

POETIC "PLAY" AND MAN'S DILEMMAS:  
STUDIES IN THE POETRY OF  
DONNE AND MARVELL

by

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Donne and Marvell are renowned as 'witty' poets. The description is invited by such habits as the use of extravagant imagery, the arguing of implausible positions, the striking of threatrical poses which call in question their attitude to themselves and to their stated views. These qualities appear not only in their slight poems, but in works that are demonstrably major, in poems which are weighty, perceptive, and passionately committed. The aim of this study is to examine a number of their major poems in some detail to see how integral their playful qualities are in establishing their full meaning.

A number of Marvell's shorter poems, "A Dialogue between the Soul and Body", the four "Mower" poems, and "To his Coy Mistress" look at fundamental human dilemmas. Artfully constructed situations and witty discussions provide parables for representative human problems, especially ones concerning the difficulties of growth and of action within a finite and mutable world.

In many of Donne's Songs and Sonnets, passionate declarations of love are made in view of a realistic assessment of the apparently threatening conditions in which that love must exist. Donne often sets the inevitable forces of change against lovers' desires for permanence, the existence of a world of public events against their desire for privacy. The forces of change and the invasion of privacy can prove paradoxically valuable, the very spirit of playfulness and assertions of the physical a sign of man's spiritual capacities.

Three major poems by Marvell, "An Horatian Ode", "The Garden", and "Upon Appleton House" are especially concerned with the relative merits of withdrawal from public life and of commitment to public action. Working often by parody, Marvell considers the implications of various decisions. He raises questions about the reliability of human perceptions and the uncertainty of human knowledge, with some of the implications for the writing of poetry.

Donne's most ambitious poem, The Second Anniversary, also questions the possibility of clear vision in a world where true knowledge is almost unattainable. Through the daring conceit of Elizabeth Drury as a life-giving, Christ-like figure, he questions the possibility of human perfection in a fallen world, and strives publicly for his own salvation.



The playfulness in these poems, while it sometimes resembles conventional poetic habits, is seen as part of the poets' response to important human dilemmas which they feel as their own. They are particularly aware of man as subject to complex pressures of 'spirit' and 'flesh', and they ask whether personal integrity and fulfilment demand withdrawal from the world or commitment to action. To confront such paradoxes and problems, both poets seek to alter men's perspectives. This involves a radical distortion of the usual habits of language and the images by which men comprehend their world. Their own poetry uses a variety of distorted images and propositions in a way that suggests the nature and degree of their own commitments.

Christopher J. Watson

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
I.	STYLE AND THEMES IN DONNE AND MARVELL . . . .	1
II.	SOME PARABLES BY MARVELL . . . . .	7
III.	DONNE'S LOVE LYRICS . . . . .	50
IV.	WITHDRAWAL AND COMMITMENT IN MARVELL . . . .	111
V.	THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY. . . . .	165
VI.	CONCLUSION . . . . .	185
	BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	190

## CHAPTER I

### STYLE AND THEMES IN DONNE AND MARVELL

In his literary epitaph for John Donne, Thomas Carew has spoken for many of John Donne's readers:

Here lies a King, that rul'd as hee thought fit  
The universal Monarchy of wit;  
Here lie two Flamens, and both these, the best,  
Apollo's first, at last, the true Gods Priest.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of Donne's ruling a "Monarchy of wit" draws attention to a style of writing, and many readers comment on Donne's wit, on the ways he transforms the witty styles he inherits from sixteenth century poets and in turn influences other writers in the seventeenth century. At the same time, Carew's tribute refers to more than stylistic features, to more than Donne's ingenuity. Carew recognizes that Donne's importance has much to do with what he says, for being the priest either of Apollo or of the true God is no trite pastime. In this, too, Carew speaks for other readers, those who emphasise Donne's themes, and the way these anticipate those of later poets.<sup>2</sup>

H.J.C. Grierson's Cross Currents in English Literature of the XVIIth Century bears the alternative title, The World,

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<sup>1</sup>"An Elegie upon the death of the Deane of Pauls, Dr. John Donne," ll. 95-98, in The Poems of Thomas Carew, ed. Rhodes Dunlap (Oxford, 1964), p. 74.

<sup>2</sup>Rather than merely list names at present, I will offer examples of other critical responses when I come to examine the poems.

the Flesh & the Spirit, Their Actions & Reactions.<sup>3</sup> Grierson discusses his theme in relation to a number of writers, including Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. His sub-title points to a recurrent theme in the poetry of the century, a preoccupation by no means unique to that century, but felt very sharply during it. Man was seen as a product of diverse and confusing tensions; writers responded in various ways to this sense of tension. Man appears as both brute and divine, as immortal in his aspirations and mortal in what he can achieve. The language for describing such a situation will often be that of 'soul' and 'body' or of 'spirit' and 'flesh'. In various contexts, both Donne and Marvell ask the question of what makes a man most fully and valuably alive, setting such a question against both a belief in, and an experience of, man's duality. The terms in which they express a 'belief' and those in which they describe an experience do not always co-incide.

Donne and Marvell do not experience this duality, as some of their language might lead us to expect, as a simple contrast between man's body and his soul, or between a worthless present world and all-valuable afterlife. Many of their poems study man's situation as something more complex than this. At times, as in Marvell's "A Dialogue between the Soul and Body" or in parts of Donne's Second Anniversary, they

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<sup>3</sup>London, 1929.

pretend to believe in a simple dualistic account of man, then play the language of 'soul' and 'body' against other insights which show that dualism to be untenable. Poems like "The Sunne Rising" or "To his Coy Mistress", without using the precise terms of 'spirit' and 'flesh', defend, even overstate, the paradoxical assertion that man's 'spirit' is most wholly alive in activities that seem most 'fleshly'. Or a poem may argue, as in "The Garden" or parts of The Second Anniversary, that one kind of absolutist behaviour--withdrawing forever to a garden, or despising the foul world--is best for man, only to play that argument against other observations that plainly challenge it.

This habit of playing insights and perspectives against each other, the tendency to pretend to a position while mocking or undermining it in some way, the wilful-looking and provocative extravagance of the treatment of some subjects or of the argument of some positions--these qualities distinguish Donne and Marvell from poets like Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton whose works show very different ways of responding to comparable dilemmas in man's situation.<sup>4</sup>

In this dissertation I approach the 'playful' qualities of Donne and of Marvell against the background of their thematic

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<sup>4</sup>This is not to deny other differences, such as those noted in Earl Miner, The Metaphysical Mode from Donne to Cowley (Princeton, N.J., 1969).

preoccupations. We may discuss "Metaphysical wit" from various points of view, relating it, for example, to witty traditions of Petrarchan poetry,<sup>5</sup> or else, after Dr Johnson's Life of Cowley, looking to conceits, to such traits as "a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike."<sup>6</sup> Donne obviously shares the rhetorical tricks of his sixteenth-century predecessors and passes on his variants of those skills to those who come after him. Yet a preoccupation with these matters, important though they are, can easily carry us away from recognizing how and why his poetry is significant.

J.B. Leishman adapts Carew's phrase, "Monarchy of wit", yet his tendency, unlike Carew's, is to see Donne's wit as fundamentally debilitating.<sup>7</sup> This comparison from his study of Shakespeare's Sonnets is a good illustration of his attitude:

To 'vent wit' was always one of Donne's keenest pleasures and most besetting temptations, and even in the poems I have mentioned ["The good-morrow", "The Canonization",

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<sup>5</sup>Donald L. Guss, in John Donne, Petrarchist (Detroit, 1966), brings this line of enquiry to its most substantial expression.

<sup>6</sup>Lives of the Poets (London, 1952), I, 14.

<sup>7</sup>J.B. Leishman, The Monarch of Wit, 6th ed. (London, 1962).

and "The Sunne Rising"] I am not sure whether this rather than, as with Shakespeare, a profound conviction, was not the main source of his inspiration.<sup>8</sup>

This approach suggests a natural tendency in our response to Donne, for we are quick to distinguish the 'playful' from what seems indeed 'serious'. For Donne, it seems, often follows through extraordinary notions for sheer pleasure. Both Dr Johnson and J.B. Leishman have every reason to worry about this feature of Donne. I wish to argue, however, that 'venting wit' is not necessarily incompatible with working out a profound conviction, that indeed such a habit may be a way of clarifying that conviction. This argument also applies to Marvell. To explicate a poem such as "The Garden" as if it were not a light and witty poem is to belie its tone and thus its meaning. Yet "The Garden" is indeed substantial enough to bear a good deal of learned commentary on its 'ideas'. What our critical accounts should do is to explain why those 'ideas' have the particular embodiment we find in the poem, and what effect the manner of writing has on the 'argument' that is being offered.

The studies of poems that I shall offer are in response to such issues as these. I will relate stylistic features to the themes, notably those I briefly suggested earlier, always

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<sup>8</sup>J.B. Leishman, Themes and Variations in Shakespeare's Sonnets, 2nd ed. (London, 1963), p. 222.

mindful of our natural tendency to separate 'form' from 'content', and attempt to see if it is more than a critical truism to claim that no true gap exists between the things the poet says and the way he says them. In so doing, I hope to recapture something of the ease with which Carew can praise Donne both as "King" in the "Monarchy of wit" and as "two Flamens", without any sense of the one contradicting the other. And if we can do this for Donne as well as Marvell, we should be in a position to recognize better the qualities of other poetry, especially of the seventeenth century.



## CHAPTER II

## SOME PARABLES BY MARVELL

## I

We are onely that amphibious piece betweene a corporall and spirituall essence, that middle forme that linkes those two together, and makes good the method of God and nature, that jumps not from extreames, but unites the incompatible distances by some middle and participating natures . . . . Thus is man that true and great Amphibium, whose nature is disposed to live not onely like creatures in diverse elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds . . . .<sup>1</sup>

In thus voicing his sense of man's disunity, Sir Thomas Browne spoke for many contemporaries as well as for himself. One traditional way of describing this disunity, the language of 'soul' and 'body', appears often in the poetry of Donne and of Marvell. Both poets recognize that man is both unified and chaotic, that his various impulses may work in harmony--as, ideally, in the deceased Elizabeth Drury, who anticipated such harmony even on earth--but are more likely to pull him in conflicting directions. They recognize too that 'body' and 'soul' are helpful words for discussing this condition only if we are aware that they are not separate objects but a metaphorical way of representing the conflicting elements in man.

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici, I, 34, in The Prose of Sir Thomas Browne, ed. Norman Endicott (New York, 1968), pp. 41-42.

Often in the poems of Donne or Marvell, we find the poet speaking of the soul and body as quite distinct things, while playing that way of speaking against other images or ideas which stress man's unity. The interplay of a language of dissociation and a language of unity takes a relatively simple form in Marvell's "A Dialogue between the Soul and Body".

This poem stands in a tradition of 'Body-Soul' dialogue poems, and adopts the traditional view that body and soul are discrete and hostile things.<sup>2</sup> But that view is qualified by the poem's insistence that the two are united intimately. While the poem is built on the obvious pretence that body and soul can speak, that pretence is played against the unspoken fact that 'soul' and 'body' exist only as parts of the one person, that the dispute is a comic dramatization of any man's striving for peace and harmony within himself.

Much of the poem's effect comes from showing how grotesque it is to think of man either as a 'manacled' soul or as a tyrannized body. The images he puts into the mouths of his speakers keep verging on the grotesque, and the laments

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<sup>2</sup>See J.B. Leishman, The Art of Marvell's Poetry, 2nd ed. (London, 1968), pp. 209-218, for a discussion of the poem in relation to its tradition. See also Kitty Scoular Datta, "New Light on Marvell's 'A Dialogue between the Soul and Body'," Ren Q, XXII (1969), 242-255.

become comic. Yet neither can we describe the poem as 'comic' and leave it at that, for the poem does give a sense of the anguish and pain of man's position, even if the 'Soul-Body' way of 'naming' that tension is shown to be inadequate.

One effect of the use of a 'debate' form is that each speaker strives to make winning points in a sharp and concise manner. We find that each speech tends to become a series of incisive epigrams. A recurrent quality of these epigrams is their insistence on some paradox; the wit keeps coming from their completely unexpected way of putting things, their reversal not only of expected values and judgments, but of the usual way of describing things. Early in the poem, the Soul describes itself thus:

With bolts of Bones, that fether'd stands  
In Feet; and manacled in Hands.

In a 'normal' prison, the feet themselves would be fettered, the hands manacled, points emphasised by the etymology of "fether'd" and "manacled" and by the way the syntax balances "feet" and "fether'd", "manacled" and "Hands" against each other. The apparently awkward, but cleverly metrical, structure of the sounds emphasises that the poem is to some extent joking, but it is also a dramatically effective sign of the soul's own sense of its contorted position. In other words, we have poetry that is playing a game, but using that game to underline some ideas, especially the paradoxical relations between the soul

and body, which in turn implies the paradoxical nature of man.

The epigrammatic manner often encourages a fusion of metaphors. The Soul complains that it is:

Constrain'd not only to indure  
Diseases, but, what's worse, the Cure:  
And ready oft the Port to gain,  
Am Shipwrackt into Health again.

The force in these lines derives especially from the word, "Shipwrackt". Marvell takes a traditional image of the passage from life through death as a voyage, and by merging this with a different kind of language, that of "Cure" and "Health", can offer a startling new notion. Further, the word "gain", derived from the world of commerce--being conveniently part of an idiomatic expression about seafaring--is woven in with these to stress the paradoxical point, familiar to a Marvell reader, that what we see as 'loss' may also be seen as 'gain'. The fusion of metaphors, made possible by the playful and epigrammatic manner, establishes Marvell's insights effectively and emphatically.

Often in this poem, images the speakers offer for one particular purpose prove to have "unintended" significance. Language that seems to the Soul or the Body rhetorically effective for establishing the fact of bondage serves to show

that if bondage exists, it can hardly be spoken of so simply.

The Soul sees itself as:

A Soul hung up, as 'twere, in Chains  
Of Nerves, and Arteries, and Veins.  
Tortur'd, besides each other part,  
In a vain Head, and double Heart.

As the analysis by Dr Leavis reminds us,<sup>3</sup> the language is defining, as far as it can, a complex group of tensions within man. The Soul, for example, would share as much responsibility for "a vain Head" as the Body does. The point I wish to stress here is the way in which the comic pretence on which the whole poem is structured allows the necessary play of language. In this case, the accumulation of things that threaten the "Soul" emphasises the many and various aspects of human nature, while setting these against the simple Soul-Body distinction highlights the difficulty of specifying which 'part' of us does which.

The theme of gain and loss appears most tellingly in the final speech of the poem, where the Body considers the price paid for man's advance beyond the bestial. That argument culminates in these lines:

What but a Soul could have the wit  
To build me up for Sin so fit?  
So Architects do square and hew,  
Green Trees that in the Forest grew.

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<sup>3</sup>F.R. Leavis, "The Responsible Critic: or the function of criticism at any time", in Scrutiny, XIX (Spring 1953), 162-183.

As often, Marvell looks to things of the 'natural world', (trees, plants, grass, and the like), and to the relation between man and that 'nature', for images of man's own condition. The very existence of man as a civilized creature demands that green trees should be cut down and shaped in accordance with men's plans. So too, man, to be more than a beast, must have 'wit' to govern unreflective and instinctual desires. The price of this growth is that he also has the power to sin, to harm himself, to suffer the things that the Body has listed in this final speech:

The Pestilence of Love does heat:  
Or Hatred's hidden Ulcer eat.  
Joy's chearful Madness does perplex:  
Or Sorrow's other Madness vex.

Such perplexity and vexation would be done away with only at the cost of our humanity. Painful though this humanity may be at times, the poem represents it as fundamentally desirable and attractive.

If we should see, in the strong and physical images of the first stanza or in the Body's final word in the last, Marvell's preference for the primacy of the Body, we have missed the point and failed to understand the game. Marvell may indeed be an innovator in the "Soul-Body dialogue" tradition by allowing so strong a last word to the Body, but his significant innovation is that he is

so good a poet as to transcend the conceptual framework of that tradition. Bones, feet, hands, eyes, and ears are a necessary part of man and it is absurd for him to imagine otherwise except as a game. Yet these 'fleshly' things do suggest his limits, his dependence on vulnerable organs that can do only so much and which one day must decay.

The poem shows an awareness of the gap that exists between what man aspires to and what he can achieve. In this, it is characteristic of its age. But the failure to live up to these aspirations may be as much due to "the Palsie Shakes of Fear" as to "Bolts of Bones"; it may with equal justice be blamed on 'body' or 'soul'. The ability to explore that fact about the gap is one reason why such poets as Donne and Marvell are so important and outstanding.

## II

Marvell's four "Mower" poems, "The Mower against Gardens", "Damon the Mower", "The Mower to the Glo-Worms", and "The Mower's Song", bring a new kind of seriousness to a minor poetic 'kind', the pastoral. Other critics, notably

Joseph H. Summers,<sup>4</sup> have pointed to the novelty and the significance of using a mower rather than a shepherd as the central figure in a pastoral lyric. But the extent of Marvell's innovation is worth further study, for these poems, especially "The Mower's Song", are more complex than is usually recognized, and their methods, characteristic of Marvell, are significant for my thesis. In particular, an adequate account of them must try to assess the effect of their lightness upon the force of the things they are 'saying'.

We cannot be certain that these poems were grouped by Marvell rather than by their first publisher. Certainly the figure of the Mower, although it alters, brings them naturally together, and the presence by name of Juliana in all but "The Mower against Gardens" implies that in these at least the Mower is the same man. In any case, the poems do belong together in more than a superficial sense, and in comparing them, we can trace important similarities of method, or else differences that suggest something like an evolving grasp of what exactly Marvell wanted to do with his Mower.

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<sup>4</sup>Joseph H. Summers, "Marvell's 'Nature'," ELH, XX (1953), 121-135. See also Introduction to Andrew Marvell: Selected Poetry, ed. Frank Kermode (New York, 1967), pp. xix-xx.



A peculiar challenge of these four poems is their own insistence that they are slight poems. The hero in each is cast in the role of a simple rustic. In "The Mower against Gardens", the Mower refuses to make any positive response to civilization. In "The Mower to the Glo-Worms", the Mower insists on the slightness of his own sphere of activity:

Ye Country Comets, that portend  
No War, nor Princes funeral,  
Shining unto no higher end  
Then to presage the Grasses fall.

In none of the poems does the hero display the witty and sophisticated intelligence that marks Donne's poetry or much of Marvell's, especially when Marvell speaks in his own voice. Indeed, part of the wit in "Damon the Mower" depends on a contrast between the simple Mower and the clever Marvell. More significantly, "The Mower against Gardens", which offers the wittiest Mower of any of the group, is, I shall argue below, the weakest poem of the four. The poetic power becomes stronger, and more subtle, when 'conscious' wit is much less obvious.

"The Mower against Gardens" has inspired more commentary than the other 'Mower' poems. Frank Kermode's introductory comments on the mower, in the selection mentioned above, devote five pages to "The Mower against Gardens" and dismiss the other 'Mower' poems with faint

praise in a short paragraph that begins with the remark that "the other Mower poems are at least proof of the poet's power, so highly valued and so valuable, to detect novelty in old situations." (xx). A recent article on Marvell's views of nature and art selects only "The Mower against Gardens" for extensive commentary.<sup>5</sup>

This situation is understandable, but regrettable. "The Mower against Gardens" is the poem to choose for explicit statements on art and nature, yet this explicitness also becomes its limitation. In a manner similar to that of Milton's "L'Allegro" or "Il Penseroso", it takes up an extreme position on one side of a rather artificial debate. Regardless of the fact that his own job involves continual interference with nature, this Mower, in objecting to Gardens, regards man's interference with natural processes as a sign of his fallen state. He does this in an argument that shows surprising wit and erudition, and offers, considering whom he is supposed to be, surprisingly sophisticated comparisons and images:

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<sup>5</sup>Nicholas A. Salerno, "Andrew Marvell and the Furor Hortensis", SEL, VIII (Winter 1968), 103-120.

The Pink grew then as double as his Mind;  
 The nutriment did change the kind.  
 With strange perfumes he did the Roses taint.  
 And Flow'rs themselves were taught to paint.  
 The Tulip, white, did for complexion seek;  
 And learn'd to interline its cheek:  
 Its Onion root they then so high did hold,  
 That one was for a Meadow sold.  
 Another World was search'd, through Oceans new,  
 To find the Marvel of Peru.

The wit of the Mower's diatribe comes through as that of a relatively complacent satirist who directs his scorn at the perversions of civilization and celebrates the pastoral life and its advantages:

'Tis all enforc'd; the Fountain and the Grot;  
 While the sweet Fields do lye forgot:  
 Where willing Nature does to all dispence  
 A wild and fragrant Innocence:  
 And Fauns and Faryes do the Meadows till,  
 More by their presence then their skill.  
 Their Statues polish'd by some ancient hand,  
 May to adorn the Gardens stand:  
 But howso'ere the Figures so excel,  
 The Gods themselves with us do dwell.

As a contribution to the furor hortensis of the seventeenth century, the poem succeeds admirably. It allows a strong statement of one position, and by inflating such qualities as the Mower's moral seriousness, by balancing the fury of his charges with the pleasant grace of the rhythms, it suggests the limits of that position. For the Mower's case is rather absurd, and Marvell achieves much of his success by lightly playing with that absurdity:

Luxurious Man, to bring his Vice in use,  
 Did after him the World seduce:  
 And from the fields the Flow'rs and Plants allure,  
 Where Nature was most plain and pure.

This insistence on the evil behaviour of man is almost grotesque, and the poetry belittles this account of a pastoral position, without explicitly arguing against it.

We see in this poem a fairly simple use of a technique of dual perspective that is developed throughout the 'Mower' poems. The Mower does all the speaking, but he is placed, also, in the poem as a figure to be judged. The Mower's own playfulness, here appearing as the wit of the secure and simple-minded satirist, is complemented by the playfulness of the poet, mocking his speaker through his rhythms and through the implications of his language.

The Mower appears in this poem as a literary mask not fully realized and inconsistently handled, in the relation between what he says and what he is supposed to be. The Mower of any other poem in the group is more dramatically real, the voice is more truly his own; he is less portentous and solemn in manner, but reveals insights more subtle than any in "The Mower against Gardens"; he draws more heavily, too, on pastoral

assumptions and on the implications of his own job, yet overthrows some of those assumptions more effectively than does Marvell's implicit mockery in "The Mower against Gardens".

### III

"Damon the Mower" is the only one of the "Mower" poems where the dual perspective, using both the Mower's view of things and Marvell's, is formalized by the use of two different speaking voices. We find Marvell standing outside the figure and the situation as a superior person, free of conflict, knowing more than his simple rustic hero. Marvell parodies the Mower's response to Juliana as with mock solemnity he introduces his hero:

Heark how the Mower Damon Sung,  
With love of Juliana stung!  
While ev'ry thing did seem to paint  
The Scene more fit for his complaint.  
Like her fair Eyes the day was fair;  
But scorching like his am'rous Care.  
Sharp like his Sythe his Sorrow was,  
And wither'd like his Hopes the Grass.

This person is made to resemble a parody of an Elizabethan courtly lover as he finds ludicrous likenesses for his own state.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, when he speaks in his own voice, the

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<sup>6</sup> In some respects, both in rhythms and situation, the poem is almost a parody of such 'literary pastoral' poems as Fulke Greville's Caelica LXXV.

Mower appears even more as a pastoral equivalent of the courtly lover:

Not July causeth these Extremes,  
But Juliana's scorching beams.

. . . . .  
Alas! I look for Ease in vain,  
When Remedies themselves complain.  
No moisture but my Tears do rest,  
Nor Cold but in her Icy Breast.

In the latter part of the poem, however, the Mower takes on a more interesting part, especially when Marvell begins to consider the implications of his job as a way of imaging the Mower's own state, and indeed man's state generally. During the Mower's boasting, we are offered a contrast between him and the Shepherd:

What, though the piping Shepherd stock  
The plains with an unnum'ed Flock,  
This Sithe of mine discovers wide  
More ground then all his Sheep do hide.  
With this the golden fleece I shear  
Of all these Closes ev'ry Year.  
And though in Wooll more poor then they,  
Yet am I richer far in Hay.

Joseph H. Summers, in the above-mentioned article, notes that a mower is a more complex figure for the pastoral poet than is the shepherd. The Mower here works upon his surroundings in an activity that is apparently destructive, yet produces rich rewards, of "golden fleece" and "Hay". In fact, the recurrence of such wealth "ev'ry year" depends

on the Mower's activity, an important point which Summers and other critics have not stressed. This fact about agriculture becomes especially important in "The Mower's Song".

A little later in the poem, the earlier association of "his Sythe" and "his Sorrow" recurs, this time in lines spoken by the Mower himself:

How happy might I still have mow'd,  
Had not Love here his Thistles sow'd!  
But now I all the day complain,  
Joyning my Labour to my Pain;  
And with my Sythe cut down the Grass,  
Yet still my Grief is where it was;  
But, when the Iron blunter grows,  
Sighing I whet my Sythe and Woes.

Given this association, we well may wonder if the woes are as paradoxically productive as the scythe proves to be. But Damon does not see this; indeed, the scythe, like the woes of love can be used wrongly to cause self-injury:

While thus he threw his elbow round,  
Depopulating all the Ground,  
And, with his whistling Sythe, does cut  
Each stroke between the Earth and Root,  
The edged Stele by careless chance  
Did into his own Ankle glance;  
And there among the Grass fell down,  
By his own Sythe, the Mower mown.

Both scythe and love's woes may be fruitful, but only if one knows how to handle them.

We find in "Damon the Mower" a series of hints and implications that are neither recognized nor developed by the Mower, and that are only subtly referred to by Marvell himself. The play on the Mower's words depends on their understatement of the whole truth being played against the overstatement of some features of it: the woes of love are noted, but not its joys; we see the value of the Mower's labours, but not the implications of these for the human activities with which the poetry associates them.

When Marvell comes to speak in his own voice, the wit is more conscious, culminating in the epigrammatic sharpness of the lines:

And there among the Grass fell down,  
By his own Sythe, the Mower mown.

While it would be silly to talk of Marvell's patronizing a figure who exists only as his own literary creation, it is true that Marvell builds into his poem an air of superiority: unlike Damon, Marvell does know the implications of what is happening, though he prefers simply to hint at meanings and to play with words, especially when they can overstate; "Depopulating all the ground", "the Mower mown".



In the final stanza, we have again a lightly mocking rendition of the Mower's words, with a characteristically enigmatic conclusion:

Alas! said He, these hurts are slight  
 To those that dye by Loves despight.  
 With Shepherds-purse, and Clowns-all-heal,  
 The Blood I stanch, and Wound I seal.  
 Only for him no Cure is found,  
 Whom Julianas Eyes do wound.  
 'Tis death alone that this must do:  
 For Death thou art a Mower too.

The last line, as well as being a simple statement of despair by Damon, is also rich in undeveloped hints, and opens new perspectives for the poem. Part of Marvell's skill, and an added source of our pleasure, is that Marvell can withhold this new suggestion until the last.

In "Damon the Mower", then, wit and play function in a different way than they did in "The Mower against Gardens". Portentous remarks are offered in an ambiguous tone, so that it is up to the reader to work out their significance. The hero is shown to be overstating his own lot, and bragging in his self-description, yet he offers statements that, taken seriously, could have important implications for his own position as mower and as lover, implications that we find developed in "The Mower's Song". The Mower in this poem has not become much wiser through his experience, and is too miserable to be more than glumly witty; the conscious wit is

provided mostly by the 'other' voice of Marvell.

#### IV

The speaker of "The Mower to the Glo-Worms" is a more striking figure than that of "Damon the Mower". This difference is related to the different formal structure, which allows the Mower here to speak with a new flexibility and lightness. Instead of the couplets of the two "Mower" poems discussed so far we have a more lyrical quatrain form, with the one sentence running through the sixteen lines of the poem. One result of this structural change is that the final lines, which are in part a lament for the Mower's displacement, emerge also as a triumphant declaration:

Your courteous Lights in vain you wast  
 Since Juliana here is come,  
 For She my Mind hath so displac'd  
 That I shall never find my home.

To appreciate how Marvell manages this effect, and what it means, we have to consider the relation between what the Mower 'says' and the way in which he says it. He claims to be lamenting his lot, yet the rhythms are far from self-pitying. The attention of the poetry is directed away from the Mower himself until the last couplet, when he refers explicitly and simply to his own case without so much as an 'alas'. The poetry keeps directing us to the Mower's

environment, an environment to which, for all his displacement, he still can respond warmly.

S.L. Goldberg says of Marvell that "he seems, in fact, to share something of Shakespeare's dramatic insight that what a man sees as nature really defines his physical, moral and spiritual being."<sup>7</sup> While this may be too large a statement for this Mower in this poem, it is true that the Mower's way of describing this scene becomes a way of revealing a lot about himself. The hero of "The Mower against Gardens" proclaimed his feeling for nature, but this speaker reveals a more intimate sympathy:

Ye living Lamps, by whose dear light  
The Nightingale does sit so late,  
And studying all the Summer-night,  
Her matchless Songs does meditate.

Not only does he refer to the glow-worms in an intimate tone, but he becomes aware of the nightingale as more than a sweet voice; it is seen as a song-maker, and presumably as an image of himself in his new role, awake at nights composing love-songs for or about Juliana. His view of things, however, can now encompass more than a

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<sup>7</sup>S.L. Goldberg, "Marvell: Self and Art", The Critical Review, No.8 (Melbourne and Sydney, 1965), p. 34.

pastoral environment. He can respond, too, to a world of public events, of courtesy:

You country Comets, that portend  
No War, nor Princes funeral,  
Shining unto no higher end  
Then to presage the Grasses fall.

There is probably a pun implied in "courteous Lights" relating back to the court-liness (though on so diminished a scale) of what the glow-worms are doing.

Although the Mower reveals a sympathy for natural things, he is also displaced from this world - significantly, by someone from within it, the shepherdess, Juliana. For the ordinary lost Mower, the glow-worms are sufficient guide:

Ye Glo-worms, whose officious Flame  
To wandering Mowers shows the way,  
That in the Night have lost their aim,  
And after foolish Fires do stray.

While the syntax and the general mood of the poetry relates him to these lost Mowers, he also goes on to insist on the inadequacy of these creatures for whom he continues to feel such affection and closeness:

Your courteous Lights in vain you wast,  
Since Juliana here is come,  
For She my Mind hath so displac'd  
That I shall never find my home.

One feature of pastoral poetry is the association of the rural life with a good and innocent life. Marvell makes use of such a notion in "The Garden" where he relates life in his garden with life in Eden. A significant feature of "The Mower to the Glo-Worms" is that the pastoral simplicity is threatened from within a pastoral setting. Even in an environment that, by literary convention, is so simple, human nature proves life to be more complex than we might think. Part of the poem's success, then, comes from its simultaneous acceptance and rejection of pastoral notions.

Yet we must remember that, for all the range that the poem potentially encompasses, it is a simple, unpretentious and most enjoyable lyric. Its wit comes, not in conscious subtlety, in the kind of verbal coup we find so often when Marvell speaks in his own voice, or even in "The Mower against Gardens", but from the way in which a man is permitted to reveal himself simply by stating the truth as he sees it, and letting the details and movement of the poetry do their work. Quiet juxtapositions, by a subtle poet speaking in an 'apparently' unsubtle voice allow the situation to reveal its meaning. One significant feature of this song is that it sounds like both a lament and a quiet song of triumph; the Mower appears, paradoxically,

both peaceful and disturbed. In "The Mower's Song", we find this peace superseded by a more exuberant and overtly playful joy.

V

"The Mower's Song" seems, on first reading, to be a simple lament for the passing of the simple life. The very structure of the first stanza reflects the change which has taken place:

My Mind was once the true survey  
Of all these Meadows fresh and gay;  
And in the greenness of the Grass  
Did see its Hopes as in a Glass;  
When Juliana came, and She  
What I do to the Grass, does to my Thoughts and Me.

The Mower has once lived complacently in serenity, where he found in the grass a simple reflection of his hopes; this simple harmony can be summed up in a pair of neatly-structured couplets that scan readily as regular iambic tetrameters. The new state can not be summed up so easily; simple verse-form, simple syntax are no longer adequate. A curious circumlocution is required if he is to say truly what Juliana is doing to him. The first meaning suggested by his image for her effect on him is the cutting down of everything, something surely to be lamented. In the very next line, he refers to his "Sorrow", and this sorrow is insisted on throughout.

Yet the Mower is obviously posing as wretched lover and enjoying this pose. The sense of joy comes compellingly in the rhythms which mount to the final exultation of each stanza and to the most exuberant of all in the final lines of the poem where, although he pretends otherwise, the Mower is eagerly awaiting Juliana's approach and actively preparing the setting for what they are about to do in the grass:

And thus, ye Meadows, which have been  
 Companions of my thoughts more green,  
 Shall now the Heraldry become  
 With which I shall adorn my Tomb;  
 For Juliana comes, and She  
 What I do to the Grass, does to my Thoughts and Me.

This Mower appears as a jauntier and more confident figure than any we have seen in the other poems on the relationship with Juliana. Even while speaking of himself as pining with sorrow, he reveals his alert attention and a sharpness of language that belie his self-description:

But these, while I with Sorrow pine,  
 Grew more luxuriant still and fine;  
 That not one Blade of Grass you spy'd,  
 But had a Flower on either side;  
 When Juliana came, and She  
 What I do to the Grass, does to my Thoughts and Me.

The contradiction between the alleged lamentation and the apparent celebration becomes especially evident in the jubilant rhythms of the fourth stanza:

But what you in Compassion ought,  
 Shall now by my Revenge be wrought:  
 And Flow'rs, and Grass, and I and all,  
 Will in one common Ruine fall.  
 For Juliana comes, and She  
 What I do to the Grass, does to my Thoughts and Me.

By his ludicrous notion of taking revenge on the "Unthankful Meadows", the Mower-as-lamenting-lover overdoes things, choosing to interpret his usual work as a vengful act for their ingratitude. Presumably, they are ungrateful because it is the Mower's past activities as Mower that has kept them from going to seed and allowed them to flower so freely; and this gives an added meaning to that non-committal refrain concerning what Juliana does to him. Significantly, he becomes for the first time in the poem a potentially active figure--rather than one "trodden under feet"--just at the point where the refrain's alteration from "When Juliana came" to "For Juliana comes" switches attention from the past to the present and future with her present. In other words, the anticipation of her approach is seen to activate him.

To what does this expectation activate him? To a rhythmically jubilant song about an act or acts of allegedly total destruction; acts in which his own fate is closely related to that of the grass and the flowers,



where, like Adam,<sup>8</sup> he will cause and take part in "one common Ruine". Yet the same activity will be more than simply destructive:

And thus, ye Meadows, which have been  
Companions of my thoughts more green,  
Shall now the Heraldry become  
With which I shall adorn my Tomb. (*Italics mine.*)

Marvell is playing with more than the Mower's ambivalent response to his new condition. He is playing with the traditional association of pastoral life with Edenic simplicity (the notion central in "The Mower against Gardens"), and with the association of the Fall with the coming of woman and the emergence of sexuality, a theme developed more explicitly in "The Garden":

Such was that happy Garden-state,  
While Man there walk'd without a Mate:  
After a Place so pure, and sweet,  
What other Help could yet be meet!  
But 'twas beyond a Mortal's share  
To wander solitary there:  
Two Paradises 'twere in one  
To live in Paradise alone.

A basic attitude that emerges amid all the play and qualifications is that such a fall, for the Mower himself, as well as for the grass and flowers, is a desirable thing.

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Romans viii.22. Compare Donne's lines in The First Anniversary:

The noblest part, man, felt it first; and than  
Both beasts and plants, curst in the curse of man.  
(199-200)

Marvell and the Mower support that attitude by pointing to the implications of the Mower's own usual activities. Attention to the Mower's activities has been present through the poem, especially in the refrain, and it becomes most important in the final stanza, where the Mower sees himself co-operating in the emblematic dissociation of himself and the green meadows, with a re-association in different terms:

And thus, ye Meadows, which have been  
Companions of my thoughts more green,  
Shall now the Heraldry become  
With which I shall adorn my Tomb.

The ambiguous value of greenness is important here. Green is the colour of freshness and luxuriant growth, and a colour of innocence.<sup>9</sup> But it is also a colour of immaturity, of unripeness. The Mower is dismissive in his reference to "thoughts more green", rejecting the inadequacy of the

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<sup>9</sup>On green as a colour of innocence, see Frank Kermode, "The Argument of Marvell's 'Garden'" in William R. Keast (ed.), Seventeenth-Century English Poetry: Modern Essays in Criticism (New York, 1962), p. 301. Cleopatra implies immaturity in mentioning "my salad days,/When I was green in judgment" (Antony I,v).

The suggestive qualities of green are not limited to those mentioned above, which are the most important in this context. Green is important in hermetic thought where it signifies a life principle of fulness and joy. Traherne and Vaughan use the colour with such suggestions. In medieval poetry, green can have supernatural, even devilish, suggestions. The devil in The Friar's Tale wears "a courtepy of grene" (l.1382). See too Frank Kermode, "Two Notes on Marvell," N&Q, CXCVII (1952), 136-138.

simple hopes he mentions in the first stanza.

The Mower now takes for himself a new maturity and freedom, especially in the extraordinary act of adorning his own tomb. That image brilliantly and wittily concludes the conceit of the courtly-pastoral lover stricken unto death, but it also amplifies the other side of the picture: when the Mower and Juliana are joined physically in the grass, and literally 'adorned' with the fruits of the meadows, the sexual 'death' will also be the tomb of the former simple Mower, at present in a state of jubilant, if slightly worried, transition.

The elaborate play of all of this reaches its climax in the final repetition of the refrain which now recurs more strongly and triumphantly than ever, with a new depth of meaning:

For Juliana comes, and She  
What I do to the Grass, does to my Thoughts and Me.

The refrain confirms the rightness of what is happening to the Mower: just as the grass ought to be cut down lest the meadow go to seed--and therefore the meadows ought to be "thankful", not "unthankful"--so too ought the simple swain who has not yet experienced love. We find a playful recognition of a paradox that applies to man as to nature: there

is no growth without some destruction and loss.<sup>10</sup> The manner of the Mower implies an acceptance of this truth.

Just as he will delightedly cut down the grass, even if the flowers too must perish, so too will he allow Juliana to cut him down and bring him to maturity.

## VI

The "Mower" poems could bear much further study from various points of view. The especial relevance of discussing them as I have done is to emphasise that styles of writing which could be described as parody or evasiveness, or as witty and playful, are used in these poems as means of disclosing some central and paradoxical features of man's condition. Marvell here writes pastoral poetry which is both simple and profoundly subtle. Simply lyric movement exposes depths of feeling and of meaning through its very playfulness and lightness. This is especially the case when the Mower appears as an allegedly woeful lover, singing of his situation in the language most suitable to him as Mower, and allowing the metaphorical insights thus

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<sup>10</sup>This point is insisted on, with respect to Marvell, especially in the essays of S.L. Goldberg noted elsewhere.

established to clarify his own situation, and the manner of the poem to clarify his own complex responses to new experiences.

T.S. Eliot refers to "that precise taste of Marvell's which finds for him the proper degree of seriousness for every subject which he treats", and to wit as "a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace".<sup>11</sup> These somewhat elusive comments can apply to the "Mower" poems, but the poems also suggest ways they might be modified. On the matter of seriousness, we should stress how far the use of a sophisticated playfulness is itself a serious means of creating insights; and the relevant wit of the poem is better located in an interplay, or harmony, of the "tough reasonableness" and the "lyric grace" than in the presence of one "beneath" the other. The reader is involved in the pleasant game of finding hidden complexities and significance; at the same time he can delight in the elegant skill with which images and rhythms of violence and disorder are modified rather than muted by such grace and order. This simultaneous presence of order and disorder is more than a superficial matter. It is an expression of Marvell's comic sense, of his belief that even disorder and disruption are

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<sup>11</sup>T.S. Eliot, "Andrew Marvell", in Selected Essays, 3rd ed. (London, 1951), pp. 304, 293.

providential and necessary; the belief appears in more sombre contexts in "An Horatian Ode" and Upon Appleton House.

## VII

In many poems, we find a man inviting a woman to share the delights of love with him; sometimes, but not always, these could be considered as 'seduction' poems. Catullus' "Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus" assumes that a love exists, and asserts the value of that love against various threats. Catullus' poem touches several themes recurrent in the poetry of the early seventeenth century; sometimes, indeed, it provokes conscious imitation. Ben Jonson bases Volpone's seductive "Come my Celia" and "Kisse me sweet" upon it, and Campion develops his own version in "My sweetest Lesbia, let us live and love". In such poems, we find the recurrence of such conventions and themes as the extravagant use of numbers and a preoccupation with time, and especially the contrast between man's short life and the eternally recurring days and seasons. We find too that such poems take on the quality of a game: Donne's "The Flea" plays at being a light and witty attempt at seduction where the skill of the game rather than the power of the argument is shown as most likely to have the desired effect. In the English poems I have mentioned, the poet appears very much as "playing a part".

Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress" belongs, then, to a style of poetry with a long tradition and considerable popularity at the time.<sup>12</sup> This context is especially important if we consider that the poem's chief energies do not seem to arise from Marvell's personal response to a woman. In other words, the rhythmic and metaphorical strength of "To his Coy Mistress" come from something other than sexual desire. In that case, we need to discover where the strength does come from, and with what effect Marvell adopts the stance of eager lover, if he doesn't really convince us that he is one. I have looked already at Marvell speaking as a Soul, as a Body, and as Damon the Mower. We now see him playing at being a lover. Unlike the Mower, Marvell-as-lover is not bound to be a man of relatively small wit and a limited frame of reference; he may decorously offer a more forceful, elaborate, and allusive argument. But although Marvell can appear here with the full range of his powers, the poem doesn't seem as direct a response to Marvell's immediate concerns as are the best of Donne's love poems. Marvell encourages the

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<sup>12</sup>For further indications of Marvell's precedents, see J.B. Leishman's The Art of Marvell's Poetry, pp. 70-78.

sense that we are distant from his true self by the elegance of the wit, by the formality of the manner, and by the obvious fidelity to a style of poetry.

Our answer to the question of why "To his Coy Mistress" is so brilliant and impressive, however, must recognize more than novelty of usage, or the clever and more witty elaboration of long-used themes and images. The poem is passionately concerned with many of the issues it raises, with the possibility of human splendour, with the inevitability of human decay. Yet it seems to play with such themes in a violent and reckless manner. The conventions of the 'love' poems to which I refer above help to keep such extravagance decorous, but they do not explain how Marvell, in so staged and delightful a poem, can touch such frightening depths, or soar to such heights.

J.V. Cunningham argues strongly that we recognise the logical base of "To his Coy Mistress".<sup>13</sup> He points to its three-part syllogistic structure and regards most of the details as more-or-less expendable. Yet much of the poem's power lies in those apparently rambling and superfluous details.

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<sup>13</sup>J.V. Cunningham, "Logic and Lyric: Marvell, Dunbar and Nashe", in his Tradition and Poetic Structure: Essays in Literary History and Criticism (Denver, 1960), pp. 40-58.



In the opening movement of the poem, the speaker flatters with an easy grace and immense extravagance:

An hundred years should go to praise  
Thine Eyes, and on thy Forehead Gaze.  
Two hundred to adore each Breast:  
But thirty thousand to the rest.  
An Age at least to every part,  
And the last Age should show your Heart.  
For Lady you deserve this State;  
Nor would I love at lower rate.

Logically, these lines are an expansion of the opening remark,

Had we but World enough, and Time,  
This coyness Lady were no crime.

Dramatically, this extravagant expansion serves several purposes: it implies that the impatience of the lover implies no disrespect, it seeks to win the sympathy of the mistress, and it suggests that the tone of the conversation is one of slightly offhand gallantry. Yet it seems curious that so much of the poem's force is directed to expanding the ideas of "World" and "Time" which are supposed to be irrelevant to the present situation, to creating a series of images of the impossible. This extravagance is an enthusiastic response to the riches of the world:

Thou by the Indian Ganges side  
Should'st Rubies find: I by the Tide  
Of Humber would complain. I would  
Love you ten years before the Flood:  
And you should if you please refuse  
Till the Conversion of the Jews.  
My vegetable Love should grow  
Vaster then Empires, and more slow.

This extraordinary spectacle of the game of erotic pursuit being played on the stage of the whole world for almost all of created time simultaneously mocks and elevates the more mundane pursuit which is taking place on the 'occasion' of the poem.

In the light of such aspirations an immediate consummation seems undignified and inadequate, a point the poem openly grants before going on to defend that immediate consummation. Yet the fact that a person can have such aspirations is a sign of man's grandeur. The speaker here can see his present situation in the context of something much grander than mere physical satisfaction, even while admitting that his mortal condition prevents him from achieving what he seeks. The problem, seen another way, is to assert man's spirituality in a way that acknowledges the bounds of his fleshly condition. Part of man's amphibious nature leads him to contemplate, to feel free of the bounds of time and space. Though the poem later argues for a pleasurable activity that involves destructive violence, behaviour which seems improper for human beings, it also implies that without the prior contemplation, any actions will be impoverished. If the lovers do what is

finally advocated, their action will be elevated and ennobled because it takes place in the context of such meditations on the impossible.

The situation in this poem is a parable for man's condition generally. While our aspirations are ennobling, they are also impossible to fulfil; Marvell emphasizes this by stressing their splendid absurdity. If man is to aspire realistically, he must be well aware of his limits. Marvell's way of playing with the impossible is a way of creating such an awareness. Because of man's fleshly condition, that bondage which is considered in the second section of the poem, he is far from attaining such joys; yet his 'spiritual' nature can elevate his activities to more than animal behaviour -- even activities explicitly likened to those of birds of prey:

Now let us sport us while we may;  
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,  
Rather at once our Time devour,  
Than languish in his slow-chapt pow'r.

The second movement of the poem takes on a grimmer quality, and the humour becomes darker. The far-ranging metaphors look no longer to splendour, but to ashes and dust:

But at my back I alwaies hear  
 Times winged Charriot hurrying near:  
 And yonder all before us lye  
 Desarts of vast Eternity.  
 Thy Beauty shall no more be found;  
 Nor, in thy marble Vault, shall sound  
 My echoing Song: then Worms shall try  
 That long preserv'd Virginity:  
 And your quaint Honour turn to dust;  
 And into ashes all my Lust.  
 The Grave's a fine and private place,  
 But none I think do there embrace.

The passage's function in the underlying syllogistic argument is to stress the commonplace that all must die soon; but its strength and real importance in the poem comes from its particular way of perceiving that commonplace and relating it to the poem's earlier details. Time, the oppressive enemy, is both near, "at my back", and stretching "yonder" to "vast Eternity". The first part of the poem saw vast expanses of time as potentially splendid and desirable. Now, however, the vast expanse of time outside that of a single life is seen as terrifying. The brief time during which men may act becomes a blessing, for only the grave and an eternity of dust and ashes await those who fail to use the time they are given. The line, "Desarts of vast Eternity" stresses one of the poem's paradoxes: the return to dust is a sign of man's 'fleshly' condition, yet the desert of dust awaits all, including such 'spiritual contemplations as those parodied in the first part of the poem: dust is as much the end of "Honour" as ashes of the speaker's "Lust".

This opens the way for the paradoxical assertion at the end of the poem that violently fleshly activities are the ones most likely to liberate man as spiritual being from the tyranny of the sun, symbol of his mortal subjection.

Where the speaker earlier played with the grandeur of his own aspirations, he now plays with his own terror of death. The series of jokes in the presence of the grave, with their recurrently sexual reference, argue a relation between her denials and those ultimate denials of life represented by the grave. The attitude to death is both casual and urgent, as is the attitude to sex: he can joke about "Lust" as about "ashes" without denying the force of either.

The final section of the poem begins with an almost pastoral simplicity that seems to anticipate the sweet delights of sexual consummation, as we would expect of a poem in the "seduction" tradition:

Now therefore, while the youthful hew  
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,  
And while thy willing Soul transpires  
At every pore with instant Fires,  
Now let us sport us while we may.

Yet the strength and precision of the images, such as "thy willing Soul transpires", along with the mounting intensity of the rhythms, counterpoint this pastoral mood and prepare

for the extraordinary and grotesque ferocity of what follows.

We now see what the "sport" involves:

And now, like am'rous birds of prey,  
 Rather at once our Time devour,  
 Than languish in his slow-chapt pow'r.  
 Let us roll all our Strength, and all  
 Our sweetness, up into one Ball:  
 And tear our Pleasures with rough strife,  
 Thorough the Iron gates of Life,  
 Thus, though we cannot make our Sun  
 Stand still, yet we will make him run.

The attitude developed in this final movement is a complex one which rests on an elaborate interplay of several discrete elements that are carefully balanced. We find, for example, a contrast between the insistence on having "our Pleasures" and the violence of the imagery that describes those pleasures: "tear our Pleasures with rough strife,/ Thorough the Iron gates of Life". Much of the effect comes from the way in which the formality of the poem, especially in the metrical tightness, balances an almost hysterical tendency in the mounting tone. We find the rhymes holding back the forward movement to stress crucial contrasts and relationships: "devour"/"power", "strife"/"life". The paradox emerges that the same activity is seen, by a man persuading his "coy mistress", as both desirable and frighteningly destructive: "am'rous birds of prey", "our Time devour". Such an ambiguity of position is common in Marvell; yet, the force of the poetry, for all

the qualifications of any simple view of sexual delights, is to affirm not only sexual union, but all of those things that the poem has it represent, in particular the power of men to act within a potentially unfavorable universe regardless of the price.

This feeling about human power culminates in the curious image in the final couplet:

Thus, though we cannot make our Sun  
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

An interest in the sun's speed is one that appears, with variations, elsewhere in Marvell (the final stanza of "The Garden"), and in Donne ("The Sunne Rising"). Man's subjection to the sun's movements is a major symbol of his fleshly condition: he is subject to a sequence of days and years, which leads finally to the grave. The logic here is difficult to follow: as elsewhere in Marvell, the casual "thus" is not so obviously justified. The paradoxical assertion here is to claim that although man's mortal subservience to the sun's movement cannot be escaped, its effect can be altered through activities that seem most 'fleshly'. Yet such activities, in spite of the price, are the real way for man to prove that he is not utterly subject to the 'natural' forces around him.

In some ways, all of this commentary seems too solemn for what the poem actually says. Indeed, my quarrel with much Marvell criticism is the tendency to explicate poems without any indication of noticing how light and witty they are. "To his Coy Mistress" does invite such terms as those I have been using above. To some extent, I can explain its playfulness as part of its 'tactic', in keeping with the rhetorical pose adopted by its speaker. Beyond this, and more important, is the freedom allowed the poet's imagination once a playful manner has been adopted, once the usual standards of "reality" have been superseded. Yet it is also true that the 'play' is even more fundamental than that account implies, that the imaginative freedom is part of the attitude to the world and to the assertion of man's spirit which the poetry ultimately defends. There is obviously something arrogant about such assertions as are made in the closing couplet of "To his Coy Mistress" or frequently elsewhere in Donne and Marvell. They acknowledge such arrogance by touches of self-mockery, but they continue to assert its necessity. In "To his Coy Mistress", the artificial manner acts as reminder that the things asserted are both arrogant and splendid. The artifice also recalls that Marvell uses the 'seduction' situation and its possibilities as a parable for considering general tensions in man's life.



## VIII

A number of Marvell's poems, for all their differences, have revealed recurrent themes and methods. These poems make little pretence to represent spontaneous utterances. The passion and conviction which seem to be ultimately his are voiced by others in situations remote from Marvell's own, in movements formal and ordered. These poems have something of a parable quality: they symbolize fundamental concerns of Marvell's which he confronts by adapting 'conventional' styles and situations. The pretences chosen are important.

In loving, one becomes especially aware of the gaps between aspirations and achievements, but also of the way that imaginative aspirations may give richer meaning to human relations that may seem 'fleshly' and relatively unvaried. The situation of an ardent lover aware of the passing of time and of the imminence of eternity becomes a metaphor for problems that concern Marvell and for feelings he has about them. In "To his Coy Mistress", Marvell appears to parody the "seduction poem", yet he also realizes new possibilities of that mode. "To his Coy Mistress" is a significant love poem, but it is also both a sober meditation on death and an assertion of the joy of life and love.

A pastoral love lyric relates the feelings and thoughts of a 'rustic' to those things he sees around him; the mode provides an excellent opportunity for relating human affairs and their ambiguities to those of the natural world. The figure of the Mower allows one means of considering another major theme of Marvell's, the relation between destruction and growth. If the "Mower poems" are fine but slight lyrics by comparison with the achievements of some other Marvell poems, they are also very suggestive ones, and their art indicative of qualities that are basic to Marvell's success, especially the delicacy with which he can let poems depend on the interplay of the apparently urbane with suggestive and disturbing implications.

To see man as a being torn between conflicting impulses and then to schematize this tension in terms of an absolute Soul-Body conflict invites extreme statements. To play that schematic approach against other insights is to use in an unusually stark way a method that appears in more subtle forms elsewhere, as in the poems to be considered below. "A Dialogue between the Soul and Body" is a relatively impersonal poem about problems that Marvell considers elsewhere with more explicit reference to his own situation, with corresponding changes in method.

But the poems I have considered are also noteworthy in themselves, especially for these qualities: the metaphoric power, the range of activities and things that Marvell is able to make present in his writing, and the particular tone achieved, the witty tone which implies the kind of seriousness proper to the issues considered, and what attitudes are proper in confronting them. On one hand, the range of preoccupations and the intelligence with which they are developed gives depth and meaningful coherence to a style that resembles in some respects the lesser achievements of Cleveland. At the same time, the style holds the speculation in range and affirms both sanity and joy in the face of threats to them.

CHAPTER III  
DONNE'S LOVE LYRICS

I

The range of judgments that have been made of Donne's "Songs and Sonnets" indicate the variety not merely of the critics' interests, but also of the poems themselves. As well as the variety among different poems, there is a significant, and often puzzling, variety within poems. The same works can justify apparently incompatible responses. One critic, such as C.S. Lewis,<sup>1</sup> decides that Donne is only toying with ideas and images, using them as things that can be manipulated at will. Others, such as Helen Gardner<sup>2</sup> and A.J. Smith,<sup>3</sup> find serious philosophical discussions of love and related topics. Emphasis on the poems as the 'venting of wit' or as semi-philosophical expositions tends to clash with an emphasis on the passionate nature of Donne's writing. Vincent Buckley's stress on the passion of Donne's best writing follows those critical approaches that note Donne's spontaneity or his warmth of feeling.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Donne and Love Poetry in the Seventeenth Century," in John Purves (ed.), Seventeenth Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert Grierson (Oxford, 1938).

<sup>2</sup>See her edition of John Donne: The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets (Oxford, 1965).

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, "The Metaphysic of Love," RES, n.s., IX (1958), 362-375.

<sup>4</sup>Vincent Buckley, Poetry and the Sacred (London, 1968), ch.5, "John Donne's Passion."

It would be easy to multiply such cases of diverse responses. They lead back to the questions of how we are to take the poems, of the ways in which they indeed play games, of the ends to which those games are directed. Buckley's approach, with which I have much sympathy, suggests that the passion in a poem is concentrated often in a line or two standing out from a movement disturbingly cerebral. The problem he raises deserves examination. If we agree with him about the 'passionate' quality of

And now good morrow to our waking soules,  
Which watch not one another out of feare,

and agree too about its significant rhythmic difference from the preceding lines, how are we to take the poem as a whole, in which the playfulness and the cerebation are also integral?

My own judgements on this particular poem will emerge later. But the questions raised are appropriate to many poems. The problems are aggravated by the extent to which Donne strikes various poses in his poems, pretending to be in unlikely situations, pretending to hold incredible beliefs, wittily defending unlikely arguments and saying things as extravagant as anything in his 'Petrarchan' predecessors. Although Donne, unlike Marvell in the poems considered above, habitually writes in his own voice -- "Breake of Day" and "Confined Love" are the exceptions among his "Songs and

Sonnets" -- he does seem in various ways to dissociate himself from the things that are 'said' in the poems. And if we are tempted to escape from difficulties of this sort by separating the 'serious' and the 'light-hearted' poems -- as we certainly can to some extent -- the difficulty remains that poems we would naturally call 'serious' or 'passionate' share the very qualities that seem to characterize the 'light' poems. Consider, for example, both the extravagance and the cleverly rounded quality of "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day", which returns to a version of its first line after a series of extraordinary claims, yet justly receives special attention from Buckley, among others, who concentrates on such qualities as the passion rather than on the wit.

At least some of Donne's "Songs and Sonnets" are complex poems, and we find in them a strong tension between qualities that appear to pull them in different directions and to demand different evaluations. What Donne makes of these tensions I will examine by looking closely at a number of these poems. The central theme of my discussion is that qualities that I describe generally as playful are central to the success of quite serious poems. The playfulness they display may be explained partly in terms of Donne's venting wit, or doing new tricks with an old style inherited from earlier love poems, but it becomes as well a quality of

mind, a way for Donne to clarify thoughts and feelings.

Speaking of his early reading of Donne, Patrick Cruttwell comments:

It convinced me that a great deal of intense cerebration and intellectuality -- even some tongue-in-cheek show-off displays of erudition -- could be quite compatible, in the same poem, with expressions of intense passion and devout adoration: could even seem to reinforce these, in a manner I was not quite capable of analysing but was certainly capable of feeling.<sup>5</sup>

My concern here is to examine that apparent reinforcement, to show that the relationship suggested by Cruttwell is more than compatibility.

## II

Many comments made about the "Songs and Sonnets" would be relevant to other poems also. One reason for considering them separately is that their kind of play depends in part on conventions and expectations peculiar to the love-lyric. A distinctive feature of the tradition Donne inherits from such writers as Sidney is the strong element of game-playing. It is no great surprise if a Sidney sonnet claims to rely only on

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<sup>5</sup>"The Love Poetry of John Donne: Pedantique Weeddes or Fresh Invention?", in Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 11: Metaphysical Poetry (London, 1970), p. 12.

personal feelings, rejecting the words and manners of others, yet reveals much formal and conventional artistry:

Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show,  
 That the deare She might take some pleasure of my paine:  
 Pleasure might cause her reade, reading might make her know,  
 Knowledge might pitie winne, and pitie grace obtaine,  
 I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,  
 Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertaine:  
 Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow  
 Some fresh and fruitfull showers upon my sunne-burn'd braine.  
 But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay,  
 Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Studie's blowes,  
 And others' feete still semm'd but strangers in my way.  
 Thus great with child to speake, and helplesse in my throwes,  
 Biting my trewand pen, beating my selfe for spite,  
 'Foole,' said my Muse to me, 'looke in thy heart and write.'  
 (Astrophil and Stella, 1)

Over-dramatizing one's own role is an important part of this 'tradition'. The sixteenth-century love-lyric is in part a social game in which one plays at being, say, grief-stricken and inconsolable. Psychologically, one might explain the habit of eloquent play as a necessary sublimation, stiffly ordering emotions so as to make them bearable. While this may be a partial explanation of Petrarch's poetry, the phenomenon of 'Petrarchan' poetry in Elizabethan England is more complex than this. John Stevens talks of lovers playing at being poets, and poets playing at being lovers, but for the best love poetry of the period, even his account is scarcely adequate.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Stevens, Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court (London, 1961), ch.10, esp. p. 218.



During the sixteenth century, in the best poets as in the worst, rhetorical devices and tricks appear more openly; eloquence and formal precision firmly balance any supposedly disordered feelings. George Puttenham says of love that:

it requireth a forme of Poesie variable, inconstant, affected, curious, and most witty of any others, whereof the ioyes were to be vttered in one sorte, the sorrowes in an other, and, by the many formes of Poesie, the many moodes and pangs of louers throughly to be discouered.<sup>7</sup>

There is no thought that the poetry is less true or sincere for the ways in which it alters the original feelings of the lovers. Indeed Puttenham assumes that such poetry is even more likely to move someone "to great compassion" than would expressions untouched by art.

George Gascoigne is even blunter in his instructions for a would-be poet:

The first and most necessarie poynt that euer I founde to be considered in making of a delectable poeme is this, to ground it vpon some fine inuention. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Gascoigne goes on to elaborate the possibilities. For all the limitations of his view of poetry, he is at least true to his

<sup>7</sup>George Puttenham, The Arte of English Poesie (1589), quoted from G. Gregory Smith (ed.), Elizabethan Critical Essays (London, 1904), II, 47. Emphases are mine.

<sup>8</sup>George Gascoigne, Certayne Notes of Instruction (1575), quoted from G. Gregory Smith, op. cit., I, 47.

times in this emphasis, one which would also be applicable to Donne, writing a generation later.

A study of Renaissance love poetry in relation to the 'game of love' is outside my scope. My point has been that Donne inherits a tradition of love poetry where one naturally played and pretended, where skilful devices and neat rhetorical figures were praiseworthy, where wit and inflation were at least compatible with 'feeling' and might be seen even as a means of heightening it. He is close to poets, 'Petrarchan' or not, for whom invention is all-important, members of cultured and clever circles who should be expected to turn a witty verse as a normal accomplishment.<sup>9</sup>

A volume published around 1590, containing Marlowe's translations of Ovid's Elegies or Amores, as well as epigrams by Sir John Davies, represents part of Donne's inheritance, Donne's "Elegies", apparently inspired by Marlowe's versions of Ovid, are early examples of Donne's use of a discursive manner with affected roughness, and of his playing the part of a witty and amorous hero. The young Donne also wrote epigrams, anticipating the sharpness and brevity which also characterize his "Songs and Sonnets".

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<sup>9</sup>See, for example, I.C. Knights, "On the Social Background of Metaphysical Poetry", in his Further Explorations (London, 1965).

Reference to 'sources', or at least to representatives of styles with which Donne learned, does not, of course, 'explain' Donne: the important thing is what he made of these styles. As some later comparisons will show, Donne's innovations are striking, his poems significantly different in aims and techniques from those by Spenser, Sidney, or Marlowe, which they resemble in some respects. However, the awareness of such writings does help put Donne in perspective, and to remind us in a general way that the apparent contradictions between levity and seriousness, between distortion and accuracy, and so on, are not unique to Donne, that they appear often in late sixteenth-century poetry, and are expected to appear. What Donne makes of these tensions is another matter altogether.

### III

The poems we refer to as Donne's "Songs and Sonnets" are a diverse group, somewhat arbitrarily grouped together by their publishers. Many are simply clever variations on ideas, images, or styles -- exercises almost. Though often slight by Donne's own standards, they are usually informed by that vigorous intelligence and free-ranging imagination which distinguish Donne from so many of his predecessors. We might see such poems as those in the first 'group' of

Helen Gardner's edition as part of Donne's learning to write in a witty lyrical style and developing the control of language that enables him to write the major lyrics. Or they may simply be poems written in a lighter mood. While attempts to date the lyrics, or to arrange them chronologically seem a rather futile exercise, we can at least agree with Helen Gardner's arrangement of the poems in making general distinctions between poems according to their weight or subtlety.<sup>10</sup>

What are these 'weightier themes'? Generally, they arise from a sense of man's 'dual' nature, such as I have suggested earlier. In his major love poetry, Donne is especially concerned with the possibility of permanence in love. The fullness of human love becomes possible because men and women do have qualities that are somehow suggested by the word 'soul'; they can respond to each other with more than physical desire. At the same time, persons are not disembodied spirits. Without physical contact, love is real but deprived. The problems thus raised are discussed in a fairly

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<sup>10</sup>I refer to her edition of The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets (Oxford, 1965), and to the grouping of "Songs and Sonnets" in two parts, with accompanying conjectures about when they might have been written. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from "Songs and Sonnets" follow her text.

abstract and schematic manner in "The Exstasie", culminating in the invitation:

So must pure lovers soules descend  
 T'affections, and to faculties,  
 That sense may reach and apprehend,  
 Else a great Prince in prison lies.

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

The duality of man also raises the problem of the permanence and vulnerability of love. To the enraptured lover, love may seem self-sufficient and eternal; but because man is mortal, his other activities and desires, and the ultimate expectation of death, offer an invincible threat.

Donne's examination of such themes is usually dramatic: that is, he examines them while 'in' a situation. His discussions, whatever direction they take, are put in the context of how he feels about a particular person at a particular time. The general question that most poems offer to answer is something like this: "How can a man intelligently and feelingly respond to such situations as imminent separation from a beloved, the pressing demands of everyday activities, or the death itself of a beloved woman?" His responses to such questions are in various ways playful. Some of these ways I examine below.

It is significant that a recurrent playful habit of Donne's is to understate or to overstate a case, to distort the situation and possibilities, while a recurrent theme is the extent to which loving distorts 'normal' understandings of reality and of proper behaviour.

The sense of a game being played is especially strong in the lighter of the "Songs and Sonnets". In "The Flea", the argument itself is hardly likely to convince anyone. In "The Expiration", Donne appears as if in the act of kissing, arguing on astonishing grounds for the end of the kiss:

So, so, breake off this last lamenting kisse,  
Which sucks two soules, and vapors both away.

As Helen Gardner's note reminds us, the conceit relating kisses and souls has a relatively firm logical basis in the presumed relation between soul and breath.<sup>11</sup> But of course Donne is only pretending that this is a reason for stopping the kissing (and only pretending that he is kissing at all). Donne the speaker is shown to be playfully using the notion for other purposes, to amuse or to console the beloved woman. Donne the poet is also using the situation as the basis of a

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<sup>11</sup> The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets, p. 159, note to "The Expiration", l.2.

pleasant lyric and, while setting the words in a firm metrical framework, he makes the playful pretence that he is really reporting part of a conversation.

I am making a distinction between 'playing' as a kind of tactic in a dramatically-presented situation and a less obvious playfulness of thought. One striking case of play as a 'tactic' is "Song" ("Sweetest love . . ."), where we find a strong element of teasing; at the same time, this is a basis for something potentially more serious. We find in this poem responses in excess of what the situation logically requires.

The apparent situation is that a woman laments because her lover must leave and that she needs consolation. Yet the first stanza appears to be calculated to make her feel worse about the separation:

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

He implies that she may accuse him of bad motives and, in denying them, suggests what they could be. He then casually proceeds to remind her that he must die.

Such a reading ignores, however, the tone of the poetry: the manner is primarily one of teasing. The first four lines demand to be met by the statement of his true reasons for going; the "but" of the fifth line appears to promise these, but the poem changes direction and avoids giving them. The change in metrical structure, the shorter fifth line giving the impression of holding back an expected fuller statement, has a similar teasing effect. Moreover, the poem is written in a spirit of great tenderness, culminating in the beautiful yet characteristically extravagant lines:

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

In the supposed situation of the poem, Donne is repeatedly overstating her own and his own fears, changing direction, playing logical tricks, offering obviously false arguments, and suggesting, in effect, that the views of lovers in each other's presence are inevitably distorted. He is presented as charming the woman away from her original sadness without actually denying that she has reason for it, and while acknowledging quite significant threats to their love and joys.

The poem, however, is more than a playful attempt to tease a woman out of weeping at her lover's departure. This



is the occasion on which Donne builds the poem, but its effect is more complex than that would imply. We can see that each part of the poem hyperbolically refers to some important truth about men and women and their powers, yet doing this so lightly as to avoid probing such truth. The effect in this respect is comparable to that of "The Mower's Song" in that the manner of the poem seems to minimize the importance of what it says. In "Song", Donne has been quietly arguing towards an emphasis that, since lovers have great power over each other for good or ill, they should be alert and responsive, refraining from thoughtless behaviour that may be harmful; that the "keeping alive" which they can do depends on such continual alertness which is at the same time a relaxed confidence in each other's fidelity. Yet this line of reasoning is understressed in the explicit statements of the poem. Perhaps one reason for this under-emphasis is the desire to avoid too portentous or sententious a manner, which would be improper in a song and in this dramatic situation. At the same time, the poem's attention to these issues is one reason why it stands out among the other 'lyrical' and apparently earlier poems among which Helen Gardner places it.

Donne does not always feel such a need to play down the significance of what he says about love to his beloved. A possible reason for his doing so here is that he had not

yet learned to handle more elaborate thinking in lyric poetry. Whatever the reason, biographically speaking, we should remember that the lightness of manner, the dramatic emphasis on a graceful teasing of a loved woman, need not negate the observations explicit or implicit in the poem. Indeed, the manner serves to emphasise a major point of the argument in the poem, that a tender and responsive alertness is needed to preserve a love which in turn gives life and fullness to those who love.

#### IV

Doctor Johnson has made the most famous criticism of the final part of "A Valediction: forbidding mourning":

To the following comparison of a man that travels, and his wife that stays at home, with a pair of compasses, it may be doubted whether absurdity or ingenuity has the better claim.<sup>12</sup>

He moves on to generalize about the passages he has considered:

In all these examples it is apparent, that whatever is improper or vicious, is produced by a voluntary deviation from nature in pursuit of something new and strange; and that the writers fail to give delight, by their desire of exciting admiration.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets (London, 1952), I, 28.

Doctor Johnson's attitude reflects Dryden's remarks on Donne:

He affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the mind of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love.<sup>13</sup>

While Dryden doubtless underestimates the intelligence of the fair sex and overestimates the biographical significance of Donne's love poems, he and Doctor Johnson have raised central questions about Donne.

Do we not feel, in "A Valediction: forbidding mourning", some disproportion between the different elements in the poem, a gap between the moment of sad farewell that allegedly occasions the poem, and the tone which Donne adopts, more solemn and less teasing than that of "Sweetest love", but even more given to a puzzling extravagance? There seems to be a pedantic arrogance in the ingenuity, a calculated excess in image and idea. Yet the poem's manner suggests a great tenderness, and a humility before the mysteries it confronts. The critical problem, with this and other poems, is to decide how successfully, and how significantly, Donne has succeeded in bringing the diverse qualities together.

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<sup>13</sup>John Dryden, A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire (1593), in W.P. Ker (ed.), Essays of John Dryden, (Oxford, 1900), p. 101.

The time of separation provokes an elaborate 'metaphysical' enquiry into the nature of the lover's union when it is subjected to physical separation: the enquiry is conducted largely through a series of surprising images, from alchemy, from geometry, from astronomy. The assured love that is dramatically presented is counterpointed with an enquiry that probes the mysteries of love by concepts and images that are necessarily limited. Looking at the world around him, using different concepts of its nature, in order to say what the lovers are, Donne finds truth in the least likely and most spectacular accounts. He can see that their love is "elemented" in physical attraction, that the separated lovers will miss "eyes, lips, and hands", yet admits that they will not need these things for love to survive; so he probes the question of how this can be so.

One of Donne's problems is to probe and to celebrate so splendidly conceived a relationship without cliché or pretension. Yet he flies into the teeth of such dangers with lines like:

'Twere prophanation of our joyes  
To tell the layetie our love.

He seems absurdly arrogant in suggesting that their own love is a specially divine thing, that they belong to a priestly caste. To some extent the stress on the sacredness and unique quality of their own love through religious language is a variation on

a much-used theme. Yet Donne uses the language with such precision and delicacy of tone as to let his lines reveal something true and important, that the excessive mourning he forbids would be untrue to their love because their joys are so intensely personal that a public show would make them look like something they were not, and would indeed be destructive. He thus touches again on the theme of vulnerability of love that I mentioned with respect to "Sweetest love" and which is important in most of his love poetry, whatever its main emphasis. The lines are a contribution to the main theme of the poem, the extent to which lovers are held together by things that can be neither seen nor defined except obliquely. Donne's technique -- and this case is far from unusual -- is to adopt a cliché like "the religion of love" language and to use it with precision and a playful touch so as to pose the question of how the cliché may be profoundly true and to demonstrate how it may be a useful way of saying things new and important.

The poem works throughout by considering impossibilities as if they were true, both the impossibility literally of the lovers' own imperceptible melting and such impossible images as "gold to avery thinnesse beate." Throughout, the impossible and the extravagant are presented in a way that is calculated

in manner, yet tender, the latter feature a contrast with the manner of the Cowley poems that Doctor Johnson has associated with this one.

"A Valediction: forbidding mourning" is a poem both playful and serious wherein the speaker, assured of a loving union with a woman, and of that union's basis in human nature, plays with a situation and with ideas and images, not so much as a dramatic tactic in the 'dissuasion' of the woman, but rather to find a suitable way of contemplating and celebrating their union. However, the degree of sober playfulness in the poem is especially decorous in view of the human situation imagined and the structure of a dissuasive argument.

## V

The playfulness in "The Good-morrow" appears, dramatically, as an exuberance proper to a sense of joy when two people discover their love. Once again the exuberant play is more than a way of declaring the extent or intensity of their feelings. It is a means of examining the significance of what has happened, of considering the present love in the light of other things in the world -- their own world and that of other people -- and against the fact of inevitable mortality that threatens all things human.

"The Good-morrow" makes its central affirmation at the beginning of the second stanza:

And now good morrow to our waking soules,  
Which watch not one another out of feare.

The tone here is casual, though not complacent, combining a sense of wonder at this mutual discovery and a feeling of joy at its rightness and reality. Though there is a daring quality in the morning greeting to two souls, the poetry focuses not on the paradox of the situation, but on its normalcy. In this poem, the lines are relatively lacking in explicit wit, in explicit philosophical enquiry, although they are the focal point for a considerable amount of each. Playfulness is more apparent when the poem, resounding with the joy of this discovery, takes explicit notice of other things, and hence of the value of the lovers' assertions. When this happens, the language becomes more generalized, more concerned with philosophical propositions, and also more openly excessive in its range and claims.

The first stanza's statement of the case against their past can easily strike the reader as inflated, unnecessarily

excited and insistent:<sup>14</sup>

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

The rapidly-changing images suggest activities at an instinctual level, as of animals or children, the implication being that the lovers are now adult and fully human. The air of tossed-off questions implies a slightly flippant commitment to the accounts of themselves given in the first four lines. The gay bravado, suddenly concluding with the curt "'Twas so", tends to dismiss the subject of the past as of no great importance anyway. At the same time, however, the opening lines help define the meaning of "we lov'd": if this love is not the unthinking physicality of the past, it has grown in some way out of it. The souls addressed in the second stanza are far from disembodied, the implied setting is morning in a little room, with two people close enough for faces to be reflected in eyes. It is suggested too that the new love is a more relaxed activity than childish sucking or the

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<sup>14</sup>Vincent Buckley comments: "The first stanza is even vehement in its insistence on the feeling which is both its motive-power and its subject. Yet it has also, I think, something of that manipulative cerebral quality which is as often a weakness as it is a strength in Donne. It is exaggerated, hyperbolic; and while it does not conceal, but reveals and presents a strong emotion, it does so in a slightly lopsided manner" (Poetry and the Sacred, p. 102)



snorting of sleepers, something confirmed by the change to quieter rhythms when the present is more directly contemplated. The air of excited questioning is also proper to the exuberant, yet bothered, lover that is presented in the poem.

"The seaven sleepers den", while referring to the oft-footnoted young men of Ephesus, recalls too those other sleepers, the inhabitants of Plato's cave who see only dreams and fantasies, never the truth. The line thus aids the transition to the more 'philosophic' language of the final lines in the first stanza, derived ultimately from that of Plato's Republic. Part of Donne's game is to reverse Plato's notion of 'reality' and make the Form of Beauty a thoroughly mortal woman:

But this, all pleasures fancies bee.  
If ever any beauty I did see,  
Which I desir'd, and got, 'twas but a dreame of thee.

While these lines introduce one of the poem's main themes, the status of human aspirations and dreams, their most obvious function is the praise of the beloved. In this, they adapt a conventional complimentary manner of much 'Petrarchan' love poetry. Comparison with these lines from Spenser is instructive:

Yet are mine eyes so filled with the store  
of that faire sight, that nothing else they brooke,  
but lothe the things which they did like before,  
and can no more endure on them to looke.  
All this worlds glory seemeth vayne to me,  
and all their showes but shadowes, sauing she.  
(Amoretti, XXXV.)

Donne's lines are more serious yet less solemn, more ambitious yet less pretentious. Donne's assertions about the status of the present relationship are not merely compliments, not merely indexes of the strength of his feeling, but are proposals that call for serious consideration in their own right. Given Donne's perspective and the circumstances, his claim, "But this, all pleasures fancies bee", achieves the impersonality that T.S. Eliot has claimed for Dante's account of love's effects in La Vita Nuova: "Now Dante, I believe, had experiences which seemed to him of some importance . . . in themselves: and therefore they seemed to him to have some philosophical and impersonal value."<sup>15</sup> Rhythmically, Spenser's lines are solemn and eloquent, Donne's lighter and closer to those of speech. Donne's rhythms follow the expansion of mind and spirit engaged in celebrating and grasping a new self-awareness, a new state of being, a new sense of another person and of the possibilities of love. In their lightness of movement, we find at once an unselfconscious assertion of an extraordinary claim, and a detachment and self-scrutiny quite absent from Spenser's lines. Here, characteristically, Donne affirms strongly, yet in a manner that implies recognition of the fact that he is speaking truth by means of metaphors and extreme notions which can be seen from most points of view as literally absurd, which do depend on

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<sup>15</sup>From "Dante", Selected Essays, 3rd edn. (London, 1951), pp. 272-273.

submission to a particular perspective. This kind of detachment, of which an air of self-mockery is one sign, is crucial to the success of much of Donne's poetry.

Attention in the second stanza moves from the lovers' celebration of their new discovery to the discoveries, by voyage or through maps, of contemporary geography:

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
 Let Maps to others, worlds on worlds have showne,  
 Let us possesse our world, each hath one, and is one.

As in the first stanza, an apparently conventional and extravagant gesture -- one that rejects all else as insignificant -- is a means of defining a situation. While the gesture implies an air of irresponsible self-satisfaction, the words are precise and realistic in their claims: this love does not eliminate all love of other sights, but controls it, putting it in a new perspective. Unlike other explorers, who simply visit new lands or those who observe their images on maps, the lovers may "possesse our world", for "each hath one, and is one." These references to other activities provide too a way of expressing something of the magnificent quality of their own discovery.

Yet can the lovers really reject the rest of the world any more than they can wholly reject their own past? "One

little roome" can not be "an every where" for long -- except perhaps for "the seaven sleepers". The language here complements the overt argument by insisting on the excess of lovers' aspirations even while providing a means of clarifying those aspirations. Aspirations, which are not only gestures and do have their own kind of reality -- as in "To his Coy Mistress" -- are played against more mundane probabilities, a contrast which is intensified in the final stanza.

The simple reflection of faces in eyes, while offered as emblematic of the lovers' self-sufficiency and closeness, appears in its apparently simple beauty as slightly pathetic and ominous:

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares,  
 And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest,  
 Where can we finde two better hemispheares  
 Without sharpe North, without declining West?

Eyes are usually regarded as reflections of the immortal soul; these eyes reflect mortal faces.<sup>16</sup> With the open question, "Where can we find . . .?" Donne moves into a more direct and philosophic consideration of the odds confronting lovers in a mortal world. Once again language that is used overtly as a

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<sup>16</sup>The observation derives from conversations with Mr Evan Jones of the University of Melbourne.

means of unqualified praise has inescapable implications that are part of the whole logic of the poem.

The first stanza hints at mortality with its reminder that the marvellous "now" exists in time for people who have grown to it from other kinds of relationship, who by their very humanity are different from unchanging forms of beauty. The second stanza considers that this "little roome" is only part of a world of continuous activity and exploration; then, with its concluding series of lines beginning with "Let", insists on the importance of sustained willing if love is to last. The third stanza, with all of its fine flourish, acknowledges that, in terms of the philosophic language explicitly used, all things mortal, people included, are composed of unequal mixtures, that death and change are the lot of mankind:

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

The important "if" and the discordant rhythms of these lines contrast with the assertive firmness of "And now good morrow to our waking soules". Even in these final lines, the possibilities are left open: perhaps this love is so perfect that the miraculous may happen. The discord and questioning

are left in tension with the desire -- which controls the overt statement -- that present aspirations may become future reality in spite of all against this happening. Love is being put to the test in its most exuberant moment: though slackening may come, the "waking soules" watch not "out of feare", but in love. "Thou and I" for a moment, at least, become "we", and the very aspiration to remain so is of some value: Donne, with characteristic playfulness, probes the question of how much value the aspiration has while playing his own variations on the mode of celebratory love poetry.

## VI

As compliment to a beloved woman, "The Sunne Rising" is even more extravagant, even more of a spectacular performance. But it is also quite a serious assessment of the powers of lovers and of the limits within which these powers operate.

The sun threatens the lovers in several ways. First, it is a reminder that they are not in eternity, that the most delightful of activities come to a stop:

Busie old foole, unruly Sunne,  
 Why dost thou thus,  
 Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us?  
 Must to thy motions lovers seasons run?

Part of the joke in the first line is that the sun must be among

the least "unruly" of things. It is itself ruled by laws that make its motions utterly predictable, and it thus becomes the basis of man's own ordering of time, from year to year, from day to day. To call such a sun "unruly" becomes a joke with particular point, implying the existence of other rules -- those of lovers -- compared with which the sun is out of order. The poem expands the suggestion that there are alternative ways of seeing reality. Both the gay gesture -- rejection of an "old foole" -- and the suggested alternatives are part of the way people can assert themselves against things that threaten their desires and actions. Once again, we are presented with tensions of man's condition, with the conflict between aspiring 'spirit' and limiting 'flesh'. 'Flesh', as in St. Paul, suggests those aspects of man's life that make him a slave to necessities. But 'spirit' in this poem is associated, paradoxically but characteristically for the Donne of Songs and Sonnets, with a most 'fleshly' activity, being in bed with a woman.

The very assertions of the poem are in some ways doomed -- as the apparently whimsical extravagance admits -- and the word 'unruly' carries also the reminder that the sun is indeed unable to be ruled by lovers or affected by anything they do. In this independence, the sun is properly associated with the activities of everyday and courtly worlds referred to

in the following lines:

Sawcy pedantique wretch, goe chide  
 Late schoole boyes, and sowre prentices,  
 Goe tell Court-huntsmen, that the King will ride,  
 Call countrey ants to harvest offices;  
 Love, all alike, no season knowes, nor clyme,  
 Nor houres, dayes, months, which are the rags of time.

The last two lines of the stanza refer to the 'time' dilemma with their own kind of sad playfulness. The pretence is that the lovers have escaped time and mortality. Significantly, the subject of the sentence is the abstract 'love' rather than 'lovers' who do not attain such bliss. As I have observed elsewhere, such precision of language helps make conventional-looking gestures something more.

For all their limitations, lovers are not powerless:

Thy beames, so reverend, and strong  
 Why shouldst thou thinke?  
 I could eclipse and cloud them with a winke,  
 But that I would not lose her sight so long.

This literally absurd claim is at least an image for a power they do have, for at least some of the time: to remove the sun from their consciousness. The poem becomes an assertion of the liberating power of man's will and imagination, all the more impressive because it acknowledges so amply the things which limit that power. The very spirit of playfulness,



that capacity of the human mind, is something against which the sun and all the 'worldly' things it represents in this poem remain impotent. So the playfulness of the poem becomes more than a technical device for introducing and contrasting different values and images: it is part of the meaning.

Such play becomes for Donne an intellectual act, a way of understanding things, as we see by comparison with two other poems which use -- and may be sources for -- important images of "The Sunne Rising". In his Amores, as translated by Christopher Marlowe in the 1590's, Ovid too represents the sun as a person capable of moving at will:

Now o'er the sea from her old love comes she  
 That draws the day from heaven's cold axle-tree.  
 Aurora, whither slidest thou? down again,  
 And birds for Memmon yearly shall be slain.  
 Thou leav'st his bed, because he's faint through age,  
 And early mountest thy hateful carriage;  
 But held'st thou in thy arms some Cephalus,  
 Then would'st thou cry, 'Stay night, and run not thus.'  
 Dost punish me, because years make him wane?  
 I did not bid thee wed an aged swain.

(Book I, Elegia XIII.)

I have already argued for the intellectual power and precision of Donne's writing. In the rambling lines of Marlowe's Ovid, as in the original Latin, the conceit is only a useful rhetorical device for a virtuoso display of rather insipid wit, the kind

which Donne superseded in his own Elegies.

Like Donne, Spenser can relate the splendour of his beloved to the wealth of far-off places:

Ye tradefull Merchants, that with weary toyle,  
do seeke most pretious things to make your gain;  
and both the Indias of their treasures spoile,  
what needeth you to seeke so farre in vaine?  
For loe my loue doth in her selfe containe  
all this worlds riches that may farre be found.  
(Amoretti, XV)

Donne's version of the idea is even more ambitious:

If her eyes have not blinded thine,  
Looke, and to morrow late, tell mee,  
Whether both the 'India's of spice and Myne  
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with mee.  
Aske for those Kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,  
And thou shalt heare, All here in one bed lay.

His beloved does not merely "contain" riches: she is them. As well as being, like Spenser's, a fanciful compliment, Donne's lines probe the implications of his conceits, considering the question of where true wealth is to be found, and continuing his practice of opposing new value judgments to those commonly accepted.

The success of the final stanza of "The Sunne Rising" depends on a merging of this last conceit -- the beloved as being all wealth -- and the earlier one of the sun as a free

agent. Confidently asserting the glory of the two lovers,

She'is all States, and all Princes, I,  
 Nothing else is.  
 Princes doe but play us; compar'd to this,  
 All honor's mimique; All wealth alchimie,

Donne patronizingly offers aid to the aged sun, the final playful sign that he feels liberated from the sun's tyranny, in spirit if not in flesh:

Thine age askes ease, and since thy duties bee  
 To warme the world, that's done in warming us.  
 Shine here to us, and thou art every where;  
 This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy spheare.

Even in the assertion of triumph, Donne admits their dependence on the sun -- and thus on what it represents -- since he asks for its continued presence and warmth. The assertion of man's 'spirit' continues to acknowledge and to accept his fleshly condition.

## VII

Most of the poems discussed in this chapter belong to the second group of Songs and Sonnets in Helen Gardner's edition, on which she comments<sup>17</sup>:

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<sup>17</sup>"General Introduction" to The Elegies and the Songs and Sonnets, p. lvii.

I would suggest that we should think of the Songs and Sonnets as falling into two distinct sets of poems: those written before Donne became attracted by Neoplatonic conceptions, and those which show the influence of Neoplatonism or are written in forms that he appears to have developed to express these subtleties.

It is no surprise that Donne should adapt available philosophic language which was itself a response to human and philosophic problems which concerned him. But it is also significant that, as Helen Gardner notes a few lines earlier:

. . . some of the clearest expressions of Neoplatonic conceptions are to be found in poems written in the simplest verse-forms: 'The Undertaking' and 'The Ecstasy' in quatrains, and 'Image and Dream' in unvarying decasyllables.

As well as being among the least interesting poems metrically, these poems are relatively passionless and unfounded in a 'present situation'. In being relatively undramatic, they tend to lack the more spontaneous extravagance which marks many other poems of this 'second group'.

The poems I especially wish to examine are those where the playfulness is associated with a passionately serious utterance which does not seem primarily concerned with a witty arguing of some point. They are poems of self-reflection which consider with great intellectual and imaginative scope the richness and complexity of human relationships. In selecting from them, I seek not a representative survey but an understanding of

how, in some major poems, the various 'elements' are related; in particular, of how the playful qualities are related to themes which sometimes find partial expression in Neoplatonic language, or in that of body-soul language as commonly used throughout the Western tradition of thought.

Others, such as A.J. Smith and Helen Gardner, have examined Donne's ideas in relation to Renaissance Neoplatonic philosophy and the like, but there is less discussion on such points as the poems' frequent jokes about the speed and power of the sun, which are also a response to the questions that some Neoplatonic philosophy deals with. I am concerned to examine poems where plays on 'philosophic' language are related to other kinds of play, and based in human situations passionately presented in the poetry, rather than the more abstract 'manifesto' poems, though these too may be passionate in their way.

All of the poems so far examined assume an existing love of some sort. It is scarcely surprising that such poems are intensely aware of tensions between 'Soul' and 'Body', 'Spirit' and 'Flesh', 'mortal' and 'immortal': lovers are most likely to affirm the unity of people, as well as to affirm that the mortal nature of the body is a limit to their aspirations. Their joyous affirmations are qualified by threats of mortality, of real death and of 'fain'd deaths', of changes and other

business affecting their hoped-for self-sufficiency. Variations among the poems depend partly on whether attention is focussed more on present joys or on losses, past or present or future. In the poems I discuss in the rest of this chapter, the tone becomes increasingly darker, though never thoroughly pessimistic.

### VIII

"The Canonization", like "The Sunne Rising", pretends to be a response, at first defensive, finally arrogant and patronizing, to outside interference -- this time by implied criticism -- with Donne's loving. Once again, the need for defence provides an occasion for an affirmation of the splendour of love that finally becomes an offer of aid to those less fortunate. Its transitions are less smoothly managed than those of "The Sunne Rising", and the manner less dramatic, in spite of the splendidly theatrical opening line. Some of the effect comes from the cleverly contrived recurrence of "love" and its rhymes, which become 'perfect' only in the final two lines of the poem.

The first stanza extravagantly demands that all else be regarded as subordinate to Donne's loving. The second becomes even more petulant as he alters the manner of defence to minimize the power of love. It cannot affect the things which the world finds important, some of which he mocks easily,

Soldiers finde warres, and Lawyers finde out still  
Litigious men, which quarrels move,

some of which are less easily dismissed, for all the air of irritated rejection:

When did the heats which my veines fill  
Adde one man to the plagueie Bill?

Here, in a different tone, is the familiar contrast between the would-be self-sufficient world of lovers and the world they at least attempt to reject. Part of the wit here is in the adaption of the cliches of 'Petrarchan' poetry and their contrast to mundane images of worldly affairs. So far, the poem tends to be a slightly hollow rhetorical defence of 'love' and it is unclear just what Donne is doing with his contrasts.

The tone alters in the third stanza, when Donne begins to speak of "us". In relation to the poem's 'rhetorical structure', its function is to contrast valuations of lovers by showing that hostile images intended to debase them can be seen from a different perspective, and adapted to become a means of praise:

Call us what you will, wee'are made such by love;  
Call her one, mee another flye,  
We'are Tapers too, and at our owne cost die.

This is a characteristically clever tactic, but the progression from here is more than merely a 'tactic', though it is also a fitting part of the 'argument' developed through the poem:

And wee in us finde the'Eagle and the Dove;  
 The Phoenix ridle hath more wit  
 By us, we two being one, are it,  
 So, to one neutrall thing both sexes fit.  
 Wee dye and rise the same, and prove  
 Mysterious by this love.

Like that of the second stanza, the imagery is still derived from that of 'Petrarchan' love poetry, but is carried further by the force of Donne's tough arrogance, by his combination of jokes about the physiology of sex with great affirmations of the splendours of love. As in other poems, Donne asserts that man really comes to life only when he is wholly responding to another person. The language explores the nature of the response, the quality of the mutuality, and the improved quality of poetry written in response to a sense of 'us' supports the assertion of love's splendour, something inaccessible to the carping and defensive writing of the first two stanzas.

The fourth stanza plays along with variations of yet more conventional images. It returns to the theme of how lovers are related to yet different from other people, but its contrasts are quieter and more assured than those of the earlier stanzas. Then suddenly contrasts end and the poem declares a new status for lovers, and a new relationship to other people:



And by these hymnes, all shall approve  
 Us Canoniz'd for Love.

This affirmation leads to the text of the invocation which others may properly make to them, an invocation which gives yet other accounts of how the lovers see themselves in relation to the rest of the world. Introduction of the idea of canonization, followed by the text of a prayer is another clever Donne innovation on an old theme, the religion of love. Once more the assertion is playfully extravagant yet 'justified' by its part in the poem's overall structure. But here too play is more than an oratorical device, for the group of fanciful notions advanced and the tone in which they are offered reveal once more something of the quality of their love.

The spirit in which Donne speaks of love, the assessment implied by the way in which the obvious extravagance is modified by strong elements of self-mockery, the 'epitomizing' value of love when set against the inability of lovers to affect the world much at all: these are all ways of uncovering the nature of loving. We are shown people of varying passions, two people inclined to separate from the world yet inevitably defining their love in terms of it, people for whom sexual delights are also an entry into a 'religious' mystery.

## IX

"The Anniversarie" also varies its attitudes, thus seeming to trace the development of thoughts and feelings of a person considering his situation. It begins by asserting love's freedom from time and common human affairs, yet ends by clinging tightly to measured time: "Let us . . . adde . . ./ Yeares and yeares unto yeares." An apparently optimistic first stanza is answered by a gloomier second, with some resolution coming in the more sober affirmations of the third.

The first stanza contrasts:

All Kings, and all their favorites,  
 All glory' of honors, beauties, wits,  
 The Sun it selfe, which makes times, as they passe,

not with eternal lovers, but with "love":

Only our love hath no decay;  
 This no to morrow hath, nor yesterday,<sup>18</sup>  
 Running it never runs from us away,  
 But truly keepes his first, last, everlasting day.

The love is seen as other than themselves: though it appears in time, "running", it is separate from the mortal and "elder"

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<sup>18</sup>The line in Helen Gardner's edition begins, "This no to tomorrow hath," obviously a misprint. Both Grierson and Shawcross give the line as above.

things of which "they", as mortal beings, are a part. Yet lovers do have some share in the immortality, just as the implicit comparisons offer them some share in the earthly glories mentioned in the opening lines. Later, they are explicitly said to be Kings themselves, and thus sharers in that initial "All". Donne heightens the paradoxes of lovers' mortality and immortality, and thus allows himself the wit of such a line as "Running it never runs from us away", and other splendid praises of the love whose anniversary is being celebrated. The praise is heightened by the awe and tenderness which make the rhythms, as the stanza rises quietly to its conclusion, the longest in a series of four successive rhyming lines.

In view of their situation, aspiring to and sharing in the immortal, but bound by mortality, we might expect the poem to argue for an escape from mortal bonds. The poem surprises by doing the opposite, rejecting the love of heaven for that available on earth. This too is a game, since they have little control anyway over their future, even in the matter of where their graves will be:

Two graves must hide thine and my coarse,  
 If one might, death were no divorce.  
 Alas, as well as other Princes, wee,  
 (Who Prince enough in one another bee,)  
 Must leave at last in death, these eyes, and eares.

The reasons given for rejection of heavenly love seem slightly ridiculous:

And then wee shall be throughly blest,  
 But wee no more, then all the rest.  
 Here upon earth, we'are Kings, and none but wee  
 Can be such Kings, nor of such subjects bee.

Why does Donne appear to care so much about being equally blessed with others? Partly because insistence on difference from other people is a means of self-praise, partly because blessedness after death is irrelevant to what he values now. It is all very well to be "throughly blest" and to have "a love increased there above", but what is especially valuable is their mutual power:

Who is so safe as wee? where none can doe  
 Treason to us, except one of us two.

As well as playfully rejecting the prospect of a better love after death, and returning wittily to the idea that the love people can do something about exists here and now, Donne lightly touches the warning note found in "Sweetest love . . .": if fear enters, lovers may unwittingly do each other harm. Lightly and graciously, he hints that the "treason" may be fear, and affirms his acceptance of the mortal condition, where people are vulnerable, but able to act and "live":

True and false feares let us refraine,  
 Let us love nobly, 'and live, and adde againe  
 Yeares and yeares unto yeares, till we attaine  
 To write threescore: this is the second of our raigne.

The basic point of all this witty argument is that it is better to "live" as fully as possible, with the whole of one's being, than to aspire to an absolute and bodiless ideal, represented by the idea of a soul being freed from the grave of the body.<sup>19</sup> The return to the image of kingship stresses the themes of power and splendour, qualities proper to true lovers. The repeated "let us" which introduces the final splendid sentence is a reminder that "our love" -- which is to be worked at for another fifty-nine years, he hopes -- depends on the active and conscious participation of those who can "love nobly, 'and live".

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<sup>19</sup>To emphasise that he is for the present playing with notions of what happens after death, Donne uses an 'absolute' notion that runs counter to the Christian belief in the resurrection of the body, a belief underlying the first stanza of "The Relique". (Helen Gardner comments on p.200 of her edition that "the concept of the soul as buried in the body is unusual in Donne and is quickly repudiated in the next stanza."). His playing with this notion is a way of rejecting, by mockery, an absolutely Platonic view of love, as well as a way of facing the certainty of death and thus leading to the distinctions of the final stanza.

## X

"The Relique" adopts a theme of "The Canonization", that reverence for lovers increases after their death, and makes it part of its own more spectacular alternations between accounts of love that minimize lovers and those that magnify their worth. Ever-present is the certainty of death, the certainty which comments on whatever fine notions lovers may have of themselves. Many of the poems I have considered above seem in danger of disintegrating from a conflict of tone and attitudes, from a conflict between the alleged feelings and the manner of writing, or because Donne tries to do too much in the one poem. The threat is especially present in "The Relique": jostling side by side are grotesque graveyard images and emblems of courtly regard, cynical comments on female promiscuity and suggestions of great tenderness, rapid changes in scenario and in time. The witty interplay among the poses Donne takes is heightened by the effect of the poem's formal structure. Each stanza begins with two rhyming couplets, four stresses to the line, encouraging short, pithy statements; then comes a group of four lines with a more complex interplay of rhymes and line-lengths, encouraging a more explicit, yet evasive, playfulness; finally comes a group of three equally long rhyming lines, inviting a fuller, tenderer, and more substantial conclusion

to the stanza. Given the diversity, the reader is invited to wonder how seriously the poem leads into its final affirmations:

These miracles wee did; but now alas,  
All measure, and all language, I should passe,  
Should I tell what a miracle shee was.

In a poem about fantasies and conceits, about judgments true and false, how truly does Donne offer these lines of praise?

The first stanza jokes about death, about women, and about Donne himself. With the casual reference to his grave being "broke up againe", and the subsequent 'aside',

(For graves have learn'd that woman-head  
To be to more then one a Bed),

Donne gives the impression of indifference to death and to women. The subsequent lines come, then, as something of a surprise. The "bracelet of bright haire about the bone" is revealed as an emblem for the lovers' attitude to each other, and for their belief in the unity of body and soul, a unity to be restored on "the last busie day". Yet the device is pathetically futile in these respects: the bones will not even lie undisturbed, and the probable pun on "lies" is a reminder that the lovers cannot honestly expect their device to be effective. On the one hand, Donne finds in himself great aspirations, a tendency to magnificent fantasies about the power

of love. On the other is the tendency to minimize all of this: nobody will respect or even recognize his grave, he and his beloved will be insignificant among the great crowd to appear at the last day; besides, women are not habitually faithful, and love will end only in death and pathos. What the lovers have achieved is precarious -- the stanza's main clause is "Will he not let us alone", a plea for privacy -- yet of some worth, which the poem goes on to consider.

After a stanza which tends to minimize the lovers, and to seek privacy as necessary for their small triumph, the emphases of the second come as a contrast. Its main point is that public recognition of the relic will lead to a fallacious magnifying of the lovers' significance. Yet, for all of his disclaimers,

If this fall in a time, or land,  
Where mis-devotion doth command,

Donne evasively acquiesces in the false claims of greatness. He puts all the energy of his wit into proposing them, his tone implies a measure of approval, and the subsequent logic suggests that they are at least partly accepted:



Then, he that digges us up, will bring  
 Us, to the Bishop, and the King,  
     To make us Reliques; then  
 Thou shalt be 'a Mary Magdalen, and I  
     A something else thereby;  
 All women shall adore us, and some men;  
 And since at such times, miracles are sought,  
 I would that age were by this paper taught  
 What miracles wee harmlesse lovers wrought.

Having the great claims for the lovers depend on the words of others in an improbable future situation lets Donne evade personal responsibility for them, but it also suggests that, though lovers may prefer privacy, any high assessment of them depends on a more public declaration.

In the second stanza, as in the first, the final three lines are a quiet contrast to the earlier ones: after obvious excesses, mysterious hints ("A something else thereby"), and 'clever' comments ("All women shall adore us, and some men"), they have a quieter wit, in the pose of the naive and innocent lover offering to the future his feeble gesture which yet may be more than a gesture if it leads people to change their normal perspectives. The poem has rested on a tension between two simple propositions: that the lovers are great and that they are insignificant. The truth of each is comprehended in the one line with the contrast of "miracles" and "harmlesse".

Here is a recurrence, then, of a theme common to many poems by Donne and Marvell, the relation between withdrawal and 'public' commitment, both necessary, yet seemingly incompatible. As in "The Canonization", Donne claims that lovers will serve the world through their withdrawal from it. The proposal recalls New Testament remarks about Christians' relation to the world, and thus some of the discussion of Spirit-Flesh contrasts. Donne's use of 'religious' imagery emphasises this connection which he makes playfully, but by no means trivially.

The innocent pose is carried through the third stanza, magnified to the point of apparent absurdity when Donne claims:

Difference of sex no more wee knew,  
Then our Guardian Angells doe.

This overstatement, playing on the ambiguity of "knew", expands the previous notion that the lovers were unable to comprehend the mystery of their own love:

First, wee lov'd well and faithfully,  
Yet knew not what wee lov'd, nor why.

It also prepares the way for the subsequent notion concerning the respect they had for each other:

Comming and going, wee  
Perchance might kisse, but not between those meales.

By presenting the extraordinary miracles as a kind of joke, Donne is acknowledging that literal accounts of lovers' words and deeds are likely to be dull and commonplace. Offering them hyperbolically and wittily suggests ways in which even the commonplace may be seen as unique and worthy of the greatest respect.

With his apparently libertine comment,

Our hands ne'r toucht the seales,  
Which nature, injur'd by late law, sets free,

Donne plays once more with Biblical notions, those of 'nature', 'law', and 'freedom'. Since the lovers apparently despise the 'law' as a rule for behaviour, but did not follow 'nature', they must have been living by the Spirit. Further, Donne implies that, in the normal view of things, their behaviour was foolish, but he immediately likens such foolishness to that of saints: "These miracles wee did".<sup>20</sup> The analogy brings into a new light the earlier themes of the potential greatness of the seemingly foolish and insignificant. Donne

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<sup>20</sup> Compare the discussion of wisdom and foolishness in I Cor. i, 18-27, and of nature, law, and spirit, frequently in Paul's Epistles.

proves himself wise in his foolishness, in his behaviour and in his apparently foolish poetry. The pose of the ridiculous man has enabled him to praise his love and to give some insight into its significance.

The final three lines make explicit the pose of helplessness present in the corresponding lines of the earlier stanzas:

These miracles wee did; but now alas,  
All measure, and all language, I should passe,  
Should I tell what a miracle shee was.

Donne merges one traditional theme of love poetry, the impossibility of describing a beloved, with a theme which has its great poetic expression in the final canto of Dante's Paradiso, the impossibility of comprehending the sacred. Such affirmation of weakness becomes itself a high form of tribute, and the manner in which Donne makes it is a paradoxical sign of his strength, a humble understanding of the limits of his own powers.

"The Relique" develops the theme of love-as-religion not merely as a basis for a wittily complimentary monologue, but because the analogies between love and religion, though dangerous if not treated with intelligent detachment, are felt as real and important. Since the religious sensibility behind such poetry, by Donne or by his predecessors, speaks of God as love, this is hardly surprising. The success of "The Relique" and of many other

poems depends on the ability to consider love as something 'of' mortal men and women, with all the consequent limitations, yet nevertheless as an experience of an immortal Spirit.

## XI

"A Nocturnall upon S.Lucies Day, being the shortest day" is one of Donne's most difficult and important poems. Its witty argument is dense and obscure, its tone complex and elusive. "In this poem virtuosity sounds the depths", remarks George Williamson.<sup>21</sup> "What, exactly, are we to call 'A Nocturnall Upon S.Lucies Day'? Is it a love poem? a religious meditation? a lament? a metaphysical speculation? Or all these, and more?"<sup>22</sup> Various critics have offered useful insights, but all remain baffled by the poem.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>George Williamson, The Proper Wit of Poetry (London, 1961), p. 37.

<sup>22</sup>Vincent Buckley, Poetry and the Sacred, p. 106.

<sup>23</sup>Most Donne critics have something to say on the poem. Frank Kermode's comments in his John Donne (London, 1957) are suggestive but brief. Unconvincing readings are given in Doniphan Louthan's The Poetry of John Donne (New York, 1951) and N.J.C. Andreasen's John Donne: Conservative Revolutionary (Princeton, N.J., 1967).

The following are among the more important essays devoted to the poem: Richard Sleight's discussion in John Wain (ed.), Interpretations (London, 1955); W.A. Murray, "Donne and Paracelsus", RES, XXV (1949), 115-123; J.A. Mazzeo, "Notes on John Donne's Alchemical Imagery", in his Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Studies (London, 1964); Clarence H. Miller, "Donne's 'A Nocturnall upon S.Lucies Day' and the Nocturns of Matins", SEL, VI (1966), 77-86.

A central theme in the poem is the possibility of renewal from the depths of loss and desolation: the desolation is presented most eloquently, yet Donne modifies the proposition that he is permanently sunk in grief. As elsewhere, Donne sees himself as part of a universe of recurring cycles, related to the progress of the sun. The world is poised at the nadir of blackness, which is also the point where renewal may begin:

'Tis the yeares midnight, and it is the dayes,  
 . . . . .  
 At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:  
 . . . . .  
 You lovers, for whose sake, the lesser Sunne  
     At this time to the Goat is runne  
     To fetch new lust, and give it you,  
     Enjoy your summer all;  
 . . . . .  
                                 . . . since this  
 Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is.

Donne's argument seems to be that while he is associated with one aspect of nature, the apparent withdrawal of light and of life, he is unaffected by the complementary aspect, that life and light must return to the earth. But can a man be so selective in his relation to natural events?

While the final stanza denies Donne's own association with nature's cycles, its imagery insists that summer complements winter, day complements night. In explaining his difference from other men in respect to seasonal urges, Donne expands the

idea of liturgical celebration suggested in the poem's title:

Since shee enjoyes 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.

The Christian liturgical festivals recognise the links between man's life and the recurrent seasonal and daily events, but also recall the promise of liberation from those cycles, relating the recurrent events to a salvation eternally present yet awaiting its fulfilment. Donne's language in the final lines suggests that he sees his own future in such a context. Unlike other lovers, Donne does not expect a regular renewal ("nor will my Sunne renew"), but he can expect to approach the beloved through his active participation in a nocturnal ritual at "the dark time of the year". The eve of a great feast is properly a time of penance before the commemoration of and association with the saint; by participating in the "Vigill" of a feast, by giving ritual shape to grief, one becomes fit to celebrate the feast. In this case, the feast seems to be associated with the final Resurrection, which brings liberation from cycles and such fleshly bonds, as well as reunion. The poem itself is such a ritual, one which suggests the potential value of the present desolation. By the attitude he takes to his own sorrow, Donne suggests the possibility of moving beyond it.

The final anticipation of Resurrection and reunion reveals a change in the emotion of the poem, a contrast to the earlier desolation:

For I am every dead thing,  
 In whom love wrought new Alchimie.  
 For his art did expresse  
 A quintessence even from nothingnesse,  
 . . . . .  
 But I am by her death, (which word wrongs her)  
 Of the first nothing, the Elixer grown.

Yet the very trend of Donne's logic of 'annihilation', bringing him to the Elixer of the nothing that existed before the first creation, invites its own reversal. The language implies some impending creation, a more radical act than the renewal which comes in the normal cycles of human affairs. Creation depends on an act of will independent of recurrent seasonal processes, although the man to be renewed remains in some harmony with the rhythms of his world: "Since this / Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is." The pun on "Eve", the first woman, discovered by the newly created Adam, gives some further continuity with earlier references to God's first creation.

Donne offers contradictions, apparent and real, as part of a tightly organized poem, and challenges us to make of them what we will, just as he must do himself. By playing thus, Donne is true to a complex interplay of feelings and ideas



which seem to pull in different directions until they emerge in a firm yet mysterious conviction. The final outcome depends on acts of will ("Let mee prepare", "let mee call") which are also acts of faith. But the outcome also depends on an extraordinary playfulness of mind, and it seems to assert that such play is the only way in which he can "prepare towards her", for the poem's own distorted account of Donne's condition has also been a way of clarifying it and giving it direction, itself an act of ritual preparation.

As if to warn against the dangers of trusting so much to the imagination, Donne playfully refers to the lovers' tendency to indulge in fantasies:

Oft a flood  
Have wee two wept, and so  
Drownd the whole world, us two; oft did we grow  
To be two Chaosses, when we did show  
Care to ought else; and often absences  
Withdrew our soules, and made us carcasses.

Donne recalls here language of the 'Petrarchan' tradition of love poetry as adapted by himself, especially in valedictory poems. The main point seems to be that the two lovers once experienced times of great loss and sorrow which resembled those of other lovers and which seemed to require images of death and destruction, but -- as Donne goes on to argue -- they were deluded in taking themselves so seriously: there is a new loss which is

more basic and which requires more radical imagery. But if those images were somewhat fanciful responses to great emotions, what should be made of images of his present state which are offered with as much seriousness yet appear to have the same degree of implicit absurdity? Donne tells us:

Were I a man, that I were one,  
 I needs must know; I should preferre,  
 If I were any beast,  
 Some ends, some means; Yea plants, yea stones detest,  
 And love; All, all some properties invest;  
 If I an ordinary nothing were,  
 As shadow, 'a light, and body must be here.

Though logically defensible, the denial of his humanity is obviously false; Donne is, characteristically, arguing for the impossible. The poem shows that while the grief pushing him to such statements may be true, and while the hyperbole reveals something of the nature of his desolation, he indulges in a certain amount of self-delusion which is open to a touch of mockery. So too, in the poem generally, and in the imaginative acts proposed in the final lines, Donne remains aware of the limits of what he has done and can do. If the ambition seems excessive, the poem is not: it recognises its own extravagances while using them.

The trend of my argument is that throughout the poem Donne 'plays' with his own grief by overstating it in his

overt argument, while complementing that assertion by various signs of strength, culminating in the resolve at the end. Even while desolate, he is in some command of his situation, and sees himself as potentially active: "Of the first nothing, the Elixer grown" sees annihilation itself as part of a continuing and creative process. We see further signs of Donne's strength when we ask why he addresses himself to other lovers. Like them, he has suffered the 'normal' griefs of love ("Oft a flood . . ."), but in him they see the ultimate possibilities of nothingness. Yet if he can be studied with profit, he is not altogether a 'nothing', and if he wishes others to learn from him, he is not as withdrawn as he pretends.

The poem's fundamental strength becomes more striking when we consider the effect of its rhythms. Joan Bennett's comments are perceptive, but not entirely satisfactory:

His elegiac music forces us to dwell on the meaning of the words and the linking of thought with thought. . . .

The monosyllables fall like hammerstrokes; then the sound dies away in the short line

The worlds whole sap is sunke:

and increases again in volume in the lines that follow with the full tones of 'the generall balme th'hydroptique earth' and the numbing thuds of sound: 'sunke', 'drunke', 'shrunke', 'dead'; lightened with an effect of sardonic bitterness in the soft rhymes 'laugh:epitaph'; every twist and turn in the sound pattern is a preparative for the despair expressed in the central conceit of the poem:

I, by loves limbecke, am the grave  
Of all, that's nothing.

Donne deliberately deprived himself of the hypnotic power with which a regularly recurring beat plays upon the nerves.<sup>24</sup>

The very qualities referred to as preparing for despair seem to me an indication of strength. The rhythms are alert, not inert, and this signifies a passionate activity of the mind, an energetic striving for self-knowledge.

Frank Kermode's brief comment is more suggestive:

"This is the most solemn and most difficult of Donne's poems, superficially slow in movement, but with a contrapuntal velocity of thought."<sup>25</sup> The velocity applies to more than the thought. "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day" shares with other Donne poems an ability to range swiftly over a variety of ideas and images. A more distinctive quality is a wave-like accumulation of phrases: the poem seems to slow down, then suddenly is whipped forward again, as the poet pushes on to consider the implications of what has been said.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Joan Bennett, Five Metaphysical Poets (Cambridge, 1964), p. 42.

<sup>25</sup>John Donne, p. 21.

<sup>26</sup>The effect is diminished slightly by the tendency of modern editors to emphasise pauses more heavily than does the punctuation of the 1633 edition of Donne's poems.

The effect here bears comparison with that of "Aire and Angels" which introduces a series of points, each considered slowly and precisely, their relationship being stressed by frequent connectives:

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

The logical tightness of this passage contrasts with the looser, more ambiguous syntax of "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day", which is sparer in its connectives and more puzzling in their usage: "Study me then", "For I am every dead thing", "since this /Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is." The two poems share a certain excitement, that of the mind continually making new discoveries, a mind at play yet about a serious business, impelled by some present situation. The occasion of "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day" is more intense, more oppressive, more disruptive of ordered notions of things. The cooler logical recollection of the past which we find in "Aire and Angels"

is out of place here. But the mind is far from anarchic, its method of creating order paradoxically fitting for the subject and the occasion.

Consideration of the formal structure of the stanzas confirms the sense of its curious forward movement. In the first four lines of a stanza, no line rhymes with one of its own length; then a short line is followed by two five-stress lines that rhyme with it, and two more five-stress lines that share another rhyme. Generally, the effect of the first part of a stanza is to set up a variety of directions, not resolved until after the fifth line; the effect of the later lines is to consolidate; the more even weight of the lines, their couplet effect, bring a greater firmness. Each stanza ends with a full stop, but there are only three others in the poem. For all the discursiveness that contrasts this poem to "Aire and Angells" or "The Exstasie", it has a strong sense of direction which reinforces the impression of a detached self-examination mastering desolation.

Other Donne poems discussed above contemplate the union of lovers. Recurrent themes are the mutual power given by love, the possibility of preserving love in a world of change and death, the ways in which attention to a beloved governs attention to other people and things.

In "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day" Donne speaks from a new situation which alters his perspectives on such themes. The beloved is lost, apparently dead. Yet the word "death" wrongs her, not only because he can "prepare towards her", but because she still influences him so profoundly. Love has "wrought new Alchimie" in him, "to expresse / A quintessence even from nothingnesse", but it is also love which is shown to impel him towards reunion with her. The poem thus offers a radically different view of love from that which leaves a bereaved lover gazing upon his mind's image of the unattainable mistress.

Donne's techniques are a suitable response to such mysteries. For matters that cannot be comprehended by normal means of human knowledge and discourse, more adventurous language is needed. The development of the image of love as alchemist who makes him the elixer of "the first nothing" enables him to comprehend at least partially an indefinable mystery. As elsewhere, Donne himself, an intelligent, enquiring and passionate man, is chief subject of the analysis, but he is also shown coming to triumph over the threat of despair. He does this by powers of the mind that enable him to clarify his own position and by related powers of the spirit which enable him to 'play' with his own grief,

to belie the claims that he is "None". The manner in which he speaks of himself is as important as what he 'says'.

Such comments would apply to some extent to many of Donne's poems, but in few do we find so subtle an interplay of seemingly incompatible attitudes which reveal both the depths of grief and the power of the human spirit to free itself from the fleshly condition of nature's cycles and mortality which are both cause of grief and the inevitable condition on which assertions of the human spirit must be founded. "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day" is among the most impressive of a group of poems in which Donne's wit, his ability to play with ideas and images, combines with a probing intelligence to consider situations which are passionately felt as Donne's own, yet share much with those of other men. Later, when examining The Second Anniversary, I will show Donne using a different mode from the brief love lyric, yet with comparable wit enlightening a contemplation of a striving for life which is both his own and shared by all men.



## CHAPTER IV

## WITHDRAWAL AND COMMITMENT IN MARVELL

## I

Although "An Horatian Ode upon Cromwel's Return from Ireland" is concerned with public and contemporary events, its themes and methods bring it closer to poems considered in this work than to Marvell's other political poems. George de F. Lord comments on its relation to "The Garden":

The Garden, for example, illuminates the Horatian Ode and vice versa. To some extent the two poems are corollaries, one withdrawing from a life of fruitless ambition into a life of contemplative fulfillment, the other abandoning the austere and secluded garden for the arena of political and military activity. From the perspective of the garden, ambitious and successful men seem misguided and foolish; from the perspective of Cromwell's strenuous achievements, the "muses dear" and "numbers languishing" of the retired life seem equally unseasonable and absurd.<sup>1</sup>

Although Lord's comments are misleading even as summary accounts of the poems, they do point to some of their pre-occupations. The enthusiasm for garden-withdrawal which is present, though qualified, in "The Garden" is a reaction to "uncessant Labours", while the "Horatian Ode" is about one who marches "indefatigably

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<sup>1</sup>"From Contemplation to Action: Marvell's Poetical Career," PQ, XLVI (1967), 211.

on". Time spent in the garden is mentioned only briefly in the "Horatian Ode", one of a series of references to what must be abandoned in response to the demands of the times, and as the image that contrasts Oliver Cromwell's past with his present:

And, if we would speak true,  
 Much to the Man is due.  
 Who, from his private Gardens, where  
 He liv'd reserved and austere,  
 As if his highest plot  
 To plant the Bergamot,  
 Could by industrious Valour climbe  
 To ruine the great Work of Time,  
 And cast the Kingdome old  
 Into another Mold.

(27-36)

Both of these poems, along with Upon Appleton House, examine the recurrent Marvell theme that all choices have their price: whether one decides to withdraw or to act, one loses something important. In examining that theme in the "Horatian Ode", Marvell considers the price of creating a new political order, apparently sanctioned by Providence, yet in many ways abhorrent.

Much of the critical discussion of this poem tries to assess how far it is concerned to support or to condemn Cromwell.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The most important contributions include: Cleanth Brooks, "Criticism and Literary History: Marvell's Horatian Ode," SR, LV (1947), 199-222, and "A Note on the Limits of 'History' and the Limits of 'Criticism'," SR, LXI (1953), 129-135; Douglas Bush, "Marvell's Horatian Ode," SR, LX (1952), 363-376; John Wallace, Destiny his Choice: The Loyallism of Andrew Marvell (Cambridge, 1968), ch.2. Other items are mentioned in my Bibliography.

The question is important, but a limiting one if put simply in that way. It is an Ode upon Cromwell's return, its concern not merely the man, but a situation in which Cromwell is a central figure. The poem begins with a reference to the times rather than to Cromwell personally:

The forward Youth that would appear  
Must now forsake his Muses dear,  
Nor in the Shadows sing  
His Numbers languishing.  
'Tis time to leave the Books in dust,  
And oyl th'unused Armours rust:  
Removing from the Wall  
The Corslet of the Hall.

(1-8)

The times demand that the simplicities of battle take precedence over the complexities of study. The 'forward youth' must choose to strike blows for one of two opposed forces. Marvell, as Poet, faces such a choice: as a student of the Muses and of books, Marvell is in a position to see the complexities of a case; yet this withdrawn study, he suggests, is 'now' related to trivia, to merely private concerns symbolised by the singing of "numbers languishing".

Yet public commitment means adherence to actions that one's studies must question, to violence and to destruction. For all the difference between Marvell the poet and Cromwell the politician who seizes the opportunity for decisive action,

their situations are related: the times confront both with moral problems. Cromwell, the poem tells us, is destructive of himself and of other things, even of what appears most sacred, yet he has divine approval: he rends "Pallaces and Temples", yet appears himself as "angry Heavens flame". Given that ambiguity, how is one to make a moral judgment on acts of political expediency? Is moral anarchy the price of public order, political disorder the price of adherence to blameless personal behaviour? The poem has a related problem. How does he preserve his integrity as a poet, remaining faithful to the whole truth, without remaining impotent in times that demand public commitment? Much of the poignancy of the "Horatian Ode" comes from Marvell's sense of this problem as his own. Its success offers a brief resolution of the paradox, although the subsequent career of Marvell as 'political' poet shows that he had to pay the poetic price for political commitment. The success here depends on the poem's being a good deal more than a panegyric, even a qualified one.<sup>3</sup>

"Thou seest me strive for life", says Donne at a crucial point in The Second Anniversary, where we are presented with a

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<sup>3</sup>Even John M. Wallace's well-argued case fails to convince me that the poem is substantially pro-Cromwell: its emotional energies are too complex, too diverse. (See Destiny his Choice, ch.2)

man in the act of coming to terms with major issues about his life. The "Horatian Ode" is a less dramatic poem; its mode implies the presentation of the results of considered thought. As my earlier chapters have suggested, Marvell tends to be less 'present' in his writing, his defensive, ironic mannerisms more of a mask than are Donne's evasions about where he 'really' stands on a question. Even in the "Horatian Ode", Marvell's manner has more in common with a devotional poem than with a 'meditative' one. For all its ambivalences, the style of the "Horatian Ode" is persuasive and celebratory. Though obviously far more secular a poem than, say, Crashaw's Hymns, it is, like them, a poem where the poet is especially concerned to give and encourage the fit response to a person and what he or she represents.

Crashaw's poetry is frequently witty and excessive, as in these lines from "Hymn to Saint Teresa":

How kindly will thy gentle HEART  
 Kisse the sweetly-killing DART!  
 And close in his embraces deep  
 Those delicious Wounds, that weep  
 Balsom to heal themselves with. Thus  
 When These thy DEATHS, so numerous,  
 Shall all at last dy into one,  
 And melt thy Soul's sweet mansion;  
 Like a soft lump of incense, hasted  
 By too hott a fire, & wasted  
 Into perfuming clouds, so fast  
 Shalt thou exhale to Heaun at last  
 In a resolving SIGH.

(105-117)

The extent of the hyperbole is a measure of the wonder properly due to the Saint, to her extraordinary love and sanctity. Crashaw's playing here is a sign of his faith and a means of drawing the reader to the proper response. There is no attempt to hide the excess or the imminent absurdity of the images. Nor do we find -- as we often do in Donne or Marvell -- the element of self-mockery which recognises such absurdity; rather there is an assumption that we will recognise the conventions of religious praise, that in sharing the faith we will share the response.

Writing of Cromwell, Marvell too becomes excessive:

And, like the three-fork'd Lightning, first  
 Breaking the Clouds where it was nurst,  
     Did thorough his own Side  
     His fiery way divide.  
 . . . . .  
 Then burning through the Air he went,  
 And Pallaces and Temples rent:  
     And Caesars head at last  
     Did through his Laurels blast.  
                                     (13-16, 21-24)

Hyperbolic poetry has traditionally been used to praise great men in public life, as well as God and the saints, so the extent of Marvell's exaggerations does not surprise. The excess encourages a sense of awe proper to Cromwell's activities. Crashaw's language demands a judgment in favour of his heroine: the paradoxes of her life, such as her kissing

"the sweetly-killing DART", are not moral dilemmas, but indicate that she can transform all to good in her service of God. The details of Marvell's language suggest that the deeds of Cromwell demand not only awe, but a complex moral judgment, the difficulties of which are shared by poet and reader. Whereas Crashaw's poetry demands a suspension of disbelief, a rejection of any qualifications we might feel about the subject or the images used, Marvell's manner invites such qualifications. The fact that Cromwell is a destroyer of temples as well as of palaces might well lead men to resist or to blame him. Yet this is seen as madness, for he seems to work with divine approval in the destruction of the very things men regard as sacred.

The poem repeatedly considers such paradoxes. Thus, the image of lightning bursting through its own side invites a range of judgments. To comprehend the reference to Cromwell as lightning, we need to keep in mind at least three notions or images: lightning bursting from the clouds, the political ascendancy of Cromwell over other members of his party, and the soul bursting from the body. This last notion, that Cromwell has broken free of bodily limits and become something like pure spirit is continued in the following lines ("Then burning through the Air . . . ") and picked up again in:

Nature that hateth emptiness,  
 Allows of penetration less:  
 And therefore must make room  
 Where greater Spirits come.  
 (41-44)

One result of the fusion of images in the 'Lightning' passage is to diversify our responses, to help us become aware of several ways of seeing and judging an activity. We become aware of Cromwell's doing several things at once: a political triumph is seen as being a triumph of a restless spirit, an activity associated with mysterious activities elsewhere in the universe. The image of dividing a way through one's own side implies a god-like quality, but such activity is also self-destructive. (So too are some of the assertions of 'spirit' in the other Marvell poems I have considered above.)

As a divine fire, Cromwell has become an almost impersonal and inhuman force. After the passage describing Cromwell as fiery agent, the tone alters in a slightly apologetic way when attention is turned to the man:

And, if we would speak true,  
 Much to the Man is due.  
 (27-28)

The speaker is awed by the subject, by the partially supernatural yet inhuman force of violent destruction. The praise due to divine power and to the man is played against a natural terror in the face of such power. Such a dual sense persists in the poem. Marvell never denies that praise and admiration are warranted: the poem goes on to support the claim that "Much



to the Man is due" as well as to defend the proposition that Cromwell's progress seems to be supported by God. Yet Cromwell is not God, but a man. The witty manner of the poem, as well as inflating Cromwell and finding fit images for his greatness, insists too on his limitations. The measure of Cromwell, though the poem suggests that he defies all normal methods of assessing people, is a humane one which wittily sees his achievements in the light of other human activities (such as the death of the King) as well as of the laws of nature and of more abstract principles of Right and Justice.

The poem as in this passage moves back and forth between general observations about history and specific references to this one man:

Though Justice against Fate complain,  
 And plead the antient Rights in vain:  
     But those do hold or break  
     As Men are strong or weak.  
 Nature that hateth emptiness,  
 Allows of penetration less:  
     And therefore must make room  
     Where greater Spirits come.  
 What Field of all the Civil Wars,  
 Where his were not the deepest Scars?  
     And Hampton shows what part  
     He had of wiser Art.

(37-48)

This back-and-forth movement, with its surprisingly abrupt

transitions, is part of the poem's attempt to relate human will and human events to what seem to be the laws of history. Marvell believes, it seems, in some inevitable processes, providentially ordained, yet he is well aware how much these events depend on such arbitrary qualities as the will, courage, art and ambition of single men who decide to take command of events in risky endeavours:

So restless Cromwel could not cease  
 In the inglorious Arts of peace,  
 But through adventurous War  
 Urged his active Star.

(9-12)

Even in his garden, Cromwell was concerned with 'Plots'; his notable piece of art has been that which culminates in the death of Charles:

And Hampton shows what part  
 He had of wiser Art.  
 Where, twining subtile fears with hope,  
 He wove a Net of such a scope,  
 That Charles himself might chase  
 To Caresbrooks narrow case.  
 That thence the Royal Actor born  
 The Tragick Scaffold might adorn  
 While round the armed Bands  
 Did clap their bloody hands.  
He nothing common did or mean  
 Upon that memorable Scene  
 But with his keener Eye  
 The Axes edge did try:  
 Nor call'd the Gods with vulgar spight  
 To vindicate his helpless Right  
 But bow'd his comely Head,  
 Down as upon a Bed.

(47-64)

This passage, showing that the "wiser Art" culminates in the staging of a highly serious play where "the Royal Actor" meets his death, is one of the most striking, but puzzling, passages in the poem, so strongly are we shown the admirable qualities of the King, the nobility of his death, compared with the behaviour of the armed bands standing around clapping. The contrast reinforces the theme of the opening lines, that these are indeed hard times, destroying dignified action as well as sweetness and leisure, not to mention "the great Work of Time" (34) which Cromwell so ruthlessly reshapes. However much the passage on Charles's death suggests Marvell's liking for the King and the values he represented, it also sees the instability of those values: the King is a futile actor on a stage, compared with a man whose artistic performances bring him real power.

For all the elegiac qualities in this passage -- and elsewhere -- Marvell admits that even so sad a death may be a sign of providential favour:

This was that memorable Hour  
Which first assur'd the forced Pow'r.  
So when they did design  
The Capitols first Line,  
A bleeding Head where they begun,  
Did fright the Architects to run;  
And yet in that the State  
Foresaw it's happy Fate.

(65-72)

While the poem continues its qualified acceptance of the new order, in the belief that Providence may well support "the forced Pow'r", it also becomes increasingly responsive, especially in its rhythms, to the hardness and violence which characterise the new order. If the poem's ironic manner continues to suggest a degree of detachment or reserve, that reserve is directed more to the men involved in making history than to the value judgments they compel, to the demands of political commitment rather than to those of moral commitment.

Such reserve in the poem's formal manner is part of its attempt to create a unified and ordered response among the various possible judgments. Marvell recognizes that, to avoid moral -- or political -- anarchy, one must decide as well as discriminate: the tone of the poem throughout is both decisive and discriminating. The threat of anarchy appears in the public events that Marvell considers: the violence, energy and cunning by which Cromwell has triumphed are themselves difficult to control and could lead to disorder, even if in the form of a dictatorship based on those qualities. In the later part of the poem, Marvell turns more directly to this question, to ask how and why such a man could be a submissive servant of the public, controlling his apparently ceaseless energies.

The poem turns to look at the recent event noted in

the poem's title, Cromwell's victorious return from Ireland. I have not read a satisfactory account of this passage. While Marvell may have had distorted information about the savagery of the conquest, he is hardly likely to be so deceived as a 'straight' reading of this passage suggests:<sup>4</sup>

They can affirm his Praises best,  
And have, though overcome, confest  
How good he is, how just,  
And fit for highest Trust:  
Nor yet grown stiffer with Command,  
But still in the Republick's hand  
How fit he is to sway  
That can so well obey.

(77-84)

There is surely some grim humour here, which is partly a comment on Cromwell's righteousness. He is a bloodthirsty man who satisfies his hunting instincts yet acts on behalf of the state, so that he has his pleasures yet remains technically blameless. The next lines of the sequence support this suggestion: why should Cromwell pay rent except for the privilege of using somebody's estate for his own purposes? So he becomes 'good' and 'just' only by insisting on his fidelity to the commission which is

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<sup>4</sup>Various attempts have been made to 'explain' the passage; see Note 2 to this chapter for references.

both a job and a pleasure, a fidelity to which the surviving Irish can well attest.

The lines which follow emphasise the dilemma of Cromwell if he is to remain righteous:

He to the Commons Feet presents  
 A Kingdome, for his first years rents:  
 And, what he may, forbears  
 His Fame to make it theirs:  
 And has his Sword and Spoys ungirt,  
 To lay them at the Publick's skirt.  
 So when the Falcon high  
 Falls heavy from the Sky,  
 She, having kill'd, no more does search,  
 But on the next green Bow to pearch;  
 Where, when he first does lure,  
 The Falckner has her sure.

(85-96)

As well as continuing the insistence that Cromwell is being surprisingly restrained, considering his capacities, these lines also imply that such submissiveness is a condition of his continuing success. The huntsman must pay his rent if he is to continue to hunt without becoming an outlaw; he must act as servant of the state if he is to remain justified before God in his own eyes or those of other men. The falcon and the falconer have a relationship where each is dependent on the other. If the falcon is "restless Cromwel", it is unlikely to "pearch" for long: its submissiveness is uncertain, the very virtues which make it so useful a bird also make it a dangerous one if not well trained and used. In other words,

the weight of the metaphors supports the ambiguous implications of "yet" (81) and "still" (82): Cromwell and the state, for all the present harmony, are mutually dependent in a potentially unstable relationship.

Cromwell, the man who left private life for public action, who abandoned the garden for war, is seen, especially towards the end of the poem, as both master and servant, not only of the State, but of Fate. By agreeing to act violently, for whatever righteous, even necessary, cause, he has partly destroyed his own humanity and has lost some of his freedom. He is at once a monstrous and inhuman force and a man who is the victim of unchanging laws of the universe, part of a divine game in which man can be only the loser, bound increasingly by the implications of his own behaviour.

The poem moves to a series of predictions of Cromwell's possible military career, again presented in ambiguous terms:

A Caesar he ere long to Gaul  
 To Italy an Hannibal,  
 And to all States not free  
 Shall Clymacterick be  
 (101-104)

Caesar and Hannibal were great warriors, but scarcely liberators; and Hannibal, for all the fear he caused, failed to conquer Italy.

Cromwell is to range through Scotland as "The English Hunter". Rhetorically, these lines are building into a triumphant climax, but the triumph is a qualified one. The poem's final lines look at Cromwell's future in the context of his past, in a passage that is both eulogy and warning:

But thou the Wars and Fortunes Son  
 March indefatigably on;  
 And for the last effect  
 Still keep thy Sword erect:  
 Beside the force it has to fright  
 The Spirits of the shady Night,  
 The same Arts that did gain  
 A Pow'r must it maintain.  
 (113-120)

The rhythms at this point become especially stern; Cromwell's march is part of an unending procession in which he must take his place. The frightening line, "March indefatigably on" is an outstanding example of rhythms reinforcing the statement of how unfree the great conqueror really is. For all his apparent righteousness, Cromwell ends in a situation similar to that of a haunted Macbeth -- or even of that more honourable man, Brutus -- unable to sleep, visited by ghosts, compelled to wade deeper in blood.

Public life, then, may be compelled by an inscrutable Providence, by the demands of the time, by the need for glory. But it also means a considerable and painful loss, a joyless



and driven existence. What, then, are the prospects when a man withdraws to the isolated garden?

## II

In "The Garden", Marvell adopts the manner of one making a somewhat whimsical defence of an extreme proposition. He continually overstates his case, and plays with absurd notions, such as the soul's gliding into the tree. Yet the poem is far more than a delightful trifle: this fact has led many a commentator into extensive researches, relating the poem to various sources and traditions such as Bonaventura<sup>5</sup>, Hermeticism<sup>6</sup>, and the "androgynous Adam"<sup>7</sup>. The poem clearly draws on a rich variety of ideas, yet solemn explications in terms of those ideas become false to the poem by their inability to cope with its peculiar playfulness. My concern here is to see how that playfulness works to give "The Garden" its striking effect, and conversely, what makes the play so compelling, so much more than mere whimsy.

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<sup>5</sup>Ruth Wallerstein, Studies in Seventeenth Century Poetic (Madison, Wisc., 1950), ch.8.

<sup>6</sup>Maren-Sofie Røstvig, The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal, Vol.1: 1600-1700, 2nd ed. (Oslo, 1962), ch.4.

<sup>7</sup>Lawrence W. Hyman, Andrew Marvell (New York, 1964), ch.3.

In the first stanza, as in the three that follow, Marvell pretends that there is an absolute choice to be made between two extremes, and that he fully supports one of them, in this case "repose" against "unceasing Labours". But we all know that life is not a matter of such simple choices; to underline the playful nature of his case, Marvell bases the first part of his argument on the fanciful proposition that flowers and trees actively "weave the Garlands of repose." Overtly, the poem offers a distorted view of things in presenting the case for contemplative withdrawal against active involvement in affairs. At the same time, it wittily qualifies that case. The power of the first stanza depends on its striking contrast between two kinds of action, the "unceasing Labours" of men and the weaving of the plants:

How vainly men themselves amaze  
 To win the Palm, the Oke, or Bayes;  
 And their unceasing Labours see  
 Crown'd from some single Herb or Tree.  
 Whose short and narrow verged Shade  
 Does prudently their Toyls upbraid;  
 While all Flow'rs and all Trees do close  
 To weave the Garlands of repose.

A pun on "amaze" heightens the contrast between men and trees: a maze is confusing and confining compared with the orderly "Garlands of repose". The poem simply asserts that the amazement is vain and less desirable than submission to the orderly

workings of nature: the argument is that men should submit to the natural world, that in fact nature is more powerful than man and can thwart his activities, as when Marvell presents himself as stumbling and falling in the very active garden:

What wond'rous Life in this I lead!  
 Ripe Apples drop about my head;  
 The Luscious Clusters of the Vine  
 Upon my Mouth do crush their Wine;  
 The Nectaren, and curious Peach,  
 Into my hands themselves do reach;  
 Stumbling on Melons, as I pass,  
 Insnar'd with Flow'rs, I fall on Grass.

Here too the precise details of the poetry challenge Marvell's apparent endorsement of nature's pressing abundance. If man allows himself to be seduced by the garden, he may find ease and pleasure, but he will be overwhelmed also, reduced to a sub-rational vegetable state. The stanza thus introduces an important theme of the central section of "The Garden", that what seems to be a call of the Spirit for a life of contemplative solitude may prove to be a delusion, to be really the call of the Flesh for man to turn to a subhuman existence. In "A Dialogue between the Soul and Body", we saw the Body's yearning for the natural "Forest" growth of a pre-human existence, and the loss this involved. In "The Garden", Marvell looks at similar tendencies, but takes the problem much further.

The very language in which Marvell has praised the garden stresses its sensual delights:

Society is all but rude,  
To this delicious Solitude.

Indeed, the garden competes successfully with the attractions of human beauty:

No white nor red was ever seen  
So am'rous as this lovely green.  
Fond Lovers, cruel as their Flame,  
Cut in these Trees their Mistress name.  
Little, Alas, they know, or heed,  
How far these Beauties Hers exceed!

The main point of the fourth stanza is that a garden can prove to be the true end of even the most passionate human or divine behaviour:

The Gods, that mortal Beauty chase,  
Still in a Tree did end their race.

The same couplet raises the familiar theme of fusion of divine and mortal, anticipating the later parts of the poem which consider the implications of man's 'amphibious' nature.

The method of these stanzas is, in one respect, one considered above: Marvell tends to argue that the garden, place of repose, contemplation and solitude, the closest approach to Eden, is the place where man's spirit will be

most wholly alive, the creative mind and the aspiring soul having a free range. At the same time, Marvell acknowledges the traps of such beliefs, partly by representing himself as falling into them in a somewhat absurd way, as when he falls on the grass. The playful manner allows the appearance of a range of ideas and images. The tone, light but taut, helps assess the various possibilities, and suggests the degree of Marvell's commitment to them.

In the crucial sixth and seventh stanzas, Marvell plays with the images of dissociated minds and souls. As usual, he admits only approval of the supposed behaviour of mind and soul. The force of the poetry, however, is to establish a more complex judgment.

In the sixth stanza, Marvell begins to play the game of pretended dissociation of the self that has appeared earlier in such poets as Shakespeare (Sonnet 146: "Poor soule, the center of my sinfull earth"), Donne (passim, including The Second Anniversary: "Up, up, my drowsie soule" (339)), and George Herbert ("Church-monuments": "While that my soul repairs to her devotion"):

Mean while the Mind, from pleasure less,  
Withdraws into its happiness:  
The Mind, that Ocean where each kind  
Does streight its own resemblance find;  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other Worlds, and other Seas;  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green Thought in a green Shade.

William Empson's fine, if obscure, discussion of the poem, comments on the ambiguities here, including those of "from pleasure less"<sup>8</sup>; J.B. Leishman is less generous to Marvell: "Marvell's clumsy inversion, here as often elsewhere, has produced an unintended ambiguity"<sup>9</sup>. Intended or not, the ambiguity of the stanza's first couplet is a suggestive one: "pleasure less" is contrasted to "its happiness". If the emphasis falls on "its", the comparison stressed is between Marvell's succumbing to the physical pleasures of the garden and the mind's succumbing to another kind of pleasure; if the emphasis falls on "happiness", then Marvell is contrasting "pleasure" with "happiness" as being a different -- and inferior -- thing. However we take the contrast, the mind is shown as withdrawing even further than the withdrawal Marvell has already made from "busy Companies of Men" into the garden, and to be seeking something enjoyable, which we are invited to see as some kind of contemplation. Contemplation is traditionally regarded as the highest form of human activity, because it brings man closest to God, even allowing some share in his creative powers, an idea that underlies the last four lines of the stanza. Marvell's poem, however, qualifies its approval of such contemplation.

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<sup>8</sup>Some Versions of Pastoral (London, 1935), ch.IV.

<sup>9</sup>The Art of Marvell's Poetry, 2nd ed. (London, 1968), p. 312.

The pun on "streight" suggests the limits of one sort of human activity, the merely reflective. If the word implies immediacy, it also implies a simple unchanging reflection and a narrowness, all things being in effect frozen in the mind's oceanic reflection of them. The alternative to this uncreative and limiting reflection is said to be, paradoxically, a creative annihilation:

Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other Worlds, and other Seas;  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green Thought in a green Shade.

The mind, it seems, is praised for creating things transcendently green. But there is also a significant stress on "Far" followed by the repeated word, "other"; annihilation is a curiously destructive form of creation, and the product, "a green Thought in a green Shade" is a rather monotonous and insubstantial substitute for the splendid variety of the created world -- including the more variously coloured and far more substantial fruit of the preceding stanza. Whether the mind works as oceanic mirror or as annihilating creator, its products are different from -- and in significant ways inferior to -- the things of the created world. The withdrawn mind has its shortcomings, and its happiness can be self-indulgent and destructive. The pleasure -- which is Marvell's own, the dissociation of mind being only a pretence -- is still exciting

and real, a delight which the poem, for all its qualifications, affirms enthusiastically.

The dissociation conceit is taken even further in the seventh stanza's account of the soul:

Here at the Fountains sliding foot,  
Or at some Fruit-trees mossy root,  
Casting the Bodies Vest aside,  
My Soul into the boughs does glide:  
There like a Bird it sits, and sings,  
Then whets, and combs its silver Wings;  
And, till prepar'd for longer flight,  
Waves in its Plumes the various Light.

Marvell uses the notion that the soul, imprisoned in the body, will break out whenever it has the chance, drawing closer to the divine. He thus continues his defence of garden-withdrawal on the grounds that it encourages this desirable movement of the soul. Yet there is a strong element of parody in the picture of soul as bird, sitting preening itself in the branches of a tree. The parody is not entirely destructive: one may well experience an exciting elevation of the spirit while meditating in a garden, and the poem responds warmly to that experience. But the stanza also implies that the images of separation are intrinsically absurd, that the behaviour of this soul in splendid isolation from body, mind, and all else is self-regarding and perhaps as vain as the pretensions of



men who "themselves amaze / To win the Palm, the Oke, or Bayes."

Detailed meanings in this stanza are notoriously difficult to agree about, and much commentary has focussed on it. To take one case that is relevant to my present discussion, what is the precise meaning of "till prepar'd for longer flight"? Frank Kermode's gloss reads: "resting, as it were, between the created and intelligible worlds in the process of its Platonic ascent"<sup>10</sup> Marvell plays too, I think, with the idea, used in Donne's Second Anniversary, that the soul will fly up to heaven only after death: the converse is that the trees are the limit as long as man remains alive and thus partly mortal. Further, in terms of the image as Marvell presents it, the soul can stay in the tree only while Marvell is in the garden,

Here at the Fountains sliding foot,  
Or at some Fruit-trees mossy root.

The context then tends to make "till" an anticipation of a departure from the garden, with the implication that the necessary preparation for "longer flight" must take place in a more active and public environment than the one provided by the garden.

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Marvell: Selected Poetry, (New York, 1967), p. 108.

The stanza, like the poem, presents many such difficulties and we could argue endlessly about various interpretations of detail. That very fact is something a reader must assess, regardless of his own preference among interpretations. The critic must balance between ponderous explication that denies the evasive playfulness of the verse and a simple-minded underestimation of the subtlety that is there, of the learning that lies behind the poem. However we gloss it, the poetry merges gracefully a number of possibilities. One purpose of Marvell's play in "The Garden" becomes clearer as we move further into the poem: Marvell will gladly praise the pleasures and virtues of garden-withdrawal, but he sees its dangers and challenges the proposition that men should remain in the garden. Whatever the hazards of "busie Companies of Men", whatever limitations "the Bodies Vest" may impose on the soul, man is a social being and a mortal one. If his spirit is to live well, he must face these facts: garden-withdrawals, good and valuable though they be, must be kept in perspective.

The poem's last two stanzas return to the themes of the first two, seeing them from new perspectives. The second stanza offered a simple contrast:

Fair quiet, have I found thee here,  
 And Innocence thy Sister dear!  
 Mistaken long, I sought you then  
 In busie Companies of Men.

Your sacred Plants, if here below,  
 Only among the Plants will grow.  
 Society is all but rude,  
 To this delicious Solitude.

The eighth returns to themes of solitude and company:

Such was that happy Garden-state,  
 While Man there walk'd without a Mate:  
 After a Place so pure, and sweet,  
 What other Help could yet be meet!  
 But 'twas beyond a Mortal's share  
 To wander solitary there:  
 Two Paradises 'twere in one  
 To live in Paradise alone.

The close verbal echo of Genesis<sup>11</sup> provides an important clue to Marvell's position. The logical extension of the case Marvell seems to be arguing -- for the superiority of solitude -- brings a direct challenge to God's view of what is best for man, even before the Fall. However Marvell may feel about the fact, it is not man's lot to wander solitary in Eden; realistically, he recognises that the given mortal condition, ordained by God -- even if His wisdom baffles ours -- is the true test for any theories of the good life.

Marvell again uses grammatical ambiguities which depend on where the stress falls. In the line, "To wander solitary there", we tend to stress "solitary" since the main line of

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<sup>11</sup>"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." (Gen.ii,18).

thought is that man was given company even in Eden. But the word "there", if given even equal stress, is a reminder that man may still "wander solitary" elsewhere. The following couplet ends with a similar ambiguity: the main line of argument suggests that "alone" is making a point about solitude in Paradise, but if "alone" governs "Paradise" -- meaning "only" rather than "by himself" -- Marvell seems to suggest that even if Paradise were accessible, as it is by analogy in the garden, man must also live in other places. For better or for worse, the garden is only one part of the world men live in.

The final stanza has almost the air of a casual post-script to an argument which even earlier has tended to be presented as a series of semi-epigrammatic observations. But it is important as a resolution for many of the poem's tensions, the very casualness perhaps emphasising this. Marvell turns from various conjectures to look relatively directly at what is before him in the garden:

How well the skilful Gardner drew  
 Of flow'rs and herbes this Dial new;  
 Where from above the milder Sun  
 Does through a fragrant Zodiack run;  
 And, as it works, th'industrious Bee  
 Computes its time as well as we.  
 How could such sweet and wholesome Hours  
 Be reckon'd but with herbes and flow'rs!

Although the stanza may hint at the idea of God as "Gardner" of the world's "Dial" -- with perhaps a glance at Donne's much-favoured pun on Christ as "Sun" -- it seems primarily a comment on an actual garden and a human gardener. In any case, the reference to "the skilful Gardner" offers an image of human labour which can complement that of "herbs and flow'rs" rather than be contrasted to it as were the human labours rejected in the first stanza. Unlike those men who "themselves amaze", this gardener has made an arrangement orderly and meaningful and in harmony with natural processes. The labour of the gardener is related to the sun, that recurrent sign in Donne and Marvell of man's mortality, but also the source of his light and life. The dial of the garden is an indication that the mortal lot can be made more "fragrant", that the inevitable sun may be "milder".

To recognize that man's lot can be sweetened is a modest but more appropriate suggestion of the garden's importance than earlier extravagant praises. The contemplating Marvell can now speak of "we", returning implicitly to company of other men. Reference to the work of "th'industrious Bee" confirms a new attitude to industry, and leads into the final couplet: it is through man's labour and free choice that "herbs and flow'rs" can become a measure of his time.

The sense of resolution that marks this final stanza is confirmed if we look at qualities other than its thematic significance. Marvell is now less inclined to act a part than he was earlier, and the tone alters for a quieter, less argumentative and less ambiguous praise of the garden. The word-play in this stanza, as in the likening of the Bee's computing to that of men, tends to resolve tensions rather than to create them. The quiet wit of the stanza concludes with what is first of all a compliment to the excellence of a particular garden.

For all its dangers, the garden is a delightful and a good place. If I have stressed Marvell's awareness of its shortcomings, let us remember how well he asserts its virtues. The poem is both praise and warning, an affirmation of the delights of garden solitude and ease, and a recognition that the true nature of man does not fit the absolutes to which a garden-lover may be tempted. In the garden and in the poem, a man may play at being pure spirit or pure vegetable. The play is relatively harmless when one is likely to fall only on grass, although the background of the "All flesh is grass" proverb hints at more dangerous falls, especially when the poem goes on to consider the Paradise lost through the Great Fall.

The poem also suggests a way of partially recovering from that Fall: even within its own structure, the activities of mind and soul follow the fall of the sensual man. Like the parodied soul, Marvell's own poem "waves in its Plumes the various Light", playfully contemplating a variety of views and insights in an attempt to restore something of the clear light lost with the Fall. Considering that Plumes can also become pens and that the soul "sits, and sings", Marvell may well be, among other things, commenting on the value of poetry: such comment would be appropriate to "The Garden" itself. Always intelligently self-conscious and aware of his limits, Marvell has playfully and pleasantly responded to the garden and to the variety of traditional discussions around gardens to shed light on the recurrent problem of how man may live best in his confused and 'amphibious' situation.

## III

Upon Appleton House is a most discursive poem, ranging over many subjects and adopting a variety of voices. Marvell adopts the manner of a tourist guide early in the poem and at the end, but for a long time casually ignores the pretence that he is leading a particular group around the grounds on a particular day. The poem is held together not only by this erratic guided tour, but by recurrent themes. Once again, the question of choosing between withdrawal and public commitment is considered from various viewpoints. The poem considers the question of perspective, the theme that how a man sees things depends on where he is standing. This is related to questions of appearance and reality: words like "seem", "appear", and "as if" recur. As an extension of this theme, the poem considers sport and play, and the very activity of writing poetry. Many writers on Marvell have given accounts of the poem in some or other of these terms.<sup>12</sup> My own account

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<sup>12</sup>The most important commentaries include: Harry Berger Jr., "Marvell's 'Appleton House': an Interpretation," Southern Review (Adelaide), I, 4 (1965), 7-32; Rosalie L. Colie, "My Echoing Song": Andrew Marvell's Poetry of Criticism (Princeton, N.J., 1970), Part IV; M.J.K. O'Loughlin, "This Sober Frame: A Reading of 'Upon Appleton House'," in George deF. Lord (ed.), Andrew Marvell: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968); Joseph H. Summers, Introduction to his Marvell (New York, 1961). Other items are mentioned in the Bibliography and in subsequent notes.



is more selective than many of these, and emphasises some important features which relate this poem to those considered above and to the terms in which I discuss them.

John Wallace notes of the poem:

One of the most curious features of Upon Appleton House is that Marvell has carried the 'as if' process much further, so that the objects of his vision enjoy an uncertain status in the real world . . . .

The explanation of this slipperiness is that Marvell is looking not at things but at images, which are themselves reflections either of an outside reality or of the qualities of their owner, Lord Fairfax.<sup>13</sup>

In his 'explanation', Wallace seems, like many critics before him, diverted from the poetry by preconceptions about Marvell's 'Platonism'. The poem does not substantiate this kind of distinction between "appearance" and "reality". Its language suggests not simply that we can know 'reality' only through its 'appearances', but that reality exists only in appearances, of which contradictory accounts may be given with comparable validity.

When Marvell makes an explicit contrast between the two, his account of what 'is' becomes even more extravagant than his

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<sup>13</sup>Destiny His Choice, p. 233.

account of what 'seemed':

Then, to conclude these pleasant Acts,  
Denton sets ope its Cataracts;  
 And makes the Meadow truly be  
 (What it but seem'd before) a Sea.  
 For, jealous of its Lords long stay,  
 It try's t'invite him thus away.  
 The River in it self is drown'd,  
 And Isl's th'astonish'd Cattle round. (LIX)

The contrast is made with the earlier lines:

When after this 'tis pil'd in Cocks,  
 Like a calm Sea it shews the Rocks:  
 We wondring in the River near  
 How Boats among them safely steer. (LV)

In the earlier passage, "we" are said to be deluded by appearances which we know to be illusory; in the later, Marvell represents himself as being really deceived, as indulgently accepting fantastic accounts.

The previous stanza has raised in a playful way the question of the variety and the reliability of perceptions:

They seem within the polisht Grass  
 A Landskip drawn in Looking-Glass.  
 And shrunk in the huge Pasture show  
 As Spots, so shap'd, on Faces do.  
 Such Fleas, ere they approach the Eye,  
 In Multiplying Glasses lye.  
 They feed so wide, so slowly move,  
 As Constellations do above. (LVIII)

Each couplet gives a different likeness for the cattle in the meadow, depending on how they are perceived, and on how that

perception compares with perceptions of other things. By seeing them from one point of view, Marvell recognizes a pattern in their movement similar to that of the stars, one that would not be obvious in a closer inspection of either. The first couplet made quite a different observation about our perception of the cattle in relation to our perceptions of paintings and mirrors. Marvell offers his range of possibilities in light of the obvious fact that they are 'only' cattle feeding. He is doing more than showing his skill, he is confirming a point which is made often in the poem, in similarly playful ways: to say that these are 'only cattle' is not a true enough statement. They are more than that, and what they are depends on the person perceiving them, and on the way in which he perceives them.

The poem offers the proposition that truth is relative to men's perceptions, and accordingly examines the reliability of men as perceivers. Marvell's stay in the woods allows him to make some assessment of his own reliability as observer and commentator. The following stanza appears during a sequence where a characteristically precise observation of natural things mingles with a sententiousness which, for this poem especially, is equally characteristic:

Thus I, easie Philosopher,  
 Among the Birds and Trees confer:  
 And little now to make me, wants  
 Or of the Fowles, or of the Plants.  
 Give me but Wings as they, and I  
 Streight floting on the Air shall fly:  
 Or turn me but, and you shall see  
 I was but an inverted Tree. (LXXI)

Those two characteristics converge in the word "easie". In the preceding stanzas, Marvell has observed the work of the "Hewel" and the trees chosen for destruction, an activity which demands rural withdrawal, the ease which precedes contemplation -- and wonder, as T.S. Eliot remarks in Little Gidding:

I said: "The wonder that I feel is easy,  
 Yet ease is cause of wonder . . . ."

At the same time, Marvell recognizes that his "philosophy" is an "easie" one, relatively superficial in its moralizing commentary:

Nor would it, had the Tree not fed  
 A Traitor-worm, within it bred.  
 (As first our Flesh corrupt within  
 Tempts impotent and bashful Sin.  
 And yet that Worm triumphs not long,  
 But serves to feed the Hewels young.  
 While the Oake seems to fall content,  
 Viewing the Treason's Punishment. (LXX)

The stanza is subtle, witty, and clever in its ready judgments and in its use of the natural order as parable for the political order and for the spiritual battles within men. But its power

lies less in the moralizing which seems to be its point than in the swift evocation of processes of corruption and retribution that take place in many areas.

Marvell recognizes that his strength is more that of the Fool than that of the Philosopher. He recognizes too that the withdrawal preceding his 'easy philosophy' is potentially disabling. The issues are ones discussed above with respect to "The Garden": reduction to a vegetative state is seductive but dehumanising. This poem expands the theme in its own terms. Consider the force of the two "buts" in this couplet:

Or turn me but, and you shall see  
I was but an inverted Tree. (LXXI)

In this stanza he has over-emphasised his closeness to birds and trees, both declaring and lightly mocking his own tendency to withdraw from practical responsibilities. He has almost floated. As an "inverted Tree" his roots would be in heaven or stretching towards it; but his home is on earth and he knows it. As in "The Garden", a natural but spurious attempt at being pure spirit will easily reduce a man to a less than human state.

Such withdrawal has advantages as well as dangers; some of the advantages are suggested in later stanzas, such as this one:

Out of these scatter'd Sibyls Leaves  
 Strange Prophecies my Phancy weaves:  
 And in one History consumes,  
 Like Mexique Paintings, all the Plumes.  
 What Rome, Greece, Palestine, ere said  
 I in this light Mosaick read.  
 Thrice happy he who, not mistook,  
 Hath read in Natures mystick Book. (LXXIII)

Marvell shares the wisdom of the ages through an activity of his "Phancy". The complex pun on "light Mosaick" is a suggestive commentary on the activities taking place. "Light" is necessary if he is to read; but he is also reading something light -- as against heavy or solemn -- yet worthy of the reverence given to the 'Mosaic' books of the Bible. The mosaic before him is a collection of different colours and items, brought together by chance, but woven by fancy. In this respect, the mosaic before Marvell resembles the poem itself.

Marvell claims that he performs remarkable feats, but he is eager to mock what he has done, to insist that it is 'only play'. During the interlude in the woods, he continues to stress his own irresponsibility:

Then as I careless on the Bed  
 Of gelid Straw-berryes do tread. (LXVII)

He suggests the debilitating effect of his behaviour in the woods:

Then, languishing with ease, I toss  
 On Pallets swoln of Velvet Moss;  
 While the Wind, cooling through the Boughs,  
 Flatters with Air my panting Brows.  
 Thanks for my rest ye Mossy Banks,  
 And unto you cool Zephyr's Thanks,  
 Who, as my Hair, my Thoughts too shed,  
 And winnow from the Chaff my Head. (LXXV)

Marvell goes on to represent himself as 'playing' upon the world  
 as an invulnerable nuisance:

How safe, methinks, and strong, behind  
 These Trees have I incamp'd my Mind;  
 Where Beauty, aiming at the Heart,  
 Bends in some Tree its useless Dart;  
 And where the World no certain Shot  
 Can make, or me it toucheth not.  
 But I on it securely play,  
 And gaul its Horsemen all the Day. (LXXVI)

The interposed "methinks" is a hint that the Marvell represented  
 as hiding in the trees is somewhat deluded about his own security,  
 that the withdrawal is an invitation to dangerous self-indulgence.

The natural play of things has been a subject often in  
 the poem, and a justification of sorts for Marvell's own play.  
 A punning couplet links nature's play with Marvell's:

And see how Chance's better Wit  
 Could with a Mask my studies hit! (LXXIV)

This "Wit" is both a game and a means of understanding; the  
 word "Mask" pinpoints the relation of the two. Whether as a

face-covering -- as in Greek drama -- or as a dramatic performance like Comus, a "Mask" may be an especially apt way of stressing certain truths. The gratuitous play of nature, as of Marvell's "studies", is defensible as means of knowledge. Again, there is reference to the function of the poem itself. The poetry's importance is analogous to that of Appleton House itself, where pretences and distortions are meaningful, provided the reader of the meanings can recognize their limits, and is "not mistook".

Initial praise of the sobriety of Appleton House seems to reflect unfavourably on Marvell's poetic practice:

Within this sober Frame expect  
 Work of no Forrain Architect;  
 That unto Caves the Quarries drew,  
 And Forrests did to Pastures hew;  
 Who of his great Design in pain  
 Did for a Model vault his Brain,  
 Whose Columnes should so high be rais'd  
 To arch the Brows that on them gaz'd. (I)  
 . . . . .  
 But all things are composed here  
 Like Nature, orderly and near:  
 In which we the Dimensions find  
 Of that more sober Age and Mind,  
 When larger sized Men did stoop  
 To enter at a narrow loop;  
 As practising, in doors so strait,  
 To strain themselves through Heavens Gate. (IV)

Soon after, an ambiguous phrasing brings an implied comment on the worth of Marvell's own methods:



So Honour better Lowness bears,  
 Then That unwonted Greatness wears.  
 Height with a certain Grace does bend,  
 But low Things clownishly ascend.  
 And yet what needs there here Excuse,  
 Where ev'ry Thing does answer Use?  
 Where neatness nothing can condemn,  
 Nor Pride invent what to contemn? (VIII)

The most obvious meaning of the comment that "low things clownishly ascend" is that the lowly will make fools of themselves if they become too ambitious; but it is also the case that by adopting the role of Clown or Fool, a lowly person may ascend to a level otherwise inaccessible. This is the case with Marvell -- a mere poet and employed tutor compared with the great public figure, Fairfax -- whose clownish manner in the poem is his means of approaching 'high' truths.

One reason for Marvell's doing so is that his extravagant poetry also has the sober qualities associated with the house. The indulgence remains within bounds. The extravagance of the initial compliment is balanced by the measured rhythms, the formal structure, and the refusal of Marvell to go very far without some kind of self-rebuke. At one point in the poem, Marvell explicitly rejects the opportunity to indulge in paradox and witty extravagance:

Let others tell the Paradox,  
 How Eels now bellow in the Ox;  
 How Horses at their Tails do kick,  
 Turn'd as they hang to Leeches quick;  
 How Boats can over Bridges sail;  
 And Fishes do the Stables scale.  
 How Salmons trespassing are found;  
 And Pikes are taken in the Pound. (LX)

Marvell has his fun for one stanza, but this kind of poetry is for the "others" to "tell".<sup>14</sup>

Marvell is selective about the ways in which he will play because he is, for all his detachment about particular events, engaged in a serious business, a celebration of Fairfax's estate and of the values it can represent. His study -- and practice -- of play is related to his study of withdrawal. I have looked already at Marvell's own withdrawals into and within the woods. The poem's other important withdrawal is that of Fairfax himself moving out of public life. These two withdrawals reflect on each other and are seen in relation to other with-

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<sup>14</sup>"As the flood rises to force the poet into his wood-sanctuary, he refuses to treat that event passionately, but passes it off with a shrug -- "Let others tell" the paradoxes of the deluge." -- Colie, "My Ecchoing Song," p.268. I am not convinced that in this poem Marvell is much less passionate about the imagined flood than he is about many other events; the distinctive force of "Let others tell" is directed towards ways of writing about the flood rather than to the flood itself.

drawals and playful activities.

Important images for those who play and withdraw come when Marvell turns from the gardens to the meadows:

And now to the Abbyss I pass  
Of that unfathomable Grass,  
Where Men like Grashoppers appear,  
But Grashoppers are Gyants there:  
They, in there squeking Laugh, contemn  
Us as we walk more low than them:  
And, from the Precipices tall  
Of the green spir's, to us do call.

To see Men through this Meadow Dive,  
We wonder how they rise alive.  
As, under Water, none does know  
Whether he fall through it or go.  
But as the Marriners that sound,  
And show upon their Lead the Ground,  
They bring up Flow'rs so to be seen,  
And prove they've at the Bottom been.  
(XLVII-XLVIII)

The grasshoppers represent not only poets, but all men who, withdrawn from the world of action, gaze contemptuously and laughingly upon it.<sup>15</sup> In their elevated position, they can view the relations of things, freed from distractions and from the demands made of those who engage in action "at the Bottom",

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<sup>15</sup>On the grasshopper as representative of the poet, see D.C. Allen, Image and Meaning: Metaphoric Traditions in Renaissance Poetry, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, 1968), ch. 9, "Richard Lovelace: "The Grasshopper"."

those who "walk more low then them". If grasshoppers have reason to "contemn" those who walk below, the complacency of "there squeking Laugh" renders them also contemptible. Superior watchers though these grasshoppers may be, the sheer extravagance of the language in this passage reminds us that their own perspectives may be misleading also. Furthermore, only those who dive into the meadow can expect to emerge with the "Flow'rs".

Marvell, by the position he gives himself in the poem, is liable to the same strictures as the grasshoppers. So too, in some respects, is Fairfax, who has withdrawn from public life to the play-world of Appleton House. Marvell is both tactful and sympathetic in suggesting this:

And yet their walks one on the Sod  
 Who, had it pleased him and God,  
 Might once have made our Gardens spring  
 Fresh as his own and flourishing.  
 But he preferr'd to the Cinque Ports  
 These five imaginary Forts:  
 And, in those half-dry Trenches, spann'd  
 Pow'r which the Ocean might command. (XLIV)

Here is the opposite movement from Cromwell's departure "from his private Gardens" into the public realm. If there is something ludicrous in a man of such potential playing in his "imaginary Forts", Marvell is also quick to add that such

withdrawal not only pleases God, but is in itself necessary  
for sanctity:

For he did, with his utmost Skill,  
Ambition weed, but Conscience till.  
Conscience, that Heaven-nursed Plant,  
Which most our Earthly Gardens want.  
A prickling leaf it bears, and such  
As that which shrinks at ev'ry touch;  
But Flowrs eternal, and divine,  
That in the Crowns of Saints do shine. (XLV)

Although Marvell asserts the rightness of Fairfax's withdrawal,  
the force of the poetry in these stanzas is to stress what is  
lost when a man who

Might once have made our Gardens spring  
Fresh as his own and flourishing

has settled instead for games in the garden.

Marvell has shown that he can construct imaginary worlds  
in his mind -- an activity referred to in "The Garden" -- and he  
sees Fairfax as able to go further and give concrete embodiment  
to his play-world. As we have seen often, both withdrawal and  
commitment are ambivalent choices for Marvell and the good life  
seems to demand a balance of each. As a witty poem in favour  
of the artful place of withdrawal, Upon Appleton House is, for  
all of the qualifications, an endorsement of withdrawal, of  
orderly worlds of the imagination rather than the chaos of public

affairs. Near the end of the poem he praises the estate thus:

'Tis not, what once it was, the World;  
 But a rude heap together hurl'd;  
 All negligently overthrown,  
 Gulfes, Deserts, Precipices, Stone.  
 Your lesser World contains the same.  
 But in more decent Order tame;  
You Heaven's Center, Nature's Lap.  
And Paradise's only Map. (LXXXXVI)

While an ordered estate may be more attractive than a chaotic world, it is not necessarily good to stay there. "Thus if the estate finally offers "Paradise's only Map," it does so still only as an inn, fitly reminding us how to earn that blissful seat -- by leaving it."<sup>16</sup> To this pertinent comment, I add the observation that a map is most useful for those actively engaged in seeking the place represented.

More striking than this hint is the contrast of the final stanza, for the eloquent praise is not the last word of the poem.<sup>17</sup> For his final coup, Marvell again changes tone:

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<sup>16</sup>M.J.K. O'Loughlin, "This Sober Frame: A Reading of "Upon Appleton House" in Lord (ed.), Andrew Marvell: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 141.

<sup>17</sup>It is easy for some critics to imagine that it is. Dennis Davison's Survey of Upon Appleton House in his The Poetry of Andrew Marvell (London, 1964) concludes with the stanza just quoted. O'Loughlin, in his own terms, does give fair attention to the final stanza.

But now the Salmon-Fishers moist  
 Their Leathern Boats begin to hoist;  
 And, like Antipodes in Shoes,  
 Have shod their Heads in their Canoos.  
 How Tortoise like, but not so slow,  
 These rational Amphibii go?  
 Let's in: for the dark Hemisphere  
 Does now like one of them appear. (LXXXXVII)

The initial "But" suggests that we have had enough of games and of indulgent praise. Marvell, returning to his role of tourist guide, offers to usher people inside from threatening darkness. Yet his 'no nonsense' manner is accompanied by some of the most extravagant lines in the poem.

The poem returns to a heavy reliance on visual perceptions as a basis for the wit. Things seen now recall earlier images. The inversion of the "Antipodes in Shoes" recalls the "inverted Tree" of an earlier stanza. The previous reference to tortoises came at the beginning of the poem:

The low roof'd Tortoises do dwell  
 In cases fit of Tortoise-shell:  
 No Creature loves an empty space;  
 Their Bodies measure out their Place. (II)

The threatening "dark Hemisphere" contrasts to the security represented by the dome within the house:

Yet thus the laden House does sweat,  
 And scarce indures the Master great;  
 But where he comes the swelling Hall  
 Stirs, and the Square grows Spherical. (VII)

Yet that same "dark Hemisphere" also resembles one of the boats which resemble the tortoise shells which implicitly resemble the sober and protective frame of Appleton House itself! Other similar observations could be made, confirming this final stanza's importance as one where major themes in the poem are drawn together.

For all of its decisive air, the poem's close does not 'answer' the question of whether the place to which men withdraw is really so protective and free from the threats which all men face. The decisive "Let's in" depends on an ambiguous reason:

for the dark Hemisphere  
Does not like one of them appear.

"Appear" is a challenging word to use here. It recalls the poem's recurrent consideration of the "appearance-reality" theme, which we have seen to be related to the examinations of withdrawal and of playfulness. This is the first time in the poem that anyone but Fairfax deigns to enter the house itself, that "sober Frame" which is the centre of the estate's coherence. The extravagant and complex finale, while concluding with enigma, concludes too with a fine compliment to the house, and so to Fairfax: when threats appear, that house represents



safety and a shield from natural forces.<sup>18</sup>

Mary Fairfax receives the poem's most fulsome praise. While the function claimed for her is comparable to that of Elizabeth Drury in Donne's Anniversaries, her effect is less universal, since she gives order only to the "lesser World" of her father's estate:

'Tis She that to these Gardens gave  
That wondrous Beauty which they have;  
She streightness on the Woods bestows;  
To Her the Meadow sweetness owes;  
Nothing could make the River be  
So Chrystal-pure but only She;  
She yet more Pure, Sweet, Streight, and Fair,  
Then Gardens, Woods, Meads, Rivers are. (LXXXVII)

As elsewhere in the poem, Marvell uses the language of extravagant praise to express certain truths. The writing is less successful in this section of the poetry: too much operates only as vapid gestures, in spite of the obvious intentions behind the writing.

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<sup>18</sup>My comment here derives from an observation by S. Goldberg, "Andrew Marvell", Melbourne Critical Review, No. 3 (1960), p. 50:

"And the final invitation to turn indoors from the darkness of the world, which is perhaps really the darkness of man himself, involves a compliment to the house as large as the whole poem and yet, with the unobtrusive delicacy Marvell typically conceals in "wit", a compliment precisely measured."

The most notable stanza within the "Maria" section of the poem is a digression from direct praise of the heroine:

Go now fond Sex that on your Face  
Do all your useless Study place,  
Nor once at Vice your Brows dare knit  
Lest the smooth Forehead wrinkled sit:  
Yet your own Face shall at you grin,  
Thorough the Black-bag of your Skin;  
When knowledge only could have fill'd  
And Virtue all those Furrows till'd. (LXXXXII)

The macabre effect of this stanza comes from that characteristic quality of much of Marvell's best writing, the combination of sharp visual observation and the use of extraordinary perspective. The success of the allegory in the stanza contrasts with the weakness of the earlier lines on Maria:

Blest Nymph! that couldst so soon prevent  
Those Trains by Youth against thee meant;  
Tears (watry Shot that pierce the Mind;)  
And Sighs (Loves Cannon charg'd with Wind;)  
True Praise (That breaks through all defence;)  
And feign'd complying Innocence;  
But knowing where this Ambush lay,  
She scap'd the safe, but roughest Way. (LXXXX)

Marvell disappoints, too, when offering another kind of praise, through images of Maria's effect on her surroundings:

The viscous Air, wheres'ere She fly,  
Follows and sucks her Azure dy;  
The gellying Stream compacts below,  
If it might fix her shadow so;  
The stupid Fishes hang, as plain  
As Flies in Chrystal overt'ane;  
And Men the silent Scene assist,  
Charm'd with the Saphir-winged Mist. (LXXXV)

The intended images of peace and order appear as images of paralysis and enervation. The poetry is suggesting the cost of imposing order upon nature's chaotic plenitude, but the cost to the poetry itself is a discrepancy between an intention of praise and the effects of a certain kind of peace. Maria's effect is as potentially unhealthy as that of the false withdrawal which the deceitful nuns preached to her ancestor, Isabella Thwaites. I do not believe that Marvell wants to stress that similarity, but he does regard her present withdrawal as a prelude to an emergence comparable to that of Isabella Thwaites:

Hence She with Graces more divine  
 Supplies beyond her Sex the Line;  
 And, like a sprig of Mistletoe,  
 On the Fairfacian Oak does grow;  
 Whence, for some universal good,  
 The Priest shall cut the sacred Bud;  
 While her glad Parents most rejoice,  
 And make their Destiny their Choice. (LXXXXVIII)

Once again withdrawal from the world is presented as an incomplete way of life.

Several factors work against Marvell's using Mary Fairfax in his poem as successfully as Donne uses Elizabeth Drury. Donne's Second Anniversary succeeds as so much more than a complimentary poem because the terms of compliment are integrated with a theological-philosophical discussion that makes free use of a

range of language inaccessible to Marvell. Donne has the advantage of celebrating a dead heroine, whose loss produces the chaotic condition now obvious to all, whose beneficial effects are seen as existing chiefly in memory. He can afford to be vaguer about the identity of "her" than can Marvell, with Mary Fairfax walking in his presence. Making Maria an enemy of play is an incongruous move in view of his own dependence on apparently trivial "Toyes" such as those he must put away in her presence:

But now away my Hooks, my Quills,  
And Angles, idle Utensils.  
The young Maria walks to night:  
Hide trifling Youth thy Pleasures slight.  
'Twere shame that such judicious Eyes  
Should with such Toyes a Man surprize;  
She that already is the Law  
Of all her Sex, her Ages Aw. (LXXXII)

Elsewhere gestures of sobriety have preceded great extravagance in the writing, and the success of the writing has come from a play of the pose against the extravagance, and that in turn against the sober order in the verse. With Maria, such interplay is harder to manage, Marvell's clownish pose jarring awkwardly with the attempt at fulsome praise. Donne, for all of his extravagance, is much less of a clown.

In his poetry, Marvell's play is usually more forced than Donne's. The difference in quality is connected with the distance which Marvell's playfulness puts between the man himself and the

figure he cuts in his poems. Whether he uses personae or speaks in his own voice, he has difficulty in engaging directly his major concerns. Donne, on the other hand, in spite of his distancing devices and mannerisms, writes often from the heart of his own experience. In his love poems, Donne writes as one participating in the relationships being discussed, and in his religious poems he is frequently shown as wrestling with problems of salvation. We tend to see Marvell brilliantly weighing life's possibilities, issues that clearly concern him, but which he can confront only by seeing them with reference to others or by severe distortion of his own presence.<sup>19</sup>

There are many possible reasons for this difference. One may be a sharper sense of anguish that goes with Marvell's comic style; his relative sadness makes a more direct confrontation of events too difficult. A cause of this sadness may be insecurity. One factor in this could well be a decay of belief during the first part of the seventeenth century, between Donne's generation and Marvell's. There is less about which Marvell can be certain, especially in view of the traumatic experience of a civil war.

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<sup>19</sup>Robert Ellrodt comments on the difference in relation to his theme of "self-consciousness": "Le premier [Donne] a une conscience aiguë de son coeur, de ses nerfs, de sa fièvre intellectuelle. Le second [Marvell] tend à dépouiller la conscience de soi de toute particularité concrète, à l'épurer en une conscience de conscience tout idéale," L'inspiration personnelle et l'esprit du temps chez les poètes métaphysiques anglais (Paris, 1960), II, 129.

Besides such factors forced on Marvell by his time, there is the contrast suggested above and evident in the poetry. Marvell, unlike Donne in most cases, does not write his greatest poetry from the basis of relatively secure relationships with others. Marvell has a remarkable capacity for seeing things, even grazing cattle, from many perspectives. At the same time, while we find a commitment to certain values in the light of man's 'amphibious' situation, and a search for people or causes that embody those values, he finds -- in the poems I have discussed -- no person or faith to which he will commit himself unequivocally. While this is his personal misfortune, it is also an important factor behind his particular style of writing.

## CHAPTER V

## THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY

The difficulty of The Second Anniversary arises partly from Donne's apparent ambiguity as to what exactly he is arguing, from the contradictory roles he gives to its main figures, Elizabeth Drury and Donne himself.<sup>1</sup> The subtitle reads, "Of the Progres of the Soule, Wherein: By Occasion of the Religious Death of Mistris Elizabeth Drury the Incommodities of the Soule in this Life and her Exaltation in the Next, are Contemplated." While part of the poem's argument is that things are better after death, it also has a strong sense of the continuity between this world and the next, as represented especially in the life and death of its heroine. It is concerned with the progress of a soul in this world, especially the progress of Donne's soul.

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<sup>1</sup>Among the many studies of The Second Anniversary, the following are especially important: Marjorie Hope Nicolson, The Breaking of the Circle, 2nd ed. (New York, 1960), ch.3; Louis L. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Conn., 1962), ch.6; Rosalie Colie, Paradoxia Epidemica (Princeton, N.J., 1966), ch.13; O.B. Hardison, Jr., The Enduring Monument (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1962); P.G. Stanwood, "'Essentiall Joye' in Donne's Anniversaries," TSLI, XXII (1971); the Introduction to John Donne: The Anniversaries, ed. Frank Manley (Baltimore, 1963). I quote from Manley's edition, but have altered his typography slightly, printing i, j, u, and y in accordance with modern usage.

But this concern is developed in paradoxical ways, in response to a paradoxical world.

In this chapter, I look first at the place Donne gives himself in the poem, and at the problems of self-definition that he considers. I consider the place of the poem's heroine, asking who she is and how she is related to the theme of the soul's progress. The possibility of the soul's progress in a fallen world leads to questions about knowledge and about the power of poetry. In the light of my comments on these matters, I look further at why Donne goes about his examination in so strange a way.

The poem concludes with a strong affirmation of Donne's own status:

Thou art the Proclamation; and I ame  
The Trumpet, at whose voice the people came.  
(527-528)

Donne, like his heroine, has a social role. As poet, he praises her and serves others. His role as intermediary has been stressed early in the poem. The opening movement culminates in the lines:

Yet a new Deluge, and of Lethe flood,  
Hath drown'd<sup>2</sup> us all, All have forgot all good,  
Forgetting her, the maine Reserve of all;  
Yet in this Deluge, grosse and generall,  
Thou seest mee strive for life; my life shalbe,  
To bee hereafter prais'd, for praying thee,  
Immortal Mayd . . . .  
(27-33)

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<sup>2</sup>Manley's "drown' us" is surely a misprint.



"Thou seest me strive for life" is a key statement in the poem. The opening lines show Donne striving to understand the world in its present state, and the rest of the poem shows that his strivings depend on his response to the "Immortal Mayd" and to all that she represents. Further, a reader's response to that striving is to affect his, and the world's, hopes for salvation, especially if that response is the creative one of a poet:

These Hymes may worke on future wits, and so  
 May great Grand-children of thy praises grow.  
 And so, though not Revive, enbalme, and spice  
 The world, which else would putrify with vice.  
 (37-40)

Having invoked the "Immortal Mayd", Donne begins that dialogue with his own soul which continues through the poem, a dialogue which demands reflection upon the one who has gone:

Thirst for that time, O my insatiate soule,  
 And serve thy thirst, with Gods safe-sealing Bowle.  
 Bee thirsty still, and drinke still till thou goe;  
 'Tis th'onely Health, to be Hydropique so.  
 . . . . .  
 Looke upward; that's towards her, whose happy state  
 We now lament not, but congratulate.  
 (45-48; 65-66)

He begins to fulfil his prediction that we are to see him strive for life; such life depends on his praising of her, not as an arbitrary reward, but because reflection on her importance is itself a means of discovering life.

In addressing his own soul, Donne sometimes appears to contradict himself, as in these lines:

Thinke then, My soule, that death is but a Groome,  
Which brings a Taper to the outward roome,  
. . . . .  
Thinke thee laid on thy death bed, loose and slacke;  
And thinke that but unbinding of a packe,  
To take one precious thing, thy soule, from thence.  
(85-86; 93-95)

The "thy" of "thy soule" is itself "My soule"! The difficulty highlights one of the problems of self-definition in the poem, and also relates to some of the poem's difficulties. Sometimes Donne uses the word "soul" to refer to a philosophically-conceived thing, that which is in man other than his body. But he also uses the word in a richer sense, referring to something more active, in effect to Donne himself as an intelligent and reflective person. A distinction made early in The First Anniversary anticipates Donne's practice in the Second:

When that rich soule which to her Heaven is gone,  
Whom all they celebrate, who know they have one,  
(For who is sure he hath a soule, unlesse  
It see, and Judge, and follow worthinesse,  
And by Deedes praise it? He who doth not this,  
May lodge an In-mate soule, but tis not his.)  
(1-6)

At times in The Second Anniversary Donne uses the notion of "an In-mate soule", something like the imprisoned bird of Marvell's "The Garden", waiting for the chance to fly from

its cage, "the Bodies Vest", and from a corrupt world. At other times he addresses a soul which is truly "his", which represents his own capacity for understanding and willing, a capacity proper to a man living and acting in the world.

A dualistic 'body-soul' usage allows Donne to stress disgusting and destructive features of life on earth. The 'body' can represent those fleshly things which keep man from what Donne sees as true self-awareness and fulfilment. He overstates one truth, that man is a fallen creature in a fallen world. In his account of 'her', he overstates the complementary truth, the power of incarnate grace to make a holy life, and even heaven, possible on earth: "they're in Heaven on Earth, who Heavens workes do" (l.154). To reconcile both beliefs, Donne has recourse to exaggeration and paradoxical argument. Man on earth cannot see clearly, a point the poem makes often. Donne makes his own contribution to clear sight by a highly serious playing, his own form of "sacred play".<sup>3</sup>

By proposing that he himself is a mysterious fusion of body and soul, thus posing the problem of identity, Donne gives

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<sup>3</sup>The term is derived from Frank J. Warnke, "Sacred Play: Baroque Poetic Style," JAAC, XXII (1964), 455-464, although that article offers little specific help on this poem.

a crucial case of the problems of perspective and identity that dominate the poem. The poem's central concern, from which others radiate, is to discover the nature and possibilities of this mysterious self, seen in relation to the mysterious "she".

## II

Much discussion of both Anniversary poems has been concerned with the identity of the person whose death is lamented and celebrated. Ben Jonson's alleged comment, "that Dones Anniversarie was profane and full of Blasphemies,"<sup>4</sup> is a reminder that the poem was elusive even for an intelligent contemporary. Elizabeth Drury is even more puzzling a figure for twentieth-century readers less familiar with habits of thought which permitted poets to use an image of a departed woman as a symbol of other losses.<sup>5</sup>

Basic to the complex use of this mysterious figure in the poem is Donne's supposition that Elizabeth Drury represents

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<sup>4</sup>From "Ben Jonson's Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden," quoted in Ben Jonson, Works, ed. C.H. Herford and Percy Simpson, I (Oxford, 1925), p. 133.

<sup>5</sup>Examples include the child in Pearl, Beatrice in Dante's Divine Comedy, Perdita in The Winter's Tale. Rilke's use of Vera Knoop in Sonette an Orpheus is a modern example of a similar tendency.

the possibility of incarnate grace, of the Word again made flesh according to the promise of John's Gospel:

But as many as received him, to them he gave power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

(J. 12-14)

On the occasion of Elizabeth Drury's death, Donne decided that "it became me to say, not what I was sure was just truth, but the best that I could conceive."<sup>6</sup> The best he could conceive was one who received God's grace and became like Christ, the Incarnate Word, living and dying in the most perfect way possible for fallen, yet redeemed mankind.

In many ways such a person will approach the condition of men before the Fall:

Shee, to whom all this world was but a stage,  
Where all sat harkning how her youthfull age  
Should be emloyd, because in all, shee did,  
Some Figure of the Golden times, was hid.<sup>7</sup>

(67-70)

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<sup>6</sup>From a letter quoted in Edmund Gosse, The Life and Letters of John Donne (London, 1899), I, 306.

<sup>7</sup>The idea of a "Figure" being "hid" in her recalls the discussion of the notion of "figure" in relation to medieval English drama by V.A. Kolve, The Play Called Corpus Christi (London, 1966). His comments on the ease with which an earlier age, by no means vanished when Donne wrote, saw the relation of events is relevant to the ways in which time is condensed in this poem. The reference to "stage" in l.67 recalls the practice of medieval drama, the liberal and conscious use of anachronisms, as expounded by Kolve

Yet even Elizabeth Drury must die: one lesson of her life and death is that even for the best of mankind, "Death must usher, and unlocke the doore" (1.156). Donne knows that such perfection is impossible, but since theoretically men are given power to become sons of God, to be fully informed by grace in their lives, such a figure may meaningfully be supposed and contemplated. Further, he sees that this very possibility is a challenge to dualist conceptions, to the belief that all flesh is inevitably corrupt. Her flesh is presented quite differently in the poem, even though she is subject to death:

Shée, of whose soule, if we may say, t'was Gold,  
 Her body was th'Electrum, and did hold  
 Many degrees of that; we understood  
 Her by her sight, her pure and eloquent blood  
 Spoke in her cheekes, and so distinckly wrought,  
 That one might almost say, her bodie thought,  
 Shée, shée, thus richly, and largely hous'd, is gone.  
 (241-7)

Although the reference to "a yeare" is a reminder that this is a memorial poem to Elizabeth Drury, the poem's first references to her boldly suggest images of Christ:

Nothing could make mee sooner to confesse  
 That this world had an everlastingnesse,  
 Then to consider, that a yeare is runne,  
 Since both this lower worlds, and the Sunnes Sunne,  
 The Lustre, and the vigor of this All,  
 Did set; t'were Blasphemy, to say, did fall.  
 (1-6)

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and shown especially in the work of the Wakefield Master. Kolve's discussion of 'play' is enlightening also.

"The Sunnes Sunne" must be Christ, and only of God is so strong a word as "Blasphemy" applicable. Donne, picking up the scriptural notion that the Word may become flesh in the true believer, wittily draws the further conclusion that the death of such a person, Elizabeth Drury, is a passing of the Word of God from the earth. He considers the consequences of such a passing, arguing that the world now is indeed without its source of life; he pretends to be amazed that the world continues to exist, and proposes a series of startling images to explain this existence. Once more we find Donne expanding a scriptural suggestion: "All things were made by him; and without him was not made any thing that was made" (John i. 3). The poem plays with chronology and with our notions of time as it merges the recent departure of Elizabeth Drury with the Fall, the original separation of the world from the Word by whom it was made.

Throughout the poem, "she" alternates between her roles as a person and as the Incarnate Word. Mysteriously she is both, a status reasserted in the comment at the poem's end, "Thou art the Proclamation", which picks up something of the richness of the term 'logos' for which 'word' is so feeble a translation. The poem insists that her presence in the world could make it a good place:

Who could not lacke, what ere this world could give,  
 Because shee was the forme, that made it live;  
 Nor could complaine, that this world was unfit,  
 To be staid in, then when shee was in it;

. . . . .  
 Shee, shee embrac'd a sicknesse, gave it meat,  
 The purest Blood, and Breath, that ere it eat.

. . . . .  
 Shee, who had Here so much essentiall joye,  
 As no chance could distract, much lesse destroy;  
 Who with Gods presence was acquainted so,  
 (Hearing, and speaking to him) as to know  
 His face, in any naturall Stone, or Tree,  
 Better then when in Images they bee:

. . . . .  
 Who being heare fild with grace, yet strove to bee,  
 Both where more grace, and more capacitee  
 At once is given: shee to Heaven is gone,  
 Who made this world in some proportion  
 A heaven, and here, became unto us all,  
 Joye, (as our joyes admit) essentiall.  
 . (71-4; 147-8; 449-54; 465-70)

If she can be a pattern for life as well as for death, some such condition must again be possible, and the poem sets this possibility against the apparent corruption of the world and its own calls for rejection of the world.

It is important, then, that men learn to live well in this world. References to the Resurrection stress the continuity of the after-life with the present, and Elizabeth Drury shows how easy and intimate a thing such continuity may be:

Shee, who in th'Art of knowing Heaven, was growen  
 Here upon Earth, to such perfection,  
 That shee hath, ever since to Heaven shee came,  
 (In a far fairer print,) but read the same.  
 (311-315)



Death, of course, is necessary, and it is often invoked as the great liberator:

But thinke that Death hath now enfranchis'd thee,  
Thou hast thy'expansion now and libertee.  
(179-180)

Only after death can we expect to know "essentiall joy" (1.387) rather than "accidental joyes" (1.384). But some "essentiall joy" has been available on earth:

Shee, who had Here so much essentiall joye,  
As no chance could distract, much lesse destroy;  
Who with Gods presence was acquainted so,  
(Hearing, and speaking to him) as to know  
His face, in any naturall Stone, or Tree,  
Better then when in Images they bee.  
(449-454)

Although Elizabeth Drury had to die to realize her potential, something valuable is possible in this life. The First Anniversary offered a simple and commonplace association of birth and death:

Will yearly celebrate thy second birth,  
That is, thy death. For though the soule of man  
Be got when man is made, 'tis borne but than  
When man doth die. Our body's as the wombe,  
And as a mid-wife death directs it home.  
(450-454)

The Second Anniversary is interested in a new possibility, the power of grace, an intermediate occasion of paradoxical birth-

death during a person's life:

For when our soule enjoyes this [death] her third birth,  
 (Creation gave her one, a second, grace.)  
 (214-215)

The good person brings some kind of heaven into being upon  
 earth:

(For they'are in Heaven on Earth, who Heavens workes do,)  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . shee to Heaven is gone,  
 Who made this world in some proportion  
 A heaven, and here, became unto us all,  
 Joye, (as oure joyes admit) essentiall.  
 (154; 467-470)

To experience the second birth of grace is to anticipate in a  
 real way the third birth of death.

The poem exploits the metaphoric possibilities of  
 these associations. When the soul makes its spectacular  
 journey to heaven, the image becomes a metaphorical account  
 of the second birth of grace as well as of the third birth  
 of death:

But thinke that Death hath now enfranchis'd thee,  
 Thou hast thy'expansion now and libertee;  
 Thinke that a rusty Peece, discharg'd, is flowen  
 In peeces, and the bullet is his owne,  
 And freely flies: This to thy soule allow,  
 Thinke thy sheell broke, thinke thy Soule hatch'd but now.  
 And thinke this slow-pac'd soule, which late did cleave,  
 To'a body, and went but by the bodies leave,  
 Twenty, perchance, or thirty mile a day,  
 Dispatches in a minute all the way,  
 Twixt Heaven, and Earth . . . .  
 (179-189)

The repeated "thinke" insists on the importance of the flight being imagined, on the need for an imaginative liberation as prelude to an expansion of the spirit. The poem is continually engaged in making such imaginative expansions possible.

When Donne contemplates the soul's journey "at, and through the Firmament" (l.206), the methods of the passage seriously qualify the apparent rejection of the world. The strength of the writing at its best derives from its perceptions of mortal things:

And as these stars were but so many beades  
 Strunge on one string, speed undistinguish'd leades  
 Her through those spheares, as through the beades, a string,  
 Whose quick succession makes it still one thing:  
 As doth the Pith, which, least our Bodies slacke,  
 Strings fast the little bones of necke, and backe;  
 So by the soule doth death string Heaven and Earth.  
 (207-213)

A few lines later Donne makes a parenthetical comment on the use of splendid 'earthly' comparisons:

Shée, in whose body (if wee dare prefer  
 This low world, to so high a mark, as shee,)  
 The Western treasure, Esterne spicerie,  
 Europe, and Afrique, and the unknowen rest  
 Were easily found, or what in them was best.  
 (226-230)

It may be true that earthly things are feeble reflections of the divine, but they are also splendid and they are what men have to work with. If they are reflections, they are also

signs of God, a point often made by George Herbert's poems. A person striving for life through contemplation of an Elizabeth Drury can find it only by looking around him and, his capacities expanded by grace and by poetry, by assessing the significance of what he finds. The withdrawn "annihilating" mind of Marvell's "The Garden" and of the situations parodied in Marvell's reference are firmly rejected by the procedure of The Second Anniversary.

### III

Even for her, perceptions on earth were dimmed. Donne considers the general question of human perceptions in this passage:

In this low forme, poore soule what wilt thou doe?  
 When wilt thou shake off this Pedantry,  
 Of being taught by sense, and Fantasy?  
 Thou look'st through spectacles; small things seeme great,  
 Below; but up into the watch-towre get,  
 And see all things despoyle of fallacies:  
 Thou shalt not peepe through lattices of eies,  
 Nor heare through Laberinth of eares, nor learne  
 By circuit, or collections to discern.  
 In Heaven thou straight know'st all, concerning it,  
 And what concerns it not, shall straight forget.  
 There thou (but in no other schoole) maist bee  
 Perchance, as learned, and as full, as shee.  
 (290-302)

The exhortation seems to apply to the present. Although clear vision is to be possible only in heaven, the willing soul can

do something to prepare for that vision. But its preparation must rely to some extent on those "lattices of eies" and "Laberinth of eares": a soul trying to ascent "the watch-towre" in this life cannot do so divorced from eyes and ears. The poetry shows considerable dependence on the senses, on methods of discerning "by circuit, or collections," on accumulating a variety of perceptions.

The metaphoric strength of this very passage is instructive. The word "forme" presents the soul as a schoolboy in a low grade subject to pedantry -- in contrast to the "schoole" of Heaven -- and thus something to be pitied and patronized: "poore soule what wilt thou doe?" "Forme" also, among its variety of possible meanings, suggests a mould, compelling shape upon something naturally fluid. In the quiet imagery of "all things despoyle of fallacies" is the suggestion of attractive booty awaiting a plunderer. The brilliant image of peeping through lattices of eyes catches well the paradox that the understanding offered in the poetry depends on those very acts which are apparently mocked.

Herein is a rationale for Donne's own procedure as poet. Man on earth cannot "see all things despoyle of fallacies." More prosaic, 'scientific' approaches to understanding will not give the truth, whereas poetry, by recognising

and embracing the shortcomings of human vision, is able to enlarge man's imaginative capacities, to assist the progress of the soul during life on earth. The poem's final lines imply that the "Proclamation" of her life and of all that it means would not be heard at all without "the Trumpet" of the poet. The poet in a fallen world may not save men, but he can help:

These Hymes may worke on future wits, and so  
 May great Grand-children of thy praises grow.  
 And so, though not Revive, enbalme, and spice  
 The world, which else would putrify with vice.  
 For thus, Man may extend thy progeny,  
 Untill man doe but vanish, and not die.  
 These Hymns thy issue, may encrease so long,  
 As till Gods great Venite change the song.  
 (37-44)

The musical imagery suggests a connection and continuity between the poet's music and that of heaven: the songs of poets are in some ways preparatory for the great song which will come after the Resurrection. The truths reached by the poet are in some ways reflections of divine truths, of things "despoiled of fallacies" but remaining "things", and prepare men for a comprehension of them.

Such critics as Louis L. Martz have traced the general shape of the argument in The Second Anniversary, usefully establishing that it is more integrated than a random collection

of striking images and eloquent passages.<sup>8</sup> In spite of the formal coherence, the poem remains evasive in many ways, Donne seeming to declare himself firmly for a number of positions. I have already looked at places where the manner and language of the poetry complements or even contradicts the positions apparently advanced in the 'argument'. Two passages especially make an impression that seems out of proportion to their apparent place in the 'argument'.

Early in the poem comes the image of the beheaded man:

Or as sometimes in a beheaded man,  
 Though at those two Red seas, which freely ran,  
 One from the Trunke, another from the Head,  
 His soule be saild, to her eternall bed,  
 His eies will twinckle, and his tongue will roll,  
 As though he beckned, and cal'd backe his Soul,  
 He grasps his hands, and he puls up his feet,  
 And seems to reach, and to step forth to meet  
 His soule.

(9-17)

The length of this simile seems out of proportion to its function in Donne's argument, while the obvious delight in its details seems indecorous and puzzling in view of the

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<sup>8</sup>The Poetry of Meditation, pp. 236-237.

horror of the image and its apparent use as an image of "motion in corruption" (1.22). The apparent point of the comparison is that not only does the world deprived of its "Sunne" give a misleading semblance of vitality, but that it does so in a way grotesque and monstrous, like the body without its head. Yet the grotesque image is presented in so playful a way, in a rhythmic movement that so sparkles with delight that the beheaded man, and like him the world, sparkle in their very perversity.

The man "seemes to reach, and to step forth to meet / His soule." If this represents "motion in corruption", it presents a pregnant suggestion as to what such motion may mean. The behaviour of the man represents the body's natural desire for union with the soul. The idea of the soul sailing to "her eternall bed" is a reminder that an active soul needs to be associated with a body. Indeed, Donne's sense of the Resurrection and of its relation to the proper unity of man, as presented through the poem, severely qualifies the notion casually offered at this point that resting in an eternal bed is all that the soul seeks after death: that is certainly not what "she" does. If the man and the world he represents are grotesque, the cause is an unnatural separation which can be healed: the world, like the man, seeks lost unity.



The point I wish to stress at present is that Donne is formally presenting a simple view about the world's loss and introducing, as if in passing, an impressive image which suggests that things are more complex than Donne explicitly admits. A comparable passage comes later in the poem, where the language that apparently invites disgust also offers a more complex view than the overt argument permits:

Thinke that no stubborne sullen Anchorit,  
Which fixt to 'a Pillar, or a Grave doth sit  
Bedded and Bath'd in all his Ordures, dwels  
So fowly as our soules, in their first-built Cels.  
(169-172)

Donne seems to linger upon repulsive details; the pairing of words adds to this effect: "stubborn sullen", "a Pillar, or a Grave", "Bedded and Bath'd". But the precision and rhythmic energy of the lines imply a delight stronger than mere perversity. The cause for delight becomes apparent in view of the details of the comparison. The hermit has chosen to live thus for the sake of his salvation, and the ordures with which he lives are his own. So too the soul must seek out its salvation in and with a body, a body which had no existence except as the soul gave it one. While the open expression of disgust allows Donne to write of one group of truths, the style and the implications of the imagery allow him to suggest complementary ones.

In both of these passages, Donne plays up his role as Preacher, thundering forth with those diatribes which must sound simple and uncompromising if they are to be effective: all seems subordinate to general propositions that ignore the more subtle implications of his imagery. Upon this basic structure, Donne as Poet offers more subtle insights, hints which link up with more explicit statements elsewhere, aspects of the truth which take on more meaning as they become part of the complex movement of the whole poem. The presence of Donne as Preacher is qualified always by the sense of self-dialogue which I described earlier: he is publicly addressing himself, striving for life.

The puzzling nature of the poem is a response to the puzzling nature of the problems it explores. Rosalie Colie has commented that the Anniversaries "accept contradiction and paradox as the basis of limited human existence and of human understanding still more limited, and simply build upon that acceptance."<sup>9</sup> In this poem Donne builds "upon that acceptance" by astonishing comic procedures that allow him to dramatize himself and his themes with great detachment and with great imaginative scope that depends on the most extravagant conceptions. Its success depends on the fusion of a gaily playful style and an analysis of central questions about human life.

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<sup>9</sup>Paradoxia Epidemica, p. 429.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

Good poems properly demand their own terms of discussion. Their distinctive qualities are easily falsified in an account that seeks to link such unique works. At the same time, their similarities are important. In discussing the poems, it has been appropriate to keep in mind the broad areas of concern proposed in the first chapter. Central has been the question of whether such weight and insight as the poems have exists beside or in spite of their writers' tendency to 'vent wit', to utter grand extravagances, to strike astonishing poses. My answer has been "No", and I have argued for the importance to the poems of qualities which come generally under the heading of 'playful'.

While it may be a critical commonplace that the style of a work is part of its meaning, that the manner in which a poet speaks is important as what he 'says', such insistence has proved especially relevant to Donne and Marvell. The striking of poses in some of their poems is itself a matter for scrutiny and a way of commenting on matters that the poems explicitly consider. The cheeky manner of "The Sunne Rising" is a poem in which the style supports the claims of gay irresponsibility being argued. "To his Coy Mistress" is a

comparable case, the urbanity befitting a poem which argues for a willingly chosen irrationality as a way of coping with a world which is too well-ordered. The more sober play of "A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies Day" is itself a way of making that preparation "towards her" which the poem asserts must happen. "The Garden" repeatedly enacts those very attitudes which it holds up for scrutiny. The Second Anniversary is at once a persuasion to certain kinds of study and an example of how such study may take place.

To speak of poets playing parts is to comment on their self-dramatization. I have commented in earlier chapters that Marvell is more guarded than Donne about presenting himself in poems, more likely to work through a relatively impersonal mode. The difference is only a relative one. Even in "A Dialogue between the Soul and Body" or the "Mower" poems, the voice is clearly Marvell's. Donne, although more open, provokes our uncertainty by seeming to hold different attitudes at the same time. This playfulness of pose is more than a conventional mannerism for these poets. Theirs is not the "squeaking Laugh" of Marvell's grasshoppers. They usually present themselves as working out important questions, sometimes under the impulse of a momentous occasion, sometimes at more leisure, but usually as personal problems rather than as intellectual exercises. The

theatricality with which they do so is an admission of their own tendencies to extravagance and paradox and puts those habits in perspective. They are self-aware not only in themes of their discussion but also in the manner of that discussion.

Extravagance in style accompanies extravagance in metaphor and intelligently-controlled metaphoric life is the basic strength of these poems. Part of the control derives from that witty self-awareness I have mentioned; the poems offer abundant examples of what is to be controlled. The poems show a remarkable grasp of the variety of things existing in the world, and at the possible relations between them.

For all the apparent insobriety of some of their claims, the final effect is usually very sound and sober, that sobriety being a fruit of their realism. Many of the poems ponder a bewildering variety of alternative actions and judgments, and present far-ranging aspirations. The choices they finally offer are usually clear ones, although simplistic decisions or assertions are played against quite complex imaginative activity. If the poets refuse to be prey to attractive fantasies, such as solitary life in a garden, they refuse also to abandon the right to complex moral judgments about, say, the action-contemplation choice even when a Cromwell

is involved, or the right to assert the real power of the unattainable, whether that be represented by lovers having "World enough and Time", by a "happy Garden-state", or by Elizabeth Drury, the "Idea of a Woman".

The choices made in the poems are made with repeated reference to man's subjection to divergent impulses, to a tension crudely represented by a soul-body contrast, but more subtly explored in the poets' consideration of their own positions. Both in argument and in their own rationale, the poems reject dualism, in asserting man's incarnate nature. We find often the paradox, in "The Mower's Song", in some Songs and Sonnets, in The Second Anniversary, of fleshly activities having the power of spiritual liberation. The attractions of 'pure spirit', of permanent withdrawal from 'worldly' contacts, are seen as a vanity akin to that of fleshly indulgence, for the nuns in Upon Appleton House or, with less sinister implication, for Marvell himself in "The Garden".

The language of normal discourse being inadequate to cope with some of life's most important mysteries, they alter normal linguistic habits and the perspectives they imply. The importance of poetry which does not follow the usual rules is demonstrated by their own success. The poems' extravagances

of manner are a response to the extravagances of life. If they are playful in style, that is partly because Donne and Marvell perceive life as something of a game, albeit a serious one which may involve the remoulding of kingdoms or the salvation of souls.

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