem was addressed to Mrs. Herbert as the oblique reference indicates, then presumably she would appreciate the guarded terms used to describe the association.

"The Blossome" opens with an apparently objective stanza describing the transience of a flower.

Little think'st thou, poore flower,
Whom I have watch'd sixe or seaven dayes,
And seene thy birth, and seene what every houre
Gave to thy growth, thee to this height to raise,
And now dost laugh and triumph on this bough,
Little think'st thou
That it will freeze anon, and that I shall
To morrow finde thee false, or not at all.
(ll. 1-8)

The flower is at the height of its joy and "dost laugh and triumph". Yet in this carefree state it is unaware of its closeness to death. The mood is one of Romantic melancholy

with the poet's relative permanence contrasted to the flower's transience. However in this stanza, the melancholy is not for man but for the flower unaware of its inability to hold on to life. The idea suggested by the stanza is the inability to achieve one's desire while unaware of impending failure. In stanza two, a parallel is drawn between the flower and the poet's heart. However the poet assumes an objective position in order to examine his heart's actions. The heart's ignorance is contrasted with the knowledge of the poet who realizes its inability to overcome the "stiffness" of the "forbidden or forbidding tree". The analogy established in the first stanza underlines the heart's failure to realize its desire, and introduces an element of melancholy because the relationship cannot be established, and he must leave her. The double reference to the sun at the end of the stanza suggests that just like its inevitable rise and journey across the sky, so the poet's heart must leave the object of its desire. The description of the flower falling from the bough is carried into the second stanza where the heart will fall away from the beloved. In both instances there is a sense of inevitability as both the leaf and the heart have no choice. Yet the heart who is "subtile to plague" itself wishes to remain, and probably represents the unconscious desire of the poet. The line "forbidden or forbidding" might indicate that either Donne's

own personal situation does not permit such a relationship,
or the lady does not encourage his advances.

Stanza three begins the dialogue between the poet and his heart. Here, the heart represents the emotions, but not necessarily for the satisfaction of the physical self. The lines,

You goe to friends, whose love and meanes present
Various content
To your eyes, eares, and tongue, and every part
(11. 21-23)

suggest that perhaps the body is more interested in its own physical satisfaction than in a personal relationship. In the fourth stanza, the poet taunts the heart with an attack on the apparent heartless condition of woman.

How shall shee know my heart; or having none,
 Know thee for one?
Practice may make her know some other part,
But take my word, shee doth not know a Heart.
(11. 29-32)

The lines point not only to the supposed heartless condition of woman, but also to her sexual nature. The idea that

Practice may make her know some other part suggests that she has no conscious mind or desire of her own but acts according to instinct and conditioning. In the final stanza, the poet tells his heart that in London companionship with men will renew his spirits. He asks his heart to meet him in twenty days, but no reason is given for this specific amount of time. If the poem was addressed to a lady, then perhaps she knew the reason for the specific

number. In the final stanza the poet tells his heart that
in London

wee shall finde
a friend As glad to have my body, as my minde.
(ll. 39-40)

Here for the first time is a sense of harmony between the poet and his heart. And significantly it comes only when he is about to establish both a physical and a spiritual relationship with a woman. It appears, then, that the lady in stanza three is more interested in a spiritual relationship of the mind than a physical union with the poet. A comparison of the fourth and fifth stanzas suggests that his bitter denunciation of woman as heartless stems from his own rejection by a woman. The knowledge that he will find a woman who wishes his body as well as his mind perhaps indicates that he is more interested in the physical than the spiritual aspects of love. In comparison, Donne's, or more truthfully the poet's denunciation of the physical nature of woman--which ironically refers to someone more interested in a non-physical association--stems from his own physical rejection and underlines man's sexual nature rather than woman's. The poem, then, describes the conflict between two types of relationships with woman, the physical and the spiritual; the former being desired, but forbidden. The struggle within the poet is best illustrated by his plea, "For Gods sake," when asking the heart to leave the

lady. Yet such an impassioned plea only emphasizes his unconscious longing to remain.

"The Primrose, being at Mountgomery Castle, upon the hill, on which it is situate" also presents this conflict between the physical and the spiritual, again obliquely stated. The poem has been linked with Mrs. Herbert principally because of the reference to Mountgomery Castle in the title. However, considering the fact that the reference was not added until the second edition of the poems, (1635),⁷³ and also the witty, but hardly complimentary nature of the poem, one hesitates to link it with any certainty to Mrs. Herbert. There is a marked contrast between the opening and closing stanzas. The thematic movement of the poem is from a compliment suggesting the possibility of heavenly influence upon woman to the modification of a Platonic idea hinting at her infidelity. The opening stanza finds the poet walking among the primroses which like the stars would form a "terrestriall Galaxie" if the heavens would shower rain upon them. Yet the suggestion is that they are not fed from above and so he must search for a "true love" who is more or less than a woman. In his search he rejects a flower with four petals which is less than woman, probably indicating her more sexual nature. He also rejects

⁷³J.B. Leishman, op. cit., p. 167.

a six petal flower, more than woman, who would be "above / All thought of sexe," and interested only in the spiritual aspects of any relationship. The poet rejects both women as "monsters", desiring instead a balance between the physical and the spiritual aspects of love. However, his acceptance of ordinary woman is qualified by the comment that "there must reside / Falshood in woman," and also the idea that while women may be false, they are, at least, true to their own false nature. With the ordinary false woman represented by the number five, the poet goes on to discuss the implications of his realization. He refers to five as a "mysterious" number perhaps suggesting religious connotations. A noteworthy, yet questionable, idea is introduced by Louis Martz. When broken down, the word primrose becomes prime rose or first flower. Mr. Martz states:

...the number five becomes associated with the celebration of the Virgin: the five petaled Rose becomes her flower.⁷⁴

It is, of course, difficult to say if Donne realized or consciously employed the religious symbol five. If so, then to some extent the Mother of Christ is associated with "Falshood" and sexual promiscuity. In the final lines, the poet toys with numbers and concludes that since five is half of ten and "halfe ten / Belonge unto each woman," then each woman

⁷⁴Louis L. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven, 1962), p. 223.

can have half the men in the world. Or if this does not satisfy them, since all numbers are either odd or even and the first of each comes before five, then they are entitled to, and can be false to all men. The lines

if halfe ten
 Belonge unto each woman, then
 Each woman may take halfe us men;...
 (ll. 25-27)

echo Aristophanes' idea of attempting to re-establish the original unity. Here, however, Donne uses the concept to suggest sexual liberty. It is almost impossible to determine the seriousness of this poem considering on one hand the ideas suggested, and on the other, the supposed connection with Mrs. Herbert. Sir Herbert Grierson believes the poem is "...a half mystical, half cynical description of Platonic passion."⁷⁵ Yet considering the poet's statements about woman's "Falshood", the only significant differences between this poem and the more consciously sexual poems are his obvious display of wit, and the supposed connection of Mrs. Herbert with the former.

"The Dampe" also reveals this desire for sexual fulfillment which is lightened by irony and humour. The lady is again unattainable, and perhaps of noble birth as she must slay "Disdaine" and "Honor" before rejecting him of her

⁷⁵Sir Herbert Grierson, "Commentary", The Poems of John Donne (Oxford, 1912), II, 48.

own free choice. Instead of becoming depressed, he ignores the conventionality of the rejected lover's plaint and teases the lady for the rejection of his love. The poem also has an air of unreality as the thematic movement is from his imagined death to a sublimation of his desire and rejection into the genre of romance, concluding with a compliment to her physical beauty. In the first stanza, the poet imagines himself dead from some unknown malady, presumably unrequited love. When his overly curious friends cut open his body, they find a picture of the lady in his heart. So entranced by her beauty they, like the poet, will be overcome and die. The conceit that the death of his friends by her beauty will be a massacre provides an introduction to, and establishes the tone of the second stanza. He scorns and belittles the death of his friends claiming that they are "Poore victories!" If she wishes a worthwhile conquest she must first slay the "Gyant...Disdaine" and "th'enchantresse Honor". Here, the ironic use of personifications lightens the poet's presumably serious request for the lady's love. To some extent there is a reversal of traditional associations. The romance enchantress usually leads one into sin and evil. However, here she leads the lady away from a relationship with the poet and into a state of "Honor". J.B. Leishman fails to note Donne's ironic use of personification which provides the key for an interpretation of the poem.

It is curious to find Donne, who in his younger days had so deliberately and contemptuously rejected the Courtly and Petrarchan tradition, now, in his middle years, playing with such conceptions as those of murder and massacre, of the giant Disdain and the enchantress Honour, remote as his use of such conceptions may be from that of the tradition to which they properly belong.⁷⁶

Mr. Leishman fails to note that the obvious humour of the stanza and the ironic use of personifications lessen the outward seriousness of the poet's efforts to tempt the lady. She is asked to forget her "owne arts and triumphs over men," and attempt to win him purely as a woman. The movement within the stanza is from belittling and playfulness to a serious request which is countered at the beginning of stanza three with a return to irony and humour. The poet is prevented from forming a relationship by "Constancy"--which if considered seriously probably indicates his married state. Yet these are obstacles which can easily be dismissed. He asks her to forget "Disdaine" and "Honor" and love him purely as a woman following her own desires. His desire to "die / As a meere man"--with the sexual implications of the pun on the word "die"--obviously indicates his willingness to establish a physical relationship with the lady. The poem ends praising her physical beauty with the alternate reading of the final line,

⁷⁶J.B. Leishman, op. cit., p. 172

Naked you have odds enough of any man ⁷⁷

indicating a strong emphasis on the sexual element of any proposed relationship. And while its exact nature is difficult to determine, the poem illustrates this continual alternation between the poet's conscious desire for the physical and the lady's more restrained desire for a presumably spiritual or intellectual relationship--perhaps decided by her social position, her "Honor".

Finally, two poems, "Twickenham Garden" and "A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day" capture the poet's mood of depression which apparently stems from his rejection. Yet these poems are not an analysis of his depression but often an overstatement of his mood in objectified, symbolic form. One senses a certain detachment on the part of Donne who is attempting to objectify his emotional state. And while there is no actual separation between Donne and the mood expressed, the repeated attempts to externalize and symbolize his grief indicate a deliberate guise perhaps to avoid a close personal reading of the poems. Or again, perhaps the selection of specific symbols to convey his grief such as "a stone fountaine" in Twickenham Garden carries a specific symbolic known only to the poet

⁷⁷Alternate reading, "Naked 1635-69 and other MSS." John Donne, "The Dampe", The Poems of John Donne, ed. Sir Herbert Grierson (London, 1960), p. 57.

and the lady addressed. Or from another point of view, the objectification of the poet's mood is both an acute consciousness of his state, and an attempt to achieve an impersonal detachment. At times one feels Donne is too consciously exploring the various states of his depression. And while the images describe his depression, one feels they are consciously selected rather than an integral part of the mood. And yet the images which suggest an attempted objective stance underline his mood of grief. In both poems, no attempt is made to keep his grief strictly personal. He considers himself the essence of depression against which all other grieving lovers can be judged. Yet this admixture of supposed personal sorrow and the constant attempt to objectify the emotion suggests a pose in a personal, yet witty, impersonal poem reminiscent of Petrarchan love poetry. The wit, the ingenuity of the images which describe his mood, often lessen the element of personal involvement. It is, therefore, not difficult to imagine both poems as personal yet impersonal witty compliments to a lady. For they are almost too witty and consciously constructed and expressed to convey the full impact and depth of personal grief.

Both poems have been linked with Lucy, Countess of Bedford. J.B. Leishman comments,

The poem entitled "Twickenham Garden" was certainly written for the Countess of Bedford,

since Twickenham Park was her residence
from 1608 until 1617.⁷⁸

The opening line,

Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with tears,
echoes the traditional pose of the rejected Petrarchan lover
and indicates the poet's grief. Yet his entrance into the
garden suggests an intrusion which is not desired by the
lady. The garden assumes religious connotations as the "True
Paradise" into which he has introduced "the serpent", his
"spider love". Yet he wishes to remain in the garden, even
though rejected.

But that I may not this disgrace
Indure, nor yet leave loving, Love let mee
Some senslesse peece of this place bee;...
(ll. 14-16)

His plea to be a "senslesse" thing suggests a desire to
escape from his senses and emotions which recall his grief
and rejection. As a stone fountain, his tears become the
epitome of grief against which all lovers' tears can be
judged,

For all are false, that tast not just like mine;...
The final lines where the relationship between him and the
lady is obliquely described becomes a witty inversion of the
poet's often stated idea of woman's infidelity.

Alas, hearts do not in eyes shine,
Nor can you more judge womans thoughts by teares,

⁷⁸J.B. Leishman, op. cit., p. 173.

Then by her shadow, what she weares.
 O perverse sexe, where none is true but shee,
 Who's therefore true, because her truth kills mee.
 (11. 23-27)

Here, the lady's rejection of the poet is her true statement about the nature of their relationship. Her truth, the fidelity of her statement, is least desired when it brings his rejection.

Similarly in "A nocturnall upon S. Lucies day, Being the shortest day", the symbolic death of the year--the shortest day--objectifies the poet's grief after the death of an unidentified lady.

The worlds whole sap is sunke:
 The generall balme th'hydroptique earth hath drunk,
 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.
 (11. 5-9)

Or again he describes his state,

I, by loves limbecke, am the grave
 Of all, that's nothing. (11. 21-22)

The poem is saved from self-pity by the poet's attempt to externalize his emotional state through images. The images of "Alchimie" underline his depressed state of "every dead thing," yet one feels they are witty, consciously applied images. This admixture of the personal relationship and the attempt to describe it in objective, almost non-personal terms is found in one passage where the poet employs the language of the Petrarchan sonnet.

Oft a flood

Have wee two wept, and so
 Drowned the whole world, us two; oft did we grow
 To be two Chaosses, when we did show
 Care to ought else; and often absences
 Withdrew our soules, and made us carcasses.
 (ll. 22-27)

Here, the ironic use of Petrarchan language suggests a relationship perhaps more intimate than that between Donne and the Countess of Bedford. The idea of the lovers' unity which one finds in the more personal poems usually connected with Anne Donne is an isolated, almost alien passage in the poem. The relationship between Donne and the lady is never made specific. Similarly the poet's request that future lovers study his grief echoes the Petrarchan lover's personal outcry which to some extent lessens the emotional sincerity of the poem.

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee
 At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:....
 (ll. 10-11)

Or finally, he contrasts his dead relationship with the more physical union of young lovers.

But I am None; nor will my Sunne renew.
 You lovers, for whose sake, the lesser Sunne
 At this time to the Goat is ruine
 To fetch new lust, and give it you,
 Enjoy your summer all;... (ll. 37-41)

The poem, then, never describes in specific terms the relationship between the poet and the lady. And while there is a constant reiteration of his grief, his conscious use of imagery and acute awareness of the world from which he claims detachment result in a solemn if not deeply personal

poem.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this discussion. If the ladies addressed are either Mrs. Magdalen Herbert or Lucy, Countess of Bedford then the poems can be dated from 1607 until 1612. The relationships described remain on an intellectual, non-physical level. Yet this relationship is ambiguous, and perhaps deliberately so to avoid identification of the lady, or ladies. They appear to be above the poet in social rank and because of their position and his married state, are unattainable. Consequently, the language of the poet echoes the language of Petrarchan adoration, but with an ironic purpose. Underlying the ambiguous relationship between him and the lady is the poet's desire to establish their union on a physical, sexual level. However, these requests are carefully phrased and at times only obliquely stated. If these conclusions are correct, then this perhaps explains the poems' half-playful, half-serious nature. The requests of the poet are checked by the wit of the poems. He never allows himself to be completely serious, or the poems to achieve an air of complete reality. Yet underlying the wit is the consciousness of frustrated desire. Or again, one at times must distinguish between Donne the man and Donne the poet. Occasionally one detects a pose or an imagined situation which is used half-seriously by the poet to disguise his own true

feelings. Finally, the spiritual, non-physical nature of the relationship, the element of sexual desire in his appeal to a married woman, his constant rejection, and the almost constant tone of adoration suggest an adaptation of the Courtly Love tradition. If so, then it is an adaptation governed by the wit of Donne. For the poems are characterized by an interplay between the frustrated desire of Donne the man and the wit of Donne the poet, one complementing the other.

The next group of poems includes: "Aire and Angels", "The undertaking", "Negative love", "Loves growth", "A Valediction: of the booke", and "The Extasie." These poems reveal Donne attempting to grasp the nature of love, and the relationship between man and woman, body and soul. One finds both an analysis of the poet's feelings, and an attempt to describe the essential quality of his love. The emphasis is not given to the poet's expression of his love, but to the spiritual, or more precisely the Platonic element which underlies the actual physical relationship of the lovers. And while there is an awareness of both body and soul, the poet emphasizes the spiritual aspects of love--without rejecting the physical. The poems, then, represent a largely conscious analysis of the spiritual aspects of

Donne's love which are stated in terms of basic Platonic love ideas. However, it is a poetic analysis of Platonic sentiment which by its very nature indicates a somewhat objective stance by the poet. And while one never questions the sincerity of his expression, it is obvious that these poems are not impassioned or deeply personal, nor is there the almost indivisible fusion of Donne and the sentiment expressed which one finds in his most personal love poetry. The final group of poems, as we shall see, represents a complete integration of the poet and Platonic sentiment; the poet celebrating the nature of his love. In these poems, however, while Donne is discussing the nature of his love, and love itself, one feels that to some extent he is detached from his actual love relationship. One can distinguish this group of poems from the next in that the former is an analysis of Donne in love, while the latter is Donne in love. Needless to say, this artistic though not personal separation for the purpose of analysis introduces a new consideration of woman as the subject rather than the object of the poet's love. These poems present woman as both the earthly form of physical beauty, and the embodiment of the Platonic ideals of Virtue and Beauty. One does not find a close personal union between the poet and the lady described in these poems. However considering their purpose, and the poet's new concept of woman as both a physical and a spiritual

being, it is obvious that these poems presuppose a close love relationship. Here, then, is Donne's attempt to define the underlying spiritual aspects of love--a synthesis of various Platonic ideas--often employing religious language to heighten his new faith or religion of love. Significantly there is never a complete rejection of the physical aspects of love.

The most obvious Platonic poem is "Aire and Angels" where the difference "twixt Aire and Angells puritie" represents the difference between man's and woman's love. The opening lines,

Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
Before I knew thy face or name, (ll. 1-2)

which are soon followed by the almost anti-climactic line,

Some lovely glorious nothing I did see,

are not a belittling of Platonic love ideas. Instead, Donne is suggesting the ethereal nature of love which is manifested in the beauty of the beloved. The concluding lines of the stanza express the idea of love, the child of the soul, as a quality bestowed by the lover, and manifested in the object of his love.

But since my soule, whose child love is,
Takes limmes of flesh, and else could nothing doe,
More subtile then the parent is,
Love must not be, but take a body too,
And therefore what thou wert, and who,
I bid Love aske, and now
That it assume thy body, I allow,
And fixe it selfe in thy lip, eye, and brow.
(ll. 7-14)

The final lines indicate the importance of the physical body; for love becomes a physical reality when the feelings within the poet realize the object of his contemplation. The second stanza finds the poet attempting to "ballast love" or determine a balance between physical and spiritual love, finally realizing that love cannot exist in either extreme.

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

The conclusion reached in the final lines suggests a compromise where the object of the poet's love, and love itself, partakes of the divine, yet exists in an earthly sphere.

Then as an Angell, face, and wings
Of aire, not pure as it, yet pure doth weare,
So thy love may be my loves spheare;...
(ll. 23-25)

Woman, then, is first the embodiment of an ideal which given earthly form becomes man's contemplative object of divine and earthly beauty.

However in "The undertaking", one finds the concept of woman as symbolic of Ideal Virtue, and the rejection of the physical aspects of love.

But he who lovelinesse within
Hath found, all outward loathes,
For he who colour loves, and skinne,
Loves but their oldest clothes.

If, as I have, you also doe
Vertue'attir'd in woman see,
And dare love that, and say so too,
And forget the Hee and Shee;... (ll. 13-20)

There is a certain ambiguity about the poem. The thematic movement is from the poet's declaration, to his vision of the reader's declaration of his spiritually orientated concept of love. And yet this emphasis on the spiritual element of love is found in the context of a sexually conscious society. The poet hides his love from "prophane men" who would only "deride" him for his love and "love but as before." The idea of "prophane men" underlines the spiritual, almost religious nature of the poet's love, and refers to those who are more interested in the physical aspects of love. While one finds a denial of sexual love, the very denial emphasizes its existence.

A partial compromise between body and soul is reached in "Negative love." The opening lines suggest the Petrarchan adoration of physical features, the word "prey" indicating the repetition inherent in the poetry of that genre.

I never stoop'd so low, as they
Which on an eye, cheeke, lip, can prey,...
(ll. 1-2)

Similarly, he also rejects those who only admire intellect.

Seldome to them, which soare no higher
Then vertue or the minde to 'admire,
For sense, and understanding may
Know, what gives fuell to their fire:....
(ll. 3-6)

Significantly the word admire and the idea of adoration are used to describe both rejected states. And while he cannot describe "what he would have", his state is, nevertheless,

"love"; a love which by its indefinable nature and the poet's uncertainty about what he has and what he craves indicates a more realistic attitude towards the reconciliation of the physical and spiritual aspects of love.

A more personal yet meditative poem is "Loves growth" in which the poet considers the nature of his love in terms of the renewal of spring. The image of spring and rebirth indicates not only love's constant increase, but also the natural, unpretentious quality of the love. The second stanza states that love is not pure, "no quintessence," but an equal consideration of both body and soul.

love , not onely bee no quintessence,
But mixt of all stufes, paining soule, or sense,
And of the Sunne his working vigour borrow,
Love's not so pure, and abstract, as they use
To say, which have no Mistresse but their Muse,
But as all else, being elemented too,
Love sometimes would contemplate, sometimes do.
(ll. 8-14)

The idea of borrowing the "working vigour" of the "Sunne" indicates the sexual element of the poet's love, and foreshadows Donne's most personal love poems where the sun objectifies the intensity and the energy of the love. Or again, Donne dismisses the "abstract" Petrarchan love poets whose experience is limited to their "Muse". The synthesis appears in the final line of the stanza where the active (physical) and passive (spiritual) elements of love are suggested. The idea of borrowing the sun's working vigour underlines the creative element of the ever increasing love

and indirectly introduces two contrary movements which define their union. On one hand, the image of spring suggests the re-creative, ever-growing love which can be described as an outward, ever-widening movement.

If, as in water stir'd more circles bee
 Produc'd by one, love such additions take,...
(ll. 21-22)

Yet on the other hand, the love which is ever increasing is directed and focused on the lady.

Those like so many spheares, but one heaven make,
 For, they are all concentrique unto thee;...
(ll. 23-24)

The image of the circle, concentric yet focusing on the centre--the essential Platonic image of unity and oneness--characterizes the poet's love which increases in intensity while narrowing in focus. The image of the circle also foreshadows the images of oneness and unity which characterize the lovers' relationship in Donne's most personal love poetry.

Finally in "A Valediction: of the booke", the poet tells his lady that these poems are the "Rule and example" of love; and they, "loves clergie". If people wish to learn about love, they have only to read the poems.

Here Loves Divines, (since all Divinity
 Is love or wonder) may finde all they seeke,
 Whether abstract spirituall love they like,
 Their Soules exhal'd with what they do not see,
 Or, loth so to amuze
 Faiths infirmitie, they chuse
 Something which they may see and use;

For, though minde be the heaven, where love
 doth sit,
 Beauty a convenient type may be to figure it.
 (ll. 28-36)

The stanza is a realistic, almost objective statement appealing to those who seek communion with Divine Beauty, and those who seek physical union with earthly beauty. The concept of Ideal Beauty manifested in the material world in a beautiful earthly form is quite explicit. The suggestion is, of course, that woman is the embodiment of the Ideal. In the final stanza one finds a variation of Marsillio Ficino's belief that lovers will remain united by their souls, even though physically parted--an integral idea of "A Valediction: forbidding mourning."

How great love is, presence best tryall makes,
 But absence tryes how long this love will bee;...
 (ll. 57-58)

And while Donne is not explicit about the nature of their love, the religious language--the metaphor of the poem--suggests that it is an ideal love which must be communicated to "Loves Divines". Or again, the lovers are "loves clergie" while the love is a "faith" which "No schismatique will dare to wound".

The clearest statement on the relationship between the body and the soul is found in "The Extasie", or as it is called in the poem, a "dialogue of one". Again, we will consider it strictly in terms of the ideas it contains. While the poem deals primarily with the unity of the lovers'

souls, there is an increasing emphasis on the importance of the body in achieving this unity. Foreshadowing the opening stanza of "The Canonization" and "The good-morrow", the poem begins with a description of the physical relationship between the lovers. Any image of unity or harmony is achieved through their bodies, not their souls.

Our hands were firmly cimented
 With a fast balme, which thence did spring,
 Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred
 Our eyes, upon one double string;
 So to'entergraft our hands, as yet
 Was all the meanes to make us one,
 And pictures in our eyes to get
 Was all our propagation. (ll. 5-12)

The lines indicate a very harmonious relationship between the lovers at a physical, but not sensual level. One must also note the image of the lovers' eyes which becomes a central image in the most personal love poetry. One recalls Plotinus' definition of Love in which the lovers represent the microcosm of the ultimate macrocosm, the Soul contemplating the Intellectual-Principle.

Love, thus, is ever intent upon that other
 loveliness, and exists to be the medium
 between desire and that object of desire.
 It is the eye of the desirer; by its
 power what loves is enabled to see the
 loved thing.⁷⁹ (III. 5. 2)

Returning to "The Extasie", once this primary unity has been established between the bodies of the lovers, then the

⁷⁹Plotinus, op. cit., I, 56-57.

souls are able to realize their unity. In the next section, (ll. 13-20), the poet imagines their souls attempting to "advance their state" by leaving the bodies of the lovers. The bodies, which are described as "sepulchrall statues", lie still and say nothing. The word "sepulchrall" suggests the body is a depository for the soul and is, in comparison, a relatively dead thing. However, besides the connotation of death is the idea of rebirth which will take place when the soul transcends the body and is united with the soul of the beloved.

The third section of the poem, (ll. 21-28), introduces the notion that one who wishes to understand the language of the souls must be someone who is purified and "by love refin'd". Donne then describes the vision of this "refin'd" person.

He (though he knew not which soule spake,
Because both meant, both spake the same)
Might thence a new concoction take,
And part farre purer then he came.

The statement that both souls speak and mean the same is the first explicit indication that a unity of souls has been achieved. With this newly established unity, the lovers are able to see the true nature of their relationship.

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

True love, then, is not the physical attraction and relationship, but a union of souls.

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

The idea of the souls becoming one echoes the Platonic concept of unity and suggests man's desire to realize the ultimate unity, The One. Plotinus states:

so long as the attention is upon the visible form, love has not entered: when from that outward form the lover elaborates within himself, in his own partless soul, an immaterial image, then it is that love is born, then the lover longs for the sight of the beloved to make that fading image live again. If he could but learn to look elsewhere, to the more nearly formless, his longing would be for that: his first experience was loving a great luminary by way of some thin gleam from it.⁸⁰ (VI. 7. 33)

The next section of the poem, (ll. 36-48), is introduced by the image of a single plant which because of poor strength, colour, and size is replanted in hope that it will regain its quality. This image is now transferred to the union of souls. Love so intermingles the two souls that the "abler soule" can presumably purify the soul of a person who is not able to transcend his physical limitations. Once this "new soule" has been achieved, it is not subject to change.

⁸⁰Plotinus, op. cit., II, 201.

For, th'Atomies of which we grow,
 Are soules, whom no change can invade.
 (ll. 47-48)

The lines suggest the immortal aspects of the newly achieved unity of souls.

The next section of the poem, (ll. 48-60), the key section, is where Donne attempts to state the relationship between body and soul. The problem is posed in the rhetorical question

But O alas, so long, so farre
 Our bodies why doe wee forbear?
 (ll. 49-50)

The souls state that while related to the body, they are, nevertheless, a distinct entity. They are the "intelligences" housed in the "spheare" of the body. One recalls Plotinus' idea that Matter is without shape until the soul--which possesses the Divine Forms or Ideas--imposes shape upon it. The following lines, however, state that without the bodies, the souls would not have achieved the unity which now exists between them.

We owe them thanks, because they thus,
 Did us, to us, at first convay;
 Yeelded their forces, sense, to us,
 Nor are drosse to us, but allay.
 (ll. 53-56)

While Donne does not dwell on this point, the importance of the body has been established. Without the human bodies and the physical relationship to bring the lovers together, a union of souls would not have been possible. The concept

which underlies Donne's poetic statement is found in the Enneads.

In the absence of body, soul could not have gone forth, since there is no other place to which its nature would allow it to descend. Since go forth it must, it will generate a place for itself; at once body, also, exists.⁸¹ (IV. 3. 9)

The body, then, is not a "drosse" which weakens the soul but an "allay" which provides its basic strength while in the material world. The final two lines of this section emphasize the function of the body.

Soe soule into the soule may flow,
Though it to body first repaire. (ll. 59-60)

While the aim of the soul is to achieve a unity with a like soul, it must first establish a relationship with a physical body.

The attempt to describe the relationship between the body and the soul is continued into the next section of the poem, (ll. 61-68). Here, Donne states that "pure lovers soules" must first "descend / T'affections" before a unity of souls can be achieved. The word "descend" indicates the relative positions of body and soul. The soul is, of course, the more important. However, without the "affections" and "faculties" of the body which bring about the primary unity on a physical level, the soul would remain like a "Prince

⁸¹Plotinus, op. cit., II, 19.

in prison". The word "affections" is used to indicate the strong physical element in this primary relationship between the lovers.

The final section of the poem begins with what is, to some extent, a realization on the part of the souls.

To'our bodies turne wee then, that so
 Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
 Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
 But yet the body is his booke. (ll. 69-72)

The true mystery or ideal relationship is achieved in a union of souls. Before this union can be achieved, however, there must first be a harmony or unity established between the physical lovers. Finally, the idea contained in the last line indicates a harmony between body and soul. The souls state that anyone hearing this "dialogue of one" will see little change in the physical appearance of the lovers. The lines not only suggest a harmony between body and soul, but also the idea that the body is a manifestation of the beauty of the soul.

These poems represent an analysis of concepts which one discovers have been completely integrated into Donne's most personal love poems. Here Donne, consciously or unconsciously, is investigating and formulating his concept of love, and the relationship between body and soul. As we have noted, one also finds imagery in these poems--images of the sun, eyes, circles, and unity or harmony--which is essentially basic Platonic imagery. These images are used

exclusively to characterize the lovers' union. When considered from an objective, critical point of view, these poems are a necessary poetic analysis climaxed by the natural expression of Donne's love achieved in his most personal love poems.

The final group of poems includes: "The good-morrow", "The Sunne Rising", "The Anniversarie", "Song" "Sweetest love, I do not go / For weariness of thee," "A Valediction: forbidding mourning", and "The Canonization." These poems reveal not only Donne in love, but also something about the nature of that love. Nowhere else in the Songs and Sonets does one find a complete fusion of Donne the man, Donne the poet, and the sentiments expressed. There is a sincerity and immediacy about the poems which underlines the intensity of the poet's feelings. And while an objective analysis of their content and construction reveals the conscious hand of the poet, one feels they are a spontaneous attempt to communicate his love to his beloved. A natural extension of the poet's sincerity is the concept of woman as the embodiment of all that man desires. On the human level, she is the natural fulfilment of both the emotion of love and sexual desire--if a fine distinction is permissible. However, this unity and harmony of the lovers which is described

in terms of physical love is the initial step towards a union of the lovers' souls which symbolizes the near divine nature of their love. This union of souls is the symbolic fulfilment of the lovers' desire to achieve union with the Divine, or in Platonic terms, The One. Recalling the Enneads, Plotinus states:

Now everyone recognises that the emotional state for which we make this "Love" responsible rises in souls aspiring to be knit in the closest union with some beautiful object...⁸² (III. 5. 1)

Significantly, the basic image found throughout this group of poems conveys the idea of oneness, unity, and harmony; the lovers in their union becoming the microcosm of the macrocosm, The One. Woman, then, when seen in symbolic terms, represents both fulfilment of emotional love and sexual desire, and the realization of the poet's desire to achieve a form of communion with the Divine which is represented by a union of the lovers' souls. This twofold quest for physical and spiritual fulfilment is reiterated by the language and construction of the poems. There is a direct contrast established between the material world where lovers seek only physical satisfaction and the world within the minds of the lovers once they have realized the underlying spiritual nature of their love. And when the lovers largely reject

⁸²Plotinus, op. cit., I, 53.

the physical world after achieving a union of souls, they are purging their relationship of its initial consciously sexual element and suggesting the immortal quality of their love. The construction of the poems contrasts the material body with the immortal soul. A number open consciously describing physical love, and says Edward Le Comte

A number of the poems begin with a false lead: they appear to be merely about sexual love, but when carefully read prove to have a higher love in mind.⁸³

On one hand, the opening sexual union of the lovers which evolves to a more spiritual union of the lovers' souls is a largely unstated contrast between two concepts of love. Yet on the other hand, the very evolution of the love, which must initially begin with a union on the physical level, indicates the inter-dependence of the body and the soul suggested in "The Extasie." For while there is a rejection of material things and the purely sexual element of their relationship, there is no actual rejection of the physical act of love. Or again, the sexual act not only symbolizes their physical and spiritual unity, but also in "The Canonization" becomes an act of transformation wherein they achieve a sense of immortality. While their love exists in the physical, material world, it is not subject to time or decay. The

⁸³Edward S. Le Comte, op. cit., p. 47.

love, like the lovers, transcends all material, earthly limitations. Or again, the integral relationship between body and soul is underlined by the language of the poet. The language of physical love not only describes the sexual act, and the emotions of the lovers, but also suggests the union of their souls and the vision of Beauty, the spiritual reality which is the Ideal of physical beauty.

In "The good-morrow", one finds the lovers transcending their physical relationship to achieve a union of souls, and an awareness of the immortal nature of their love. The poem begins characteristically with an attention catching rhetorical question,

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we lov'd? (ll. 1-2)

The title, "The good-morrow", and the mention of "one little roome" later in the poem immediately leads one to assume that the lovers have just awakened, the word "lov'd" referring to their physical relationship. After reading through the poem, however, one realizes the ambiguity of the word "lov'd". The first line of the second stanza,

And now good morrow to our waking soules,

indicates a change in the nature of their love. The love at which Donne marvels is not the physical relationship of the lovers, but a new love inherent in the awakening and gradual union of their souls. With this realization, the reader can return to the first stanza where Donne has, in

fact, rejected the more sexual aspects of the lovers' union. The pleasures which created and sustained their sexual love are now considered childish.

were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly?
(ll. 2-3)

Or again, the phrase "all pleasures fancies bee" is, to some extent, the rejection of their physical union as fanciful and unreal when compared to the relationship established by the union of souls. Paradoxically, the physical world of concrete relationships has been rejected as fanciful and a dream, while the abstract union of souls is now considered the ultimate relationship. The final lines of the stanza hint at the Platonic idea of Ideal Beauty which lies behind the outward beauty of the beloved.

If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dreame of thee.
(ll. 6-7)

The words "desir'd," "got," and earlier in the poem, "countrey" with their sexual implications characterize Donne's concept of love before his awakening, and provide a contrast to his realization that outward beauty is only a manifestation of the soul's beauty. This rejected sexual love is similar to the attitude towards woman found in the consciously physical, Ovidian poems which we examined at the beginning of the discussion. In these poems, the sexually conscious poet rejected the ideas of Platonic unity which

are now an inherent part of Donne's love.

The movement from the first to the second stanza symbolizes the evolution of love from the rejected sexual union to the awakening and eventual unity of the lovers' souls.

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

Foreshadowing "The Sunne Rising", and "The Canonization", the realization about the nature of their new love enables them to contract the material world and make "one little roome, an every where." In "The Canonization", the lovers' union, their "hermitage", represents the newly found peace and tranquillity away from the world they have transcended. Donne then contrasts the discovery of the lovers' souls with the discoveries of men who have explored the world, the former being of greater significance. And while explorers travel the world attempting to give it unity on a map, the lovers already possess a unified world, themselves.

Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one. From an awakening of "soules" at the beginning of the stanza, there has been a gradual movement towards their union which is realized in the final line. And while the more sexual element of the relationship was rejected in the first stanza,

the idea of possessing "one world"--an image indicating perhaps the physical body--suggests that union of their bodies is an initial step towards the union of their souls.

This new sense of unity is examined at the beginning of stanza three with a return to the "little roome," and the lovers.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
 And true plain hearts doe in the faces rest,
 Where can we finde two better hemispheares
 Without sharpe North, without declining West?
 (ll. 15-18)

The image of the lover awakens the soul of the beloved, an awakening which is apparent on the face of each. The harmony between them is suggested by their ability to incorporate each other into their eyes. Again the image of geography is introduced; this time, however, related to the lovers' eyes. Their images on each other's eyes are equated to the hemispheres on the explorers' maps; the idea that the lovers could not find "two better hemispheres" suggesting that their union is of far greater value than anything in the material world. They can epitomize the world in their eyes. The material world is of little value or importance to the lovers; they are themselves a world. The final three lines of the stanza underline the unity of their souls.

What ever dyes, was not mixt equally;
 If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
 Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die.
 (ll. 19-21)

True love is an inseparable fusion of two souls in which the

"two loves be one". The phrase "love so alike" suggests the harmony inherent in a union of souls. Finally, the idea that "none can die" echoes the concept of the lovers' immortality which underlies the phoenix image in "The Canonization." The unity of souls, then, which has raised their union from a physical to a spiritual level, is immortal. And while their relationship will continue to have its physical aspects, the awakening of the souls has altered the essential nature of their union.

The lovers' relationship in "The Sunne Rising" is similar to that described at the end of "The good-morrow." Donne suggests the intensity of their love by offering to "warne the world" for the sun whose "age askes ease". The sun symbolizes both the creative energy which generates and sustains life, and time which decays and eventually destroys it. The lovers partake of, and become a microcosm of this creative energy. Echoing "The good-morrow", their awakening is the realization of what lies beneath their ostensibly physical union. The opening rhetorical question,

Must to thy motions lovers seasons run?

is asked with the awareness of themselves as symbolic of all lovers, and therefore beyond the decay of time. With this realization of themselves as the creative, and therefore immortal element of mankind, the lovers answer their own question by belittling the sun which by its nature symbolizes

the seasons, and therefore time and decay.

Love, all alike, no season knowes, nor clyme,
Nor houres, dayes, moneths, which are the rags
of time. (ll. 9-10)

Once the parallel between the sun and the poet has been established, the realization of the macrocosm, the world, and the microcosm, the lovers' bedroom, is only a natural extension. And while the sun creates and sustains the world, the lovers realize that their physical union is the immediate source of life.

Aske for those Kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt heare, All here in one bed lay.
(ll. 19-20)

Similarly, the final stanza reiterates the idea that the lovers symbolize the creative energy of life.

She'is all States, and all Princes, I,
Nothing else is. (ll. 21-22)

The lovers, then, through the physical union of love become the creative life-giving force within their own microcosm, yet drawing their energy ultimately from the sun.

Thou sunne art halfe as happy'as wee,
In that the world's contracted thus;
Thine age askes 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 spheare.
(ll. 25-30)

The focus of attention is upon the lovers not as individuals, but as a union of the two. The microcosm image not only indicates the intensity of their love, but underlines and focuses on the importance of the lovers. The largely

unstated theme is the all-sufficiency of the lovers who are detached from the material world, yet an integral part of life within their own bedroom. Throughout the poem, no reference is made to either as an individual which would suggest they are other than a complete, inseparable union. They exist, and symbolize the creative force of life only as a pair. And within their room, they have created their own world.

One finds similar themes and imagery in "The Anniversarie" which like "The Sunne Rising" opens amid the passing of time, and its inherent decay.

The Sun it selfe, 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,
Onely our love hath no decay;... (ll. 3-7)

Again, the lovers feel detached from the world, the intensity and depth of their love not subject to time. Similarly the third stanza restates the idea of their unity and inviolability.

Who is so safe as wee? where none can doe
Treason to us, except one of us two. (ll. 25-26)

Their love, then, is as permanent and indestructible as their souls which are initially brought together and ultimately freed by the mortal body.

But soules where nothing dwells but love
(All other thoughts being inmates) then shall prove
This, or a love increased there above,
When bodies to their graves, soules from their
graves remove. (ll. 17-20)

The unity and confidence of the lovers that physical death will only free the souls and not end their love underlines their existence in the material world, and their sense of immortality from a love free from earth's inherent decay. And while the physical bodies bring the lovers together, it is the union of souls which brings permanence to their love.

From this discussion, the similarities between these three poems are obvious. The concept of love expressed, the fusion of idea and image which captures the essential quality of this love, the inseparable union of Donne and the lady, and the obviously genuine nature of the expression point to his wife Anne as the lady in the poems. Two poems can be dated to some extent by internal evidence. In "The Sunne Rising", the line

Goe tell Court-huntsmen, that the King will ride
probably refers to a favourite pastime of King James I.

J.B. Leishman comments,

this line, I think we can say with certainty, was written, not only after Donne's marriage in December 1601, not only after the death of Elizabeth [Drury] on 24th March, 1603, but after James I had been on the throne long enough for his passion for hunting to have become, as it did, a topic of both private conversation and public satire.⁸⁴

Similarly in "The Anniversarie", the opening line,

⁸⁴J.B. Leishman, op. cit., p. 183.

All Kings, and all their favorites,
is probable a reference to James I. These poems, then, can probably be dated about 1603 to 1605 and from all indications are addressed to his wife, Anne.

Another two poems have been linked with Anne Donne and were supposedly written to lessen her fears about Donne's trip to the continent with Sir Robert Drury in 1612. The first is "Song" "Sweetest love, I do not goe, / For weariness of thee" which Edward Le Comte believes "She received as a farewell present".⁸⁵ The poem is less intense and vigorous than "The Sunne Rising" or "The Canonization" yet has a meditative quality and a sense of man's transience which underlines the sincerity of the expression. He looks upon his journey as a form of death, but suggests his return by comparing himself to the inevitable sun which "went hence, / And yet is here to day". However, the linking of parting and death which was done in "jest" causes the poet to think on the inability of man to foresee and determine his fate. His realization about the instability and transience of personal relationships brings him to a new awareness his own union. The final stanza indicates her fears for his safety, the unknown element of fate, and the unity and immortal quality of their love.

⁸⁵Edward S. Le Comte, op. cit., p. 135.

Let not thy divining heart
 Forethinke me any ill,
 Destiny may take thy part,
 And may thy feares fulfill;
 But thinke that wee
 Are but turn'd aside to sleepe;
 They who one another keepe
 Alive, ne'r parted bee. (ll. 33-40)

Similarly in "A Valediction: forbidding mourning" one finds a more contemplative Donne comforting his wife at the moment of parting. Characteristically, the ideas and images of Platonic love describe the love between him and Anne.

Ficino's idea that the lovers remain united through their souls even though physically parted becomes the central theme of the poem. However before Donne describes their love, he points to those whose love depends upon continuous physical presence.

Dull sublunary lovers love
 (Whose soule is sense) cannot admit
 Absence, because it doth remove
 Those things which elemented it. (ll. 13-16)

Once the physical lovers have been dismissed, Donne now focuses on the love between him and Anne. The stanzas are familiar, yet must be quoted. The simple diction, the freedom from any thought inversion, and the complete integration of thought, sentiment, and image underline his sincerity. Even the ingenious compass image does not protrude, but remains an integral element of the poem and objectifies not only the lovers, but the essence of the love, itself.

Our two soules therefore, which are one,
 Though I must goe, endure not yet

A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate.

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

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

Such wilt thou be to mee, who must
Like th'other foot, obliquely runne;
Thy firmnes makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begunne.
(ll. 21-36)

Here is perhaps the most complete integration of Platonic ideas and images into Donne's most personal expression of his love. Through their unity of souls, the lovers become a circle, a microcosm of The One. Plotinus states that the natural course of the soul

may be likened to that in which a circle turns not upon some external but on its own centre, the point to which it owes its rise. The soul's movement will be about its source; to this it will hold, poised intent towards that unity to which all souls should move and the divine souls always move, divine in virtue of that movement;...⁸⁶ (VI. 9. 8)

The most familiar and most often discussed major poem of Donne is probably "The Canonization." The basic thematic movement within the poem is from the material world of the friend through the newly discovered world of the lovers

⁸⁶Plotinus, op. cit., II, 247.

to the material world this time seen through the lovers' eyes. This progression becomes more obvious when it is seen in terms of the movement of Donne, himself. Beginning at stanza one where he is chastized by the friend, the poet achieves a union with his beloved in stanza three. By the final stanza, they have become the ideal pattern of true lovers. Significantly, the movement from the physical world to the world of unity within their minds is paralleled by a shift from "I" and "me" (Donne), to "us" (the lovers).

Characteristically, Donne begins the poem describing the world and its values which will be rejected by the lovers. The friend is encouraged to seek wealth and to find a high position--goals which are presumably admired by the friend but of no importance to the poet. The parody of Petrarchan conceits in the following stanza suggests the insincerity of the love relationships in the friend's world.

Alas, alas, who's injur'd by my love?
 What merchants ships have my sighs drown'd?
 Who saies my teares have overflow'd his ground?
 When did my colds a forward spring remove?
 When did the heats which my veines fill
 Adde one more to the plagueie Bill?
(ll. 10-15)

The gradual detachment from, and eventual rejection of this world is a very natural movement towards the unity of the two lovers. The first stanza deals with Donne's defence of his love. His beloved is acknowledged, but not specifically mentioned. The phrases "let me love," and "by my love" which

occur in these stanzas, suggest that a union between the lovers cannot be achieved, or is not sought after when they are restricted by the material world and its values. However, by the end of stanza two, when Donne has scorned and rejected the values of this world, he introduces his beloved in the line "Though she and I do love." The introduction of his beloved draws our attention to the central third stanza where "she and I" become "we" and "us".

Call us what you will, wee are 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. (ll. 19-27)

The central images in the stanza are those of unity and rebirth. While the ostensible unity of the lovers is physical as suggested by the pun on "die," there is also an indication that the souls of the lovers have also become one. The more spiritual nature of their relationship is underlined by the phoenix image, the image of rebirth and immortality. However, it is a rebirth peculiar to these lovers. The idea of unity, and the phrases "one neutrall thing", and "Wee dye and rise the same," suggest a rebirth which retains the essence of their love. The word "neutrall", probably meaning sexless, describes the spiritual union which has evolved from their physical relationship. Clay Hunt says,

...it implies that the lovers have somehow been transfigured by their sexual union so that their relationship has been purged of its specifically sexual character.⁸⁷

The union of the lovers, like the phoenix, is not consumed and destroyed but reborn with new significance. The friend may look upon their union as ultimately doomed, consumed by its own lust. However, the intensity of the love is maintained through a union of souls rather than a physical union.

The word "die," also meaning physical death, and the symbols of rebirth also suggest, to some extent, the idea of Christian death and resurrection. If this parallel is valid, then sexual intercourse is equated with the Christian ideas of death and resurrection giving the physical union of the lovers a religious significance. Through this paradox, Donne suggests that the physical union brings about a union of their souls and ultimately a rebirth from the physical into the spiritual world. The final line of the third stanza, "Mysterious by this love", hints at the spiritual, almost mystical union achieved by the lovers.

After Donne's plea for Canonization as Saints of Love in stanza four, he returns to the friend and the material world in stanza five.

⁸⁷Clay Hunt, Donne's Poetry (New Haven, 1954), p. 77.

And thus invoke us; You whom reverend love
 Made one anothers hermitage;
 You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
 Who did the shole worlds soule contract, and drove
 Into the glasses of your eyes
 So made such mirrors, and such spies,
 That they did all to you epitomize,
 Countries, Townes, Courts: Beg from above
 A patterne of your love! (ll. 37-45)

The material world is now seen in terms of the new relationship established between the lovers. The love between Donne and his beloved is now "reverend", a love which has "Made one anothers hermitage". Again the words "reverend" and "hermitage" underline the religious nature of their union while stressing the essential unity of the lovers. The word "hermitage" contains the idea of peace and tranquillity and provides a contrast between the lovers' relationship which is "peace" and the material world which is "rage".

The final image of unity is the lovers' eyes which, significantly, are mentioned in relation to the physical world. The world and its values which threatened the lovers at the beginning of the poem are now contracted within their eyes. Therefore, says Mr. Hunt,

Each of the lovers, then, is able to
 renounce the world because each sees
 in the microcosm of the beloved the
 world in epitome.⁸⁸

Finally in the last lines, the world is asked to "Beg from

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 83.

above / A patterne" of the lovers' ideal relationship. The final stanza is, to some extent, a prayer which seeks this ideal union from above. Here again, the spiritual nature of the love is reiterated. The word "patterne" is synonymous with the Platonic concept of Ideas or Forms in the mind of The One. Therefore as the world is asked to beg from above, from the Divine, a "patterne" of the lovers' relationship, this union has assumed the position of an Ideal Form. The lovers, then, have transcended their physical relationship, to realize a union of souls which embodies the Ideal.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the relationship described in Donne's most personal love poems. Donne begins in the material world suggesting the physical relationship of the lovers who will eventually achieve a unity of souls. As a result of this unity, they are able to epitomize the material world. This suggests, in part, the spiritual nature of their union. However, it also indicates that the world and the values which have been epitomized and, in one sense, rejected by the lovers, have little or no influence upon their relationship. The concept of Eros suggests that man must deny the physical body and the material world to achieve union with the Divine. This union is symbolized in Donne's most personal love poetry by the union of the lovers' souls. Significantly, Donne modifies the concept of Eros to define the nature of his love. And while

the material world and its values are rejected, there is no rejection of the body, and physical love. The physical union is the necessary first step towards a union of the lovers' souls. Finally, through this union of souls, the material world paradoxically takes on an air of unreality. The lovers transcend this world to achieve a more ideal union. Their new relationship is described as immortal, beyond change.

From this discussion of the Songs and Sonets one can see not only the varied use of traditional literary and philosophical concepts but the constantly changing relationship between Donne and his poetry. The groupings and their arrangement underline the various concepts of love and attitudes towards woman which echo distinct literary antecedents and suggest different stages in Donne's emotional and intellectual maturity. The poems range from the conscious celebration of sexual love with woman strictly as the object of desire to the love poems where one finds a complete fusion of the physical and spiritual aspects of love symbolized by the lovers' union. The first group represent a complete rejection of the courtly love and Petrarchan adoration of woman, and a denial of any spiritual element in the relationship. There is a complete denial of

the Platonic concept of unity which underlies the love described in Donne's most personal love poetry. However, the reaction against the adoration of woman, the standards of Christian morality, and the obvious libertine expression of a blatantly sexual love should be considered a reaction against the Petrarchan love poetry of the 1590-1600 period rather than an actual expression of Donne's beliefs and actions. The rejection of Petrarchan adoration by Ovidian desire suggests the wit of Donne the poet rather than the experiences of Donne the man. On the other hand, Donne modifies the plaint of the rejected Petrarchan and courtly lover to describe the relationship found in the poems which are thought to be addressed to Mrs. Herbert and Lucy, Countess of Bedford. However, the poems are not the conventional lover's plaint but a witty attack on woman's constant inconstancy tempered with oblique hints of sexual desire. Finally in Donne's most personal love poems the concepts and images of Christian Platonism have been incorporated into his expression of love. In these poems, the literary conventions associated with Ovid, courtly love, and Petrarchan love poetry have been rejected for a complete and inseparable union between the lovers. The constantly changing relationship between Donne and his poetry, then, must be determined by his acceptance or denial of traditional literary and philosophical concepts in relation to the attitude towards

love and woman described in each poem. For Donne has incorporated both the literary and philosophical love traditions into his poetry, adapting them until they became either a personal expression of his own love, or a rejection of the love described in the often stylized, non-personal love poetry of his day. The Songs and Sonets represent the love poetry of an individual who adopts conventionality only to reject it, and modifies and infuses traditional concepts with new meaning by the personal expression of his love.

IV

APPENDIX A

The Countess of Bedford and Mrs. Magdalen Herbert

A brief note must be made about Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford and Mrs. Magdalen Herbert and their little known relationship with Donne and the seven poems which we have just examined. If the poems were written between 1607 and 1612 as is generally thought, then perhaps their wit and ironic, mock-serious tone stem from Donne's liberation from poverty in 1608-1609. At that time, Sir George More settled £800 a year on his daughter and as a result says Edmund Gosse,

...the very first symptom of the removal of indigence is that Donne re-enters that society with which, since his marriage, he had kept up but a shadowy connection....

The great ladies now, once more, pass into Donne's life, those gracious and dignified women of quality whom he had charmed long ago in the Lord Keeper's household, and who had continued to have him in their minds.⁸⁹

To what extent Mr. Gosse is correct it is difficult to say. At times, one suspects that his imagination has coloured the facts. However, late in 1608 Donne met Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford and formed what was to become a close

⁸⁹Edmund Gosse, The Life and Letters of John Donne (London, 1899), I, 209..

personal friendship. Needless to say, one can only suggest possible motives for Donne's interest in Lucy Russell. At this time he was seeking a government position and would need a friend at Court. Perhaps he thought that one of the Queen's closest friends, the Countess of Bedford, would speak on his behalf. G.P.V. Akrigg states:

If Queen Anne had for the first lady of her bedchamber the Scottish Mistress Drummond, she had for her closest confidant Lucy Russell, the English Countess of Bedford.⁹⁰

However, Donne's attempts to become a Secretary in Ireland, (1608), and Secretary in Virginia, (1609), were unsuccessful. His hopes for an influential friend at Court seem to have been frustrated. Her social position and interest in poetry, on the other hand, brought him into contact with nobility, and his fellow poets. At Twickenham she entertained a number of poets including Daniel and Drayton, and was known as the "Favourite of the Muses".⁹¹ In what is today a rather dated passage, Edmund Gosse attempts to suggest the nature of their relationship from Donne's letters to her.

The language of Donne in speaking of and to the Countess of Bedford is unique in his writings. He was never shy or put out of countenance by social obstacles.... He adores, and not from a distance, yet

⁹⁰G.P.V. Akrigg, Jacobean Pageant (Cambridge Mass., 1962), p. 54.

⁹¹Edmund Gosse, op. cit., I, 212.

upon his knees. There is always the little touch of awe, of sacred wonder, which keeps his impassioned addresses dignified and pure. He worships her; his heart is beating in his hands; but he never forgets that this divine and crystal creature is not made for earthly love.⁹²

She became Donne's patron and according to Mr. Gosse was one of the main reasons for his renewed interest in poetry. Yet the exact nature of their relationship is not known.

Another probable relationship described in the poems is that between Donne and Mrs. Magdalen Herbert whom he began corresponding with in 1607. Among the poems he sent her was

seven linked sonnets entitled "La Corona," besides a dedicatory sonnet comparing her to St. Mary Magdalen. This group he was careful to send out on St. Mary Magdalen's day, "this good day," in July of 1607--or so Walton, affixing perhaps too early a date, would have us believe.⁹³

A passage from a letter dated 1607 is worth quoting.

But my not coming was excusable, because earnest business detained me; and my coming this day is by the example of your St. Mary Magdalen, who rose early upon Sunday to seek that which she loved most; and so did I. And, from her and myself, I return such thanks as are due to one to whom we owe all the good opinion that they whom we need most have of us.⁹⁴

⁹²Ibid., I, 211.

⁹³Edward S. Le Comte, op. cit., p. 104.

⁹⁴John Donne, letter to Mrs. Magdalen Herbert, July 11, 1607, as cited in Edmund Gosse, op. cit., I, 167.

Here, one sees that Donne had linked together the names Mary Magdalen and Magdalen Herbert. The passage is typical of the whole letter which indicates the kindness of Mrs. Herbert. The "she" and "her" presumably refer to Donne's wife whom he appears to love very much. Admittedly this letter was written soon after he met her and so it is almost impossible to determine the exact nature of their relationship.

It is not difficult to imagine a close relationship, presumably an intellectual one, being formed between Donne and the Countess of Bedford or Mrs. Herbert. And while they must be mentioned, their importance must not be stressed. One must approach the poetry ready to note any probable references, but not with the preconceived idea that because a poem describes a non-physical relationship, the lady must be one of these ladies.

V

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