FORM AND VISION IN FOUR METAPHYSICAL POETS

by

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between form and content in the religious

verse of the metaphysical poets is of great importance in

tracing the development of a tradition which includes such

dissimilar poets as Donne and Traherne. The nature of the

personal religious experience, as expressed in the religious

poetry of the first half of the seventeenth century, undergoes

significant change. This change is most apparent in the verse

of Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne, and may be described

basically in terms of the time when individual soul and God

are united. For Donne this union is unattainable in the present

and is to be found only after death, as the Divine Poems and the

Anniversaries demonstrate; in the poems of Traherne, however, it

is experienced at the moment of birth and becomes a continuing,

present reality. As we trace in the work of the four poets the

gradual bringing into this world of the soul's union with God,

we discover also a process in which the barriers of the self are

broken down. Individual personality becomes increasingly

identified with the Divine Personality, and finally nothing

intervenes between present reality and the long-sought vision.
This vision, symbolized in Donne's _Anniversaries_ by the
liberation after death of the soul of Elizabeth Drury, is
progressively interiorized in the verse of the later poets,
and in Traherne's lyrics finds a new embodiment in the living
experience of the poet.

Such a change can be traced in the forms the poets use.
We may find not only in the inner structure of line and stanza,
but also in the total visual arrangement and organizing
principle of a poem or group of poems, formal equivalents to
the kind of vision expressed. The _Anniversaries_ and _Divine_
Poems of Donne and the poems in Herbert's _The Temple_ are
notable for the complexity of their controlling figures and
the intricacy of their verbal structure. In Vaughan's _Silex_
Scintillans and in the poems of Traherne, however, we find
simpler and more flexible organizing principles and a corres-
ponding decline in the use of complex symbols and conceits.
In general, the formal and structural changes which occur
between Donne and Traherne may best be seen as a progressive
simplifying and paring down--a removal, in the verse itself,
of all that might stand between individual soul and God.

But while the nature of the actual religious experience
changes in the four poets, and with it the inner structures and

outer forms of their verse, there remains one single, informing

vision of God. God is encountered and described in different

ways, but His essential nature is recognized as changeless

and unconditioned. In the same way we must examine the differ-

ent formal principles within a larger context. In all four

poets the concept of the poem as a celebration of and a

sacrifice to God remains constant. In all four poets the act

of poetic creation itself is analogous to the greater creative

Act of God; the poems themselves are individual acts of praise

which celebrate as they embody the multiplicity-in-unity of

the Creation. Within this context a study of the best and

most characteristic verse of these poets shows that there is

nothing accidental or unplanned in the methods of organization

each used to convey his religious experience. The different

poetic forms we encounter, many of them unique, are our first

and most compelling guide to the spiritual core of the poetry;

they are the means by which we recognize not only the uniqueness

of the individual experience, but also its place in the larger

framework of universal praise.

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INTRODUCTION

This study of four metaphysical poets of the seventeenth

century has its origin in a specific question: how can we best

relate the religious poetry of John Donne to that of Thomas

Traherne, so that these two apparently dissimilar poets,

writing at either end of a period which produced so much

religious literature, can be seen as part of one evolving

tradition - a tradition which also includes George Herbert and

Henry Vaughan? What is the relationship between the complex,

intricately structured <u>Divine Poems</u> and <u>Anniversaries</u> of Donne,

and the free-flowing, repetitive and almost structureless

poems of Traherne? The specific question, which serves to

define the historical limits of this study, is only part of a

more general question which relates in some degree to all

religious poetry: how is the religious experience itself to be

embodied and conveyed through the medium of verse? If the

experience of God and the understanding of His nature vary

significantly from one poet to another, how are these

differences expressed in terms of the poetry itself?

In suggesting answers to both the specific and the

general question, I have chosen to concentrate on the actual

forms the poets use. The word 'form' here includes both

outer shape and inner structure--the total 'arrangement' of

a poem as well as the composition of its separate parts. I

have chosen to approach the poems not from the point of view

of theme and image, where these have meanings independent of

the particular poetic context in which they occur, but from

the point of view of the poem itself as a unique verbal

structure, appealing to eye and ear alike, and with its own

significant rhythmical and visual pattern.

Much attention has been given to common rhetorical devices,

common meditative and devotional patterns, and common religious,

philosophical and scientific beliefs, all of which linked the

metaphysical poets to their predecessors, and to the European

Renaissance in general. Less attention has been given to the

way in which the individual poets took common devices, patterns

and beliefs and made from them poems whose own individual forms

are uniquely expressive of a particular and personal experience

of God. One of the most striking results of this expressiveness

is the quality of 'inevitability' which is to be found in so many religious poems of the period--a quality which resides not so much in the appropriateness of a particular poetic form to the experience described, but in the feeling that no other form could have been used so effectively to convey that experience. It is as if each encounter with God, each moment of insight, demanded a new kind of expression in response to His own infinite expressiveness.

There is to be found in almost all the metaphysical poets a constant pleasure in devising new stanza patterns, new juxtapositions of rhyme and meter, new modulations and harmonies of sound, within the wide range of lyric possibilities that the Elizabethan poets first began to explore. But in the four religious poets I am concerned with the pleasure is not that of inventiveness for its own sake. Nor is it virtuosity only which ensures that in so many cases a particular verse form appears only once. The care and conscious craftsmanship no less apparent in Vaughan and Traherne than in Donne and Herbert testify to the abiding belief of these poets that the religious poem was at once a hymn, a sacrifice and a celebration. The Church itself provided in its scriptures and its liturgy a rich store of verbal patterns expressive of the praise and prayer of all men. The metaphysical poets drew widely from these

common patterns, but their most famous and distinctive poems describe rather the unique encounters between the individual soul and God. These poems combine what is universal with what is most personal. We may find, for instance, common devotional and meditative patterns in the work of all four poets I have chosen to discuss. Such patterns, however, cannot define the essential quality of each poet's separate vision; nor, finally, can they define what the poets share at the deepest level--a vision of God at once personal in its effect and universal in its application.

By examining the form and inner structure of individual poems we may discover what 'essential,' rather than 'accidental,' qualities these four poets have in common, and what is distinctive to each. I hope to show that the radical formal changes that occur between Donne and Traherne are neither random in nature nor determined by the vagaries of 'taste.' They are in fact 'inevitable,' given the changes which occur in the nature of the religious experience itself-- here considered as both personal experience, and as a larger historical process. But it is one thing to notice that changes occur; it is another to ascribe to them a consistent pattern. Even a brief comparison of one of Traherne's poems with one of Donne's is sufficient to indicate the radical changes which

occurred in theme and form. But is it possible to trace the way in which these changes occurred, to find the intermediary steps by which the complex, analytical and introspective verse of Donne gave way in time to the simple, even naive, lyrical outpouring of Traherne? In the poetry of Herbert and Vaughan we can, I believe, trace the successive stages by which this change occurred. Each of the four, while remaining a distinctive poet in his own right, represents part of an evolution in religious thought which is most clearly and immediately seen in the poetic forms each uses.

In this study I shall be giving equal attention to each of the four poets chosen, in the belief that each casts an illuminating light on the others. Thus in my use of the term 'evolution' I do not wish to imply a rigid historical framework, nor will I pay special attention to chronological sequence within a particular poet's work. Such a sequence is in many cases impossible to establish exactly; it must also leave out many important considerations in the development of style and form in religious poetry--considerations relating not to calendar time but to the time of the soul, and ultimately to the timelessness of God. That the deepest meaning of a religious poem is essentially unaffected by its particular historical context I take for granted; the form in which that meaning is conveyed, however, does respond to an historical

evolution of poetic style, and each poet, by a combination of
innovation and imitation, plays a part in this evolution. I
believe that this is the only kind of evolution which can be
accurately traced without entering into speculation outside of
the poetry itself. It is an historical evolution only in so
far as different poetic forms and styles succeed each other in
time. But its course is determined not so much by an historical
pattern of cause and effect, as by a continuous process of
remembrance of things past and anticipation of things future.
While occurring in time, this process is not regulated by time.
Its ultimate nature is mysterious, but the verbal structures are
there before us, concrete and unalterable, and it is in terms
of these structures and the observable differences and similar-
ities between them that I wish to establish patterns of change
in the religious experience itself.

There are several limitations to this study. The first
arises necessarily from a belief that the forms of metaphysical
poetry are ultimately self-sufficient: that is, it is not
necessary to consult works of contemporary poetic theory, manuals
of rhetoric, or the examples of other poets, in order to 'explain'
the form of a particular poem. The poets themselves tell us,
often in great detail, how their religious poetry is to be read
and what the principles of its construction are--and with the
possible exception of Vaughan, they tell us in their own poetry.

If we first take heed of these general principles, the care
these poets take in their verse ensures that the form of any
particular poem will generally explain itself. I have tried,
therefore, to keep outside reference to a minimum. I have
excluded both theoretical works by other authors and the
various prose works of the poets themselves.

The second, more important limitation concerns the choice
of the poetry itself. I have excluded from discussion all the
secular poetry of the poets under consideration. The distinction
between 'secular' and 'religious,' particularly in the case of
Donne, is admittedly difficult to establish--though it seems
to have raised few difficulties for the poets themselves. My
choice of poems, however, is restricted to those which describe
in a subjective manner the encounter between the individual
soul and God. As a general rule, these are the only religious
poems of these poets in which verse forms become significant
in themselves. Therefore, I have not included in this study
religious poems of a purely expository or didactic nature, or
orthodox devotional exercises in which the record of distinct
personal encounter is absent. In such poems as Herbert's
The Church-porch and Vaughan's verse commentaries on passages
from Scripture, the chosen form is essentially a serviceable
vehicle, uninteresting in itself. But the major religious
poems of all four poets are not of this type; they are poems in

which form reflects personal experience at the deepest level.

A similar principle underlies the choice of poets. I have chosen four poets who best portray the personal search for union with the Divine, and whose poetry embodies in its forms the nature of this search. I have not included Richard Crashaw because, though a major devotional poet, his poetry on the whole is more a ritualistic celebration than a record of personal search; the basis of subjective experience is transformed into stylized modes of hymn and incantation in which personal elements are of secondary importance. Nor do Crashaw's poetic forms appear to arise inevitably from a specific situation, as do those of the other poets; rather, they are skillful embellishments of given themes. The exclusion of Andrew Marvell rests primarily on the fact that little of his poetry is essentially religious in nature. Although in many of his poems there is a definite mystical strain, few if any could be described as expressions of a personal encounter with God. Finally, such is the diversity to be found within the four poets I have chosen, that the introduction of more poets would, I feel, make the pattern which I wish to establish less clear through less relevant example.

In discussing Donne's _Divine Poems_ and the _Anniversaries_, Herbert's _The Temple_, Vaughan's _Silex Scintillans_ and the verse

of Traherne, I shall examine, in addition to the best known
poems in these collections, lesser known poems which, regard-
less of poetic merit, show significant thematic and formal
features. Some poems which may appear either atypical or
of only minor importance in themselves, nevertheless point
forward in a significant way. For instance, specific themes
and forms may be of only minor importance in Donne, and
found in only two or three poems of The Temple, yet assume
major importance in Vaughan and Traherne. Conversely,
certain themes and forms which are dominant in Donne are less
important in Herbert, and may disappear entirely in Vaughan
and Traherne.

I will also emphasize poems, again regardless of merit,
which deal specifically with the nature of poetic creation and
poetic form as the poet sees them. The religious poet in
particular is likely to see them in the light of the Creation
and Forms of God, and it is possible here to establish a
principle which remains constant, despite formal and thematic
change--a principle which does in the end unite the widely
differing groups of poems, and makes the four poets funda-
mentally one in their poetic purpose, if not in the means by
which they fulfill that purpose.

This purpose has been briefly alluded to already. It is,
in the widest sense, to praise God, and at the same time to know

Him to the fullest possible extent and to enter into a state
of union with His Will. Within this general purpose lies a
belief that the poem which expresses the soul's longing for
greater knowledge and unity is itself the result of a
creative act, reflecting in its own limited way the greater
Act of the Creator. And since this greater Act inevitably
links the individual self with the rest of the Creation, so
there is a tendency in all four poets to regard all of Nature
as meaningful, its design and pattern reflecting the mind of
God. This principle of harmony makes it inevitable that the
poem itself should be as far as possible a similar reflection
of God's Design, its beauty and proportion an acknowledgement
of His beauty and proportion. This idea did not of course
originate with the metaphysical poets. It is they, however,
who fully recognized its possibilities, who carried it all the
way into the heart and mind and applied its principles to an
understanding of the deepest and most intimate personal
experience. It is this experience that is finally ordered,
given the shape and form of poetry, and offered up as
sacrifice. Whether the individual poem expresses joy or
penitence, resignation or despair, it is still a sacrifice to
God, who is the ultimate reader of the poem and its ultimate
Cause. In this sense the poetry of Donne, Herbert, Vaughan
and Traherne takes us beyond the limits of poetry itself to

contemplation of the Divine. Within this light rather than in the light of any one literary or poetic principle we most clearly see the unity of these poets.

It is easier to suggest briefly what unites the poets than it is to summarize the complex changes in tone, theme and form which account for their individuality. Just as the knowledge of God arises from many individual situations and states of mind, so does the verse of these poets take on many different shapes and patterns. Even within a single poet's work can be heard different voices expressing different aspects of the self in its search for wholeness. I have attempted as far as possible within each chapter to define these special voices and patterns in terms of larger organizing principles. We can find poems, for example, whose pattern of development is controlled by an outer, imposed form, as with Donne's sonnets and Herbert's dialogues and emblems; by one central figure or symbol, as in Donne's Anniversaries and "Goodfriday, 1613;" by a real or imagined sequence of events, as in Herbert's and Vaughan's narrative poems; by the associative, non-logical expansion of a single idea through a series of examples or variations, as in Herbert's "Man" and Vaughan's "Rules and Lessons;" or by an inter-relating series of simple words and images, as in most of Traherne's poems.

Similarly, we will find poems of a strongly antithetical nature where lines, stanzas and sections are 'played off' against each other and brought together through juxtaposition and logical analysis to form an intricately structured whole; or we will find poems in which stanzas proliferate in a kind of spontaneous overflow in which analytic method and logical sequence are replaced by the direct, sensuous depiction of a universe in which God and self are one. We will find poems in which grammatical structure is complex and controlling images multi-structured and ambiguous, and poems which cultivate an extreme simplicity of image and syntax; poems in which space and time patterns form their own intricate structures, and poems in which space and time, as perceived in this world at least, scarcely seem to exist. There are poems in which, as in many of Donne's, inner conflict seems to do violence to the form which contains it, and poems, like Traherne's, where the voice of discord is never heard, and line flows into line, stanza follows stanza, in a sustained and seamless unity.

I should only wish to suggest now that the great variety of forms and methods of organization can be resolved into a meaningful pattern if we consider the movement from Donne to Traherne, by way of Herbert and Vaughan, as a movement from complexity to simplicity. We will find, for instance,

progressively less dependence on complex situations and figures,
and a greater emphasis on direct and spontaneous modes of
expression. We will find that the poetic unit becomes smaller
and simpler: the Anniversaries and The Temple are large and
intricately structured poetic wholes, the meaning of which is
not fully apparent without complete assimilation of the whole.
Silex Scintillans does not have this kind of overall structure,
and by the time we reach Traherne we find that each individual
poem contains within itself a vision of the whole, and is in a
sense interchangeable with almost any other poem. While it is
true that stanza pattern after Donne becomes increasingly
complex in terms of line length and rhyme scheme, the iambic
foot becomes constant and individual words and images become
increasingly simple. Paradox, antithesis and complex conceit
give way to a simple, transparent vision.

I have mentioned only a few instances of the movement toward
simplicity in form. To describe the change in the nature of
the religious experience itself as a movement toward simplicity
would be misleading--yet, as I hope to show, the quality of
'inevitability' in the work of these poets is such that no
radical formal change could occur without at the same time
reflecting deep changes in the way God is experienced and under-
stood by the individual poet. We cannot say that in Vaughan

and Traherne experience and understanding of God are simpler

than in Donne and Herbert; we can, however, find in the later

poets a strong desire for the direct, unmediated vision. We

can find an increasing dissatisfaction with any order other

than the total order of God; Vaughan and Traherne both seem

to demand an intimate yet complete realization of God's order

within the self, and both show a movement away from the more

logical, analytical methods of Donne and Herbert. There is

a gradual shift in modes of thought from the analytical to

the intuitive and the mystical. That which constitutes error

for Donne takes up more space in the <u>Anniversaries</u> than the

direct contemplation of God; in Herbert the revealing and

explaining of error are as important as the actual description

of the soul's union with God. If in their analysis of error

Donne and Herbert are concerned mainly with the preparation

of the soul for its future transformation, Vaughan and Traherne

show less interest in the preparation, and more in the trans-

formation itself. In Traherne, finally, that transformation

occurs not in the future but in the present, and it is so

immediate and all-consuming that no construction of mind and

intellect, such as Donne's symbolic Elizabeth Drury or Herbert's

Temple, mediates between the individual soul and the vision it

has attained. To express this immediate unity of the soul in

God Traherne replaces the complex organizing structures of Donne and Herbert with his own simpler expression.

Finally, I have endeavored to make my own approach to each poet reflect the change from complexity to simplicity that I have outlined briefly above. In Donne's poems my main concern is the large controlling figures and the intricate relationship in each poem between the juxtaposed parts and the complex poetic whole. In The Temple and Silex Scintillans of Herbert and Vaughan I am less concerned with the overall structure of these two collections of poems than with the smaller details of rhyme, line length and stanza pattern which make each poem, however short, a self-contained unit expressive of a particular situation or state of mind. Traherne I have approached initially from the smallest possible unit, the word itself, in order to demonstrate that his poems are based on formal principles significantly different from those of the earlier poets. In each case I have tried to assess the poems from a critical point of view which best accords with the vision of the individual poet and with the poetic principles he espouses. Such an approach will, I hope, convey the essential quality of each poet and at the same time establish the common end which they all shared--greater knowledge of God and His life within the individual soul.

CHAPTER ONE

John Donne

I

It is not easy to trace a consistent pattern of development

in Donne's religious poetry. Written over a long period of

time in response to widely varying circumstances, the religious

poems seem to show more differences than similarities. Nor does

it appear that Donne ever conceived of them as a single literary

work, as did Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne in their respective

collections. Nevertheless, it is possible to discover in the

forms of the religious verse a movement towards order and

synthesis which reflects a changing relationship between poet

and God.

The _Divine Poems_, which I will consider first, represent

only part of this development. In them a number of different

Christian themes are expressed, a number of different voices heard, a number of different formal and structural principles explored. But the sonnets, lyrics and meditative and devotional exercises which comprise the Divine Poems, while essential to an understanding of Donne's religious experience, are in many ways a prelude to the long and complex Anniversaries. In describing the different voices and the different formal principles of the Divine Poems, I hope at the same time to trace a movement towards integration of form and integration of religious experience which is not made fully apparent until the Anniversaries—poems which, at once personal, philosophical and ethical in nature, reveal the essence of Donne's religious thought. The Anniversaries must be regarded as religious poems because, while not specifically Christian in content, they show the final result of the poet's investigation of the life of the individual soul on earth and in heaven. They provide also the resolution to problems which remain unanswered in many of the specifically Christian poems. It is these problems I wish to examine first, and in order to do this I have divided the Divine Poems into three groups: first, the "Holy Sonnets;" second, "La Corona" and "A Litanie;" third, the "Annunciation and Passion" and "Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward."

The "Holy Sonnets" provide the first demonstration of
Donne's ability to subject a broad range of religious ideas
and feelings to the discipline of poetic form, and at the
same time to imbue that form with his own distinctive voice.
In view of Shakespeare's achievement we might well ask whether
any further developments in the sonnet form were possible.
The technical skill and the intense feeling of Donne's sonnets
are justly admired, yet it is sometimes felt that, compared
with Shakespeare's, their range is narrower and their interest
confined to an intense but nevertheless restricted investigation
of one man's private relationship with God. But these sonnets
are not just a postscript to the great age of sonnet writing;
they in fact contain the elements of another, older, tradition,
and the coming together of these two traditions marks a new
departure in the use of a well-established form. Since Donne
is the only one of the four poets included in this study to
make extensive use of an exacting and established poetic form
like the sonnet, it is important that we should understand the
changes he wrought in it.

Briefly described, the older of the two traditions which
merge in Donne's sonnets is what Douglas L. Peterson calls "an
uninterrupted tradition of renunciation and penitential lyric,"[1]
beginning in the Middle Ages and continuing into the Renaissance

with such poets as Skelton and Southwell. This religious
literary tradition reached its height in the metaphysical
poets of the seventeenth century, where it became "the
dominant and most vigorous mode of English lyric."[2] On the
other hand we have the English sonnet tradition itself, with
its gradual replacement of Petrarchan idealism by a kind of
native secular empiricism and concreteness, as outlined by
J. W. Lever in The Elizabethan Love Sonnet. As early as Wyatt,
Lever claims, the sonnet came to reflect "a view of life
almost directly antithetical to that of Petrarch. It was
rational rather than imaginative, empirical rather than trans-
cendental, and in matters of love it replaced romantic ardour
by Tudor egotism."[3] The egotism and rationality of the secular
sonnet on the one hand, and the spirituality and renunciation
of the penitential lyric on the other--they do not suggest an
easy or harmonious combination. Yet they do combine in the
"Holy Sonnets," and if the resulting poems are uneven, even
violent in their extremes, so is the relationship with God which
they express.

The English sonnet had certain distinct characteristics,
and Donne's initial choice of this form as a vehicle for his
Christian 'confession' was not an arbitrary one. But if, as
Peterson claims, criticism of licentiousness was one of the main

causes of the religious lyric's reappearance at the end of the century,[4] then why should Donne, as one of the major religious poets of the period, seem almost to go out of his way to express religious experience in the forms and language of secular verse? It does not seem to have been his intention to 'redeem' the form itself, as Spenser may be said to have done in Amoretti. Nor did Donne ask of God, as Herbert did, "Why are not Sonnets made of thee? and layes / Upon thine Altar burnt?" The answer, I believe, lies in the logical and even syllogistic nature of the sonnet itself, in its ability, as developed successively by Wyatt, Sidney and Shakespeare, to embody an argument that moves from premises to conclusions in a way not possible in a simple lyric. For Donne, trained in logic and rhetoric from an early age, such a form would seem to have had an inevitable appeal. He would have been aware of the sonnet's ability to juxtapose quatrains and couplet, octet and sestet, in many suggestive ways; to develop within a short space of time the kind of rationally ordered and persuasive argument that simpler lyric and stanzaic forms were not suited for. But neither casuistry for its own sake nor the refinements of secular love are to be found in these sonnets. They are deeply serious and penitential poems, and an examination of their form will show how Donne was able to adapt to his own religious purpose the sonnet's rational structure.

It is possible to divide the "Holy Sonnets" into two
general thematic groups. One group is based upon the relation-
ship between self, God, and Christ the Redeemer; the main
examples of this group are Holy Sonnets IV, XI, XII and XV.[5]
It will be found that, on the whole, these are the more regular
in their form and diction, due largely to the presence of Christ
who, in these Sonnets, allays all doubt and answers all
questions. For example, Holy Sonnet XV moves steadily forward
in long balanced phrases. Clear breaks between quatrains
permit the orderly development of the sonnet's action, reaching
a climax in the third quatrain with the account of the descent
of the Son, and levelling out finally in the antithetical
couplet which summarizes and concludes the "meditation:"

> 'Twas much, that man was made like God before,
> But, that God should be made like man, much more.
> (p.11, 11.13-14)

The feeling is one of wholeness and completion, of a series of
actions both inevitable and reciprocal, with Christ as the
perfect manifestation of the mysterious interaction between
individual soul and God. The more obvious oppositions of Holy
Sonnet XII--the question-answer relationship between octet and
sestet, the clearly drawn comparison between sinful man and
innocent nature--are likewise resolved in the paradox of the
Incarnation:

> But their Creator, whom sin, nor nature tyed,
> For us, his Creatures, and his foes, hath dyed.
> (p.10, 11.13-14)

The extreme unevenness of the first eight lines of Holy Sonnet

IV, where the soul is suddenly called back to face the imminence

of death, is matched by the perfect balance and the intricate,

almost liturgical repetitions of the conclusion:

> Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke;
> But who shall give thee that grace to beginne?
> Oh make thy selfe with holy mourning blacke,
> And red with blushing, as thou art with sinne;
> Or wash thee in Christs blood, which hath this might
> That being red, it dyes red soules to white.
> (p.7, 11.9-14)

Even the violence of the famous opening of Holy Sonnet XI ("Spit

in my face you Jewes") gives way to a repeated assertion of that

"strange love" by which "God cloth'd himselfe in vile mans flesh,

that so / Hee might be weake enough to suffer woe" (p.9, 11.13-14).

In all these sonnets there is little enjambment, and the intimate

voice of the poet describing his own predicament is at the end

caught up in the general statement of reconciliation in Christ.

The action in each case moves steadily toward the Atonement which

places in harmonious relationship all that was opposed and

antithetical. Only in Holy Sonnet XIII does a more hesitant note

intrude: "What if this present were the worlds last night?" The

soul which seeks the reassurance of Christ is presented with an

analogy, drawn from the poet's "idolatrie," which remains some-

what tenuous. The marked change in tone between second and third

quatrains as sacred and profane are thrown into jarring

juxtaposition, causes a break in the poem and a lapse in the

logical development which the final couplet cannot completely

mend. The significance of Christ's redemptive act seems

almost forgotten, and the persuasiveness of the couplet corres-

pondingly diminished:

> so I say to thee,
> To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd,
> This beauteous forme assures a pitious minde.
>   (p.10, 11.12-14)

The interior stress of this Sonnet and the tendency of the couplet

to polarize rather than to reconcile two extremes are character-

istics of the second group of "Holy Sonnets."

The centrality of the Christ figure is not a constant

principle in the "Holy Sonnets." In the second group a different

kind of thematic structure prevails, and there is a subtle but

important change in the way the sonnet form is used. Instead of

Christ at the center, symbolic of the reconciliation between self

and God, in the second major group of sonnets, particularly I, II,

III, V, VI, VII, XIV and XIX, the self is at the center, caught

in what appears to be an unequal struggle between God and Satan--

unequal because, apparently, God does not choose to fight, and

the self is impotent in the face of the enemy's advances. With

such profound inequalities as its subject, the sonnet's develop-

ment is not towards a balanced resolution, but towards polarity

and despair. Only in Shakespeare's Dark Lady sonnets, with
their significant identification of the lady with the Devil, do
we find something similar--no final equilibrium, but rather a
pitting against each other of opposed elements: in Shakespeare,
poet and lady, in Donne, self and God, soul and Devil. There
is no issue other than a forceful statement of the impasse.

To understand why, in these most antithetical of Donne's
poems, there is no balance or resolution, we must begin with a
basic idea common to all the sonnets of the second group. This
is the idea of a contract between self and God, drawn up a long
time ago, now largely unheeded, but brought forcibly to mind
again with the passing of time and the imminent expiry of the
contract's terms:

> Thou hast made me, And shall thy worke decay?
> Repaire me now, for now mine end doth hast.
>   (I, p.12, 11.1-2)

The idea is established, not only of a delinquent self, reduced
now to passivity, but also of a seemingly delinquent God, who
could act but chooses not to. Instead, like an absentee landlord
unmindful of his own best interest, God turns away while his house
is robbed and his enemy triumphs:

> Why doth he steale, nay ravish that's thy right?
> Except thou rise and for thine owne worke fight,
> Oh I shall soone despaire.
>   (II, p.6, 11.10-12)

The essential tone of many of this second group of sonnets is conveyed here--despair before the fact that the contract is allowed to fall into the hands of frauds and usurpers. The sonnets of the first group that deal specifically with the Incarnation show an awareness of the fulfillment of the contract in Christ, and they recognize the nature of the legacy left by Christ's death; but they express what Donne himself calls a "wholesome meditation" (XV)--of the kind which seems to lack efficacy when the predicament is most sharply felt. In this predicament the self stands midway between God and Satan, crying out to the one and unable to resist the other. Christ is not mentioned. At the very brink of destruction the contract seems to remain still unfulfilled.

In some cases resentment is directed against the whole idea of contracts and laws:

> None doth, but all-healing grace and Spirit,
> Revive againe what law and letter kill.
> Thy lawes abridgement, and thy last command
> Is all but love; Oh let this last Will stand!
> (XVI, p.12, 11.11-14)

Grace, it seems, is to be extended not through Christ but through an immediate divine gesture to the individual soul--not so much in the fulfilling of an old covenant as in the creating of a new which would cancel all others. It is characteristic of Donne that this wished-for "abridgement" should take the form of a complete destruction of the basis of the contract, the house of

the soul itself:

> Let their flames retire,
> And burne me ô Lord, with a fiery zeale
> Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heale.
> (V, p.13, 11.12-14)

There is a constant potential for violence and destruction
in these poems which becomes immediately apparent in the form.
It works counter to the idea of order embodied in wills and
contracts, and disrupts the inner structure of the poems. The
ordered relationship between component parts which characterizes
the sonnet form is weakened by the constant sense of discon-
tinuity between the soul and God. The personal voice which in
the Christ-centered sonnets became in the end caught up in the
transcending order and eloquence of the Incarnation, is now
forced to fill with its own eloquence the vacuum of God's seeming
indifference. The intimacy of the terms of address in these
sonnets is profoundly ironical, not only in view of the great
gap between man and God, but also in view of God's apparent
failure to respond. And so it is that the imbalance between
self and God, with the self as an imprisoned sufferer calling
for help, is paradoxically reversed in such a poem as Holy
Sonnet XIV, where the full force of personality and language
combine to dominate our responses to the verse. It is this force
which cuts across and disrupts the orderly development of the
sonnet. Excessive enjambment and strong caesural breaks not

only suggest the jagged accents of the impassioned speaking voice, but also effectively prevent the productive coming together of opposites in a greater whole. In the end it is that powerful voice which, thrown against the closed system of the sonnet form, disrupts its inner structure and generates an energy of antagonism so often present in Donne's poetry when the parts cannot be united in a greater whole.

To understand the full significance of this antagonism in the second group of "Holy Sonnets," we need to consider again the formal quality of the sonnet in English. In contrast to longer, more discursive forms, the sonnet became the vehicle for tightly constructed, logical argument. It could lend itself equally to witty trifling with the paradoxes of love or to serious exploration of inner psychological conflict, but in any case it moved logically from premises to conclusions. Lever says that "the sonnet form of Wyatt and Surrey was especially designed for progressive exposition and inferential reasoning."[6] One might go further and claim that the end of this exposition and reasoning was an action--not necessarily explicit in the poem, but surely implied. For sonnets are strongly rhetorical, and the end of rhetoric is action--in the case of the love sonnet the union of poet and lady.

The "Holy Sonnets" have always as the end of their reasoning and rhetoric the union, not of poet and lady, but of self and God. The action they point to is the outgoing of the self and the inflowing of Grace. But the ironies and paradoxes of the second group of sonnets prevent that action, and the poems end in impasse. The result is a clash between vehemence of language and paralysis of will that is almost unique to these poems. We see in them what Louis Martz in his study of the sonnets as formal meditations calls "the action of an inward search."[7] But the outcome of that search, which in the meditative tradition means the translation of the discovery of the image of God within the soul into the outgoing of the soul toward God, is frustrated. Action leading to union is not possible because God cannot be found within the soul. He is in fact a terrible distance away. This awareness of distance occurs in much of Donne's religious poetry, and accounts for some of his most striking images.[8] It is crucial in the "Holy Sonnets," where the form itself seems to require reconciliation in the couplet, but where in fact such a reconciliation is denied because of the apparent indifference of God and the impotence of the soul. This lack of reconciliation is conveyed by sharply opposed lines, and by increasing polarization of images. The most striking example occurs in the sestet of Holy Sonnet XIV:

> Yet dearely' I love you, and would be lov'd faine,
> But am betroth'd unto your enemie,
> Divorce mee,'untie, or breake that knot againe,
> Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
> Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,
> Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee.
>
> (p.11, 11.9-14)

Here five of the six lines are separated from each other by emphatic antithesis, while each line in the couplet is further divided within itself, to make the polarization complete. The repeated negatives in the couplet suggest the possibility of an endless prolongation of a state of spiritual aridity and incompleteness. In this way the "action of the inward search" is cut off at just that point where both sonnet form and meditative pattern would normally carry it through to its proper end and resolution.

Martz says of the meditative pattern that "by repetition the mind gradually brings forward into the light of the Divine Idea that knowledge which lies, unformed, within the mind's unconscious and subconscious depths."[9] A similar forward movement is to be found in the sonnet form—though in this case the movement toward a synthesis is made by way of the logical development of the sonnet's several parts. But in this poem the logical forward movement of the sonnet pattern, and the emergence into the light of knowledge of the meditative pattern, are both checked by the rigid antithesis. Only an illusion of forward movement is conveyed by the onrush of the

verse itself, the effect mainly of a series of closely allied

verbs ("breake," "blowe," "burn;" "divorce," "untie," "breake");

only a parody of close relationship is conveyed by the repeated

juxtaposition of first and second person pronouns. The energy

of the sonnet is unproductive, given shape only by the outward

form of the sonnet itself, which here is essentially closed,

like the walls of the self which have grown too thick for

penetration from outside. For the logical process of the sonnet

form has been turned inward upon itself, and like the soul's

reason "is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue."

Not all the sonnets are as extreme as this, but most of them

in the second group are concerned with the same question of

fulfillment in time, the same desire for all conflicting things

to be made one. This desire is frustrated not only by a

paralysis of reason and will, but also by a sense of disruption

in time. For instance, imagery associated with the Last Judgment

occurs frequently, but in a curious relationship with the poet's

own sense of the present moment. In Holy Sonnet VII ("At the

round earths imagin'd corners") the first two quatrains,

unseparated, convey through a sustained flow of images a

magnificent apocalypse. But in the succeeding six lines there

is a complete reversal of mood as the poet seeks some private

peace here and now. However, we do not find the Christ of the

earlier sonnets who reconciled the temporal and the eternal, and

there is no final order. Death and the unknown loom up ahead,
while the past is a chaos which does not bear thinking about:

> The itchy Lecher, and selfe tickling proud
> Have the remembrance of past joyes, for reliefe
> Of coming ills. To (poore) me is allow'd
> No ease.[10]
>
> <div align="right">(III, p.14, ll.10-13)</div>

There is often a distinct sense of terror as time and space seem
to close in:

> This is my playes last scene, here heavens appoint
> My pilgrimages last mile; and my race
> Idly, yet quickly runne, hath this last pace,
> My spans last inch, my minutes latest point,
> And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoynt
> My body.
>
> <div align="right">(VI, p.7, ll.1-6)</div>

The sense of being caught in some ever-narrowing space between
life and death combines with the sense of the infinite gulf
separating self and God to produce in several of the sonnets an
almost complete destruction of the logical sequence and the
orderly development in time which we expect the sonnet form and
meditative pattern alike to reflect.

Perhaps it is just this sense of collapse and disorder which
gives the sonnets their dramatic immediacy. But what is this
dramatic quality, and how does it relate to the poet's relation-
ship with God in these poems? It is not the same thing that we
find in the Satyres, the Elegies, or the Songs and Sonets, despite
similarities in tone and prosodic effects. It is something that
arises from the sonnets themselves considered as monologues. In

most of the secular poems there is a constant sense of inter-
action between the poet and some other individual--mistress,
friend, or sometimes only a hypothetical, unidentified
listener--whose presence is taken for granted. These are
essentially garrulous, social poems, and in most cases their
movement is that of conversation and argument with another
person. They are dialogues conducted between the poet and a
living, responsive world.[11] The great energy of the "Holy
Sonnets," however, should not obscure the fact that they are
monologues, when what the poet most desperately wants is
dialogue. If a monologue of this nature can be considered
dramatic, it must be so in terms of a kind of internal drama, in
which the various 'voices' are aspects and projections of the
self.

When this kind of internal drama occurs in the secular poems,
it most often appears as the familiar theme of man as microcosm,
and is closely allied with the idea of all-encompassing love, as
in the "little worlds" of "The good-morrow" and "The Sunne
Rising." What happens to this theme in the sonnets is made clear
in Holy Sonnet V, where the theme of the microcosm, announced in the
opening line ("I am a little world made cunningly"), is modified
drastically by what follows. The "little world" is drowned and
burned in order that it might be made over entirely in the image

"of thee and thy house." For the inner "drama" of these sonnets

is the unproductive drama of solipsism, fruitless engagements

with the self from which the poet cries to be released. From

this solipsism comes the pride which exhorts God to action, and

which, of course, God does not respond to, as the poet himself

realizes: "But who am I, that dare dispute with thee / O God?"

Beyond the assertions of personality lies the one God in whom,

hopefully, all individuality will be subsumed—not so much

through an act of grace perhaps, as through an act of forgetting:

> That thou remember them, some claime as debt,
> I thinke it mercy, if thou wilt forget.
> <div style="text-align:right">(IX, p.8, 11.13-14)</div>

A further dramatic quality might be found in the elements of

formal meditation in the sonnets. Martz describes as the essential

process of all meditative poetry, "the interaction between a

projected, dramatized part of the self, and the whole mind of the

meditative man."[12] It seems clear, however, that in many of the

sonnets where the figure of Christ is absent, there is no real

interaction at all, because the "whole mind" is fragmented. They

depict, in fact, the dangers of subjectivity which constantly

attend those engaged in the "inward search." The "dramatic

reconciliation of two selves, of actor and mind," which Martz

discovers in the sestets of the "Holy Sonnets,"[13] is not, I

think, to be found there. We can be led by the logic of the

sonnet form itself to expect a reconciliation, if not between

"actor" and "mind," then possibly between self and God. Such

is our accustomed habit in reading sonnets to expect a

resolution in the couplet that we can easily mistake the

direction most often taken in the sestets of these particular

sonnets--not a moving forward to reconciliation, but a further

widening of the gap. So also, the power of the speaking voice

can distract us from the actual process of disintegration the

words describe. The "little world made cunningly" becomes by

ironic inversion a symbol of the utmost disorder. We are

finally led to understand that, in the most extreme of these

sonnets, nothing is what it seems to be:

> Oh, to vex me, contraryes meete in one:
> Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott
> A constant habit.
>
> <div align="right">(XIX, p.15, 11.1-3)</div>

In this sonnet the antitheses are powerful enough to threaten

even the syntactic order, and when this happens, all sense of

logical subordination seems to disappear:

> As humorous is my contritione
> As my prophane love, and as soone forgott:
> As ridlingly distemperd, cold and hott,
> As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.
>
> <div align="right">(11.5-8)</div>

The third quatrain presents a similar breakdown of the temporal

order:

> I durst not view heaven yesterday; and to day
> In prayers, and flattering speaches I court God:
> To morrow I quake with true feare of his rod.
>
> (11.9-11)

In this terrible telescoping of time and space no reconciliation
is possible, and at the end we are left with a weary assertion
of the arbitrariness of the isolated self:

> So my devout fitts come and go away
> Like a fantastique Ague.
>
> (11.12-13)

The 'dramatization' of the soul's predicament thus leads to no
fruitful interaction between "actor" and "mind," or between
self and God. The only result of the 'dramatization' is a
complete dissolution, conveyed through a disordered time scheme
and a fragmented syntax.

I have tried to indicate that Donne was able to take the
sonnet form to that extreme stage where its logical structure is
threatened by the nature of the thought and feeling expressed.
Under most circumstances we might think that the result of this
tension between form and content would be a bad poem. It is
possible, however, that many poems derive much of their effect-
iveness from such a tension, which Wylie Sypher identifies as a
"mannerist" technique:

> The poets and dramatists of this era have a logic
> of their own, a rhetorical and dramatic logic that
> does not operate by transition and sequence but by
> circulating through extremes, opposites, and diver-
> gencies, digesting every sort of experience by
> putting sudden stress on language and gesture.[14]

But it is not just that, as Sypher says, "the psychological
effect diverges from the structural logic"[15]--the sonnet form
also contains and restrains, and is analogous to the power of
the rational mind to formulate the terms of its own restriction.
But once its essential characteristics of logical development
and resolution within an evolving time scheme have been
abandoned, it cannot, of its own, provide a satisfying order to
counteract the disorder within.

II

If in the majority of the "Holy Sonnets" the logical develop-
ment suggested by the sonnet form is at variance with the poet's
inner conflict, in the rest of the Divine Poems these antagonisms
are not so evident. Two different kinds of ordering principles
can be observed, and in neither of them is an established form
subjected to the kind of strain we find in the second group of
sonnets. "La Corona" and "A Litanie" are poems of a less personal,
more liturgical nature. Their basic structure is not that of an
argument proceeding from certain premises to certain conclusions,
but rather that of repetition of words, phrases and invocations.
If in the majority of the "Holy Sonnets" the rational process
fails to bring about the desired result, in the repetitions of

formal prayer are found other means to dispose the soul toward
God and God toward the soul. And so we find in "La Corona" and
"A Litanie" a harmony with God which in the "Holy Sonnets" is
only rarely experienced.

"La Corona" differs most from the "Holy Sonnets" in that
here the individual sonnets are linked by first and last lines
to form a unified whole--as Martz says, "properly speaking, there
are no individual sonnets."[16] The linking of each in a sequence
naturally reinforces the sequence of events in Christ's life
which the poems describe. But more than this, the final
joining of the last sonnet to the first to form a complete
circle expresses the perfect fulfillment of Christ's death and
resurrection, whereby the poet also may come to "salute the
last and everlasting day."

It will be seen that the structure of "La Corona," at once
sequential and circular, introduces a concept of time very
different from that of the "Holy Sonnets," and thus there is a
different inner development. In many of the "Holy Sonnets,"
particularly I, IV, V, VII, XIII, XIV and XIX, past and future
come together as in a nightmare, producing remorse and fear as
the poet finds himself seemingly isolated from the redemptive
pattern. Here, beginning and end are fused in an eternal,
transcending present:

> The ends crowne our workes, but thou crown'st our ends,
> For, at our end begins our endlesse rest;
> The first last end, now zealously possest.
> (1, p.2, 11.9-11)

Thus, while the fifth sonnet speaks of those who crucified Christ

as "Measuring self-lifes infinity to a span, / Nay to an inch,"

in terms that recall "this last pace, / My spans last inch, my

minutes latest point" of Holy Sonnet VI, we are nevertheless

aware that the least moment in time contains within it, in

fruitful paradox, all eternity. The chronological sequence of

events is only the manifestation on earth of the greater

mystery which imbues each part with the whole. Thus is the

Virgin addressed in the Annunciation sonnet:

> Ere by the spheares time was created, thou
> Wast in his minde, who is thy Sonne, and Brother.
> (2, p.2, 11.9-10)

As with time, so with space: "Immensity cloysterd in thy dear

wombe" links second and third sonnets, and at the Nativity it

is the eye of faith which sees "how he / Which fils all place,

yet none holds him, doth lye."

The destructive paradoxes of the "Holy Sonnets" arise from

the irreconcilability of the finite and the infinite, of self and

God; the constructive paradoxes of "La Corona" arise from the

coming together of finite and infinite in each separate event, and

this coming together is conveyed in the most direct way by the

overall interlocking pattern. Such a pattern does not allow for

a traditional development within each sonnet. There are no
sharply juxtaposed quatrains, and there is no sense of anti-
thesis or complement between octet and sestet--each sonnet
moves forward smoothly and without disruption to its
concluding couplet. Only in the sixth sonnet (Resurrection) do
we find, in the first six lines, a certain unevenness as the
obdurate soul awaits release:

> <u>Moyst with one drop of thy blood, my dry soule</u>
> Shall (though she now be in extreme degree
> Too stony hard, and yet too fleshly,) bee
> Freed by that drop, from being starv'd, hard, or foule,
> And life, by this death abled, shall controule
> Death, whom thy death slue.
> <div align="right">(6, p.4, 11.1-6)</div>

From this point to the end of the sequence there is an unbroken
upward movement, culminating in the triple invocation of the
seventh sonnet:

> O strong Ramme, which hast batter'd heaven for mee,
> Milde lambe, which with thy blood, hast mark'd the path;
> Bright Torch, which shin'st, that I the way may see.
> <div align="right">(7, p.5, 11.9-11)</div>

One might contrast these emphatic parallel statements with the
somewhat similar opening of Holy Sonnet XIV: "Batter my heart,
three person'd God; for, you / As yet but knocke, breathe, shine,
and seeke to mend." Although in these lines the Trinity is
directly invoked, the antitheses which dominate the sonnet's
structure suggest, if not a fragmented God, at least a God who
has not fulfilled Himself in time and space. He has "as yet"

been too gentle to pierce the stony heart. But at the end of
"La Corona" it is emphasized that Christ himself was the
fulfillment, and combined within his Person all the qualities
of gentleness and strength, the "lambe" and the "Ramme," which
are opposed in the sound and structure of the first quatrain of
the other sonnet.

The idea of the Incarnation dominates "La Corona," as it
does the first group of Holy Sonnets (IV, XI, XII, XV), but in
a different way. In those sonnets Christ is, in structural
terms, the logical resolution of the doubts and questions
raised at the beginning of each poem, and the end towards which
each was moving. In "La Corona" there is literally no end. As
Donne indicates throughout, the whole is implied in each part,
and Christ is the beginning of the argument as well as the end.

"A Litanie," though a meditative exercise like "La Corona,"
shows a quite different use of the techniques of repetition. It
is not only a longer poem, but also much more diffuse, and the
interlocking pattern and internal cross-referencing of "La
Corona" are notably absent. Somewhat paradoxically, "A Litanie"
has a much more episodic effect than the chronologically arranged
events of "La Corona." The twenty-eight stanzas can be made to
fall into several larger groupings, following the structure of
the litany,[17] but Donne seems deliberately to lessen the effects

of liturgical formality by varying the responses and

rearranging in many small but important ways the wording in

the concluding couplet of each stanza: "deliver us," for

example, occurs in almost every possible position, and is

sometimes replaced by a parallel construction such as "heare

us." These variations make the work much more interesting

poetically, but they do not change the essential nature of

the litany, and of all his religious poems this is the most

formal. Even so, while isolated passages stand out, they do

not seem to fit in to any larger whole. In fact, the

discrepancy between individual parts and overall structure

arises from much the same kind of discrepancy we have examined

in many of the sonnets, between what we have come to expect of

a certain form and the way in which Donne actually uses it.

Helen Gardner says of "A Litanie:"

> The contrast between the simple traditional outline
> of the poem and the intricacies of the separate
> stanzas is the formal expression of the poem's
> ambiguity. It appears impersonal, but is, in fact,
> highly personal.[18]

This kind of ambiguity, arising from the use of certain poetic or

liturgical forms in a very personal and, in a sense, anti-

traditional way, is often a source of great strength in Donne's

poems. The most powerful of the "Holy Sonnets" are the ones in

which this ambiguity is strongest--no device could more powerfully

reflect the poet's state of mind in, for example, Holy Sonnet

XIX. But if it is not entirely successful in "A Litanie," the

reason is that traditional outline and individual parts are not

really reacting with each other at all, either in harmony, as

in "La Corona," or in opposition, as in many of the "Holy

Sonnets."[19]

It seems evident that Donne was at this stage more interested

in the possibilities of the nine-line irregular stanza than in

the overall significance of the form of the litany--and in this

respect at least, "A Litanie" is an interesting foreshadowing

of later developments in the religious lyric. Donne's use of

this particular stanza, however, is perfectly consistent with

what is perhaps the main preoccupation in the poem, the search

for a balance between the harmful extremes of human behavior.

This search is, I feel, not so much the result of any particularly

Anglican desire for the via media,[20] as a manifestation of the

deep fear of the "Holy Sonnets" that contrary states of mind, as

in Holy Sonnet XIX, somehow reinforce each other and build up

between them too thick a wall for God to penetrate. We have

seen how Donne's antithetical verbal structures can convey just

this impenetrable barrier of contraries; but in "A Litanie," as

in "La Corona," the emphasis is on "That harmony, which made of

two / One law, and did unite, but not confound" (p.19, 11.66-67).

Where antithetical structures are present, their polarizing

effect is diminished, first by the alternation of four- and

five-stress lines, and second by our anticipation in each

stanza of the closing supplication which resolves and rounds

off with a couplet the sometimes discursive development of the

preceding lines:

> From being anxious, or secure,
> Dead clods of sadnesse, or light squibs of mirth,
> From thinking, that great courts immure
> All, or no happinesse, or that this earth
> Is only for our prison fram'd,
> Or that thou art covetous
> To them whom thou lov'st, or that they are maim'd
> From reaching this worlds sweet, who seek thee thus,
> With all their might, Good Lord deliver us.
> (p.21, 11.127-135)

The closing imprecations are, as a result of the nature of the

litany itself, quite different from the agonized imperatives of

the "Holy Sonnets," just as the opposed states of mind, as

described in the first half of this stanza, are hypothetical

possibilities rather than actualities presently experienced. All

of these factors give to the poem its appropriately detached,

ritual quality, its sense of speaking, like the sermons, for all

mankind rather than just for the writer himself. Within this

setting the kind of development which we see later in Herbert's,

Vaughan's and Traherne's use of the irregular stanza is not

possible. For this kind of stanza was to become the natural

vehicle for the most personal kind of meditation; in "A Litanie,"

however, the personal, subjective tone is deliberately muted, as

when the poet, invoking the Prophets, prays

> That I by them excuse not my excesse
> In seeking secrets, or Poëtiquenesse.
>   (p.19, ll.71-72)

But it is not Donne's characteristic method in his religious

poetry to avoid excess, or even to apologize for it. It is

doubtful whether the cultivation of "meane waies," as a poetic

principle at least, would ever have resulted in the kind of

poetry we see in Donne at his best--poetry in which extremes

of feeling are subjected to the restraints of form, there to

find their resolution or not, depending on the particular poem.

In the case of the more formal religious exercises like "La

Corona" and "A Litanie" the forms offer no real restraints

because there are no real conflicts. The 'resolution,' owing

to the pattern of repetition which in each case is established

early, is apparent in the form to begin with, and this seems

not to have given Donne the kind of poetic impetus which he

best responded to--the initial statement of a problem the

resolution of which must be fought for with all the resources of

emotion and intellect. The "Holy Sonnets" provided him with

one kind of appropriate form--short, compressed, and in Donne's

hands variable and unpredictable, but above all full of a feeling

of energy, movement, and even of discovery. The same might be

said of the third important group of poems, comprising "Upon
the Annunciation and Passion falling upon one day. 1608" and
"Goodfriday, 1613. Riding Westward."

The length of these two poems is not restricted by any
formal necessity, and Donne extends his sequence of couplets
to whatever length his subject demands. The greater freedom
which this allows him has the initial effect of reducing that
tension between form and subject matter which has been noted
in many of the "Holy Sonnets," while at the same time giving
him the opportunity for a fuller development of subsidiary
themes. But more important in these poems is the way in which
the structural basis shifts from that of a predetermined form
such as sonnet or litany, to an actual occasion described
within the poem itself. The subject matter of these poems is
in general the same as that of the sonnets. The gulf that
separates man and God, the mystery of the Incarnation, the
paradoxes that arise from man's divided nature, the struggle
of the self to enter into community with the Divine--these
preoccupations remain constant, but here they are embodied in
a central situation, or a central symbol, which governs the
whole movement of the poem. The nature of this central
situation or symbol might be deduced from those sonnets whose
resolution is found in the image of Christ. It will draw

together all that is contrary, and will give an eternal

significance to a specific event in a specific time and place.

The "Annunciation and Passion" provides perhaps the

clearest example of this kind of situation, but it is on the

whole a static poem, showing little sense of personal

involvement, apart from the rather flat concluding couplet

addressed to the soul. The intellectual concentration of its

lines is remarkable, but achieved at the expense of the

forward movement that we find in "La Corona," that other

"Abridgement of Christs story." The situation, that of the

coincidence of two mysteries in the church calendar, would

appear to lend itself admirably to Donne's kind of meditative

speculation--too admirably perhaps, since in this case the

speculation takes on a certain mechanical quality. But this

may be the result of the "accidental" nature of the occasion

itself, one in which the poet himself remains essentially

uninvolved. The occasion given, it can be elaborated on, and

its implications drawn out and repeated, but it cannot be made

the center of a complex and evolving action with which the poet

is fully identified.

The essential difference in the handling of a central

'occasion' can be seen when the "Annunciation and Passion" and

"Goodfriday, 1613" are placed next to each other. The two

formally similar poems are linked by their meter, by their use

of situation, and by imagery derived from astronomy, navigation,

the Nativity, the Crucifixion, and contemplation of the Virgin;

but only in the latter poem does Donne's full power emerge. We

note first of all the dominant sense of purpose, of movement in

time and space toward some as yet unidentified goal. The

speculation of the opening lines combines abstract hypothesis

with the physical movement suggested by an accelerating series

of verbs ("be," "moves," "hurried," "whirld") which change from

active to passive in preparation for the couplet which focuses

all the cosmic activity of the opening on the solitary form of

the poet himself:

> Hence is't, that I am carryed towards the West
> This day, when my Soules forme bends toward the East.
> (p.30, ll.9-10)

The movement so far has been rhythmically regular, carrying us

inward to the central situation through long vowels and balanced,

even couplets. This movement ceases with the first description

of the Crucifixion:

> There I should see a Sunne, by rising set,
> And by that setting endlesse day beget;
> But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall,
> Sinne had eternally benighted all.
> (p.31, ll.11-14)

The lateral breadth of the opening hypothesis is now replaced by

the vertical movement suggested by "rise," "set" and "fall,"

while the multiple puns in these two antithetical couplets
establish a verbal density which brings us close to the
structural center of the poem. Here Donne allows us a brief
rest from the "spectacle of too much weight," as he ponders
the question of whether the human soul can bear this weight.
But the inward movement is resumed, and with one isolated and
magnificent couplet we are at the exact center of the poem:

> Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,
> And turne all spheares at once, peirc'd with those holes?
> (p.31, ll.21-22)

Here the images and rhythm of the opening section of the poem
(ll.1-10) are combined with the paradoxes of the second section
(ll.11-14) to provide a focal point and resolution. In Holy
Sonnets IV, XI, XII and XV, the same focal point and resolution
occurs in the final couplet, as we would expect, but in this
poem there is a second, counterbalancing section which constitutes
a movement away from the center. For only at that center, at
the Crucifixion itself, did the various orders of time and space
become fused in one perfect, simultaneous turning of all the
spheres in harmony. Now these orders become once again separate
and distinct, and again we become aware of the poet riding
westward, away from Calvary. At the same time the attention
shifts, slightly, from God's apparel, "rag'd, and torne," to
Christ's mother beside the cross. But the inescapable nature of

that central vision, once established, persists until the end;

even as the rider turns his back on Christ, the picture of

Calvary remains burned in the memory. The ninth line from the

end ("Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye") echoes

the ninth from the beginning ("Hence is't, that I am carryed

towards the West"), but introduces in the last section of the

poem a new personal intensity quite different from the

expansive opening, and reminiscent in tone of Holy Sonnet XIV:

> O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
> Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
> Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
> That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.
> (p.31, 11.39-42)

But the effect of these lines is very different from the "breake,

blowe, burne and make me new" of the sonnet. For the controlling

symbol of "Goodfriday, 1613", the crucified and the risen Christ,

is present at the very heart of the poem, anticipated in the

inward movement of the first part, remembered in the outward

movement of the second. The Incarnation and the Redemption, so

notably absent from the sonnet, control the very structure of

"Goodfriday, 1613," and it is the immensity of Christ's presence,

not his absence, which underlies the anguish of the closing

line.

It is a measure of the poem's subtlety that despite its

structural symmetry and the centrality of its controlling figure,

the note of anguish becomes increasingly apparent as the poem

progresses. It establishes, imperceptibly at first, its own

rising movement. We see the first intimations of disorder in

the "forraigne motions" of the fourth line; then in the

convulsions which shook the world at the time of Christ's death

and in the ragged and torn flesh; and finally in the mounting

violence of the concluding lines. Working counter to the

unifying figure of Christ which the poet has depicted so

eloquently at the center of the poem, is the obduracy of the

self, refusing in its timidity and its perversity to admit

Christ, and fleeing in the opposite direction. Against the

mutilation of Christ's body, paradoxical symbol of the complete-

ness of the Redemption, must be seen the "deformity" of the soul

which will not act upon what it knows, and is thus denied

completion, cut off from the restoring image by its own rusts.

Thus in direct contrast to the opening lines, the concluding

lines are harsh and disruptive. Their relation to the central

perfectly balanced couplet ("Could I behold those hands which

span the Poles, / And turne all spheares at once, peirc'd with

those holes?") might be compared to the relation between the

perfect order which the soul apprehends, and the soul's own

disorder. Donne's mastery of the couplet allows him, in these

forty-two lines unbroken by stanza or paragraph division, to convey

both the harmony of man and God, and the division between them.

III

For the most complete account of these complexities of harmony and division we must turn finally to the Anniversaries, where for the only time in Donne's religious poetry a vision capable of reconciling all disparities is fully developed. One might begin by considering the way in which the Anniversaries, taken together, combine the different formal principles which have so far been examined in the Divine Poems. Like the "Holy Sonnets" they are made up of juxtaposed parts which are often in formal and thematic opposition to each other; like "La Corona" and "A Litanie" they also have strong links with patterns of formal religious observance--in this case the meditation and the sermon; and like the "Annunciation and Passion" and "Goodfriday, 1613" they are written in couplets and contain a powerful central figure. Above all, when they are taken together the poems show Donne's most successful attempt to combine antithetical structures with unifying resolutions. Thus any study of the formal unity of the Anniversaries must take into account a number of different considerations. The main emphasis must, I think, be placed on the central figure of Elizabeth Drury, whose death the poems celebrate, and it is in their relation to this figure that the different formal aspects of the Anniversaries will be considered.

The distinct parts into which each poem is divided do
not at first appear to be as logically connected as the
quatrains and couplet, or the octet and sestet, of a sonnet.
Spread over a much greater length, and punctuated by the same
repeated statement that she is dead, the first set of
meditations on the death of Elizabeth Drury seems to be a
series of variations on the one theme, the sickness of this
world now that she who could give it order and health has
gone. In the same way, we may tend to think of the second
poem as basically a repetition in kind of the first, following
on from Donne's own declared intention in the second poem,
"Yearely to bring forth such a child as this." Yet a definite
sequence links the two poems in a non-repetitive way. The
same sequence also binds together internally the separate sections
of each poem. I will examine the separate sections first.

The sequence within each section, as analysed by Louis
Martz,[21] consists of meditation, eulogy, and refrain and moral,
with refrain and moral largely omitted in the second poem. The
syllogistic nature of this sequence becomes apparent if we think
of it as consisting of first, a general statement or observation
concerning the decayed state of the world; second, a statement
concerning the particular saving virtues of she who is now dead
and departed to a new world; third, an application of her example

to the world, and to the individual soul, that it might pattern

itself on her and regain, if not its lost purity, at least

self-knowledge:

> This new world may be safer, being told
> The dangers and diseases of the old:
> For with due temper men doe them forgoe,
> Or couet things, when they their true worth know.[22]

But as these lines indicate, it is not sufficient merely

that the example or "moral" be given. We know from the "Holy

Sonnets" that even though the soul clearly sees the disparity

between the real and the ideal, the corrupt and the pure, it

may be unwilling or unable to act upon its knowledge. The

result in many of the sonnets is an impasse, a fruitless

paradox. The importance of acting upon the knowledge provided

in the meditations and the eulogies is stressed throughout the

Anniversaries, and becomes, in fact, a key to an understanding

of the entire work. The theme of necessary action is first

conveyed to the reader, deceptively enough, in two parenthetical

statements at the beginning of the Anatomy: all men who possess

a soul celebrate the soul of Elizabeth Drury:

> (For who is sure he hath a Soule, vnlesse
> It see, and Iudge, and follow worthinesse,
> And by Deedes praise it? . . .)
>
> (11.3-5)

Since she is gone, the world is perplexed, but it still must act:

> (Because since now no other way there is
> But goodnes, to see her, whom all would see,
> All must endeuour to be good as shee)
> (ll.16-18)

But can any actions now bring about the regeneration of a

corrupt world? Donne's answer at first seems equivocal. On

the one hand he says:

> But though it be too late to succour thee,
> Sicke world, yea dead, yea putrified, since shee
> Thy'ntrinsique balme, and thy preseruatiue,
> Can neuer be renew'd, thou neuer liue,
> (ll.55-58)

yet on the other hand, and paradoxically by her very death, a

new world has been created:

> The twi-light of her memory doth stay;
> Which, from the carcasse of the old world, free,
> Creates a new world; and new creatures be
> Produc'd: the matter and the stuffe of this,
> Her uertue, and the forme our practise is.
> (ll.74-78)

Donne makes his distinction here clear: an old, corrupt world

died at the death of Elizabeth Drury, while a new world was

created.[23] The couplet already quoted sums up the idea:

> This new world may be safer, being told
> The dangers and diseases of the old.
> (ll.87-88)

This new world, however, while its matter is her "uertue," must

be given shape and form by "our practise." It is this "practise"

which is outlined in the "moral," or application, of each

separate section.

A brief examination of any of the separate sections of the Anatomy will serve to show the pattern which all follow, and which Donne has emphasized in the introduction. In the section on the dullness of the world (11.339-376) we have a meditation of twenty-two lines on the fading of color and beauty in the old world, an eight-line eulogy on she who was the source of all color, and an eight-line refrain and application which refer forward to the "new world." Thus we have an inner structure which embodies a forward movement in time.[24] The essential continuity is provided by the figure of Elizabeth Drury, whose "uertue" is described in the central eulogy. This "uertue," which existed incarnate in the old world, continues in the new, but it must now be given form by our own actions—actions which must be free of that deceit by which the old world died:

> Tis now but wicked vanity to thinke
> To color vitious deeds with good pretence,
> Or with bought colors to illude mens sense.[25]
> (11.374-376)

The sections in The Progres of the Soule do not follow quite the same pattern, as Martz points out.[26] The refrain and the moral seem to have disappeared. This is not, of course, because the world is now remade and pure, and hence in no need of instruction. Rather, the instruction takes a different form, a form which relates directly to the different,

though complementary, nature of the second poem. The first
thing we should notice is that the refrain of the _Anatomy_ has
not disappeared completely, but has changed. In six of the
seven sections of the _Progress_, always within four lines of
the end, the same phrase occurs, with only minor variations.
At the end of the first section it appears as "Shee, shee is
gone; she is gone" (1.81), thus establishing its close
relationship with the refrain of the _Anatomy_, "Shee, she is
dead, shee's dead." In subsequent sections it occurs with
various interposed elements such as "Shee, shee, thus richly,
and largely hous'd, is gone" (1.247), or with other minor
changes, such as "Shee, shee doth leaue it" (1.379), or "Shee
to Heauen is gone" (1.467). Changes in wording do not alter
the meaning apparent at the end of each of the sections. Our
attention is drawn to the future state of the soul of
Elizabeth Drury once it has left this world. In the _Anatomy_ we
are not told of this future state--only that "Shee, shee is
dead." Nor, in the applications of her death to us in the new
world, are we told specifically how we are to act, but rather
how we are not to act--the "morals" are in fact prohibitions
based essentially on the _contemptus mundi_ of which her life on
earth was the best example. But if the new world is defined in
the _Anatomy_ only in terms of its opposition to the old, in the

Progress its nature is clearly and positively described in
the eulogies themselves. This new world is no mere con-
tinuation of the old; it is rather a complete transcendence
of it, and it is towards such a transcendence that our actions
must be directed. The fourth section, dealing with knowledge
in this life and the next, furnishes a clear example. The
opening meditation of forty-four lines (11.251-94) begins by
emphasizing the change from old world to new:

> But t'were but little to haue chang'd our roome,
> If, as we were in this our liuing Tombe
> Oppress'd with ignorance, we still were so.
> (11.251-253)

There follows a detailed account of the restrictions on our
knowledge in the old world:

> What hope haue we to know our selues, when wee
> Know not the least things, which for our vse bee?
> (11.279-280)

Then, at the beginning of the eulogy, our vantage point is
suddenly changed:

> But vp vnto the watch-towre get,
> And see all things despoyld of fallacies:
> Thou shalt not peepe through lattices of eies,
> Nor heare through Laberinths of eares, nor learne
> By circuit, or collections to discerne.
> In Heauen thou straight know'st all, concerning it,
> And what concerns it not, shall straight forget.
> (11.294-300)

Our virtuous actions now are clear: they are to be imitations
of her one action, even though they cannot equal it. Those

living in the new world will understand

> That aie the vertuous Actions they expresse,
> Are but a new, and worse edition,
> Of her some one thought, or one action.
> (11.308-310)

The new world, then, is to be modeled on the heavenly world
where Elizabeth Drury's soul now lives and moves. Thus in
the different sections of the Progress there is no need of
moral or application--the virtuous action which such a moral
or application would point to has already been described in
the eulogy.

The greater feeling of integration that we derive from
the Progress can be partly explained by this two-part structure
replacing the three-part structure of the Anatomy. But more
important perhaps is the closer identity between the soul of
Elizabeth Drury and "my Soule" to whom most of the second
poem is addressed--nor does the title of the poem make clear
which soul the poet has in mind. It is not just a matter of
Donne's imaginative projection of himself in the figure of
Elizabeth Drury--though there are strong elements of this,
particularly in the more bravura passages. Rather, the
individual soul finds its ultimate possible development in the
soul of Elizabeth Drury, omnipresent since its release from
the prison of the old world. Donne spoke, in the introduction
of the Anatomy, of our need to give, in our "practise," new

form to her "uertue;" how this is to be done is made finally

clear in the concluding lines of the section. She is gone,

but in the triumph of her going,

> cals vs after her, in that shee tooke,
> (Taking herselfe) our best, and worthiest booke.
>   (11.319-320)

The structure of the individual sections of each poem depends

upon the idea of transition--from old world to new, from earth

to heaven--with Elizabeth Drury signifying both a lost perfection

in the backward-looking Anatomy, and a perfection still to be

found in the forward-looking Progress. The two poems taken as

a whole reflect the movement that occurs in their separate

parts. Though the sections in each poem repeat the same pattern,

one cannot read the Anniversaries without becoming aware of the

way in which they are linked by a sense of great movement in

time and space. This development, which has been examined as it

works within the separate sections, is clearly at work also in

the actual titles of the poems. The Anatomy as a whole might be

regarded as one long meditation, embodying a downward movement

into the very core of death and corruption; the Progress as one

long eulogy, embodying an upward movement into the realm of

heaven. The turning point is reached at the beginning of the

Progress, in the extraordinary description of the beheaded man

whose soul sails out upon seas of blood, leaving the body to its

frantic parody of movement and life:

> 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 graspes his hands, and he puls vp his feet,
> And seemes to reach, and to step forth to meet
> His soule.
>
> (11.10-17)

At this point begins the slow upward movement, the piecing together

anew of the broken body of the world. The "glimmering light"

once perceived from the deathbed,

> Thinke thy selfe laboring now with broken breath,
> And thinke those broken and soft Notes to bee
> Diuision, and thy happiest Harmonee.
>
> (11.90-92)

The progress continues, the soul to whom the poem is addressed

identifying itself more and more with the soul of Elizabeth Drury.

The passage describing the upward flight (11.179-218) is one of

the most remarkable examples of Donne's ability to visualize in

space and time a process which transcends both:

> But ere shee can consider how shee went,
> At once is at, and through the Firmament.
>
> (11.205-206)

Such striking images of movement as the free-flying bullet and

the "speed vndistinguish'd" that strings the spheres together

like beads are the means "To'aduance these thoughts" by which the

soul of Elizabeth Drury and the soul of the speaker are brought

into such close identity: "This must, my soule, thy long-short

Progresse bee." The essential movement in the second poem is
always upward to perfection--an effect most clearly seen in the
repeated use of the preposition in the passage beginning "Vp vp,
my drowsie soule, where thy new eare / Shall in the Angels songs
no discord heare" (ll.339-40). This upward movement is the key
to an understanding of the action which must clothe, in the new
world, the abiding "uertue" of Elizabeth Drury; it is in fact
the "practise" which Donne set forth as a necessity at the
beginning of the Anatomy. Thus, the two poems taken together
demonstrate the same structure that governs the individual
sections of each--the translation of knowledge into act.[27] Only
by knowledge of the old world which, though dead, is the center
of attention in the Anatomy, can we proceed to the free, pure
and unlimited action of the soul in the new world, which is the
center of attention in the Progress.

I have tried to indicate that the two poems are themselves
a formal embodiment of the process Donne outlines at the begin-
ning of the work, and that they are a unified whole, by virtue
of their structure and the central figure of Elizabeth Drury.
Yet the Anniversaries continue to mystify, and the mystery seems
to center on the symbolic identity of the central figure, who has
been variously identified as Queen Elizabeth, the Church of
England, Christ, the Virgin, Astrea, Wisdom and Logos--or as some

kind of combination of all. I do not believe the question of

identity can ever be satisfactorily answered; but it is possible

that the question itself is misleading, at least in so far as

it attempts to find a fixed definition and explanation for the

central figure. Rosalie Colie observes:

> ...when all the separate explications and interpret-
> ations are added up, the Anniversary Poems prove to be
> more than the sum of their parts. They hold in balance
> many oppositions and contradictions: they are, in short,
> paradoxical poems, poems about paradoxes and poems within
> the paradoxical rhetoric.[28]

Yet for all the paradoxes that the poems contain, the final effect

is not, I feel, one of paradox, but rather of a constant develop-

ment toward an affirmative statement of faith. We have seen how,

in some of the "Holy Sonnets," the figure of Christ in the sestet

reconciles all opposites in the paradox of the Incarnation. For

all its centrality, however, the figure of Elizabeth Drury does

not fulfill the same function. In a way which would not be

possible with the Christ of the sonnets, Elizabeth Drury is an

invented and manipulated figure. I do not mean to imply by this

that Donne strains our credulity in making such a paragon of a

child he hardly knew, or in weighing her down with so much symbolic

meaning. Rather, I believe Donne intends us to go beyond

Elizabeth Drury to the poetic act that embodies her, as she

embodied all virtue. For if our actions are to give shape and

form to virtue, as Donne claimed at the beginning, then these two

poems are just such an act. The Anniversaries are finally a
celebration not so much of Elizabeth Drury as of the creative
power of the soul itself, and particularly of the power of the
poet who interprets and prophesies and gives form to the
highest truth. In no other of his poems does Donne refer to
this idea of the poet; in the Anniversaries, however, the true
poetic function is quite clearly alluded to, and dominates the
conclusion of the work.

As the underlying movement of the two poems is prefigured
at the beginning of the Anatomy, so is their nature as poetic
creations. There we find that Elizabeth Drury first gave order
to the world: "Her name defin'd thee, gaue thee forme and frame"
(1.37). But the clear outline faded as the world grew sick and
corrupt, and with her death that order was lost:

> But this is worse, that thou art speechlesse growne.
> Thou hast forgot thy name, thou hadst; thou wast
> Nothing but she, and her thou hast o'repast.
> (11.30-32)

It is now for the poet in his own way to repeat the act of Eliza-
beth Drury and to give to the new world a pattern and form, in
his celebration of her who gave pattern and form to the old
world. For the poet, as much as Elizabeth Drury, is "A Prince,
expected long, come to fulfill / The Ceremonies" (11.34-35). And
since each year a new poem is to be written, so, at the beginning
of the Progress, Donne refers to the future offspring of the

original creative act:

>Immortal Mayd, who though thou wouldst refuse
>The name of Mother, be vnto my Muse,
>A Father since her chast Ambition is,
>Yearely to bring forth such a child as this.
><div style="text-align:right">(11.33-36)</div>

Thus the poems, now described by the poet as hymns, are to be a perpetual celebration and re-creation of the name which the new world, through the poet's art, will not forget:

>These Hymns thy issue, may encrease so long,
>As till Gods great Venite change the song.
><div style="text-align:right">(11.43-44)</div>

As these lines suggest, the creative act, whether of Elizabeth Drury in the old world or of John Donne in the new, is finally to be traced back to the will of God, and Donne at the end of the Progress re-establishes the context in which Elizabeth Drury, the poet, and the poems themselves, are to be seen:

>But thou wouldst not; nor wouldst thou be content,
>To take this, for my second yeeres true Rent,
>Did this Coine beare any other stampe, then his,
>That gaue thee power to doe, me, to say this.
><div style="text-align:right">(11.519-522)</div>

It might be argued that Donne is simply attempting here to bring back into a more orthodox framework a poem which to many people has seemed constantly to verge on the unorthodox, even the blasphemous. But the structure and essential nature of the work, as outlined by the poet at the beginning of each poem and implied throughout, has led inevitably to the triumphant

conclusion, where neither Elizabeth Drury nor the poet himself
is the originator of the original creative act, but both are
instruments of it:

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

We have come a long way from the death and fragmentation of the
old world to this reuniting in the new of matter and form,
proclamation and trumpet, poet and people. In this new unity
we find a counterpart to the formal and thematic disunity of
the "Holy Sonnets," themselves part of the old world, now
transcended. Such a unity cannot be imposed. It can only grow
from a poem which is itself a unified whole, a fitting
embodiment of the message it conveys. The scope and ambition
of the Anniversaries are equalled only by the formal skill
which went into their making.[29]

All of the religious poetry so far discussed shows Donne's
intimate concern with form as an expression in itself of
religious feeling. Whatever conclusions we may reach concerning
the nature of his attitude towards God, with its elements of
humility and pride, rebellion and submission, certainly these
poems are controlled by a tight structure which is able to
contain and give order to all manner of opposing elements. With
the possible exception of those poems based on a liturgical series

of repetitions, the nature of this structure is essentially
logical, moving from premises to conclusions, and from
conclusions to postulated future action. Sometimes, as in the
"Holy Sonnets," the conclusions are contradictory and no action
is possible--the form here imposes an order fundamentally
opposed to the conflict within the poem. At other times the
order comes from an organizing principle within the poem itself,
from some complex and unifying symbol such as the crucified and
risen Christ, or Elizabeth Drury, and it is this symbol, rather
than a prescribed convention, which dictates the shape and
movement of the poem. In these poems the form expresses an
order already present in the subject of the poem. But in either
case antithetical elements are always present, due perhaps to
Donne's constant awareness of the great distance between the
real and the ideal and between individual soul and God. The
harmonious resolution of the Anniversaries is all the more
effective for its being rooted in an uncompromising demonstration
of that distance.

In the relationship between the two Anniversaries, between
the octet and sestet of the sonnets, between the two lines of
the couplet, we see Donne drawn constantly towards the principle
of resolution through opposites. At the same time, what gives
Donne's religious poetry much of its force and conviction is the

unifying forward impetus of the voice itself--defining,

questioning, imploring, prophesying, but all the time pushing

on toward greater knowledge of the God who is at once so close

and so far away. It is this voice which so often seems to

disrupt the prosodic order, to impose itself on and even to

obliterate the poetic structure--until we realize that it is

also the means whereby the intricate inner balances and

paradoxes can be made to yield the true prophetic statement,

such as we find at the end of the Anniversaries. In other

words, the balances and paradoxes of analysis provide the

necessary means for the final synthesis. It is here that we

find the probable reason for Donne's avoidance, in his religious

poetry, of the more loose and irregular verse forms of his

secular poems. The latitude of the Songs and Sonets, the

Satyres and the Elegies allows him to combine seriousness

with sophistry, cynicism, bawdiness and irreverence. But

the seriousness of the religious poetry lies in its greater

commitment to truth and virtuous action, and this is conveyed

in the poems by the stricter and more rigorous verse forms.

The only notable exception occurs in the three late hymns.

These are poems of leavetaking, poems in which the problems of

virtuous action in a corrupt world seem finally to be taken out

of the poet's hands. Neither the anguish of frustrated will nor

the joy of the creative act is present. There is a sense of
closeness to God found nowhere else in the religious poetry,
and it is not surprising that in these poems the tension of
opposites is absent. Even in "A Hymne to God the Father" the
questions and answers which seem in the first two stanzas to
suggest great disparity between the poet's sins and God's
willingness to forgive, merge in the third stanza in an
evocation of the Son, and in the quiet conclusion, "I feare no
more." The harmony which Donne seeks in the other poems and
finds in such figures as Christ and Elizabeth Drury seems to be
achieved already in these poems of acceptance and resignation,
as the poet himself becomes, in his consciousness, the center of
all things. No longer divided within himself, his soul is free
now to expand. He can ask in "Hymne to God my God, in my
sicknesse:"

> Is the Pacifique Sea my home? Or are
> The Easterne riches? Is _Jerusalem_?
> _Anyan_, and _Magellan_, and _Gibraltare_,
>   All streights, and none but streights, are wayes to them,
>   Whether where _Japhet_ dwelt, or _Cham_, or _Sem_.
>   (p.50, 11.16-20)

The structure of the poem is not so much logical as associative:
when West and East are one, and "both _Adams_ met in me," there is
no further need of the tightly disciplined structures and the
logical developments of the other poems. In this respect, Donne
is pointing the way forward to later developments in metaphysical
poetry.

In the poems of Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne there is an increasing tendency to abandon a strict logical development within a strict formal framework, and to adopt looser poetic structures which suggest a new freedom of the soul to escape its worldly confines and become at one with the Creation. This kind of visionary quality is suggested by Donne in the second of the Anniversaries and in the late lyrics, but as an end, not as a beginning. In the later poets the visionary quality becomes more and more a point of departure, to be developed by techniques of repetition, association and elaboration very different from Donne's controlling central figures and his resolution through antithesis. The change in formal principles also signifies a change in the nature of the relationship between individual soul and God.

FOOTNOTES

1 _The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne_ (Princeton, 1967), p.330.

2 p.107.

3 _The Elizabethan Love Sonnet_ (London, 1956), p.26.

4 p.172.

5 _John Donne: The Divine Poems_, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford, 1952). While following Miss Gardner's text, I have in the interests of simplicity retained the familiar Grierson numbers, given by Miss Gardner in parenthesis at the end of each sonnet. All page references are to the above edition.

6 p.275. The specific form the reasoning process takes naturally varies from poet to poet, and from sonnet to sonnet. But in general we find a three-part argument, consisting of a statement of a problem or hypothesis, presentation of a further inference which often modifies the premises of the initial statement, and finally a resolution of the problem or a proving of the hypothesis. This is the pattern of argument in most of the sonnets in _Astrophel and Stella_. The initial statement occupies the octet; the presentation of a new inference and the final resolution occupy the sestet, with, as a rule, three lines to each. Each transition in the argument is indicated usually by an initial "but," "therefore," "so," "since," "if," "yet," or "then." Representative examples are X, XV, XXVI, XXVII, XXXIII, XLV, L, LII, LIV, LVI, LXII, LXVI, LXIX, XC, XCIV, XCVII. In Shakespeare's sonnets the pattern is more varied due to the four-part division of the sonnet rather than Sidney's three-part division. Often, however, the octet forms a unit similar to Sidney's, and the sestet presents a new inference in the quatrain and a final emphatic resolution or paradox in the couplet. But Shakespeare's divisions are as clear as Sidney's, and his use of "but," "therefore," etc., just as indicative of the logical nature of his argument. Particularly clear examples are XXIX, XXX, XLII, LI, LIV, LXII, LXXII, LXXVI, LXXVIII, LXXXVIII, XCIII, XCVI, XCVIII, CII, CIV, CVI, CX, CXVIII, CXXV, CXXVII, CXXXVIII, CXLVI.

7 The Poem of the Mind (New York, 1966), p.4. See also
Stanley Archer, "Meditation and the Structure of Donne's
'Holy Sonnets,'" ELH, XXVIII (1961), 137-147. Archer disputes
Martz's attribution of the structure of the sonnets to the
meditative tradition, as does Douglas L. Peterson in "John
Donne's Holy Sonnets and the Anglican Doctrine of Contrition,"
SP, LVI (1959), 504-518.

8 The audacity and power of many of Donne's conceits may arise
from the need to lessen this distance by the forceful bringing
together of the images of heaven and earth, a 'device' found
in almost all Donne's writings.

9 The Paradise Within (New Haven, 1964), p.48.

10 A comparison with Shakespeare is interesting: Sonnet XXX,
for example, with its "sweet silent thought" and its "remembrance
of things past;" or LX, with its minutes hastening to their
end "in sequent toil." No matter what damage time may do,
Shakespeare's vision is always of process in time, and
almost all his sonnets move forward with this process to the
repeated, confident affirmations of process itself transcended
by art. In this respect, as determinants of poetic structure,
Shakespeare's 'art' and Donne's Christ are analogous, as are
the destructive figures of the Dark Lady and the Devil.

11 This is not to deny that many of the Songs and Sonets, for
instance, are complex poetical structures within themselves,
but voice and tone are what is first impressed on the reader.
Significantly, those of the Songs and Sonets which are closest
in tone and feeling to the "Holy Sonnets" are the "Nocturnall
upon S.Lucies day" and "Twicknam Garden." Both poems are
essentially monologues.

12 The Poem of the Mind, p.7.

13 Ibid., p.6.

14 Four Stages of Renaissance Style (New York, 1955), p.119.

15 p.127.

16 The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven, 1962), p.110.

17 See Gardner, p.xxviii.

18 p.xxiv.

19 Miss Gardner's explanation is somewhat different: "The form
has had to be too much twisted to fit the material, and the
material has been moulded to the form rather than expressed by
it." (p.xxviii)

20 See Gardner, p.xxvii.

21 The Poetry of Meditation, p.222.

22 John Donne: The Anniversaries, ed. Frank Manley (Baltimore,
1963), p.70, 11.87-90. All subsequent line references are to
this edition. When referring to each poem separately, I will
use Anatomy and Progress.

23 For further discussion of the 'new world' see O.B. Hardison,
Jr., The Enduring Monument (Chapel Hill, 1962), pp.163-186.
The author compares Donne's 'new world' with similar concepts
in Dante and Petrarch.

24 Hardison claims that "the most striking fact about the
organization of the Anniversaries is their use of topical--i.e.,
analytical--rather than chronological development" (p.171).
This topical development "moves from physical through aesthetic
to spiritual aspects of the world" (p.172). While this kind of
development is demonstrably present, it does not, I feel,
constitute the main structural principle of the Anniversaries;
nor, as the author admits, does it explain the inner structure
of each section.

25 I hope to have suggested here a possible answer to Martz's
claim that one reason for the "failure" of the Anatomy is that
it is too rigidly divided into sections and sub-sections, that
the transitions are clumsy, and that "the parts will not fuse
into an imaginative organism" (p.233). The main reason for
his dissatisfaction is, however, the "central inconsistency"
regarding the true cause of the decay of the world (pp.229-232).
I believe this inconsistency exists, but I do not feel it
affects the structure of the poem.

26 p.237.

27 Arnold Stein seems to have this transition in mind when he
speaks of the acute sense of self-consciousness in Donne's
poetry, and the unspoken desire to escape from self-conscious-
ness into action! "For the religious poet consciousness,
which characteristically separates and detaches, must also
assume the responsibility of integrating the whole man, who
must act" (John Donne's Lyrics: The Eloquence of Action
[Minneapolis, 1962], p.182). The author makes the same point
in reference to Donne's prosody in "Structures of Sound in
Donne's Verse," KR, XIII (1951), 256-278. The Anniversaries
show that Donne himself was aware of the problem, going so
far as to make this "integration" the major 'cause' of the
two poems.

28 Paradoxia Epidemica (Princeton, 1966), p.414.

29 Miss Colie, though proceeding from a different point of
view, reaches a similar conclusion: "These poems are a dirge
that lies about itself, although like a good paradox it
leaves the reader in no doubt about fundamental truth: these
poems are a song of triumph, both in God's glory and the art
of verse" (p.429).

CHAPTER TWO

George Herbert

I

Of all the metaphysical poets, Herbert was the one who was most obviously concerned with poetic form. Unlike Donne and the later poets, who say comparatively little about the nature and function of poetry, Herbert makes continual reference, implicit and explicit, to his art. It is the art of a man in whom the functions of poet and priest are one; it is the art in which the celebration of God and the service to God unite. Donne at the end of the Anniversaries expresses such a concept of poetry. He too is preacher and poet, the voice to which the people come; he too celebrates Elizabeth Drury while rendering to her these annual services of tribute. And more than this, he too pays ultimate tribute in his own

creative act to the original creative Act of God. But this is
the only place in Donne's religious poetry where such a formu-
lation occurs, and even here it is in the nature of a discovery
that the great forward progress of the Anniversaries inevitably
leads to, rather than a guiding principle throughout.

A basic difference between the religious poetry of Donne
and Herbert can be found in this 'discovery'. Donne's poems
are for the most part explorations of the present moment: we
do not feel, as we begin reading them, that we can be altogether
certain of the direction they will take. Some of the "Holy
Sonnets" end in the reconciling presence of Christ, while others
end in despair--but it would be hard to predict the direction
from the beginnings of the poems, even if we had read all
Donne's other poetry beforehand. There is always in Donne an
element of the unexpected--we live through his poems even as
he himself lives through them, caught up in their movement and
in the immediacy of the poet's speaking voice. In Herbert's
poems, even the most intimate and colloquial, there is a sense
of inevitability, of the experience they describe having been
lived through already, and reflected on deeply. The greatest
pleasure which Herbert offers is not the discovery of new
perceptions, new truths, but the discovery of how many ways an
old truth may be newly shaped.

But if the methods and outcome of Donne's search are unpredictable, its object is clear: harmony of the individual will with the will of God. Herbert's object is the same, but it is for him an experienced reality rather than a goal much longed for but infrequently attained. Donne's methods of analysis and inference serve in many cases only to widen the gap between self and God, and the harmony envisioned by the intellect remains unattainable by the unaided will. Herbert is always aware of this possibility of failure, and knows that the revealed truth must find its way through the snares of self-centeredness to become a living reality in the heart. In order that this may occur, Herbert's poetry contains an elaborate system of checks and counter-checks which serves constantly to expose the proneness of the self to falling into prideful delusion. At the center of this 'system' lies the principle of imitation: the principle upon which The Temple is built.

This principle is found also in Donne's Anniversaries, where the salvation of the new world and the individual soul lies in their imitation of that perfect pattern which Elizabeth Drury embodied. And, though perhaps less consciously than in Herbert, the Anniversaries themselves formally constitute such an imitation. But in Herbert the principle of imitation in poetic form is fully articulated, and the visual forms of the poems

reflect in a highly conscious manner the multiplicity and harmony of the divine plan. Wherever logical argument and inference are at work in Herbert's poetry, their function is to make more clear the beauty of that plan, which was not just revealed to man at one specific time, but is a continuing reality. That which is to be imitated is all around us. Joseph Summers has described the relationship between the divine plan and the plan of Herbert's poetry as follows:

> The poet's duty was to perceive and to communicate
> God's forms. In the process he would construct out
> of the chaos of experience and the mass of language
> another object which would reflect his discovery:
> literary form as we understand it was but a reflection
> of that form which was everywhere present, although
> often hidden to eyes that could not 'see.' It, too,
> in its material embodiment appealed to man's senses
> and moved his affections. The rational contemplation
> of it should lead to an understanding of its symbolic
> significance.[1]

Or, as Herbert himself says,

>   then shall our brain
> All her invention on thine Altar lay,
> And there in hymnes send back thy fire again.[2]

It is the principle of imitation which, consciously applied throughout, makes Herbert's poetry a unified whole. However unified the individual poems of Donne may be, they do not together constitute such a whole: their different methods of organization and their different inner structures do not relate, as those of Herbert's individual poems do, to a single, over-

arching poetic conception. It is with this basic difference

in mind that I wish to approach The Temple.

The Temple is a complete edifice,[3] raised to the glory of

God and consisting of a large number of distinct but related

parts. As the separate lines of the first poem in The Church,

"The Altar," are shaped into the pattern of an altar, so do

the separate poems join as "stones to praise thee," and so do

the separate sections, The Church Porch, Superliminare, The

Church and The Church Militant, combine in a total symbol of

the Christian life. And as the body is the Temple of the

Spirit, so are the poems members of that body, joined in praise:

> Wherefore each part
> Of my hard heart
> Meets in this frame,
> To praise thy Name.
> ("The Altar," p.26, 11.9-12)

But within the "frame" of The Temple is found the greatest possible

diversity, and the major problem we face in Herbert is in recon-

ciling this diversity with the single poetic conception.

The large number of different verse forms is of course our

first indication of this diversity--they alone make it virtually

impossible to absorb The Temple at one reading. Each poem makes

its own demands upon us. Although we soon realize that faith in

the revealed truth and in God's love and justice are in every

poem, each poem arrives at this faith from a different starting

point in human experience. In this regard Herbert is the most

empirical of poets. His poems take their initial departure

not from doctrine, but from the diversity of human experience

and response. Doctrine and instruction emerge from this

diversity, and it is one of the great achievements of Herbert's

poetry that the doctrine is clear and persuasive because

nothing of life is left out. The voice we hear, the images we

see and the rhythms we feel in each particular poem, are those

of a particular situation. And there is no human situation,

whether rooted in anger and frustration or in simple joy and

thankfulness, that cannot be given its own appropriate poetic

form and made part of the temple of praise.

I believe that, initially, The Temple is best approached

from careful study of individual poems and the individual sit-

uations they arise from. Such an approach necessarily involves

a great deal of selection. If we agree with Summers that "the

only justifiable generalization is that every poem required a

new beginning, a new form, a new rhythm,"[4] then any selection

must be somewhat arbitrary, depending on what each individual

reader finds most important in Herbert's work. First, I wish

to discuss briefly Herbert's own conception of what a poem

should be, and to stress again the importance to the poet of the

principle of imitation. Then I wish to examine a number of

poems representative of the diversity of The Temple; I have

chosen them also to illustrate what I believe to be an important inner development in use of form--a development which does not follow the exact order of the poems but is suggested by it. This inner development reflects Herbert's own "progress of the soul," from its first awareness of Separateness from God, to its final approach to a state of unity.

II

Certain general formal principles can be applied to all of Herbert's poetry, without our necessarily understanding how they are applied so effectively to each individual poem and the situation which produced it. I have mentioned already the concept of the poem as a gesture of thankfulness, praise and imitation. Certain more definite formal principles can be learned from direct statements about his art in the poems them- selves. The two "Jordan" poems, for instance, tell us of Herbert's disapproval of ornament for its own sake, and of the necessity for form to reflect truth rather than fiction:

> Is all good structure in a winding stair?
> May no lines passe, except they do their dutie
> Not to a true, but painted chair?
>   ("Jordan I," p.56, ll.3-5)

The true poet in the service of God must also learn to avoid
the beguilements of poetic figures which obscure rather than
reveal the brightness of the subject:

> My thoughts began to burnish, sprout, and swell,
> Curling with metaphors a plain intention,
> Decking the sense, as if it were to sell.
> ("Jordan II," p.102, 11.4-6)

Yet "sweet phrases" and "lovely metaphors" need not be avoided,
even though

> Thou art still my God, is all that ye
> Perhaps with more embellishment can say.
> ("The Forerunners," p.176, 11.32-33)

For "Beautie and beauteous words should go together." But how
is the simple yet beautiful directness to be achieved? And
can man's art approach the perfection of that Providence "through
whom my fingers bend / To hold my quill?" In "Providence" the
poet surveys the harmony of the Creation and is filled with awe
at "Thy curious art in marshalling thy goods." He knows that
"None can express thy works, but he that knows them: / And none
can know thy works" (p.121, 11.142-143). But in imitation of
that God who is present in the smallest thing, who is "infinite
in one and all," the poet finds that nothing is so small that
it cannot serve, without added artifice, to express truth:

> All things that are, though they have sev'rall wayes,
> Yet in their being joyn with one advise
> To honour thee: and so I give thee praise
> In all my other hymnes, but in this twice.

>Each thing that is, although in use and name
>It go for one, hath many wayes in store
>To honour thee; and so each hymne thy fame
>Extolleth many wayes, yet this one more.
>   (p.121, ll.145-152)

The principle of multiplicity in unity which the poet sees evident all around him must be the principle of his verse. It is not for the poet to set about adorning and complicating that which in itself contains a multiple richness of meaning. This meaning will be lost if the poet insists on imposing on simple things the "thousands of notions" which fill his brain with metaphor and invention. Instead, he must draw out from simple objects and situations their own inner complexities, their own infinite expressiveness.

The "Jordan" poems and "The Forerunners" explain Herbert's theory of simplicity, but we need also to examine the way the poet puts his theory into practice. In "The Windows," for example, we see how a simple object is made to reveal its own complex inner meaning. Here the church windows signify the frailty of man himself, the "brittle crazie glass;" the trans- forming of the body into a fit house for the soul, and of the church into the temple of the Holy Spirit; the emanating light of the priestly function; the coming together of senses and intellect in the true celebration of God; the emptiness of words without the transcending light. The windows are the means by which the light of God illuminates the inner soul. They are full

of meaning in themselves, yet their purpose lies in "Making
thy life to shine within." We might view Herbert's individual
poems as just such artifacts--each one intricate, self-
contained, telling its own "story," yet designed to carry into
the heart of the congregation-reader the light of God as
reflected through the preacher-poet. Their origins in specific
things and specific situations, these poems, sometimes in a
remarkably short space of time, draw out the significance of
their initial subject in such a way that aesthetic and
intellectual pleasure are inseparable from the moral teaching.
As in the church windows,

>   Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one
>   When they combine and mingle, bring
>   A strong regard and aw.
>   (p.68, ll.11-13)

In "The Windows" the physical object and the lesson it
teaches are as near identical as possible. So it is with those
best known of Herbert's poems where the actual shape on the
page suggests the poem's subject. Only two poems, "Easter
Wings" and "The Altar," visually represent an actual object,
but numerous others attest to Herbert's pleasure in ensuring
that "ear and eye alike told the same tale."[5] In "Deniall"
(p.79) the lack of harmony between self and God is suggested to
eye and ear by the jarring last line of each stanza but the last,
where the rhyme is finally "mended." In a manner reminiscent of

Donne's "La Corona," the first and last lines of the stanzas

of "Sinnes round" (p.122) link up to make a complete circle,

in this case literally a "vicious circle," unlike the circle

of perfection of Donne's poem. In "Paradise" (p.132) the last

word in each line loses its initial letter in the succeeding

line, to illustrate the paring down of the self as trees are

pruned to make them more fruitful. That Herbert did not

consider such verbal devices to be mere literary games,

"quaint words" such as he deplored in "Jordan (II)," is

indicated by the fact that as many occur among the later poems

which were added to those in the Williams manuscript of 1629,

as occur in that manuscript itself.[6] At the simplest level

they represent the fusion of the emblem and the explanatory

text which accompanied it in a new, self-explanatory whole.

But more important, they embody the principle of imitation that

underlies almost all of Herbert's poetry: the poem should not

be merely a commentary on a certain theme, with such poetic

embellishments as might be thought appropriate, but the overall

form of the poem, together with its inner structure, should

grow inevitably out of that theme. In many cases the nature of

the subject does not lend itself to an immediately apparent

visual equivalent. Nevertheless, the principle of the visual

equivalent is a useful starting point in an examination of the

various poetic forms of The Temple.

The simple hieroglyphic poem does not need to concern itself with a special relationship between poet and subject. Like emblems and their explanatory texts its meaning is general and universal, and its basis in the poet's own personal experience of lesser importance. But in most of Herbert's poems subjective elements are as important as they are in Donne, and The Temple is as much a spiritual autobiography as the "Holy Sonnets" or the Anniversaries. Herbert's own relationship with God is as closely analysed, in all its varied complexity, as Donne's, but it has an extra quality of balanced reflection and calm perspective that is not nearly so common in Donne's work. The origins of Herbert's poems lie in specific situations, but these situations are always part of a larger whole. The Temple records Herbert's own progress of the soul, but every stage in that progress is recounted from the viewpoint reached at the end of the progress. The poems are full of the spirit of self-knowledge and acceptance which comes after spiritual crisis, even though the crisis itself is presented in all its immediacy. In the ensuing pages I wish to examine the different stages in the progress towards true knowledge of self and God--the knowledge which informs The Temple, and in the light of which the principle of imitation is most clearly understood.

III

The difficult path of self-knowledge begins in Herbert with
the recognition of a sense of otherness and loss, of the
deprivation wrought by man upon himself at the moment of the
Fall. The first major group of poems to be dealt with are
those in which the estrangement is most deeply felt. These
are poems which are based upon the relationship between fallen
man and Christ who redeemed him. It is in these poems that we
find Herbert's most antithetical poetic structures; it is these
poems also which seem closest in tone and poetic method to
Donne. The one which first engages our attention is "The
Sacrifice," if only by virtue of its length and its commanding
position in The Temple.[7] "The Sacrifice" is also significant
because it is the only poem in which the speaking voice is not
that of the poet himself. It is as if, in order to establish
the necessary frame of reference for the poems that follow,
Herbert must present to himself and the reader the very archetype
of estrangement, found in the Passion itself, the estrangement
of Christ from man and from God the Father:

> Now heal thy self, Physician; now come down.
> Alas! I did so, when I left my crown
> And father's smile for you, to feel his frown:
> > Was ever grief like mine?
> > > (p.34, 11.221-224)

"The Sacrifice" is perhaps the most austere and uncompromising poem Herbert wrote. After every three-line stanza the same refrain occurs, except for the last, where the question is finally answered: "Never was grief like mine." The pattern of development within the poem is rigidly controlled by the repeated refrain. As the various events of the Passion are recalled, and as Christ's great love is revealed, we are brought back at the end of every three lines to the central situation, Christ helpless on the cross. The strong sense of movement which dominates Donne's "Goodfriday, 1613" is the result of the poet's inability to face "that spectacle of too much weight." But Herbert speaks in the voice of Christ himself, and forces that spectacle upon us. Nor from the vantage point he assumes does any fruitful outcome appear possible. Paradoxically, the Act of Atonement is the subject of the only poem in The Temple which conveys real despair. In his singular concentration on this one moment, Herbert places the center of all suffering and solitude in the consciousness of the one man who rescued from suffering and solitude all men. In doing so he deliberately minimizes the implications of Christ's death--implications which are brought out as soon as the poet begins speaking in his own voice, which, unlike Christ's voice in "The Sacrifice," speaks in the knowledge of the Resurrection.

The other poems which are centered on the figure of Christ do not show the same repetitive structure of "The Sacrifice," but the sense of antithesis is still dominant. In "The Thanksgiving," which is in a sense a companion piece to "The Sacrifice," the poet makes a sudden transition to the risen Christ, and with a talkative enthusiasm further emphasized by the one long unbroken stanza, sets about the task of paying back the debt to the Savior:

>   Shall I then sing, skipping thy dolefull storie,
>   And side with thy triumphant glorie?
>   Shall thy strokes be my stroking? thorns, my flower?
>   Thy rod, my posie? crosse, my bower?
>   (p.35, ll.11-14)

The change in tone from "The Sacrifice" is striking, but at the end of the poem all the cheerful plans and activities are checked by a sudden remembrance of what was made so clear in the preceding poem:

>   Thy art of love, which I'le turn back on thee:
>   O my dear Saviour, Victorie!
>   Then for thy passion--I will do for that--
>   Alas, my God, I know not what.
>   (p.36, ll.47-50)

The sense of distance and loss is abruptly re-established in the last line, and with it a new humility. The easy confidence of the rest of the poem is conveyed primarily by the rhymed couplets, a form rarely encountered in The Temple. Each couplet is emphatically end-stopped, suggesting a mechanical succession of

actions quite different from the one Act of Christ, which "The

Sacrifice" suggested in its single repeated refrain. Only

once before the end does the voice desist for a moment from its

long list of pieties:

> As for thy passion--But of that anon,
> When with the other I have done.
>
> (p.35, ll.29-30)

The "other" occupies almost the entire length of the poem. "The

Sacrifice" and "The Thanksgiving" stand in close relationship

to each other. They are the authentic voice of suffering and

the inauthentic voice of scarcely concealed pride and human

"busyness." "The Thanksgiving" represents an unsuccessful

attempt to bridge the distance that separates man and God, even

after Christ's sacrifice.

The poems that follow show how, in the light of increased

self-knowledge, the relationship between poet and Savior is

more deeply understood; the voice of Christ and the voice of

the poet are not now so distinctly at cross purposes. In "The

Reprisall" (p.36), which directly follows "The Thanksgiving,"

the key to the new relationship lies in the acceptance of the

fact that "There is no dealing with thy mighty passion." But

this disparity between Christ's pure love and pure suffering,

and the hardness of man's heart, need not be cause for despair,

since the greater power of Christ's love will always respond to

the lesser love of man with force enough to break through that
hardness. Such is the message of "Sepulchre," a poem which
shows visibly in its structure the workings of these opposed
powers, and juxtaposes the situations of Christ and the penitent.
On the one hand we have the "cold hard stone" of the sepulchre
which now holds the body of Christ; on the other hand, the
capaciousness of men's hearts, which yet refused him. These
disparities are conveyed first of all by the stanza pattern:
three rhyming decasyllabic lines, reminiscent of "The Sacrifice,"
are followed by a disproportionately short trisyllabic line.
This kind of stanza pattern is very common in Herbert, and is
the most frequently occurring of his antithetical forms.[8] His
use of it in preference to the more common vehicle for anti-
thesis, the couplet, can be explained by his emphasis, especially
in the earlier parts of The Temple, on the imbalance between
men's efforts and Christ's achievement. In this pattern the
final short line usually works to counter the longer preceding
lines, and strikes home with the greater force of truth. We
have already seen a whole poem, "The Thanksgiving," constructed
on this principle. In "Sepulchre" each stanza is so constructed,
with the additional complexity of a system of stanza pairing by
rhyme scheme. In the first stanza the tercet links together the
"cold hard stone" of the sepulchre and the "many hearts on earth,"

and opposes them to the concept of love so briefly expressed

in the short final line:

> O Blessed bodie! Whither art thou thrown?
> No lodging for thee, but a cold hard stone?
> So many hearts on earth, and yet not one
> > Receive thee?
> > > (p.40, 11.1-4)

In the second stanza the situation is reversed. All the

"weight" of the tercet is given to the false largesse of the

heart, while the bitter reality is conveyed in the final line:

> Sure there is room within our hearts good store;
> For they can lodge transgressions by the score:
> Thousands of toyes dwell there, yet out of doore
> > They leave thee.
> > > (11.5-8)

The same pattern follows in the two remaining pairs of stanzas.

In the light of dawning knowledge, the rock of the sepulchre

becomes pure, incapable of the "murder" so strongly emphasized

in the last line of the third stanza; while in the fourth, the

counterbalancing "order" of the last line stands completely

opposed to the cruelty and injustice described in the preceding

lines. Only in the last two stanzas is the bleakness of these

oppositions mitigated first by the introduction of a third

meaning of "stone" (the stone upon which the Law was written),

and second, by a sudden shift at the beginning of the sixth

stanza, which operates in relation to the whole poem as the

final short line does to each individual stanza:

> Yet do we still persist as we began,
> And so should perish, but that nothing can,
> Though it be cold, hard, foul, from loving man
> Withhold thee.
> (p.41, 11.21-24)

The poems so far dealt with occur early in The Temple, and they represent the distance between man and Christ. Their inner structure reflects this distance through a principle of 'imbalance'--tercets weighed against short terminal lines in "The Sacrifice" and "Sepulchre," a short final line against the rest of the poem in "The Thanksgiving." But this imbalance can be rectified. Already there are signs, particularly in "Sepulchre," of how the distance between Christ and the penitent soul can be narrowed--through love and self-knowledge. In this way the sufferings of Christ, and his all-sacrificing love, must be experienced within the heart of every individual, and the drama of death and resurrection made the interior drama of every soul. The nature of this transition is suggested in "Sion," where the glory of Solomon's temple is contrasted with God's greater concern for the temple of the heart:

> Yet all this glorie, all this pomp and state
> Did not affect thee much, was not thy aim;
>   Something there was, that sow'd debate:
>   Wherefore thou quitt'st thy ancient claim:
> And now thy Architecture meets with sinne;
> For all thy frame and fabrick is within.
> (p.106, 11.7-12)

Herbert is not often content merely to point out the short-
comings of selfish men when compared with him they crucified--
besides, as "The Sacrifice" showed, Christ was also fully
human, and the events of his life are those which are
repeated in all men's lives in a common pattern of temptation,
betrayal, injustice, despair, death, and finally everlasting
life. The direction of these early poems is clear--they move
steadily toward an interiorization of the disparity which has
first been realized in the initial, glaring disparity of God's
treatment at the hand of man.

This process of interiorization is seen most clearly in
"Good Friday," a poem which, in its two formally distinct
parts, shows how the inner drama is arrived at. In the first
part of the poem we return to the familiar question, how to
express the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice:

> O My chief good,
> How shall I measure out thy bloud?
> How shall I count what thee befell,
> And each grief tell?
> (p.38, ll.1-4)

The question is answered partially in the fourth stanza by the
poet's experiencing every hour of his life a grief that will
remind him of Christ's grief. He prays "That thy distresse
through all may runne, / And be my sunne." But it is in the
three quatrains which compose the second part of the poem that

the specific interior action is described. For the events of

Good Friday are written in the heart itself, so that the sin

which resided there before is forced out:

> That when sinne spies so many foes,
> Thy whips, thy nails, thy wounds, thy woes,
> All come to lodge there, sinne may say,
> <u>No room for me</u>, and flie away.
>   (p.39, ll.25-28)

Sin once gone, the heart can be filled with the image of Christ.

But the battle is one that must be fought continually, and

constant guard must be kept "Lest sinne take courage and return,

/ And all the writings blot or burn." For if the sufferings of

Christ are to enter the heart, they bring with them also the

knowledge of the cause of those sufferings--the warped and

unregenerate nature of man since the Fall. This is made clear

in the final stanza of "The Reprisall:"

> Yet by confession will I come
> Into thy conquest: though I can do nought
> Against thee, in thee I will overcome
> The man, who once against thee fought.
>   (p.37, ll.13-16)

Thus within the heart are both First and Second Adam present,

They are present as ignorance and knowledge, will and conscience,

and the central body of poems in The Temple records the inter-

action between them--the "debate" of which the outer magnificence

of Solomon's temple knew nothing, and whose "frame and fabrick

is within." In none of Herbert's poems, however, do we find

the same drama of fragmentation that we find in many of Donne's.

For the knowledge of Christ and the knowledge of sinful man,

both present within the self, have been established at the

beginning of The Temple. We see in the poems that follow many

delusions, misunderstandings and setbacks, but the closely

structured interior dialogues between one part of the soul and

another never reach the impasse of many of the "Holy Sonnets."

Instead, the knowledge of Christ's sufferings is already within,

and there can never be that gulf which made Donne "quake with

fear" and give way to despair. In Herbert's interior dramas

the 'voices' are not those of different aspects of the self

joined in fruitless struggle. One of the 'voices' is always

that of the indwelling God.

IV

Herbert's inner dramas take two major forms-- dialogue and

narrative. The simpler of the two, and the most clearly related

to the hieroglyphic poems mentioned earlier, is the dialogue.

In several poems, most notably the two "Antiphons" (pp.53, 92)

and "A Dialogue-Antheme" (p.169), the different speakers of the

lines are identified--Chorus and Verse, Chorus, Men and Angels,

Christian and Death. But these are fragmentary pieces, suggested

by certain musical and liturgical forms. It is not this kind

of exterior, impersonal dialogue I am concerned with, but with

the inner dialogue in which the participants are not named,

and where often not even the use of italics separates one

'speaker' from the other. A clear division, however, separates

the speakers of the poem simply entitled "Dialogue." Here

Christ speaks from within the soul itself. In the second stanza,

he rebukes the poet for finding his own soul unworthy: "What,

Child, is the ballance thine, / Thine the poise and measure?"

(p.114, ll.9-10) The poet responds in the third stanza by

disclaiming all responsibility, and shifting the entire burden

of his justification to Christ, who in the fourth stanza points

out that in doing this the poet is unknowingly doing what he

himself did:

> That as I did freely part
> With my glorie and desert,
> Left all joyes to feel all smart—
> Ah! no more: thou break'st my heart.
> (p.115, ll.29-32)

The dialogue is interrupted and concluded by the poet as the

truth of Christ's words becomes apparent; the distance which

was felt initially to separate the soul from Christ, and thus

formally to separate the first two opposed stanzas, is removed

by the revelation of Christ's presence within the soul, which is

in turn symbolized by the presence of both voices in the final

stanza.

But the self acts often in rebellion against this presence,
and in many of the interior dialogues the two voices are those
of willfulness and conscience. The method whereby the excesses
of the one are controlled by the knowledge of the other is
central to these dialogues, and is outlined clearly in "The
Method." Here the heart is instructed to search within itself
for the cause of God's apparent refusal to act, and the
conscience answers:

> What do I see
> Written above there? <u>Yesterday</u>
> <u>I did behave me carelessly,</u>
> <u>When I did pray.</u>
> (p.133, ll.13-16)

Again the unsatisfied will rebels, and again the conscience
answers, but at the end of the poem conscience and will are at
one in prayer, and the final voice of the dialogue is that of
God:

> Then once more pray:
> Down with thy knees, up with thy voice.
> Seek pardon first, and God will say,
> <u>Glad heart rejoyce.</u>
> (p.134, ll.29-32)

Possibly the most famous of Herbert's dialogue poems is
"The Collar." For thirty-two lines there appears to be no
dialogue at all. Blind will instructs the poet to "leave thy
cold dispute / Of what is fit, and not" (p.153, ll.20-21), and
for most of the poem the questions and answers belong to the
same voice, the voice of rationalizing self-interest. Into this

specious 'dialogue' the voice of God is not permitted to intrude, and the result is that "My lines and life are free." But this "freedom" is nothing but disorder, a disorder conveyed to eye and ear by an extreme irregularity in line length and rhyme scheme.[9] In the midst of this disorder, one sentence at least ends with a calculated and emphasized ambiguity:

> Forsake thy cage,
> Thy rope of sands,
> Which pettie thoughts have made, and made to thee
> Good cable, to enforce and draw,
> And be thy law,
> While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
> (p.134, 11.21-26)

What the will does not see is made clear in the concluding lines, where in the new-found harmony of the lines themselves, the true dialogue is heard for the first time:

> But as I rav'd and grew more fierce and wilde
> At every word,
> Me thoughts I heard one calling, Child!
> And I reply'd, My Lord.
> (pp.153-154, 11.33-36)

From this poem, which Joseph Summers calls "one of Herbert's most deliberate ventures in 'hieroglyphic form,'"[10] we might turn to what is perhaps the most complex of the inner dialogues.

"Love unknown" bears certain resemblances to "The Collar." An experience is recounted at some length in one unbroken stanza, and at the end we are given the truth underlying that experience. But in almost all other respects the poem presents a striking

contrast. Unlike "The Collar," "Love unknown" describes an experience which occurred some time ago; it is a "long and sad" tale which the poet now tells to a "Deare Friend." It is told in long, even, alternate rhyme pentameter lines, broken only by three short interjections ("I sigh to say," "I sigh to tell," "I sigh to speak") as the poet expresses his present sorrow at the memory. The listener likewise interrupts three times to tell the poet that his heart was "foul," "hard," and "dull," but these interruptions are incorporated into the basic pentameter pattern. Finally, the "friend" concludes the poem with his own explanation of the curious events described. A tripartite structure is apparent in the interjections of both narrator and friend, and also in the three events described. In two of these events a sacrifice is offered up, but in each case it is insufficient, and the narrator's heart is taken instead, to be purified first by baptism and second by affliction. In the third event, he retires to bed, but finds that "some had stuff'd the bed with thoughts, / I would say thorns" (p.130, 11.51-52) It is possible, as Hutchinson claims,[11] that Herbert is working here from specific emblems, and that the full significance of the three events must remain somewhat obscure. Nevertheless, the symbols of Baptism and Eucharist, and the reference to the thorns of the Crucifixion, recall the actual

events in the life of Christ, to whom the narrator had given

the key to his "house;" thus Christ's suffering is re-enacted

within the individual soul, as Herbert indicated it must be in

the first group of Easter poems. But the identity of the other

voice in the poem remains undisclosed. Perhaps the best clue

is provided in the lines which describe the Lord instructing

a servant to take the narrator's heart instead of the fruit he

has brought:

> But he
> (I sigh to say)
> Lookt on a servant, who did know his eye
> Better than you know me, or (which is one)
> Then I myself.
>
>   (p.129, 11.7-11)

This seems clearly to indicate that the two voices are those of

the divided self, or, as in "The Method" and "The Collar,"

conscience and will. The will, however, in this poem clearly

seeks to do good; it is from conviction of its own virtue that

it remains so puzzled by the apparent rebuffs it meets. It is

this conviction also which allows the will to tell the conscience,

at the beginning of the poem, that "In my faintings I presume

your love / Will more complie then help" (11.2-3). Since

compliance is obviously what the will at this stage wants, it is

made all the more difficult for the conscience to get a word in,

and when it does, in the three interjections, its voice passes

almost unnoticed, caught up in the continuing narration. At the

same time, it is the will's hurt pride which captures our atten-
tion in the three isolated interjections, "I sigh to say," "I
sigh to tell" and "I sigh to speak." Finally, the pretense is
dropped. The virtuous self-assurance disappears and the will
confesses that it has not always acted in accord with conscience:

>   Indeed a slack and sleepie state of minde
>   Did oft possesse me, so that when I pray'd,
>   Though my lips went, my heart did stay behinde.
>   (p.130, 11.57-59)

It is this recognition that at last enables the conscience to
speak forthrightly, and to convince the will that its good
intentions were not sufficient, that "All did but strive to
mend, what you had marr'd." In this dialogue, then, it is the
failure to distinguish sufficiently between the two voices which
is important; the failure lies in the readiness of the will,
convinced of its virtue, to take for granted the acquiescence
of conscience. This is the lesson which must be learned: it is
the lesson which underlies the events described in the poem,
and which Herbert, in his most subtle way, figures forth in the
very structure of the poem.

In the next group of poems to be considered, Herbert further
refines his technique of interior dialogue by replacing the
device of two separate voices with a single, straightforward
narrative of seemingly uniform tone. This technique has been
anticipated to a certain extent in "Love unknown," where an

event, or series of events, was described from a dual point of view in time. One voice told us of the feelings and emotions these events evoked at the time they occurred, while the other voice explained their deeper significance when reflected on later by knowledge and experience. In this case the voice of reflecting conscience gave a moral meaning to things which the will was blind to at the time. Herbert's use of a formal distinction between the voices made the point clear. But how to convey both the immediacy of the events described, and their moral implications, when there is only one voice, and no apparent division in time? For, as Herbert so often shows, our understanding of the things that happen to us is fragmented and deluded until we can incorporate our immediate response within the framework of knowledge and faith. He is able to convey both immediate response and later understanding within a unified narrative by making the ordering principle of the poem the events themselves. In much the same way that Donne shifts his structural center from the predetermined forms of sonnet and litany to the central interior situations of his longer poems, so Herbert's dialogues of the self lose their two-voice structure, and this structure becomes implicit within the events described. For this to occur, words, images, even the events themselves, now take on double meanings--

but no second voice is there to explain them. Instead, the two levels of meaning refer directly to the initial response to a situation, and to its later understanding by the reflecting conscience.

The simplest example of this process can be found in Herbert's use of familiar symbols. Thus in "Love unknown" the symbols of Baptism, Communion and the Crucifixion are quite evident in the narrator's story, but are 'explained' nonetheless by the voice of conscience and knowledge at the end of the poem. Notexplained in this way, but just as clear, is the meaning of "Redemption," where the same basic conceit of "Love unknown," the narrator as tenant to a Lord, serves as vehicle for an elaborate play on the meaning of such legal terms as "lease" and "suit." Herbert's use of this terminology is different from Donne's similar use of the contract idea in the "Holy Sonnets," in that Herbert deliberately adopts the voice of a bustling, bourgeois man of affairs. The prosaic and almost comically detailed account of the search for the Lord who is to renew the lease occupies the three quatrains of Herbert's sonnet, until the "ragged noise and mirth / Of thieves and murderers" announces the end of the quest at Calvary:

> there I him espied,
> Who straight, _Your suit is granted_, said, & died.
> (p.40, 11.13-14)

The cancelling of the old Hebraic law in the new law of Christ, the great price of God's taking on man's flesh, and the final granting of the suit at the Crucifixion, are all immediately apparent as symbolic meanings long before the last italicized words of Christ, which nevertheless convey a forceful impact in opposition to the garrulous tone of the rest of the poem. Herbert's use of the sonnet form might well pass unnoticed, since it in no way depends on a traditional logical development from premises to conclusions. The three quatrains simply record the different stages in the search; enjambed lines help to make one seamless structure, the third quatrain moving without break into the climax of the couplet. In this way the couplet functions not as a resolution for a number of opposed or complementary elements earlier in the poem, but as the vital key with which we must reinterpret all that has gone before. The effect is similar to that of the short terminal lines we find in many of the hieroglyphic and dialogue poems, except that here the line on which all the weight falls is not in any kind of formal opposition to what has preceded it. In emerging as the final and inevitable conclusion, it does not draw together two opposed voices of ignorance and knowledge, but reveals both voices simultaneously, co-present in the same narrative.

This principle is found in other poems of greater complexity. "Redemption" achieves its effect through its relative simplicity, due mainly to the fact that there is no inner conflict present in the narrator-persona, no debate concerning the rightness of his actions or the integrity of his search. But, as usual in Herbert, much attention is given to such matters, and in "Affliction I," another poem based on the concept of narrator as servant, there is a constant moral ambiguity in the nature of the search engaged in and the service paid. "Affliction I" might be regarded initially as another version of "Love unknown," with the dialogue of that poem replaced by a single, unified monologue, describing an unbroken series of events from the first enlisting in the Lord's service up to the present moment. But the tone of the monologue is elusive. There are hints of complacency, rebelliousness, disappointment and genuine grief, often shading into one another. Nor does Herbert give the reader any clearly identifiable symbols which will enable him to understand what the narrator ostensibly does not. In this poem the reader is obliged to identify closely with the narrating voice, and to share in the fluctuating moods and the various attempts at understanding, with none of the help that another 'voice' or a familiar symbol would provide.

The first three stanzas tell of the simple joy which accompanied the first entry into the service of the Lord. This, it seems, happened a long time ago, when the Lord and the created world alike were full of beneficence and the promise of future joy:

> When first thou didst entice to thee my heart,
> > I thought the service brave:
> So many joyes I writ down for my part,
> > Besides what I might have
> Out of my stock of naturall delights,
> Augmented with thy gracious benefits.
> > (p.46, 11.1-6)

Yet a desire for greater knowledge prompts the soul to seek the face of the Lord, and the many years of suffering begin. The Lord's initial enticements seem to have been mere trickery, the promises hollow, for now, "Thus thinne and lean without a fence or friend, / I was blown through with ev'ry storm and winde" (p.47, 11.35-36). Distrust of this Lord increases to the point where cynicism and suspicion reject any sign of good will, and bring the soul to a state of helpless passivity:

> Thou often didst with Academick praise
> > Melt and dissolve my rage.
> I took thy sweetned pill, till I came where
> > I could not go away, nor persevere.
> > (p.47, 11.45-48)

But lest the soul grow to love its own familiar misery, the Lord heaps new miseries upon it, until it seems the soul is engaged in a cruel contest with a totally superior adversary:

> Thus doth thy power crosse-bias me, not making
> Thine own gift good, yet me from my wayes taking.
> (p.48, ll.53-54)

The second last stanza brings us up to the present time ("Now I am here"). The last stanza looks into the future, and the soul, in a sudden burst of bravado, plots a rebellion:

> Well, I will change the service, and go seek
> Some other master out.
> (ll.63-64)

Then the sudden and dramatic about-face of the concluding lines:

> Ah my deare God! though I am clean forgot,
> Let me not love thee, if I love thee not.
> (ll.65-66)

But the interpenetration of the divine will and the human will, of divine and human love, which the narrator 'discovers' at the end, will be seen to have been present in every action the poem describes. The second level of meaning, apparently so contrary to the first, is stated explicitly in the last two lines, and from it we must reconstruct the rest of the poem in a new way, in the light of a number of key words and phrases. "Entice" in the first and second stanzas, for instance, refers at first reading to the soul's being taken in by false promises. It is in this sense that it is later "betrayed." A victim only of its own misunderstanding, it has taken the things of the world as the true payment for its service. But the Lord does "entice," does attract by his own truth and beauty, and the "payment" is

the service itself. Nor need there be any conflict between
God and His creation, any more than, as the final lines of the
poem indicate, there need be conflict between divine and human
will. The world, being created for man, is full of "naturall
delights," and the "gracious benefits" are in fact the super-
addition of Grace which the uninstructed soul reads merely as
a worldly dividend. Similarly in the second stanza, the soul
is wrong to count the stars as its own if it regards them as
payment for the service it has rendered, but right in doing so
if it recognizes them as expressions of God's infinite love
and bounty toward man, the climax of the creation. Since the
generosity of God is at first misunderstood, so is His apparent
cruelty and injustice. The "sicknesses" and "consuming agues,"
the betrayal "to a lingring book," are in fact the implanting
of those experiences which God himself suffered in order to
redeem man from the effects of the Fall. The power of God to
"crosse-bias" the individual soul is in fact the very way of
"making / Thine own gift good," by taking the soul from its own
selfish ways. As the poet says elsewhere in "Assurance:"

> O most gracious Lord,
> If all the hope and comfort that I gather,
> Were from my self, I had not half a word,
> Not half a letter to oppose
> What is objected by my foes.
> (p.155, 11.20-24)

"Affliction I" represents, like many other individual poems, the progress of the soul from the first high expectations in the service of God, through doubt and misunderstanding of God's ways, to final resignation and acceptance. The form of the poem is an unbroken narrative sequence in which the meaning of the whole is not conveyed by any dialectical method involving text and commentary, but rather by an implanting of the deeper meaning in the words and phrases used in "telling the story." The reading of such poems approximates closely the experience of the narrator--only at the end of the events described do we have the knowledge that enables us to read the whole correctly.

Other poems which reflect the same pattern may be briefly mentioned. In "Vanitie I" (p.85) the various objects of man's enquiry are presented to us in the first three stanzas. The astronomer's spheres, the diver's "dearely-earned pearl," and the alchemist's elixir, are all instances of man's pride and his insatiable desire to know all things. But in the last stanza the poet asks, "What hath not man sought out and found, / But his deare God?" and in retrospect we see that the spheres are the symbol of perfection, the pearl is the pearl of great price, and the elixir is the abiding spirit when worldly encumbrance is stripped away. In "Peace" (p.124) the soul seeks

its goal in a cave, a rainbow and a flower. The cave is empty,
the rainbow disperses as the clouds break, and the flower is
devoured by worms; but all three prefigure the "Prince of old,"
Melchisedec, whom "sweetnesse" did not save from death, yet
from whose grave sprang the wheat which "did soon disperse /
Through all the earth." In the same way Melchisedec himself
prefigured Christ. "The Collar" (p.153) is full of images of
a more obvious typological nature--the board, the thorn, the
wine and the corn-- and though this poem draws its main force
from its hieroglyphic elements, it too reveals its deeper
meaning in individual words and images. The essence of all
these poems is summed up in the last lines of "Vanitie I:"

> Poore man, thou searchest round
> To finde out <u>death</u>, but missest <u>life</u> at hand.
> (p.86, 11.27-28)

To find death and life in the same image, the same experience,
is one of Herbert's unique qualities as a poet. It is in this
sense that Herbert's poems can only be poems written from the
standpoint of a mature and reflective wisdom, despite their
remarkable evocation of immediate experience. Mary Ellen Rickey
sees the presence of different levels of meaning within the
same image as that which separates Herbert from the other
metaphysical poets:

> ...his feat of managing language so that several
> metaphorical statements are offered at the one
> time, and offered without the fanfare of conspicuous
> ambiguity, makes his verse very different from that
> of the other so-called metaphysical poets, whose
> practice it was to use different images successively,
> not attendantly.[12]

Certainly this quality is not often found in Donne's religious poetry. His is a more dualistic mind, where the things of life and the things of death remain separate. Even in his most unified work, the _Anniversaries_, the transcending figure of Elizabeth Drury herself is viewed constantly from her two aspects, the earthly and the heavenly, and the form of the work is strongly dualistic, as the two-poems-in-one indicate. In the narrative poems of Herbert, however, form itself becomes more and more integrated, and the experiences the poems describe contain within themselves both the way to life and the way to death. The soul itself can choose which way to take, as it chooses whether or not to accept God's love and providence. Herbert, like the Lord he describes in "Sinne I" (p.45), might seem to invent many "Fine nets and stratagems to catch us in," but like that Lord, he never indulges in obscurity for its own sake.

V

The poems which describe God's indwelling presence by means of hieroglyph, dialogue and single unified narrative, occupy a

major part of The Temple. But in most of them Herbert is more
concerned with the infinite number of ways in which the soul
comes to God, than with the state of the soul in God. In many
poems a simple gesture of acceptance, remorse or love signifies
that the soul is in unity with God, and that the vicissitudes
it suffered in arriving here are now made meaningful and can be
seen as part of God's providence. But these gestures are
usually brief, and their importance lies in the new meaning they
give to the experiences that led up to them. They interpret
the past rather than predict the future. Herbert does not write
much concerning future states of bliss, and seems not to possess
those mystical yearnings which even Donne expresses in the more
visionary passages of the Anniversaries. Perhaps Herbert's
strong belief in the directing presence of God in all phases of
human life on earth leads him to concentrate on the present
realities of the soul in the fallen world rather than on its
future bliss. But having said this, one is still aware of a
strong visionary element in The Temple. The last group of poems
I wish to discuss are poems in which the visionary element
predominates. These poems have their own principles of
construction, and though few in number, anticipate the visionary
poems of Vaughan and Traherne.

Herbert's vision does not take the form of a sudden apocalyptic or mystical illumination--it is in fact firmly rooted in the observation of 'ordinary' reality. We have seen how God is revealed in human suffering, and how the troubles that beset the soul are reminders of the greater agony of Christ's Passion. But God revealed Himself also in His Creation, in the Book of the Creatures as well as in the Scriptures, and the soul, having come to God through its own inner experience, can now see with a new clarity God's omnipresence in the world. The soul itself is now able to flow out and encompass the world, as is shown in "Content." Though it "Gad not abroad at ev'ry quest and call,"

> This soul doth span the world, and hang content
> From either pole unto the center.
> (p.69, 11.17-18)

The inner dialogue ceases:

> Then cease discoursing soul, till thine own ground
> Do not thy self or friends importune.
> He that by seeking hath himself once found,
> Hath even found a happie fortune.
> (11.33-36)

One poem which outlines this transition from inner dialogue to a new harmony within the soul and within nature is "The Flower." It retains a narrative structure, but the narrative in this case is framed by stanzas expressing the new found joy in the Creation:

> How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean
> Are thy returns! ev'n as the flowers in spring;
> To which, besides their own demean,
> The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring.
>   (p.165, ll.1-4)

The suffering of the past is then described, but with a new

lyricism and richness of natural imagery suggestive in them-

selves of the mood of the present. "Killing and quickning,"

"growing and groaning" are linked together as parts of the same

process governing the cycles of nature. And now there has been

a new transformation and rebirth, a new creativity:

> And now in age I bud again,
> After so many deaths I live and write;
> I once more smell the dew and rain,
> And relish versing: O my onely light,
>   It cannot be
>   That I am he
> On whom thy tempests fell all night.
>   (p.166, ll.36-42)

The poem itself of course is testimony to the rebirth, to the

discovery of the soul's true home in the "garden" and "Paradise"

of the last stanza. In this garden the soul need suffer no

longer under the yoke of time, no longer need exclaim "O that

I once past changing were." With less emphasis on temporal

change, the stanzas of the poem are not linked nearly so closely

together by narrative sequence. Unlike "Affliction I," the

sufferings of the past are left deliberately vague and

unspecified, consigned to a similarly unspecified "then." The

looser structure of the poem which results turns our attention

more to each individual stanza and to its inner music. In
this poem we can see emerging a new principle of organization,
whereby the first stanza announces the basic theme, and the
succeeding stanzas constitute variations on it. In the same
way that the soul has now arrived at its destination, so the
'visionary' poems of Herbert do not necessarily 'go' anywhere.
Movement forward in time is replaced by movement outward in
space, as the soul expands to fill the world.

Perhaps the best example of this kind of poem is "Man,"
a celebration of the beauty of the Creation, and its culmination
in man himself. Throughout the poem Herbert weaves a tapestry
of geographical and astronomical images, none dwelt on for long
or made in any way particular, as in "The Flower," but all
combining in a general harmony. At the beginning the theme is
stated in an almost prosaic manner, but immediately afterwards
it is elaborated and drawn out in a series of perfectly
balanced stanzas:

> Man is all symmetrie,
> Full of proportions, one limbe to another,
> And all to all the world besides:
> Each part may call the furthest, brother:
> For head with foot hath private amitie,
> And both with moons and tides.
>   (p.91, 11.13-18)

Close examination of these stanzas reveals the extreme simplicity
of Herbert's means. There are virtually no adjectives or

parenthetical constructions, and there is little enjambment.
The first four lines of each stanza are usually simple statements
unlinked by any subordinating device; in the last two lines
there is a summarizing and somewhat longer syntactic unit. Yet
we scarcely notice this in the delicate harmonies of image and
rhythm:

> The starres have us to bed;
> Night draws the curtain, which the sunne withdraws;
> Musick and light attend our head.
> All things unto our flesh are kinde
> In their descent and being; to our minde
> In their ascent and cause.
> (p.91, 11.31-36)

Reflecting man, who is "all symmetrie, / Full of proportions,"
each stanza is a perfectly symmetrical unit, the two central
four-stress lines flanked on either side by a five-stress and a
three-stress line. Yet variety within unity is conveyed by the
variations in rhyme within each stanza: only the second and
eighth stanzas share the same rhyme pattern.[13] The lack of
subordination of ideas together with the principle of variation
lead me to believe that, with the exception of the first and last
stanzas which provide a kind of doctrinal framework, the
remaining stanzas could be rearranged in some other order with
little harm being done to the total meaning and effect of the
poem. This does not mean that Herbert is careless in his
construction--only that the ordering principle is basically

different from that of the dialectical and narrative poems.
The number of stanzas and the way they are arranged are no
longer determined by logical argument, debate, or temporal
sequence.

One of the longest poems in The Temple, "Providence,"
represents the extreme to which Herbert takes his structure of
theme and variation. This poem, though it shares the theme of
"Man," differs in several important respects.[14] "Man" draws on
spacious and unspecific images of cosmic processes--spheres,
stars, sun, moons, tides, winds, fountains--the generality is
emphasized by the repeated plural nouns. "Providence" on the
other hand is a delighted excursion into the particular. God
being present in all things, His "curious art" leads the poet
into minute observations on the jaws of crocodiles, the sleeping
habits of elephants, and other singularities which serve "to
show thou art not bound." God's easy freedom, and the multi-
plicity He allows within His one law, is very much evident in
Herbert's own poetic structure. This structure is perhaps best
described by the following lines:

> How finely dost thou times and seasons spin,
> And make a twist checker'd with night and day!
> Which as it lengthens windes, and windes us in,
> As bouls go on, but turning all the way.
> (p.118, 11.57-60)

The method is simpler and sparer than in "Man." The stanzas
with their four lines of equal length are not carefully
structured, symmetrical units which are played off against each
other by a varying rhyme scheme. The poem is not so much
concerned with overall pattern as with the individual threads
as they wind their way through the multiplicity of Creation.
There is even a suggestion that the total pattern can never be
comprehended: "If we could heare / Thy skill and art, what
musick would it be!" Rather, all we can do is observe how
every created thing fulfills its own function and complements
the functions of others. Each short stanza reflects this
concern by its interior juxtaposition of elements, by which it
is broken down into even smaller units:

        Light without winde is glasse: warm without weight
        Is wooll and furre: cool without closenesse, shade:
        Speed without pains, a horse: tall without height,
        A servile hawk: low without losse, a spade.

The total effect is a curious one--elliptical yet remarkably
detailed, always wavering and moving, yet confined within a rigid
frame. In itself it complements "Man"--the two together show
the range of Herbert's vision of Creation.

Such poems as these seem to stand in complete opposition to
a poem like "The Sacrifice." In "The Sacrifice" there are also
variations on a theme and a similarly spare technique, but the
theme is estrangement and division, and the repeated refrains a

hammering home of this theme by repetition and jarring trans-
ition. The total effect is of great concentration--on a small
number of events occurring in a specific time and place. In
"Man" and "Providence" we are in a world spacious and free, a
world in which it seems the Fall had never happened, where time
and space are infinite, and where all that is partial is, like
Donne's "broken and soft Notes," "Division, and thy happyest
Harmonie."

But it must be recognized that this vision of Creation, and
the particular methods used to convey it in these two poems,
are not common in The Temple. There is necessarily a kind of
impersonality in this vision, even a hint of deistic remoteness,
despite the richness of detail. The sense of personal engage-
ment so central to most of Herbert's poetry is missing here.
Elsewhere the poet points out the dangers of worshipping the
Creation rather than the Creator--as in "Mans Medley," for
instance, where we are reminded that despite the singing birds
and the ringing woods, "Mans joy and pleasure / Rather hereafter,
then in present, is." The poem goes on to put into a more
dualistic and Donnean perspective the pleasures of this world:

> Not that he may not here
> Taste of the cheer,
> But as birds drink, and straight lift up their head,
> So he must sip and think
> Of better drink
> He may attain to, after he is dead.
>
> (p.131, 11.19-24)

Herbert is careful to avoid regarding God as the image of nature,
rather than nature as the image of God.

But the visionary quality in Herbert is not restricted to
those poems which describe the Creation. There are visionary
poems which describe intense personal experience. There are
visionary poems which return again to the familiar pattern of
temporal change which "The Flower," "Man" and "Providence" seemed
to be escaping from, visionary poems which return again to the
unifying figure of Christ. In so far as they bring together an
awareness of both man's fallen state and his potential trans-
cendence through Christ, they may be regarded as more doctrinally
orthodox in theme than "Man" or "Providence." But more
important is the way in which the visionary quality is made to
infuse and bring together the different types of poems which so
far I have discussed in separate groups according to their
structural basis. I wish now to show how hieroglyphic poems,
dialectical poems, narrative poems and poems of theme and
variation can be seen together as a total expression of the
Christian vision--the vision which is the end of The Temple's
symbolic journey from outer recognition of the sufferings of
Christ, through inner conflict and dialogue, to final peace.[15]

In the first group of poems dealing with the Crucifixion we
find two which, while maintaining the same relationship between

the individual soul and Christ that we find in "The Reprisall,"
"The Thanksgiving" and "Sepulchre," treat that relationship in
a new light, the light of the risen Christ. The disparity between
the individual soul and Christ is formally expressed in the other
poems of this group by imbalance between short single lines and
longer stanza units, leading to a corresponding sense of
imbalance between divine and human actions. In "Easter-wings"
the visual pattern of the hieroglyph seems at first to make
the same point:

> Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,
>   Though foolishly he lost the same,
>   Decaying more and more,
>   Till he became
>   Most poore:
>   With thee
>   O let me rise
>   As larks, harmoniously,
>   And sing this day thy victories:
> Then shall the fall further the flight in me.
>   (p.43, 11.1-10)

The disparity between man and Christ is conveyed simply by the
short lines at the center of the "wings:" "Most poore," "Most
thinne." But these short lines are followed in each stanza by
one equally short, "With thee," and the conjunction of the two
enables the verse to "expand" to the "victories" and "flight"
of the concluding long lines. From "sicknesses" and "affliction"
emerges the new freedom of the soul's flight, the vision which
Donne described in similar terms in the Anniversaries - in

"Easter-wings" we may even see a small, emblematic replica of Donne's major visionary poem.

"Easter" follows a more complicated pattern. We begin with joyful recognition of the meaning of the Ascension: "Rise heart; thy Lord is risen." The first three stanzas of the poem stress the close parallel between soul and Christ. The short lines alternate with the long lines as corroborations and extensions of them, while the final couplet imposes its own balanced harmony, at the same time continuing to stress the inevitable disparity between the perfect and the imperfect:

> Consort both heart and lute, and twist a song
>   Pleasant and long:
> Or, since all musick is but three parts vied
>   And multiplied,
> O let thy blessed Spirit bear a part,
> And make up our defects with his sweetest art.
>   (p.42, ll.13-18)

The second three stanzas are quatrains of even length and alternating rhyme. In this they recall the stanzas of "Providence" and they too are concerned with the world of the Creation. They are a natural counterpart to the first three stanzas dealing with the soul, but though the two parts are formally distinct, they are linked thematically, in that the created world, like the individual soul, is inferior to the great spectacle of Christ's ascension:

> The Sunne arising in the East,
> Though he give light, & th'East perfume;
> If they should offer to contest
> With thy arising, they presume.
>
> (11.23-26)

So, in these two poems antithetical elements apparent at even
the simple visual level are reconciled by a greater vision which
binds God, Man and the Creation together.

"Christmas" presents a two-part structure similar to
"Easter," but here the difference between the two parts is much
more apparent. The first part is a sonnet, beginning with a
deliberately prosaic narrative and ending with a prayer that
"Since my darke soul and brutish is thy right, / To Man of all
beasts be not thou a stranger" (p.81, 11.11-12). The second
part is a psalm-like song in which the Nativity images of the
opening narrative are expanded into a hymn of praise which
becomes the poem itself:

> His beams shall cheer my breast and both so twine,
> Till ev'n his beams sing, and my musick shine.
>
> (p.81, 11.33-34)

From the past of the narrative through the present of the prayer
to the future of the hymn of praise, "We sing one common Lord."

A similar effect is obtained in "Sunday," though this poem
is made up of a series of variations on the general subject of
that day "most calm, most bright." In one way the stanzas, like
those of "Man," are separate acts of praise, resembling the
"Sundaies of mans life" which,

> Thredded together on times string,
> Make bracelets to adorn the wife
> Of the eternall glorious King.
>> (p.76, ll.30-32)

The string which binds them together in the poem is the history

of Redemption, from the Sunday when Christ rose to that final

"day of mirth" which the poet addresses in the last stanza:

> O let me take thee at the bound,
> Leaping with thee from sev'n to sev'n,
> Till that we both, being toss'd from earth,
>> Flie hand in hand to heav'n!
>> (pp.76-77, ll.60-63)

Perhaps the most accomplished set of variations is that

played on the name of "Aaron," where five five-line stanzas have

the same identical rhyme scheme, even the same rhyming words.

Each stanza repeats the same pattern of increasing and diminishing

line lengths, suggestive of the "harmonious bells" on the hem of

Aaron's coat. What makes the poem more than just a technical

tour-de-force, however, is the sustaining vision which is built

up through the successive stanzas, a vision whereby the "profane-

nesse" and the "darknesse" of the "poore priest" are redeemed in

"Another musick, making live not dead, / Without whom I could

have no rest." The "old man" dies, the new is born in Christ;

the darkness is replaced by light, the defects by perfection--and

all within the space of a poem whose separate stanzas are as near

identical as possible, and whose music is one sustained harmony,

almost obscuring the great transitions within. Once again we have

a poem which is in itself an expression of the "doctrine" it
teaches:

> So holy in my head,
> Perfect and light in my deare breast,
> My doctrine tun'd by Christ, (who is not dead,
> But lives in me while I do rest)
> Come people; Aaron's drest.
>   (p.174, ll.21-25)

Only one other poem, perhaps, expresses as much in as short
a space and within so formally demanding a framework. The last
poem in The Church, the familiar "Love III," is a simple
dialogue-narrative. But the antitheses and planned ambiguities
of the earlier dialogues and narratives are almost entirely
absent. The two voices sound in a perfect counterpoint in
which there is no sign of the distinctions made in the other
dialogues by italics or juxtaposition of longer and shorter
units. When the voice of the soul as it enters heaven expresses
doubt concerning its own inadequacy, Love counters not by
opposing but by including, not by telling of future bliss, but
by referring back to the Crucifixion, when man's inadequacy was
first redeemed:

> Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
>   Go where it doth deserve.
> And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
>   My deare, then I will serve.
> You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
>   So I did sit and eat.
>   (p.189, ll.13-18)

That the reception of the soul into heaven should be the subject

of this final poem is only fitting in this record of the journey

of the Christian soul.[16] That the poem should take the form of

a closely-constructed narrative-dialogue is, I believe, entirely

characteristic of Herbert's final vision. This vision does not

look forward into bliss, but backward into the long history of

the soul from the time, recorded in "The Sacrifice," when Christ

first spoke to man from the cross and changed the very nature

of the world.

The final vision, then, is centered on the faltering soul

of man in this life, and is described in the commonplaces of

everyday existence. Herbert, as we have seen, is quite capable

of conveying the vision of a glorious Creation, a universe of

multiplicity in unity which man himself is heir to. But he

concludes with a short dialogue--no longer the dialogue of the

inner soul, the dialogue of will and conscience, but the dialogue

of the resolved, submissive soul and the power of universal,

all-encompassing Love. This dialogue is the fulfillment in

time of the pledge made at Christ's death, the dialogue which

could grow out of the first terrible monologue, "The Sacrifice,"

once man's soul made Christ's sufferings its own. The final

poems I have discussed show that in the life of the soul, from

its memory of the birth and the death of Christ ("Easter" and

"Christmas") through its participation in the life of Christ's Church ("Sunday" and "Aaron") to its final reception into heaven ("Love III"), in this life all stages are illuminated by the vision of transforming Love and Grace. In these poems, no matter which particular form Herbert uses--hieroglyphic or narrative, dialogue or variations--that vision is not just suggested, but is actively present as an organizing principle.

It is the knowledge of that vision, whether implicit or explicit, which informs all Herbert's poems and makes them carefully structured artifacts and fit offerings to God. But each poem in The Temple establishes its own inner music and its own visual pattern, and the relationships between the two are as subtle and intertwined as that between the complex inner processes of the soul and its potential unity within the larger pattern of God's will. As The Temple as a whole reflects the larger pattern, so the individual poems record in their many forms the way in which that pattern is perceived in day-to-day existence. It was Herbert's great achievement to give to the religious lyric a new range of expressive forms; to combine the act of devotion with a new process of inner discovery; and "to remain, while surrendering himself to God, intensely aware of God's personality and his own."[17]

Vaughan and Traherne were to learn much from the expressive forms of The Temple. The varied intricacy of their stanza patterns, the simplicity of their diction and the colloquial rhythms of their verse, reflect Herbert's rather than Donne's influence. They also, in their own ways, pursue the goal of self-knowledge and inner discovery which the act of devotion makes possible. But in these poets the concept of personality, both God's and their own, changes significantly as the moment of final transformation draws closer. What could be experienced only after death for Donne and Herbert becomes for Vaughan an intermittent experience in the present, and for Traherne a continuing reality which began at the moment of birth. It is this change which at bottom accounts for the new and different principles of organization we find in their poetry.

FOOTNOTES

[1] _George Herbert: His Religion and Art_ (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), p.93.

[2] "Love II," 11.6-8, in _The Works of George Herbert_, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1941), p.54. All subsequent references are to this edition.

[3] For further discussion of the title of the work, see particularly Mary Ellen Rickey, _Utmost Art: Complexity in the Verse of George Herbert_ (Lexington, Ky., 1966); Margaret Bottrall, _George Herbert_ (London, 1954); John David Walker, "The Architectonics of George Herbert's _The Temple_," _ELH_, XXIX (1962), 289-305.

[4] p.149.

[5] Catherine Ing, _Elizabethan Lyrics_ (London, 1951), p.51. Mrs. Ing deals at length with the Elizabethan taste for visual-aural correlations, geometrical figures, emblems and devices. For the more direct influence on Herbert of the later emblem books, see Rosemary Freeman, _English Emblem Books_ (London, 1948), pp.148-172.

[6] For a discussion of formal and stylistic differences between the earlier and the later poems, see Rickey, pp.133-147.

[7] For a detailed discussion of the long tradition of medieval lyric which lies behind "The Sacrifice," see Rosemond Tuve, _A Reading of George Herbert_ (Chicago, 1952), pp.19-99.

[8] Other clear examples of this form are "Longing," "The Pilgrimage," "Gratefulnesse," "The Pearl," "Vertue" and "Grace." In many other poems the technique is modified somewhat by placing emphatic short lines within the stanza as well as at the end. In these cases the sense of antithesis is less pronounced.

[9] As George Williamson says, "Here the verse rather seeks freedom from the inner constraint symbolized by the collar, and so escape all set patterns" (_Six Metaphysical Poets: A Reader's Guide_ [New York, 1967], p.114). But see also Miss Rickey's discussion in _Utmost Art_: she finds that the poem is actually made up of quatrains, all of which are "distorted versions of the tranquil measure of the conclusion" (p.146).

[10] p.90.

[11] Works, p.522.

[12] p.60.

[13] Miss Rickey observes that "the changing stanza forms are clearly appropriate to his exploratory mood," and claims also that "the difference in the degree of change occurring in the stanza patterns coincides with the thematic shifts" (p.144). My own examination of the poem leads me to the conclusion that what thematic shifts there may be are of minor importance. Apart from the last stanza, I find there is basically only one theme expressed in a number of different ways. See also G. H. Koretz, "Rhyme in Man," N&Q, III (1956), 144-146.

[14] See also Colie, pp.209-214. Miss Colie's chapter on Herbert is a useful account of Herbert's 'imitation' of the Creation.

[15] For a detailed account of The Temple as a spiritual journey, see Walker's article. The author describes The Temple as "a poem of the soul's progress from primal obedience to Christ, to maturity in affliction, to the ultimate destiny of Union with God" (p.291). I am indebted to this account, and have tried to show how the different stages in the journey described by Walker are given different formal treatment.

[16] For further discussion of the symbolism of "Love III" see Summers, pp.88-89, and James Thorpe, "Herbert's 'Love (III),'" Explicator, XXIV (October, 1965), item 16.

[17] J. B. Leishman, The Metaphysical Poets (Oxford, 1934), p.139.

CHAPTER THREE

Henry Vaughan

I

Herbert's influence on Henry Vaughan has been widely

acknowledged. As F. E. Hutchinson says in his introduction to

Herbert, "there is no example in English literature of one poet

adopting another poet's words so extensively."[1] Vaughan himself,

in the Preface to Silex Scintillans, confesses his indebtedness

to "the blessed man, Mr. George Herbert, whose holy life and

verse gained many pious converts (of whom I am the least) . . ."[2]

Yet most modern criticism of Vaughan has recognized that the

Welsh poet has his own music and his own vision--and that, not

unexpectedly, his true excellence is most apparent in those of

his poems which are least imitative of the earlier poet.[3] This
excellence has been found in striking individual images and
lines in which a sense of brooding darkness and vague longing
is suddenly quickened by a brief, bright vision. Such visions
in Vaughan seem to fade as quickly as they come, to be glimpsed
only occasionally through the mists of the world around him--a
world of "meer glimmering and decays." Some feel that Vaughan's
poetry achieves complete success only in these occasional
glimpses, and many instances are given of poems which seem to
begin with a bright freshness, but which cannot sustain it, and
trail off into the commonplace and the repetitive. But no poet
can survive only on the basis of a few striking images and lines.
Vaughan's best poems have a delicacy and strength which, like
similar qualities in Herbert, depend upon an absolute rightness
of outer form and inner structure. Such poems, though there are
fewer of them in Silex Scintillans than in The Temple, grow out
of and give perfect form to the personal experience they describe.
Since this experience is different from that of Herbert or Donne,
the poems themselves, for all their indebtedness to Herbert,
must be examined formally from Vaughan's own unique but more
elusive standpoint, and it is this standpoint that I first wish
to establish.

Vaughan's excellence as a poet does not depend solely on his most effective images; nor are his weaknesses simply a result of flatness of imagery and diction when the 'visionary' quality is absent. If we stress only the 'visionary' quality and the famous light-and-dark imagery which supports it, we may overlook the formal and structural basis without which it could not exist. How does this basis differ from Herbert's, and what differences in the quality of religious experience are reflected in it?

As the Preface to Silex Scintillans shows, Vaughan was aware of the difficulties faced by any poet who took Herbert as his model. But his comments on the various imitations of The Temple which appeared after Herbert's death[4] show that he was more concerned with the spirit in which these imitations were written than with the formal poetic standards which The Temple established. The "vast distance from him" which these imitations show is a result of their concentrating on mere "verse" rather than "perfection:"

> Hence sprang those wide, those weak, and lean
> conceptions, which in the most inclinable Reader
> will scarce give any nourishment or help to
> devotion; for not flowing from a true, practick
> piety, it was impossible they should effect
> those things abroad, which they never had acquaint-
> ance with at home, being onely the productions of
> a common spirit, and the obvious ebullitions of
> that light humor, which takes the pen in hand,
> out of no other consideration, then to be seen
> in print.
>
> (II.391)

The Preface abounds with criticism of "vitious verse."
It lacks the milder and more urbane tone of Herbert's strictures,
and suggests that Vaughan is, paradoxically, less certain of
his own poetic intentions than Herbert was. But, more important,
Vaughan's initial didacticism, his single-minded insistence on
the ends of poetry rather than the means, threatens a division
between subject and form which Herbert's strongly emblematic
sense did not allow. The result is that throughout Silex
Scintillans we find a search for appropriate form which is
only sometimes successful. The great variety of metrical and
stanzaic patterns reflects not so much a delight in the many
ways in which God may be praised, but rather a constant endeavor
to find the one way, the one true, perfect expression of God's
love and beauty. In short, there is in Vaughan a kind of
absolutism arising from a dissatisfaction and frustration
reminiscent more of Donne than of Herbert. This kind of
absolutism, born of the conviction that nothing less than the
full realization of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth can provide
complete satisfaction, and nurtured by actual brief experiences
of what this Kingdom is like, was not to be well served by
Herbert's example; neither Herbert's themes nor his forms proved
in the end to be of much use in Vaughan's own poetic search.

The problem in Vaughan emerges more clearly if we recall the kind of integration of form and subject which Donne and Herbert were able to achieve. Donne relied on either a strong, regulating form or a powerful controlling figure to express a large body of conflicting ideas and feelings. Herbert, with his great visual and musical skill, united form and subject by a number of methods ranging from simple hieroglyphs to the most complex of stanza forms; at the same time ambiguous words and images gave his verse its characteristic density and its fusion of different levels of experience. Vaughan as a primarily lyric poet does not for the most part use Donne's kind of regulating forms and central figures; nor do we find in his poetry Herbert's density of thought and his balanced understanding. Vaughan did inherit from Herbert a large number of forms and conventions suitable for the poetic expression of religious truth; in Vaughan, however, that truth had not, at least at the time of writing Silex Scintillans, been made fully manifest.[5] The search for that truth underlies and explains the nature of Vaughan's formal qualities as a poet.

For Vaughan the true experience of God tends to lie in some future state that the poems can suggest, but not fully embody or describe. In this sense he is a poet of the intangible. The search for bliss is conducted with little apparent regard for the complexity of experience in the present, and in this

Vaughan differs considerably from Donne and Herbert. The poetry
itself, in its many changes of mood and its frequent odd
dislocations of meter and stanza development, reflects a kind
of restlessness of mind and soul. In his search for that joy
and peace in God which is only sometimes found in the present,
and for the most part remains dimly perceived in an indeter-
minate future state, Vaughan uses many expressive forms. The
way in which these forms are used suggests that the poet sees
in them many possible avenues to the discovery of the joy and
peace he seeks, but cannot make of them, as Herbert can, the
formal embodiment of that discovery. Whereas Herbert's poems
interpret present and past events from the point of view of one
who has, as far as possible in this world, reached the end of
his search, Vaughan's poems look continually forward to that
future time when all the imperfect stages in the soul's progress
will fall away and be forgotten in the longed-for brightness.
Vaughan's different attitude toward everyday experience, his
constant anticipation of something more pure and more complete
which is as yet only intermittently visible, is central to an
understanding not only of his imagery but also of his poetic
forms. For these forms are best seen as experiments, attempts
in themselves to define what is imminent, but has not yet been
fully experienced.[6]

If we allow the memory of Herbert to dominate our reading
of Vaughan, we may find in the latter poet's tentativeness and
unpredictability, as in the structural shifts which characterize
many of his poems, a certain carelessness and an insufficient
attention to the formal demands of his art. George Herbert
Palmer first made the comparison when he claimed that the
religious poets who followed Herbert, including Vaughan,
Crashaw and Traherne, have little regard for "structural plan"
and are "conspicuously lacking in restraint."[7] Albert McHarg
Hayes, one of the first to oppose Palmer's theory concerning
Herbert's obscurity and unmusicality, nevertheless continues
the tradition of viewing Herbert's mastery of form as the only
standard. In contrasting the later poets with Herbert, he says
that "with all these men . . . the variety of their stanzas
represents license, not law. Their inventions are haphazard,
thoughtless, unplanned."[8] The Temple has indeed cast a long
shadow over Vaughan, and it is perhaps inevitable that it should.
Most critical attention has as a result been given to those
poems which share, to a greater or lesser extent, Herbert's
qualities of compactness, verbal density and consistency of
metrical and stanzaic pattern. But we may better understand
Vaughan if our formal approach to his poetry accords with the
peculiarly restless quality of his mind.

Such an approach has already been suggested in two recent studies of Vaughan. R. A. Durr claims in The Mystical Poetry of Henry Vaughan that "we have no right to demand of Vaughan' the kind of form so readily discoverable in Herbert and then, not finding it, to disparage his artistry; for the two poets had undertaken to transform into art quite different experiences within the religious life, and the structural nature of their poems must differ accordingly."[9] The nature of this difference lies in the fact that Vaughan's poems "move with the unpredictability of a spontaneous gesture but, rightly seen, with as much grace. They express Life ebullient, dynamic, unfixed, unformulated, 'imperfect.'"[10] This is close to what I have called the 'restless' quality in Vaughan, and further points up the distinction between a poet who is constantly moving ahead to some as yet unexperienced fulfillment, and one who looks back to reinterpret past experience in the light of an achieved end. But the forward movement of Vaughan's poetry is not usually that of closely reasoned argument such as we find, in different ways, in Donne and Herbert. E. C. Pettet has defined this movement as follows:

> . . . many of his lyrics, including most of the best
> ones, evolve not so much through the logical con-
> nected development from thought to thought, as by
> way of association, sometimes rather oblique in
> nature, and by the spontaneous proliferating of
> some unifying complex of imagery.[11]

This inner movement of his poetry, whether or not it can be described as associative, alogical, spontaneous or oblique, is linked in a profound way with Vaughan's awareness of himself, the world around him, and the perfection beyond that world. Like Herbert, Vaughan is aware of the perfect order of the Creation--but it is an order from which in many poems man himself is excluded, an order which is as a result difficult for man to imitate, for his knowledge of it is limited.

The implications of this sense of exclusion in a study of form will become clearer if we briefly contrast Herbert's "Man" with Vaughan's poem of the same name. Herbert's poem (Hutchinson, p.90) celebrates man as the center and climax of the Creation; man is all proportion and all harmony, and in his works he can reflect this proportion and harmony, and make of himself a fit dwelling-place for the Spirit. The poem itself is a harmonious visual and formal imitation of the unity and diversity of the Creation. But Vaughan's "Man" is quite different. While birds, bees and flowers are all part of the greater harmony, and "To his divine appointments ever cleave," man himself is "restless and Irregular," moving about the earth with no real sense of direction, only a vague awareness of loss:

```
     He knocks at all doors, strays and roams,
   Nay hath not so much wit as some stones have
   Which in the darkest nights point to their homes,
       By some hid sense their Maker gave;
   Man is the shuttle, to whose winding quest
                      And passage through these looms
   God order'd motion, but ordain'd no rest.
                              (II.477, 11.22-28)
```

Vaughan's image here is likewise significantly different from

Herbert's checkered twist in "Providence," which "windes us in,"

or the silk twist of "The Pearl" which leads us straight to

God. Herbert's rationally apprehended pattern derives from

the design of the Creation and provides the design of the poem,

and the individual soul is able, at least through Nature, to

apprehend the design, but, like the shuttle, is not part of

it, and must live with the knowledge of its own estrangement

in the present world.

The inability in this world to understand and feel part of

the overall design of God is of great importance in Vaughan's

poetry. It explains the restless tone of many poems, as well

as the constantly repeated desire to escape from the clouded

vision of this world to the perfect knowledge of the soul after

death, to that vision which Donne made the center of the Second

Anniversary.

```
   Either disperse these mists, which blot and fill
       My perspective (still) as they pass,
   Or else remove me hence unto that hill,
       Where I shall need no glass.
                   ("They are all gone into the world of
                    light," II.484, 11.37-40)
```

It explains also the unpredictable and varied structure of many
of the poems, since Vaughan lacks Herbert's sense that the poet,
as an individual soul at the center of the Creation, can under-
stand and reflect that ordered beauty in his own creation, his
own poems. Last, and most important, the obscured vision and
the sense of separateness are closely related to Vaughan's own
consciousness of self. That sense of individuality which is
so strong in Donne and Herbert, and which we recognize in their
poetry in the easy colloquialism and the intimacy of address,
is not nearly so evident in Vaughan. Even in those poems of
Donne and Herbert where the assertions of self are most deplored,
the individual, personal tone serves as a constant, unifying
force, suggesting the immediacy of the soul's struggle with
itself and even with God. In Vaughan the personal tone is much
more elusive, because, as Robert Ellrodt points out, the
individual soul, so often addressed directly in the earlier poets,
is no longer seen as the microcosm, the point of convergence
between self and God, any more than man is the central figure in
the design of the Creation:

> Une conscience diffuse est moins apte que la
> conscience étroite de Donne, de Herbert ou de
> Marvell à se saisir elle-même comme un centre,
> comme un point de convergence, dans l'acte même
> de la vision ou de la réflexion. Elle sera aussi
> plus disposée à se répandre au dehors, à se mêler
> aux choses qu'à en prendre possession intérieure-
> ment par une appréhension réfléchie. N'ayant pas
> de centre, elle s'abandonne plus aisément
> à l'errance des songes et de la rêverie.[12]

In their respective studies, Durr, Pettet and Ellrodt
have all attempted to define that quality which separates
Vaughan's poetry from Herbert's. They have pointed to the
spontaneous, associative development of thought, to the
reverie, and to the desires which are not always clearly
defined. These qualities are especially noticeable in those
poems where metrical and stanzaic patterns are not consistently
maintained, but fluctuate and change in a seemingly random
manner. But, as I hope to show, they are present also in the
most formally regular poems, because they are all signs of
that lack of self-centeredness which characterizes Vaughan's
religious experience. The core of this experience is a process
of fragmentation in which distinct personality disappears in
the search for a greater identity with God:

> O that I were all Soul! that thou
> Wouldst make each part
> Of this poor, sinfull frame pure heart!
> Then would I drown
> My single one,
> And to thy praise
> A Consort raise
> Of Hallelujahs here below
> ("Chearfulness," II.429, 11.17-24)

Donne describes, from within the strongly dualistic framework
of the Anniversaries, what such a greater identity within God
will be like; Herbert, at the end of The Temple, brings us to
the very threshold of union in "Love III." But both poets deal

with this mystical transformation from the point of view of

the individual soul, a soul intensely self-conscious and

self-analytic. In Vaughan, however, we do not find that

same preoccupation with the individual soul and its inner

drama which are at the center of Donne's and Herbert's poems.

Ellrodt refers to Vaughan's lack of "self-consciousness"

(the English word is used), and describes its importance in

the development of thought and feeling in the poems:

> Ce mouvement naturel de la pensée et de l'émotion
> chez Vaughan est un mouvement linéaire, ralenti ou
> dévié par la méditation, mais sans revirement
> psychologique, sans ces brusques détours que l'analyse
> de leurs sentiments, la perception d'une intime
> complexité imposent à la reflexion chez Donne et
> chez Herbert.[13]

It is as if Vaughan seeks in his poems to break down the barriers

of self to the point where the personal voice and the distinct

personality will dissolve in the Divine Personality, whose

immanence is for Donne and Herbert an end, but for Vaughan only

a beginning.

The end of Vaughan's search, as religious man and poet, can

be deduced from several poems which are specifically concerned

with that transformation which the immanence of the Divine has

promised. The poet knows, as Donne and Herbert do, that physical

death must first intervene for the soul to be freed from its

earthly prison, but unlike Donne and Herbert, Vaughan finds

immediate and striking evidence of the transformation to come

in brief moments of visionary insight, moments of ecstasy when

all worldly things are suspended and made transparent, when

ignorance is replaced by knowledge, and the soul itself is

touched momentarily by an unexpected brightness:

>He that hath found some fledg'd birds nest, may know
>   At first sight, if the bird be flown;
>But what fair Well, or Grove he sings in now,
>   That is to him unknown.
>
>And yet, as Angels in some brighter dreams
>   Call to the soul, when man doth sleep:
>So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted theams,
>   And into glory peep.
>   ("They are all gone into the world of
>   light," II.484, 11.21-28)

In such poems as "The Morning-watch," "Cock-crowing" and "The

World," these brief moments are extended into whole stanzas or

sections, but for the most part it is the search for such

moments the poems record:

>I search, and rack my soul to see
>   Those beams again,
>But nothing but the snuff to me
>   Appeareth plain.
>("Silence, and stealth of days!" II.426, 11.17-20)

The inner world provides no more opportunities for trans-

cendence than the outer world. Even though, as Louis Martz has

pointed out, the memory of a divine reality still remains, and

in several of Vaughan's poems we see "a sinking inward upon the

mind's resources, until all the evocative ramifications of the

memory have been restored,"[14] such a restoration of memory

cannot be fully satisfying to the man who has peeped into the

glory still to come. As "Vanity of Spirit" shows, all we can

find through painful inner search is an awareness of the

fragments of vision, not the vision itself:

> I summon'd nature: peirc'd through all her store,
> Broke up some seales, which none had touch'd before,
>   Her wombe, her bosome, and her head
>   Where all her secrets lay a bed
>   I rifled quite, and having past
>   Through all the Creatures, came at last
>   To search my selfe, where I did find
>   Traces, and sounds of a strange kind.
> <div align="right">(II.418, 11.9-16)</div>

But these traces are "Hyerogliphicks quite dismembred, / And

broken letters scarce remembred." The pieces cannot be united:

> At last, said I,
> Since in these veyls my Ecclips'd Eye
> May not approach thee, (for at night
> Who can have commerce with the light?)
> I'le disapparell, and to buy
> But one half glaunce, most gladly die.
> <div align="right">(II.419, 11.29-34)</div>

With the barriers of self broken down, but with the ultimate

transformation unattainable until after death, it is almost as

if deliberate search in this world is a waste of time. Unlike

Donne who, deprived in the "Holy Sonnets" of any manifestation

of God's providence, remains imprisoned in the walls of the

self, Vaughan is free to 'wander' at will. His excursions into

Hermeticism and occult philosophy, into medicine and the Book of

the Creatures, can be seen as different stages in his wanderings.

But always in the background is the voice at the end of "The
Search:"

> Search well another world; who studies this,
> Travels in Clouds, seeks <u>Manna</u>, where none is.
> <div align="right">(II.407, ll.95-96)</div>

The act of searching itself involves an assertion of will
and personality which seems to defeat its own true object. That
sense of a distinct, engaged personality which, as I have
claimed, is never strong in Vaughan, is least so in those poems
where some object from nature, unsought, seen almost by chance,
becomes the object of rapt contemplation and seems to take over
completely the poet's consciousness, restoring in him once more
his faith in future fulfillment. Such poems as "The Tempest"
and "The Water-fall" show clearly the restorative process.
Despite their earth-bound natures, both storm and waterfall
embody that upward movement to heaven which man longs to imitate:

> All things here shew him heaven; <u>Waters</u> that fall
> Chide, and fly up; <u>Mists</u> of corruptest fome
> Quit their first beds & mount; trees, herbs, flowres, all
> Strive upwards stil, and point him the way home.

> <div align="right">("The Tempest," II.461, ll.25-28)</div>

It is the waterfall, the tempest, the crowing cock, the tree, the
shower, all natural and spontaneous sources of energy, which
provide in Vaughan's poems the main channels through which
regeneration will come and the individual soul, now wandering
and fragmented, will be made whole again. The way is not easy

to find, but it is there. It may be seen only partially, in infrequent glimpses, "But is stil trod / By ev'ry wandring clod." In its wanderings, then, the soul is hesitant and even despairing in the face of the unknowable, but its wanderings are necessary, for only the restless soul remains receptive to the divine spark which at intervals illuminates the darkness and renews the promise of coming transformation. The fixed soul, on the other hand, remains ignorant of the tempest's meaning:

> Thus groveling in the shade, and darkness, he
> Sinks to a dead oblivion.
>
> (11.41-42)

II

The poems of <u>Silex Scintillans</u>, taken as a whole, reflect the wandering quest, but unlike Herbert's journey of the soul, the end of Vaughan's quest is often obscure, and there are few sure guides. The poems are not parts contributing to a temple of praise, where the temple is a symbol of the traditional, eternal bond between soul and God. They are the records of long periods of sorrow and frustration interspersed with the briefer moments of illumination. They are not contained within a careful overall pattern like that of <u>The Temple</u>, since such a pattern is an imitation of the divine pattern which to Vaughan has not yet

been fully revealed. Nor within themselves do they exhibit the
tight and controlled structure found in individual poems of
Donne and Herbert. There is in many single poems of Vaughan a
sense of something formally incomplete, a sense even of fragments
awaiting their final ordering. The effect is not accidental.
The emblem on the title page shows the downward dropping tears
and the upward rising flames—but only in some future state will
the fragmented heart be reunited in God. In his explanation of
the emblem Vaughan writes:

> En lacerum! Caelosque tuos ardentia tandem
> Fragmenta, & liquidas ex Adamante genas.

But this is a future vision, the long awaited release of the soul
from its earthly prison. The poems of Silex Scintillans are not
the carefully hewn and placed stones of The Temple, but fragments
of the stony heart seeking their unification in the sustained
light of God now glimpsed only as sparks. Vaughan's temple is
not of this world.

To convey in verse this vision seen only intermittently was
no easy task. Vaughan was served by a fairly narrow but fully
explored and interiorized vocabulary of words and images which
he returned to in poem after poem. Images of light and dark, of
stars, clouds, springs and plants, recur as constants, but the
formal contexts in which they appear vary considerably. It may
be true, as Kermode has suggested, [15] that Vaughan often used his

familiar and evocative images when the real vision was absent.

That Vaughan was aware of the danger here is made clear by the

insistence on integrity of feeling in the Preface, and by the

short and unusually 'self-conscious' "Anguish:"

> O! 'tis an easie thing
> To write and sing;
> But to write true, unfeigned verse
> Is very hard! O God, disperse
> These weights, and give my spirit leave
> To act as well as to conceive!
>
> (II.526, 11.13-18)

But rather than question the poet's "sincerity," more will be

learned by looking at the formal contexts in which the familiar

images occur.

In doing so, we should first take note of the virtual absence

of several of the structural principles which are so widely used

by Herbert. For this is one case, I believe, where the absence

of imitation of Herbert is of considerable importance in an

assessment of the forms we do find. First, there are very few

hieroglyphic poems where verbal or typographical devices imitate

in a directly visual way the subject of the poem. "Distraction"

(II.413) and "Disorder and Frailty" (II.444) echo the planned

irregularities of rhyme and line length of "The Collar;" "Love-

sick" (II.493) and "The Wreath" (II.539), with their repetition

of end words in succeeding lines, echo Herbert's "A Wreath" and

"Sinnes Round" (though in Vaughan this pattern is not consistently

maintained); and "Trinity-Sunday" (II.493), with its three three-

line stanzas, is a direct imitation of Herbert's poem of the
same name.[16] But Vaughan's visual sense is essentially different
from Herbert's, and what Herbert was able to raise to a high
poetic art remains in Vaughan a somewhat self-conscious device.
Nor was Vaughan's visual sense usefully employed in the close
systematic analysis of an object for its inner symbolic meaning,
in the manner of Herbert's "The Pulley," "The Church-floore,"
or "The Windows." Only one of Vaughan's poems, "The Lampe"
(II.410), is emblematic in this way, and it is more labored than
revealing.[17] Such an interiorization of meaning as Herbert was
able to achieve in the objects and situations he wrote of is
rarely found in Vaughan, in whom concentration on small and
intricate detail is replaced by a process in which analysis
gives way to synthesis in the light of the imagined unity to
come. Even that object of profound contemplation, the waterfall,
loses its form in its plunge to destruction, and its trans-
formation suggests all the more strikingly the heavenly unity
which lies beyond this world.

Since we cannot hope to find here in this world the unifying
vision, then the objects and situations which Herbert found
meaningful enough to represent in the detailed visual equivalents
of hieroglyph and emblem, will not be so significant to Vaughan.
The same applies to the enclosed world of the self. Since the
transforming of the self in the world to come is the major

motivating force in Vaughan's search, the drama of inner
personality in the present world is not nearly as important in
his poetry as it is in Herbert's, and thus it is not surprising
that Herbert's dialogue and narrative forms are largely absent
from Silex Scintillans. On the lack of dialogue in Vaughan
J. B. Leishman has commented:

> It may indeed be doubted whether the essentially
> contemplative, single-minded and consistently serious
> author of Silex Scintillans would have been
> capable of writing a genuinely dialectical,
> dramatic and two-sided dialogue.[18]

There is little to indicate, however, that Vaughan found any
kind of logical or dialectic process conducive to the attain-
ment of truth. Nor does he find useful the analytic and
abstracting process by which Herbert in his dialogues gives
voice to such separate entities as the Will, the Conscience,
and the Holy Spirit, as they work within the individual soul.
It is with their fusion in a future totality rather than with
their relationship in the imperfect present that Vaughan is
mainly concerned. There are only three short formal dialogues
in Silex Scintillans: "Death" (II.399), "Resurrection and
Immortality" (II.400) and "The Evening-watch" (II.425). They
take the form of the traditional impersonal dialogue between
body and soul, and in no way suggest Herbert's complex
interiorized dramas.

But the lack of formal dialectic in Vaughan's poetry is not the result of a solemn single-mindedness, or of any lack of imaginative power. The poet's wandering search takes him through many states of mind and feeling, but the linear development of the poems tends to prevent the establishing of any clear and definite relationship between these states, and we cannot give such labels as "Will" and "Conscience" to the different 'voices' which occur in the poems. Even those exterior voices, usually signified by italics, which "whisper" at the end of such poems as "The Search" and "The World" are not readily identified, as similar voices in Herbert are.

The lack of concern for the inner drama of the self, together with an episodic development of ideas and feelings, make it impossible for Vaughan to write a true dialogue in the manner of Herbert. The same episodic development precludes the particular narrative forms of Herbert, where experiences are recounted which are 'interpreted' by a second speaker or by carefully planned ambiguities, and the poet's acceptance of God's will at the time of writing reflects back upon the events described and gives them deeper meanings unperceived at the time. Where by an act of retrospection Herbert explains and places within a wider Christian context the trials of the soul in this world, Vaughan's 'narratives' move characteristically toward, not a reinterpretation of experience in the world, but a

transcendence of it. At the end of these 'narratives' we are not intended to go back and discover the divine truth which Herbert so often presents, on first reading, as divine perversity; we can only go on, for in the past lie only "broken letters scarce remembred."

The first person narrative poems remain on the whole full of mysteries, full of intimations of something not yet made clear. In this way, "Regeneration," the first poem of Silex Scintillans, takes us through a succession of strange sights and sounds. The poet's "restless Eye" and listening ear seek explanations, as does the reader. The explanation, when it comes, does not really explain anything, but rather opens up an entirely new range of possibilities beyond our immediate understanding. The poem ends with the description of a "rushing wind:"

> I turn'd me round, and to each shade
> Dispatch'd an Eye,
> To see, if any leafe had made
> Least motion, or Reply,
> But while I listning sought
> My mind to ease
> By knowing, where 'twas, or where not,
> It whisper'd; Where I please.
> (II.399, ll.73-80)

Nor do the separate events which make up the narratives necessarily show a close logical relationship. In Herbert events which seem unrelated to the uninstructed soul always become meaningfully

related in the light of conscience and knowledge; in Vaughan
their unrelatedness is likely to be central to our reading of
the poem, and our search to find relatedness, in the form of a
clear and fixed allegorical pattern, as frustrating as Vaughan's
own search to find the perfect design in the mists of the world.

Lacking the sense of fulfillment in present time, lacking
the assurance of knowledge and the strong, controlling personal
voice, Vaughan develops his poems in a much more tentative way
than Herbert. I will examine a number of poems under two
general headings: those which show an irregular pattern of
development and those which show a regular pattern. In a few
of the irregular poems lack of purpose is an obvious flaw, but
in most cases formal shifts and inconsistencies are deeply
expressive of complex feelings and thought patterns. In the
regular poems, those in which a uniform stanzaic and metrical
pattern is maintained throughout, the inner structure of the
stanza may show the same kind of appropriate or inappropriate
metrical variation. In the remainder of this chapter I will
examine in closer detail the way in which both the formally
regular and the formally irregular poems in Silex Scintillans can
be seen to embody the same search for truth and wholeness, the
search in whose terms so much of Vaughan's religious experience
is defined.[19]

III

I will begin by considering a number of poems of the
irregular type, where abrupt shifts in meter and verse form
create effects which may be relatively common in post-Romantic
poetry, but whose originality in the seventeenth century is
striking.[20] The first of these poems to be discussed is "The
Search"--not only because its very title conveys the quest
which underlies so much of <u>Silex Scintillans</u>, but also because
it contains several devices which appear to be borrowed from
Herbert. It is a narrative; a second voice is heard at the
end in what may seem like a dialogue; and it contains many
scriptural allusions. But it does not look like a poem by
Herbert. Its verbal 'masses' appear unevenly distributed and
'top-heavy.' Seventy-four lines of tetrameter couplet forming
a solid block are followed by three short lyric stanzas, and
the whole is rounded off by a pentameter couplet. The first
long section of the poem records the search itself, begun in
darkness:

> all night have I
> Spent in a roving Extasie
> To find my Saviour.
>   (II.405, 11.3-5)

The poet wanders from place to place, following Christ's own
path, from Bethlehem to the Hill of Calvary, but all he finds
is heaps of ashes, sighs, empty tombs, mere "<u>Idaeas</u> of his Agonie."

The forward movement of this part of the poem is vague--a
succession of briefly mentioned places seen only in darkness--
and is conveyed with great appropriateness by couplets whose
own outline is blurred by constant enjambment and various
parenthetical phrases. There is a feeling of breathlessness
and of basic indirection, similar in effect to the narrative
in Herbert's "Redemption." But as daylight comes, and with
it the discovery that "my Quest is vaine," the poet decides
he will go to the wilderness, for "He liv'd there safe, 'twas
his retreat / From the fierce Jew, and Herods heat." Seeking
sanctuary, he anticipates the pleasures of rest:

> What pleasures should my Journey crown,
> What silent paths, what shades, and Cells,
> Faire, virgin-flowers, and hallow'd Wells
> I should rove in, and rest my head
> Where my deare Lord did often tread.
> (II.407, 11.68-72)

The couplets are now lulling and even in their movement, and with
the introduction of the voice of "one singing," we may expect a
continuation in the same manner. But the short lyrics that
follow are unexpectedly disruptive, not only of the movement
from restless wandering to the promise of peace which has
evolved up to this point, but of the whole idea of peace and rest
in this world, even in those places of hallowed memory--places
now seen merely as "the skinne, and shell of things," "old
Elements, / or Dust." This, then, is the real wilderness, and

the broken lines and awkward rhyme pattern tell their own

story:

> The skinne, and shell of things
>   Though faire,
>   are not
> Thy wish, nor pray'r
>   but got
> By meer Despair
>   of wings.
>
>   (11.81-87)

Even the scenes of the Passion and the Crucifixion seem now

without meaning; their significance is solely to point forward,

and the final antithetical couplet, while it brings the worldly

search to a conclusive end, points forward to another world,

whose nature we might deduce from Scripture, but about which

Vaughan remains deliberately vague:

> Search well another world; who studies this,
> Travels in clouds, seeks <u>Manna</u>, where none is.
>   (11.95-96)

It is evident that the final short lyrics and couplet are in

structural and thematic opposition to the rest of the poem, but

rather than modify each other in the kind of meaningful inter-

action we find in similar examples in Herbert ("The Pearl,"

"Love Unknown," etc.), the two unequal 'halves' of this poem

serve to point, in different ways, to the continuation of the

search in realms beyond this world, and beyond this poem.

Fortunately we have a continuation of "The Search" in a poem

which bears much the same relationship to that poem as Donne's

Second Anniversary does to the First.

"Ascension-day," the first poem in the second part of

Silex Scintillans, and an evident companion-piece to "The

Search," reverses the structure of the earlier poem, and

complements it with an imagined identification of the poet with

the risen Christ.[21]   Instead of a long, uniform opening section

giving way abruptly to a second, shorter, fragmentary section,

here the 'intrusion' of a short lyric occurs at the beginning,

and after initial unevenness the poem proceeds through sustained,

regular couplets to a triumphant conclusion. This poem is one

of the few in which Vaughan seems to achieve transformation,

and in it he looks back in the light of the new discovery. We

may note also, along with the structural reversal, a reversal in

the soul's relationship with God. In "The Search" (as in

"Regeneration"), the soul is finally thrown back upon itself,

and its distance from true unity is stressed in the abrupt and

unsettling conclusion. "Ascension-day" begins at this point.

The gap that once separated the soul from God is alluded to at

the beginning of the poem, where close juxtaposition of pronouns,

emphatic enjambment and a parenthetical intrusion recall Donne's

use of similar devices in the "Holy Sonnets:"

> Thy glorious, bright Ascension (though remov'd
> So many Ages from me) is so prov'd
> And by thy Spirit seal'd to me, that I
> Feel me a sharer in thy victory.
> <div align="right">(II.481, 11.5-8)</div>

The tentativeness of these lines is suddenly dispelled by a short

lyric section, which, despite its lack of any poetic merit,

announces a transition as clear and abrupt as that at the end

of "The Search:"

> I soar and rise
> Up to the skies,
> Leaving the world their day,
> And in my flight,
> For the true light
> Go seeking all the way.
> <div align="right">(11.9-14)</div>

From this new view-point, imaginatively at one with the risen

Christ, the poet, rather than seeking further, in fact returns

to the scene of "The Search" and finds the Sepulchre, the Grave,

the "now Primros'd-fields," shining in the light of the risen

sun. The lonely traveler of the earlier poem, no longer locked

within himself, becomes at one with the transformed world:

> I see them, hear them, mark their haste, and move
> Amongst them, with them, wing'd with faith and love.
> <div align="right">(11.31-32)</div>

In contrast to the long opening section of "The Search," where

in a deliberately prosaic way the succession of couplets records

an actual physical journey conducted in this world's time and

space, the long closing section of "Ascension-day" reveals a

spacious vision in which the poet seems to be in all places,
and in all time, at once. Past and future become one in an
endless present, as "I walk the fields of Bethani which
shine / All now as fresh as Eden, and as fine." Further
comparison reveals that narrative has given way to pure
imaginative vision, as the search is succeeded by the discovery;
particularity of detail is replaced by a generality which in
Vaughan, as in Traherne later, signifies the soul's yearning
for wholeness.[22] The heroic couplets of this poem take up
the Edenic vision so fleetingly glimpsed in "The Search," and
extend it in a stately music which owes very little to Herbert,
but which seems rather to suggest the balanced measures of the
Augustans:

> When Heav'n above them shin'd like molten glass,
> While all the Planets did unclouded pass;
> And Springs, like dissolv'd Pearls their Streams did pour
> Ne'er marr'd with floods, nor anger'd with a showre.[23]
>   (II.482, 11.45-48)

Both poems, then, use immediately apparent imbalances to make
their point. The long repetitive opening sequence of "The Search"
depicts the unprofitable realities of this world, but the pattern
of this sequence is abruptly broken by new rhythms, and, finally,
new possibilities. The terminal couplet establishes the dominant
metrical pattern of "Ascension-day," in which, after an initial
abrupt transition, the soul breaks free of the world, and the new

reality is established in a new time and a new space. Like "The Sacrifice" and "Love III" in The Temple, these two poems constitute a beginning and an end in Silex Scintillans. They are in a sense atypical poems--few others give so little indication of the end of the soul's quest as "The Search;" few make the end so imaginatively explicit as "Ascension-day." Between these two poles can be placed other more typical poems, where structural shifts bring this world and the next into much closer relationship with each other--into the kind of proximity which Vaughan's own sudden moments of vision, and also, perhaps, his reading of the Canticles and the Hermetica, had suggested. This proximity is most immediately felt when the power of some natural phenomenon, spontaneous and unself-conscious, enters the soul and directs it back to its true course.

"The Tempest," like "Man," contrasts the intuitive closeness of nature to God with man's almost perverse preference for ignorance and separation. Although "all things here shew him heaven," and all living things as well as all elements point upward, man himself remains imprisoned by false values. This imprisonment is suggested immediately by the four-line stanzas with their enclosed abba rhyme scheme. This stanza is also well suited to express the contrasts which the poet establishes

by means of repeated questions and exclamations:

> O foolish man! how hast thou lost thy sight?
>   How is it that the Sun to thee alone
>   Is grown thick darkness, and thy bread, a stone?
> Hath flesh no softness now? mid-day no light?
> <div align="right">(II.462, 11.53-56)</div>

The extent of our loss is, however, made immediately apparent by
the insertion between first and second stanzas of a twelve-line
lyric which recalls a time when earth and heaven were in
harmonious accord:

> When nature on her bosome saw
>   Her Infants die,
> And all her flowres wither'd to straw,
>   Her brests grown dry;
> She made the Earth their nurse, & tomb,
>   Sigh to the sky,
> 'Til to those sighes fetch'd from her womb
>   Rain did reply,
> So in the midst of all her fears
>   And faint requests
> Her Earnest sighes procur'd her tears
>   And fill'd her brests.
> <div align="right">(II.460, 11.5-16)</div>

The simplicity of this lyric is in obvious contrast to the pattern
of the rest of the poem. Alternating four- and two-stress lines
and an alternating rhyme scheme combine with carefully juxtaposed
long and short vowels and repeated key words like "sighes" and
"brests" to produce a mysterious and sensuous music which man
can no longer hear, for "Heaven hath less beauty than the dust
he spies, / And money better musick than the Spheres." In the
stanzas that follow the lyric, the vision of unity is alluded

to several times, but seems to retreat further and further as
the agitated angularity of the dominant pattern establishes
itself.

Since the short lyric is a formal italicized intrusion in
"The Tempest," it gains an added emphasis and calls to mind
the great distance separating the real and the ideal. In
"The Dawning," however, there is a greater sense of nearness
and imminence, and metrical shifts and variations are worked
into the basic pattern of the poem to produce a mood of
expectancy. The irregularity of the first of the poem's two
sections conveys with considerable skill the mounting excitement
of the soul as it awaits the vision of light. The opening
pentameter line scarcely has a chance to establish itself; it
is followed immediately by four octosyllabic lines, which in
turn give way to a daring four-syllable line in which the iambic
pattern of the opening is almost entirely lost:

>   Ah! what time wilt thou come? when shall that crie
>   The _Bridegroome's Comming!_ fil the sky?
>   Shall it in the Evening run
>   When our words and works are done?
>   Or will thy all-surprizing light
>   Break at midnight?
>   (II.451, ll.1-6)

Three more short lines interrupt at irregular intervals during
the rest of the opening section, as if to concentrate our
wandering attention on the joyous event. But the irregular

opening serves a further purpose. Man, until the dawning, is
"without measure;" but now "Ful hymns doth yield," and "The
whole Creation shakes off night." The second part of the poem
proceeds in the new measure of regular octosyllabics. As
sometimes happens in Vaughan, the initial excitement is
dissipated. The poem turns into a more conventional devotional
exercise as, paradoxically, the "all-surprizing light" retreats
into some undetermined future:

> So when that day, and hour shal come
> In which thy self wil be the Sun,
> Thou'lt find me drest and on my way,
> Watching the Break of thy great day.
> > (II.452, 11.45-48)

"The Morning-watch," on the other hand, sustains its "full
hymn" throughout. Five-stress, three-stress and two-stress lines
are arranged in a set order. Man "without measure" is now
raised into a "world in tune." Lines of widely varying length
are run on, and a complex rhyme scheme establishes its own
interlocking pattern to suggest the continuing, unbroken dawn-
vision:

> In what Rings
> And Hymning Circulations the quick world
> Awakes, and sings;
> The rising winds,
> And falling springs,
> Birds, beasts, all things
> Adore him in their kinds.
> Thus all is hurl'd
> In sacred Hymnes, and Order, the great Chime
> And Symphony of nature.
> > (II.424, 11.9-18)

There is no feeling in this poem, as there is in "The Dawning,"
that a familiar metrical pattern is being imposed as a kind of
substitute for the celestial music only half-heard. What
finally eludes the poet in "The Dawning" is here made fully
manifest, and, in the words of another of Vaughan's critics,
the rhythmical achievement is "particularly noticeable in the
sections of shortened lines, where the dangerously brief
phrases and the close proximity of rhyming words rarely impede
the sustained flow of the poem."[24]

"The Morning-watch," while offering a useful comparison
with "The Dawning," remains on the same level throughout. The
ordered pattern of its lines does not embody the sense of
movement and transition, the searching quality, which formal
irregularity in Vaughan usually expresses. Sometimes, however,
as in "The Bird," metrical and stanzaic variation are merely
gratuitous and reflect a lack of real interest in, or an
uneasiness with, the subject. A series of general reflections
on the birds of light and the birds of darkness is given no
point or direction by seven differently structured stanzas.
Only the sixth seizes our attention with its stark ballad-like
rhythm which Vaughan handles, in this instance, with perfect
control:

> The Turtle then in Palm-trees mourns,
>   While Owls and Satyrs howl;
> The pleasant Land to brimstone turns
>   And all her streams grow foul.
>   (II.497, 11.27-30)

For Vaughan's irregularly structured poems to succeed, there

must be a feeling of close identity with the subject, and such

a feeling is lacking here.

As a final example of the irregular poems, one might

examine "The Water-fall." Its structure is basically similar

to that of "The Dawning" and "The Tempest," in that the

irregular 'intrusions' occur at the beginning, after which the

poem establishes its own fixed metrical pattern. The difference

lies in the fact that there is no division in tone or meaning,

just as there is no stanza division. The seamless integration

of the whole is a result of the complete absorption of the poet

in the subject of the poem. The poem itself imitates the

waterfall. Yet there is no sense of ingenuity or contrivance,

and the imitation is heard rather than seen. The two initial

slow pentameter lines, for instance, with their long suggestive

vowels and alliterated consonants, 'flow' almost imperceptibly

into the second couplet, where four verbs in two four-syllable

lines convey the sense of an unexpected fall, and a new,

quicker music breaks through:

> With what deep murmurs through times silent stealth
> Doth thy transparent, cool and watry wealth
> > Here flowing fall,
> > And chide, and call,
> As if his liquid, loose Retinue staid
> Lingring, and were of this steep place afraid.
> > > (II.537, 11.1-6)

The fifth and sixth lines interrupt the quickening movement of
the verse--the voice must slow down progressively to give equal
weight to the last four words of the fifth line, and the run-on,
perfectly placed "lingring" of the fifth. But the descending
movement continues until finally checked by the two initial
negatives of the tenth and eleventh lines:

> > The common pass
> > Where, clear as glass,
> > All must descend
> > Not to an end:
> But quickned by this deep and rocky grave,
> Rise to a longer course more bright and brave.
> > > (11.7-12)

The sudden change in direction signaled by these lines introduces
the renewed journey of the stream toward the "sea of light"
from which it came. This new movement finds its structural
counterpart in the "longer course" of the poem itself, as the
interaction of five-stress and two-stress lines resolves itself
in the steady flowing rhythm of the tetrameter couplets which
make up the concluding section. Within this new movement the
poet draws out the "lesson" of the waterfall. There is now a
certain distancing from the subject--not because a vision has

been lost, as in "The Dawning," but because it has been found,

through the poet's absorption in his subject.

The movement of the water is now revealed to be ultimately

cyclic, and it is the perfection of the great circle of stream,

sea and sky which draws the mind to God, and which has particular

significance for the wandering soul of man. The waterfall never

disappears from the poem,[25] but its movement becomes part of

the greater movement of all "mystical, deep streams," part of

the Spirit "Which first upon thy face did move, / And hatch'd

all with his quickning love" (11.31-32). The successive and

linear movement of the poem seems in this one case to merge

with an ever-widening circular movement, as the soul moves out-

ward like the "streaming rings" at the base of the waterfall,

"Which reach by course the bank, and then / Are no more seen,

just so pass men" (11.35-36). Finally, the waterfall itself, as

a mere part of the greater order, is transcended, at the very

moment when the poet's identification with it is most complete:

> O my invisible estate,
> My glorious liberty, still late!
> Thou art the Channel my soul seeks,
> Not this with Cataracts and Creeks.
> (11.37-40)

In this way the transitions at the beginning of the poem, where

the actual physical waterfall of the senses is so vividly evoked,

are forgotten when the soul itself merges with the "mystical

stream" in the "longer course" towards liberty and light.

IV

Throughout the irregular poems we are made aware of the importance of the couplet, but its true significance in <u>Silex Scintillans</u> is best revealed in the formally regular poems which I now wish to discuss. No other metaphysical poet, except perhaps Marvell, makes such extensive and varied use of this "hallmark of the Jonsonian mode."[26] Edmund Blunden noted this in his early study of the poet, and claimed that it is only when Vaughan is writing couplets, particularly octosyllabic couplets, that "his thought advances vigorously and clearly, and is strengthened by apt modifications of accent and sound."[27] At first glance it may seem strange that a poet as unanalytic and as little given to logical argument as Vaughan should be attracted to such a precise and even constricting form--particularly when his master Herbert made only sparing use of it, as did his more 'mystical' successor Traherne. But it seems likely that in Vaughan the couplet serves the same purpose as Herbert's more tightly organized stanza patterns--to provide a solid formal basis for subtle nuance and spontaneity of feeling.

Pettet draws our attention, in "The Water-fall," to "the counterpoint effect of the natural, uncontorted word-order and the flowing supple rhythm of one long sentence against the taut

and highly formal metrical pattern."[28] Ellrodt finds Vaughan's

poetry occupying a kind of middle ground between complete

formal spontaneity and adherence to one particular, prescribed,

but infinitely adaptable, literary convention:

> Il n'est pas de ces poètes dont l'esprit se
> forge spontanément ses propres moyens d'expression.
> Mais son inspiration n'épouse pas non plus les
> formes strictes d'une convention littéraire
> définie, dont l'artifice même, chez Crashaw ou
> chez Marvell, est le fond neutre sur lequel
> s'accuse les plus menues particularités de
> l'inspiration personnelle.[29]

The kind of progress we observe in much of Vaughan's poetry is

towards the establishing of a formally regulating pattern. Such

a pattern is based almost invariably on the couplet, or a

modified version of it.

Entire poems can show this transition to a couplet pattern,

as I have shown in "Ascension-day" and "The Water-fall." Some

simply conclude with a single, summarizing couplet, a favorite

device in poems of a more orthodox devotional or didactic nature,

such as "Death" (II.399), "Religion" (II.404), "The Pursuite"

(II.414) and "Jesus weeping" (II.503). "Regeneration" (II.397),

"Affliction" (II.459), "The Evening-watch" (II.425) and "Joy"

(II.491) are poems in which a single terminal couplet reimposes

a sense of order on inner discord. Similar transitions can also

be observed to form a common, repeated pattern within each

individual stanza, and the control of the couplet can be felt

throughout the poem. Such is the case in "Dressing" (II.455),
"The Law, and the Gospel" (II.465), "Cock-crowing" (II.488) and
"The Jews" (II.499). Finally, taking Silex Scintillans as a
whole, it will be found that an overall pattern of increasing
regularization emerges clearly. Less than a quarter of the
poems in Part I (1650) consist wholly of regular or alternating
couplets, as opposed to over half in Part II (1655).

The tendency towards the formality of the couplet does, I
think, suggest that Vaughan found it a useful discipline and
guide for feelings and experiences which lay outside the
pattern of Anglican orthodoxy. If it is true, as H. J. Oliver
has suggested,[30] that Anglicanism, like Hermeticism, was for
Vaughan a useful framework for a genuine but intermittent
mysticism, then the prevalence of couplet forms becomes more
significant. As the disciplines of orthodox religious
observance are always there when the actual transforming vision
is not, so in Vaughan's poetry the discipline and order of the
couplet remain when the dawning of a new 'order' does not come
and the vision is obscured in mist. The couplet can become
merely a vehicle for instruction, as in the many orthodox
exercises of Part II of Silex Scintillans; it is often used in
a mechanical way. But in several of Vaughan's most successful
poems it provides a flexible and expressive framework for the

same search for unity and light that has been observed in the
irregular poems.

"The Retreate," the only one of Vaughan's well-known poems
to be composed entirely in couplets, has received attention more
because of its supposed foreshadowing of Wordsworth and the
childhood vision than because of its own technical and formal
merits. It is essential to a study of Vaughan's own search
motif, particularly in view of its muted, elegiac tone. There
is little sense of immediate anticipation, for in this poem the
'discovery' has been made already at the beginning. Because of
this, the kind of forward movement and accompanying structural
shifts which characterize many of the irregular poems are no
longer appropriate. Now that the poet has correctly "understood
this place," he must return to the other place, the "Angell-
infancy" in which his search was first begun,

> When yet I had not walkt above
> A mile, or two, from my first love,
> And looking back (at that short space,)
> Could see a glimpse of his bright-face.
>   (II.419, ll.7-10)

The first twenty-line section of the poem is a complex meditation
on the opening exclamation, as formally balanced within itself as
the couplets which make it up. Present estrangement and past
unity are juxtaposed by means of four distinct, four-line,
parallel clauses, a "before" clause on either side of the two

"when" clauses, suggesting the restriction of that past vision

within the confines of the present. For now the soul is

divided against itself. Where before it could be at one with

the celestial thought, the bright face and the gilded flower,

its various parts now corrupt each other:

> Before I taught my tongue to wound
> My Conscience with a sinfull sound,
> Or had the black art to dispence
> A sev'rall sinne to ev'ry sence.
> <div align="right">(11.15-18)</div>

In the last couplet as in the first of this section Vaughan

brings together time present and past, fragmentation and whole-

ness, in one of his most famous images: "But felt through all this

fleshly dresse / Bright _shootes_ of everlastingnesse." So con-

vincingly does this couplet, with its vivid concreteness, bridge

the great gap of time, that the second section of the poem seems

almost to be an afterthought, similar in effect to the opening

of the second section of "The Water-fall." But the discords of

the present assert themselves again when after six smoothly-

flowing lines the vision of the "shady city" finally disappears

and the first of the two "but" clauses brings about a new feeling

of separateness: "But (ah!) my soul with too much stay / Is

drunk, and staggers in the way." The emphatic breaks after

"drunk" and "way" disrupt the basic rhythm in a striking confirm-

ation of the sense of the lines, but this rhythm is restored in

the last four lines:

> Some men a forward motion love,
> But I by backward steps would move,
> And when this dust falls to the urn
> In that state I came return.
>
> (II.420, ll.29-32)

"Backward" and "forward" balance each other like the "before" and "when" clauses of the first section; but here the effect is rather that of mutual cancellation. The final couplet moves with a slow, falling cadence which contrasts with the rising cadence of the last couplet of the first section and brings us back in a full circle to the opening lines of the poem. Thus, a series of subtle rhythmical and grammatical juxtapositions works in close association with the couplet base and the opposed image pattern to produce a total realization of the search for unity--not now a forward moving search through successive states but a retreat back through time to the source of all that is constant, to that unity whose presence seems to be suggested throughout the poem by the couplet's slow music.[31]

Vaughan's use of this meter is nowhere else as successful as in "The Retreate." In other poems where it is used unvaryingly, it can easily become merely a method of stringing together a series of impersonal moralistic comments, as in "St. Mary Magdalen" (II.507) or "Fair and young light" (II.513). Or, when not held together by any sense of dominant movement or fixed purpose, it can result merely in the poet spreading himself too

thin, over too little matter, as in "Misery" (II.472). In
poems of celebration Vaughan usually chooses to avoid the
couplet, though exceptions occur in "Easter Hymn" (II.457),
where a combination in the first half of trochaic feet and
feminine endings produces an unfortunate doggerel-like effect,
and in "White Sunday" (II.485), where a long series of "ifs"
and "buts" results only in inappropriate equivocation. In
many of his most successful poems, however, Vaughan chooses
to modify the closed couplet form with a number of simple
variations which affect line length, rhyme scheme and stanza
pattern, but involve no radical departure from the couplet base.

"Cock-crowing," for instance, maintains an octosyllabic
pattern throughout, but is organized by stanzas made up of four
lines of alternating rhyme and two lines forming a regular
closed couplet. This stanza pattern allows the poet to use
the first four lines for exclamation, conjecture and questioning,
out of which emerges the authoritative affirmation of the last
two. In the first stanza we can see how in the first four lines
alternate rhyme and enjambment are a preparation for the theme
which does not appear with full clarity and simplicity until
the couplet:

> Father of lights! what Sunnie seed,
> What glance of day hast thou confin'd
> Into this bird? To all the breed
> This busie Ray thou hast assign'd;
>> Their magnetisme works all night,
>> And dreams of Paradise and light.
>> (II.488, 11.1-6)

The final couplets of each stanza in the first half of the poem provide a series of discoveries and affirmations which arise directly from the more complex texture of the preceding lines and convey a sense of the real immanence of the "father of lights." By the end of the fourth stanza the shift in emphasis from bird to individual soul is complete, and the couplet might well be the conclusion of a quite satisfying poem: "Seeing thy seed abides in me, / Dwell thou in it, and I in thee." But as in other poems there is a change in thought and tone, and the second half is full of the images of darkness, shadows, and the veil which separates the soul from God. The note of affirmation contained in the couplets of the first half disappears, and these later couplets are tied in much more closely with the argument of the rest of the stanzas. The fifth stanza is made virtually indivisible by the repetition of "this veyle" at the beginning of the first, third and fifth lines. In the last stanza "O take it off!" is repeated in the first and fifth lines, and so the poem ends with a sustained prayer in marked contrast to the more logical deductions of the first half of the poem.

A similar stanza pattern is found in "Rules and Lessons,"
an uneven poem which shows that in Vaughan the couplet's
influence was not at all times salutary. In "Cock-crowing"
the interaction between the couplet and the four preceding
lines is always significant, building up at the end to the
point where the two parts merge in unified prayer. The "lesson"
which the bird, as part of nature, provides is not so simply
applied as the first half of the poem suggests. In "Rules and
Lessons," however, the couplets supply only a long string of
moral tags whose sound and sense often jar with the rest of
the stanzas. Despite a carefully drawn up 'program' in which
the natural phenomena of a single day become the pattern for
man's whole devotional life, the poem should not be read as an
organically developed whole. It is a simple series of
variations on one theme. But we need examine only one repre-
sentative stanza to see that two different organizing principles
are pulling against each other:

> Walk with thy fellow-creatures: note the hush
> And whispers amongst them. There's not a Spring,
> Or Leafe but hath his Morning-hymn; Each Bush
> And Oak doth know I AM; canst thou not sing?
> O leave thy Cares, and follies! go this way
> And thou art sure to prosper all the day.
> (II.436, 11.13-18)

The brightness of the morning-vision is conveyed with great effectiveness in the first four lines by the way in which the verse, through unpredictable emphases and varying caesural breaks, seeks to free itself from the basic four-line pattern. But this sense of freedom and expansion is checked by the imposed authority of the couplet, where it is not so much the mediocrity of thought as the inappropriateness of the new rhythmic order which produces the sense of deflation. This exact pattern is not repeated in every stanza--sometimes a whole stanza is devoted to a description of the Creation, in which case the couplet loses its rigid outline and merges with the rest (see stanzas 15, 16, 22, 23); at other times a whole stanza becomes a moral tag, in which case the final couplet exerts its power over the whole. The first four lines show the same rigid structure as the last two, and the short, periodic sentences take on the movement of the wagging finger rather than the spontaneous vitality of the natural world (see stanzas 6-9). It is as if the "Mysteries" of the mornings, the "restless motions," the "running Lights" and the Vast Circling Azure" of noon--the day's great movement of "Rise, hight, and Descent"--are being forced into a smaller, narrower scheme. The weaknesses of this poem, the great distance between its high and its low points, are worthy of note because they indicate that Vaughan's

choice of poetic forms was often much less sure than that of

Donne, Herbert and Traherne, all of whom found their own

appropriate ways of conveying the same kind of expansive vision

and the "moral" it contains.

In "Rules and Lessons" there is no active search for

meaning, no personal engagement, no inner movement through

different states of mind and feeling. Vaughan's vision is

most effective when it remains elusive, mysterious and ultimately

independent of the things of this world--when it is suggested,

not described. One may refer again to "The Morning-watch,"

where a bright vision is described, yet the poem concludes

with the "mistie shrowd" and the "Curtain'd grave" which keep

the vision still distant, still unattainable.

In one great poem only, "The World," is the vision apparently

described rather than suggested--described in a minuteness of

detail which has led to considerable critical dispute over

whether the vision was really experienced, and whether the poem

is in any way a unified whole.[32] It should be noticed first,

perhaps, that the actual ring of eternity is described only once

in the whole poem: it is calm and bright. The rest of the poem,

as its title indicates, describes the world of time, "like a

vast shadow," and it is essentially from the standpoint of this

world of time that the poem is written. As in "Regeneration"

and "The Search," the poet himself is instructed by a mysterious whisper—he does not, until the end of the poem, know exactly which is the way "where you might tread the Sun, and be / More bright than he."

In "The World" the couplet is used in such a way that its initial force at the beginning of each stanza is modified by a rhyming three-stress line that follows immediately after. The subsequent pattern of five-stress lines alternating with two- and three-stress lines retains the rhyme scheme and the metrical authority of the opening pentameter couplet. The same pattern gives the poem a constantly varying movement and a lyrical lightness rarely found in other poems of a didactic nature, and binds it together into one rhythmical whole. "The World" is for Vaughan an unusually 'complete' poem. The image of the ring itself, mentioned explicitly only at the beginning and the end, encloses all the allegorical figures and their separate actions, as does the sustained metrical pattern. The last two lines take us back to the first two, but the change which occurs from the opening vision, through its detailed explanation, to the final assertion of the doctrine of election, is clearly seen and heard in the metrical variation which is found in each stanza, and in the poem as a whole. At the beginning the couplet is 'extended,' the great vision flows over into a third rhyming and appositive line:

>   I saw Eternity the other night
>   Like a great <u>Ring</u> of pure and endless light,
>   All calm, as it was bright.
>   (II.466, 11.1-3)

But at the end the ultimate distance of man from this vision is

conveyed by the restriction of the last antithetical, "truncated"

couplet:

>   <u>This Ring the Bride-groome did for none provide</u>
>   <u>But for his bride</u>.
>   (II.467, 11.59-60)

"The World" differs somewhat from most of the poems I have

examined in that the vision actually precedes the "search." But

its poetic method is shared by many of the most successful

poems, where a regular stanzaic pattern is made up of various

modifications of the couplet base, and where the strong frame-

work provided by this base allows for pleasing variations in

line length and subtle changes of mood.

This is the essence of Vaughan's counterpoint. It lacks the

finer musicality of Herbert because of its lesser range,

particularly in the matter of rhyme, and it only rarely suggests

the harmony between individual soul and God which informs <u>The</u>

<u>Temple</u>. <u>Silex Scintillans</u> does not approach Herbert's complete-

ness--it illuminates by sudden sparks and flashes rather than by

a sustained light. But out of the varying accents of Vaughan's

verse arise the intense moments and images for which the poet is

chiefly remembered. It is not that such moments and images are

merely happy discoveries in otherwise bad poems. To examine more closely the structure of the verse itself is to discover that these moments and images cannot be isolated, that they can in many cases be fully experienced and understood only by looking at the larger structure in which they occur. Thus the ring of light is the central symbol of a poem which, despite apparent changes in tone, remains unified not only by this symbol, but by a metrical and stanzaic structure which in its own way 'explains' the symbol and makes it live in the senses as in the intellect.

In the same way, "Gods silent, searching flight" and "His still, soft call" become more meaningful when they are seen to be reflected in the structure of each stanza of "The Night." Out of the interweaving pattern of sound wrought in the first four lines comes the response of the concluding couplet with its sense of balance and commerce between earth and heaven—such a commerce as Nicodemus first knew and which the poet seeks to know as well. But the poet's own "searching flight" is full of longing and uncertainty. In the final stanza of the poem the image of the "deep, but dazling darkness" is locked up in four lines whose dislocations in rhyme and meter give a peculiar added weight to the fourth line:

> There is in God (some say)
> A deep, but dazling darkness; As men here
> Say it is late and dusky, because they
> See not all clear.
>
> (II.523, 11.49-52)

But the ways in which men try to describe God, and thus define

their own search, are confused. This confusion is a product of

the disordered self which in the clarity of the final couplet

disappears in the longed for new order where self and God are

one:

> O for that night! where I in him
> Might live invisible and dim.
>
> (11.53-54)

For further knowledge of this new order which Vaughan seemed

never quite to attain, we must turn to Traherne.

FOOTNOTES

1 Works, p.xlii.

2 The Works of Henry Vaughan, ed. L. C. Martin, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1914), II.391. All subsequent references are to this edition.

3 The following works all take as their point of departure Vaughan's essential originality: R. A. Durr, On the Mystical Poetry of Henry Vaughan (Cambridge, Mass., 1962); E. C. Pettet, Of Paradise and Light (Cambridge, 1960); Ross Garner, Henry Vaughan: Experience and the Tradition (Chicago, 1959). See also F. E. Hutchinson, Henry Vaughan: A Life and Interpretation (Oxford, 1947); Helen White, The Metaphysical Poets: A Study in Religious Experience (New York, 1962), Chapter 11; Robert Ellrodt, Les Poètes Métaphysiques Anglais (Paris, 1960), II, Chapter 3.

4 For an account of these imitations, see Hutchinson's Works, pp.xl-xlii.

5 The suddenness and apparent intensity of Vaughan's conversion has been much commented on: see particularly Hutchinson, White, and E. L. Marilla, "The Religious Conversion of Henry Vaughan," RES, XXI (1945), 15-22. The nature of this conversion and its essential difference from the experience of Herbert is, I believe, best revealed in those poems in which Vaughan anticipates and searches for the bliss to come, as opposed to the generally less interesting poems written within a more orthodox scriptural and doctrinal framework.

6 In this regard I feel that attempts to read the poetry as auto-biographical statement are misguided. Frank Kermode makes the same point in "The Private Imagery of Henry Vaughan," RES, I (1950), 206-225. He discusses the relationship between the poet's own religious experience and the images and symbols, often traditional in nature, which he uses to describe it, and suggests that in his best poems Vaughan uses traditional images and symbols in a poet's way, "which is not the way of the philosopher or mystic" (p.209). It is still possible, however, that Vaughan's use of a traditional terminology helped to give shape and form to what remained undefined in his own experience.

7 The English Works of George Herbert, 3 vols. (London, 1905), I.141.

[8] "Counterpoint in Herbert," _SP_, XXXV (1938), 57.

[9] p.10.

[10] p.11.

[11] _Of Paradise and Light_, p.24. This study of Vaughan includes the only detailed account so far of the poet's meters and rhythms (pp.179-190). Though somewhat brief, it contains valuable insights into a number of poems. A further chapter on "The Unity and Continuity of _Silex Scintillans_" is also of interest, though I cannot agree that _Silex Scintillans_ "makes . . . its profoundest impact as a whole" (p.196).

[12] II.183.

[13] II.198.

[14] _The Paradise Within_, p.25.

[15] See n.6.

[16] See Mary Ellen Rickey, "Vaughan, _The Temple_ and Poetic Form," _SP_, LIX (1962), 162-170. Miss Rickey, in seeking to demonstrate the formal debt which Vaughan owed to _The Temple_, places, I feel, too much emphasis on these relatively few minor poems. But her reference to "the use of carefully controlled rhyme irregularities throughout the poems and then the normalizing of them in the last stanza" (p.163) points to one of Vaughan's main structural devices, and in particular to his distinctive use of the couplet. I will take up this point later in the chapter.

[17] There are of course many allegorical and emblematic figures in Vaughan's poems, but they are not subjected to the kind of analysis that we find in _The Temple_. I believe they are incidental rather than crucial in _Silex Scintillans_. See Freeman, p.151, for an account of emblem figures in "The World," and Kermode, p.215, n.7, for a number of borrowings from the _Emblemes_ of Francis Quarles.

[18] _The Art of Marvell's Poetry_ (London, 1966), p.214. Ellrodt explains the lack of irony and humor in Vaughan from a similar standpoint, but he places more emphasis on the absence of "self-consciousness:" "L'ironie et l'humour semblent de même bannis de la vie onirique. Point d'ambiguïte où il n'est point de _self-consciousness_" (II.192).

[19] My discussion will omit poems in which conventional Christian moralizing replaces the sense of wandering and search, and poems which act as commentaries on and extensions of scriptural texts. Such pieces are to be found throughout Silex Scintillans, as might be expected, this work not being a carefully arranged whole like The Temple, where they occur separately at beginning and end.

[20] I do not include here linked series of formally different lyrics such as Jonson's "Celebration of Charis," or formally 'irregular' Pindarics such as Dryden's "Alexander's Feast."

[21] This kind of identification with the risen Christ is quite common in Vaughan, and is in keeping with the constant theme of regeneration and re-union in God. There is correspondingly less identification with the crucified Christ of Calvary. This constitutes in Vaughan a major shift away from Donne and Herbert, towards Traherne. As Ellrodt says, "Il est dès lors inévitable qu'il y ait au coeur de la théologie personnelle du poète . . . l'attente d'une régénération mystique, renouvelée en chaque créature, plutôt que le fait historique de l'Incarnation" (II.234).

[22] Similar shifts from detailed, specific images of things in this world to a general, unspecific evocation of the world to come can also be found in "The Proffer," "Regeneration," "The Timber" and "The World," to name only a few where the shift is particularly apparent. Whether in the outside world or in the self, particularity implies separateness, and separateness is anathema to Vaughan.

[23] The 'authorized' version of Denham's "Cooper's Hill" appeared in 1655, the same year as the complete Silex Scintillans. If not acquainted with this version at the time of writing "Ascension-day," Vaughan may have read the poem in one of its earlier pirated editions. There are certainly strong formal resemblances. Compare for instance the lines quoted with Denham's famous description of the Thames:

>   Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull,
>   Strong without rage, without ore-flowing full.
>   (II.191-192)

[24] Pettet, p.127.

[25] Ellrodt claims that this poem is the one great exception to Vaughan's besetting weakness--"impuissance à unir l'image et l'idée dans le symbole" (II.258).

[26] Martz, The Poem of the Mind, p.51. See also Jean-Jacques Denonain, Thèmes et Formes de la Poésie "Métaphysique" (Algiers, 1956), pp.441-444.

[27] On the Poems of Henry Vaughan (London, 1927), p.46.

[28] p.181.

[29] II.175.

[30] "The Mysticism of Henry Vaughan: A Reply," JEGP, LIII (1954), 352-360.

[31] The same power of successive couplets to suggest unity within a time scheme which embraces past, present and future was recognized by other poets of the period as well. See particularly Jonson's "To Penshurst," King's "The Exequy," Herbert's "The Church Militant," Denham's "Cooper's Hill" and Marvell's "The Garden" and "Upon Appleton House."

[32] See James D. Simmonds, "Vaughan's Masterpiece and its Critics: 'The World' revaluated," SEL, II, 1 (Winter 1962), 77-93.

CHAPTER FOUR

Thomas Traherne

I

In his study of Vaughan, R. A. Durr makes the following

comment on Traherne, whom he sees following on in the same

"mystical" tradition: "His poetry . . . seems less accomplished,

though it may be we have not yet read it correctly."[1] Since

Durr's premise is that Vaughan's poetry is a unique reflection

of his own experience, and is not to be judged by the standards

we apply to Herbert, we may assume that Traherne too deserves

to be judged on his own terms. Yet we may ask why it should be

felt that we have not yet read Traherne's poetry "correctly." At

first glance Traherne would seem to offer no difficulties, since

he is one of the most open, the most naive, the least 'subtle'
of the seventeenth-century religious poets. There is much
repetition and little variation in the manner and content of
all his writings, both poetry and prose. There are virtually
no symbols and no conceits, and there is little syntactic
complexity. In his poems there is less logical argument and
development of ideas than in any of the poets so far studied,
and the tone remains much the same throughout--fervent and
enthusiastic. From this we might assume that any difficulty
in assessing Traherne the poet comes not from what we find in
his poetry, but from what we do not find; and if what we do
not find is what we consider essential to all good poetry,
then Traherne may be considered as interesting for his 'ideas'
but a relative failure as a poet.

An adverse judgment of the poetry has in fact been made by
many people who have yet found much beauty in the Centuries of
Meditations, and have been receptive to Traherne's 'vision.'
Helen White, for instance, has found him "sadly deficient in
that sustained emotional glow of sound and movement that is the
peculiar life of poetry," "flat in sustained emotional pitch,
heavy and aimless in movement."[2] Louis Martz says that "the
power of Traherne's mind seems hampered by the necessity of
making ends meet in verse," and that his poetry "too often

consists primarily in versified statement, assertion, or exclamation."[3] One of Traherne's editors speaks of a lyrical impulse "insufficient to convert the thought into the fine gold of poetry,"[4] and even the poet's most enthusiastic admirer and biographer says of the poems that "there is not a vital connection between form and content," that his form is "only a dress, embroidered and arranged with some care."[5] The emphasis varies, but a consensus remains: Traherne's poetry was an attempt to put into verse what had been, or was to be, better expressed in the form of the prose Centuries. My present concern is not so much to rescue Traherne the poet, as to suggest that we encounter in his work problems which have a wider bearing on the question of religious poetry than is usually assumed--problems which make it legitimate to ask whether we have yet read Traherne correctly.

There are three immediate problems which lead me to repeat Durr's question here. First: can we make the kind of clear distinction between the poetry and the prose that has been readily made in the past, or is there in fact a closer relationship, a formal and structural bond that would make it more difficult to reject the one while wholeheartedly accepting the other? A glance at the Thanksgivings and the Contemplation, and at the verse we find scattered throughout the Centuries

and Christian Ethicks, would indicate that Traherne himself
made little distinction between poetic and prosaic modes of
expression, and indeed blended the two in a way familiar to
any reader of the Psalms. We must, I think, formulate an
impossibly rigid distinction between propriety in prose and
propriety in verse if we are to accept one 'half' of Traherne's
work and reject the other.[6]

The second problem concerns the repeated emphasis which
Traherne gives throughout his work to the importance of the
forms and structures we perceive in the world around us, and
to the nature and ends of creative power. Though generally
abstract in tone, and concerned with the essential nature of
God and His eternal creative Act, these speculations have an
important bearing on the nature of the creative and organizing
power that is immediately apparent in the careful and deliberate
forms of his verse. I shall only observe for the moment that
these speculations differ in some ways from those which underlie
our own usual methods of analysing and judging the created forms
of poetry. Does Traherne, then, constitute a 'special case?'
The answer lies in the third and most important problem from the
point of view of this study: what is Traherne's relationship to
the other poets so far discussed?

To approach Traherne as an eccentric original would be to neglect the presence in the earlier poets of similar ideas concerning the nature of the soul and its relationship to God, similar conceptions of the Creation and of the eternal creative Act, and similar poetic forms in which to express them. Traherne carries to an extreme ideas and expressive forms which are present, if not dominant, in the earlier poets. It is important not that Traherne should be made to constitute a special case, but that in him we should see the expression of a kind of religious awareness which is also present, though to a lesser degree, in the poets who preceded him. It is important, too, that, whatever our final judgment of Traherne as a poet may be, we first judge the appropriateness of the expression to this awareness.

In this chapter, then, I wish to discuss first the development in Traherne of those perceptions concerning the soul, God and the Creation which are present to a lesser degree in the earlier poets, and second, to show how the formal expression of these perceptions in Traherne's poems accords with formal patterns found also in the earlier poets. I also wish to stress the relationship of Traherne to Donne, the other 'pole' of this study, and to examine the way in which Donne's vision of the soul of Elizabeth Drury is reborn in the poetry of Traherne.

Perhaps the first thing to strike the reader of Traherne's
verse is its essential sameness throughout. There is little
variation in tone, and even less sense of a developing
'personality' than in Vaughan. Those attitudes, ranging from
rebellion to acceptance and submission, which give such
diversity to the poetry of Donne and Herbert and which
constitute the many distinct and often opposed 'voices' of
these poets, are absent from Traherne. Even though his poetry
is ostensibly the most 'self-centered' of all the metaphysical
poets, consisting as it so often does of extended celebrations
of "Myself," there is a curious lack of distinct personality.
Traherne's egotism, which to Douglas Bush amounts to a certain
"inhumanity,"[7] is very different from the egotism of Donne.
The complex personality which emerges from the "Holy Sonnets,"
for instance, is largely a result of a series of encounters
between self and God in which the many 'voices' of the self
assert, defend, implore, appeal and even pray, but to no
effect--more often they succeed in building up a wall which the
voice of God cannot penetrate. Only in the Anniversaries, in
the great act of celebration of one whose 'personality' in no
way restricted or defined her essential being in God, does the
voice of the poet become absorbed in the greatness of the
"proclamation"--become, in fact, a transparent, impersonal

"trumpet." There are even more 'voices' in Herbert, but the progress toward the closer identification of self with God is considerably advanced, since resignation of the self to God's will is at once the state in which all of The Temple is written, and the point of view from which the different voices are controlled and finally united in the greater whole.

Vaughan, with little of Herbert's sureness of self-knowledge, nonetheless moves even closer to that mystical identity with God which Herbert for the most part does not actually describe. The lack of self-consciousness and personality which I have noted in Vaughan can be attributed to his constant awareness of the coming transformation of his whole self and personality in the light of eternity. In Traherne this transformation has already occurred. From the moment of birth, from the first awareness, the "invisible estate" of Vaughan has been made visible and real, the light not intermittent but constant. The self no longer recognizes barriers or restrictions, and expands freely throughout the universe. Its 'identity' is the identity of all things. This process of expansion and assimilation is described in "My Spirit:"

> A Strange Extended Orb of Joy,
>   Proceeding from within,
> Which did on evry side convey
> It self, and being nigh of Kin
>   To God did evry Way
> Dilate it self even in an Instant, and
> Like an Indivisible Centre Stand
> At once Surrounding all Eternitie.[8]

We may be reminded here of the soul of Elizabeth Drury, which "ere shee can consider how shee went, / At once is at, and through the Firmament" (Second Anniversary, ll.205-206); or of those lines contained within circles which "For once that they the center touch, do touch / Twice the circumference" (ll.437-438). Thus, what was for Donne an ideal state of unity unattainable in this world becomes for Traherne a reality to be experienced in the present. In Traherne, self, soul and God are frequently mentioned and addressed, as in Donne and Herbert, but the distinction between them is no longer clear, since all are interfused. As a result, the individual 'voice' is not distinct, or even separately identifiable, since the only 'personality' is the greater Personality of God.

This interfusion represents the last step in a process of interiorization which begins with the disordered microcosm of Donne's "little world," in which mental states come and go "like a fantastique Ague," but from which the ordering presence of God is excluded. The solipsism and despair of Donne's inner drama are present in Herbert, but are held in check by conscience and self-knowledge, and by knowledge of the sufferings of Christ, now admitted to the heart. The walls of the self begin to crumble, and individual personality becomes interfused with the personality of the Son. At the same time the beauty of the

Creation is more intensely felt, and with this beauty a new

longing for the unity it promises. Vaughan's use of cosmic

imagery and his intense identification with natural processes

are further steps in an attempt to encompass within the self

the order and beauty of the universe, but it is not until

Traherne that the process of interiorization is completed.

In Traherne the "little world," the microcosm, is completely

reshaped so that now, with the barriers which separated it

from the macrocosm dissolved, the two are virtually one. There

is finally only one vision, perceived by the soul which is now

"A Living Endless Ey," "A Naked Simple Pure Intelligence"

("The Preparative," II.20, 11.12, 20). We have arrived at

that end imagined by Donne for the soul of Elizabeth Drury,

"who now is growne all eye."

Traherne's virtual equation of the eye, which implies

vision, and the intelligence, which implies understanding, shows

a further fulfillment of the promise of the Second Anniversary.

For Donne himself, as for all who inhabit the sublunary world,

the act of intellect is not on its own capable of realizing the

longed for vision. In the "Holy Sonnets" and the Anniversaries

Donne frequently tells us that in this world the ends and the

means of knowledge are incommensurate. Only in Elizabeth Drury

are the distorting "spectacles" removed, only in the sight of

God are the "object" and the "wit" united. In Herbert, the object of our understanding and the means of our understanding are brought closer together in this world through the enlightened conscience and the presence of Christ in the heart; in Vaughan the immanence of God in the Creation brings closer still the moment when man's knowledge of God will become integral and complete, as in the creatures who, "by some hid sense their Maker gave," participate wholly in the Divine Plan without consciousness of separation. Vaughan's restless search is unsuccessful when its object is conceived of as 'other,' as beyond and outside of the individual soul. It is successful when at unpredictable and unsought for moments object and subject become one, as in "The Water-fall," and the eye and the intelligence are united. Such moments are almost continuous in Traherne--only "custom" separates what God united at man's birth since it is "custom" which makes him wish to acquire that which was his, and part of him, from the beginning. In Traherne the 'infant eye' is only a symbol of the process of unlearning which is necessary for knowledge and vision to become one, and which we can find implied throughout Donne's account of the new knowledge of Elizabeth Drury, who "carries no desire to know, nor sense."[9] But what in Donne could be found only after death comes to Traherne at birth. Eternity, Infinity and Love are "Silent Joys" that are felt intuitively within:

                              so at my Birth
          All these were unperceivd, yet did appear:
              Not by Reflexion, and Distinctly known,
            But, by their Efficacy, all mine own.
                              ("The Improvment," II.36, 11.81-84)

Clearly, the divisions within the self, and between the self

and God, which for Donne result in the disparity between our

present knowledge and the kind of knowledge enjoyed by the

liberated soul of Elizabeth Drury, are manifestations of the

greater time-honored division between this world and the next

on which the dualism of the Anniversaries is based. Between

matter and spirit, and between this world's time and space and

the time and space of eternity, exist sharp discontinuities--

discontinuities which Traherne attributes simply to custom and

false perception. Yet the gap which would seem to separate

Donne and Traherne is at least partially bridged by Herbert and

Vaughan, each of whom in his own way draws Donne's two worlds

closer together--the one through constant emphasis on the

efficacy of the Sacraments and Divine Providence and on the

Church as the Mystical Body, the other through moments of

illumination and through close observation of the harmony in

the world of nature. Finally, Herbert's emphasis on the signifi-

cance of the soul's life in this world, and Vaughan's on the

imminence of its reunion in the next, are reconciled in Traherne,

for whom these distinctions exist only in misunderstanding. The

soul itself "No Limits will endure." Characteristically,

Traherne takes the very idea of duality, expands it to plurality,

and rejoices in the new vision:

> "Tis mean Ambition to desire
>   A single World:
>   To many I aspire,
>   The one upon another hurl'd:
> Nor will they all, if they be all confin'd,
>   Delight my Mind.
>   ("Insatiableness II," II.146, 11.7-12)

In this movement towards the re-establishing of a cosmic unity

within this world and within the individual soul itself, we find

a corresponding lessening of the distance between God and man.

Despite the personal tone of his address, Donne's emphasis on

the single, redemptive figures of Christ and Elizabeth Drury

shows a continuing awareness of the need for an intermediary

between the human and the divine, so great is the gulf resulting

from the Fall when spirit and matter, time and eternity, were

first divided. The redemptive Christ figures prominently in

The Temple, too, but in the majority of poems God is spoken to,

and speaks, as "My Lord." After the early group of Easter poems

we find few distinct references to the Trinity, to the Father and

the Son so carefully distinguished by Donne; and in several poems,

notably "Providence" and "Man," God is an impersonal and almost

deistic architect, while man, at the summit of the Creation, His

best and most perfect work, seems almost never to have fallen.

In Vaughan, as I have indicated previously,[10] there is a
noticeable shift in emphasis from the Crucified to the Risen
Christ, to Christ as a principle of transformation and unity
virtually indistinguishable from the central light image of
so many poems. In Traherne's poetry, with the restoration and
the transformation already accomplished, there is little
reference to Christ at all,[11] and God Himself is referred to
in the broadest possible way: "Sure there's a GOD (for els
there's no Delight) / One Infinit" ("Insatiableness II," II.147,
11.23-24). Not only is the individual soul now at once the
center and the circumference of the Creation, to use both
Donne's and Traherne's image, but God Himself is imagined by
Traherne, in one significant group of poems, as being dependent
on man for the full realization of His pleasure:

        The GODHEAD cannot prize
    The Sun at all, nor yet the Skies,
    Or Air, or Earth, or Trees, or Seas,
    Or Stars, unless the Soul of Man they pleas.[12]
            ("The Demonstration," II.158, 11.43-46)

Such is the nature of God's love that it had to overflow its own
completeness, to extend itself in the Creation, there to be
mirrored in the responding soul of man:

        His Gifts as they to us com down
            Are infinit, and crown
        The Soul with Strange Fruitions; yet
    Returning from us they more value get.
                (11.37-40)

In the recognition that "ours is far more His Bliss / Then his is ours" ("Another," II.165, 11.2-3), Traherne discovers the fullest possible participation of the Creator in the Creation, the Infinite in the Finite, the One in the Many. The future transformation of the soul which Donne depicted in the Second Anniversary, Herbert in "Love III," and Vaughan in "The Morning-watch," is finally made continuous and present by Traherne, who can now proclaim of God's Creation: "The End Compleat, the Means must needs be so" ("The Anticipation," II.160, 1.46).

By thus bringing into harmony the ends and means of the Creation, Traherne emphasizes what Herbert had emphasized throughout The Temple--that it is only misunderstanding and a willful separation of oneself from Divine Providence that produces perplexity, estrangement and the setting up of false ideals. Herbert, too, like Donne at the end of the Anniversaries, conceived of his own poetry as a celebration and an embodiment of God's unified creative Act. Traherne himself expresses the essence of the poetic function when in the third Century he says of the Psalmist: "Enflamd with Lov it was his great Desire, / To Sing Contemplat Ponder and Admire" (I.151, 11.29-30), and of God Himself, "He is an Act that doth Communicate" ("The Antici-pation," II.162, 1.99).[13] But in considering the special form

which this celebration takes in Traherne's poetry, and the
difference of his poetic means from those of his predecessors,
we must be aware of the transitions I have briefly outlined
above. In the gradual change from a distinct sense of
individual personality to a sense of transformation and larger
identity with all things, and from an emphasis on the Trini-
tarian God and the suffering Christ to an emphasis on one
indivisible Spirit, we see a constant movement toward synthesis,
toward a breaking down of hierarchic order and its replacement
by a new kind of order embracing the self, the world, the
universe in a totality where higher and lower, inner and outer,
ends and means, are no longer separate. Such a totality is
envisaged by all three of the earlier poets, and their poetry
is concerned with the means of achieving it. But Traherne's
poetry describes the very experience of this totality, and in
his creative act, as in the creative Act of God, the means and
the ends become fused.

I will attempt to illustrate the importance of this fusion
by a brief reconsideration of two poetic 'means' which I have
described in the preceding chapters as basic structural
principles. First is the actual development, the inner progress
of a poem from a beginning to an 'end.' In the case of Donne,
Herbert and Vaughan, the 'end' which inspires the poetry is

greater knowledge of God. The poem itself, as a means of achieving this end, proceeds by way of logical, analytic argument, as in Donne, or by dialogue, emblem or narrative, as in Herbert, or by Vaughan's 'search' through association. Thus the poem presents a progressive unfolding of meaning, and its sequence is a logical sequence in time and space. As the physical beginning and end of the poem are not the same (with the limited exception of 'circular' poems like "La Corona"), neither is the 'end,' in the sense of our greater knowledge of God, the same as the poetic means used to arrive there. Thus, the Anniversaries of Donne and the dialogues and narratives of Herbert do not actually express the knowledge of God, but rather the way in which that knowledge is to be attained.

I have indicated, however, certain exceptions, in Herbert particularly, where there is little actual development or progress and where stanzas could be rearranged or left out with no real structural harm being done. In these poems a principle of repetition of an immediately stated theme replaces a principle of progressive unfolding of meaning. The 'discovery' made, the poem 'goes' nowhere; rather the poet draws out his discovery for as long as he feels inclined. In this sense, poetic ends and means have come much closer together. In the

poetry of Traherne, who constantly stresses the identity of the Means and Ends of God's creative Act, we can expect to find a similar principle throughout. Apart from a relatively small number of 'narratives' where there is a simple temporal sequence, we do in fact find little development, in the sense of a progressive unfolding of meaning, and little 'structure,' in the sense of logical arrangement and subordination of thought. It is this absence which gives to his poetry its apparent sameness and which defines for many his limitations as a poet.

The other structural principle we will not find in Traherne is closely allied to lack of 'development,' and involves the outer forms and the internal figures, symbols and situations which give order and pattern to that development in the earlier poets. In Donne it is the sonnet form and such figures as Christ and Elizabeth Drury which contain and give direction to the development of feeling and idea; in Herbert it is dramatic situation, religious symbol, and the overall design of the Temple itself; in Vaughan, significantly, there are fewer controlling forms and figures, but the dominating image patterns remain, and they too give direction to his more 'wandering' poems. But in Traherne, there being little significant development within his poems, there is little corresponding need for controlling forms or figures. The ornate stanza forms do not really direct

and give shape to the thought--the thought rather flows into
and fills them; nor is there anything inevitable in the form a
particular poem takes: it is sufficient that it should be
visually pleasing, and suggestive in itself of the perfect
order which the poet seeks to convey. Similarly, the conscious
intellectual complexity of Donne's Elizabeth Drury or of
Herbert's narratives and dialogues, and the structured
hierarchies of meaning they contain, are foreign to Traherne's
mode of perception--the infant eye which absorbs without
defining, the soul which expands ever outward to embrace the
one true order. This order is the 'unstructured' interpenetration
of the one and the many, and it must be conveyed directly with
as little as possible intervening between God, poet and reader.

It is the absence of inner development and of controlling
figures which is primarily responsible for Traherne's
'simplicity.' Yet this simplicity is obviously not that of, say,
a courtly song or pastoral lyric, where familiar, conventional
thoughts and images may also lack any significant development.
Traherne's simplicity depends on no familiar literary convention,
but on the stripping away from his language of all particularity,
all metaphor and 'device,' all rhetorical figures and tropes
whose own structure and ingenuity might stand in the way of a
clear perception of the unity of God, the world and the self.

The result in Traherne is almost the exact opposite of what
we ordinarily mean by 'lyric simplicity'--his poems have a
degree of abstractness and intellectual complexity which,
unlike Donne's or Herbert's, is devoid of any immediate
appeal to the senses. This degree of abstraction is perhaps
the single most important principle in Traherne's 'simplicity.'
It may be felt that a highly abstract language and an essentially
simple vision cannot come together in any poetically satisfying
way. The combination is not common in English poetry, but I
believe that Traherne was able to achieve it with considerable
skill.

II

To understand how a combination of abstraction and
simplicity determines Traherne's forms, we must begin at the
level of word and image, since it is at this level that the
larger formal units of the stanza and the whole poem find their
beginnings. Thus we have a formal principle which differs in
significant ways from those which we have seen in the earlier
poets. Where logical argument and complex figures and situations
are present, they will largely determine the form a particular
poem will take, and thus almost any successful poem of Donne,

Herbert or Vaughan has a unique form appropriate to that
particular poem. Traherne's poems, on the other hand, not
having as their formal determinants specific arguments,
symbols or situations, but direct apprehension of the unity
of all things, become formal variations on one basic,
unchanging pattern--simple in essence yet capable of an
almost unlimited number of elaborations. It is in this way
that all of Traherne's poems become virtually one poem,
united by the same basic pattern and the same unchanging
perception. Of course, it is possible to claim that The
Temple, too, is virtually one poem, united by the larger
framework which contains the individual poems. It is possible
to claim also that Herbert's several groupings of poems
within The Temple are like similar groupings in Traherne.
The difference lies in the fact that the unifying principle
of The Temple is never wholly apparent in any one individual
poem, but only in the totality of all the poems as they bring
together the separate stages in the journey of the Christian
soul. In Traherne, on the other hand, there is scarcely a
single poem which does not announce somewhere, in a single word
or groups of words, the entire theme of interpenetration, and
which does not relate to all the other poems in a way which the
theme itself suggests.[14]

Though the inner ordering principle of his poetry is
different from that of the other poets, Traherne's use of words
and images follows an established tradition. Herbert himself,
in the "Jordan" poems and "The Forerunners," and by allusion
and implication elsewhere, stresses the importance of avoiding
the kinds of tropes and devices which obscure with unnecessary
ornament the plain and simple beauty of the Christian theme.
In his important introductory poem, "The Author to the
Critical Peruser," Traherne virtually repeats Herbert's theme:

> The naked Truth in many faces shewn,
> Whose inward Beauties very few hav known,
> A Simple Light, transparent Words, a Strain
> That lowly creeps, yet maketh Mountains plain,
> Brings down the highest Mysteries to sense
> And Keeps them there; that is Our Excellence:
> At that we aim; to th'end thy Soul might see
> With open Eys thy Great Felicity.
>   (II.2, 11.1-8)

Herbert speaks in "Jordan II" of his previous habit of "Curling
with metaphors a plain intention, / Decking the sense as if it
were to sell" (Hutchinson, p.102, 11.5-6). Traherne evidently
remembers these lines when he goes on to speak of "No curling
Metaphors that gild the Sence, / Nor pictures here, no painted
Eloquence" (11.11-12). Avoiding "Poetick Strains and Shadows,"
his words will flow in "A clearer Stream than that which Poets
feign, / Whose bottom may, how deep so'ere, be seen" (11.18-19).
There is nothing unusual in such a rejection of mere artifice,

particularly in a poet writing in the middle of the seventeenth century. What is striking in Traherne's verse is the extent to which he actually follows his own advice, consistently stripping from his language all ingenious trope and metaphor, and all but the simplest and least connotative adjectives and similes.

Herbert's praise of simplicity and his use of colloquialism and homely metaphor belie, in a sense, his real achievement-- verse whose verbal density and calculated ambiguity show the way in which he exploited the very "metaphors" and "inventions" he seems to reject. It is clear, however, that Herbert only wished to avoid poetic figures and devices which served no functional purpose. He does not deny that "fictions" become a verse; he does deny that "fictions onely" become a verse. In "The Forerunners," clearly a late poem, he says that he has rescued "sweet phrases," "lovely metaphors" and "enchanting language" from the "stews and brothels," and brought them to Church "well drest and clad." But in one poem at least Herbert forsakes his usual metaphors and figures for a sparer, more generalized diction. "Man" not only anticipates Traherne structurally and thematically, it also foreshadows the later poet's avoidance of specific, delimiting description in order that the greater and more universal design may emerge more

clearly. Herbert's unmodified "fountains," "starres," "Musick and light" draw attention not to themselves but to the general harmony of which they and man are parts. In Vaughan this kind of unmodified, general image becomes a dominant characteristic. As we move in "The Search" and "Ascension-day" from the limitations of this world to the unbounded freedom of the next, we move also from very specific images and figures to the simple, unspecific "Springs," "Planets" and "Streams" of the new "bright world." As the true unity which the poet seeks comes closer, the language takes on an increasingly abstract quality; the transparent, cool and watry wealth" and the "liquid, loose Retinue" of the waterfall become the "useful Element" and the "Fountain of life;" life itself becomes "A quickness, which my God hath kist," and God "A deep, but dazling darkness." Vaughan's bare images of stars, light and darkness are always suggestive of something which lies beyond, something not of this world but informing it in a mysterious way. When exact and specific images do occur, they are frequently combined with highly abstract words, as in the famous "Bright shootes of everlastingnesse." Within each individual "sacred leaf" lies, undivided, "The fulness of the Deity."

Thus it is that the great vision of the soul of Elizabeth Drury, free from the confines of earthly time and space, finds

its actual verbal embodiment in the later poets in a language

of increasing generality and abstractness. What was untypical

in Herbert becomes typical in Vaughan, and all-pervasive in

Traherne, as a glance at the titles of his poems indicates.

The degree of abstraction can be seen in the following stanza

from "Right Apprehension:"

> What Newness once suggested to,
> Now clearer Reason doth improv, my View:
> By Novelty my Soul was taught
> At first; but now Reality my Thought
> > Inspires: And I
> > With clarity
> Both ways instructed am; by Sense
> Experience, Reason and Intelligence.
> > > (II.124, 11.33-40)

Such an example amply bears out Helen White's observation that

"in general he turned away from the delights and the tempt-

ations of imagery to put his trust in the bare relation of

ideas,"[15] and it is perhaps the completeness of such a turning

away which most disconcerts the reader for whom the sensuous

apprehension of a truth remains the basis of poetry. Traherne's

stanza is not obscure--there are no dark conceits of shadowed

meanings--the subject is communicated with a functional clarity

and bare directness. What is missing is the means whereby the

senses are gratified at the same time as the intellect is

instructed.

Susanne Langer says of all works of art:

> The production of such expressive structures
> requires some more tangible conception than the
> idea which is yet inarticulate, to guide the
> artist's purpose. Nothing is so elusive as an
> unsymbolized conception . . . So the usual anchor
> for such intuitions is an object in which the artist
> sees possibilities of the form he envisages and
> wants to create.[16]

The three earlier poets gave substance and sensuous appeal to

their religious ideas and intuitions through their use of

dramatic situations, symbolic figures and concrete images and

metaphors. But if the means are identical with the ends in

the poet's creation as in God's Creation, then only the

barest, most general and unadorned statement will be trans-

parent enough to convey to the reader's experience, without

any intermediary regulating devices, the divine presence in

all things. That which is concrete, specific and directly

appealing to the senses--that which, in short, draws

attention first of all to itself--cannot, according to Traherne,

convey directly the omnipresence of God:

> To _walk_ abroad is, not with Eys,
> But Thoughts, the Fields to see and prize.
>   ("Walking," II.135, ll.1-2)

Through such figures as Elizabeth Drury, the crucified and risen

Christ, the waterfall and the cock, and even through the

appropriate form of the poem itself, the divine presence may

be revealed, the divine unity embodied as far as this world allows.

But it is significant that Vaughan, in whom we see a considerable reduction in the number and importance of controlling forms and figures, should be the one to emphasize so often the inefficacy of all things in this world. It is when the divine unity is felt to be most imminent that any kind of 'substitute' or symbol for it is least acceptable--and thus the cry which recurs throughout Silex Scintillans: "remove me hence unto that hill, / Where I shall need no glass" ("They are all gone into the world of light," Martin, II.484, ll.39-40). In Traherne the "glass" has gone, along with most of the other formal and symbolic devices which the earlier poets used to make the distant vision clearer to earthbound eyes.

Finally, one may summarize this casting-off process by noting in Traherne the virtual disappearance of the 'metaphysical conceit.' In Donne the essence of the conceit lies in the discovery and exploitation of new, unexpected relationships between things normally considered incompatible. We may find such a relationship in a single striking image such as the spheres joined together like beads on a string; or it may govern the structure of an entire poem, as in "Goodfriday, 1613" or the Anniversaries, where earthly and heavenly 'correspondences' form the structural and thematic framework. But the mind which

perceives surprising new relationships between things does not

remove the separateness of those things; Donne's analytic

mind finds much complex and instructive relationship, but not

fusion: only Elizabeth Drury after death has the vision which

can deny difference and unite rather than merely juxtapose

the disparities we perceive on earth. The most notable

modification which Herbert makes in his use of the conceit is

in a lessening of the dualistic tension which so often

characterizes the device in Donne. By combining different

levels of meaning in one figure rather than juxtaposing two

figures, Herbert insists much more than Donne on the actual

interpenetration of human and divine, finite and infinite.

By the use of this device, as in "Affliction I" and "Love

unknown," and by the use of sacramental imagery in conceits

throughout The Temple, Herbert emphasizes not the difference

between things earthly and heavenly, but rather the immanence

in all of the divine spirit. Vaughan feels this immanence

even more strongly, but without Herbert's sense of Christian

form and ritual. The reluctance or inability in Vaughan to

accept any order other than the total divine order produces in

his verse a greater simplicity and generality of image, and

far fewer complex conceits than we find in either Donne or

Herbert. When the goal is the virtual disappearance of the

individual self and soul and the assumption of all that is
particular and separate into an undifferentiated unity, then
the sense of fixed relationship that the metaphysical conceit
suggests is considerably weakened. When in Traherne the
finite self has already become one with the infinity of God,
the conceit disappears altogether. The special relationship
which governs the conceit and keeps its part distinct is
replaced by a fusion in which, as Ellrodt says, "Il n'y a
plus conjonction de réalités unies mais distinctes; il y a
osmose."[17]

This 'osmosis' in Traherne produces at the simple verbal
level two different effects. One, mentioned already, is a
high degree of abstraction, seen in the great number of abstract
nouns and vague, unspecific adjectives like "real," "great,"
"glorious," "sweet" and "blessed." The other effect is that
created by long lists of simple nouns and adjectives such as
we find, for instance, in "Wonder:"

> Proprieties themselvs were mine,
> And Hedges Ornaments;
> Walls, Boxes, Coffers, and their rich Contents
> Did not Divide my Joys, but shine.
> (II.10, 11.57-60)

Or a more extreme example from "Eden:"

> Joy, Pleasure, Beauty, Kindness, Glory, Lov,
> Sleep, Day, Life, Light,
> Peace, Melody, my Sight,
> My Ears and Heart did fill, and freely mov.
> (II.12, 11.15-18)

Here we see within the line itself the kind of 'order' which suggests a breakdown of all fixed relationship. The verbal structure is such that, within the limits of an undemanding prosody, any order of words is possible, and any number of words is possible. This principle has been observed already in Herbert, but only at the stanza level. In "Providence" and "Man" the stanza sequence could conceivably have been extended or rearranged with little change in meaning or effect, since they are poems constructed according to no rigid pattern of time or place or logical argument. In some poems of Vaughan the principle of 'interchangeability' can be seen at work within the stanza itself, as in "Rules and Lessons" and "Son-dayes." In Traherne this principle is dominant. The replacement of the principle of fixed relationship with the principle of interpenetration results in language which combines abstractness with an extreme syntactic simplicity, amounting at times to whole stanzas of sustained apposition.[18] Traherne's interchangeable 'lists' are as simple and directly functional in their own way as Herbert's hieroglyphs: they convey the poet's repeated theme that all things viewed correctly, with the infant eye, are equally infused with the whole nature of God, while all things viewed incorrectly, for themselves alone, are equally valueless.

The kind of progression which I have attempted to trace formally and thematically from Donne to Traherne may perhaps be seen as a regression, involving on the one hand a loss of sensuous and rhetorical beauty in the poetry itself, and on the other, a return to a kind of unsophisticated primitivism. On both issues it may be wiser to speak not of progression or regression, but of change. At the same time, the idea of regression in the sense of 'retreat' is firmly embedded in Traherne, and to a limited extent in Vaughan before him, and this idea must be contrasted with the idea of forward movement-- 'progress' in time--that is so prevalent in Donne. In his poetry images of death and apocalypse recur constantly; images of birth hardly appear at all. There is little in his religious poems that is backward looking, and no attempt to recreate past experience or in any way to recollect in tranquillity. In Herbert, however, we find an increasing preoccupation with past events, but only for the meaning these events hold for the present--they are never idealized or seen as belonging in a time of innocence. In Vaughan the idea of regression to such an actual time of innocence, associated with infancy, appears almost fully developed in "The Retreate,"[19] and there are hints of it in other poems where memory and anticipation appear to be very close together. But it is

Traherne who speaks unequivocally of the return to the
uncorrupted state from which we came, and who says that, in
order to gain the kind of vision Donne projects in the Second
Anniversary, "I must becom a Child again" ("Innocence," II.18,
l.60).

To become a child again one must in a literal sense go
backwards in time, and many of Traherne's poems are written in
the past tense; but this should not obscure the essential
meaning of Traherne's one major metaphor. Traherne's Child
transcends time, just as Donne's Elizabeth Drury does. The
vision both embody is independent of the direction we must
move in order to attain it--a forward 'progress' through death
in Donne, a backward 'regression' to birth in Traherne.
Whichever way we take, whether we find in Elizabeth Drury or
the Child "our best, and worthiest booke," we must engage in a
process of unlearning to gain the true knowledge which each
represents. Custom and habit, as well as the fantastic theories
of misguided intellect, must be cast off. But for Donne the
perfect knowledge and vision of the soul are to be found only
after its release from the world and ascent to heaven, while in
Traherne perfect knowledge and vision are to be found only after
the soul's descent and release into the world. Donne's "Up, up,
my drowsie Soule" may be contrasted with Traherne's "How like an

Angel came I down!" The soul "that so long / Was Nothing from Eternitie" is made a conscious, sentient being at the moment of birth. In such a way God has extended Himself that His Creation might be more fully enjoyed.

The final relationship between Donne's Heaven and Traherne's Eden can be only briefly suggested here; I am more concerned with the way in which these wished-for states are to be attained. In the Anniversaries the great mass of the world's learning is contrasted with the one small figure of Elizabeth Drury, who proves that this learning is based on fundamental ignorance. Our only hope for true knowledge lies in imitation of her. Since her heavenly state cannot be fully known to any on earth, Donne's method of describing it lies mainly in contrasting it with what we do know, and much of the Anniversaries consists of an account of worldly knowledge, examined in detail and found wanting. In Traherne there is no such account. Donne's "meditation of what thou shalt bee" is based fundamentally on knowledge of what we are; Traherne's is a meditation of what we can be in the present, based on knowledge of what we were. The experience of being born into the world in a state of wholeness and perfection is to Traherne what the experience of mortality and worldly imperfection is to Donne--the basic experience from which all knowledge of Heaven or Eden grows. It matters not so

much whether we regard the acquiring of this knowledge as a
'progression' or a 'regression,' an accumulation or a stripping
away. What effect does the knowledge of a lived, experienced
perfection, rather than an imagined future perfection, have upon
the language and forms the poet uses?

I have suggested already the way in which Traherne's simple
syntactic patterns and unspecific and abstract diction replace
the complex governing structures of Donne and Herbert, just as
the interpenetration and virtual identity of heaven and earth,
God and individual soul, replace the complex relationships and
fixed hierarchies of the earlier poets. But Traherne's simple
language is more than just an appropriate way of expressing a
simple, unified vision. The tenacity with which he upheld his
principle of no ornamentation, and the recurrence in his work of
the idea of coming into being, suggest that Traherne is aware
of language not only as a basic imitative tool, as in Herbert,
but also as a basic creative tool, creative of orders both true
and false. The transition from perception to verbalized
concept seems to have constituted for Traherne a mystery akin
to that of the Creation itself, by which order was imposed on
chaos. The first poem in the autograph manuscript begins with
this mystery--the mystery of the created being and of the Word
itself:

                 These little Limmes
          These Eys and Hands which here I find,
        These rosie Cheeks wherwith my Life begins,
             Where have ye been,? Behind
        What Curtain were ye from me hid so long!
        Where was? in what Abyss, my Speaking Tongue?
                    ("The Salutation," II.4, 11.1-6)

The slow repetition of phrases which do not seem to form into

sentences--phrases which are part question, part exclamation--

suggests the gradual awakening of a new power of speech after

that eternity

                    When silent I,
              So many thousand thousand yeers
            Beneath the Dust did in a Chaos lie.
                         (11.7-9)

But with the poet's entry into the world as a physical being,

delighting in his own hands, eyes and ears, comes the recognition

through the senses of his own existence as a unique and separate

entity, and thus of his own potential separateness from all that

is outside himself, including God. The ability to conceptualize

his own existence by means of the "Speaking Tongue" of language

and thought is at the same time the ability to construct false

orders and false relationships which stand between the Creator

and the Created. As he himself is a means by which the end of

the Creation is made manifest, so is the gift of language a means

by which, through his own creative act, he can himself further

realize the Divine plan--or he can lose sight of the Divine plan

altogether with the painted and false eloquence that tells

"A Tale in tongues that sound like <u>Babel-Hell</u>." Such is this

danger that in "Dumnesse" the first word spoken by the child

seems to divide and distinguish between things that before

speech were wholly and intuitively known: "<u>I then my Bliss</u>

<u>did, when my Silence, break</u>." Within the brief period of

silence

> a Pulpit in my Mind,
> A Temple, and a Teacher I did find,
> With a large Text to comment on. No Ear,
> But Eys them selvs were all the Hearers there.
> And evry Stone, and Evry Star a Tongue,
> And evry Gale of Wind a Curious Song.
> . . . .
> All things did com
> With Voices and Instructions; but when I
> Had gaind a Tongue, their Power began to die.
> (II.42, ll.57-62; 44, ll.66-68)

The first "Words," however, the "Things which in my Dumnesse did

appear," took root, and were not drowned in the noise of Babel:

> these will whisper if I will but hear,
> And penetrat the Heart, if not the Ear.
> (II.44, ll.87-88)

It is these original "Voices" and "Instructions" that

Traherne's words describe, and their ultimate appeal is not to

the senses which delight, quite legitimately, in the differences

of things, but to the heart and mind which alone perceive the

true unity. It is to this end that the poetic act creates first

by taking away, by removing the accretions which language gathers

around itself when, bemused by the differences of things, it

labels, codifies and defines with structures of its own. The

way in which Traherne uses language to celebrate the unity of

all things is clearly set out in "The Person:"

>   Mistake me not, I do not mean to bring
>   New Robes, but to Display the Thing:
>   Nor Paint, nor Cloath, nor Crown, nor add a Ray,
>   But Glorify by taking all away.
>
>   (II.74, 11.13-16)

Thus we have a reduction whereby the inner life and the principle

of unity are revealed. Traherne, after stating that "Metaphores

conceal" (1.25), somewhat inconsistently goes on to use one

himself. He speaks of the "Anatomie" which language must

perform. Whereas Donne's anatomy served to reveal the sickness

and corruption at the center of all things, Traherne's reveals

the life and the spirit: "Survey the Skin, cut up the Flesh,

the Veins / Unfold: The Glory there remains" (II.76, 11.29-30).

The individual parts reveal their harmony only when no attempt

is made to define their individuality, to characterize and

distinguish by imposed metaphor and ornament. Thus "My Cheeks,

my Lips, my Ears, my Hands, my Feet"--images undistinguished

and 'arranged' in only that 'order' which permits the greatest

sense of participation and identity between the individual

members--together form the human body, and, by Traherne's own

analogy, the poem itself:

>   And these in all my Ways
>   Shall Themes becom, and Organs of thy Praise.
>   (II.78, 11.63-64)

If we understand the kind of participation and identity
which Traherne finds in all parts which make up greater wholes--
the limbs and organs of the body, the streets of a city, the
minerals that make up the earth, the individual men, women and
children who make up the race--we can understand the function
of the parts which make up the poems, beginning with the words
themselves. In order to express the great theme of Felicity,
the joy he finds in such richness and harmony, Traherne some-
times introduces images from a mythical or allegorical frame-
work, only to dismiss them as inadequate. In "Love," for
instance, Danae and Ganymede are seen as representing the poet's
delight in God's abundance, but in the end they are "Too Weak
and feeble Pictures to Express / The true Mysterious Depths of
Blessedness" (II.168, 11.37-38). The more complex the symbol,
the less likely that Traherne will find any use for it. Instead,
he will pare away and reduce till we are left with the bare bones
of language, mere abstractions from 'reality.' But as I. A.
Richards has pointed out, "An image may lose almost all its
sensory nature to the point of becoming scarcely an image at all,
a mere skeleton, and yet represent a sensation quite as
adequately as if it were flaring with hallucinatory vividity."[20]
Traherne's bare images do not appeal to the senses, or, to be
more exact, to that store of memories of individual sensations

and associations which most poets draw their images from, and
to which they appeal in the reader. In those cases where the
images he uses do have associative and sensuous power, as in
the frequent adaptations of the language of the Psalms or the
Canticles, Traherne often sets them against a greater and more
abstract reality, as in "The Odour:"

> What's Cinnamon, compar'd to thee?
> Thy Body is than Cedars better far:
> Those Fruits and Flowers which in Fields I see,
>   With thine, can not compare.
> Where ere thou movest, there the Scent I find
> Of fragrant Myrrh and Aloes left behind.
>   (II.122, 11.55-60)

The "sensation" we are left with, the cumulative effect, is of
sense itself suffused with spirit, as the poet himself suggests
in an impressionistic passage from "Wonder:"

> I felt a Vigour in my Sence
> That was all SPIRIT. I within did flow
>   With seas of Life, like Wine.
>   (II.8, 11.20-22)

Traherne's 'lists' of common objects, feelings and states
of mind serve the same purpose: to convey, like the separate
dots in a pointillist painting, a total impression of the one
"Spirit," which, while not apprehended through logic or
reason, nevertheless inhabits the realm of pure "Idea."[21] The
activity which occurs in this realm is described in "Walking,"
where "To walk is by a Thought to go; / To mov in Spirit to and
fro" (II.135, 11.19-20). To observe pleasurably the things of

the world is not to stop at the level of sense, but

> To fly abroad like activ Bees,
> Among the Hedges and the Trees,
> To cull the Dew that lies
> On evry Blade,
> From evry Blossom; till we lade
> Our <u>Minds</u>, as they their <u>Thighs</u>.
>
> (II.135-136, 11.31-36)

It is in the transition from "Things" to "Thoughts" that Traherne finds true wisdom and felicity.[22] "Thoughts" are the "Ends of Outward Treasure," the only way in which we can apprehend God since the senses are finally limited: "The Ey's confind, the Body's pent / In narrow Room: Lims are of small extent" ("Thoughts I," II.170, 11.61-62). The purpose underlying Traherne's bare images and abstractions seems clear: to use words that convey the general and not the particular truth; words that deliberately avoid 'describing,' where describing means differentiating; words which, when run together, convey the essence of unrestricted thought.

One critic has found it paradoxical that "it is when he is writing of visions that Traherne is most concrete."[23] It is true that in several poems a great number of specific images occur, but the kind of vision such poems contain is often of a desolate nature, as if the detail itself were conspiring to rob the poet of his true felicity. Such a vision is the subject of "Solitude." The poet has left the town, "The Sword of State,

the Mayor's Gown, / And all the Neighb'ring Boys," but nature

offers no consolation despite, or rather because of, the

particularity of her several pleasures--a particularity which

the presence of limiting adjectives always suggests in

Traherne:

> The shady Trees,
> The Ev'ning dark, the humming Bees,
> The chirping Birds, mute Springs and Fords, conspire,
> To giv no Answer unto my Desire.
> (II.99, ll.53-56)

So also in "Poverty," where the cups and dishes and wooden

stools, and the painted cloth which wrought "som ancient Story,"

convey only desolation because, as the poet goes on to say in

his more familiar style, "I neither thought the Sun, / Nor

Moon, nor Stars, nor Peeple, mine" (II.102, ll.25-26). When we

read in "Dissatisfaction" that,

> In ev'ry House I sought for Health,
> Searcht ev'ry Cabinet to spy my Wealth,
> I knockt at ev'ry Door
> (II.103, ll.9-11)

we are reminded of Vaughan, whose search through the actual

places where Christ lived and died was fruitless. In the New

Jerusalem of "Christendom," however, as in Vaughan's Eden of

"Ascension-day," the vision is boundless, and immediate detail

disappears in the transforming whole:

> No Markets, Shops or Old Exchange,
> No Childish Trifles, useless Things;
> No Wall, nor Bounds
> That Town surrounds;

> But as if all its Streets ev'n endless were:
> Without or Gate or Wall it did appear.
>> (II.108, ll.45-50)

Two visions are juxtaposed in "Shadows in the Water," one the actual mirror-image of the other, but the exact detail which is reflected in the water is clearly no key to an understanding of the other world which lies beyond. Though similar in all outward respects, this other world transcends the clear detail which is all the eye of the senses can see: "For other great and glorious Ends, / Inhabit yet my unknown Friends" (II.129, ll.55-56). It is through a simple, repetitive and unspecific diction that Traherne seeks to bring that other world into the reality of mind and thought.

III

Having considered first the kind of reduction we find in Traherne, that part of the poetic act which works to "Glorify by taking all away," we are in a better position to assess the 'other side' of his poetry, its simple profusion and multiplication of idea and image. At first this profusion seems undisciplined and essentially contrary to the bareness of the poetic means, but it follows inevitably from the removal of all that is particular and the revelation of all that is common.

Subtraction and multiplication are processes inextricably

linked in Traherne. A correct understanding of God and the

universe depends on our correct understanding of the things of

the world and even the parts of our own body. Once the 'purity'

of lips, eyes and ears has been established--their purity, that

is, in the realm of thought--then the true harmony of the body

can be properly understood. In the same way each individual

man relates to all men, all "People," and thus we move ever

outwards to establish the true order of God. As the poet makes

clear in "Consummation," this order is no invention of fancy.

We may picture whales and dolphins sweeping with their tails

the waters of distant seas, but within the true realm of thought

such momentarily pleasing pictures disappear:

> Nor shall we then invent
> Nor alter Things; but with content
> All in their places see,
> As doth the Glorious Deity;
> Within the Scope of whose Great Mind,
> We all in their tru Nature find.
> (II.148, 11.49-54)

This order is not so much a traditional Christian or Platonic

ascending order, but one which moves outwards in all directions

at once, from any given center of consciousness. Thus is each

man an Adam, each city a Jerusalem.

We can apply a similar principle in our assessment of

Traherne's poetry as a whole. Once the purity of the naked image

has been established with its particularity removed, then it can multiply through lines, stanzas and whole poems, until a whole new 'world' is created. Since this poetic order, like the divine order it imitates, is not hierarchical in nature, but tends to move outward from any given point, the complex syntax and the extended symbols and conceits which give density to Donne and Herbert would act as inhibiting factors, and are thus present only to a marginal degree. Traherne's poetry has not depth, but extension, and its forms accord perfectly with his vision of cosmic order.

That Traherne was profoundly concerned with order, yet hardly at all with 'inner structure,' need not appear inconsistent if we consider that his order is essentially two-dimensional, as opposed to the three-dimensional order of Donne, in whose poetry the dimension of depth is of major importance. In Donne's most fully developed visions of cosmic order, those of "Goodfriday, 1613" and the Second Anniversary, lateral movement in space is always combined with vertical movement. In "Goodfriday, 1613" the "rising" and "setting" of the Christ-sun, and the closely associated image of the Christ-sun controlling the earth's light and darkness along its polar axis, combine with the lateral movement of the planets and of the rider himself to produce a complex three-dimensional structure;

similarly, the outward movement of Elizabeth Drury's soul in

the Second Anniversary is also an upward movement, thus encom-

passing both the limitless extension of space and the fixed

'stages' of the vertical hierarchy.[24]   But it is difficult to

imagine how Traherne's interchangeable and interpenetrating

order, with its center in every created thing, could be

conceived of in any other than a two-dimensional way. In a

poem such as "On Leaping over the Moon" (II.130), where he does

attempt to visualize a three-dimensional universe, the result

is little more than a self-conscious jeu d'esprit (it is perhaps

significant that the poem records not his own imagined experience,

but his brother's). Traherne's 'pictures' of fields, streets

and cities characteristically stretch out in flat, endless

vistas; he tells us frequently of the absence of walls, hedges

and other barriers to expansion. "Cursd and Devisd Proprieties"

fled from sight,

> And so did Hedges, Ditches, Limits, Bounds,
> I dreamed not ought of those,
> But wanderd over all mens Grounds,
> And found Repose.[25]
> ("Wonder," II.10, ll.53-56)

If, then, we mean by 'structure' an essentially vertical

pattern of fixed relationships, Traherne's poems have no

structure and no fixed order, either within themselves or in

relation to each other. But if we conceive of an 'order' which

is essentially unstructured, but which has breadth and width and in which parts are interchangeable, then we can understand how the poet can insist on the importance of order, as in "The Vision:"

> Order the Beauty even of Beauty is,
>   It is the Rule of Bliss,
> The very Life and Form and Caus of Pleasure;
>   Which if we do not understand,
> Ten thousand Heaps of vain confused Treasure
>   Will but oppress the Land.
>   (II.26, 11.9-14)

Such an order is not static. In "The Improvment" the poet says that there would be no goodness, wisdom or happiness in things, "Did not they all in one fair Order move" (II.32, 1.21). But we will look in vain for the kind of inner movement or development which in Donne, Herbert and Vaughan is based on the notion of specific direction. Instead, the poems imitate the expansion of the spirit itself as described in "Nature:"

> It did not move, nor one way go, but stood,
> And by Dilating of it self, all Good
> It strove to see, as if twere present there,
> Even while it present stood conversing here.
>   (II.62, 11.33-36)

The movement is that of thought itself, which, free of the restrictions of the senses, and depending in no way on logical argument, "From Nothing to Infinitie it turns, / Even in a Moment" ("Thoughts III," II.176, 11.37-38).

This does not mean that only the Ideal and the Infinite have value: if this were the case, we would find it difficult to explain why Traherne took such care with the actual finite patterns of his verse, and why he did not simply run everything together in an unrestricted outpouring of words. Once again the explanation lies in the nature of God's own creative Act. Within the world of the Creation God chose to limit things, since infinity cannot 'extend' itself, but can only 'contract' itself in the finite. Traherne does not avoid the paradox which must ensue; rather, he accepts it and realizes that for the human spirit to be conscious of, and delight in, the infinite freedom of thought, it must also know and understand limitation. Thus we find in one of the poems from <u>Christian Ethicks</u>:

> A Sea that's bounded in a finite shore,
> Is better far because it is no more.
> Should Waters endlessly exceed the Skies,
> They'd drown the World, and all whate'er we prize.
> (II.186, 11.13-16)

It is the central mystery in Traherne's view of Creation that individual forms and parts, while all one in the realm of thought, should necessarily remain themselves. Ordinary things are to be seen and understood in themselves, but not for themselves. The same observation can be made of the individual poems.

It is through the senses, the awareness of limbs, eyes
and ears, that the infinite is first made known to us; it is
likewise through the senses that Traherne's verse makes its
first, though not its last, appeal. It is significant that,
within the wide bounds of a concept of form which almost
totally rejected complexity of inner structure and controlling
figures, Traherne should have taken such care with his
elaborate stanzas, some of the most elaborate the seventeenth
century produced, from the point of view of length, rhyme
scheme, and number of feet to a line. Miss Wade, while
denying any organic relationship between verse pattern and
contained theme, observes that "there can be no doubt that
Traherne took considerable trouble with the actual design of
his writing, that is, the pattern presented to the eye by the
arrangement of words and lines."[26] The dangers of mere
shapeless effusion are constantly present in a poet like
Traherne, but they are met, on the whole, more successfully in
the poems than in any other part of his writings, except
perhaps certain parts of the Centuries.

Traherne's poems are, in fact, a distillation of the
experiences conveyed in the Centuries. This does not mean that
they are more 'concise,' or less repetitive, but that much of
the directly autobiographical material found in the Centuries is

omitted in the poetry, particularly in that selection which the author himself gives us in the autograph manuscript. The poems which are found within the Centuries and Christian Ethicks are likewise distillations in verse of the prose which surrounds them, differing not so much in essential structure as in their general and timeless application of the specific meditations.

But the problem of arrangement remains, even when this selective process is taken into account. The principle of multi-centeredness and interpenetration is always of great importance in Traherne's thought, and in his verse the poet sacrifices none of the repetitions and 'lists' of the prose-- he rather extends them and emphasizes them further by the removal of a personal, autobiographical framework. The poems must provide, as it were, their own framework. It is as an attempt to find this framework that we can best account for the curious structure of the half-prose, half-verse Contemplation and Thanksgivings. Here the principle of interchangeability is applied in its most directly visual way, as dependent series of words are bracketed and otherwise arranged in groups and clusters. The following is a small example taken from the Thanksgivings for the Soul:

```
        Atheists,           Physicians,
        Divines,            Philosophers,
           All agree and consent to this,
                    That
   Nature never gave to any thing a power in vain.
   To what end therefore am I endued with these eternal Powers,
                         ⎛Greatness⎞
      The similitude of thy⎨Infinity ⎬in my Soul?
                         ⎝Eternity ⎠
         It is not that I might live,
                         ⎛Wisdom   ⎞
   In the similitude of thy⎨Goodness ⎬ towards all thy Creatures?
                         ⎝Holiness ⎠
                         (II.236, 11.264-276)
```

In these works we see in a kind of chaos all the potential forms

the poems might take. Long lines, short lines, italics and

capitals, strings of synonyms, instances and examples--the raw

material of his poetry waiting for the hand which will give it

beautiful shape, but which will in no way restrict or delimit;

the poem, like those objects which first attract the infant eye,

must attract the reader's eye with its ordered beauty, but its

visible shape and its sound to the ear must conduct the reader

to the pure realm of thought.

At a simple level, Traherne's verse patterns perform a

similar function to those of Herbert: to reveal the many ways

in which God manifests and extends Himself throughout Creation

and in the mind of man. But where Herbert's verse patterns

rise inevitably out of the particular situation which is the

subject of the poem, Traherne's lack this kind of inevitability,

mainly because the poems themselves do not for the most part

arise from particular situations, but from a perception of the
one truth underlying all situations. I have said before that
virtually any poem of Traherne offers direct access to this
central truth, and this truth in turn, rather than the
particular poem, justifies the verse form. But only certain
kinds of verse form are likely to prove amenable to this
principle. We would not expect, for instance, to find
Traherne writing sonnets or dialogues, or any other form
where antithetical elements are present and constitute a
logical and progressive order of their own. In that
minority of poems composed of unvarying couplets we sense a
rigid and superimposed plan at odds with the flexibility and
expansion of his characteristic vision. The progressive
forward movement of Donne's couplets in the _Anniversaries_ is
an indication of the successive development of ideas; in
Traherne, this kind of development being largely absent, the
couplet proves to be an inappropriate and monotonous vehicle.

With his use, however, of the kind of counterpoint of
rhyme, line length and syntactic unit which Herbert developed,
Traherne was able to construct a large number of different
stanza forms all of which give a graceful shape to but do not
impose on or obscure the all-encompassing vision. The
arbitrariness of arrangement evident in the _Contemplation_ and

the Thanksgivings is replaced by the symmetry of the lines
themselves, while the sense of complete openness and freedom
is maintained by the enjambment, the constant controlled
overflowing of one line into the next. Robert Ellrodt
provides a valuable summing-up of the function of Traherne's
verse patterns:

> De leur complication même naît l'impression
> de naturel que donne l'irrégularité quand on
> ne sent pas de contrainte pour amener la pensée
> à épouser les contours capricieux de ce cadre.
> Or, à cet égard, Traherne est servi par la "facilité"
> même de son art: comme il n'hésite pas à répéter
> l'idée, à multiplier les énumérations, à prodiguer
> les synonymes, il n'a point de peine à remplir
> le cadre tout en laissant à la syntaxe et au
> rhythme leur fluidité.[27]

Finally, then, though we cannot say that a particular verse form
or stanza pattern is inevitable for the particular poem in which
it occurs, we can say that the pattern of Traherne's verse as a
whole is the inevitable expression of a single vision, of which
each part reflects all the others.

I have tried to show that our understanding of Traherne's
overall poetic form depends upon our first understanding his use
of words and images within the sentence. The individual simple
words and images which the poet has arrived at "by taking all
away" are the foundation from which grows the whole poetic
edifice. Between the smallest and the largest unit, however,
there is perhaps less difference and less distance than in any

other poet of the period. In Traherne poetic means and poetic

ends are indeed fused in a way not possible in other poets

whose more complex awareness of division and disparity within

the self and the world demands more complex organizing structures

and more complex development of ideas. But in the identity

of poetic means and ends, and in the near-identity of smallest

and largest poetic units, Traherne's poems reflect as clearly

as those of any other religious poet an individual experience

of God--in this case a God in whom means and ends, large and

small, are meaningless as distinct and separate ideas. By

"taking all away" we discover that all are one; by enumerating

and multiplying we celebrate that oneness.

Finally, then, we must see the poems of Traherne as a single

gesture, a single act. Their value as poetry lies ultimately

in the value we assign to that act: there is little that is

incidental to it, little that can be extracted and admired for

its own sake. Single images and phrases taken out of context

inevitably appear flat and unpoetic, not so much because of a

lack of expressiveness, but because the ideas which they do

express live only within a total creative act--an act of love,

in the poet as in the God he celebrates.[28] Seen within this

larger context, images and phrases reinforce each other and

build up a cumulative power through repetition. Yet the final

effect is not that of incantation. The variety of stanza forms provides an everchanging setting for familiar words and ideas, a visual equivalent to the numberless orders of things in the world.

More important, however, is the way in which a single word or idea may be mentioned only in passing in one poem, as an example perhaps, or as one item in a 'list,' but may become of central importance in another poem or group of poems. Thus do various 'themes' such as Innocence, Eden, Thought, Love and Knowledge appear in turn as important aspects of our total being in God. No one theme stands pre-eminent, and each involves the others.[29] Traherne's disposition of words, themes and verse forms reinforces his poetry's essential 'structure.' Each poem stands at the center of all the others. Just as every individual soul stands, for Traherne, at the center of the Creation as its inheritor and its summation, so does each poem stand as a separate expression of a general truth, a single poetic act whose nature can be understood only by reference to the total act in which it occurs. The realization of this kind of poetic whole depended upon the evolution or distillation of a simple, basic vocabulary and a mode of expression absolutely clear and unencumbered by complex, particular figures and other structural devices. Vaughan,

I think, was clearly moving in this direction, but it was

Traherne who followed Herbert's advice most rigorously, and

in so doing created his own consistent and appropriate poetic

forms.

CONCLUSION

In terms of the changes in poetic form and spiritual vision
which I have attempted to trace, Traherne's poetry marks in
certain respects a terminal point. Donne's and Herbert's methods
of logical development, antithetical argument and complex and
ambiguous controlling figures were shared by the secular poets
as well, as the example of Jonson demonstrates. From these
methods grew, ultimately, the rational and discursive modes of
the Restoration and the eighteenth century. But with Traherne
the short religious lyric, and the vision which sustained it,
virtually came to an end as a major poetic form. The complex

stanza pattern, coupled with a plain, repetitive and abstract language, first seen briefly in Herbert and further developed in Vaughan, was carried to its furthest point in Traherne, and could go no further. Nothing more could be added without taking away, just as nothing could be added to Traherne's harmonious vision of man and God without reducing it. Although complex and irregular stanza forms appear in the work of other notable poets such as Cowley, Dryden, and Collins, the inspiration, as with Jonson, is primarily classical and secular. It is not the "easy Stile drawn from a native vein" which Traherne wrote of, and in which he praised God and the Creation with simplicity and fervor. Later figures such as Blake, Shelley and Whitman show in some ways a return to Traherne's vision and poetic methods, but in a context so removed from that of seventeenth-century Christian devotion that meaningful comparison is all but impossible. It is with the other metaphysical poets that he finds his place, and it is from their poetry that his own poetic forms emerge.

In describing the formal and structural principles that are to be found embodied in the religious poetry of Donne, Herbert, Vaughan and Traherne, I have tried to find a balance between what is common to the poets and what separates them. What is common is the desire not only to celebrate God, but

actively to know Him in a most immediate and personal way;

not to define and justify one particular way of knowing Him,

according to a predetermined pattern of orthodox observance,

but to know Him within the individual soul, to know Him in an

intense encounter which transcends, though it may spring from,

formal patterns of Christian worship. There is a large body

of religious poetry which is concerned with the celebration of

God and with the justification of a particular way of

celebrating Him. Such a body of poetry may include everything

from simple hymns and devotional exercises to long, discursive

poems with a doctrinal or even polemical basis. Though there

are orthodox devotional and doctrinal poems in the work of all

four poets I have chosen to discuss, I have concentrated on the

subjective account each one gives of his own personal search

for union with the Divine. Within the 'limits' of this search

there is room for the greatest possible diversity--a diversity

immediately apparent in the range of expressive forms we find.

My primary concern with the forms these poets use has been

dictated by a belief, first, that the relationship between them

as religious poets is most clearly to be seen in the nature of

their poems as verbal structures, and second, that these verbal

structures embody and give the most direct access to their

essential religious experience. By examining them it is possible

to find a surprisingly consistent pattern of change which

corresponds to a similar change in the relationship between

individual soul and God as experienced by each poet. As two

convenient terminal points in this study, Donne's Second

Anniversary and Traherne's poems taken as a whole define

the nature of a 'progress' which is important not only in

an understanding of seventeenth-century religious verse, but

also in an understanding of the basic issue faced by all

poets who must try to convey in words the ineffable. For

if, in Donne's vision, the soul of Elizabeth Drury in its

unrestricted flight represents a state of perfect knowledge,

perfect unity and final freedom from the limitations of space

and time, then the problem of how this state is to be realized

within each soul, and conveyed through the medium of poetry,

is central to all four poets. And it is by means of a

gradual replacement of complex poetic structures and figures

by simple ones, of logical progression and argument by

spontaneous and associative expansion, and of the defining

particular instance by the suggestive generalization, that

Donne's vision of the soul's freedom becomes increasingly central

in the work of the later poets, and provides Traherne with the

very basis of his poetic forms.

With the dismantling of the complex structures of Donne

and Herbert, and with the return to smaller poetic units and

a simpler, unspecific diction, Vaughan and Traherne move

away from concreteness, from what Eliot calls "direct,

sensuous apprehension of thought," and towards poetic language

and poetic forms which do not define particular individual

experiences, but rather suggest a potential, shared experience

in which individuality is transformed in the newly discovered

light of unity. Finally, in Traherne, the indivisible nature

of God, man and Creation, and the assimilation by expansion of

the boundaries of time and space, are expressed directly by

the poetic form itself. Donne recognized that the poetic act

was an imitation of the purer, unrestricted act of Elizabeth

Drury, and ultimately of the original creative Act of God

Himself; the essential meaning of the Anniversaries is found

in this analogy. Traherne's poetry is also an imitation. But

without the sustaining metaphors and the structured logical

development of Donne's imitation, Traherne's proceeds on the

principle of the virtual identity of the two creative acts, the

same fusion of ends and means in both God's Creation and the

poet's.

As expressions of religious experience and of mystical

insight the poetic methods of Donne and Traherne seem to me to

be equally valid and equally appropriate. They are not polar

opposites, as the presence of both methods in Herbert and

Vaughan indicates. Nor, for all the differences in sensibility,

are any of these poets in disagreement concerning the dignity

of their subject and the dignity of their poetic calling.

Considered simply as poets, as 'makers' of poems, they may be

judged to have reached very different levels of achievement.

I hope to have shown that an understanding of the appropriate-

ness of their particular poetic means to the end which all

shared--the greater knowledge and love of God--is necessary

before this judgment can be made.

I have said that the widely varying methods of each poet

illustrate the complexity of the problem faced by all poets

who seek to convey in words God's "deep, but dazling darkness."

These same varying methods also raise a critical problem if

the wide range of personal religious verse which characterizes

the earlier part of the seventeenth century is to be seen whole,

and not simply as an extension of the poetic practice of, say,

Donne or Herbert. Alternatively, examination of the actual

forms of later poets like Vaughan and Traherne may cast a

revealing 'backward' light on the essential nature of the earlier

poetry. In this way it is possible to establish a coherent

pattern of change within the one spacious framework--a framework

consisting not of a set of rules concerning the essential

"poëtiquenesse" (to use Donne's word) of certain modes of

expression, but of the greater awareness of God which these

different modes convey, and which was the one shared aim of

all the poets. If we allow certain elements only in the style

and techniques of Donne and his 'school' to dominate our

response to the other religious poets, we may misunderstand

those poets who are spiritually closest to him. Wylie Sypher's

comment is relevant here:

> Coleridge's emphasis upon an imaginative _discordia_
> _concors_, the opposition of impulse within a poem,
> has stimulated a criticism that is always seeking
> out or wondering at complexities, ambiguities,
> tensions, and the shifts in tone associated with
> irony. If a sense of these is not evoked from the
> reader, the poem is suspected of approaching the
> over-simplified, the naive, the sentimental . . . .[30]

Such an emphasis can lead not only to a neglect of the essential

quality and seriousness of Traherne's poetry, and of his position

in relation to Donne, but it can also lead to a neglect of the

unified, unambiguous vision which informs the Anniversaries them-

selves, and which each of the poets I have discussed seeks to

convey in his verse. To consider the poems as artifacts, as

expressive and beautiful forms, is, I believe, to remove an

emphasis on what is ultimately partial and incidental and to

concentrate instead on what is enduring--the experience finely

shaped, offered not so much to the reader as to God. The care

with which each poet made this offering itself constitutes a

bond between them; this care is also, in a way not easy to

define, a guarantee of the integrity of form, and, in the end,

of its essential rightness.

FOOTNOTES

[1] _On the Mystical Poetry of Henry Vaughan_, p.xviii. This opinion occurs elsewhere: "Perhaps Traherne's poetry is generally less valued than his justly esteemed prose in large part because we have not yet clearly understood and fully appreciated the specific form and mode of his poetic expression . . ." (A. L. Clements, "On the Mode and Meaning of Traherne's Mystical Poetry," _SP_, LXI [1964], 500.)

[2] _The Metaphysical Poets_, p.332.

[3] _The Paradise Within_, p.80.

[4] H. I. Bell, ed., _Traherne's Poems of Felicity_ (Oxford 1910), p.xxix.

[5] Gladys Wade, _Thomas Traherne_ (Princeton, 1946), p.196.

[6] A more useful distinction might be that already made in the poetry of Vaughan-- a distinction between the more orthodox pieces written from within a conventional Christian framework, and the less orthodox pieces, among them the poet's most accomplished work, which owe little to any such framework. The distinction is perhaps no more final than that commonly made between prose and verse, but I believe it is the one that should be made if we are to arrive at the 'essence' of these two later poets, neither of whom seems to have been as firmly rooted as Donne and Herbert were in the pattern of orthodox Christian observance. In Traherne's poetry the distinction is particularly important. Allan H. Gilbert has claimed, on evidence drawn from a close comparison of the autograph Dobell MS and the Burney MS in Philip Traherne's hand, that "the selection of poems in the Dobell MS indicates that when his artistic interests were uppermost, the ecclesiastical aspects of religion were little regarded" ("Thomas Traherne as Artist," _MLQ_, VIII [1947], 326). My own attention will be directed primarily to poems in the Dobell MS, not only because it is an autograph and represents Traherne's own selective principle, but also because of the generally recognized superiority of the poems over those added in the later manuscript, whether subjected to Philip's amendments or not. See also Clements, _passim_.

[7] *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1945), p.149.

[8] *Thomas Traherne: Centuries, Poems and Thanksgivings*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1958), II.54, ll.86-93. All subsequent references are to this edition. Where a poem appears in different versions in the Dobell MS and the Burney MS, the Dobell version will always be given.

[9] See Gilbert, pp.436-442. It is as important in reading Traherne as in reading Vaughan that we do not confuse characteristic modes of expressing spiritual truth with literal, autobiographical statement. That Traherne attributes clarity of vision to the state of infancy does not mean that such vision was enjoyed by Traherne only as a child. "Infancy" and the "Infant Eye" are part of a traditional body of imagery referring to a special closeness to God. This closeness may be lost in time, but, in Traherne, may also be regained in time. Infancy and Eden exist always within the soul, as does primal Innocence. That they can be recovered from error and misunderstanding is the point of much of his poetry and prose (see particularly *Centuries* III.5). See also Harold G. Ridlon, "The Function of the 'Infant-Ey' in Traherne's Poetry," *SP*, LXI (1964), 627-639.

[10] See Chapter III, n.21. A similar kind of 'transformation' in the idea of Christ is found by Sypher in the typical "centralized" church of the Italian Renaissance: "In these churches so luminously planned Christ is no longer the suffering medieval man who is crucified but a Pythagorean creative principle, Christ Pantocrator, a Logos-God whose divinity is expressed by symmetries" (*Four Stages of Renaissance Style*, p.63). Not only in Vaughan and Traherne but also in Milton, Bunyan and the Cambridge Platonists we find Christ the Exemplar stressed rather than Christ the Sufferer.

[11] Gilbert points out the "lack of churchly and Trinitarian reference" in the Dobell MS and in the most generally acclaimed parts of the *Centuries* (p.327). Christ the Savior is mentioned only once in the entire Dobell MS, and in only four linked poems in the Burney MS. At times the poet himself takes on the different aspects of Godhead, as in "Love:" "I am his Image, and his Friend, / His Son, Bride, Glory, Temple, End." For further discussion of Traherne's concepts of original sin and redemption, see William H. Marshall, "Thomas Traherne and the Doctrine of Original Sin," *MLN*, LXXIII (1958), 161-165, and K. W. Salter, *Thomas Traherne: Mystic and Poet* (London, 1964), Chapter II.

[12] Note also, in Traherne's translation of Pico della Mirandola's De Dignitate Hominis, the description of man as "The Hymenaeus Marrying the Creator and his Creatures together" (Centuries IV.74).

[13] Traherne's strong sense of identification with the Psalmist is made explicit in the Centuries: "You cannot imagine how unspeakably I was delighted to see so glorious a person, so great a prince, so divine a sage, that was a man after God's own heart, by the testimony of God Himself, rejoicing in the same things, meditating on the same, and praising God for the same. For by this I perceived we were led by one Spirit" (III.70). Elsewhere, however, Traherne sees the act of poetic creation as similar to God's own Act. See Ronald W. Hepburn, "Thomas Traherne: The Nature and Dignity of Imagination," Cambridge Journal, VI (1953), 725-734.

[14] Such an interrelationship may be seen in Herbert only within an individual poem. The poem closest in theme to Traherne, "Man," shows the same kind of formal relationship between its stanzas as that which exists between Traherne's individual poems. Each stanza has its own pattern, yet each reflects the same comprehensive vision. One might note also that this relationship in Traherne's poetry means that we do not find poems acting as 'polar opposites' between which the rest of the poet's work seems to fall. Examples I have already cited are the two Anniversaries of Donne, Herbert's "The Sacrifice" and "Love III," Vaughan's "The Search" and "Ascension-day." Such poems also stand at either end of an evolving time scheme which is not found in Traherne, though some individual poems do contain a simple progression in time from confusion to enlightenment, or from grief to joy.

[15] p.338.

[16] Problems of Art (New York, 1957), p.95.

[17] II.378.

[18] Miss Colie points out the sustained apposition of Herbert's "Prayer I," and her reading of that poem suggests its similarity in principle to many of Traherne's poems: "The whole poem is an attempt to bracket, to close in upon the logos without limiting its extent, to find some words to invoke the words for which no other words will do, the Word that is, in the end, simply "something understood" (Paradoxia Epidemica, p.207).

19 Lowry Nelson in Baroque Lyric Poetry (New Haven, 1961) finds "The Retreate" an exception to the normal tendency of the period: "Movement toward the future, either full or incomplete, is perhaps the commonest movement to be found in the Baroque lyric" (p.36).

20 Principles of Literary Criticism (London, 1924), p.120.

21 Traherne's use of the words "Idea," "Thought" and "Mind" is perhaps best understood by quoting from Peter Sterry's A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will (London, 1675), p.49. Sterry defines Idea as "the first and distinct Image of each form of things in the Divine Mind . . . Thus in every Idea of each Creature doth this universal Idea dwell at large, and freely shine forth with all its fulnesses and sweetnesses in a distinct form, as it self in another form." This passage is quoted in Carol L. Marks's useful survey, "Thomas Traherne and Cambridge Platonism," PMLA, LXXXI (1966), 521-534. For further discussion of Traherne's conception of the Infinite and its relation to the world of the finite, see Colie, pp.145-168, and Nicolson, pp.196-203.

22 For a detailed account of the relationship in Traherne between sense impression, idea, and knowledge of God, see Salter, Chapter III.

23 Margaret Bottrall, "Traherne's Praise of the Creation," CritQ, I (1959), 130.

24 A similar combination occurs in Vaughan's "The Water-fall" and "The World," but the episodic development of most of his poems suggests a moving away from the earlier concept of hierarchy.

25 Miss Colie also notes the absence in Traherne's imagery of circles, spheres and rings (p.167). These traditional symbols of perfection and wholeness, as seen particularly in Donne's Anniversaries and Vaughan's "The World," may have suggested enclosure and restriction to Traherne.

26 p.147.

27 II.389.

28 See Salter, Chapter VII. Though regarding the poetry as inferior to the prose, Salter makes clear the appropriateness of Traherne's poetic means in the light of his poetic intentions.

[29] The order in which these various 'themes' occur has been discussed at length by John M. Wallace in "Thomas Traherne and the Structure of Meditation," ELH, XXV (1958), 79-89. Wallace suggests that the thirty-seven poems of the Dobell MS "constitute a complete five-part meditation which fulfills all the major conditions of a Jesuit exercise" (p.80). While there is no doubt that Traherne arranged the poems with some care, I do not believe that he was concerned with writing a meditative exercise. For the influence of the Augustinian meditation in Traherne, see Martz, The Paradise Within, Chapter II. For further discussion of the order of poems in the Dobell MS, see Denonain, pp.254-267.

[30] "The Metaphysicals and the Baroque," PR, XI (1944), 3.

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