

JOHN DONNE: THE MITCHAM YEARS, 1606-1611

11:00:00

JOHN DONNE: THE MITCHAM YEARS, 1606-1611

BY

JENNIFER REYNOLDS TAYLOR, B.A.

A Thesis  
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies  
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree  
Master of Arts

McMaster University

October, 1973

© Jennifer Reynolds Taylor, 1973

MASTER OF ARTS (1973)  
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY  
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: John Donne: The Mitcham Years, 1606-1611

AUTHOR: Jennifer Reynolds Taylor, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: A. W. Brink

NUMBER OF PAGES: v, 137

## ABSTRACT

This thesis represents an attempt to define the nature of the intense personal crisis Donne suffered in the Mitcham years, 1606-1611. Interpreted as a modified spiritual autobiography, the poetry written in these years reflects the crisis itself and the ensuing search for resolution of personal conflicts.

The years 1607-1609 were a period of transition: the earliest divine poems reflect an attempted self-accommodation to formal religious devotion, while the late love lyrics reveal the disillusion accompanying the failure of sustained human relation in love of woman. Significant in this period is Donne's intense personal relationship with Lucy, Countess of Bedford. The collapse of this relationship in 1609 contributed to a crisis compounded of poverty, illness, and profound dejection of spirit. Donne's sense of inner incompleteness, the need for the security and assurance of a sustaining personal relation, is poignantly expressed in the late lyrics and in the 'Holy Sonnets': love of woman and love of God appear as opposite foci in the search for a sufficient personal object of devotion.

In the 'Holy Sonnets' renewed consciousness of repressed guilt and fear reinforces the urgency of this search. The resolution was both personal and religious: Donne would always live in fear, but henceforth fear tempered by recognition of an acceptance by a loving father in God. The self-renewal achieved with the resolution of the 1609 crisis represents an impressive human accomplishment. The 'Holy Sonnets' themselves illustrate the reparative function of poetry in achieving a fundamental redirection and reorganization of the self.

To the members of the Graduate Studies Committee of the Department, who allowed me an inordinate amount of time for the completion of this thesis, and especially to Dr. Shrive and Dr. Duncan, my thanks.

To Carol Robinson and Sheila Day, for their work in typing and proofreading, my thanks.

To E.A.T., F.M.T., D.E.C., for debts of love and friendship too numerous to be remembered, my warmest thanks.

To A.W.B., to whose encouragement and patience I owe all that is best in this study, my deepest appreciation.

JRT

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND	
I JOHN DONNE: LIFE AND WORKS	3
II THE CRISIS OF THE MITCHAM YEARS	12
III DONNE AND THE COUNTESS OF BEDFORD	27
CHAPTER TWO: POEMS OF TRANSITION	45
CHAPTER THREE: THE 'HOLY SONNETS'	
I MEDITATIVE STRUCTURE AND THE SEQUENCE OF THE 'HOLY SONNETS'	76
II A READING OF THE 'HOLY SONNETS'	88
III DONNE AND GOD THE FATHER	117
CONCLUSION	130
BIBLIOGRAPHY	136

## INTRODUCTION

With the critical and textual work of Helen Gardner in her edition of The Divine Poems in 1952, and biographical evidence presented by R. C. Bald in his life of Donne in 1970, it is now generally accepted that a majority of the 'Holy Sonnets', as well as the earlier divine poems and the late lyrics of disillusion in love, were written in the years Donne lived with his growing family at Mitcham.

For a majority of readers of Donne, interest centers on the great love lyrics in which an intensely realized personal voice celebrates the life-affirming qualities of mutual human love. Religious poetry is intrinsically more difficult to approach with sympathy, particularly when that poetry reflects the search for resolution of intense personal distress in a personal relationship with God. Yet the interpretation of the 'Holy Sonnets' seems central to an understanding of Donne. It is no longer possible to view Donne's ordination in 1615 as the definitive watershed of life experience separating Jack and the Doctor, nor to see Donne quite so simply, as Walton did, and as no doubt Donne wished to be seen, as the Augustine of seventeenth-century England.

The Mitcham years, 1606-1611, were a period of destitution and physical illness during which Donne's constitutional melancholy intensified into a deep dejection of spirits. The 'Holy Sonnets' were written in this period when poverty, illness, and despair contributed to a reduction of spirit which brought Donne near to suicide. The overall movement of spirit reflected in the 'Holy Sonnets' is from distrust of self and fear

of God toward acceptance of the presence and personal efficacy of God's merciful love.

Essential to an understanding of the 'Holy Sonnets' is an examination of their relation to Donne's state of mind and concerns of spirit in the Mitcham years. Critical effort must now turn to an attempt to define the nature of the crisis Donne suffered in the Mitcham years, its reflection in works written during this period, and the resolution of inner conflict to which these works themselves contributed. It is to this most fascinating and compelling of problems in Donne scholarship that the present study is addressed.



## CHAPTER ONE: BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

## I

JOHN DONNE: LIFE AND WORKS

The foundation for an understanding of the interrelation of Donne's life and work lies in a combination of biography with the poetry considered as a modified spiritual autobiography. Poems and groups of poems relate directly to events or persons in Donne's life, or more generally reflect his inner life in terms of his changing concerns of spirit.

One approach to such an understanding is to begin with Satire III, in which the central image is a metaphor for life development:

On a huge hill,  
Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will  
Reach her, about must, and about must goe;  
And what th'hills suddennes resists, winne so;  
Yet strive so, that before age, deaths twilight,<sup>1</sup>  
Thy Soule rest, for none can worke in that night.

Life is seen as linear sequence and circular prevarication, through 'striving' toward 'rest': personal life becomes a search for a relational center which will not fail.

It is important to recognize with Grierson that "It was not often in the sixteenth or seventeenth century that a completely emancipated and critical attitude on religious, not philosophical, questions was expressed with such entire frankness and seriousness",<sup>2</sup> and to remember that Satire III which reveals this attitude was contemporaneous with the Elegies and the earliest secular verse.<sup>3</sup> It is possible to see in this juxtaposition of interests an early indication of Donne's own life pattern. The spiritual pilgrimage toward ultimate truth is also a metaphor for the personal search

for an ideal object, an outer referent for inner need. His life presented two alternatives: devotion to woman and devotion to God. One must be cancelled out; at this point in time, he expects to have both. In his search for a devotional center to fill the inner void, woman becomes conflated with God. The early poems reflect an erotic quest focusing on woman as ideal object: Satire III indicates that devotion to God was the other approach which Donne held in reserve, should his secular devotion fail. "Truth" is a female figure, yet the poem moves away from this personified abstraction toward an affirmation of the efficacy of "God himselfe to trust": Satire III thus provides for the transition effected much later from devotion to a female figure to devotion to a male deity.

The early poems, those written before 1601,<sup>4</sup> are intensely dramatic, often highly ironic, characterized by agile wit and a certain defensive role-playing. This early period includes the Elegies, and others identified as the 'promiscuity' poems: for example, "Goe, and catche a falling starre", "The Indifferent", "Communitie", "Confined Love". Also of this period are the witty seduction pieces, "The Prohibition", "The Flea", "The Dream", and early poems of unrequited love such as "The Broken Heart", "The Paradox", and "The Triple Fool". Most are poems of profligacy and misogyny, reflecting distrust of woman and of himself. They are cynical, completely unidealized and almost devoid of sentiment in their depiction of the love relationship, and frequently anti-feminine. In these early poems Donne proceeds with little self-knowledge and discovers himself and the truths of his situation through the poetry. The most notable feature of his self-presentation in these poems is the absence of any stability in the self or in relationship with woman. He defines himself in defining what he desires: that is, his attitude to woman is

a statement about himself. In turn, he berates inconstancy in woman, revels in his own sexual license, scorns fidelity to another lover, and attacks constancy through attempted seduction. His declarations of sexual and emotional independence reflect his distrust of woman and his fears of his own emotional incapacity. His insecurity is projected as defiant masculinity. He demands freedom because he fears his own inability to achieve a sustained emotional relationship; that incapacity in himself he projects as incapacity in woman. The volatile masculine persona is thus a 'mask' for personal vulnerability.

The poems of mutual and contented love which are usually identified with the years immediately following Donne's marriage in 1601 reflect a development toward emotional maturity, as his ambivalence about woman and about relationship itself is temporarily resolved. Intense idealization of relationship to woman combines with a certain realism of personal feeling. In his adoration, the ideal woman is conflated with God. Sex as ritual represents the consummation of the love religion; in "The Canonization" he and the beloved become votive objects for other less perfect lovers. Complete human love provides personal salvation from a limbo of vanity, detachment and fear, a secular redemption. He sees their miraculous union as a perfect circle of being, their relationship as a world center.<sup>5</sup>

"The Good-morrow" is an aubade of achieved union, presenting a far less voluble persona than that of the 'promiscuity' poems. In this poem, "The Sunne Rising" and "The Anniversarie", Donne achieves a true revelation of the possibilities of human love. His is the rare celebratory voice trumpeting not conquest but achieved union and mutual love. The relationship he celebrates represents the only true sense of mutuality

Donne ever achieved, and lends a degree of emotional stability not previously evident in the projected personality. Yet within these poems of positive love vision Donne provides for the possibility of the failure of the love religion: even at the center of a personally redeeming love he is afflicted with endemic distrust, of himself, of woman, of change and time. In "The Good-morrow", a suspicion of inconstancy: "If our two loves be one, or, thou and I/Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die"; in "The Anniversarie", an explicit fear of betrayal which is not faced but avoided: "Who is so safe as wee? where none can doe/Treason to us, except one of us two./True and false feares let us refrain";<sup>6</sup> these represent a defensive reaction, as he prepares himself for later failure. In "The Sunne Rising" and "The Canonization" love is a stronghold against the displeasure of the outside world. Donne is hyperbolic in his defense of their mutuality as a celebration of life itself, and vituperative in his attack against the interference of the material world. An important element in these poems is that the persona is looking outward defensively: human relationship becomes an exclusive enclosure, a protective confine of womb-like security. Yet there remains the possibility that this earthly paradise will be undermined from within: distrust and fear are never entirely overcome. 'Perfect love' is known to be impossible, or at least recognized as flawed. Following the first great fervour of love union, there is a recognition that human reality includes the possibility of change if not decline: "Where can we find two better hemispheares/Without sharpe North, without declining West?" becomes "If our loves faint, and westwardly decline".<sup>7</sup> However, this recognition is advanced in a tone neither bitter nor reproachful, as he reaches a more mature understanding of the inevitability of change.

Donne's marriage in 1601 resulted in social disgrace and professional disaster. For the first five years, the needs of his small family, growing debts, and lack of employment were offset by the charity of friends and relatives; after 1606, when he moved to a small house at Mitcham, Donne suffered a period of destitution, illness and despair. Yet this was also a period of increased literary activity. In 1607, Donne produced some of the prose Problems, the "La Corona" sonnets, the sonnet to Mrs. Herbert, of St. Mary Magdalen, probably "The Crosse", and early verse letters; in 1608, "A Litanie", "Upon the Annunciation and Passion", and the prose treatise Biathanatos; in 1609, sixteen of the nineteen 'Holy Sonnets', possibly the late love lyrics,<sup>8</sup> and Pseudo-Martyr, published January 1610; in 1610, Ignatius his Conclave. During the same period, Donne made numerous attempts to find employment: in June 1607, he sought the assistance of William Fowler, secretary to Queen Anne, to obtain a place in the Queen's household; in November 1608, he hoped to succeed Sir Geoffrey Fenton to a secretaryship in Ireland; in February 1608/9, he wished to be appointed secretary to the Virginia company.<sup>9</sup> Doubtless there were other attempts now unknown, all of which proved unavailing. Moreover, Donne's letters indicate his growing interest in the religious controversies raging in England. Thomas Morton, later Bishop of Durham, was distinguishing himself in the war of pamphlets as a learned and temperate controversialist: he and Donne were friends if not colleagues in controversy. In 1607, when Morton was created Dean of Gloucester, he offered Donne a benefice and encouraged him to enter the Church. If Donne was employed by Morton as an assistant in the preparation of his controversial works, though Bald seriously doubts it, the term of such employment was most likely to have been during these same years, 1606-1610,<sup>10</sup> preceding Donne's own

involvement in the religious controversies.

In the first part of the Mitcham period, between 1606 and the end of 1609, Donne suffered an intense personal crisis compounded of many elements: extreme poverty, recurrent illness, lack of employment or valid life-direction, intense dejection of spirits, despair. Poems which chronicle the failure of the love religion, his sense of self-as-nothing evident in letters and poems, and persistent thoughts of suicide indicate that Donne was approaching an existential state of nihilism and alienation. Guilt for 'sin' and for failure of human relation culminated in self-distrust, intense despondency and despair. Desire for death and the next life was set against fear of physical death itself and a search for a new life-center. Donne sought that new center in personal relationships, for example his intimate friendships with Lucy Countess of Bedford and Mrs. Herbert. It is possible that Donne saw in these two ladies appropriate emblems of two ideal feminine figures, the younger woman as ideal love, the older woman as motherly affection. Poems usually associated with these ladies reflect the failure of relation to a female figure to provide needed stability, and Donne's final disillusion with the love religion. In "The Funeral" and "The Relique" it is important that the persona speaks from death, that the love religion is imaged as past and ultimately unavailing. In "The Funeral" the tone is still reproachful, vituperative, as he still believes in the idealization of woman which he expected would suffice as a relational center. In "The Relique" his mood is tempered by the realization that the idealization itself is in the past; the implication is that he is freed by his disillusion to search elsewhere for a sustaining relational center. Thus too "Twicknam Garden" chronicles within itself the disintegration of

the love religion. The garden changes from an earthly paradise of spring-time and renewal to a personal hell of winter and spiritual death. To a degree the poem is self-pitying, as he still places the responsibility for his unhappiness at the failure of love on the woman; yet he admits he is himself the agent of the change -- "I have the serpent brought" -- and the poem provides a limited resolution in that he becomes a votive object for other lovers. "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies day" laments the 'death' of a saint in the religion of love. This 'death' could represent her rejection of him and thus the death of their relationship, as much as the actual death of the beloved. The metaphoric tension between grief and a sense of nothingness enclosing the self, and earthly renewal in the spring is a secular equivalent of Christ's agony in the garden; so too the devotee in love's religion sanctifies himself to accept a new life-direction as the poem closes.

The failure of the love religion to provide emotional security more than temporarily forced Donne to search elsewhere for a relational center which would not fail. In the earliest divine poems, his need for a devotional object shifts toward relation to a masculine God: this search underlies the formal and ritual structure of "La Corona" and "A Litanie". The 'Holy Sonnets' reflect the beginning of a regenerative phase. Purgatorial and confessional aspects reflect a need to enclose and then transcend the self. The sonnets express the intense spiritual agony of his search for accommodation in religious devotion, the phases of upheaval -- self-blame, self-distrust, self-castigation for sinfulness; fear of death, distrust of God, fear of rejection -- in his approach to resolution of his inner conflicts. The 'Holy Sonnets' are remarkable for the incredible formal

control brought to bear on lacerating self-examination and tortured self-presentation. The sonnet form and available religious metaphor combine with a certain depressive candour in Donne's will to resolution. In the movement toward personal regeneration, the 'Holy Sonnets' are themselves a remaking process: locating the ultimate center in God, Donne appeals for healing, for reattachment, for possession by the force of primal unity which is God.

In the latter part of the Mitcham period, 1610-11, this personal accommodation becomes a more formal commitment to the Anglican position and to the possibility of accepting a life within the Church. Pseudo-Martyr is violently anti-Jesuit if not anti-Catholic, and represents Donne's final renunciation of his personal background: in the preface Donne for the first time firmly acknowledges having reached accommodation within the established Church. The Anniversaries represent the inverse movement: as in the prose works he divests himself of his Catholic heritage, so in these poems he releases himself from devotion to an idealized female figure.

The works which followed Donne's ordination, the Devotions, the late "Hymnes", and the Sermons are all essentially meditations on the central theme of death and dying well. They reveal a penitential submissiveness to the will of God which dispels remaining fears, and a modulation toward peace of mind in the absence of strident self-laceration. Even then, however, the fear of rejection recurs: in the Sermons, where hell is most often described as an eternity of deprivation and exclusion from the presence and sight of God; and in the "Hymne to God the Father", only the assurance of forgiveness contained in the promise to Abraham,



"Swear by thy selfe", will suffice to countervail his remaining fears.

Only in the Sermons did Donne ever achieve that vision of divine love characteristic of deep faith:

The contemplation of God, and heaven, is a kinde of buriall, and Sepulchre, and rest of the soule; and in this death of rapture, and extasie; in this death of the Contemplation of my interest in my Saviour, I shall finde my self, and all my sins enterred, and entombed in his wounds, and like a Lily in Paradise, out of red earth, I shall see my soule rise out of his blade, in a candor, and in an innocence, contracted there, acceptable in the sight of his Father.<sup>11</sup>

As in the divine poems where it is attempted, that vision when achieved is relational:

It was no longer sufficient to feel and to declare that this world was vanity -- he must now try to establish some permanent relationship with the unseen world in the light of which this world is to be judged. It was his desire and his endeavour to establish so close a relationship with that other world that he might feel habitually, as he had felt of the world which he and his wife had created in earlier years, that nothing else was; to establish with God a relationship analogous to that. . . . But this peace, this security, seems only very seldom to have been granted him.<sup>12</sup>

Following his ordination and the death of his wife, Donne consciously dedicated himself to his role in the Church and a life in God. For Donne the only possible solution to sexual ambivalence, endemic depression and self-distrust was in an intense personal relationship with a masculine God in which he achieved a security absent since earliest childhood. God provided both authority and affection: loving acceptance finally removed both guilt and fear.

## II

THE CRISIS OF THE MITCHAM YEARS

The sense of fascinating complexity in Donne's life during the Mitcham period has its source in the juxtaposition of his continuing physical illness and profound personal distress with an incredible literary productivity. It is important first to examine the nature of the personal crisis Donne suffered in these years, and then to analyze the poems which were both a product of that crisis in its various stages and a method of approaching its resolution.

The evidence concerning Donne's state of mind, his physical illness and mental distress, comes entirely from Donne's own analysis and self-presentation in his letters. Those who are addicted to correspondence as Donne was usually have one especially close friend with whom they share open and honest communication: for Donne, that friend was Sir Henry Goodyer. Early in their life-long friendship they agreed to maintain a weekly exchange of letters. Examples from the surprising number of these letters which survive, arranged according to their probable date of composition, show Donne revealing his physical condition, his personal distress, and his concerns of spirit in an entirely candid if controlled self-presentation.

Donne's reference to his composition of "A Litanie" would date the following letter, in accordance with Gardner's dating of the poem, in late summer of 1608.<sup>13</sup> The exact nature of Donne's illness is unknown, though he describes his symptoms in some detail. Without doubt, his illness contributed to the tone of melancholy resignation with which this first letter concludes:

This letter hath more merit than one of more diligence, for I wrote it in my bed, and with much pain. I have occasion to sit late some nights in my study (which your books make a pretty library), and now I find that that room hath a wholesome emblematic use; for having under it a vault, I make that promise me, that I shall die reading, since my book and a grave are so near. But it hath another unwholesomness, that by raw vapours rising from thence (for I can impute it to nothing else), I have contracted a sickness which I cannot name nor describe. For it hath so much of a continual cramp, that it wrests the sinews, so much of a tetane, that it withdraws and pulls the mouth, and so much of the gout (which they whose counsel I use, say it is) that it is not like to be cured, though I am too hasty in three days to pronounce it.

. . . when I humbly thank God, I ask and have His comfort of sadder meditations; I do not condemn in myself, that I have given my wit such evaporations as those, if they be free from profaneness or obscene provocations.

Sir, you would pity me if you saw me write, and therefore will pardon me if I write no more: my pain hath drawn my head so much awry, and holds it so, that mine eye cannot follow mine hand. I receive you therefore into my prayers with mine own weary soul and commend myself to yours. I doubt not but next week I shall be good news to you, for I have mending or dying on my side, which is two to one. If I continue thus, I shall have comfort in this, that my B. Saviour, exercising His justice upon my two worldly parts, my fortune and body, reserves all his mercy for that which best tastes it and most needs it, my soul. I profess to you truly, that my loathness to give over now, seems to myself an ill sign that I shall write no more.<sup>14</sup>

His effort to redirect his mental energies from 'witty evaporations' toward "sadder meditations" is again evident in a letter probably also of 1608. Donne obviously tried to conceal from his poor wife the truth of his dejection of spirits, while revealing to Goodyer the gathering force of his depression:

But I write from the fireside in my parlour, and in the noise of three gamesome children; and by the side of her, whom because I have transplanted into a wretched fortune, I must labour to disguise that from her by all such honest devices, as giving her my company and discourse;

therefore I steal from her all the time which I give this letter, and it is therefore that I take so short a list, and gallop so fast over it. I have not been out of my house since I received your packet.

As I have much quenched my senses and disused my body from pleasure, and so tried how I can endure to be mine own grave, so I try now how I can suffer a prison. And since it is but to build one wall more about our soul, she is still in her own centre, how many circumferences soever fortune or our own perverseness cast about her. I would I could as well entreat her to go out, as she knows whither to go.<sup>15</sup>

A letter from the spring of the same year reveals Donne's habit of profound self-examination. Here, he investigates his mental distress in a general way, and elucidates in some detail his alternations of mood between melancholy and conviviality:

If I knew that I were ill, I were well; for we consist of three parts, a soul, and body, and mind: which I call those thoughts and affections, and passions, which neither soul nor body hath alone, but have been begotten by their communication, as music results out of our breath and a cornet.

And of all these the diseases are cures, if they be known. Of our soul's sicknesses, which are sins, the knowledge is to acknowledge, and that is her physic, in which we are not dieted by drams and scruples, for we cannot take too much. Of our body's infirmities, though our knowledge be partly ab extrinseco, from the opinion of the physician, and that the subject and matter be flexible and various, yet their rules are certain, and if the matter be rightly applied to the rule, our knowledge thereof is also certain.

But, of the diseases of the mind there is no criterion, no canon, no rule; for our own taste and apprehension and interpretation should be the judge, and that is the disease itself. Therefore sometimes when I find myself transported with jollity and love of company, I hang leads at my heels, and reduce to my thoughts my fortunes, my years, the duties of a man, of a friend, of a husband, of a father, and all the incumbencies of a family; when sadness dejects me, either I countermine it with another sadness, or I kindle light squibs about me again, and fly into sportfulness and company: and I find ever after all, that I am like an exorcist, which had long laboured about one, which at last appears to have the mother, that I still

mistake my disease.<sup>16</sup>

It is interesting that Donne, in understanding his own condition, distinguishes so carefully between sicknesses of the soul and diseases of the mind, and acknowledges that it is the latter under which he suffers.

Later in 1608, Donne wrote "from my Hospital at Mitcham" on August 10th to apologize for delaying a reply. The desperation of his family's situation, and his own inability to alleviate their distress are partially masked by a vaguely disquieting detachment which borders on a macabre lack of seriousness:

And the reason why I did not send an answer to your last week's letter was because it then found me under too great a sadness, and at present it is thus with me. There is no one person but myself well of my family; I have already lost half a child, and with that mischance of hers, my wife is fallen into such a discomposure as would afflict her too extremely, but that the sickness of all her other children stupefies her; of one of which, in good faith, I have not much hope; and these meet with a fortune so ill provided for physic and such relief, that if God should ease us with burials, I know not how to perform even that: but I flatter myself with this hope that I am dying too; for I cannot waste faster than by such griefs.<sup>17</sup>

There is a different form of detachment evident in the dignified examination of his deepest concerns and of his past life which occupies Donne in the next letter:

Two of the most precious things which God hath afforded us here, for the agony and exercise of our sense and spirit, which are a thirst and inhiation after the next life, and a frequency of prayer and meditation in this, are often envenomed and putrified, and stray into a corrupt disease; . . . . With the first of these I have often suspected myself to be overtaken, which is with a desire of the next life; which though I know it is not merely out of a weariness of this, because I had the same desires when I went with the tide, and enjoyed fairer hopes than now; yet I doubt not worldly encumbrances have

increased it. I would not that death should take me asleep. I would not have him merely seize me, and only declare me to be dead, but win me and overcome me.

This I made account that I begun early, when I understood the study of our laws; but was diverted by the worst voluptuousness, which is an hydroptic, immoderate desire of human learning and languages -- beautiful ornaments to great fortunes; but mine needed an occupation, and a course which I thought I entered well into when I submitted myself to such a service, as I thought might (have) employed those poor advantages which I had.

And there I stumbled too, yet I would try again; for to this hour I am nothing, or so little, that I am scarce subject and argument good enough for one of mine own letters; yet I fear, that doth not ever proceed from a good root, that I am so well content to be less, that is dead.<sup>18</sup>

Donne's comments on the recent death of Captain Edmund Whitelocke in a lengthy postscript to the same letter would date it in September 1608:

Perchance his life needed a longer sickness, but a man may go faster and safer when he enjoys that daylight of a clear and sound understanding, than in the night or twilight of an ague or other disease. And the grace of Almighty God doth everything suddenly and hastily, but depart from us, it enlightens us, warms us, heats us, ravishes us, at once. Such a medicine, I fear, his inconsideration needed; and I hope as confidently that he had it. As our soul is infused when it is created, and created when it is infused, so at her going out, God's mercy is had by asking, and that is asked by having.<sup>19</sup>

These letters reflect the deepening seriousness of Donne's concerns. His admission in this letter of his preoccupation with the idea of suicide echoes his statement in the preface to Biathanatos, which was composed about this time:

I have often such a sickely inclination. And, whether it be, because I had my first breeding and conversation with men of a suppressed and afflicted Religion, accustomed to the despite of death, and hungry of an imagin'd Martyrdome; Or that the common Enemie find that doore worst locked aganst him in mee; Or that

there bee a perplexitie and flexibility in the doctrine itselfe; Or because my Conscience ever assures me, that no rebellious grudging at Gods gifts, nor other sinfull concurrence accompanies these thoughts in me, or that a brave scorn, or that a faint cowardlinesse beget it, whensoever any affliction assailes me, mee thinks I have the keyes of my prison in mine owne hand, and no remedy presents itselfe so soone to my heart, as mine own sword.<sup>20</sup>

The difference in station and fortune which separated Goodyer and Donne never roused Donne's envy. In the following letter he contrasts their life-styles with elaborate details of intellectual ingenuity and metaphor which still do not obscure his genuine feeling for his friend, and his obvious resolute good humour in face of continued misfortune:

To your life of variety nothing is old, nor new to mine; and as to that life all stickings and hesitations seem stupid and stony, so to this, all fluid slipperinesses and transitory migrations seem giddy and feathery. In that life one is ever in the porch or postern, going in or out, never within his house himself: it is a garment made of remnants, a life ravelled out into ends, a line discontinued, and a number of small wretched points, useless, because they concur not: a life built of past and future, not proposing any constant present; they have more pleasures than we, but not more pleasure; they joy oftener, we longer; and no man but of so much understanding as may deliver him from being a fool, would change with a madman, which had a better proportion of wit in his often lucidis.

. . . but neither of our lives are in such extremes; for you living at Court without ambition, which would burn you, or envy, which would divest others, live in the sun, not in the fire: and I which live in the country without stupefying, am not in darkness, but in shadow, which is not no light, but a pallid, waterish, and diluted one.

. . . But truly wheresoever we are, if we can but tell ourselves truly what and where we would be, we may make any state and place such; for we are so composed that if abundance or glory scorch and melt us, we have an earthly cave, our bodies, to go into by consideration and cool ourselves; and if we be frozen, and contracted with lower and dark fortunes, we have within us a torch, a soul, lighter and warmer than any without: we are therefore our own umbrellas and our own suns.<sup>21</sup>

Donne's endemic depression was never entirely alleviated, his concerns of spirit were not yet completely resolved, and he was plagued for the rest of his life by recurrent debilitating illnesses: yet, by the end of 1609 Donne had passed the worst point of his immediate misfortunes. In letters of 1609 and 1610 Donne informs Goodyer of his interest and involvement in the controversies raging between Protestant and Catholic, centering on the Oath of Allegiance. A lengthy letter explains Donne's objections to An Answer to a Catholic Englishman written by William Marlow, the Bishop of Lincoln. Donne trusts his friend not to be "easily scandalized" by his entirely negative evaluation,

that the book is full of falsifications in words and in sense, and of falsehoods in matter of fact, and of inconsequent and unscholarlike arguings, and of relinquishing the King, in many points of defence, and of contradiction of himself, and of dangerous and suspected doctrine in divinity, and of silly ridiculous triflings, and of extreme flatteries, and of neglecting better and more obvious answers, and of letting slip some enormous advantages which the other gave and he spies not.<sup>22</sup>

Earlier in the same letter there is a revealing parenthesis. Donne writes, "In the main point in question, I think truly there is a perplexity (as far as I see yet), and both sides may be in justice and innocence."<sup>23</sup>

Though Donne was about to engage himself in the controversy on the Anglican side, he yet hesitated to commit himself fully to the Anglican position. Another letter indicates that he was possessed of what was for his time remarkable toleration:

You know I never fettered nor imprisoned the word Religion, not straightening it friarly, ad Religiones factitias (as the Romans call well their orders of Religion), nor immuring it in a Rome, or a Wittemberg, or a Geneva; they are all virtual beams of one Sun, and wheresoever they find clay hearts, they harden them and moulder them into dust; and they entender



and mollify waxen. They are not so contrary as the North and South Poles, and that (?) they are co-natural pieces of one circle. Religion is Christianity, which being too spiritual to be seen by us, doth therefore take an apparent body of good life and works, so salvation requires an honest Christian.<sup>24</sup>

However tolerant he was in his private thinking, the inadequacy of other controversialists, and his sense of his own ability to contribute valuably drew Donne into the fray. This personal involvement in the controversies, or his alleged work assisting Morton, apparently moved him to complete his mental self-accommodation to the Anglican Church. The most concise statement of his exercise of spirit to this end is in his preface to Pseudo-Martyr, published in 1610:

They who have descended so low, as to take knowledge of me and to admit me into their consideration, know well that I used no inordinate haste nor precipitation in binding my conscience to any local religion. I had a longer work to do than many other men, for I was first to blot out certain impressions of the Roman religion, and to wrestle both against the examples and against the reasons by which some hold was taken and some anticipations early laid upon my conscience, both by persons who by nature had a power and superiority over my will, and others who by their learning and good life seemed to me justly to claim an interest for the guiding and rectifying of mine understanding in these matters. And although I apprehended well enough that this irresolution not only retarded my fortune but also bred some scandal, and endangered my spiritual reputation by laying me open to many misinterpretations, yet all these respects did not transport me to any violent and sudden determination till I had, to the measure of my poor wit and judgement, surveyed and digested the whole body of Divinity controverted between ours and the Roman Church. In which search and disquisition, that God which awakened me then, and hath never forsaken me in that industry, as He is the author of that purpose, so is He a witness of this protestation, that I behaved myself, and proceeded therein with humility and diffidence in myself, and by that which by His grace I took to be the ordinary means, which is frequent prayer, and equal and indifferent affections.<sup>25</sup>

In the letters of 1609 and 1610, and in this preface, there is a different tone entirely: calmer, indeed almost resigned. The intensity

remains, but the desperate searching underlined by physical illness and mental distress has given way to at least a measure of assurance. By 1610 much of the questioning is in the past: Donne has accepted the available solution to at least the outward aspects of his difficulty, the 'truth' of the Anglican Church, and perhaps his place in it.

At the close of the nineteenth century Sir Edmund Gosse attempted to present the surviving letters in an intelligible order, and to use them as a basis for a comprehensive biography of Donne. Although Gosse was somewhat too reliant on Walton, and frequently wrong in attempts to date events and times of composition, Grierson's compliment that "there is no higher authority when it comes to the interpretation of Donne's character and mind"<sup>26</sup> was not entirely misplaced, for Gosse obviously felt some essential sympathy with the personality of Donne which many recent commentators, somewhat more detached and scholarly, do not share.

From his awareness of Donne's distress, Gosse developed an idea of the entire progress of Donne's state of mind throughout the Mitcham period:

. . . crisis after crisis brought Donne nearer and nearer to the religious life. His marriage, and the shock to his fortunes produced by it; his secretarial work for Morton; each of his serious attacks of illness; each proof he had of declining physical vitality; brought him nearer and nearer to the state of grace, lowering the material and heightening the spiritual part of him. More or less distinctly he was himself aware of his coldness, aware that what he was willing enough to hold out towards the altar was as yet in no sense a burning sacrifice. And, without question, this self-knowledge was at the base of the long vacillation and delay in adopting the obvious and, at last, entirely inevitable profession of priest.<sup>27</sup>

Gosse recognized that the Mitcham years were marked by ill-health, "grievous depression and poverty", and identified the latter half of 1608 as the time when "this condition reached an almost intolerable climax":<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps, because of Sir Henry Goodyer's misfortunes, certainly because of the cessation of work for Morton, and the persistent illness in Donne's family, doubtless from other causes now obscure to us, the summer and autumn of 1608 formed a period of unmitigated distress at Mitcham. This was the nadir of Donne's life, his point of deepest moral and physical wretchedness.<sup>29</sup>

In considering Donne's treatise Biathanatos, probably written in 1608-9, Gosse wrote in some detail of Donne's state of mind in this desperate period when "the wretchedness of the household at Mitcham reached its climax of sickness and poverty".<sup>30</sup> His comments relate generally to Donne's obvious distress in this period, and specifically with insight and compassion to Donne's admitted preoccupation with the thought of suicide:

It seems quite certain that he preserved, at all events in early middle life, a very faint hold upon vitality, and that he suffered, in his moments of depression, from an intense desire to free himself from the burden of it by poison, pistol, or flood. He knew that the wish was a morbid one, but he was conscious of its strength, and the fear was always present with him that he might some day succumb to it. But he was a man of unquestioning faith and of intense religious convictions. The ideas of mental disease, or neurosis, of irresistible and irresponsible impulse, which prevail to-day, and are so great a comfort to the weak, had not been propounded in Donne's day, although it is plain that some of them had faintly suggested themselves to him. It was, therefore, of extreme importance to Donne to persuade himself, with all the casuistry of which his ingenious brain was capable, that if he did some day yield to his weakness, and in a moment of despair throw off the intolerable load of life, he would yet have not committed a mortal sin. If this is not the purpose and the aim of Biathanatos, then it appears to me the idlest trifling with the dry bones of disquisition that was ever committed. I am willing to believe that Donne was sick in soul, but not that he was a fantastic trifler, and I regard this curious little book as one of the most poignant relics of his intellectual career.<sup>31</sup>

For one so attuned to Donne's personal reality, Gosse's explanations of Donne's reluctance to accept ordination are strangely impersonal.

Although Gosse recognized a deepening seriousness and spirituality in Donne, the result of depression and privation, he felt that the major personal difficulty which Donne faced centred on the intellectual question of religious allegiance. In spite of his recognition that this was a period of serious distress, that Donne had admitted suicidal tendencies, and that Donne apparently confessed moral reservations to Morton, Gosse affirmed that "the real difficulty must have been theological".<sup>32</sup> At this point in his study, Gosse was caught in a conflict between his personal insight and his intellectual conclusions. The problem arose from his failure to relate the 'Holy Sonnets' to Donne's obvious distress at this time:

When the true date of most of the 'Holy Sonnets' is recognized, however, a host of difficulties vanishes. One is no longer startled by the utter absence of inward peace, nor puzzled by the lack of any sense of priestly vocation. These sonnets were not written, as was earlier supposed, by a man in holy orders, but during a period of Donne's life when he had no vocation and felt keenly that he had no place in the divinely ordered scheme. His integrity, too, is vindicated, and one understands far better his prolonged hesitation to enter the Church.<sup>33</sup>

Gosse dated all the 'Holy Sonnets' after Donne's ordination and the death of his wife in 1617. Although that date cannot now be accepted, Gosse showed valuable insight in his remarks concerning Donne's rededication to life in the Church following his wife's death:

. . . the spiritual phenomenon which is known as 'conversion' . . . is not a matter of conviction or works, . . . nor is it in any degree universal among those who are eminent for piety and unction. . . . It is a state of soul, a psychological condition abruptly reached by some, and not reached at all by many. . . . There is abundant evidence to show that this condition or crisis was passed through by Donne in the winter of 1617; that at that time he became 'converted' in the intense and incandescent sense. . . . With Donne, an intellectual curiosity as to theological questions preceded any subjection of his brain or heart to that conduct of life logically involved by them.<sup>34</sup>

Gosse is surely right that the death of Donne's wife produced a further and deeper self-dedication to the Church. It is obvious, however, that such a deep and serious sense of purpose is one element quite absent from the 'Holy Sonnets'. In his awareness that Donne's spirituality developed toward this state of 'conversion' through a series of personal crises Gosse lacked only the realization that an important element of this process of self-redirection was Donne's attempt to accommodate his very real distress by writing.

In his recent biography of Donne, R. C. Bald acknowledged the complexity of Donne's life in the Mitcham years, and summarized the diverse nature of Donne's activities and concerns:

Donne was in London as often as with his wife and family at Mitcham; he followed the Court and cultivated patrons and patronesses; he devoted laborious hours of study and research to problems of divinity and canon law; and while he addressed poems to great ladies and theological pamphlets to the King, he also cultivated a certain Bohemianism in his leisure hours and liked to relax in the company of wits and writers. His friends and acquaintances were to be found in every rank of society, and he moved from one group to another with surprising ease. The very lack of regular employment and of a sense of definite direction contributes to the sense of complexity in Donne's life at this period, though doubtless no one regretted it more than he or wished more fervently that his varied endeavours could be reduced and dominated by singleness of purpose.<sup>35</sup>

Not to be forgotten were the strain of an ever-increasing household --

"The Donnes brought three children with them to Mitcham; four others were born during the five years they were there"<sup>36</sup> -- and the problem of recurrent illness:

It is impossible to date all the references to ill-health in Donne's letters, but one of the severest attacks seems to have been in the winter of 1608/9, when he suffered from prolonged neuritis. He was forced to take to his bed, and was in such agony of pain that he feared his life was in danger; nevertheless, in this state he composed his 'Litanie',

a poem of over 250 lines. Yet, though such ill-health accelerated rather than slowed down the activity of his mind, it profoundly depressed his spirits. Many of the Mitcham letters are thus full of melancholy and show that at such times Donne's mind could not help turning to thoughts of suicide.<sup>37</sup>

Bald agreed that Biathanatos was itself a product of these persistent thoughts of suicide, and an indication "of the need to find some such way of exorcizing them".<sup>38</sup> This important insight, that for Donne writing was an 'exorcism' of his mental distress, applies as much to the poetry written in the Mitcham years as to the controversial works.

Donne's personal crisis was compounded of several elements. Bald accepted Walton's account of Donne's refusal to Morton in 1607, at least to some extent. Bald felt that Donne was

still conscious of sins in his past life (and there is little doubt that he referred to more than the mere circumstances of his marriage) that in the eyes of some were sufficient to stand in the way of his performing the holy offices of priesthood.<sup>39</sup>

Bald also thought that Donne's unexplained 'other reasons' were more personal than Gosse recognized: "The essential cause was his lack of conviction of his own salvation, without which no man was qualified to preach the gospel of Christ".<sup>40</sup> That absence of conviction contributed to the lack of direction in Donne's life in these years, reflected most obviously in his vacillation between efforts to accommodate himself to religious devotion and the Anglican position, and attempts to secure secular employment. This lack of direction made Donne "deeply despondent" as "he watched his fits of melancholy and tried to diagnose his alternations of mood".<sup>41</sup>

Recurrent debilitating physical illness, an accompanying mental hyperactivity and a certain morbidity, despondency at lack of conviction or life-direction, a deep depression: these were the elements of a profound

personal crisis Bald found reflected in the poetry:

In the more personal 'Holy Sonnets' a far greater sense of urgency is revealed. Despair has entered in at the breach it had made. Despair, it should be recalled, was in the seventeenth century sin as well as suffering, for it implied distrust in God and His mercy; and Donne was afflicted by this distrust.<sup>42</sup>

Bald thus located Donne's main difficulty where it truly was, within himself. For the present that distrust, certainly the central element of the crisis of the Mitcham years, can be explained in traditional theological terms. Certain of his sinful unworthiness, uncertain of the means to grace, he tries to engage his soul in devotion to God whose angry rejection he fears.

Thus the years 1607-1610 were probably the most disturbed and anxious years of Donne's life. He passed through a spiritual crisis which was in large measure concealed from those closest to him. . . . But it is revealed clearly enough in the 'Holy Sonnets', and in the sermons of later years he looked back with a particular sense of poignancy to the despair and suffering through which he had passed. . . . The frequent outcome of such crises is conversion, either sudden or gradual, but Donne still had some years to wait before he was secure in the conviction of God's ever-present mercy.<sup>43</sup>

This movement from despair and fear to conviction and a sense of personal security is the central movement of spirit reflected in the poems of the Mitcham years.

There is one final observation regarding this period in Donne's life from Helen Gardner, who rejects the idea of crisis but accepts the view of Donne's gradually deepening seriousness:

There is no trace of any period of religious or moral crisis in Donne's works. The change was a gradual one, brought about by the circumstances of his life and the maturing of his mind and temperament.<sup>44</sup>

Gardner does recognize, however, that the Mitcham years were a period of illness and anxiety, and contributes her valuable insight that in the

composition of the 'Holy Sonnets', Donne returned to habits of religious thought which he had been taught, and which had proved effective, in his childhood:

The religion he had learnt as a child, whose central teaching he had not repudiated, however much he may have ignored it, reasserted its claim upon his conscience. It was strong enough to preserve him from the temptations of 'our old subtle foe' in his middle years: temptations to sins more deadly, because less generous, than those of his youth -- envy, bitterness, and despair. During these years of illness, disappointment, perpetual anxiety, and humiliating financial dependence, he began to write divine poems, and they show us the continuity of his religious life. The habits of devotion they reflect are those he must have been taught as a child, which he took up again -- he may never have abandoned them -- with adult seriousness and adult intensity.<sup>45</sup>



## III

DONNE AND THE COUNTESS OF BEDFORD

A figure of central importance in Donne's life, particularly in the Mitcham years, was Lucy Harrington Russell, Countess of Bedford. Born in 1581, she was the daughter of Sir John Harrington of Coombe and Exton, who was entrusted with the guardianship of the Princess Elizabeth. Little is known of her education or of her life before her marriage: at the age of thirteen, on 12 December 1594, she married Edward Russell, Earl of Bedford. For peripheral involvement in Essex's rebellion, the Earl was first imprisoned and later confined to his estates until the death of Elizabeth I. Young Lady Bedford, however, accompanied her parents to meet the new King and Queen on their journey southwards. She immediately became a close friend of Queen Anne, taking a prominent place in the new Court: "From 1603 until about 1620 Lady Bedford was one of the most influential women in England."<sup>46</sup> Her husband, however, never regained a prominent position in public life.

Donne's close friend Sir Henry Goodyer, in addition to being a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to King James, was attached in some way to the Bedford household. In 1607 he acted for Lady Bedford in the acquisition of Twickenham Park, an estate bordering the Thames about nine miles from London. For the next ten years it became Lady Bedford's principal home, though she was often in residence at the Earl's estates, or at Bedford House in London.

While acknowledging that any account of the relationship between Donne and Lady Bedford rests on a considerable degree of conjecture, it is possible to outline at least the main features of their long and

intimate friendship.

Donne probably became closely acquainted with Lady Bedford in 1607.<sup>47</sup> A letter of 23 February 1601/2 in which he informs Goodyer of the death of Lady Bedford's infant son indicates little more than Donne's awareness of his friend's connection with the Bedford family. While Donne might have made Lady Bedford's acquaintance much earlier, at the court of Elizabeth I when Donne was in Essex's train about 1597, the first evidence of close acquaintance is a letter from Peckham, written probably in the late spring of 1606, in which he presents his regards and his humble thanks to Lady Bedford and her brother. By early 1608, when Donne began sending letters to the Countess through Goodyer, a close relationship was established.

The friendship with Lady Bedford developed with rapidity and fervour. There was a strong element of mutual attraction between them. . . . Lady Bedford was just as eager as Donne to explore all the possibilities of her new friendship, and as anxious to find out all she could about him as he was to celebrate her beauty and virtue.<sup>48</sup>

Lady Bedford acquired a manuscript of Donne's satires, either through Ben Jonson's agency, as some verses of his accompanied it, or because Donne revised the satires to send to her. At this time, or sometime later, Donne declared that her influence moved him to renounce satire for more serious if not religious poetry:

Temples were not demolish'd, though prophane:  
Here Peter, Joves; there Paul hath Dian's Fane.  
So whether my hymnes you admit or chuse,  
In me you've hallowed a Pagan Muse,  
And denizend a stranger, . . .<sup>49</sup>

Donne's correspondence during the spring and autumn of 1608 shows that he visited Lady Bedford frequently, always a welcome guest. In August 1608 she stood godmother for the baptism of his daughter whom he named

Lucy for her. By 1609, she became "the centre of the principal group of Donne's friends, and for the rest of her life she was his patron, inspiration and support. . . . He found in her delightful company everything which he required to stimulate and develop him."<sup>50</sup> Donne's severe illness in the winter of 1608/9 which enforced his 'imprisonment' at Mitcham prevented him from visiting the Countess quite so frequently. When his illness subsided, and Sir George More relieved their worst financial distress by finally agreeing to pay Ann Donne's dower, Donne began appearing in fashionable circles again, and their "intimacy was renewed on an even closer footing."<sup>51</sup> The letters of early 1609 "illustrate the growing hold which the Countess took upon Donne's thoughts and aspirations."<sup>52</sup> Donne's warmth of feeling is evident in all the references to the Countess in his letters:

. . . for I have made her opinion of me the balance by which I weigh myself;

. . . I would write apace to her, whilst it is possible to express that which I yet know of her, for by this growth I see how soon she will be ineffable.<sup>53</sup>

Almost every letter to Goodyer contained some such phrase celebrating her and his good fortune in knowing her. "With a curiosity bordering on jealousy Donne scanned Lady Bedford's actions, observed her household, and delighted in the warmth with which he was received."<sup>54</sup> Donne's involvement with Lady Bedford's household was intimate enough in 1609 that "he acted almost as if he were Lady Bedford's officially appointed laureate."<sup>55</sup> When Bridget, Lady Markham, died at Twickenham in May, and Cecilia Bulstrode in August, Donne supplied elaborate if artificial elegies to commemorate these close friends of the Countess.

Most of the time Lady Bedford apparently lived apart from her husband. In a personal sense her marriage to Edward Russell was unfortunate.

All that is known of the third Earl indicates he was a conservative and religious man, quite different in temperament from his beautiful, charming and intelligent lady. He seems to have been a rather weak and inept man, who never achieved the position at Court or in public life to which his rank entitled him. At Twickenham Lady Bedford established an elaborate and expansive household surrounding herself with close friends and literary acquaintances. Her house became "a little court of literature -- as near an approach to the French salon as the English seventeenth century ever achieved."<sup>56</sup> Numerous dedicatory verses and Petrarchan poems of courtly address written to the Countess by Daniel, Drayton, Jonson, and Donne suggest a rarified atmosphere approaching the diaphanous unreality of the private court of Queen Anne, a hothouse environment in which courtly love and some not entirely courtly amours, with all the accompanying intrigue, flourished. The supposed immorality of Cecilia Bulstrode,<sup>57</sup> and Bald's suggestion that Donne's friend Sir Thomas Roe was her lover, indicate that actual love relationships did occur within the Twickenham circle. Even at this period, before a deepening religious sense developed, Lady Bedford herself seems incapable of such indiscretions. Rather it appears that, in the fashion of the court life of their time, she and Donne made love in a courtly or Petrarchan sense. They were playing a conventional social game, in which she no doubt displayed consummate gamesmanship. He was not her only partner, though probably the most attractive one:

Of Lady Bedford's feeling for Donne we have only what his letters reveal, and that is no more than that she was his warm friend and generous patroness. It is clear, however, from their enduring friendship and from the tone of that correspondence that she found in him a friend of rarer and finer calibre than in the other poets whom she patronized

in turn, Daniel and Drayton and Jonson -- some one whose sensitive, complex, fascinating personality could hardly fail to touch a woman's imagination and heart.<sup>58</sup>

By the end of 1608 Donne was an intimate of Lady Bedford's household. Probably early in 1609, having recovered from his winter's illness, he wrote to the Countess, asking for copies of some of her own verses:

Happiest and Worthiest Lady, -- I do not remember that ever I have seen a petition in verse. I would not therefore be singular, nor add these to your other papers. I have yet adventured so near as to make a petition for verse, it is for those your Ladyship did me the honour to see in Twicknam garden, except you repent your making; and having mended your judgment by thinking worse, that is, better, because juster, of their subject. They must needs be an excellent exercise of your wit, which speak so well of so ill: I humbly beg them of your Ladyship, with two such promises, as to any other of your compositions were threatenings; that I will not show them, and that I will not believe them; and nothing should be so used that comes from your brain or breast. If I should confess a fault in the boldness of asking them, or make a fault by doing it in a longer letter, your Ladyship might use your style and old fashion of the court towards me, and pay me with a pardon. Here therefore I humbly kiss your Ladyship's fair learned hands, and wish you good wishes and speedy grants.<sup>59</sup>

If her verses were Petrarchan love poems, perhaps too personal, it would prove embarrassing if they were read generally by her friends: therefore he promises not to show them. Neither will he believe them, that is take them seriously as declarations of affection. Actual events are entirely conjectural, yet the teasing ambiguity of this letter, the warmth of feeling in the surviving verse letters, and the intense personal emotion evident in "Twicknam Garden" and "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies day" suggest at least a plausible sequence. Lady Bedford showed Donne some verses, perhaps Petrarchan love poems; he responded by writing, or at least by showing to her, his poem "Twicknam Garden".<sup>60</sup>

Though based upon a traditional Petrarchan theme, the contrast

between the unhappy lover and the beauty of spring, "Twicknam Garden" extends beyond the conventional toward intensely personal statement; the poem reveals a greater depth of personal involvement than his early verse-letters to the Countess indicate. She became alarmed at his over-seriousness, at his failure to play their game of love on a sufficiently detached and unreal level. Lady Bedford did not entirely reject Donne, but insisted that he return to a more discreet and socially acceptable devotion. Donne, who had misunderstood the nature of their relationship, felt this as actual rejection. There is evidence that, following the death of Lady Markham, probably her closest friend, the Countess was quite ill in early June 1609.<sup>61</sup> Both illness and rejection could be implied in the reference to the "death" of the lady in "A Nocturnall": this poem marks, I suggest, the close of this phase of Donne's relationship with Lady Bedford.<sup>62</sup> Of these poems, Grierson remarked that,

There can, I think, be little doubt that it is to her [Lady Bedford], and neither to his wife nor the mistress of his earlier, wandering fancy, that these lines ["Twicknam Garden"], conventional in theme but given an amazing timbre by the impulse of Donne's subtle and passionate mind, were addressed. . . . the Nocturnall is a sincerer and profounder poem than Twicknam Garden, and it is more difficult to imagine it the expression of a conventional sentiment. . . . It is a highly metaphysical yet sombre and sincere description of the emptiness of life without love.<sup>63</sup>

At some point in 1609, Sir Henry Goodyer tried to interest Donne in approaching Lady Huntingdon with some poetic tribute, perhaps as a new patroness. Donne did not refuse, but replied that he owed all his allegiance to Lady Bedford:

The other stronger reason, is my integrity to the other Countesse, of whose worthinesse though I swallowed your opinion at first upon your words, yet I have had since

an explicit faith, and now a knowledge: and for her delight (since she descends to them) I had reserved not only all the verses, which I should make, but all the thoughts of womens worthinesse.<sup>64</sup>

By 1611, however, Donne was willing to dispense at least with Lady Bedford's patronage, though not her friendship. Donne wrote to Goodyer,

I must entreat you to continue that wherein you have most expressed your love to me, which is, to maintain me in the same room in my Lady Bedford's opinion, in the which you placed me. I profess to you that I am too much bound to her for expressing every way her care of my fortune, that I am weary before she is; and out of a loathness, that so good works should be bestowed upon so ill stuff, or that so much ill-fortune should be mingled with hers, as that she should miss anything that she desired, though it were but for me; I am willing to depart from further exercising her endeavours in that kind.<sup>65</sup>

Donne's new patron was Sir Robert Drury, with whom Donne journeyed on the Continent. The Anniversaries were ostensibly addressed as a tribute to his daughter Elizabeth, who died in her fifteenth year in December 1610, frustrating her father's plan for an advantageous marriage, hopefully with the young Prince Henry.<sup>66</sup> Whatever their other merits, considered as verses commemorative of a young girl, Donne's Anniversaries are ingenious, extravagant, hyperbolic in the extreme. Donne was soon aware of the resentment these poems caused among the ladies of fashion to whom his usual tributes were addressed. In a letter to George Garrard Donne reacted quite peevishly to the censures of his publication of these poems: "If any of those ladies think that Mistress Drury was not so, let that lady make herself fit for all those praises in the book, and it shall be hers."<sup>67</sup> That Lady Bedford in particular objected to his extravagance, and that her displeasure moved Donne as none other could, an unfinished verse letter attests. One suspects it was abandoned as over-ingenious, an illustration rather than a refutation of the poetic

fault it seeks to excuse. Yet in the lines which echo Donne's letter to Goodyer, that he reserves for Lady Bedford "all the thoughts of womens worthnesse", there seems less disingenuous flattery and greater personal feeling:

First I confesse I have to others lent  
Your stock, and over prodigally spent  
Your treasure, for since I had never knowne  
Vertue or beautie, but as they are growne  
In you, I should not thinke or say they shine,  
(So as I have) in any other Mine.<sup>68</sup>

Donne's indirect apologies through Goodyer and Garrard undoubtedly reached the Countess, but little is known of their relationship in ensuing months. Her severe illness, which lasted from late November 1612 through mid January 1612/13, perhaps prevented a renewal of close friendship. The next episode in their relationship which can be documented occurred in August 1613, when Donne wrote to console Lady Bedford on the death of her father. In February 1614 the Countess's brother, the second Lord Harrington, died at her house at Twickenham. Donne enclosed his "Obsequies of the Lord Harrington" in a brief letter in which he tactlessly reminded her that she now had the use of her brother's fortune. In his elegy Donne laments the untimely death of the gifted and gracious young man whom he had known and held in warm affection for years. The elegy closes with a vow to abandon poetry:

Do not, fair soul, this sacrifice refuse,  
That in thy grave I do inter my Muse,  
Which, by my grief, great as thy worth, being cast  
Behindhand, yet hath spoke, and spoke her last.<sup>69</sup>

A gallant gesture, and with few exceptions one to which Donne adhered, if the reader accepts this Muse as the muse of his secular verse. That a perfectly tasteless letter obviously seeking financial reward accompanied



this elaborate elegy could hardly have renewed Donne in Lady Bedford's esteem. "There was no actual breach between Donne and Lady Bedford; Donne still felt a strong sense of obligation towards her, but their relations can have been neither so close nor so cordial as formerly."<sup>70</sup>

Donne's proposed entrance into the Anglican priesthood created another rift between them. Following her own misfortunes of 1611-14 -- her own severe illness, an injury to her husband which left him partially paralyzed, the deaths of her father and her brother -- Lady Bedford seemed "a much-changed woman".<sup>71</sup> Her natural piety took on a Puritan hue under the ministrations of Dr. John Burgess, who attended her during her illness and afterwards. Her own deepening seriousness might have encouraged her to accept Donne's religious orientation as genuine, but in fact she appears to have been the one close acquaintance to object strongly. Her actual objection is not known, but Donne disclosed in a letter to Goodyer that she questioned the sincerity of his calling. The long paragraph about Lady Bedford is a masterpiece of tasteless anger and bitter disappointment:

Of my Lady Bedford, I must say so much as must importune you to burn the letter; for I would say nothing of her upon record, that should not testify my thankfulness for all her graces. But upon this motion, which I made to her by letter, and by Sir Thomas Roe's assistance, if any scruple should arise in her, she was somewhat more startling, than I looked for from her; she had more suspicion of my calling, a better memory of my past life, than I thought her nobility could have admitted; of all which, though I humbly thank God, I can make good use, as one that needs as many remembrances in that kind, as not only friends but enemies can present, yet I am afraid they proceed in her rather from some ill impression taken from Dr. Burges, than that they grow in herself. But whosoever be the conduit, the water is the Holy Ghost's, and in that acceptation I take it. For her other way of expressing her favour to me, I must say, it is not with that cheerfulness as heretofore she hath delivered herself towards me. I am almost sorry, that an elegy should have been able to move

her to so much compassion heretofore, as to offer to pay my debts; and my greater wants now, and for so good a purpose, as to come disengaged into that profession, being plainly laid upon to her, should work no farther but that she sent me £30, which in good faith she excused with that, which is in both parts true, that her present debts were burdensome, and that I could not doubt of her inclination, upon all future emergent occasions, to assist me. I confess to you, her former fashion towards me had given a better confidence; . . . . 72

Donne quite characteristically attributed her objection, not so much to her knowledge of him, though he admits her "better memory of my past life", but to the malign influence of another. Even a sympathetic reader, coming upon this letter, is tempted to agree with the Countess in her objection: Donne's self-righteous indignation in his attempt to turn her galling criticism to good use, and his hypocrisy in writing so ungraciously of her in secret while outwardly 'testifying his thankfulness for all her graces' are hardly characteristic of a man newly devoted to a sincere religious calling. Donne scarcely controlled his bitterness against Lady Bedford when he discussed her inability to assist him financially. Though he admits that her own situation prohibited her usual generosity, he seemed to attribute her refusal to that "ill impression" of the sincerity of his calling. Finally, he again asks Goodyer to burn the letter, not to prevent Lady Bedford discovering his ingratitude, but to ensure that a new patroness is not influenced by the negative opinion of 'one who knows no better'. Outside the early poems of negative abuse of woman, Donne is rarely this vituperative.

Even this incident did not cause a complete breach between them. Little is known of their relationship after Donne's early years in the Church: they probably saw much less of each other than formerly, and their friendship was of a more reserved and formal nature. Donne accepted at least one invitation to preach before her, in 1620. Lady

Bedford died 31 May 1627, less than a month after the death of her husband:  
Donne apparently did not commemorate the loss of his once-beloved friend  
in any way.

## FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER ONE)

<sup>1</sup>John Donne, The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters, W. Milgate, ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 13, ll. 79-84.

<sup>2</sup>Sir Herbert J. C. Grierson, "Introduction" to his edition of The Poems of John Donne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), II, p. xvii.

<sup>3</sup>Milgate dates Satire III 1594-5; Gardner dates the Elegies 1593-6; it is assumed that the early 'promiscuity' poems date from 1584-1597, Donne's years at University and the Inns of Court.

<sup>4</sup>In accord with the common critical opinion that the great lyrics of mutual and contented love date from the years immediately following his marriage.

<sup>5</sup>This concept of the "religion of love" I owe entirely to Andrew W. Brink, who first introduced it years ago in undergraduate lectures on Donne. It defines Donne's ambivalent but adoring relation to a usually dominant female figure who becomes the ideal object of his secular devotion. The structure of idealization appropriates traditional religious metaphor; the female figure becomes a saint in love's religion to whom, as to the god of Love, adoration and devotion are due. I appropriate this concept here as an essential element in my overall understanding of Donne.

<sup>6</sup>"The Good-morrow" ll. 20-21; "The Anniversarie" ll. 25-27. The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets, Helen Gardner ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965). All subsequent quotations from The Songs and Sonnets are from this text.

<sup>7</sup>"The Good-morrow", ll. 17-18; "A Lecture upon the Shadow", l. 19.

<sup>8</sup>Poems including "Farewell to Love", "The Dissolution", "Twicknam Garden", "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies day", "The Blossome", "The Primrose", "The Relique", "The Funeral".

<sup>9</sup>R. C. Bald, John Donne -- A Life (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 160-162.

<sup>10</sup>Bald, pp. 210-211.

- <sup>11</sup> Sermon No. 9, Vol. II The Sermons of John Donne, G. R. Potter and E. M. Simpson, eds., (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955), pp. 210-211. Sermon 27 in LXXX Sermons.
- <sup>12</sup> J. B. Leishman, The Monarch of Wit: An Analytical and Comparative Study of the Poetry of John Donne (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951), pp. 258-259.
- <sup>13</sup> Helen Gardner, "Commentary", John Donne: The Divine Poems, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 81.
- <sup>14</sup> Letter quoted in full in Sir Edmund Gosse, The Life and Letters of John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's (London: William Heinemann, 1899), I, pp. 195-197.
- <sup>15</sup> Letter quoted in Gosse, I, pp. 214-215.
- <sup>16</sup> Letter quoted in Gosse, I, p. 184.
- <sup>17</sup> Letter quoted in Gosse, I, p. 189.
- <sup>18</sup> Letter quoted in Gosse, I, pp. 190-191.
- <sup>19</sup> Letter quoted in Gosse, I, p. 192.
- <sup>20</sup> Preface to Biathanatos quoted in Bald, p. 231.
- <sup>21</sup> Letter quoted in Gosse, I, pp. 219-220.
- <sup>22</sup> Letter quoted in Gosse, I, pp. 222-223.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 221.
- <sup>24</sup> Letter quoted in Gosse, I, p. 226.
- <sup>25</sup> Preface to Pseudo-Martyr quoted in Gosse, I, p. 250.
- <sup>26</sup> Grierson, II, p. xxii.
- <sup>27</sup> Gosse, II, p. 101.
- <sup>28</sup> Gosse, I, p. 168.

<sup>29</sup>Gosse, I, pp. 187-8.

<sup>30</sup>Gosse, I, p. 207.

<sup>31</sup>Gosse, I, pp. 262-263.

<sup>32</sup>Gosse, I, p. 160.

<sup>33</sup>Bald, p. 236.

<sup>34</sup>Gosse, II, pp. 99-100.

<sup>35</sup>R. C. Bald, John Donne -- A Life, p. 155.

<sup>36</sup>Bald, p. 156.

<sup>37</sup>Bald, p. 157.

<sup>38</sup>Bald, p. 231.

<sup>39</sup>Bald, p. 207.

<sup>40</sup>Bald, p. 233.

<sup>41</sup>Bald, p. 230.

<sup>42</sup>Bald, pp. 233-234.

<sup>43</sup>Bald, pp. 235-236.

<sup>44</sup>Dame Helen Gardner, "Introduction" to her edition of The Divine Poems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. xx.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. xxi.

<sup>46</sup>Bald, p. 172.

<sup>47</sup>For the information presented in this section, I have been heavily reliant on the work of Gosse and Bald. For the Mitcham years in particular, see Gosse I, pp. 209-212; Bald, pp. 170-180. For other information regarding the Countess, see particularly the following pages: Gosse I, pp. 110, 188-9, 213, 217-8, 229, 284, 306-7, 314; Gosse II, pp. 4, 16, 42-3, 70, 73, 76, 79, 248, 330-1; Bald, pp. 158, 195-6, 230, 251, 274-6, 280, 294-7, 495-6.

<sup>48</sup>Bald, p. 173.

<sup>49</sup>Verse letter "To the Countesse of Bedford: T'have written then," The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters, W. Milgate ed., p. 95f., ll. 13-17.

<sup>50</sup>Gosse I, p. 211.

<sup>51</sup>Bald, p. 177.

<sup>52</sup>Gosse I, p. 212.

<sup>53</sup>Letters quoted in Gosse I, pp. 213, 220.

<sup>54</sup>Bald, p. 174.

<sup>55</sup>  
Bald, p. 177.

<sup>56</sup>C. H. Herford and P. and E. Simpson, Ben Jonson (Oxford: 1925), I, p. 54. Gosse also referred to "the graceful and brilliant little court which she gathered in the mazes of her garden at Twickenham" (II, p. 4; also p. 330).

<sup>57</sup>A poem, attributed to Sir John Roe, suggests that she had invited the writer to be her lover, and he somewhat ungraciously refuses. In "An Epigram on the Court Pucell" Ben Jonson "assailed" her with "foul-mouthed ferocity" (Herford and Simpson, p. 59). Jonson's elegy on Mistress Bulstrode, probably written at the behest of Lady Bedford, endeavours to leave no doubt of her virtue, but it is as elaborate, artificial and insincere as Donne's elegy on the same lady.

Jonson himself enjoyed close relationships with "the ladies of distinguished family who surrounded the queen . . .": among them, Herford and Simpson rather coyly suggest, were "some who admitted him to friendship, if not to more intimate relations still" (I, p. 53).

<sup>58</sup>Grierson, II, p. xxiii.

<sup>59</sup>Letter quoted in Gosse, I, pp. 217-218.

<sup>60</sup>See Gardner, The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets, Appendix C: "Lady Bedford and Mrs. Herbert", p. 250.

<sup>61</sup>H.M.C.R., VII, p. 527. Referred to in "A Biography of Lucy, Countess of Bedford, The Last Great Literary Patroness", unpublished doctoral thesis by Florence H. Morgan, University of Southern California, January 1956, p. 75.

<sup>62</sup>I hesitate to date these poems specifically. There exists a wide range of critical opinion as to possible dates of Donne's composition of "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies day". Most critics agree with Grierson that the "Nocturnall" and its companion piece "Twicknam Garden" are related to Donne's friendship with Lady Bedford, and attempt to refer at least the "Nocturnall" to some specific event.

Doniphan Louthan, in The Poetry of John Donne, A Study in Explication (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951), suggested that "A Nocturnall" marked Lucy Harrington's marriage to the young Earl of Bedford 12 December, 1594.

Gosse related the poem to Donne's early unsatisfactory loves, before his marriage in 1601. (I, p. 74)

Grierson related "A Nocturnall" to Lady Bedford's severe illness in 1612. (II, p. xxiii)

Leishman felt that "A Nocturnall" was written while Donne was in Paris with the Drurys, in anticipation of the death of his wife from her childbed illness in late 1611. (p. 172)

Gardner was more than usually undecided on this question. She acknowledged several possibilities, 1611, 1612, or 1617, the death of Donne's wife in that year, and concluded only that "A Nocturnall" was probably connected to Lady Bedford and therefore was written after 1607. (Songs and Sonnets, p. 251)

It seems to me quite impossible that "A Nocturnall" could have been written before the great lyrics of mutual and contented love which are usually identified with the early years of Donne's marriage, following 1601. Though the sardonic wit of "Twicknam Garden" echoes the mood of the early poems of negative abuse of women, it is entirely a more masterful poem, refined in style and of greater emotional intensity.

That "A Nocturnall" was written in 1617 seems equally unlikely. Only the last stanza reveals any similarity of concern with the early hymns. It is difficult to relate this poem to the death of Donne's wife, since it has nothing in common with the 'Holy Sonnet' "Since she whom I lov'd . . ." which is usually regarded as commemorative of her.

Another possibility is that "A Nocturnall" referred to the death of Lady Bedford in 1627, since textual work of Grierson and Gardner established that the poem is not included in any manuscript which antedates that year. It is improbable that, with the exception of the "Hymne to God the Father", "A Nocturnall" should be the last poem Donne wrote. It hardly reflects the general tenor of mind of the worthy Dean of St. Paul's which Donne had become. The existence of "A Nocturnall" in a very few



late manuscripts while "Twicknam Garden" is present in all collections would in fact support my suggestion of an earlier date. "Twicknam Garden" is a set piece on a traditional theme, while "A Nocturnall" is intensely personal. There would be no difficulty in circulating the former, while Donne perhaps prevented the circulation of "A Nocturnall", in the same way that he promised not "to show" Lady Bedford's own poems. "A Nocturnall" thus did not circulate until after the deaths of those who would understand its personal meaning: Lady Bedford and Sir Henry Goodyer both died in 1627.

The final and most serious possibility is that "A Nocturnall" was written in 1611 or 1612. If so, it would be related directly to the Anniversaries which were written at that time. These poems do share a certain similarity of theme, focusing on the loss of a personally redeeming female figure, but in tone, direction, and effect, they are quite different. "A Nocturnall" and the Anniversaries seem to me to be the first and last phases of the same movement of spirit, as Donne disengages himself from the female figure. The bitterness of rejection in "Twicknam Garden" is modified to a sense of personal nullity at the profound loss of redeeming personal relation in "A Nocturnall". At its most basic, the Second Anniversary indicates the conclusion of this movement, for in the religious resolution of inner conflict Donne imagines that his soul follows the soul of the ideal woman to heaven. "A Nocturnall" is a first step toward this resolution. In disillusion with his secular ideals, Donne begins to disengage himself from devotion to an idealized female figure, at the same time that the earliest 'Holy Sonnets' reveal Donne's effort at self-adjustment to God.

It is therefore my suggestion that "Twicknam Garden" was written in late 1608, perhaps in answer to some Petrarchan love verses of Lady Bedford's. Donne, who had interpreted their relationship as a serious emotional involvement, responded to her 'rejection' of him which the intensity of the earlier poem caused with "A Nocturnall": probably written in late summer 1609, it is one of Donne's finest, and certainly most evocative and personally intense poems.

<sup>63</sup>Grierson, II, p. xxii.

<sup>64</sup>Letter quoted in Bald, p. 180.

<sup>65</sup>Letter quoted in Gosse, I, p. 284. Bald identified Goodyer as the person addressed, p. 244.

<sup>66</sup>Gosse made this suggestion, I, p. 273. Unfortunately I was unable to verify it; Bald does not mention such a plan in the biography, and his earlier study, Donne and the Drurys (Cambridge University Press, 1959) was unavailable.

<sup>67</sup>Letter quoted in Gosse, I, p. 302.

<sup>68</sup>Verse letter, "To the Countesse of Bedford, Begun in France but never perfected", Milgate, p. 104, ll. 11-16.

<sup>69</sup>Quoted in Gosse, II, p. 45.

<sup>70</sup>Bald, p. 276.

<sup>71</sup>Bald, p. 275.

<sup>72</sup>Letter quoted in Gosse, II, p. 73.

## CHAPTER TWO: POEMS OF TRANSITION

The poems written in the first years of the Mitcham period, 1606-1609, reflect the opening phase of Donne's mental transition from devotion to woman and his secular ideal of fulfilling love toward devotion to God. The earliest divine poems are founded upon formal meditative and liturgical structures: poetic and devotional forms serve to restrain elements of personal distress which yet at times break through the imposed control. Almost contemporaneous with the early divine poems are the late 'love' lyrics: these poems of disillusion with relationship to woman detail a parallel movement of spirit as Donne disengages himself from woman while at the same time turning toward God.

"La Corona", written in July 1607,<sup>1</sup> and "A Litanie", written in autumn 1608,<sup>2</sup> are the earliest of the divine poems. It is most probable that the sonnet "Of St. Mary Magdalen" accompanied the "La Corona" sonnets when Donne sent them to Mrs. Magdalen Herbert for her judgement and approval.<sup>3</sup> Though Donne may have met Mrs. Herbert in Oxford in 1599 or 1600, in 1607 his long and intimate friendship with her was probably just beginning.<sup>4</sup> It was throughout their lives a soberer, more awed and respectful relationship on Donne's part than was his friendship with the Countess of Bedford. A lady of strong conviction and formidable personality, Mrs. Herbert perhaps served as a sobering influence on Donne, encouraging his earliest attempts at religious devotion. The serious tone of "La Corona" and the poetic felicity of the opening and

closing sonnets may reflect her influence.

"La Corona" and "A Litanie" reflect Donne's first attempts to alleviate personal distress through religious devotion: they illustrate this transitional phase in Donne's poetry both structurally and thematically. The emphasis of major critics has been to establish the formal religious traditions to which these early divine poems are related. Gardner views "La Corona" as 'an accomplished religious exercise':

inspired by liturgical prayer and praise -- oral prayer; not by private meditation and the tradition of mental prayer. . . . The impulse with which he began 'La Corona' is clearly visible in the first two sonnets. His 'crowne of prayer and praise' was to be woven from the prayers and praises of the Church. It is possible he chose to use the sonnet, a form he had used before this only for epistles, because he wished to write formally and impersonally: to create an offering of beauty and dignity.<sup>5</sup>

Noting the obvious difference between the "La Corona" sonnets and the 'Holy Sonnets' in emotional and poetic quality, Louis Martz relates the earlier sequence not to the Ignatian tradition, but to "the popular practice of meditation according to the corona".<sup>6</sup> For his 'rectified devotion' Donne abandons emphasis on the life of the Virgin to concentrate more fully on the life of Christ. In accord with interpreting "La Corona" as reflective of a period of transition is Martz' further recognition that this sequence represents "a complex synthesis of methods and materials from both religious and profane poetry, from the liturgy of the Church, and from all the various ways of meditating on the life of Christ".<sup>7</sup>

This traditional context, liturgical and meditative, is clearly present in "La Corona": however, Leishman's reservations about the

operation of Donne's sensibilities within that context are particularly apt: Donne

meditates, but intellectually, wittily even; rather than profoundly or passionately, exhibiting and, as it were, underlining, with characteristic ingenuity, some of the paradoxes inherent in Christianity and in the two-fold nature of Christ as God and man. His attitude, whatever it may actually have been, appears in these poems strangely external and detached.  
 . . . . They are essentially religious exercises.<sup>8</sup>

The relation of the "La Corona" sequence to formal religious traditions in effect serves to underline the obvious personal elements ignored by many critics. The focus of self-concern and the imagery employed in its expression, while detailing Donne's mood and state of mind, point forward to the later 'Holy Sonnets'.

The opening word "Deigne" creates with soft-spoken emphasis an immediate sense of humility and personal unworthiness, a supplicant pose underlined in the second line by Donne's admission of a prevailing depression, "in my low devout melancholie". Indeed, the absence of intensity of emotion or of conviction carries through until the last six lines of the sequence, an underlying sadness of spirit which Donne referred to in a letter of 1608 as 'my weary soul'. The implied rejection of secular poetry through denying the secular muse,

But doe not, with a vile crowne of fraile bayes,  
 Reward my muses white sincerity, (11.5-6)<sup>9</sup>

taken together with

The ends crowne our workes, but thou crown'st our ends,  
 For, at our end begins our endlesse rest,  
 This first last end, now zealously possesst, (11.9-11)

becomes an attempt at self-conviction, a denial of what he is and has been in favour of what he now wishes to be: in effect, the essence of

man-at-prayer. This in turn becomes a spiritual state of inaction, typical of Donne, and magnificently expressed in "With a strong sober thirst, my soule attends" (l. 12), an impression of passive necessity which belies the obvious creative effort behind these sonnets. This preliminary attempt at self-conviction concludes with "'Tis time" (l. 13), a recognition of his present state of mind and of the need for renewal.

The central sequence of "La Corona", the four sonnets on "Annunciation", "Nativitie", "Temple", and "Crucyfying", Martz describes as

the twining of an endless wreath of praise: the twining of a mind that winds its way from paradox to paradox, sometimes seeing the spot, sometimes crying out sharply, but always enveloping the scenes and the cries in a rich sinuosity of intellectual analysis.<sup>10</sup>

It is difficult to agree with this description, however, for these poems, however ingenious, remain a somewhat pedestrian catalogue of aspects of the essential Christian paradox of God-in-man. Only in scattered moments of increased intensity and personal concern, which indicate the difficulty of the very accommodation Donne feels compelled to make, does the sequence escape the commonplace.

The first example of the intrusion of personal feeling is the oddest. In "Annunciation" and in "Nativitie" images of Mary's womb as a prison -- Christ "yeelds himselfe to lye/In prison, in thy wombe" (ll. 5-6); "yet he'll weare/Taken from thence, flesh" (ll. 7-8); "light in darke" (l. 13); "shutst in little roome" (l. 13); "cloysterd" (ll. 14 and 1): "his welbelov'd imprisonment" (l. 2); "made himselfe to his intent/Weake enough" (ll. 3-4) -- indicate a scarcely disguised resentment of the manner of human gestation through the agency of woman.<sup>11</sup>

In "Nativitie" an apostrophe to himself, "Seest thou, my Soule,

with thy faiths eyes" (l. 9), carries over from the profane poems Donne's predilection for images of the face, particularly the eyes, and relates to his fondness for St. Paul's famous phrase, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known".<sup>12</sup> Both images, religious and profane, reveal a need to have one's own identity and very existence verified by being reflected in and from another, providing a basis of assurance.

In "Crucifying" the present tense used throughout the poem seems to bear greater emphasis, "the worst are most, they will and can,/Alas, and do, . . . now prescribe a Fate" (ll. 5-6, 7), leading to the more impassioned plea for acceptance in the last lines -- "Now thou art lifted up, draw mee to thee" -- and "my dry soule" recalls the "strong sober thirst" with which he began. In "Resurrection" his "dry soule" is "Freed" by the blood of Christ from that thirst and from the "Feare of first or last death" (l. 7) which the absence of assurance engendered. Even now, however, Donne hesitates, "If in thy little booke my name thou enroule" (l. 8), emphasizing both that lack of assurance and his desperate need. The hesitation is reinforced by the preceding lines, "And life, by this death abled, shall controule/Death, whom thy death slue" (ll. 5-6), in which Donne attempts quite unsuccessfully to convince himself of the resurrection paradox, death and spiritual rebirth.

In contrast to the rather mundane central sequence which is enlivened only occasionally by these personal interpolations, the concluding sonnet of the "La Corona" sequence, "Ascention", approaches the later 'Holy Sonnets' in quality and intensity of effect. The emphasis

on imperative verbs, "Salute", "Joy", "Behold", "quench", and "Deigne", addressed to the penitent self first, then to the Saviour, gives an impression of positive resolution. Indeed, the structure of the final petition underlines this impression, as it moves through the three parallel phrases of address to Christ toward the verb "quench", emphatically situated in the center of a balanced line:

O strong Ramme, which hast batter'd heaven for mee,  
Mild lambe, which with thy blood, hast mark'd the path;  
Bright torch, which shin'st, that I the way may see,  
Oh, with thine owne blood quench thine owne just wrath. (9-12)

The resolution, however, remains at best tentative:

And if thy holy Spirit, my Muse did raise,  
Deigne at my hands this crowne of prayer and praise. (11.13-14)

The sequence ends in genuine hesitation, which recalls the attempts at self-conviction of the first sonnet and underlines the mood of self-abnegation and the passive necessity of seeking God's condescension.

As probably the earliest of Donne's Divine Poems, "La Corona" illustrates what Helen Gardner calls "the continuity of his religious life".<sup>13</sup> These sonnets reveal Donne's essential concerns, which remain constant throughout the religious poems and recur in the sermons: a conviction of personal unworthiness, dejection, a desperate necessity to achieve a basis of assurance, absence of trust in the reality of divine love, and fear of death. Yet the similarity of imagery in "La Corona" and in the later 'Holy Sonnets' indicates that this early sonnet sequence served as a form of notebook, in which these personal concerns and the images, traditional or ingenious, used to express them were first 'collected', to be expanded in the later sonnets as Donne worked toward resolution of inner conflict. "La Corona" adumbrates in hope



the movement from fear to trust which Donne accomplishes, at least to an extent, in the 'Holy Sonnets'.

In the year which passed between the composition of the "La Corona" sonnets and that of "A Litanie" Donne suffered further personal decline. In the autumn of 1608 he was approaching the mood of desperation evident in the 'Holy Sonnets'. "We know from Donne's letter to Goodyer, in which he refers to its composition, that 'A Litany' was written during an illness and in a mood of dejection. The 'low devout melancholy' of 'La Corona' has deepened into a sin from which Donne prays to be delivered."<sup>14</sup> Since Donne does not use the word himself, Gardner and other critics avoid his 'despair' and escape into commentary on the tension between an impersonal form and personal content. This is not to deny the value of Gardner's excellent analysis, which contrasts 'the simple traditional outline' with the 'stanza of his own invention', indicating the conflict between Donne's 'intellectual ingenuity' and 'verbal audacity' and the very Anglican 'ideal of moderation in all things'.<sup>15</sup> An understanding of the more personal reflections within the poem needs a basis in such formal appreciation, if only for the context it provides. Gardner, for instance, does recognize that, while parts of the poem relate to current religious controversy, "A Litanie" also reflects "Donne's personal searchings of conscience in his years of failure."<sup>16</sup> She commends Donne's unusual 'sobriety', and concludes that it is "a singularly unbitting poem, although it was written at a bitter time."<sup>17</sup>

'Sobriety' is a characteristic of the ideal Donne is seeking and of the way it is sought through the paradox and balance of witty

analysis, the form of expression giving obvious evidence to himself and others that he can become what he wishes to be. A prevailing sobriety, however, does not dismiss the importance of the poem's personal reflections. Nor does Gardner's attempt to systematize Donne's personal concerns indicate that the distress which occasions them has been more than temporarily controlled:

We may also see in the whole poem a habit of mind which has been shaped by the practice of systematic self-examination, and thinks more in terms of particular sins and failings than in terms of general and total unworthiness; but the particular sins which Donne prays to be delivered from are not the traditional sins. . . . Instead the sins in 'A Litany' can all be referred back to two general philosophic conceptions: the conception of virtue as the mean between two extremes, and the related conception of virtue as the proper use of all the faculties.<sup>18</sup>

This analysis and the poem itself reveal a highly individual temperament forcing its accommodation to an external system, the 'via media' of early Anglicanism being made acceptable to a volatile personality given to extremes. With admittedly limited success, Donne attempts to rationalize the conscious choice of the middle way between the martyrdom of his catholic relatives and the prodigality of his earlier life.

"A Litanie" begins with an intense personal plea to God the Father:

And re-create mee, now growne ruinous:  
 My heart is by dejection, clay,  
 And by selfe-murder, red.  
 From this red earth, O Father, purge away  
 All vicious tinctures, that new fashioned  
 I may rise up from death, before I'am dead. (11.4-9)

As in "La Corona", Donne assumes a passive stance, and in a calmer tone than that of the 'Holy Sonnets' makes an appeal which introduces the possibility of a gentle God. Given Donne's melancholy and physical

illness, this plea is a simple self-presentation, a statement of emotional fact: not a black soul, but a grey state of mind. The calmer tone is only temporary, however, as Donne addresses a more strident plea to God the Son: "O be thou nail'd unto my heart,/And crucified againe," (ll. 14-15). As later in the 'Holy Sonnets', only a violent redemption will serve: "Drown'd in thy blood, and in thy passion slaine" (l. 18). To the Holy Ghost, he appeals for repentance and humility, admitting his past errors: "And being sacrilegiously/Halfe wasted with youths fires, of pride and lust," (ll. 21-22). To the assembled Trinity he reiterates his plea to be made anew: "Of these let all mee elemented bee,/Of power, to love, to know, you unnumbered three" (ll. 35-36). The 'elementing' of secular love has proved incomplete; his disillusion and dejection, as much as consciousness of past misdeeds, bring him to prayer.

Throughout the remaining twenty-four stanzas Donne details his appeal for rebirth through grace. His attempt to contemplate each extreme and choose the middle course becomes a plea for life-direction and for protection, in large part protection from himself. His accommodation to the Anglican ideal finds its best expression for Donne personally in stanza XV, which echoes the style and the concerns of letters of the Mitcham period:

From being anxious, or secure,  
 Dead clods of sadnesse, or light squibs of mirth,  
 From thinking, that great courts immure  
 All, or no happinesse, or that this earth  
     Is only for our prison fram'd,  
     Or that thou art covetous  
 To them whom thou lov'st, or that they are maim'd  
 From reaching this worlds sweet, who seek thee thus,  
 With all their might, Good Lord deliver us. (ll.127-135)

'Systematic self-examination' produced in Donne a recognition of his inability to stabilize his own personality without reference to an external loving and directing authority figure. Religious devotion brought not mystic ecstasy but emotional security. Note in this regard the reiteration of an ideal of inner harmony, essential to the Anglican 'middle way', and the several images of music which culminate in an appeal to the efficacy of divine love:

That musique of thy promises  
Not threats in Thunder may  
Awaken us to our just offices; (XXIV: 11.212-214).

"A Litanie" represents a deliberate attempt to accommodate personal distress within an externally motivated formal devotional structure. In a letter to Sir Henry Goodyer, Donne commented on this poem, at the time newly written, anticipating Gardner's criticism that "It is an elaborate private prayer rather incongruously cast into a liturgical form"<sup>19</sup>:

Since my imprisonment in my bed, I have made a meditation in verse, which I call a Litany; the word you know imports no other than supplication, but all Churches have one form of supplication by that name. Amongst ancient annals -- I mean some eight hundred years -- I have met two Litanies in Latin verse, which gave me not the reason of my meditations, for in good faith I thought not upon them then, but they give me a defence, if any man to a layman and a private impute it as a fault, to take such divine and public names to his own little thoughts. . . . Mine is for lesser chapels, which are my friends; . . . That by which it will deserve best acceptation is, that neither the Roman Church need call it defective, because it abhors not the particular mention of the blessed triumphers in heaven, not the Reformed can discreetly accuse it of attributing more than a rectified devotion ought to do.<sup>20</sup>

Donne's concern that the poem be acceptable to both denominations indicates that at the time of its composition, in autumn 1608, he

remained undecided about his religious allegiance. One basis for his indecision can be seen in the very incongruities of the poem: Donne was only beginning to approach the emotional security he sought, and, through an exploration of the Anglican ideal of 'moderation in all things', tentatively hoping to find individual accommodation within the outward form of the established Church.

The absence of cohesion of personal concern to formal structure leads Helen Gardner to judge the poem unsatisfactory:

One may sympathize with Donne's desire to find a form for his meditation; but the incompatibility between the material of the poem and the chosen form is too great. The form has had to be too much twisted to fit the material, and the material has been moulded to the poem rather than expressed by it.<sup>21</sup>

This difficulty is the essence of the poem. The attempted accommodation to an external ideal fails because the intended self-adjustment, personal and artistic, is not achieved. The incongruities of "A Litanie" reflect Donne's anxious insecurities in the Mitcham period.

Finding in this poem "the special interest of poems which are the product of a period of transition, when in the process of re-shaping a personality some elements are stressed to the exclusion of others",<sup>22</sup> Gardner approaches an explanation of Donne's personal motivation for writing in a formal meditative and liturgical structure at this time. He attempts to channel his awareness of his own ambivalence, his personal uncertainties, into the available structure of religious metaphor. Public prayer is perhaps always incongruous; in the Judaeo-Christian tradition the emphasis is on the personal relation of one man to his one God, making the very act of prayer intensely private. The 'public'

nature of Donne's 'Litany' is itself a device for personal control, the resultant 'sobriety' an achieved effect of the strained attempt to acknowledge his extremes without surrendering to them.

The predominant mood of "La Corona" is humility, passive necessity, a self-reduced waiting for the mercy of God. In "A Litanie", with repeated reference to dejection, waste, blindness, anxiety, inner 'war', and despair, Donne works his genuine sense of the particularity of sin into a form which allows some (artistic) control of that feeling. Donne's legalistic tone is a necessary first step in testing his acceptability. He seeks to move beyond the feeling of useless detachment evident in a letter to Sir Henry Goodyer:

Therefore I would fain do something, but  
that I cannot tell what is no wonder. For  
to choose is to do; but to be no part of  
any body is to be nothing. At most, the  
greatest persons are but great wens and  
excrescences; men of wit and delightful  
conversation but as moles for ornament,  
except they be so incorporated into the  
body of the world that they contribute  
something to the sustentation of the whole.<sup>23</sup>

The voice of "A Litanie" begins as "I" and becomes "we", moving through this need to identify himself as part of something external toward establishing that continuity of identity. Much of his earlier poetry served only to negate the viability of alternative, secular solutions. In the early divine poems Donne begins his attempt to accommodate himself to the external forms of the Anglican Church, and to find in personal devotion the lasting emotional security which relationship with woman had failed to provide.

As poems of transition, "Twicknam Garden" and "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies day" are related to the early divine poems in the

essential way delineated by Judah Stampfer:

As the female figure thinned to insubstantiality in his late love lyrics, Donne began sketching a context . . . for a fresh alter ego in God. The two movements overlap. In both, there is the same hesitation on an object, the same way-station, or limited circle of devotion; but the early devotions are without the mannerist ambiguity of the late love lyrics.<sup>24</sup>

This changing focus can be metaphored as a developing search for a relational center which will not fail: from center in relationship to woman through a spiritual search where the personal distress is itself center to an acceptance and recognition of God as sustaining center. Reliance on such imagery of center is a recognition of the significance of such imagery to Donne, a fascination with ideas of circularity and centrality which perhaps grew from his interest in current astronomy to become a metaphor for the changing object of intellectual and emotional focus. Note in this regard Donne's letter to Goodyer, probably written in 1609:

I often compare not you and me, but the sphere in which your resolutions are and my wheel, both I hope concentric to God: for methinks the new astronomy is thus applicable well, that we which are a little earth should rather move towards God, than that he which is fulfilling, and can come no whither, should move towards us.<sup>25</sup>

The failure of the 'love religion' entailed the abandonment of woman as emotional center: "Twicknam Garden" and "A Nocturnall" reflect different phases of Donne's disillusion.

In "Twicknam Garden" this disillusion, though real enough, arises more from ironic bitterness than from despairing loss. Indeed the loss seems only temporary, and known to be temporary, as the last couplet wittily relates the loss of her to the loss of all others.

Compared to the somber "Nocturnall", "Twickenham Garden" is a self-mocking palliative.

Related in this essential way as variations on a theme, "Twickenham Garden" and "A Nocturnall" also share some connection, however defined, to Lucy, Countess of Bedford. I cannot share Gardner's hesitations regarding Donne's relationship with the Countess, or her reasons for them:

In view of all we know of Donne's relations with the Countess of Bedford and the tone of his letters to her in prose and in verse, it seems incredible that either poem should be thought to be concerned with Donne's actual feelings for his patroness.

The poems may, all the same, very well be connected with her, although it is not her cruelty or her imagined death that they mourn. A poem may be written 'for' someone without necessarily being 'about' that person.

. . . "A Nocturnall" . . . is a companion piece to "Twickenham Garden" and it is possible that the idea of writing a poem on St. Lucy's Eve was a gesture of compliment to the countess. If so, the poem far transcends its original conception and has become the most profound expression of the sensation of utter and irremediable loss. The sombre and passionate intensity of both poems, their haunting slow rhythms, may more properly be ascribed to the date at which they were written<sup>26</sup> than to some imagined crisis in Donne's relations with his patron. If they are connected with Lucy Bedford they must have been written after 1607 when Donne was approaching middle age and his verse was developing the intensity of his Divine Poems, . . . .<sup>27</sup>

Gardner's insistence that these two poems are not related directly to the Countess, and her corollary defence of the 'innocence' of this relationship rest on two points, the tone of Donne's letters to the Countess, and his age at the time.

Donne's letters are models of sober petition and exaggerated



compliment, deifying the Countess as the embodiment of all virtue, letters which could have been written by any aspirant to favour. Before accepting this tone as entirely genuine, however, the reader must remember that these letters were frequently entrusted to friends for delivery; Goodyer, whose closer connection to the Countess made him ideal for the task, habitually copied ideas, phrases, occasionally whole letters. Yet even under such essentially public conditions, the courtly voice sometimes cracks. In a verse letter accepted as being early in their friendship, possibly late 1608 or 1609,<sup>28</sup> after affirming "you're vertues temple", he bursts out

Yet not as consecrate, but merely 'as faire,  
On these I cast a lay and country eye.  
Of past and future stories, which are rare,  
I finde you all record, all prophecie.  
Purge but the booke of Fate, that it admit  
No sad nor guilty legends, you are it.<sup>29</sup>

Try as he will to correct it in the last couplet, that is the voice of the great love lyrics: surely the echo of the first stanza of "The Good-Morrow" is obvious? That Donne was 'approaching middle age' in 1607 -- he would have been thirty-five -- seems even less credible as a reason for their relationship remaining 'courtly'.

Donne's biographers have similar difficulties discussing this relationship. Gosse too offers his assurance that Donne adored Lady Bedford in polite awe from a friendly distance, but acknowledges that their friendship was "one of the most durable and the most intimate of his life".<sup>30</sup> Bald exercises a similar restraint, barely avoiding a less honourable conclusion:

It is probable that close relations between Donne and Lady Bedford did not develop until 1607, the year in which she acquired Twickenham Park. . . .

The friendship . . . developed with rapidity and fervour. There was a strong element of mutual attraction between them. She possessed, besides rank and wealth, youth and charm as well as wit and an unusual share of intellectual capacity, and all those qualities attracted Donne to her. She, on her side, found something intoxicating in the brilliance of his mind and in the quality of his flattery.<sup>31</sup>

All such commentators are at pains to establish the innocence of this relationship, which, except for these poems, might appear obvious.

The difficulty for such scholars is their inability to accept Donne's obvious ambivalence in this period. He was almost literally half in a blatantly secular world and half in a world of strident personal religiosity, which Louis Martz refers to as Donne's "Great Divide between the sacred and the profane, now facing one way, now another, but always remaining intensely aware of both sides."<sup>32</sup> That this transition period involved crossing this divide toward the religious did not necessitate a denial of the profane world left behind: the essence of the transition is Donne's accommodation within himself of his rejection of the secular alternatives.

As for the Countess, Grierson's diplomatic comment presents the best solution, for the moment:

Friendship between man and woman is love in some degree. There is no need to exaggerate the situation, or to reflect on either her loyalty or his to other claims, to recognize that their mutual feeling was of the kind for which the Petrarchan convention afforded a ready and recognized vehicle of expression.<sup>33</sup>

The formal basis of "Twicknam Garden" is in the Petrarchan convention: the poem is a highly individual variation on a traditional theme -- the contrast between the dejection of the lover whose love is

hopeless, and the life and beauty of the spring.<sup>34</sup> Relating the poem to a formal tradition only, critics fail to recognize that it is the poet's motivation to choose a particular form rather than the form for itself which is significant. A little closer to emotional reality is Martz' idea that "the tears and sighs of the traditional lover are converted into agony by a bitter play upon religious images . . .".<sup>35</sup> Though he thus recognizes the poem as a cathartic experience, Martz seems to have the creative process backwards: the 'agony' must precede the imagery used to contain it. The use of a 'stock theme' only indicates the poet's personal need for a tradition, a structure, an archetype if you will, within which personal experience and intense emotion can reach adequate expression. What "Twicknam Garden" illustrates is the use of art as a control for an intensity of feeling which needed and could be accommodated to conventional terms.

A letter to Sir Henry Goodyer, probably written in the spring of 1608, indicates that the contrast between personal dejection and seasonal renewal was much more than a convenient literary device for Donne:

Because I am in a place and season where I see everything bud forth, I must do so too, and vent some of my meditations to you; the rather because all other buds being yet without taste or virtue, my letters may be like them. The pleasantness of the season displeases me. Everything refreshes, and I wither, and I grow older and not better, my strength diminishes, and my load grows, . . .<sup>36</sup>

In "Twicknam Garden" this traditional contrast underlies the tension between the literary theme and imagery and the subjective material. A close examination of the poem reveals that Donne's concentration of self-concern in effect undermines the traditional elements.

The first stanza establishes that he is himself the cause of the failure of this love, of the darkening of the garden. "The spider love" which converts affection to distrust is within himself; the serpent he brings is not only envy, but deceit. His ironic self-concern extends to extreme pathetic fallacy which borders on paranoia. He appears incapable of a 'purer', less self-interested affection, and must disrupt the beauty and serenity of the garden itself: this is the true origin of his wish to remain. Hopefully that wish would indicate a desire to overcome this negative self, but instead it establishes a perverse security in dejection. With the third stanza the rhythm of the poem breaks down, his forced and bitter jocularly falls away. Changed to a fountain, he wishes to become a votive object for other lovers. As together he and his beloved were the emblem of true love in "The Canonization", so now he becomes the emblem of failed love. Wilbur Sanders' perceptive comments on the love lyric are worth noting here:

. . . the mental operations in 'The Canonization'  
 . . . seem the operations of a very uneasy mind.  
 I'll be noting more than once how fond Donne is of  
 inviting the reader's complicity in the activities  
 of chronic self-consciousness, and how frequently  
 he has to have recourse to the hypothetical votary  
 or voyeur, the watching eye of the external world,  
 before he can give any substance to his love.<sup>37</sup>

His attempt to restructure his crumbling self leads him into two essentially negative actions: he seeks public confirmation of his failure, and he tries to cast the responsibility for that failure upon the woman.

To identify rejection with death -- "her truth kills me" -- is an innately childish response indicating a complete absence of emotional self-sufficiency. Yet the idea that 'if my existence is not confirmed

by her, 'I shall cease to exist' is not an honest recognition within himself of his inability to survive, but an hysterical pose. Like a spoiled child he demands attention from the woman addressed and from the reader. This pose becomes the basis for false solutions, which avoid coming to terms with the inner distress which occasions the poem and its causes. In the poem he wishes to remain in the garden as a galling reminder of her unkindness, and to be metamorphosed into a personified inanimate object because he cannot deal with the emotional difficulties of being human. 'I shall simply die' rather than face the problem which is within me. Compared to the deep concentration of personal negativity in the "Nocturnall", in "Twicknam Garden" Donne is playing image games with his distress, fooling only himself, and only temporarily.

"A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies day" reveals the profound dejection which accompanied the failure of the 'love religion'. All the difficulties concerning Donne's relationship with Lucy, Countess of Bedford, surround the poem. Gardner thinks it "incredible" that "A Nocturnall" could contain Donne's "actual feelings" for his patroness, but does recognize the intensity of feeling within the poem: ". . . the poem far transcends its original conception and has become the most profound expression of the sensation of utter and irremediable loss."<sup>38</sup> Louis Martz carries this realization further, finding that within the poem "human love is exalted to the religious level", and defining a certain ritual element:

In accordance with the ancient ecclesiastical usage of the term "nocturnal", or "nocturne", Donne presents a midnight service, a "Vigill", commemorating the death of his beloved -- his saint. He recalls the passionate fluctuations of their worldly career, in terms that suggest a long period of frustrated

spiritual devotion. . . . But with her death  
his physical life has died. . . . His only  
life now lies in the spiritual realm where she  
now lives.<sup>39</sup>

Although both critics exhibit a partial awareness of Donne's emotional state, both miss the essential point. If the poem is a "profound expression of utter and irremediable loss", it is because the loss, however defined, is very real: the poem cannot be seen as merely an elaborate gesture.

Quotation from a verse letter to the Countess serves to indicate that Donne frequently referred to himself throughout their acquaintance as 'nothing':

This twilight of two yeares, not past nor next,  
Some embleme is of mee, or I of this,  
Who Meteor-like, of stufte and forme perplext,  
Whose what, and where, in disputation is,  
If I should call mee any thing, should misse.

I summe the yeares, and mee, and finde mee not  
Debtor to th'old, nor Creditor to th'new,  
That cannot say, My thanks I have forgot,  
Nor trust I this with hopes, and yet scarce true  
This bravery is, since these times shew'd mee you.<sup>40</sup>

The tone of this opening also reveals that Lady Bedford was well informed of Donne's darker moods. The corollary of seeing himself as 'nothing' was to consider her 'everything': in other verse letters she is 'divinity' itself, 'God's masterpeece', 'vertues temple', and 'vertue' itself. If, as I shall suggest, "A Nocturnall" marks the end of a particularly intense phase of their relationship, then what Donne recognized as the loss of the 'All' which was she would reinforce his sense of being 'nothing'. Grierson defined this as "the sense of nothingness which can overtake one who has lost the central motive of his life".<sup>41</sup>

A critical problem in relating "A Nocturnall" to Lady Bedford centers on the reference to "her death" (l. 28). As Gardner notes, critics have attempted to relate this reference to the serious illness of Donne's wife in 1611, or to Lady Bedford's illness in 1612, or to the death of Donne's wife in 1617.<sup>42</sup> I think; however, that this reference, qualified as it is -- "her death (which word wrongs her)" -- is used in an entirely metaphorical sense: "her death" means her death to him, that is, an end to their present relationship. R. S. Jackson offers an explanation which relates this phrase forward to the conclusion of the poem:

"Death" meant for Donne, as for his contemporaries generally, the separation of body from soul (psyche, life), and anything suggestive of that state was appropriately alluded to by that term. It is close to what Saint Paul means by the death of "the old man" and is a prelude to the experience of second birth. In this sense, it is a spiritual or psychic death and is felt as part of the totality of this life.

. . . .  
The function of such a death is that the psyche, by becoming detached in some sense or other from the body and the whole of this world, may become more sensitive to the "other world" at whose door it lurks.<sup>43</sup>

It is not necessary to decide the exact nature of Donne's relationship with Lucy Bedford; though I think theirs was a love affair of courtly sensuality which had by this time proved unsatisfactory as a bulwark against Donne's inner distress, it is possible that this 'death' marks the end of the frustration of an unrequited adoration. That Donne continued to know Lady Bedford presents no problem: it is possible to end a particular relationship without ceasing to know the person involved. The essence of the poem is that the 'exalted love' of which Martz speaks has failed

— the symbolism of the 'love religion' has not proved viable to sustain Donne's life-direction more than temporarily.

The central personal experience of "A Nocturnall" is contained in the ritualistic incantation of nothingness which is at the core of the poem. Stampfer has expressed this as

the long systematic exorcism of the poem,  
the ritual penance in the runic repetition  
of phrases, one behind the other, (which)  
has built to the pitchpoint of "But I am  
none", an exorcism of all life, vitality,  
body, masculinity, and property.<sup>44</sup>

The self-reduction began with the wish to be "some senselesse peece of this place" (l. 16) in "Twicknam Garden"; in "A Nocturnall" even this must be abandoned, since even plants and stones "detest,/And love", in order to achieve a drastically complete self-reduction. There is still, it seems, a bitter pride in being even less than "an ordinary nothing" without self or shadow.

Donne is not merely playing an intellectual word game with the idea of 'nothing', though his fascination with the word during this period has many similarities to his life-long punning on his name. This fascination, and the very real emotional self-assessment which underlies it, are reflected in several letters of the Mitcham period:

to Sir Henry Goodyer, supposedly July 1607:

Sir, if I were anything, my love to you  
might multiply it, and dignify it: but  
infinite nothings are but one such; yet  
since even chimeras have some name and  
titles, I am also

Yours.

to 'a person of honour', March 1607/8:

There is some of the honour and some of the  
degrees of a Creation to make a friendship



of nothing. . . . Yet, not to annihilate myself utterly (for though it seem humbleness, yet it is a work of as much almightiness to bring a thing to nothing as from nothing), though I be not of the best stuff for friendship, which men of warm and durable fortunes only are, I cannot say I am not of the best fashion, if truth and honesty be that. . . .

to Goodyer, September 1608:

For to this hour I am nothing, or so little, that I am scarce subject and argument good enough for one of mine own letters; yet I fear, that doth not ever proceed from a good root, that I am so well content to be less, that is dead.<sup>45</sup>

By experimenting with 'nothing' and all its synonyms, Donne is attempting to achieve an expression of a very real feeling of non-existence, of incapacity, of personal nullity.

The existentialist critic Robert Ellrodt finds in "A Nocturnall" a universe of death constructed about a center which is concrete, defined: that center is the self, if not the experience of 'nothingness' within the self. Ellrodt relates Donne's fascination with 'nothingness' to his life-long obsession with death: these have a common origin in the intuition which the poet gains of his inability to direct his own life, in effect his inability to continue living. This recognition would seem to indicate a fundamental emptiness at the core of personality itself. Yet it is from this experience of emptiness that the desire for fulfillment is born.<sup>46</sup>

In the attempt to define personal nothingness begins the possibility of regeneration. The effect is of extreme concentration, a willed self-analysis. To achieve definition is to establish a measure of control. The incantation of nothingness is at once a

self-defense against emotional reality and a presentation of that reality, a coming to terms with personal distress, protected by words.

The psychoanalyst Erik Erikson discusses the "depth of regression which can ensue from an identity-crisis" in terms remarkably similar to the imagery of "Twicknam Garden" and "A Nocturnall":

Total feeling becomes dehumanized, and eventually even de-mammalized. These patients can feel like a crab or a shellfish or a mollusk, or even abandon what life and movement there is on the lowest animal level and become a lonely twisted tree on the ledge of a stormy rock, or the rock, or just the ledge out in nowhere. . . . at no other time in life can severe regression to a play with nothingness appear in such systematized form, and yet be, as it were, experimental, an adventure in reaching inner rock bottom to find something firm to stand on.<sup>47</sup>

This possibility of regeneration in "A Nocturnall" carries through the imagery of seasonal and diurnal renewal in the opening of the last stanza into the concluding lines:

Since she enjoys her long nights festivall,  
Let mee prepare towards her, and let mee call  
This houre her Vigill, and her Eve, since this  
Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is.

Personal realization is no longer possible within the confines of the 'religion of love', yet the creation of new life-direction arises from personal devotion to a female figure. The contrast is no longer between joy in love and sorrow in loss, but between diverse qualities of celebration. Only with positive vision gained through intense self-examination can 'her long night' through 'midnight' and 'deep midnight' be experienced as a 'festivall'. The religious imagery is entirely positive: a devotional watch on the eve of the celebration of a joyful mystery -- not self-defeat but regeneration.

To see in these closing lines the consummation of personal negativity, as Wilbur Sanders does -- "It sounds like someone untwisting the last strands of man in himself and giving way to despair. Suicide, ultimately"<sup>48</sup> -- is to ignore the increment of life-possibility present in the preceding lines and the gradual modulation to a calmer tone. The center of despair in the poem is within the metaphoric suicide of persistent self-reduction. Even if "her death" is an actual death it is difficult to find suicidal despair in "Let mee prepare towards her": the intention is toward a new life-direction, a re-weaving of those strands of human potential disjunctured by personal loss.

"Let mee prepare towards her" also contains possible reference to the Countess of Bedford. Commenting on a verse letter to the Countess, probably written in the latter part of 1609, R. C. Bald affirms that

Donne responded to her admiration of the satires by telling her that her influence and example had caused him to renounce satire for religious verse:

. . .  
 . . . whether my hymnes you admit or chuse,  
 In me you've hallowed a Pagan Muse,  
 And denizend a stranger, who mistaught  
 By blamers of the times they mard, hath sought  
 Vertues in corners, which now bravely doe  
 Shine in the worlds best part, or all It; You.<sup>49</sup>

and concludes with this note concerning the Countess: "Despite her apparent worldliness there was a pietistical strain in Lady Bedford which, as she grew older, became more and more tinged with Puritanism." There may be as much truth as compliment in the letter: if "her death" in "A Nocturnall" marks the end of a particularly intense aspect of their relationship, her 'rejection' of Donne could have reinforced his already deepening religious orientation.

Sanders compares this possibility of new life-direction to the conclusion of "A Hymne to Christ, at the Author's last going into Germany":

The 'renunciation' of the 'Hymne' is, by comparison, passionless, bleak, and final. The possibility it figures (and it is figured equally by the 'Nocturnall' and 'Since she whome I lovd') is that, beyond the romantic battleground where passions and gods contend in fierce emulation, there may be some silent ground of naturalness -- which it would be folly either to seek out or to shun, but which may, ineluctably, disclose itself as the real.<sup>50</sup>

Donne's choice of "an everlasting night" at the close of his 'Hymne' has its foundation in "the religious emotion, awe carried to the supreme pitch which is darkness, stillness, nothingness."<sup>51</sup> This is the qualitative difference between 'midnight' and 'deep midnight', and it is in the depths of that dark transition that the final choice begins to be made.

"Twicknam Garden" and "A Nocturnall" register Donne's final disillusion with his secular ideals, with the possibility of realization -- of self, of mutuality, of any sustained relatedness -- within the context of the 'religion of love'. The 'nothing else is' of the great love lyrics has become nothing itself. In this period of transition, when the 'Holy Sonnets' began to be written, Donne reached that state of spiritual self-annihilation which Erik Erikson describes as the "immutable bedrock" of personality,<sup>52</sup> and R. D. Laing, in strangely Donnian terms, refers to as the nothing which is the essence of everything at the center of creative personality.<sup>53</sup> From within an abyss of self-reduction begins a reorganization of the self, Donne disengaging himself from woman and looking toward God in his search for personal security and a basis of assurance.

## FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER TWO)

<sup>1</sup>Gardner, "Commentary", Divine Poems, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 55-56; also Bald, p. 182.

<sup>4</sup>Bald, p. 119.

<sup>5</sup>Gardner, "Introduction", Divine Poems, pp. xxii - xxiii.

<sup>6</sup>Louis Martz, The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 107.

<sup>7</sup>Martz, p. 108.

<sup>8</sup>Leishman, pp. 252-253.

<sup>9</sup>John Donne, "La Corona" in The Divine Poems of John Donne ed. Helen Gardner, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952). All subsequent quotations from the Divine Poems are from this text.

<sup>10</sup>Martz, p. 111.

<sup>11</sup>I cannot agree with Helen Gardner that "the metaphor is natural -- prison is normally interpreted allegorically as the world or the body." As she notes, medieval reference specifically to Mary's pregnancy is exactly the opposite: "But medieval allegorists and poets celebrated the womb of Mary as 'palace', 'bower', and 'garden enclosed'. (Notes to her edition of the Divine Poems, p. 59) In "A Litanie", Donne himself celebrates Mary "whose wombe was a strange heav'n" (l. 41). Although the world and the body are frequently interpreted metaphorically as prisons of the soul, I find nothing 'natural' in this particular image, nor have I found a precedent for feeling that Christ is anything but pleased to accept his humanity through Mary's agency. I therefore take this to be a personal view, and relate it to Donne's always ambivalent attitude to woman.

Even if such imagery were typical, the vituperative scorn is

not: Donne's disgust is obvious in The Second Anniversary ll. 163-174, where he begins a catalogue of the 'Incommodities of the Soule in the Body' with reference to "This curded milke, this poore unlittered whelpe/My body" which 'infects' the soul with 'originall sinne'; both existence in the womb and in the new-born body is a 'poore prison'.

<sup>12</sup>Holy Bible, King James Version. I Corinthians 13:12.

<sup>13</sup>Gardner, "Introduction", Divine Poems, p. xxi.

<sup>14</sup>Gardner, "Introduction", Divine Poems, pp. xxiv-xxv.

<sup>15</sup>Gardner's analysis (pp. xxiv-xxviii in the "Introduction" to her edition of the Divine Poems) is too long to quote in full, although her analysis could be qualified or expanded almost point by point. Gardner is engaging in 'descriptive' criticism, as Bald does in 'descriptive' biography, providing helpful clues but little conclusion.

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

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

<sup>18</sup>Gardner, "Introduction", Divine Poems, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

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

<sup>20</sup>Letter quoted in Gosse, I, pp. 195-196.

<sup>21</sup>Gardner, "Introduction", Divine Poems, p. xxvii.

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

<sup>23</sup>Letter quoted in Gosse, I, p. 191, and dated September 1608.

<sup>24</sup>Judah Stampfer, John Donne and the Metaphysical Gesture (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), p. 231.

<sup>25</sup>Letter quoted in Gosse, I, pp. 218-219.

<sup>26</sup> An interesting suggestion. However, in her Notes to The Songs and Sonnets, p. 216, Gardner suggests three possible dates, 1611, 1612, and 1617. 'Sombre and passionate intensity' and 'haunting slow rhythms' can hardly be characteristic of the entire period 1611-1617, which included the composition of such diverse works as Donne's contribution to Coryate's Crudities, The Anniversaries, "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward", the prose satire Ignatius his Conclave and the early sermons. For my own discussion of the probable date of "Twicknam Garden" and "A Nocturnall" see note 62 Chapter One.

<sup>27</sup> Gardner, "Lady Bedford and Mrs. Herbert", Appendix C in her edition of The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets, pp. 250-251.

<sup>28</sup> See W. Milgate, Notes to his edition of The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters, pp. 253, 256.

<sup>29</sup> "To the Countess of Bedford: Madame, You have refin'd mee, . . .", The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters, W. Milgate ed., p. 91f., ll. 49-54.

<sup>30</sup> Gosse, I, p. 209.

<sup>31</sup> Bald, p. 173.

<sup>32</sup> Martz, p. 215.

<sup>33</sup> Grierson, "Introduction", II, p. xxiii.

<sup>34</sup> See Gardner, "Lady Bedford and Mrs. Herbert", p. 249; Bald, pp. 175-176.

<sup>35</sup> Martz, p. 213.

<sup>36</sup> Letter quoted in Gosse, I, p. 185; also Bald, p. 175.

<sup>37</sup> Wilbur Sanders, John Donne's Poetry, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1971), p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Gardner, "Lady Bedford and Mrs. Herbert", p. 251.

<sup>39</sup>Martz, p. 214.

<sup>40</sup>"To the Countesse of Bedford At New-Yeaes Tide", The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters, p. 98f., ll. 1-10. The editor of the verse letters, W. Milgate, suggests this letter marked the new year 25 March 1610 (Notes, p. 266). R. C. Bald suggests 31 December 1607, taking this letter to be the one referred to in a letter to Goodyer dated 'the last of 1607' (which may have meant 25 March 1607/8). (Bald, p. 173). I prefer the earlier date, as I take l. 10 'since these times shew'd mee you' to refer to the beginning of their friendship.

<sup>41</sup>H. J. C. Grierson, "Notes", Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century, Donne to Butler, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 220. My italics.

<sup>42</sup>See Gardner, Notes to The Songs and Sonnets, p. 216; also note 62, pp. 42-3 above.

<sup>43</sup>R. S. Jackson, John Donne's Christian Vocation, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 87.

<sup>44</sup>Stampfer, p. 195.

<sup>45</sup>Letters quoted in Gosse, I, pp. 171, 181, 191.

<sup>46</sup>Robert Ellrodt, L'Inspiration Personnelle et L'Esprit du Temps Chez Les Poètes Métaphysiques Anglais, Première Partie: Les Structures Fondamentales de L'Inspiration Personnelle, Tome I: John Donne et Les Poètes de la Tradition Chrétienne, (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1960). Ellrodt's discussion of "A Nocturnall" is rather rambling; this comment is a synthesis of remarks from pages 103, 113, 124, and 136. My translation.

<sup>47</sup>Erik H. Erikson, Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History, (New York: W. W. Norton and Co. Ltd., 1958), pp. 103-104.

<sup>48</sup>Sanders, p. 119. He complains that "There is no reason offered for regarding the unutterable blankness and silence as 'her long nights festivall', nor for calling his unhoping, hopeless watch, a 'Vigill'." However, he continues: "Whatever sense of renewed possibility we find in these gestures -- and it's impossible not to find some -- we find it on our own responsibility." (p. 119). Meaning, I suppose, that it isn't actually present in the poem. Yet the existence



of the poem itself indicates that the 'blankness and silence' are not, or no longer, 'unutterable', that a sense of nothingness which achieves formal expression is already partially overcome.

<sup>49</sup>Bald, p. 174.

<sup>50</sup>Sanders, p. 157.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>52</sup>Erikson, p. 103.

<sup>53</sup>See R. D. Laing, The Politics of Experience and The Bird of Paradise, (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1967), pp. 32-38.

## CHAPTER THREE: THE 'HOLY SONNETS'

## I

MEDITATIVE STRUCTURE AND THE SEQUENCE OF THE 'HOLY SONNETS'

Criticism of the 'Holy Sonnets' has concentrated on two essential aspects: the formal religious traditions to which the sonnets can be related, and the relationship of the 'self' presented in the sonnets to God, including the often startling imagery in which that relationship is figured. The valuable insights provided by such studies can best be examined in the contributions of Dame Helen Gardner and Louis Martz.

In her "Introduction" to her edition of the Divine Poems, Gardner assembles evidence of manuscript transmission to support returning to the early printed editions for a rearrangement of the order of the 'Holy Sonnets'. The order she accepts, twelve sonnets of the 1633 edition, four of the 1635 edition, and three preserved only in the Westmoreland manuscript, reflects a thematic order:

The first six are quite clearly a short sequence on one of the most familiar themes for a meditation: death and judgement, or the Last Things. The first sonnet is a preparatory prayer before making a meditation, beginning with an act of recollection; . . . the second vividly imagines extreme sickness; . . . the third, with equal vividness, imagines the very moment of death; . . . the fourth brings before us the general judgement of the Last Day; . . . the fifth is more discursive, but its subject is damnation; the sixth is on the death of Death at the resurrection of the just. The last six sonnets are less of a sequence; but they are on two aspects of a single theme, love. The first three (7-9) are concerned with the Atonement, and the mystery of the Creator's love for his creatures, for whom he was willing

to suffer death. The last three (10-12) reverse the theme and are on the love man owes to God and to his neighbour. The progress is clear: 'We love him because he first loved us.'<sup>1</sup>

The four sonnets added in the 1635 edition are again related by theme:

"They are all penitential and are linked by their common emphasis on sin and tears for sin. They also handle, in the manner of a meditation, a traditional subject for meditation."<sup>2</sup> Finally, the three Westmoreland sonnets are unconnected with each other, or with the other sequences;

They really deserve to be called 'separate ejaculations'. But they are also quite distinct in their inspiration from the sixteen which precede them in the manuscript. They owe nothing in either subject or treatment to the tradition of formal meditation. The first is highly personal, on the death of Donne's wife; the second is a prayer to Christ for unity in his church; the third is again purely personal, but is analytic and devotional.<sup>3</sup>

Gardner does not claim that this arrangement of the sonnets represents the order of composition; rather it appears to reflect the organizational effort of an editor, perhaps Donne himself, or his friend Henry King, later Bishop of Chichester, whom Grierson thought to have superintended the 1633 edition through the press. The nineteen sonnets do not form an organized sequence, even so arranged: they are separate examinations from different angles of the fundamental problem of the individual's relation to himself and to God.

Gardner marshalls evidence to indicate that the first six of the 1633 sonnets were written between February and August 1609.<sup>4</sup> She then relates the second six to the same period, as "they are so closely linked to the first set in inspiration."<sup>5</sup> Gardner suggests that the four penitential sonnets added in the 1635 edition were written slightly later than these first twelve, as they reflect a more discursive use of the method of formal meditation; these four were probably written between

the second half of 1609, and the composition of the First Anniversary in 1611.<sup>6</sup> The date of the three Westmoreland sonnets presents more of a problem. The first, "Since she whome I lov'd," is assumed to refer to the death of Donne's wife in 1617; Gardner would date it "just before Donne's journey of May 1619" because of the 'tone of resignation' and the similarity of theme to "A Hymne to Christ". The two remaining sonnets Gardner assumes were written after his ordination in 1615, "inspired by what appears to have been casual moods".<sup>7</sup>

Gardner finds that the first six of the 1633 sonnets reflect the Ignatian method of formal meditation in theme, structure, and imagery, while the second six reveal a more discursive use of particular features of meditative composition. The four penitential sonnets of 1635 form a brief independent sequence which again adapts separate elements of the meditative method. While thus relating the 'Holy Sonnets' to a formal religious tradition, Gardner is careful to acknowledge that Donne is "a poet using for his own purposes various elements from a familiar tradition".<sup>8</sup> She affirms that "the influence of the formal meditation lies behind the 'Holy Sonnets', not as a literary source, but as a way of thinking, a method of prayer."<sup>9</sup> Thus she relates the 'Holy Sonnets' more directly to Donne's state of mind in the middle of the distress-filled Mitcham period:

The almost histrionic note of the 'Holy Sonnets' may be attributed partly to the meditation's deliberate stimulation of emotion; it is the special danger of this exercise that, in stimulating feeling, it may falsify it, and overdramatize the spiritual life. But Donne's choice of subjects and his whole-hearted use of the method are symptoms of a condition of mind very different from the mood of 'La Corona' or even from the conflicts which can be felt behind 'A Litany'. The meditation on sin and on judgement is strong medicine;

the mere fact that his mind turned to it suggests some sickness in the soul. The 'low devout melancholie' of 'La Corona', the 'dejection' of 'A Litany' are replaced by something darker. In both his preparatory prayers Donne uses a more terrible word, despair. The note of anguish is unmistakable. The image of a soul in meditation which the 'Holy Sonnets' present is an image of a soul working out its salvation in fear and trembling. The two poles between which it oscillates are faith in the mercy of God in Christ, and a sense of personal unworthiness that is very near to despair.<sup>10</sup>

Gardner seems, however, to participate in the difficulties of dual vision. On the one hand she recognizes 'some sickness in the soul', 'an unmistakable anguish', a mood 'very near to despair'. Yet the emphasis on the personal, both the evocation of immediacy of experience and the extreme emphasis on the personal pronouns, Gardner sees as poetic devices to create "the illusion of present experience".<sup>11</sup> Critical emphasis on the deliberate nature of meditative composition leads to this failure to acknowledge the present-ness of the experience, or to recognize that emphatic use of the personal pronouns indicates an intense focus of self-concern. Moreover, the 'unanalysable magic' of his 'dramatic language'<sup>12</sup> is deliberate in a sense which Gardner overlooks: Donne wished his 'position' to be unanswerable; heightened, almost incantatory language assists in imagining the strong presence of an invisible figure, the reality of whose existence no one could deny. Gardner is surely right that "the strength with which his imagination presents this figure is the measure of his need".<sup>13</sup>

In theological terms it is Donne's pervasive 'sinne of feare' which creates this profound need for the divine presence. Of Donne's lack of religious security, Gardner remarks,

the Divine Poems are poems of faith, not of vision. . . . The absence of ecstasy makes his divine poems so different from his love poems. There is an ecstasy of joy and an ecstasy of grief in his love poetry; in his divine poetry we are conscious almost always of an effort of will. In the 'Holy Sonnets' there is passion and longing, . . . but there is no rapture.<sup>14</sup>

If "His Maker is more powerfully present to the imagination in his divine poems than any mistress is in his love poems",<sup>15</sup> it is because Donne needed a presence more powerful than his own. From this need arose the essential healing function Donne sought in the religious poems:

He did not look to religion for an ecstasy of the spirit which would efface the memory of the ecstasy of the flesh; but for an 'evennesse' of piety which would preserve him from despair.<sup>16</sup>

In their recognition of the importance of meditative techniques in the poetry of Donne, the essential difference between Dame Helen Gardner and Louis Martz is that Martz seems intent upon separating the poems from the poet: he is not concerned with the personality behind the formal structure it appropriates to its own use. Gardner tempers her analysis of form and structure with at least some awareness of Donne's personal reality at the time the 'Holy Sonnets' were composed.

In The Poetry of Meditation Martz defines meditation very generally in order to create a 'genre of meditative poetry' which would include poems of intense though not necessarily religious inward focus:

intense, imaginative meditation that brings together the senses, the emotions, and the intellectual faculties of man; brings them together in a moment of dramatic, creative experience.<sup>17</sup>

His basis for referring Donne's divine poems to meditative techniques generally, and to Ignatian meditation in particular, is biographical:

John Donne was reared in a devout Catholic family, and his uncle, Jasper Heywood, was one of the leading Jesuit missionaries in England during Donne's childhood: it would be reasonable to suppose that Donne was subjected to a strong Jesuit influence during his formative years.<sup>18</sup>

R. C. Bald effectively counters this assumption, insisting that for Donne to have had a Jesuit education was impossible: conversations between a precocious child and his Jesuit uncles during their necessarily infrequent visits cannot be said to constitute a governing influence. Bald concludes that "Donne's education, though Catholic, was not therefore Jesuit, nor was it even humanist in the best tradition of Sir Thomas More."<sup>19</sup> I do not wish on this basis to deny Martz' valuable insight: the meditative context of Donne's divine poems need not rest directly on the foundations of a Jesuit education.

Martz interprets the 'Holy Sonnets' with reference to methods of meditation, establishing an available tradition as a general context for poetic composition:

The finest of the 'Holy Sonnets', proper, represent the carefully integrated work of all the powers of the soul within the borders of a single sonnet; and in particular that several of them show a powerful development from vivid composition of place, through devout analysis, to impassioned colloquy.<sup>20</sup>

He then adds to the meditative context the concept of systematic self-examination proposed in The Spiritual Combat, published in England in 1598, as a continuing activity and a specific preparation for devotional exercises:

The center of the book is self-analysis, the prime weapon in the spiritual combat. . . . The weapons set forth . . . are four in number: distrust of self, confidence in God, "exercise" -- that is, the proper use of the senses and the faculties of the soul in considerations directed toward the extirpating of vices and the planting of virtues --  
21  
and prayer, which includes both petition and meditation.

Martz relates Donne's preoccupation with self-analysis first to his verse letter to Rowland Woodward advising "Seeke wee then ourselves in our selves", which Gardner suggests was written in 1597, more than ten years before the 'Holy Sonnets', and then to the paradoxical combination of Donne's personality of an air of detachment with acute self-consciousness.<sup>22</sup> Martz sees the activity of spiritual combat as clearly evident in the 'Holy Sonnets':

In his religious poetry Donne deals with two dominant vices: the "sinne of fear" which he was still combating in one of his last hymns, and the sin of intellectual pride. . . . The way to deal with these, as we have seen, is to face them squarely, arouse the sinful impulses deliberately, and then repel them by examining all situations in the light of one's ultimate goal: conformity with the will of God. In Holy Sonnet 1 [Sonnet 1 of 1635 in Gardner] we watch the speaker, in the octave of the poem, deliberately arouse sensations of "despaire" and "terroure" at the thoughts of sin and death and hell, and then, in the sestet, firmly repel them by confidence in God's grace. Or in Holy Sonnet 9 [Sonnet 5] we see him deliberately cultivate the blasphemous thoughts of his unruly intellect that dares dispute with God -- and then repel these outrageous "motions" by casting himself on God's mercy.<sup>23</sup>

In recognizing Donne's genuine fears and very real horror of death, Martz himself undermines this 'deliberate' element in the 'Holy Sonnets':

. . . we feel the depravity of the "feeble flesh" -- with a consequent fear and horror of judgement, deliberately evoked: even in his "Death be not proud" there is a tone of stridency, almost of truculence -- a sense of daring to stand up to the terror.<sup>24</sup>

Martz finds in the 'Holy Sonnets' the overall movement of the meditative sequence, directed toward overcoming these fears:

Whatever the methods by which self-knowledge is pursued, the ultimate goal remains the same: to move from Fear to Charity, from distrust of the



self to confidence in God: by the intense exercise of self-analysis to purge the soul, and so make way for the "presence of God."<sup>25</sup>

He concludes by relating the 'Holy Sonnets' to Donne's difficulties in the period preceding his decision to accept ordination: the sonnets "may be seen as part of the spiritual exercises which Donne was performing in the effort to determine his problem of 'election': . . . the problem of deciding upon a way of life . . ."<sup>26</sup>

Martz makes his most valuable contribution in general statements which characterize the operation of a mind within an available and popular tradition:

. . . all the ways of speaking and writing that a man has learned will inevitably help to form the thoughts of the "whole soul". At the same time, the enormous popularity of methodical meditation in this era may be attributed to the fact that it satisfied and developed a natural, fundamental tendency of the human mind -- a tendency to work from a particular situation, through analysis of that situation, and finally to some sort of resolution of the problems which the situation has presented. Meditation focused and disciplined the powers that a man already possessed, both his innate powers and his acquired modes of logical analysis and rhetorical development. The process of meditation, then, is not an isolated factor in this poetry; it exists, I believe, as a fundamental organizing impulse deep within the poetry.<sup>27</sup>

Though he has this final reservation concerning the operation of meditative technique as a formal structure in poetry -- "But perhaps this general movement of a poem only shows that meditative technique and poetic method are inevitably similar; that this movement from concrete place, to 'question', to emotional resolution is a natural, common movement of the mind?"<sup>28</sup> -- Martz fails to come to terms with what it is within the mind of the poet which seeks this resolution, which needs to be

organized through meditation or through poetry itself.

Martz' analysis of the operation of meditative techniques within the 'Holy Sonnets' rests on his repeated insistence that the emotional states which underlie the poems are deliberately evoked: Donne deliberately recalls sinful impulses; deliberately arouses despair; deliberately cultivates blasphemous thoughts. In order to accept this interpretation it seems necessary either to ignore Donne's very real distress in the Mitcham period, or to interpret the 'Holy Sonnets' as written after this distress is somehow resolved, deliberately recalling it. I would rather conclude that the meditative structure is an imposed control than that the distress is a pose necessary to meditation. Further to this distinction is that though Martz acknowledges the real sense of fear and terror inherent in some of the 'Holy Sonnets', he interprets Donne's "emotional violence" as a device of meditation carried "to the extreme limit compatible with unified control".<sup>29</sup> Again I find the definition a reversal of the creative process: emotional violence carries Donne; the extremes are real; the sonnet form is an attempt to achieve, or at best to maintain, control. Witness Martz' own comment that "in Donne the noise of thoughts is clamorous; the grief pours forth in anguished eruption; the central mood and tone is summed up in the violence and tumult of his famous "Batter my heart, three person'd God".<sup>30</sup>

The 'Holy Sonnets' indicate Donne's attempt to dispel his recognition of fear and despair by a grasping at articles of faith. One of Donne's difficulties appears to be the very inadequacies of the traditional structures and techniques available to him: there is always the possibility, the fear, with self-examination, of looking

inward and not finding sustenance or sufficiency. Donne, I think, had this fear, and used elements of available religious traditions to direct his search outward toward a devotional object.

Martz is, I think, closest to recognizing Donne's actual state of mind when he describes the movement of meditative self-analysis as being "from distrust of the self to confidence in God".<sup>31</sup> This movement was an integral part of the mental transition effected in the Mitcham years. Martz' final recognition of the essential similarities between the art of meditation and the composition of poetry underlies his general insights; while accepting the influence of the meditative tradition on Donne's religious poetry, I would conclude that meditative structure is for Donne a device and not a motive force.

Critical emphasis on the formal meditative structure of the 'Holy Sonnets' results in part from a failure to define the nature of the personal crisis of the Mitcham years; with some critics, indeed, a failure to recognize that a crisis occurred, though there is considerable biographical evidence to that effect. Thus the 'Holy Sonnets' are seen as formal meditative structures intended by Donne to order a purely religious commitment. The personal insights the sonnets afford move outward from these structures to provide a portrait of a distressed personality which is in fundamental accord with the content of the letters of the Mitcham period. What critics like Martz see as a process for defining 'election' is in personal terms a process of transition, a change in mental focus from woman to God as 'devotional object'. In the 'Holy Sonnets' known and available traditions become vehicles for this redirection of focus toward God. This movement is not a 'progress'

through the 'Holy Sonnets' as poetic or emotional sequence, but a portrait of the inner man from different angles, almost simultaneously highlighting different aspects of a complex personality and its fundamental concerns.

Gardner, Martz, and Bald seem to lack some essential sympathy with Donne which Gosse and Grierson shared, despite their factual errors. Gosse and Grierson interpreted the 'Holy Sonnets' as the product of an intensely individual mind schooling itself to acceptance of a position which, although difficult, was by circumstance inevitable. Dating the 'Holy Sonnets' after the death of Donne's wife in 1617, Gosse and Grierson saw in them evidence of a cementing of purpose, a consolidation of life-direction and commitment.<sup>32</sup> Donne's conscious decision to be a worthy cleric was accompanied by his urgent need for an affirming personal relationship with God. Grierson recognized that Donne was too much 'a self-tormenting mind' to be able to reach beyond effort toward 'the natural love of God' afforded less complex souls, and saw Donne's personality within the 'Holy Sonnets' 'beating as it were against the bars of self in the desire to break through to a fuller apprehension of the mercy and love of God'.<sup>33</sup>

To a great extent critics have endeavoured to ignore the focus of self-concern and the significance of the wealth of intense personal content in the divine poems. When the 'Holy Sonnets' are examined as expressions of immediate and complex personal distress, such hesitation is understandable: probing the evidence of another's agony seems a basically insensitive activity. Yet if Donne is fundamentally a great and complex personality, and if that personality is as powerfully present in the 'Holy Sonnets' as in the great love lyrics, then this aspect deserves closest attention. Unlike the 'Songs and Sonnets', the question

here is not one of biographical relation to specific persons or events, but rather of the expression in the poetry of intense personal distress arising out of a fundamental reorganization of the self.

## II

A READING OF THE 'HOLY SONNETS'

In the sequence established by Helen Gardner, the first six of the 'Holy Sonnets' of 1633 concentrate on the meditative themes of death and judgement. The first sonnet begins as a formal document in religious litigation: "As due by many titles I resigne/My selfe to thee, O God." Clearly his self-surrender is in payment for a truly mortgaged soul, not a free gift of love. The detached, judicious voice, the legalistic tone suggest a will not an innate desire toward religious devotion; on the other hand, there is the sense that he is responding, somewhat reluctantly, to God's just claims. "First made" and "blood bought" present the two possibilities for general redemption which man has failed to accept, creation by God and resurrection through Christ. But his 'decay' and an undertone of passive weariness indicate that a general redemption was not enough to protect him from himself, that he now needs a more radically personal redemption. The sequence of "titles" begins with the redemption and moves backward to the 'general beginning' of man in the Old Testament. He is son, servant, sheep, Image of God, and finally temple of the Holy Spirit: this reversal of the Biblical order from creation to redemption emphasizes the personal nature of his subsequent appeal. The passive construction "I was decay'd" suggests his attempt to evade responsibility for his own degeneration; the catalogue of God's "titles" serves to remind him that the evasion must cease: thus, "I betray'd/My selfe". The sestet opens with two questions which undermine the contractual foundations he has been at such pains to

establish. Although his questions maintain his formal tone, the repeated "why? why?" indicates that he is unable to understand his own sinfulness, Job-like in his incomprehension of God's passivity implied in the devil's power. At the same time, the images of forced possession in war or in sexual passion, "usurpe", "steale", "ravish", are intended to absolve him once again of responsibility for his sinfulness, while his appeal to God to "rise and for thine owne worke fight" underlines his failure to actively seek redemption. The closing lines offer not a resolution but a reiteration in calmer terms of the situation presented in his central questions: "Thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt'not chuse me,/ And Satan hates mee, yet is loth to lose mee." In this return to passivity his cry "Oh I shall soon despaire" amounts to emotional blackmail. Only now does he approach his true concern which underlies both his legalistic detachment and his anguished questioning: he seeks not legal possession but love; his deepest fear is not of the devil's power or his own sinfulness, but a fear of rejection by God.

The opening of the second sonnet announces that the situation is more desperate here: "Oh my blacke Soule! now thou art summoned/By sicknesse, deaths herald, and champion". There is considerable dramatic tension between the impassioned outcry addressed to his inner self, and the rather formal statement of his present situation. This tension continues throughout the octave, where in superficially flat and factual terms he compares his beleaguered soul to a traitor and a thief. The emphatic disruption of the traditional metaphor of life as a pilgrimage toward heaven centers on the absence of grace implicit in that he 'dare not' turn again toward God: "Man is utterly dependent on grace which

is outside himself, yet is responsible for its initiation. The maddening and frightening circularity is well caught in the verse."<sup>34</sup> The sestet opens with an attempt to convince himself of the efficacy of grace: "Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke". This attempt is undermined by the broken rhythm of the line, by his hesitation, and by the question which follows: "But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?" From the outset, addressing his soul rather than God does not indicate a renewal of action on his own behalf, but his profound isolation: alone with his soul, separated by 'treason' from the promised land, uncertain where to turn for grace. Although the closing lines give an illusion of action, his stance remains essentially passive: God must bring him to repentance through giving 'grace to begin'. The imperatives "make thy selfe" and "wash thee" as an attempt to rally himself to action on his own behalf only move him toward new role-playing. The poem ends with a ghastly and rather tasteless charade: ". . . the verbal games with colour symbolism . . . have nothing to say to the sense of necessary and inexorable guilt which is the poem's point of departure."<sup>35</sup>

In the third sonnet, Louis Martz remarks that "we watch the speaker, in the octave of the poem, deliberately arouse sensations of 'despaire' and 'terroure' at the thoughts of sin and death and hell, and then, in the sestet, firmly repel them by confidence in God's grace."<sup>36</sup> The poem does appear to be more of a formal exercise than the first two sonnets, the opening lines somewhat stilted in their use of conventional images: play, pilgrimage, race. Yet the halting rhythm, emphasized by a preponderance of monosyllabic words, is deliberately laboured to



simulate a gasping-for-breath at death. The gradual reduction in space in this 'last scene' from 'last mile' through 'last pace' and 'last inch' to 'last point' accompanies a passing reflection which is at least vaguely more personally centred -- "my race/Idly, yet quickly runne." At the final point of death, there is a strange confusion: in the separation of body and soul, "I" is identified with the body, and left to 'sleepe a space' with the 'earth-borne'. The soul, which in the second sonnet could be separated from the self and directly addressed, is here separated finally and 'takes flight' to heaven. Yet it is about the soul's reception that the speaker expresses his genuine hesitation, not the physical fact of death which usually preoccupies him: "But my'ever-waking part shall see that face,/Whose feare already shakes my every joynt." In itself, this is a startling admission, and it is heightened by the sense that the halting movement of the first six lines comes to rest in this terrible final feeling. In an attempt to recover from this admission, the speaker tries to picture each aspect of self in its proper place: soul in heaven, body in earthly grave, sins fallen to hell. But his confusion is all too apparent, and his attempt unconvincing: he is left with his vision of disintegration. His concluding request, "Impute me righteous, thus purg'd of evill," only serves to emphasize the absence of resolution. Has the 'fall' of his sins been accomplished by the false logic of similitudes? Who is this "me", since "I" has been identified with the body, and the soul has absconded into bliss? He remains incapable of coherent self-definition; the purgation is little more than a wish-fulfillment; if only because the devil certainly has not left him, the renunciation is unconvincing.

Attempted consolation fails because no resolution is even attempted for the only genuine concern expressed in this sonnet, the fear of the face of judgement.

The fourth sonnet opens with an impassioned evocation of a vision of the last judgement:

At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow  
Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise  
From death, you numberlesse infinities  
Of soules, and to your scattred bodies goe.

This generalization continues through a factual catalogue of kinds of death which eliminates both the individual and any sense of suffering:

All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,  
All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,  
Despaire, law, chance, hath slaine, and you whose eyes,  
Shall behold God, and never tast deaths woe.

Neither death nor judgement involves the speaker: the detached, public voice does not falter until the opening of the sestet. There, the reality of his own situation pushes aside all cant and a less strident, a melancholy voice, breaks through his pose: "But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne a space." There is soft-spoken emphasis in the succession of monosyllables, the unbroken soft sounds, the double pause which gives the important centrally weighted position to the single noun of humble address, "Lord". This focal and pivotal line presents a genuine desire for personal repentance at the center of a formal meditation. Yet this moment of humility is broken by his succeeding pose as the 'greatest of sinners'. All impression of a serious interest in self-repossession and reconstruction disappears in his 'better late than never' play upon positions between 'here' and 'there'. Even his central request, "Teach mee how to repent", is undermined by the

disingenuous wit of his concluding thought. Anyone who genuinely sought repentance would acknowledge as an article of faith, as a "title" to God's mercy, the reality of the redemption through Christ's sacrifice as the 'seal of pardon' for sins too numerous to mention, not the least of which is such lack of taste.

The fifth sonnet focuses not on a generalized vision of the last judgement but on the idea of judgement -- and of damnation -- itself. The octave "presents two sets of two contrasting items. The first half of each pair, 'poysonous mineralls' and 'lecherous goats', is naturally evil; the second, the tree of knowledge, the envious serpent, is depraved, participating in original sin. Chafing, he demands to know why his guilt should be greater than theirs."<sup>37</sup> The answer is implicit in the wording of the question: "Why should intent or reason, borne in mee,/Make sinnes, else equall, in mee, more heinous?" It is precisely "intent or reason" which differentiates man from both animate and inanimate creation, in that man alone possesses intellectual awareness of the significance of his actions. Man sins deliberately, intentionally, through will, with full knowledge of his moral responsibility, of his action and its consequences. The "audacious, blasphemous evasion of responsibility"<sup>38</sup> combines with another attempt at emotional blackmail: mercy is 'easie' and 'glorious'. Yet the aggressive pose, the imperious questioning, is not sufficient to prevent a final admission of the real cause of all this semi-hysterical defensiveness: "why threatens hee?" Again the genuine concern is fear; the operative contrast is between mercy and wrath. A dramatic change in tone accompanies a shift in address from 'hee' to 'thee'. The thrashing about in a limbo of

unassimilated dogma ends in an impassioned address which can no longer be avoided: "But who am I, that dare dispute with thee?" The emphatic position of "I" and the contrast and tension created structurally between "I" and "thee" indicates an incredible presumption, a superb pride in the obvious fact that he does dare. That pride is a defensive pose, an escape from the fear which is once again not faced. The closing lines resort to disingenuous word-play which, like the colour symbolism which closes sonnet two, remains unconvincingly detached from the main point. It is mildly interesting that he asks God to forget not forgive, perhaps a recognition that forgiveness requires a more honest self-presentation. The subtle ingenuity of his appeal to the efficacy of divine love indicates quite plainly that he is not yet beyond the sins of 'the world, the flesh, and devill' supposedly renounced in the second sonnet.

The opening phrase of the sixth sonnet is a shout of defiance: "Death be not proud." It is the only statement of any credible force in the first eleven lines. The largest part of the sonnet is given over to a laboured attempt to convince himself that death is disarmed of terror if not actually non-existent. The arguments he marshals -- first an outright denial of pride or power which divorces death-the-agent from Satan; then the platitudinous identification of death with sleep; finally the reduction of death to a mere agent of others' will -- amount to a negative incantation. Through a magical denial he can avoid the reality, limiting it to words. Fear of physical death, the fact of his own mortality, is never faced. The argument has a semblance of efficacy until his question "why swell'st thou then?" reduces his attempt at

self-conviction to a hysterical pose. He tries by force of will to eliminate a threatening phenomenon; not only does it not disappear, but in horror he recognizes that it has increased in proportion. Only in the thirteenth line does he approach some semblance of assurance, and it is a masterful line. "One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally": the sharp clipped words of the first phrase emphasize how short and soon past that one sleep will be; the alliteration opening the second phrase is equally affirming; in contrast to the brevity of that sleep, there is now an eternity of wakefulness -- the one word "eternally" equalling the four syllables of the entire first phrase. Yet the possibility of assurance so skillfully structured is immediately lost in his return to hysterical defiance: "And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die." Obviously the fearful ogre has not disappeared, and still requires shouted denial. Yet in this last line there are two 'deaths', the first the actuality of dying, his own death, the second 'Death' as a metaphysical concept. Even if the latter is overcome, the former always remains. Fear of his own death can be temporarily diverted by a theological commonplace, but he is left finally with only his emotional defiance. No resolution is possible because the genuine fear is never faced.<sup>39</sup>

In these six sonnets on death and judgement, Donne consistently avoids the central issue, his genuine fears of death, of sinfulness, of rejection by God, and veers off into evasions and denials of uncertain effect and frequently questionable taste. Several times he returns almost involuntarily to his essential fear of God the Father who is for him the Old Testament figure of righteousness and wrath. His appeals

to the efficacy of the redemption through Christ as a defense against this fear remain unconvincing even to himself: he resorts to the doctrine of the redemption without experiencing it as personally relevant. He remains essentially passive, perhaps because to strive for acceptance and still be denied is too painful a possibility. He is unable to invest himself without prior assurance of acceptability and returned affection. Never honestly faced, his fears cannot be resolved: unresolved, his fears remain the major obstacle to the achievement of an affirming and enabling relationship with God.

The second group of six sonnets from the 1633 edition Helen Gardner views as less of a coherent sequence: the first three focus on God's love for his creatures, the last three on the love owed in return. The seventh sonnet begins with a violent wish to be physically punished for actual sin. The contrast established is between the self whose actual sinfulness escapes punishment, and Christ whose token sinfulness received all too real punishment. There is a certain pride in the focus on the self -- my face, my side, crucify me, I have sinned, my death: "even the gesture of apparent selflessness betrays the presumption of the speaker. He would thrust Christ aside and take his place, when he has neither the vision nor the grace."<sup>40</sup> Yet this self-concern does contain one of Donne's most genuine statements of recognized sinfulness outside the sermons, achieved through a simplicity of word and tone quite unlike the more violent sonnets, or the opening lines here: "For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd"; "But by my death can not be satisfied/My sinnes"; "I/Crucifie him daily". The sestet fails to resolve this problem of personal sinfulness, as it turns away from the

self toward the mystery of the redemption through the incarnation of Christ: there is a marked change in tone as the personal is abandoned in favour of a detached sobriety. The violence of his opening self-involvement disappears: the attempt to identify self with Christ fails. His detachment is implicit in his calm plea, "Oh let mee then, his strange love still admire." Such love is 'strange' because sacrificial love, as opposed to the self-interested which Jacob represents, is not characteristic of "inglorious man". The incarnation remains a mystery, set apart from the personal: that "God cloth'd himselfe in vile mans flesh, that so/Hee might be weake enough to suffer woe" does not answer the actual problem. The self remains imprisoned in weakness and woe, as Christ's participation in the general human misery is not felt as curative of present personal distress. The disjunction between the self who admires and the Saviour who loves prohibits effective resolution.

In the eighth sonnet Donne ponders the relationship of man to other beings, formally questioning man's place in the hierarchy of creation. Here, however, the questioning is neither aggressive nor presumptuous: there is a groundtone of humility in the recognition that lesser creatures and natural elements are 'purer', 'simpler', and 'further from corruption'. This sonnet presents the obverse of sonnet five: as there the lower creation 'cannot be damned', so here, implicitly, it cannot be saved. Only man has the destiny and the ability to choose: thus, because the choice is always misdirected, "Weaker I am, woe is mee, and worse then you,/You have not sinn'd, nor need be timorous." In these lines the voice loses the querulous stridency of

the octave, the broken rhythm and soft sounds indicating a winding down. The concluding lines, however, seem an academic and laboured effort to maintain some semblance of self-control: "wonder at a greater wonder" is quite inexpressive and unconvincing. Nowhere is he further from realizing that man's true place is an expression of God's will than in the final couplet: as animals which could devour man are subjected to him by 'created nature', so God who could destroy man utterly dies to prevent that destruction. Rarely has the essential Christian paradox of judgement tempered with mercy through the divine becoming flesh been so unconvincingly expressed: the redemption is seen only as an aspect of a cosmic riddle; nowhere in the sonnet is there any sense of divine love as the motive force for man's original place in creation.

Simplicity of structure and diction in the opening line of the ninth sonnet, a meditation on the possibility of apocalypse, prevent the question <sup>of man's !!</sup> being hysterical: "What if this present were the worlds last night?" The tone of rational enquiry belies the very real fear aroused by such a prospect. The effort of calling forth "the picture of Christ crucified", rather than providing an antidote to such terror, seems to shatter any last vestige of self-possession: "his vision evokes a host of voices in disarray. He is one presence, his soul another, his heart an objectified third, with a fourth presence stamped upon it that he wants to absorb them all, the image of Christ."<sup>41</sup> In panic he tries to view "that countenance" in its merciful aspects; tears and blood will hopefully overcome dreadful and frowning perception of man's sinfulness. In graphically confronting the terrible reality of man crucifying God, he attempts to see beyond the supposed signs of anger and retribution in



Christ's face, which are occasioned by his own all-consuming fear, toward the truth of divine mercy. After this fearful tumult, image clashing against image, the flat denial with which the sestet opens remains unemphatic, unconvincing. He veers away from his fear of rejection and denial into a weak Petrarchan pose as he compares Christ to the 'profane mistresses' of his 'idolatrie'. Pity of the lover's plight would lead the lady to accept his suit: thus he attempts to assure his soul that in true pity Christ will extend loving acceptance to him, however unworthy. The crabbed and tortured logic of these lines creates a confusion of thought and image. The relation of 'horrid shape' to 'beauteous form' is too indistinct for contrast; justice and mercy, blood and tears, horror and beauty, fear and assurance remain inextricably entwined in his confused perception. Imagining Christ as his soul's pitying lover provides only a shallow assurance, and no resolution for his original fear.

The tenth sonnet opens with a traditional if startlingly violent appeal:

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you  
 As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;  
 That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee, 'and bend  
 Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.

The sinful heart, obdurate and stony, needs violent reclamation; half measures will not suffice. The speaker is, in spite of despair and awareness of sin, still too controlled, too contained, too self-possessed. This self must be 'overthrown', its imprisoning boundaries destroyed. The appeal is for the direct and immediate involvement of the Lord as the speaker remains consciously passive:

I, like an usurpt towne, to 'another due,  
 Labour to 'admit you, but Oh, to no end.

Self-surrender is impossible to a nature so centrally self-conscious. The attempted resignation of the self to God's just claims remains as inefficacious as it was in sonnet one, but the situation is more desperate. For his passivity, his abdication of responsibility, some explanation must be attempted:

Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,  
But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.

With that inability to define his own situation, to say more than is already obvious, any strength remaining in his position as plaintiff disappears. He can only repeat his self-presentation, now more tactfully:

Yet dearely'I love you, and would be lov'd faine,  
But am betroth'd unto youremie.

All that remains is this feeble assertion of devotion and its accompanying admission of his perversion into sin. Yet there is finally this first statement of affection toward his Lord as a motive for his opening appeal for violent reclamation.

In its least offensive interpretation, this imagery is a startling adaptation of the metaphor of spiritual combat, as God and the devil fight for possession of the individual soul. Taking the metaphor literally, Donne draws up the Lord's forces before the beleaguered city of the self, and sends urgent dispatches appealing for a brutal counter attack to dislodge the intruder. Yet the confusion of images suggests something more disquieting, as "the metaphor of the usurped town, one of property and legalistic relationships, dissolves into the image of betrothal, one of a love relationship."<sup>42</sup> As in the love lyrics he considered the female figure a minor divinity, so here he

imagines God as a sexual lover. The sexual metaphor is undeniably explicit in the closing quatrain:

Divorce mee, 'untie mee, or breake that knot againe,  
 Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I  
 Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,  
 Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.

The appeal for such a relationship is overt if ill-defined; in retrospect, the opening invocation of violence indicates a fascination with physical brutality which is more than vaguely suggestive. Donne moves beyond the imagery of betrothal appropriated from Revelation to its more fundamentally human aspects without achieving the romantic lyricism of the Song of Solomon. "In the final quatrain there is a return to the torment and fascination of the basic sexual metaphor, as the battering insensitivity of this God's forced entry is both invoked and rhythmically enacted. The tumbled passionate utterance suggests real, panic ecstasy, and a horrible rapt absorption in the violation about to be undergone."<sup>43</sup>

The difficulty is to interpret the imagery of this sonnet without doing critical violence to the work of art or to the personality which created it. The problem is not to define a masked sexual perversion involuntarily breaking through his usual self-possession in a radical use of traditional imagery, but to understand the desperate emotional need which sought satisfaction in the violent intimacy of sexual metaphor. Stampfer elucidates an important distinction in metaphors of personal relation to God, defining the metaphor as either parental or romantic: "the parental metaphor suggests orderly structure, hierarchy, and enduring commitment, the romantic metaphor mystical experience, insecurity, and the suspension of any hierarchy of being."<sup>44</sup> The romantic metaphor not only captures the imagination, it arouses the

whole self from its imprisoning passivity. In the preceding sonnets Donne sought a parental relation with God issuing in acceptance and affirmation. The attempt has been to divide his sense of relation between these two possibilities, and deliberately to ignore the more threatening one. Absence of resolution in the other sonnets indicates the inadequacy of this approach. In sonnet 10 he violently confronts the other possibility, a 'romantic' relation with God: this form of relation, and that element of self which seeks it, have been pushed aside in his attempts to achieve a 'parental' relation. He must come to terms with this possibility of a different consummation, and assimilate at least that possibility into a more unified personality. Relation to a male authority figure must include both aggression and loving acceptance; only then is true resolution possible. The sonnet itself presents only a reiterated appeal, not a complete resolution. Fear of exclusion leads to his appeal for violent action. A mind so painfully self-conscious remains incapable of complete self-surrender, seeing it as personal extinction; he demands to be taken by force, and finds in the aggression involved an exhilarating proof of divine love.

The evenness of tone in the eleventh sonnet suggests that once honestly faced, the violence and extreme fear can again be laid aside. In the opening address to his soul, the love of God for individual man is accepted as personally relevant as he calmly urges his soul to learn to return that love. "Wholesome meditation" replaces violent appeal or indignant question. His personal application of doctrine involves the Trinity in all its aspects. Each person of God enters voluntarily into relation with man: the Spirit chooses the heart of man as its temple;

the Father begets the Son who retrieves the 'adopted' son from sin and damnation. God's entry into the world through Christ is seen as an eternal begetting which becomes an image of the infusion of grace in the individual soul. The motion to love God in response to God loving man adumbrates the possibility of the resolution of his fears in an affirming relationship. He is no longer appealing to traditional metaphor as a bulwark against fear. His explanations of the action of grace in repurchasing mortgaged souls and loosing the bonds of sin have a simplicity of conviction entirely absent from his earlier attempts. There is a certain calm assurance in his recognition that God's love provides exactly the relation necessary: "deign'd to chuse thee by adoption" presents that relation in a doctrinally acceptable metaphor. Personally, it is a literal adoption, as God becomes a Father to replace the original father. Metaphorically, this adoption answers the problem broached in sonnet 1, and not yet resolved: "thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt'not chuse mee,/And Satan hates mee, yet is loth to lose mee." The conclusion of the poem identifies the original creation with the incarnation, linking God and man in a reflexive relation as divine and human are linked in the person of Christ. The eternal begetting thus comes to symbolize an eternal reciprocity of love.

Sonnet 12 comes to terms formally with the problem broached specifically in sonnet 2 -- "Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke;/But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?" -- and generally in other sonnets where the redemption through Christ is advanced as a doctrinal salve for a wounded spirit. The opening apostrophe to God the Father establishes the efficacy of the 'adoption' accomplished in sonnet 11; the ensuing explanations of accepted doctrine indicate that

the speaker has become truly a 'coheire' of Christ. The crucifixion as the means to grace is imagined as eternally recurring; man's 'title' to redemption is contained in Christ's "two Wills". The first, contained in the Old Testament, is the law, the moral and theological requirements for accession to everlasting life, the method by which the self is made acceptable to God. An important aspect of the law is that, in spite of the limitations of being human, the individual must strive to 'fulfill those statutes'. The grace to seek perfection is promised in the second will, contained in the New Testament: this second will is love, the 'lawes abridgement' and the 'last command'. The essential contrast is between Old and New Testament doctrine, between justice and mercy, law and love, between the Father of wrath and the Son of propitiation. That the last appeal, "Oh let that last Will stand!" is affirmative not interrogative establishes that the reality of the redemption has been recognized as a 'guarantee' of grace.

The second group of sonnets from the 1633 edition, sonnets 7-12, focus on the theme of love, attempting to establish a reciprocal relation as God's love overcomes man's unworthiness and moves him to love in return. In the first sonnets, 7, 8, and 9, the incarnation, crucifixion and redemption through Christ are doctrinal tags given as arbitrary conclusions intended to mask unresolved distress. In the most violent sonnet, 10, Donne abruptly faces the problem of establishing a relationship with God when the self is fearful, passive, unable to act. Only a violent reclamation is possible. What he desires is love; what he feels at present is fear and violation. He fears relationship itself, and the loss of self-hood it entails: while he remains passive, he

demands that God act as a proof of love. His fear of rejection underlies his passivity. He cannot imagine a love which will reclaim him from sin and despair if it is not violent; the only reclaiming, fulfilling love he has known, however temporary, has been a sexual relationship. He depicts the love of God in the same way, facing his fears by challenging the fearful personality and evoking the fearful situation. Once these fears are approached, they can to an extent be laid aside. The final sonnets, 11 and 12, are more fully "Divine Meditations": somewhat formal, definitely restrained, they give the impression of a calmer spirit achieved after great struggle with the self. It is difficult to avoid the sense that these two sonnets represent a concluding movement in an overall sequence.

The four sonnets added in the 1635 edition at first appear to share the calmer tone of sonnets 11 and 12: in the first three, however, this tone reveals not an achieved peace of mind but a reduction of spirit very near to despair. These sonnets provide three interrelated self-presentations summarizing his state of mind. In them his dejection echoes the mental exhaustion and physical debility evident in the letters of the Mitcham period. That such shattering self-truths become poetry at all is a measure of the incredible strength of will Donne brought to bear on the urgent necessity for resolution of personal distress. That the poetry is sometimes fine and beautiful gives evidence of the conscious effort toward control as he sought expression and accommodation for that distress in formal structure. The fourth sonnet seems quite separate, a concluding statement in which he presents his "mindes white truth" to God the Father and to the soul of his own father.

The first sonnet of 1635 opens with a combined statement and question. The statement, "Thou hast made me", establishes the primary 'title' of man's claim to God's involvement; the question, "And shall thy worke decay?" suggests that the continuing condition of the creature is the responsibility of the creator. "Decay" again suggests a passive stance and includes both decay into sin and decay in illness and age. The appeal qualifies the question: "repaire me now" implies that the "decay" is past, not future. Reclamation is a present necessity, recalling the opening appeal of "A Litanie", "And re-create mee, now growne ruinous". Yet there is at least a hint of eleventh-hour contrition, better late than never, in his admission "for now mine end doth haste". The sense of self as victim caught in an inevitable process, "I runne to death, and death meets me as fast", is almost impersonal: "I" implies only a rhetorical presence, a disembodied voice with little sense of involvement or responsibility. Suspicions of a falsifying of mood continue as he cannot avoid mentioning his 'pleasures'. The disquieting contradiction of tones culminates in the melodramatic presentation of his immediate situation, which yet implies his true state of mind: "I dare not move my dimme eyes any way,/Despaire behind, and death before doth cast/Such terrour". "Despaire" is a known terror, not overcome but already experienced; "death" remains the unknown yet obsessively feared. He seeks escape from a situation which he can only overdramatize. His restatement of his decayed condition, "my feebled flesh doth waste/By sinne in it", again avoids personal responsibility. In the octave there is "no true movement of spirit"<sup>45</sup>, indeed no honest self-presentation. Yet though the poetic voice and histrionic pose



crack, the sense of fear and of the self trapped and desperate in its fear remains compellingly real.

To this confusion of tone the sestet provides not an answer but a relief. What genuine sense of 'decay into sin' is present in the octave finds accommodation in an appeal to grace. Humble address replaces melodramatic cant: few of Donne's lines are as beautifully effective as these.

Onely thou art above, and when towards thee  
By thy leave I can looke, I rise againe;  
But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,  
That not one houre I can my selfe sustaine;  
Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his art  
And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart.

His appeal to the efficacy of grace rises from an awareness of what has become an undeniable presence -- "Onely thou art above". The simplicity of statement underlines a certain modest assurance: he has found 'that grace to begin' and does not avoid the central issue, the absence of self-sufficiency. In these lines a known self confronts its limitations. The true nature of his passivity lies not in an evasion of responsibility but in this genuine recognition of his inability to sustain himself. The problem can be honestly faced because the outcome is already known and accepted: his is still an iron heart, but he has found what will suffice to move him toward repentance. The sonnet as a whole, however, leaves more than vague uneasiness. The shift in tone between octave and sestet is so complete, so jarring, that the reader must be forgiven for wondering which represents the mask, which the true face.

The second sonnet from 1635 opens with a generalized description of man's creation and fall into sin which in effect expands on "Thou hast made me, And shall thy worke decay?":

I am a little world made cunningly  
 Of Elements, and an Angelike spright,  
 But blacke sinne hath betraid to endlesse night  
 My worlds both parts, and (oh) both parts must die.

Man is a microcosm of body and soul, united in sinfulness, so united in death. It is still "black sinne hath betrayed" not 'I have sinned': the focus on the self again indicates self-pitying concern and evasion of responsibility. This opening self-presentation is too formal, too stylized to be effective. It is abruptly abandoned as he turns to secular authorities, astronomers and explorers, for help in finding the waters of penitence. The irony of his appeal to authorities he brushed aside in the love lyrics --

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
 Let Maps to others, worlds on worlds hath showne,  
 Let us possesse our world, each hath one, and is one --<sup>46</sup>

suggests that devotion to God is not as complete an emotional experience, not as self-sufficing as fulfilled earthly love. Even the image of weeping seems more an echo of "Draw not up seas to drowne me in thy spheare"<sup>47</sup> than a traditional emblem of penitence. As the voice grows more strident -- "Drowne my world with my weeping earnestly" -- not only the reader but the speaker becomes aware of the total impropriety of such imagery: he catches hold of himself, with more than a touch of wry humour: "Or wash it, if it must be drown'd no more".

Yet one is tempted to give Donne the benefit of the doubt: perhaps the imagery is seriously meant, though somewhat out of control. The five line sequence, running over the octave division, lends emphasis to his frenzied attempt at self-purification, and its subsequent failure. The ineffectiveness of the authorities he appeals to, figures of esoteric learning, and of the imagery taken over from the secular verse,

underlines the contrast between his former life and his new direction. The change from 'drowne' to 'wash' could reflect this contrast: sins of the old man are drowned as in the Old Testament flood while the new man is purified in baptism. Such charitable readings do little to account for the absence of coherent focus or purpose in this sonnet: at best the fragmented approach reflects the collapse into disunity of the 'little world' of the self.

In the first nine lines Donne appears to be turning about, seeking a source from which movement toward redemption can begin. Formal statement of his fallen condition only sets the stage. His search for an appropriate image indicates his inability to establish effective control over his thoughts: the only control which exists is the arbitrary one of containing his incoherence within a formal structure. In the final five lines he advances another traditional image which is more effective because more controlled. Both tears and fire have contrasting dimensions: the purely human or secular one is destructive -- drowned by tears, made foul by fires of lust and envy -- and is abandoned or renounced in favour of the devotional one which is purgative -- washed by tears, healed by fiery zeal. The simplicity of direct appeal, "Let their flames retire,/And burne me ô Lord," indicates a genuine renunciation of earlier life, style, and self in exchange for "a fiery zeale/. . . which doth in eating heale." Loss of self is implicit in being so consumed: 'healed' means purged not only of worldly desires but of extreme self-consciousness.

This second sonnet is more uneven than the first. Shifts in tone and direction betray the absence of coherence in thought. That he finds an entirely appropriate image with which to conclude indicates

little more than the strength of will exerted in the search. Certain only of his present depravity, uncertain of the possibility of personal reclamation, he appeals to the Old Testament images of fire and water, not to the personal reality of the resurrection through Christ which proved effective before. He seems strangely detached from the images he hopes will prove adequate to describe hoped-for action on God's part. The sonnet is a testing out of images in order to find one sufficient to express the need itself, not the solution.

The third sonnet seems more unified in tone than either of the first two. The single focus of self-concern is emphasized by the absence of address outside the self. The sonnet advances descriptions of his present situation which are not really explorations of his state of mind but entirely static self-presentations. His situation is slightly clarified in restating, but the sonnet evinces no movement of spirit and no development toward resolution. The contrast implicit in his opening self-presentation in the first quatrain expands upon the distinction made in sonnet 2 between tears for failed love and tears of repentance: that his present discontent is "holy" implies an earlier 'unholy discontent'. The multiple meanings of "returne againe" reinforce this contrast. "Sighes and teares" are a Petrarchan emblem which was available to him in his secular verse: now he needs a similar emblem, and recalls this one to use. As an experience as well as an image, his "sighes and teares" are remembered and called forth again, his 'grief' deliberately recreated in the meditative method of recollection. He remembers them in order to examine and then to deny them and to replace them with pure tears shed for his new purpose: "That I might in this

holy discontent/Mourne with some fruit, as I have mourn'd in vaine."  
Mourning the lost love was 'in vain' because his pose as sighing lover did not restore the beloved woman to him, and because his mourning could not purge him of an affection which was not dead.

The second quatrain clarifies his opening presentation as he identifies the implicit 'unholy' discontent as his "Idolatry". 'Unholy' was merely a different form of 'holy', for in his devotion to woman in the 'love religion' the female figure was conflated with God. "That sufferance was my sin"; the suffering itself was sin, that he grieved so deeply for so trivial a thing as earthly love and its failure; sufferance was sin, that he allowed himself excessive grief. After these ambiguous admissions, how convincing is his announcement "Now I repent"? The reader is allowed a little scepticism: there is more than a hint that his renunciation of the world and the flesh is far from complete, as he cannot refrain from thinking of his worldly discontents. He is to be punished now for his earlier sin: "Because I did suffer I must suffer paine." This punishment is for self-indulgence, not in 'the sins of the flesh' themselves but in exaggerated grief at the loss of sinful pleasure, at the failure of love, at the imperfection of fleshly affection. His excess of grief indicated how much such human relation meant to him, as does his seeming inability to abandon it here.

Ordinary sinners have the memory of earthly joy to offset pain or punishment; of his four categories of earth-bound men, "Th'hydroptique drunkard, and night-scouting thiefe,/The itchy Lecher, and selfe tickling proud," the uncharitable reader suspects Donne has been at least the last two. There is a certain measure of self-pity, "To (poore)

me is allow'd/No ease," in defining past and present existence as a cycle of unrelieved pain. "Long, yet vehement grieffe" summarizes a life of suffering: at best, he exchanges one pain for another. Grief at the loss of sinful pleasures, or at the failure of love, was itself a sin: that sin is now the cause of his "holy discontent"; his present grief is thus the effect of and the punishment for his earlier 'vain' grief.

This third sonnet presents in some detail Donne's unresolved inner conflict. His secular ideal expressed in his devotion to woman is more than a disturbing memory: it remains a presence, a part of his personality which he cannot effectively deny. It is important to remember that he regrets only his grief at the failure of love, not the love itself: only his grief is acknowledged as futile. In the sequence established by Helen Gardner, Donne's identification of Christ with his "profane mistresses" and Christ's mercy toward an unworthy soul with a beautiful woman's pity for a scorned lover (in sonnet 9) immediately precedes his appeal for violent possession by God, conveyed in sexual metaphor (in sonnet 10). The female figure remains a central and disturbing presence. The involuntary mental association of woman with God creates a basic confusion as he seems incapable of defining the distinction between essential forms of relation. He returns repeatedly to admissions of his secular devotion: "my Idolatry", "all my profane mistresses" (sonnet 9), "the fire/Of lust and envie" (2), "my Idolatry" (3), "idolatrous lovers weepe and mourne" (4). In sonnet 9 his reference to 'all the profane mistresses' of his "Idolatry" is a disarming personal admission: here, an incredibly selective memory

affirms that nothing existed except the pain. Stampfer is surely right that "something in Donne's psyche is blocking and fading away that entire world of experience."<sup>48</sup> This sonnet shows no extension beyond the self and its immediate situation, no movement of his self-awareness toward resolution of fundamental conflicts, but rather a deliberate fragmentation of experience which pushes aside aspects which cannot be assimilated into the single focus of his new self-direction.

The fourth sonnet added in 1635 is quite different in tone and theme. It appears to be a formal enquiry into the scholastic debate whether a human soul once in heaven perceives immediately and directly as angels do, or if it still perceives from appearances as men do on earth. The opening quatrain presents the first possibility, that souls perceive directly as angels do. Thus his father's soul, presumed to be in "full felicitie", sees "That valiantly I hels wide mouth o'rstride". That position usually refers to man's combat with sin. With Donne one is tempted to give such an image a more personal reference: caught between his earlier life and life in the church; between the profligacy of his youth and the martyrdom of his Catholic relatives; between devotion to woman, which has proved insufficient, and devotion to God, in which as yet he does not fully trust. In the middle, an abyss of dejection, self-distrust, despair, fear of which makes action impossible.

The second quatrain turns to the other possibility, that souls perceive as men do, "By circumstances, and by signes that be/Apparent in us, not immediately". The problem then becomes not only to do good, but to be seen to do it. "How shall my mindes white truth to them be try'd?": he fears that even in making the appearance reflect the inner truth of his new life-direction he cannot be distinguished from those

who cultivate the appearance only.<sup>49</sup> Yet in the assertion of his "mindes white truth" there is a measure of assurance similar to the closing lines of the first sonnet. There, he accepted the efficacy of grace to move his iron heart to repentance; here, he announces that he is at last worthy. "Then turne/O pensive soule, to God": there is a suggestion that he now turns away from the kind of hollow posturing he here condemns. He has already admitted his "Idolatry", with frequent emphasis on 'weeping and mourning'. It is not much of a stretch of the imagination to equate his attempts to use the redemption through Christ as doctrinal salve for his wounded spirit with 'vile blasphemous Conjuring', or some of the 'Holy Sonnets' themselves, where Donne is particularly disingenuous, with 'feigned devotion'. At the very least, from his misdevotion he turns his now pensive soul toward God.

His "true griefe" remains ambiguous, identified only as coming from God. Stampfer advances possible explanations:

His soul is only pensive, not depraved nor insecure, yet caught up in an unnamed "true griefe," shared only with God. Its content is nowise hinted at. The poet's opaque dignity is not to be penetrated. He will only leave its responsibility in God's hands, who put it in his. This somehow reads as a personal, not theoretical matter, and of central importance, to merit the designation, "Thy true griefe." In so loose and open a sonnet, it could be anything, perhaps a premonition of his wife's coming death, . . . . Perhaps it is an anticipation of his eventual meeting in heaven with the family, Catholics, saints, and martyrs all, and he, the Anglican apostate. Perhaps it is an acknowledgment of the dust and ashes his early ambition has turned into. The man's silence is not to be penetrated. Whatever his "true griefe," his "mindes white truth" is not shaken.<sup>50</sup>

How is this undefined grief related to the grief of sonnet 3? There, repentant grief replaced grief at the loss of love: that is, grief



at the failure of his secular ideal was replaced but not resolved by his later remorse. "Long, yet vehement griefe" by deliberately selective memory becomes his personality.

Indeed the entire sonnet is ambiguous. What is the present relationship between his father's soul in bliss and his self struggling against the threatening abyss? How is the reader, the father's soul, or Donne himself to distinguish his "mindes white truth" from the appearances maintained by dissemblers? What is the true relationship of the pensive soul to the true grief located in his heart, or to the God who put it there? Again, Stampfer offers an explanation:

The abrupt reference to his father, closing a cluster of sonnets and simultaneous with a first pronouncement of his "mindes white truth," that "valiantly I helms wide mouth o'rstride," corresponds with our general sense of Donne's poetic mind, dredging up loosely related areas and shaping their instinctual hungers and commitments into poetic form. One father, as it were, touched the other to life, God and John Donne, Sr., in a single sonnet, his innocence and his father's soul in heaven. A great process of integration is clearly under way, . . . .<sup>51</sup>

Conjunctions between areas of experience which seem arbitrary actually reflect the normal operation of the unconscious mind; what order the sonnet itself imposes indicates an effort of will or of the conscious mind which prevents such unconscious associations from breaking through uncontrolled.

This sonnet seems to me an example of what Wallace Stevens described as "The poem of the mind in the act of finding/What will suffice." In the final sonnet of the 1633 sequence, formal and dignified address to God the Father assumed the efficacy of the adoption of the self as son and "coheire" of Christ (in sonnet 11). Yet the

action of grace and love was still the subject of a fervent request, "Oh let that last Will stand!" In this sonnet he presents himself to his other father, long dead. There is a sense that he becomes the true son of his dead earthly father in being the true son of his adoptive heavenly father. He has achieved his "mindes white truth" but needs the final assurance that what he becomes is acceptable to his father as well as his Father.

## III

DONNE AND GOD THE FATHER

The early years of the Mitcham period, 1606-1609, were years of profound suffering for Donne: physical illness and personal distress combined as catalyst and crucible of literary activity. Donne defined his own condition of mind, in the terms available to him, as melancholy and despair. His was an intense personal crisis at once emotional, psychological and spiritual. Poetry became a therapeutic agent in a fundamental reorganization of the self, disengaging from the female figure and turning toward God in a search for personal security. The self-truths expressed in the 'Holy Sonnets' were self-fragmenting but ultimately regenerative. This change in focus and life-direction from devotion to a secular ideal to devotion to God redefines the familiar dichotomy between Jack Donne and the Doctor. Donne abandoned as unsatisfactory the quest for an ideal sustaining relationship with woman and turned toward God in his search for a relational center which would not fail.

With regard to the 'Holy Sonnets' Gardner and Martz are in substantial agreement concerning the meditative context. Both overshadow their valuable insights by emphasizing the deliberate modelling of the poems after meditative exercises, failing to take into account the immediate emotional necessity, the very real personal distress seeking in the meditative structure an appropriate, viable form of expression.

Though the specifically Jesuit influence on Donne's education must be discounted, it is significant for an understanding of the 'Holy

Sonnets' and their relation to Donne's inner distress to acknowledge the valuable contribution of both Gardner and Martz in establishing that the use of liturgical and meditative structures represents Donne's return to using ways of prayer learned as a child. Thus the working inward toward the truths of the essential self can be a working backward to a way which was operative before difficulty and distress intervened. Religious fervour has in general a regressive element, a return to dependence on a great Provider and Protector figure in the adoption of a parent-child relationship with God.

A child defines itself first in relation to the mother, who is predominantly a figure of love and protection. The first development of separate identity, the awareness of a distinction between self and other, is accomplished within the maternal relationship. Later the child expands its awareness to include the father: relation to the father is essential at the time when the child begins to establish autonomous existence. The father becomes the guarantor of the child's individual existence as the child begins to separate himself from the maternal center and to establish his separate identity. The relation to the father is always ambivalent: the father is a figure of both authority and protective love. It is ambivalent, and it reconciles ambivalence: "For there is something which only a father can do, which is, I think, to balance the threatening and forbidding aspects of his appearance and impression with the guardianship of the guiding voice."<sup>52</sup>

Donne's father died when Donne was scarcely four years old. Three to four is the age when this expansion of relation to include the father occurs, as the child consolidates his separate identity. With

male children, this relation includes the transference of identification from the female model to the male. The psychological effect of the early death of a parent is extensive: the fact of the death itself is usually more traumatic to children than adults realize, and the death of a parent is accompanied in the child's mind with guilt, a feeling that the child is somehow responsible. This feeling is frequently not recognized, and cannot be rationally explained away by the remaining parent or by the child himself as he matures. In male children this feeling of responsibility for the death of the father is connected to Oedipal wishes to supplant the father in relationship with the mother. At the same time the child's identity development is hampered by the disruption of the continuity of the male model. The death of Donne's father was followed by his mother's immediate remarriage, within 5-6 months. Little is actually known of Dr. John Syminges, Donne's first stepfather, at least personally as regards his relation with Donne. Whether Syminges was an adequate father-replacement is not in question, and indeed probably makes little difference. There is a definite possibility that isolation, resentment of the replacement figure connected to grief and to Oedipal wishes, distrust, insecurity, and fear of further loss were the psychological results of the death of Donne's father. There is the further possibility that the transference of focus of identification, especially in rôle-modelling, from the female figure to the male figure was unsatisfactory, inadequate, or not made at all. The result of the early death of his father and these attendant circumstances was perturbation in the psyche toward paternal authority figures, basic mistrust in relationship, fear of the absconding male figure, and an

inordinate faith in woman.<sup>53</sup>

The poems of transition, from the late love lyrics to the early divine poems, reflect a similar transference of identification. Donne defines himself in ways similar to the growing self-definition of a child, first in reference to a female figure, and later in reference to a male figure of authority and affection. The first phase of this movement is worked through in the love poetry. Donne attempts to define himself in relation to woman. The focus is always on the self: the woman tends to be a presence, at most a face. The imagery of personal relation concentrates on the reflection of the self in the eyes of the beloved. Preoccupation with imagery of the face and eyes, in relation to woman and to God, reflects an overwhelming need for affirmation: mutual recognition is the essence of the primary affirming relation between mother and child, and of later relationships between lovers.<sup>54</sup> The first stage proved inadequate as a focus of self-definition: relationship with woman was only temporarily self-sustaining. Woman as devotional object did not ensure self-completion. The failure of the religion of love reinforced genuine fears of inadequacy, of rejection, of loss. In this transition period, Donne worked through the necessary steps of personality development, and of relational self-definition, which correspond to development in childhood. The transition toward relation to a male authority figure was extremely difficult and distressful because the inner substance of ego-structure was not strong: this is the real origin of Donne's favourite self-metaphor of the Mitcham years, of looking to the self and finding 'nothing'.

Donne attempts in the 'Holy Sonnets' to state in full the inner

truth, but to bring it immediately under control. Desperation and anxiety precede accommodation in his search for self-completion. Feelings of guilt and fears of inadequacy and rejection underlie the themes of ruin, decay, regret and self-laceration for the profligacy of his early life and the prostitution of his talents. The sonnet provides a discipline, a poetic ordering, a way of containing distress while allowing it expression. That ordering places intensely personal material in perspective; confession itself releases tension.

In the 'Holy Sonnets' repressed ideas of the father reappear.

There is a fine Hamlet-like resonance in his father's sudden, early death and his mother's speedy remarriage; but the echo is too neat and tidy, and without any direct evidence in Donne's own writings. The absence of his father betrays itself in Donne's life, as in his poetry, not as a personality to make peace with, but a great emptiness he is unable to structure, in the lack of any secure government.<sup>55</sup>

In the complexities of the subconscious mind, there is not a direct correspondence between the earthly father lost in childhood and the heavenly Father regained in faith, at least not in the sense of attributing to God the Father the personal and temperamental qualities of the earthly father. Donne's concept of God and his depiction of the relationship with God, however, arise from the grave personal anxiety which has its roots in the early death of his father.

. . . The deepest search in life, . . . the thing that in one way or another was central to all living was man's search to find a father, not merely the father of his flesh, not merely the lost father of his youth, but the image of a strength and wisdom external to his need and superior to his hunger, to which the belief and power of his own life could be united.<sup>56</sup>

God appears in the 'Holy Sonnets' primarily as a figure of wrath

and judgment whose violence hopefully precedes loving acceptance. One notes the almost total absence of the gentle and loving aspect of the Christian God, what might be called maternal qualities, life-giving and life-sustaining. Instead, God is a figure of Old Testament stature, a force of jealous wrath and judgment. There is indeed no sense of a loving Christ figure: Donne appeals to redemption in Christ as his 'title' to the love of God the Father, yet sees Christ as a blood-covered sacrifice, scion of a violent God, and himself a figure of judgment.

Donne's relation to God the Father is ambivalent. He fears wrathful rejection, yet seeks love and acceptance. This ambivalence is only momentarily resolved in the closing sonnets of the 1633 sequence. In sonnet 10 Donne appeals for a violent reclamation. His powerful statement of need contains a disturbing element of sexual sadism, as he demands to be possessed by a violent and punishing God. Sonnet 11, however, shows evidence of a feeling of election. Donne moves toward resolution of inner conflict in accepting 'adoption' by God the Father. Sonnet 12 is a formal appeal to the efficacy of resurrection in Christ and the New Testament law of love. Donne approaches God the Father directly, with a mellowing sense of having been chosen.

In Donne's final acceptance of the love and mercy of God the Father, there is a different form of passivity. He comes to realize that his early defiantly masculine persona was passive, in that lust and misdevotion acted through him. He now moves toward that total spiritual passivity which is the accommodation of self and personal will to the will of God. This final acceptance of God's love and mercy is not entirely achieved until the Sermons: the 'sinne of feare', mistrust



of God's presence and continued loving acceptance, is still powerfully present in the late hymns.

Relationship with God the Father provides a presence to fill the inner void. In the psychology of replacement, God provides a dominant male figure absent since the early death of the father, and a sense of personal security which counteracts fears of rejection and loss. God's omnipotence allows man's impotence in a way which human relation cannot: impotence in the broadest human sense, the inability to survive or to be self-sustaining. The essence of God's fatherhood is this sustaining and protective love.

Donne's need for an adequate devotional object finally centers on God. The 'Holy Sonnets' reflect an intense spiritual agony in which the movement toward personal regeneration begins. Donne's search for a relational center which would not fail concludes with his acceptance of the love of God. Donne uses familiar and available structures of religious metaphor and form to locate this ultimate center in God. In the 'Holy Sonnets', which are a regenerative phase in an overall movement toward self-completion, Donne appeals for a reattachment which will heal his distressed spirit. He seeks a loving acceptance which will counteract isolation, insecurity, and guilt. In the 'Holy Sonnets' the pose, even at its most violent, is that of the prodigal son: repair me, reclaim me, beat me into submission; I made the mistake of claiming my birthright in Adam; now I wish to claim my deathright in Christ. In accepting the love of God as a personal redemption, Donne reached the only true security he had known. The authority figure, God as judge, provided necessary external order; the paternal figure, the

God of love, provided a relationship analogous to the primary affirming relationships of childhood and to the mutually affirming love relationship which had proved emotionally sustaining only temporarily.

The conversion Donne experienced was essentially a process of unification: in religious terms, the divided self is that disjunction between man's impulse to sin and his 'higher' impulse toward good. Regeneration includes the remedying of inner incompleteness and the reduction of inner discord. Security and emotional stability succeed a period of intense distress. Religious conversion is of two essential forms. The first is conscious and voluntary, a regenerative change brought about gradually through stages of increasing moral and spiritual awareness and self-dedication. Such stages are often marked by intense personal crises. The second form is unconscious and involuntary, an abandoning of the personal will in more or less mystic self-surrender. Donne's conversion was primarily of the first sort, a conscious self-adjustment to an external order. He was a being too morbidly self-conscious to be capable of complete self-surrender; in remaining passive and demanding God's action, he allayed his underlying fears of the loss of self. Only in the Sermons did Donne even approach visionary awareness. The struggle in the 'Holy Sonnets' is against the self as well as toward God: appeals for repossession reflect an alliance of conscious will and subconscious forces, in his attempt to move from sinfulness, the sense of present incompleteness, toward God, the positive ideal which the self desires to encompass.

## FOOTNOTES (CHAPTER THREE)

<sup>1</sup>Gardner, "Introduction", Divine Poems, pp. xl-xli.

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

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. xli-xlii.

<sup>4</sup>Gardner's conclusion is based on the following points:

1) an examination of Donne's views on the immortality of the soul and what happens to the soul at death, views which differ before and after his ordination (xliii-xlvi); 2) connection of Donne's elegy on Mrs. Bulstrode which begins "Death I recant" to Sonnet Six "Death be not proud" and to the second elegy which borrows this opening phrase (xlvi); 3) connection of the verse letter "To E. of D. with six holy Sonnets" to the third Earl of Dorset, who succeeded to the title in February 1609 as accompanying these six rather than six of the seven La Corona sonnets (xlviii-xlix).

I find Gardner's arguments quite convincing, and agree that her arrangement of the sonnets provides a basically sensible order on which to base a coherent reading.

<sup>5</sup>Gardner, "Introduction", Divine Poems, p. xlix.

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

<sup>7</sup>Gardner, "Commentary", Divine Poems, pp. 77, 78.

The existence of the 'Westmoreland sonnets' only in the one manuscript, their probable later dates of composition, and their quite independent themes effectively separate them from the sixteen 'Holy Sonnets' written during the Mitcham years. From this point, therefore, they are excluded from my discussion.

<sup>8</sup>Gardner, "Introduction", Divine Poems, pp. lii-liii.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. xxxiv-xxxv.

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

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

<sup>17</sup>Martz, The Poetry of Meditation, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>19</sup>Bald, pp. 39, 40.

<sup>20</sup>Martz, p. 110.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 126-127.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 326.

I have throughout used the first edition (1954) of The Poetry of Meditation. For the second edition (1962) Martz extensively rewrote the concluding chapter, in which this particular comment was included.

Since Martz' revised conclusion still attempts to relate meditative structure in poetry to a general mental activity of intense inward focus, frequently not itself religious, I saw no reason to disregard this earlier quite significant disclaimer.

<sup>29</sup>Martz, p. 146.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>32</sup>See Gosse, The Life and Letters of John Donne, Ch. XII "Reader at Lincoln's Inn 1617-1621", II, p. 99f.; and Grierson, "Introduction" to The Poems of John Donne", II, p. xlix f.

<sup>33</sup>Grierson, "Introduction", p. liii.

<sup>34</sup>Wilbur Sanders, John Donne's Poetry, p. 127.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>36</sup>Louis Martz, The Poetry of Meditation, p. 132.

<sup>37</sup>Judah Stampfer, John Donne and the Metaphysical Gesture, p. 248.

<sup>38</sup>Louis Martz, p. 52.

<sup>39</sup>For a somewhat similar analysis, see Stampfer pp. 249-252; his conclusions are more positive than mine.

<sup>40</sup>Stampfer, pp. 253-4.

<sup>41</sup>Stampfer, p. 256.

<sup>42</sup>Stampfer, p. 259.

<sup>43</sup>Sanders, p. 130.

<sup>44</sup>Stampfer, p. 261.

<sup>45</sup>Stampfer, p. 268.

<sup>46</sup>"The Good-morrow", ll. 12-14.

<sup>47</sup>"A Valediction: Of Weeping", l. 20.

<sup>48</sup>Stampfer, p. 273.

<sup>49</sup>The similarity between the problem discussed in this sonnet and Walton's account of Donne's reasons for refusing Morton's offer in 1607 is well worth noting:

" . . . some irregularities of my life have been so visible to some men, that though I have, I thank God, made my peace with him by penitential resolutions against them, and by the assistance of his Grace banish'd them my affections; yet this, which God knows to be so, is not so visible to man, as to free me from their censures, and it may be that sacred calling from a dishonour."

Quoted in Bald, p. 206.

<sup>50</sup>Stampfer, p. 273.

<sup>51</sup>Stampfer, p. 272.

<sup>52</sup>Erikson, Young Man Luther, p. 124.

<sup>53</sup>The psychoanalytic literature focusing on relationship with the father is, to my knowledge, quite limited. For general evidence in support of this summary of childhood development, see John Bowlby, Child Care and the Growth of Love, 2nd. ed. (Penguin, 1968). For a discussion of the importance of the rôle of the father, and especially of the diminishing effectiveness of the paternal figure in twentieth-century society, see Alexander Mitscherlich, Society Without the Father: A Contribution to Social Psychology, trans. Eric Mosbacher, (Schocken, 1970). For the distressful effect on the child of the early death of a parent, see John Bowlby, "Grief and Mourning in Infancy and Early Childhood", Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, 15, pp. 251-269. A study which has particular reference to the correspondence between the relationship between child and father and the later relationship

between grown man and God the Father is Erik Erikson's Young Man Luther. While the circumstances, both personal and religious, of Martin Luther's life were quite different from those of Donne's life, Erikson's study was of considerable influence in my analysis of Donne's relationship with God the Father.

<sup>54</sup>See Erikson, pp. 115-118. Erikson relates the affirmation gained from a smiling face to the child's development of "basic trust in mutuality". An examination of Donne's preoccupation with imagery of the face first in relation with woman and then in relation to God would prove to be an interesting and informative study.

<sup>55</sup>Stampfer, p. 53.

<sup>56</sup>Thomas Wolfe, The Story of a Novel, p. 39. Quoted in Erikson, p. 123.

## CONCLUSION

When Donne moved his family to Mitcham in 1606, the move was significant of more than a temporary withdrawal from the social life of London and the court. It seems to mark the end of the first great fervour of love union reflected in the great love lyrics, and the increase of Donne's feeling that he was weighed down by responsibilities he could not discharge. Debts, illnesses, births and deaths of children, and the lack of any purposeful life-direction afflicted Donne's already melancholy mind. His letters underline these difficulties with growing emphasis and poignancy in 1608 and 1609.

There are four poems, representative of a period of transition, which intensify our awareness of Donne's distress. The two earliest divine poems reflect an attempt to accommodate a wayward and intensely individual spirit to an external order of formal religious devotion. The poetic infelicities of "A Litanie" reflect the difficulty inherent in Donne's attempt to contain personal material within a liturgical structure. The "La Corona" sonnets are a more unified and successful poetic achievement: the more complete adjustment of the personal voice within a controlled meditative form perhaps reflects the personal context of these poems as a tribute to Mrs. Herbert, and their slightly earlier date of composition. Both poems reveal Donne's attempt to use the available structures of religious metaphor to contain a growing personal distress. In "Twicknam Garden" the Petrarchan theme serves a similar function, providing an



external form within which intense feeling can be structured. With "A Nocturnall", however, the intensity of emotion is only barely contained.

Lucy, Countess of Bedford was the single most important figure in Donne's life in the first years of the Mitcham period. Whether accepted as referring to Donne's relationship with Lady Bedford or not, "Twicknam Garden" and "A Nocturnall" are intensely personal reflections upon the disillusion which accompanied the failure of mutuality and sustaining relation in human love. "Twicknam Garden" and "A Nocturnall" are not the only poems which register Donne's disillusion with the 'religion of love'. For example, "The Dissolution" reflects a situation similar to that of "A Nocturnall". The poem laments the 'death' of the beloved, which dissolved their 'union of elements'. Separated thus from his beloved, what elements remain in himself -- "My fire of Passion, sighes of ayre,/Water of teares, and earthly sad despaire," -- feed on themselves and hasten his own death: "And so my soule more earnestly releas'd,/Will outstrip hers". Gardner suspected that "The Dissolution" was "a draft and not a finished poem":<sup>1</sup> it is certainly much less impressive or poetically successful than "A Nocturnall". So too the poems usually connected to Mrs. Herbert, "The Funeral" and "The Relique", treat of the death of love or of the lover himself with an element of playfulness which is both ironic and macabre. In contrast, "Twicknam Garden" and "A Nocturnall" are two of Donne's finest lyric poems: the first is a tour-de-force of sardonic wit, the latter a somber reflection on the essential meaning of the loss of love. The two essential aspects of Donne's disillusion in love, bitterness at rejection and numbing sorrow at profound loss, are best instanced in these two poems.

The deep concentration of negativity and personal nullity reflected in "A Nocturnall" in fact represents the abyss of self-reduction from within which regeneration begins, as Donne disengages himself from the female figure and turns toward God in his search for personal security and a basis of assurance. "An Anatomie of the World", Donne's First Anniversarie, reflects a further stage of this same movement of spirit. It shares with "A Nocturnall" the theme of the supreme loss felt in the 'death' of the idealized woman. This long poem, written at the close of the Mitcham period, focuses directly on the disillusioning limitations and failures of human life, and attributes human unworthiness and incompleteness to this profound loss. In the Second Anniversarie, "The Progres of the Soule", this loss is to an extent overcome in personal religious renunciation, as Donne imagines his bereaved soul following the soul of the idealized female figure to heaven.

Disillusion with the possibility of achieved mutuality expressed in the late lyrics reflects the failure of human love to provide an assured defence against inner incompleteness and isolation. The 'Holy Sonnets' reveal a parallel movement of spirit in the establishment of an affirming relationship with God.

Interpreted as reflective of an intense personal crisis, the 'Holy Sonnets' in essence define the nature of Donne's inner distress. The sonnets themselves are a series of self-presentations and dramatizations; though some are false starts, some approach genuine self-examination and adumbrate a resolution of inner conflict. They reveal that the spiritual movement toward acceptance of the love of God the Father was for Donne personal and relational. Donne's sense of inner

incompletion led him to seek emotional security in a relationship to a personal devotional object: when relationship to woman failed to provide this needed security more than temporarily, Donne sought an analogous relationship with God. Relationship with God the Father provides emotional security absent since childhood and a sense of assurance which counteracts fears of rejection and loss.

This study is not intended to be a definitive statement, nor to exclude other forms of critical comment on the 'Holy Sonnets', but to examine the possibility that, interpreted as a modified form of spiritual autobiography, Donne's 'Holy Sonnets' reflect the search for resolution of an intense personal crisis, to an extent distanced and objectified through form. An entirely comprehensive study of the Mitcham period in Donne's life would include examination of the prose works written in these years. Such an examination was beyond the scope of the present study, except in so far as such works reflect Donne's personal concerns of spirit. The content of these controversial works does not alter the movement of spirit effected in the Mitcham years and reflected in the poetry. So too the examination of Donne's relationship with God the Father requires further corroboration in extensive study of the late hymnes, the Devotions, and the Sermons. That Donne sought in a personal relationship with God the Father security and assurance to counteract the 'sinne of feare' which beset him to the end of his life could at least be illustrated. This fear of death as the annihilation of the self and the extinction of personal identity is related to Donne's effort to have the self confirmed by the love of another. The ultimate source of affirming and enabling love was in a personal relationship of

passionate devotion to God the Father.

'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'; but to fall out of the hands of the living God is a horror beyond our expression, beyond our imagination.

That God should let my soul fall out of his hand into a bottomless pit and roll an unremovable stone upon it . . . ; that that God who looked upon me when I was nothing and called me when I was not, as though I had been, out of the womb and depth of darkness, will not look upon me now when though a miserable and banished and damned creature, yet I am his creature still and contribute something to his glory even in my damnation; . . . that that God who, when he could not get into me by standing and knocking, by his ordinary means of entering, by his word, his mercies, hath applied his judgments and hath shaken the house, this body, . . . and frightened the master of the house, my soul, with horrors and heavy apprehensions and so made an entrance into me; that that God should frustrate all his own purposes and practices upon me and leave me and cast me away as though I had cost him nothing; . . . what Tophet is not paradise, what brimstone is not amber, what gnashing is not a comfort, what gnawing of the worm is not a tickling, what torment is not a marriage-bed to this damnation, to be secluded eternally, eternally, eternally from the sight of God.<sup>2</sup>

## FOOTNOTES (CONCLUSION)

<sup>1</sup>Gardner, "Commentary", The Songs and Sonnets, p. 213.

<sup>2</sup>Sermon No. 13, Vol. V. Potter and Simpson, pp. 266-267. Sermon 76 in LXXX Sermons.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography is restricted to those works directly referred to in the text of this thesis.

Primary Sources

- Donne, John. The Divine Poems. Edited by Helen Gardner. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952.
- Donne, John. The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets. Edited by Helen Gardner. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- Donne, John. The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters. Edited by W. Milgate. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.
- Donne, John. The Poems of John Donne. Edited by Herbert J. C. Grierson. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912.
- Donne, John. The Sermons of John Donne. Edited by G. R. Potter and E. M. Simpson. 10 vols. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953-1962.
- Grierson, Herbert J. C. Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century, Donne to Butler. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921.

Secondary Sources

- Bald, R. C. John Donne -- A Life. London: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Bowlby, John. "Grief and Mourning in Infancy and Early Childhood", Psychoanalytic Study of the Child, 15, pp. 251-269.
- Bowlby, John. Child Care and the Growth of Love. Edited by Margery Fry, 2nd edition. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968.
- Ellrodt, Robert. "L'Inspiration Personelle et L'Esprit du Temps Chez Les Poètes Métaphysiques Anglais, Première Partie: Les Structures Fondamentales de L'Inspiration Personelle, Tome I: John Donne et Les Poètes de la Tradition Chrétienne". Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1960.
- Erikson, Erik H. Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History. New York: Norton, 1962.

- Gosse, Edmund. The Life and Letters of John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's. 2 vols. London: William Heinemann, 1899.
- Herford, C. H. and P. Simpson, editors. Ben Jonson. 10 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925-1954.
- Historical Manuscript Commission Reports. VII. Referred to in Florence H. Morgan, "A Biography of Lucy Countess of Bedford, The Last Great Literary Patroness." Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Southern California, January 1956.
- Jackson, R. S. John Donne's Christian Vocation. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1970.
- Laing, R. D. The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1970.
- Leishman, J. B. The Monarch of Wit: An Analytical and Comparative Study of the Poetry of John Donne. London: Hutchinson, 1951.
- Louthan, Doniphan. The Poetry of John Donne: A Study in Explication. New York: Bookman Associates, 1951.
- Martz, Louis L. The Poetry of Meditation: A Study in English Religious Literature of the Seventeenth Century. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1954.
- Mitscherlich, Alexander. Society Without the Father: A Contribution to Social Psychology. Translated by Eric Mosbacher. New York, Schocken, 1970.
- Sanders, Wilbur. John Donne's Poetry. Cambridge University Press, 1971.
- Stampfer, Judah. John Donne and the Metaphysical Gesture. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971.