

JOHN DONNE'S USE OF THE CONVENTIONS FOR THE ELIZABETHAN
SONNET SEQUENCE IN HOLY SONNETS

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PREFACE

Authorities differ concerning the sequence of Donne's Holy Sonnets. Certain scholars have attempted to relate the twelve sonnets from the 1633 edition to a sequence influenced by the Anglican Doctrine of Contrition, pertaining to strict disciplines of the Anglican Church which one must follow in order to attain salvation. According to particular themes, a sequence of this nature is evident; however, it is not too poetically satisfying to relate Donne's sonnets to this rigorous and methodical plan of redemption. Others argue that there is no coherent sequence in the Holy Sonnets, explaining that each sonnet forms a poem in itself separate from the rest. This present study attempts to relate Donne's Holy Sonnets to the tradition of the Elizabethan sonnet sequence following the pattern of a male narrator's addressing a female in the form of the dramatic monologue. Although the female does not audibly reply to the narrator, there is a dramatic tension and action between the two characters that causes one sonnet to continue logically to the next, thus forming a sonnet-cycle.

In the first chapter the author is concerned with the background of the Elizabethan sonnet sequence. She considers Sidney's sonnet sequence, Astrophel and Stella, Spenser's Amoretti, Drayton's Idea, and Daniel's Delia. In the second chapter, the author considers Shakespeare's sonnet sequence and states several theories related to the complex characters

and actions in his sonnets. Donne's handling of three love poems, "The Flea," "The Canonization," and "The Anniversary," make up the third chapter, in which the author reveals that an action between two characters, the male and the female, is taking place. Donne, through the medium of the male narrator, discusses the complex interactions that occur between his lover and himself and expresses the emotions caused by these interactions. Although Donne disliked the Elizabethan style of poetic expression, he seems to adapt it to his own use by means of the dramatic monologue.

The fourth chapter concerns the Holy Sonnets. It attempts to reveal Donne as the poet addressing his sonnets to his lover, God. God, then, plays the part of the woman similar to the beautiful mistress in the Elizabethan sonnet sequence, and causes Donne to experience an agonizing love affair. *

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CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND AND TRADITION OF THE MAJOR ELIZABETHAN SONNET SEQUENCES

The sonnet sequence in the Elizabethan Age was a series concerned with one subject, usually the burning lust of a young man for a beautiful woman.¹ The sequence or cycle was narrated by a male, either in soliloquy or in conversation with his mistress. As he speaks, the sonnets often take on the characteristics of a personal confession. The Elizabethan sonnet-cycles partook of two forms: e.g., the Petrarchan and the Neo-Platonic sonnet-cycles. The Petrarchan cycle concerned itself with the subject of free love and adultery so characteristic of its feudal background, while the Neo-Platonic cycle explored a doctrine of the chaste or virtuous love popular with the Tudor aristocracy. The aim of the proponents of the Neo-Platonic sonnet-cycle was to demonstrate reason's conquering passion. Because of an idealistic strain found in these cycles, these particular sonnets achieved a vast popularity.²

While the Petrarchan sonnet-cycle was not meant to be taken literally, the Neo-Platonic sonnet-cycle readily

¹W. T. Going, "The Term, Sonnet Sequence," MLN, LXII (June, 1947), 400-402.

²P. N. Siegel, "Petrarchan Sonneteers and Neo-Platonic Love," SP, XLII (April, 1945), 182.

established its own sincerity.³ After Sidney's Neo-Platonic Astrophel and Stella was published in 1592, many similar cycles followed, and more than twenty were published from 1592 to 1602.⁴ Sidney's sonnets form a narrative sequence. A male narrates the poem under the name of Astrophel. Stella was the beautiful girl whom he loves passionately. Actually, she is Penelope Devereux, the daughter of Walter Devereux, First Earl of Essex, who was betrothed to Sidney at the age of fourteen, but was married to Lord Rich at the age of nineteen.⁵ Scholars argue that it is not important to attempt to identify Stella as Penelope Devereux and Astrophel as Sidney, suggesting that the two characters are fictional. However, a poet often takes material circumstances and changes them into spiritual elements. Some of the incidents in Sidney's sonnet-cycle are undoubtedly actual occurrences, but whether great or small, they serve as a spark to kindle the poet's imagination.⁶ For example, the narrator is not speaking of historical (or past) happenings between himself and Penelope Devereux. Rather, he is telling

³Ibid., p. 169.

⁴O. F. Emerson, "Shakespeare's Sonneteering," SP, XX (April, 1923), 111.

⁵Sir A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (eds.), Cambridge History of English Literature, III, 254.

⁶John Drinkwater (ed.), The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney, pp. 54-56.

Stella what is within his heart; hence, the poem is fiction in the sense that it is a dramatization of feelings.⁷

Sidney's sequence also shows a continuous narrative development. It is an autobiographical account of the late realization of love.⁸ As the narrator dramatizes his varied mental states,⁹ the entire sequence becomes involved in the various happenings between Astrophel and Stella, and one event leads to the next as one sonnet leads to the next. The sequence itself relates directly to the author's personality--his feelings upon public, literary, military, and religious matters, and upon those involving his relationships with others; and Stella, the focus of the cycle, influences Sidney in all of these situations.¹⁰

At an earlier date, Sidney wrote the first twenty-seven sonnets, excluding I, II, III, VI, XV, XIX, and XXIV. After Penelope's marriage to Lord Rich, Sidney realized that his youthful lover no longer existed. Consequently, he wrote the aforementioned additional sonnets, displaying an intense jealousy of Lord Rich. In these, he plays upon the word, rich, as the

⁷T. B. Stroup, "Speaking Picture Realized: Sidney's Forty-fifth Sonnet," PQ, XXIX (October, 1950), 442.

⁸Lisle Cecile John, The Elizabethan Sonnet Sequence, p. 55.

⁹Robert L. Montgomery, Symmetry and Sense, p. 104.

¹⁰J. W. Lever, The Elizabethan Love Sonnet, p. 54.

"blackest face of woe." Also, at this late date, he develops a greater concern for the art form of the sonnet sequence,¹¹ giving his later sonnets smoother transitions and more earthy metaphors.¹² In sonnets I-XXXVI, by means of Astrophel he employs the conventional technique of the Petrarchan sonneteer, withdrawing from the world of reason so that love may become the central theme and Stella the main object. Thus, there occurs in these poems a lively communication between Astrophel and Stella. In the beginning, Astrophel seems gently to be teasing her, and she flirts easily with him.¹³ However, as Astrophel's love for Stella deepens, the mood of the sonnets changes. For example, when Stella coldly responds to him, the narrator replies sarcastically to her. As the sequence continues, Astrophel is encouraged by Stella, but later rejected. This encouragement and rejection cause Astrophel some difficulty. He experiences joy, hope, hopelessness, hostility, a lack of physical satisfaction, and, finally, sheer frustration.¹⁴ As Stella causes his emotions to surge and vary, so do these sonnets reflect a tension and show much variation. In sonnet XXXIV, Astrophel realizes the necessity of turning his thoughts toward inward reflection:

¹¹A. R. Howe, "Astrophel and Stella: Why and How," SP, LXI (April, 1964), 161.

¹²Loc. cit.

¹³Loc. cit.

¹⁴Montgomery, op. cit., p. 102.

What idler thing, then speak and not be heard?
 What harder thing then smart, and not to speak?
 Peace, foolish wit, with wit my wit is marr'd
 Thus write I, while I doubt to write, and wreak
 My harms in inks poor loss. Perhaps some find
 Stella's great powers, that so confuse my mind.¹⁵

Since he knows that he must take seriously his moral obligation, he obviously struggles within himself. Furthermore, this entire group of sonnets is not constant or uninterrupted. For example, in one sonnet, Astrophel is sensitive to shame but confident; in another, he is without confidence. Furthermore, he is often melancholy in one sonnet and full of praise and admiration for Stella in another.¹⁶ In sonnets XLI-XLIII, he attempts to accept the code of Platonic love; but in XLIV, he laments that Stella does not appreciate him. In sonnet XLVII, he begins to reconsider the price of love:

What have I thus betrayed my liberty!
 Can those black beams such burning marks engrave
 In my free side; or am I born a slave,
 Whose neck becomes such yoke of tyranny!
 Or want I sense to feel my misery,
 Or sprite, disdain of such disdain to have!
 Who for long faith, though daily help I crave,
 May get no alms but scorn of beggary.¹⁷

In sonnet LX, he is so full of passion that he finds it difficult to think. Although Stella encourages him, she so physically upsets him that, by sonnet LXIV, he begs her not to

¹⁵Drinkwater (ed.), op. cit., p. 100.

¹⁶Montgomery, op. cit., p. 112.

¹⁷Drinkwater (ed.), op. cit., p. 113.

resist him and is prepared to forsake all moral obligation:

No, more, my dear, no more these counsels try,
O give my passions leave to run their race;
Let fortune lay on me her worst disgrace,
Let folke o'ercharged with brain against me cry.¹⁸

In the next few sonnets, Astrophel is joyous. When Stella encourages him, he steals a kiss. As he begs for more, she refuses and, thus, leaves him in despair.¹⁹

Stella finally accepts Astrophel as a Platonic lover in sonnet LXIX and insists that he overcome his physical desire for her. In the next few sonnets, he reveals that he cannot overcome his desire, and, then, in sonnets LXXIX-LXXXIV, one notes that a physical separation of the two takes place, convincing Astrophel that other women can also tempt him. As he regains his interest in others, he feels less passion for Stella, as he tries to explain in sonnet XCI. His love for her becomes universal in XCIX, C, and CIII, love encompassing all things of beauty, like day, night, flowers, wind, trees, and birds.²⁰ In sonnet CVII, he no longer feels pain as a lover and, now, regains his former interest in country and self-dignity. In the final sonnet, he expresses sadness for a love affair that could not be.²¹ The sequence is resolved in the

¹⁸Ibid., p. 133.

¹⁹Theodore Howard Banks, "Sidney's Astrophel and Stella Reconsidered," PMLA, L (June, 1935), 410.

²⁰Lever, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

²¹Ibid., p. 82.

standard paradox of the sonnet-cycles, e.g., a resolution brought about by the irresolution in *Astrophel*.²²

Another contemporary Elizabethan sonneteer, Edmund Spenser, wrote a series of eighty-eight sonnets in 1592 at a time during which he was courting his future wife.²³ In the *Amoretti*, Spenser's narrator speaks to a beautiful but cruel mistress of her many beauties and delicately describes the various parts of her anatomy, in a few instances revealing his lust as one desiring to devour his lover greedily.²⁴ In sonnet LXXVII, Spenser describes the mistress as an ivory table ". . . all spred with juncats . . .," whose centerpiece is a silver dish containing two golden apples.²⁵ As the cycle continues, however, the lover moves from a low level of lust and sex to a higher level of understanding, hence, the Neo-Platonic ladder which the male narrator is attempting to climb.²⁶ As he attempts to ascend this spiritual ladder of love, his mistress causes him to descend to a low, animal-like state of physical

²²Montgomery, op. cit., p. 117.

²³Sidney Lee, Elizabethan Sonnets, p. xcii.

²⁴A. Brien, "Afterthought (Spenser and Sex)," Spectator, CCXI (November 15, 1963), 646.

²⁵Edwin Greenlaw and others (eds.), The Works of Edmund Spenser, II, 227.

²⁶A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Nature and Grace in Spenser," RES, VI (July, 1955), 284.

love.²⁷ On the lowest rung of this Neo-Platonic ladder is the region of sensual love. At times, however, Spenser's narrator ascends to the second rung of the ladder where he has knowledge of this sensual love. On the third rung, he converts the physical beauty of his mistress into an image.²⁸ In his struggles (from sonnet to sonnet) to climb the ladder, he reaches the fourth rung eventually and converts a sensual image of her beauty into one of universal beauty.²⁹ On the fifth rung, when he looks into his own soul to find universal beauty nearing a state of perfection, this concept of universal beauty merges with that of an angelic nature or universal intellect as he moves to the sixth rung.³⁰ At last, he escapes reason, and when he reaches the seventh rung or the "landing stage," his universal intellect produces within him a mystic union with the One.³¹ In sonnet LXXII, he speaks in retrospect of the rungs of this Neo-Platonic ladder:

Oft when my spirit doth spread her bolder wings
 In mind to mount up to the purest sky
 It down is weigh'd with thought of earthly things,
 And clog'd with burden of mortality.³²

²⁷Ewin Casady, "The Neo-Platonic Ladder in Spenser's Amoretti," PQ, XX (July, 1941), 294.

²⁸Ibid., p. 285.

²⁹Ibid., p. 286.

³⁰Loc. cit.

³¹Ibid., p. 288.

³²Greenlaw and others (eds.), op. cit., II, 225.

Because of his mistress's physical beauty, the narrator can remain only for a short time on the top rung of the ladder. Consequently, he continually descends to the lower rungs, his intense passion pulling him downward.

Another distinguished Elizabethan sonneteer, Michael Drayton, composed a sonnet-cycle consisting of fifty-two sonnets in which he frequently borrowed familiar devices from contemporary sonneteers and pretended to tell of his own love. Although Drayton's sonnets are similar to Sidney's or Spenser's, they lack sincere feelings. Drayton's beautiful mistress (who, in abstract form, is Idea) was actually Ann Goodere whose doctor, also the son-in-law of Shakespeare, described her as ". . . beautiful, and of a gallant structure of body."³³ Even when she had married and Drayton had become a good friend of her husband, Sir Henry Rainsford of Clifford Chambers, the author writes: "I am still inviolate to you."³⁴ While the narrator of the sonnet-cycle reveals his passion for the beautiful mistress and praises her many beauties, not all of Drayton's sonnets are full of the subject of love. For example, in sonnet XV, the beautiful woman, by means of her cold, chaste attitude, almost turns his passionate feelings into something monstrous:³⁵

³³Oliver Elton, Michael Drayton, p. 68.

³⁴Quoted in ibid., p. 71.

³⁵Ibid., p. 61.

I have a Med'cine that shall cure my Love,
 The powder of her Heart dried, when she is dead
 That Gold nor Honour ne'r had power to move;
 Mixed with her Teares, that ne'r her True-Love
 crost. . . .³⁶

Drayton's narrator seems to lessen his passionate feelings for his mistress in the later editions of this sonnet-cycle, revealing a cool, cynical attitude toward his mistress's chastity. In the second edition, the original sonnets which had praised Idea as being virtuous are now omitted, as well as those in which Drayton had described the purity of his love.³⁷ In this second edition, he also avoids an atmosphere of sadness and attempts to write according to the way in which he feels.³⁸ He now becomes more sober, cool, and independent, similar in his attitude to that expressed in Donne, whose cynical attitude toward an idealized lover is evident in Songs and Sonnets. Drayton does not praise his mistress for being spiritual but shows impatience with the coyness of this mere woman. Although his sonnets reveal his emotions for the beautiful woman, they lack the sudden changes in feeling so frequently exhibited in Sidney's sonnet-cycle.³⁹

³⁶William Hebel (ed.), The Works of Michael Drayton, II, 318.

³⁷F. Y. St. Clair, "Drayton's First Revision of His Sonnets," SP, XXXVI (January, 1939), 54-55.

³⁸Loc. cit.

³⁹Ibid., p. 57.

Finally, Samuel Daniel composed a sonnet-cycle entitled Delia to the Countess of Pembroke, the sister of Sidney. As did Spenser, Daniel attempts to eternalize the beauty of his attractive mistress, thereby revealing an agonizing relationship between himself and a cruel woman.⁴⁰ Although he is not so fiery in temperament as Sidney, he uses the same techniques. As Delia encourages the poor, love-sick narrator, he is aroused, joyous, full of anticipation, hopeless, savage, and finally heartbroken.⁴¹ As in the case of the later editions of the sonnet-cycles of Drayton and Sidney, subsequent revisions of Daniel's work also portray less force and lusty passion. For example, there are no melodramatic cries of a passionate young man as in sonnet XVI in the first edition: "Weep hours, grieve daies, sigh months, and still mourn yearly. . . ." In a later edition, the line was changed: "Waile all my life, my griefes do touch so neerely. . . ."⁴² These revisions imply that the sonnet sequences were the results of fiery, youthful experiences, and as time passed, the sonneteers thought more of their poetic art than of their own passionate emotions and, thus, changed various sonnets in

⁴⁰ John, op. cit., p. 55.

⁴¹ P. Thomson, "Sonnet Fifteen of Samuel Daniel's Delia: A Petrarchan Imitation," Comparative Literature, XVII (Spring, 1965), 155-156.

⁴² Alexander B. Grosart (ed.), The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Samuel Daniel, I, 47.

their cycles.⁴³ Another instance in Daniel's sonnet-cycle of a less passionate narrator occurs in sonnet XX in the first edition: "Whiles dearest blood my fierie passions seal-eth. . . ." This line was later changed, as follows: "Whilst my best blood my young desiers seaeth. . . ."⁴⁴ The sonnet-cycles revealed the lusty, fiery passion of a male narrator in his youth, but this lust and passion melted into a deeper concern of the poet for his art form in later years. Less idolization of the mistress and more sarcasm for her also developed in the later editions of these sonnet-cycles.

One detects a definite pattern emerging in these major sonnet-cycles. For example, the woman in each instance is physically attractive. She is so beautiful that the narrator devotes many sonnets to describing the various portions of her body such as the hair, the eyes, the lips, the skin, the breasts, the hands. The mistress displays an intellectual beauty, also. She devotes her thinking to the spiritual rather than to the physical and material worlds. She seems aloof to any physical lovers, her attitude developing into one of indifference and unconcern. Hence, she becomes an image of cold chastity, a woman delighting in her virtuous self at the expense of the suffering narrator. While Sidney and Spenser gradually

⁴³E. H. Miller, "Samuel Daniel's Revision in Delia," JEGP, LIII (January, 1954), 62.

⁴⁴Grosart (ed.), op. cit., I, 49.

develop an admiration for the Neo-Platonic concept of a virtuous woman, Drayton and Daniel in the later editions of their sonnet-cycles become less passionate and more cynical toward the female chaste lover. Drayton, especially, develops sarcasm and cynicism for his mistress; however, she remains unchanged in her beautiful, desirable, cold, and cruelly virtuous personality in most of the other Neo-Platonic sonnet-cycles.

Although the nature of the mistress is cool and indifferent, the nature of the narrator is that of a love-sick puppy. In each of the sonnet-cycles, he is struck with love for the beautiful woman. At first, he is not confident in this love, but as his passions surge, he develops an intense and fiery spirit within each successive sonnet. Sidney's narrator is much more sincere than Drayton's or Daniel's, his sonnets burning with the physical lust of a youthful male as in sonnet LXXI: "As fast thy Virtue bends that love to good: / But ah, Desire still cries, give me some food."⁴⁵ The narrator in these sonnet-cycles desires the woman physically. Knowing his physical desire to be of a low and lusty nature, he struggles morally and intellectually within himself. This struggle for Sidney and Spenser concerns a serious moral obligation, the narrators in both sonnet-cycles being responsible for the honor

⁴⁵Drinkwater (ed.), op. cit., p. 140.

of their mistresses and themselves. The Neo-Platonic concept of a chaste, virtuous love causes deep frustrations to occur within each narrator. Drayton, however, does not concern himself as deeply with this moral conflict as do Sidney and Spenser.

In the particular sonnet-cycles, a male narrates his thoughts and feelings evoked by a beautiful woman. He speaks of occurrences between the two and often seems to be speaking directly to the woman. Although the woman does not reply, the reader is made aware of what is happening between the two by the various reactions of the male narrator. As the woman first appears in the sonnet-cycle, the narrator demonstrates awe and confusion. Later, the reader knows when the mistress has encouraged the narrator when the latter soars with joyfulness and happy anticipation of future meetings. While the narrator attempts to control his vigorous passion, the woman seems to enjoy his discomfort, remaining cold and unconcerned. As the narrator utters his passionate thoughts but does not satisfy his lust, the reader is aware that the lady has treated the narrator objectively. The man seems to soar to heights of joy in one sonnet and sink into the depths of despair in another, each sonnet being, therefore, a reaction to the mistress's particular attitude, each revealing the narrator's emotions of hope, lust, joy, hate, anger, and frustration, all appearing throughout the sonnet-cycle and ending with a sense of exhaustion and physical frustration.

Finally, the male narrator speaks of his mistress as an honorable Neo-Platonic lover who has accomplished a spiritual victory over himself. Ultimately, he is resigned to giving up passionate thoughts that might lower his own self-dignity and destroy her honorable character. Although the lady does not reply, the narrator reveals her character well, as the reader of the sonnet-cycle pictures her standing haughtily and proud in all her virtuous glory. Donne also develops the dramatic monologue, addressing his sonnets to a mistress in the pattern of the earlier Elizabethan sonneteers.

CHAPTER II

SHAKESPEARE'S SONNET SEQUENCE

It is important to understand Shakespeare's theory of love, since he believed in two kinds--the spiritual and the diabolic.⁴⁶ In his sonnet sequence, he narrates the story of a man who attempts to so-divide his love. For example, instead of addressing his sonnets solely to a beautiful woman, as did his contemporaries, he addresses them to an angelic boy and a gonorrheal whore.⁴⁷ In each case, he writes his sonnets from the viewpoint of a humble lover possessing both high, spiritual ideals and passionate, physical desire. The passionate lover is demanding and loves in despair; whereas, the spiritual lover is giving and loves unselfishly.⁴⁸

Shakespeare is also cynical in his idealization of woman, shifting this traditional idealization to a man. In the sonnet-cycle, he shows the narrator suffering for a man, not a woman. However, he realizes that this suffering and the love that causes it are necessary. The attitude of withdrawal and coldness of the man who is loved is similar to that evinced by a

⁴⁶ Leslie A. Fiedler, "Some Context of Shakespeare's Sonnets," The Riddle of Shakespeare's Sonnets, pp. 86-87.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁸ C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, pp. 503-505.

beautiful mistress in other Elizabethan sonnet-cycles. Hence, the coldness and indifference of the addressed male become the attitude of the world, but it is an indifference worth the joy of loving.⁴⁹

Shakespeare's sonnets have more of a sequential organization than any of the other Elizabethan sonnet-cycles, because always the reader is aware of a constant pressure sustained within each unit. Whereas many Elizabethan sonneteers wrote mechanically, their sonnets lacking sincere feeling and displaying a concern only for the conventional and fashionable mode of poetic expression, Shakespeare's sonnets, on the other hand, expose an unique personality with whom the reader is in constant touch.⁵⁰ In the poet's personal experiences, the male narrator embraces joy, sorrow, disgust, agony, and fear.⁵¹ These emotions, especially characteristic of a self-conscious adolescent, comply with the theory that Shakespeare had accomplished a complete draft of the sonnet-cycle between the years of 1596-1603, thus establishing a pattern for other sonneteers rather than following a tradition already pursued by conventional Elizabethan sonneteers.⁵² Hence, he may have written

⁴⁹Fiedler, op. cit., p. 83.

⁵⁰Patrick Cruttwell, The English Sonnet, p. 22.

⁵¹Loc. cit.

⁵²Leslie Hotson, Shakespeare's Sonnets Dated, p. 34.

his sonnets with the sincere fervor of a passionate and idealistic youth, approximately twenty-two years of age.⁵³ Nevertheless, his sonnet-cycle developed from the inspiration of a young friend whose initials were "W. H."; and his "Dark Lady," thus, falls into the category in which she belongs, along with the mistresses of the poet's youth, comparable to the mistresses in John Donne's Songs and Sonnets.⁵⁴

Information concerning the passionate youth of Shakespeare as a poet generally is based upon evidence found in sonnet CVII, considered to be the chief dating sonnet of the sequence. Herein, the "Mortall Moone" does not refer to the dead Queen Elizabeth, which identification would put the date of the sonnet in 1603, but rather to the brilliant defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.⁵⁵ Furthermore, in sonnet CXXIII, addressed to Time, in which the poet says, "Thy pyramids built up with newer might / To me are nothing novel . . .,"⁵⁶ one finds an allusion to the great engineering feat of Domenico Fontana, engineer of Pope Sixtus V, who set up four Egyptian obelisks in Rome in 1586, 1587, 1588, and 1589.⁵⁷ In addition,

⁵³Ibid., p. 35.

⁵⁴Loc. cit.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁶W. G. Ingram and Theodore Redpath (eds.), Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 283. This edition will be used in all future quotations from Shakespeare's sonnets.

⁵⁷Hotson, op. cit., p. 25.

the term, novel, connotes a new, or the latest, thing, while the present tense of a verb in this sonnet ("What thou dost foist upon us") indicates a correspondence to the obelisks removed from Egypt to Rome by Fontana.⁵⁸ Hence, Hotson concludes that Shakespeare wrote these sonnets in the years, 1588-1589.⁵⁹ Finally, in sonnet CXXIV, occur political allusions to King Henri III of France, a do-nothing king scorned by the people of Paris who rose against him in 1588 in favor of his enemy, the Duke of Guise.⁶⁰ In this sonnet, the narrator compares the strong, confident love of his friend to the insecurity of some prince or "child of state" who ". . . suffers in smiling pomp [and] falls under the blow of thrall'd discontent. . . . Thus, the preceding sonnets, near the close of the "first series" of one hundred and twenty-six sonnets, reveal definite proof that Shakespeare completed the sequence around the time of his thirty-third to fortieth year; hence, one concludes that his craft had reached its peak when he was twenty-five, the sonnets representing some of his greatest poetry.⁶¹ However, as one considers Shakespeare's craft, he realizes that the general construction of the entire sequence is handled poorly, because the sonnets follow the common English metrical pattern, but

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁹Loc. cit.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 27.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 33.

fail to fit into it logically. For example, three quatrains should co-ordinate with a final couplet in order to relate to the series collectively. Approximately one-half of Shakespeare's sonnets fit into this scheme, but the remaining are variant.⁶² Shakespeare also alternates in a choice of two different styles of poetry throughout the sequence, thus producing an uneven execution with what may be termed a rather up-and-down quality: e.g., the first is that of romantic poetry or of the poetry of feeling rather than of knowledge, illustrating Shakespeare's pursuing an object with little intellectual zeal. In this case, pretty words that are fairly harmonious have pleasing but indefinite associations, as in sonnet XXXIII:⁶³

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
 Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,
 Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
 Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.

Here, the poet intends the quatrain to portray a fine morning, the sun symbolizing a false, fair-weather friend. The image becomes conventional or "literary," portraying the poet's sense of piety rather than his keen observation or wit.⁶⁴

Although Shakespeare possesses no university discipline and is not equal to the systematic exercises of Donne, he

⁶² John Crowe Ransom, The World's Body, p. 273.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 279.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 280.

handles a type of metaphysical poetry in the sense that he determines a line of action, goes directly through to a completion of the action, and finally ends in the extinction of all feeling.⁶⁵ In sonnet LVII, he is self-conscious and deliberate and possesses the qualities of a metaphysical poet, beginning with a feeling and objectifying it in external action. This sonnet is technically good and possesses careful modulation.⁶⁶ In three quatrains, it faithfully concerns the proper behavior of a slave to his master, and not until the final couplet does the poet reveal the resentment of a distressed lover, loathing his servile dependence and inability to escape the emotional domination of his friend.⁶⁷ Sonnet LVII also illustrates a sound use of the traditional English metrical pattern with three quatrains co-ordinating and a final couplet drawing them together:

Being your slave what should I doe but tend,
 Upon the houres, and times of your desire?
 I have no precious time at al to spend;
 Nor services to doe til you require
 Nor dare I chide the world without end houre,
 Whilst I (my souveraine) watch the clock for you,
 Nor thinke the bitternesse of absence sowre,
 When you have bid your servant once adieue.

Frequently, however, Shakespeare alternates a romantic image with a metaphysical image, although the two cannot logically

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 286.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 296.

⁶⁷Hilton Landry, Interpretations in Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 72.

co-exist. Rather than risking the power of a single figure, he compounds two unrelated figures, resulting in a rather jagged and uneven quality of poetry, as in sonnet LXXIII:⁶⁸

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

The first image of the boughs' shaking against the cold symbolizes an old, rejected lover and stands at the subjective level of experience. In this romantic type of image, the poet attempts to satisfy feeling by just naming or, rather, having it, resulting in sheer sentimentalism.⁶⁹ The image of the boughs as ruined choirs where birds no longer sing represents an old, forsaken lover also, but it is a much more ingenious and a richer representation, a type of metaphysical image. Hence, the two images cannot logically stand together.⁷⁰ Perhaps, Shakespeare's lack of craftsmanship in the sonnets is further proof that they were written at an early period in his life during the passionate, lusty years of his youth close to maturity.

In addition to the many theories concerning the dating of these sonnets are countless theories concerning the sequence.

⁶⁸Ransom, op. cit., p. 297.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 298.

⁷⁰Loc. cit.

One point of view focuses upon the arrangement of themes. For example, each group of sonnets contains distinguishing themes,⁷¹ each forming a certain position in the entire sequence, with trivial sonnets in the beginning and more serious ones toward the conclusion.⁷² Furthermore, there seems to be no order in the "Mistress" group of sonnets that stands as a subplot, although various themes are related to the "Friend" series.⁷³ In sonnets I-XIX, the theme is marriage, and the narrator urges the young man to marry, not for physical or mental aspects but for the sake of procreation only.⁷⁴ Sonnet XIX concludes this initial group, introducing the main theme of the entire sequence--that of defiance of Time: "Yet do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong / My love shall in my verse ever live young." The second group reveals the poet in the absence of his lover, the lover being a male rather than a female. The narrator speaks of sleepless nights, of a saddened heart, and of tearful eyes.⁷⁵ Only when he is separated from his friend does he dwell upon shadows or conjure up symbols of his lover, thereby allowing imagination to create a mythical

⁷¹Lever, op. cit., p. 172.

⁷²Loc. cit.

⁷³Ibid., p. 173.

⁷⁴Landry, op. cit., p. 7.

⁷⁵Lever, op. cit., p. 202.

image of the friend.⁷⁶ Sonnets XXVII, XXXVII, XLIII, LIII, LXI, XCVIII, XCIX, and CXIII contain shadows, images, and spirits reminding the narrator of the absent friend.⁷⁷ For example, in sonnet CXIII, he explains that his eye perceives visions of his friend in nature:

For if it see the rud'st or gentlest sight,
The most sweet favor or deformedst creature,
The mountain, or the sea, the day, or night,
The Croe, or Dove, it shapes them to your feature:
Incapable of more, replete with you,
My most true minde thus maketh mine eye untrue.

On the other hand, the absence of the friend in sonnets XXXIII-XCVI reveals a change in the relationship of the lovers. Just as the beautiful mistress in other sonnet-cycles rejected the poor, love-sick narrator, so the young man rejects Shakespeare's narrator, who finally accepts this lover's rejection as another contradiction of the world. He, then, forgives his young friend and realizes joy through suffering, thereby concluding this group with an attitude similar to Sidney's Neo-Platonic conclusion to Astrophel and Stella.⁷⁸

In the following group of sonnets, however, the narrator attempts to regain his lover's friendship. Ultimately, he realizes that bitterness can be a destructive force.⁷⁹ Finally,

⁷⁶Landry, op. cit., p. 47.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 46.

⁷⁸John Dover Wilson, Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 23.

⁷⁹Lever, op. cit., p. 236.

in the "Immortalization" group, he writes dramatically of the conflict of love and time.⁸⁰ Whereas Sidney idealizes love and Spenser speaks of an angel, Shakespeare creates an intensely dramatic situation between two individuals.⁸¹ Sidney, perhaps, comes closer to Shakespeare in creating a sincere feeling, both poets blending their own personal experiences with the conventional and the colloquial.⁸²

Another theory related to Shakespeare's sonnet sequence concerns him as a professional poet hired to write for someone else.⁸³ Thus, rather than Shakespeare's writing passionately and sincerely of his own youthful experiences and creating an intensely dramatic sonnet-cycle concerning a beloved friend and lusty mistresses,⁸⁴ his poetry is now considered as a means of bettering his financial status by writing sonnets for a wealthy patron and is not autobiographical at all. In this sense, sonnets I-LXXVI come to illustrate an old man's fawning upon a younger man. The older man urges the boy to marry, and

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 246.

⁸¹M. C. Bradbrook, Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry, p. 145.

⁸²Ibid., p. 143.

⁸³W. M. Blatt, "New Light on the Sonnets," MP, XI (July, 1913), 135.

⁸⁴Stephen Spender, "The Alike and the Other," The Riddle of Shakespeare's Sonnets, p. 101.

this group, thus, forms a unit.⁸⁵ As the sonnet-cycle continues, the young man agrees to help the old man, or narrator, regain a lusty mistress. The old man leaves so that the boy can woo the lady in privacy. Finally, the distressed narrator tires of waiting, and people tell him that the love affair is not going to end. The old man experiences despair and pain and, later, becomes bitter and sarcastic.⁸⁶ As fear of death creeps upon him, his sarcasm becomes more intense. Finally, he mellows as the atmosphere of the sonnets becomes soft and gentle toward the young man, his bitterness gradually disappearing. The older man, or narrator, even praises and urges the young suitor to marry, again.⁸⁷ Continuing to the final sonnets concerning the "Dark Lady," the older man begs, scolds, and finally rejects her completely, realizing that a purely physical relationship is utterly hopeless.⁸⁸

Scholars suggest that Shakespeare may have been employed to write the sonnet-cycle by the Earl of Southampton, who supposedly gave him a large sum of money with which to start a new acting company.⁸⁹ Southampton was a vain, resentful,

⁸⁵Blatt, op. cit., p. 136.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 137.

⁸⁷Loc. cit.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 139.

⁸⁹W. Empson, "Shakespeare's Angel," New Statesman, LXVI (October, 1963), 447-448.

and mentally sick man, almost twenty-one years of age when Shakespeare was thirty.⁹⁰ In the sonnets, Shakespeare may have considered himself as the old man, and the wealthy patron as the boy.⁹¹ Thus, when Shakespeare composed the following line, he may have been thinking of the social difference between them: "Nor thou with public kindness honour me / Unless thou take that honour from thy name."

Another theory concerning Shakespeare's sonnet-cycle proposes that these poems are linked by such stylistic devices as the repetition of words and sounds, as well as by sense-content.⁹² Because of related images, phrases, or ideas, sonnets C, CI, LXIII-LVIII, XIX, XXI, and CV consist of a group.⁹³ If this theory is correct, one has reason to believe that sonnets XCVII-XCIX, CII-CIV, and I-XVII form a group concerned with friend and the subject of procreation.⁹⁴ Sonnets XXXIII-XLII concentrate upon the poet, friend, and woman, while sonnets LXXVIII-LXXXVI concern the poet, friend, and rival poet.⁹⁵ The arrangement of the preceding groupings, regarding

⁹⁰Loc. cit.

⁹¹Blatt, op. cit., p. 138.

⁹²Wilson, op. cit., p. 23.

⁹³P. Sterling, "Shakespeare's Sonnet Group," PMLA, LXXV (September, 1960), 341.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 349.

⁹⁵Loc. cit.

stylistic devices and sense-content, would, thus, allow for the sonnet-cycle to be a tightly written sequence with "associational" unity and consecutive development.⁹⁶

Another theory concerning the sequence involves infatuation, the poems dwelling upon its beginning, development, triumph, and disaster. Thus, in all of the sonnets, Shakespeare is thought to be speaking to his inner-self. As he prepares the reader for the central theme of infatuation in the first seventeen sonnets, he shows in sonnet XXII the relationship of body to soul.⁹⁷ The poet becomes infatuated with his soul, and the treachery of this infatuation is evident.⁹⁸ The next group illustrates how the narrator's infatuation is subject to change with the emotions of love, hate, violence, and jealousy developing within him.⁹⁹ These emotions are reflections of the later stages of infatuation when all pretense is gone. At times, occasional thoughts of purer infatuation seem to lift the poet's soul; however, desperation, the most serious emotion caused by infatuation, is manifest in sonnets XLIX-XLV.¹⁰⁰ Shakespeare considers

⁹⁶Loc. cit.

⁹⁷R. P. Blackmur, "Poetics for Infatuation," Kenyon Review, XXIII (Fall, 1961), 649.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 653.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 655-656.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 658.

suicide, but then slips back into the idea of infatuation, actually self-love in pretense for someone else. Sonnet LXVI becomes, therefore, the center of the sequence, the narrator realizing that not to be able to love is hell. Shakespeare realizes that poets make infatuation out of life, not of true love.¹⁰¹ All of the people in the poet's life (the rival poet and the mistress shared by himself and his friend) make it possible for him to search for humility, realizing his own personal falseness and seeking the grace of shame.¹⁰² Sonnets CV-CVIII illustrate that cheaters and fickle people are not longing for love but for infatuation. As the sequence draws to a close, the narrator curses infatuation and the energy that people must expend upon this falsity. He sees all people as potential mistakes of life, realizing that, unless one makes something of these mistakes, he is a failure.¹⁰³ Thus, in sonnet CLII he expresses the final aim of the sequence--that of repudiation without renunciation. Mankind's lies or oaths make its truths. The world's great monuments, cities, and catacombs are proof of the world's powers; they, in their purposeless existence, make people meaningful.¹⁰⁴ The following excerpt from sonnet CLII illustrates the conclusion:

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 662.

¹⁰²Loc. cit.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 666.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 670.

In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn,
 But thou art twice forsworn to me love swearing
 In act thy bed-vow broke and now faith torn,
 In vowing new hate after new love bearing:
 But why of two oaths' breach do I accuse thee,
 When I break twenty? I am perjur'd most
 For all my vows are oaths but to misuse thee,
 For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kindness
 Oaths of thy love, thy truth thy constancy.

Although the sonnets fit into a sequence, each stands well as a separate poem. And while it would be difficult to analyze each unit in the cycle, sonnet CXXIX dramatically reveals the narrator's reacting to a bitter sexual experience. Emotion begins violently and in irregular spurts, decreasing until very little energy is left as can be expected in the sex act.¹⁰⁵ As Shakespeare attempts to dramatize the internal action of sex, he does not portray himself vividly. It is clear that this episode is not his first experience, nor will it be his last. Hell in the last line is not strong enough to be a renunciation.¹⁰⁶ This sonnet could well be an answer to Donne's "Ah cannot we, / As well as Cocks and Lyons jocund be, / After such pleasures?" Shakespeare's answer is the advice of surrender; however, it lacks Donne's ironic attitude toward human passion.¹⁰⁷ The poet is angry with himself, blames lust, and develops a conclusion that actually he had already reached;

¹⁰⁵R. Levin, "Sonnet CXXIX as a Dramatic Poem," SQ, XVI (Spring, 1965), 177.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 179-180.

¹⁰⁷Karl F. Thompson, "Shakespeare's Sonnet CXXIX," The Explicator, VII (February, 1949), 27.

i.e., negation is not strong enough after the sex act to keep man from doing it, again. As Shakespeare employs the romantic type of image with that of the metaphysical, he is not experiencing this conclusion as is Donne in "Farewell to Love." Without using an entirely metaphysical image, Shakespeare's is a static experience.¹⁰⁸

Throughout the sonnet-cycle, Shakespeare attempts to separate body from soul. For example, the narrator realizes in sonnet CXLVI that this separation is not possible. In the first quatrain, the body feels pity for the soul, while in the first part of the second quatrain, the body is stupid and vain. The second part of this quatrain reveals the soul's foolishly suffering for the body.¹⁰⁹ In the third quatrain, the narrator sarcastically speaks of the soul as making a bargain with heaven for suffering on earth, realizing that, perhaps, the soul is not actually suffering. In the final couplet, he shows that the body and spirit are indivisible. Shakespeare is not so joyful as Donne in "Holy Sonnet Ten," but he develops a conclusion of spirit triumphant over the body, believing not in conquest of Death but conquest by Death.¹¹⁰ In this poem, Shakespeare follows a definite pattern of development which he

¹⁰⁸Levin, op. cit., p. 180.

¹⁰⁹B. C. Southam, "Shakespeare's Christian Sonnet? Number CXLVI," SQ, XI (Winter, 1960), 70.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 71.

often employs in individual sonnets. For instance, the first couplet makes up the text or theme to be developed. The main body of the poem fits into two parts: e.g., ll. 3-8 concern the stupidity of an actual relationship between body and soul, while ll. 9-14 urge the soul to react and comply to the ideal of this relationship.¹¹¹ The central conceit that concerns the ways in which the soul may use or misuse the body thus shapes the imagery within the sonnet.¹¹²

One discovers that Shakespeare's sonnets are similar to the pattern established by other Elizabethan sonneteers, although he attempts to change the idea of an idealized woman. There is a general agreement concerning the sequence in that the first group urges a young man to marry, while the second group relates to the defiance of time. In this group, there are a separation of the poet and friend, a return, a quarrel, a reconciliation, and finally, a rival poet who appears more successful than Shakespeare's narrator at winning the approval of the young man or patron.¹¹³ The "Dark Lady" of the sequence seems to be the narrator's mistress and later the young man, causing conflict between the two by her fickleness.¹¹⁴ Whether

¹¹¹Albert S. Gerard, "Ionic Organization in Shakespeare's Sonnet CXLVI," English Studies, XLII (June, 1961), 159.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 115.

¹¹³Patrick Cruttwell, The Shakespearean Moment and Its Place in the Poetry of the Seventeenth Century, p. 3.

¹¹⁴Loc. cit.

these poems are fiction or autobiography, there are definite themes running through the entire sonnet sequence, illustrating the poet's contempt of the despicable job of being a popular actor and playwright, his bitterness toward growing old, his envy of contemporary writers with more intellectual and sophisticated craft, his anger and disillusionment over the inconsistencies of mankind, his anxiety and awkwardness concerning the poet's status in society, and, finally, his repudiation concerning the whole business of love and sex.¹¹⁵ Shakespeare expresses emotions of joy, anger, sarcasm, jealousy, and despair, as do other Elizabethan sonneteers. But in the final resignation of the sonnet-cycle, he seems to be speaking to the world, and his sonnet sequence takes on more significance than the words of other sonneteers of the period.

¹¹⁵Loc. cit.

CHAPTER III

DONNE'S HANDLING OF THREE LOVE POEMS

Donne rejected Elizabethan poetic conventions established in the sonnet sequence; he was concerned with the mind, not emotions. As Elizabethan sonneteers wrote smoothly, Donne wrote ruggedly and carelessly. He was subtle and ingenious, while other sonneteers were simple and direct.¹¹⁶ Although Donne hated the Elizabethan style of writing, in many ways he wrote like an Elizabethan sonneteer. His sonnets were evaluative, metered, and of a predictive manner, indicating the very tradition of English Renaissance poetry.¹¹⁷ He may not have been aware of it, but Thomas Wyatt, who has been considered the "Father of the English Sonnet," had a great influence upon his dramatic lyric form in the sense that both used iambic verse as a pattern of stresses, rather than as a syllabic structure.¹¹⁸ Both, Wyatt and Donne, devise an actual, moving scene in the natural inflections of a speaking voice, resulting in a lyrical rather than rhetorical effect.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶R. Jenkins, "Drayton's Relations to the School of Donne as Revealed in the 'Shepherd's Sirena,'" PMLA, XXXVIII (September, 1923), 557.

¹¹⁷J. Miles, "Language of the Donne Tradition," Kenyon Review, XIII (Spring, 1951), 39.

¹¹⁸A. Stein, "Structure of Sound in Donne's Verse," Kenyon Review, XIII (Spring, 1951), 24.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 33.

Donne did not create a new literary style; he obviously adapted the Elizabethan style of writing to meet his own needs. As Spenser thought a touch of bitterness in a sonnet made it seem sweeter, Donne takes bitterness and exaggerates it to such a degree that his poetry becomes a violent revolt against the Elizabethan, the Ciceronian, and the Petrarchan idea of verse.¹²⁰ He also colloquializes words, thus broadening the language by employing his own vocabulary in a conversational manner.¹²¹ In his poems, he uses an intellectual development that compels the reader to think at all times. Other Elizabethan sonneteers repeat constantly and do not require the reader so to strain himself mentally.¹²² Just as Elizabethan sonneteers make use of extravagant conceits, Donne employs conceits so minute that his poetry literally explodes.¹²³

Although Donne was contemptuous of the theatre, seeing it as a worldly place of bright, gaudy, painted faces,¹²⁴ Ben Jonson was his good friend, John Heywood, a court musician and author of interludes, was his grandfather, and Jasper Heywood,

¹²⁰A. Stein, "Donne's Harshness and the Elizabethan Tradition," SP, XLI (July, 1944), 405.

¹²¹Andrew Wanning, John Donne, p. 14.

¹²²Ibid., p. 15.

¹²³Ibid., pp. 16-17.

¹²⁴Victor Harris, "John Donne and the Theater," PQ, XL (January, 1962), 262.

translator of several Senecan tragedies, was his uncle.¹²⁵

Donne was accepted at Lincoln's Inn in 1593 and became Master of Revels.¹²⁶ Here, he was responsible for plays, masques, and other entertainments.¹²⁷ Perhaps, this dramatic background concerns the reason why, in each of Donne's love poems, he first sets a scene, gives motives to particular characters, and develops a dramatic type of verse similar in some ways to a verse novel.¹²⁸

In the previously discussed sonnet-cycles, sonneteers such as Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, and Drayton gave the reader a type of drama concerning two main characters, the beautiful mistress and the love-sick poet. Donne also invests his poems with drama, but it is a type of drama that moves. In Astrophel and Stella, Sidney describes his lover as tempting and virtuous. Donne, however, is not interested in descriptions of his lover. Instead, he wants to reveal how his lover makes him feel, how he makes his lover feel, and, then, to explain the complex interaction of these feelings.¹²⁹ The subject of Donne's love poetry is much more than an account of his own

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 259.

¹²⁶Loc. cit.

¹²⁷Loc. cit.

¹²⁸Cruttwell, The Shakespearean Moment and Its Place in the Poetry of the Seventeenth Century, p. 43.

¹²⁹A. S. Brandenburg, "Dynamic Image in Metaphysical Poetry," PMLA, XXXVII (December, 1942), 1042.

individual, lusty experience. He is concerned with the subject of love itself, creating dramatic situations between people who are in love or who are interested in love, revealing a variety of moods, attitudes, emotions, experiences, and even methodical experiments in love.¹³⁰ Shakespeare in his sonnet sequence, uses static imagery to describe the appearance, taste, smell, feel, and sound of things, while Donne uses dynamic imagery concerned with the "way" a person feels, experiences, and thinks.¹³¹ This dynamic imagery is responsible for the drama in Donne's poetry. It is closely related to sensuous thinking and psychological effects of dramatic tension.¹³² For example, in sonnet CXXX, Shakespeare satirically describes his mistress, using static imagery, thus, losing some dramatic effect:

My Mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
 Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
 If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
 If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head:
 I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
 But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
 And in some perfumes is there more delight,
 Than in her breath that from my mistress reeks:
 I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
 That music hath a far more pleasing sound. . . .¹³³

On the other hand, Donne's images move, causing the mood of

¹³⁰Cruttwell, The Shakespearean Moment and Its Place in the Poetry of the Seventeenth Century, p. 46.

¹³¹Brandenburg, op. cit., p. 1039.

¹³²Ibid., p. 1042.

¹³³Ingram and Redpath (eds.), op. cit., p. 301.

the poem to alter with supersonic speed. At times, this movement is violent, causing the language to be telescoped and the wording wrenched in order to keep pace with the action.¹³⁴

In other instances, his descriptions reveal a less violent movement as in "Elegy VIII": "And like a bunch of ragged carrets stand / The short swolne fingers of thy gouty hand."¹³⁵

Moreover, when Shakespeare employs the dynamic image, he describes physical motion and derives his image from common sources or from nature. When Donne uses the dynamic image, it remains neutral, because he draws his image from technical or scientific sources.¹³⁶ An example of the neutrality of Donne's dynamic image is to be found in the following passage from

"Anatomie of the World":

But as some Serpents poyson hurteth not
Except it be from the live Serpent shot,
So doth her vertue need her here, to fit
That unto us, shee working more then it.

As the images remain neutral, so Donne's characters remain neutral; hence, the reader is not so much interested in the personality of each character as he is in the action that is taking place between the two characters.

¹³⁴Cruttwell, The Shakespearean Moment and Its Place in the Poetry of the Seventeenth Century, p. 45.

¹³⁵The text used for all Donne quotations is H. J. C. Grierson (ed.), Donne's Poetical Works.

¹³⁶Brandenburg, op. cit., p. 1045.

Donne and Shakespeare both make use of a popular Elizabethan technique; e.g., the quibble,¹³⁷ a conscious repetition of words to produce grace and strength. Donne's use of this technique, however, is individualistic, not like that of other Elizabethan sonneteers. For instance, in "Elegy XVI," one finds his use of the quibble: "If thou stay here. O stay here, for, for thee." At the same time, Donne's repetitions usually are not harmonious. In the following quotation, he repeats the same word but in a different sense: "All things are one, and that one none can be / Since all formes, uniforme deformity."¹³⁸

Donne's use of the dramatic monologue had more influence, perhaps, than Sidney's, Drayton's, Spenser's, or Daniel's, because his was different in many respects. His handling of the dramatic monologue is similar to Montaigne, who forms a first person essay; hence, Donne works with that of a first person poem. For example, both Montaigne and Donne create a monologue-drama by the shifting of "I's"; both constantly aware of the changing self, always remembering that the "I" of today is neither the "I" of tomorrow nor the "I" of yesterday; hence, they portray the ego realistically as a

¹³⁷A. Stein, "Meter and Meaning in Donne's Verse," Sewanee Review, LII (April, 1944), 294.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 295.

shifting, slippery, tricky, and fascinating character.¹³⁹ After Donne's popular use of an informal and witty person in Songs and Sonnets, many playwrights began also to write loose, sensual, and witty plays, the Platonic concept of love diminished, and clever conversations against the institution of marriage developed in the theatre.¹⁴⁰ Just as Donne in his poems created worldly characters with witty and colloquial speaking manners, so did the playwrights. For example, Killigrew used lines taken directly from Donne's "Love's Alchymie" in The Parson's Wedding.¹⁴¹ Still later, Robert Browning, poetical artist of the nineteenth century, was also greatly influenced by Donne's use of the dramatic monologue.¹⁴²

Before analyzing three of Donne's love poems, one must understand that this poet had a personality much more complex, intellectual, and searching than that of Sidney, Drayton, Spenser, or Daniel. Thus, Donne's violent struggle within himself becomes a basis for his love poems.¹⁴³ Moreover, his

¹³⁹Cruttwell, The Shakespearean Moment and Its Place in the Poetry of the Seventeenth Century, p. 49.

¹⁴⁰W. R. Keast, "Killigrew's Use of Donne in The Parson's Wedding," MLR, XLV (October, 1950), 513.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 514.

¹⁴²J. E. Duncan, "Intellectual Kinship of John Donne and Robert Browning," SP, L (January, 1953), 100.

¹⁴³M. Bewley, "Religious Cynicism in Donne's Poetry," Kenyon Review, XIV (Winter, 1932), 639.

personality is very similar to that of Shakespeare's Hamlet--- thoughtful, weak-willed, and saddened. Donne is a person who communicated with lust and death, and his sonnets reveal a man who experiences love with his whole body, or with mind and body working together.¹⁴⁴ Donne sets a dramatic scene. He is the speaker and in the center of the stage. He creates tension between two people, the "other" person usually being a woman. The two figures in this dramatic scene have contrasting opinions, or feeling out of harmony with knowledge. This tension causes an intense drama to unfold that is impure, however, because Donne does not employ the traditional dramatic values.¹⁴⁵ As he develops his poem, for example, he makes the speaker in a sonnet pretend to explore a subject. Actually, however, the person is exploring a feeling. If this feeling is not in accord with Donne's own, the poem develops even more dramatically.¹⁴⁶

The subject that Donne always explores in his love poems is that of sex. He shows the complex, mental process of man's anticipation of sexual intercourse; the man in his poems is impatient and speaks continually of sex.¹⁴⁷ Donne, however,

¹⁴⁴J. E. Duncan, "Revival of Metaphysical Poetry," PMLA, LXVIII (September, 1953), 662-663.

¹⁴⁵R. M. Adams, "Donne and Eliot--Metaphysicals," Kenyon Review, XVI (Winter, 1954), 290.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 281-282.

¹⁴⁷D. W. Harding, "Coherence of Theme in Donne's Poetry," Kenyon Review, XIII (Spring, 1951), 427.

is not so interested in possessing the lady as he is in merely throwing words at her. He is playing a game with a woman, but he is actually searching for an answer to frustrating emotions.¹⁴⁸ The woman is an abstract character without personality; the important role that she plays in the love poem is Donne's confusing, complex relationship to her.¹⁴⁹ Consequently, his Songs and Sonnets fall into two categories--the positive and the negative. For example, "The Flea," "The Canonization," and "The Anniversary" are all positive poems, because they express a happy attitude or an opinion of approval.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, his positive poems may be sub-divided into further categories of poems expressing inconstancy, poems concerning courtship, poems expressing satisfaction with love, poems related to parting, and poems in which love is threatened by the shadow of death.¹⁵¹ "The Flea" is a courting poem, while "The Canonization" and "The Anniversary" are poems expressing satisfaction in love.¹⁵²

The mistress in "The Flea" is very much the opposite of the mistress in Sidney's or Spenser's sonnet-cycle. In fact,

¹⁴⁸Bewley, op. cit., p. 639.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 638.

¹⁵⁰Theodore Redpath (ed.), The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne, p. xxiv.

¹⁵¹Ibid., pp. xxvi-xxvii.

¹⁵²Ibid., p. xxvi.

Donne mocks all women who are virtuous and indifferent.¹⁵³ He deals with the moral aspects of right and wrong in one's conduct by using the two Ovidian principles of change and that of use.¹⁵⁴ Donne plays the part of a disillusioned lover who realizes that women are unfaithful; however, he does not care about their inconstancy since he enjoys sexual promiscuity. In this poem, he is not dealing with his usual complex consciousness.¹⁵⁵ He is simply making a statement (through an epigrammatic lyric) that sexual promiscuity is good.¹⁵⁶ He uses analogy, not proof in his argument. His argument is also quite witty and paradoxical.¹⁵⁷ As he attempts to seduce his lady friend, he uses intellectual terms that are very unconvincing.¹⁵⁸ When he argues that sex may take place without the institution of marriage, the lady usually does not seem to have any objection to this proposal, finding his argument unanswerable. In "The Flea," a ritual or battle of wits takes place, but Donne is already aware of the outcome. He thinks it fun, a lovers' quarrel; and this attitude seems to add more

¹⁵³Douglas L. Peterson, The English Lyric from Wyatt to Donne, p. 296.

¹⁵⁴N. J. C. Andreasen, John Donne, Conservative Revolutionary, p. 193.

¹⁵⁵Donald L. Guss, John Donne, Petrarchist, p. 115.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 113.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁵⁸Doniphan Louthan, The Poetry of John Donne, pp. 81-82.

enjoyment to the ending.¹⁵⁹ Donne uses the flea as a symbol of the slight pleasure the lady is withholding from him:¹⁶⁰

"Marke but this flea, and marke in this / How little that which thou deny'st me is." When he causes the flea to suck both his and his mistress's blood, he is using a Renaissance medical idea that states that blood is mingled in the marriage bed to cause procreation. The flea feels pleasure, just as if intercourse had taken place; hence, Donne argues that he and his lover would feel the same pleasure if she would consent:¹⁶¹

It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee;
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sinne, nor shame, nor losse of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoys before it wooe. . . .

Donne, then, argues that the flea becomes a pampered, expectant mother:¹⁶² "And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two / And this, alas, is more then wee would doe." According to Petrarch, the beautiful mistress kills her lover with scorn; here, she kills the flea.¹⁶³ She has committed murder and also the greater crime of suicide, because three bloods are mingled in the flea. The flea, if considered the marriage temple

¹⁵⁹Ibid... p. 83.

¹⁶⁰Ibid... p. 84.

¹⁶¹Ibid... p. 83.

¹⁶²Loc. cit.

¹⁶³Ibid... p. 84.

wherein the lovers' blood is united, is sacred and should not be touched. The mistress feels happy, because no actual harm has come to her. But Donne takes the lady's conclusion for his own use and argues that neither his nor his lover's honor will suffer in the act of sexual intercourse, because they will both be happy:¹⁶⁴

Wherein could this flea guilty bee,
Except in that drop which it suckt from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and saist that thou
Find'st not thy selfe, nor mee the weaker now;
'Tis true, then learne how false, feares bee;
Just so much honor, when thou yeeld'st to mee,
Will wast, as this flea's death tooke life
from thee.

The best example of Donne's dramatic monologue occurs in "The Canonization,"¹⁶⁵ the basis of which could be an argument in defense of his marriage. Before Donne married, he looked forward to a bright future. Sir Thomas Egerton was the Lord Keeper and a powerful patron.¹⁶⁶ After his marriage, Donne lived in poverty for fifteen years.¹⁶⁷ No one knows if Donne realized that his marriage would cause such a disaster, but for this very reason he may have felt it necessary to marry secretly.¹⁶⁸ Consequently, "The Canonization" seems to be

¹⁶⁴Loc. cit.

¹⁶⁵Duncan, "Intellectual Kinship of John Donne to Robert Browning," p. 88.

¹⁶⁶Peterson, op. cit., p. 294.

¹⁶⁷Loc. cit.

¹⁶⁸Loc. cit.

Donne's reaction to the world that thinks him a fool for giving up wealth and fame, just for love. The opening lines reply to a person who is scolding the narrator, and he shows impatient defiance to this man, telling him to mind his own business.¹⁶⁹ Although the opening lines of "The Canonization" seem satirical and humorous, they are actually the lines of an ingenious debater stating the view of an opposing person in order to begin an argument:¹⁷⁰

For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsie, or my gout,
My five gray haire, or ruin'd fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your minde with
Arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honour, or his grace
Or the Kings, reall, or his stamped face
Contemplate, what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.

In stanza three, the idea for which Donne is arguing is stated, and a debate between two people is set forth, involving spiritual and material values.¹⁷¹ In ll. 20-21, Donne speaks of love as physical: "Call her one, mee another flye / We are Tapers too, and at our owne cost die." In ll. 23-27, sexual intercourse has taken place, bringing perfect physical unity. Donne and his lover have purified themselves into a neutral, sexless being:¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p. 295.

¹⁷⁰Clay Hunt, Donne's Poetry, p. 75.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 77.

The phoenix riddle hath more wit
 By us, we two being one, are it.
 So to one neutrall thing both sexes fit,
 Wee dye and use the same, and prove
 Mysterious by this love.

In stanzas four and five, death of love comes about, and a spiritual feeling develops that is so out of tune with the world that it cannot exist. Thus, the lovers die for this spiritual love and are martyrs who become saints.¹⁷³ The theme of "The Canonization," therefore, is the sacrifice of worldly pleasures for something much greater, that of a perfect spiritual and physical love. At first, love is a mystery, and the world cannot understand it. Next, it compares worldly values with spiritual values, revealing that the worldly values are not important. In the conclusion, Donne renounces the world, justifying this renunciation in that the two lovers have the world in themselves.¹⁷⁴ Hence, he accomplishes a saintliness at the end of his poem by any means but a saintly behavior. The poem begins with physical lust, continues with passionate lovemaking, and ends with spiritual union. Donne is not successful in convincing his readers that he has produced a truly spiritual poem. Too much of the drama of this work remains in his own mind, and the poem is too witty and brief for such an actual experience to seem plausible to the reader.¹⁷⁵ Donne,

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., pp. 85-86.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., p. 87.

perhaps, does not convince his reader, because he is arguing with himself and is not yet convinced that spiritual satisfaction can come through sexual intercourse. Later in his life, as he becomes more strong-willed, he writes a much more convincing love poem than "The Canonization."¹⁷⁶

Thus, as time passes, Donne develops deeper convictions about his theory of love. For example, in "The Anniversary," he is more able to persuade the reader that a physical union between two lovers can bring about a spiritual union that shuts out the world completely. It is possible that "The Anniversary" developed from Donne's relationship with his wife. It shows Donne becoming idealistic, realizing that true love on earth can develop without dishonesty and insincerity.¹⁷⁷ In loving his wife, Donne found the spiritual value of love. He expresses passion in "The Anniversary," just as he does in "The Canonization"; however, it is purified as he transforms physical lust into a spiritual and divine union with his lover.¹⁷⁸ In "The Anniversary," the subject and theme relate closely to the Neo-Platonic sonnet-cycle. Just as Sidney fretted over love's confusing introduction, hated the chaste mistress's indifference, grieved at the parting or absence of his lover,

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁷⁷Andreasen, op. cit., p. 197.

¹⁷⁸Helen Gardner (ed.), John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 33.

and finally repudiated the whole business of love and sex, so does Donne, except for showing a concern for his beautiful mistress's hair, eyes, lips, and other parts of her body.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, he turns to the Neo-Platonic theory that love is eternal, however, combining the Christian concept of death and judgment, thus, fusing love with human destiny.¹⁸⁰ Here, he combines the sensual and the serene, and the two worlds which most poets think uncombinable, the secular and the devotional, come together as one.¹⁸¹

In the first lines of "The Anniversary," a year has passed since the two people have been married. Donne tells his lover that their love has been unaffected by this passage of time. He contrasts the worldly and the spiritual, the permanent and the changing, and the dynamic and the static. He explains that earthly pleasure will soon vanish, certain earthly things will be destroyed, and even the sun will be hastening to its destruction:¹⁸²

All Kings, and all their favorites,
 All glory of honors, beauties, wits,
 The Sun it selfe, which makes times, as they passe,
 Is elder by a yeare, now, then it was
 When thou and I first one another saw:
 When other things, to their destruction draw,

¹⁷⁹Guss, op. cit., p. 50.

¹⁸⁰Peterson, op. cit., p. 209.

¹⁸¹Loc. cit.

¹⁸²Andreasen, op. cit., p. 219.

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

In the next stanza, Donne considers death, explaining that although their bodies will be destroyed and placed in separate graves, their physical death will only cause their love to grow stronger, since their love makes up the soul. After the souls arise to meet God face-to-face, their love will be proved. Thus, Donne introduces the Christian concept of death and judgment into this stanza along with the Neo-Platonic concept that love is eternal:¹⁸³

Two graves must hide thine and my corse;
 If one might, death were no divorce.
 Alas, as well as other Princes, will,
 (Who Prince enough in one another bee,)
 Must leave at last in death, these eyes, and eares,
 Oft fed with true oathes, and with sweet salt teares;
 But soules where nothing dwells but love
 (All other thoughts bring inmates) then shall prove
 This, or a love increased there above,
 When bodies to their graves, soules from their graves
 remove.

Since the lovers had a true and spiritual love on earth, God now blesses their love which then becomes even greater after resurrection. Donne also states that fear is unnecessary and insists that only true fear develops from one's failing to repent before resurrection.¹⁸⁴ In this stanza, he finds

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 220.

¹⁸⁴ Peterson, op. cit., p. 329.

security in love,¹⁸⁵ and the question of inconstancy he no longer fears.¹⁸⁶ Another theory of the fear that insinuates itself into the last stanza of "The Anniversary" concerns other people who are also in heaven and who might cause Donne or his lover to be unfaithful to each other. Because all people in heaven enjoy a sense of security in a perfect, spiritual love, Donne and his lover need not fear anyone except themselves. This fear of inconstancy in themselves is the false fear of which Donne writes. The two lovers certainly do not need to fear each other. The true fear of which Donne speaks is that of physical death; but since death will be overcome, there should actually be no fear at all.¹⁸⁷ In "The Anniversary," Donne is not witty, sarcastic, and complex; he expresses peace rather than brutality, and his tone is one of serenity. He combines realism with idealism, resulting in a powerful poem. He also achieves a sincerity that is not found in "The Canonization." In "The Anniversary," he overcomes his fears of time and death by facing these fears. One must remember, however, that these two forces, time and death, are not actualities but only threats.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵Harding, op. cit., p. 436.

¹⁸⁶Louthan, op. cit., p. 170.

¹⁸⁷Andreasen, op. cit., p. 222.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., p. 223.

Donne's use of the dramatic monologue is evident in each of these three poems in which he portrays himself as a clever debater, arguing for lusty, sexual pleasures (in "The Flea") and caring little about his abstract mistress who listens to his argument but does not reveal her personality. As the early Neo-Platonic sonneteers often seem to be speaking in soliloquy, so does Donne produce a dramatic performance, causing the reader to visualize a stage with particular actors creating highly emotional and intense action. In "The Canonization," the reader looks "in on" a play, consisting of two people passionately making love. Donne is even arguing with one on-looker as he attempts to justify the lusty relationship between himself and his mistress. While he cleverly argues, he "steals the show," allowing himself to be the center of attention around whom all action is revolving, thus revealing himself as a shifting, changing, tricky, and completely fascinating character.

As he matures as an individual and develops deeper convictions toward the subject of physical and spiritual love, he continues to employ the technique of the dramatic monologue in the composition of a much more convincing love poem in "The Anniversary." The nature of the mistress in this poem continues to remain abstract; however, Donne's relationship to her develops into one of deep complexity, concerning the spiritual as well as the physical qualities of love and such forces

as time and death that constantly threaten the relationship. As the reader observes the drama of Donne's mind vividly portrayed by an intense love and deep concern for the mistress, the narrator convinces one that through physical union (representative of all physical action in life) comes a sincere, serene, and spiritual type of love which will die physically, but will never die spiritually. Thus, Donne fuses the Neo-Platonic concept of eternal love and the Christian concept of redemption and salvation to arrive confidently at this conclusion.

CHAPTER IV

A STUDY OF DONNE'S SONNET SEQUENCE,

THE HOLY SONNETS

Donne's Holy Sonnets should be discussed in the ordering of the Westmoreland MS., since it gives the most logical poetical explanation. In this ordering, the sonnets most clearly follow the pattern of the Elizabethan sonnet sequence. The series begins with a poet with troubled mind. As he writes to relieve his troubled thoughts, each sonnet fits into the whole sonnet-cycle by a particular tone, mood, or word. Each sonnet also forms a unique, satisfying poem in itself.¹⁸⁹ This sonnet-cycle has an emotional development as did Sidney's, Spenser's, or Drayton's. As the writer considers the dominant subject of the sonnets, his emotion changes from that of intense fear, to confusing frustration, to sorrow, to peaceful meditation, to extreme joyfulness, and even to violence.¹⁹⁰

Because Donne considers God the basis of true love, God and Donne's relationship to Him is the subject of this cycle.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹Don M. Ricks, "The Westmoreland Manuscript and the Order of Donne's Holy Sonnets," SP, LXIII (April, 1966), 195.

¹⁹⁰Loc. cit.

¹⁹¹R. A. Durr, "Donne's 'The Primrose,'" JEGP, LIX (April, 1960), 222.

Donne realizes, as a few of the Neo-Platonists did, that copulation with God has been attained by only one man, that man being Moses. This union with God is the only means by which a person can attain to divine knowledge and beauty.¹⁹² Inasmuch as the term, copulation, implies sexual intercourse, Donne expands the meaning to more than just a physical aspect to a spiritual kind of sexual intercourse. At times, he reflects the Asiatic view and considers it necessary for himself to unite with God into one being, feeling that he must lose his identity in God or become one with God.¹⁹³

In his Holy Sonnets, Donne courts his God with passionate energy, similar to the same passionate energy used in courting his mistresses in Songs and Sonnets. Thus, he considers God the beautiful woman in the love sonnet and himself, the tortured lover or narrator.¹⁹⁴ The only way the narrator can find any peace is through copulation with God, his lover. Copulation with God is frightening to the passionate lover, because the act would cause him to soar to a climax in death. Within the sonnets are the same temptations which appeared in Donne's love poems, Donne's narrator being helpless in his

¹⁹²M. Y. Hughes, "Some of Donne's Ecstasies," PMLA, LXXV (December, 1960), 515.

¹⁹³W. Empson, "Donne the Space Man," Kenyon Review, XIX (Summer, 1957), 351.

¹⁹⁴Hugh I'Anson Fausset (ed.), Poems by John Donne, p. xxii.

sinning and devotion to worldly vices. Donne uses sensuous and erotic imagery, reflecting a kind of irreverence and profanity, at first, in his sacred poetry.¹⁹⁵ The narrator finds his courtship with God unsatisfying in many ways, and it disgusts him. At times, he reaches heights of joy, but he never is able to remain happy for any length of time. In these sonnets, too many times Donne's narrator reaches the depths of sorrow without reaching any illuminating conclusions.¹⁹⁶

The first four poems in the series comprise a proem. The narrator, in revealing a troubled mind, introduces the themes to be discussed. For example, in Sonnet I, "Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay," he is contemplating death, damnation, sin, and redemption.¹⁹⁷ The emotion controlling this sonnet is that of fear, the narrator's fear of utter helplessness in sinning. Hence, he has a double fear of death, that of a loss of self identity and that of putrefaction of the body.¹⁹⁸ Between Sonnet I and Sonnet II, God has appeared aloof to the narrator; hence, in Sonnet II, "As due by many titles I resign," he expands his awful fears and enthusiastically reveals his willingness to seek forgiveness.¹⁹⁹ One

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. xxiii.

¹⁹⁶Loc. cit.

¹⁹⁷Ricks, op. cit., pp. 189-190.

¹⁹⁸Harding, op. cit., p. 442.

¹⁹⁹Ricks, op. cit., p. 190.

recalls that God acted similarly to the cold and chaste woman of the earlier Neo-Platonic cycles. God's cruel indifference, thus, causes the narrator to recognize his own vanities, thus accusing himself of youthful, passionate sins and of the sins of grief and despair.²⁰⁰ In Sonnet III, Donne's narrator is so overcome by God's continuing coolness and his own terrible guilt feelings that he pleads for his lover to forgive him:

In mind Idolatry what showres of raine
 Mine eyes did waste? what griefs my heart did rent?
 That sufferance was my sinne, I now repent;
 'Cause I did suffer I must paine.

God, however, is still reacting coldly to the narrator; He even now seems to imply a contempt for the poor wretch possibly hating him for his sinful nature. Finally, in Sonnet IV, "Father part of his double interest," the poor narrator begs God for mercy. He is full of intense fear and realizes that his redemption or deliverance from wrath, so to speak, can occur only through the workings of God.²⁰¹

The next group, V-XI, reveal the narrator in meditation. He has pleaded to God for mercy, and between each of these sonnets, God has apparently responded warmly to his pleas and no longer remains a cool, indifferent lover; indeed, He demonstrates a love beyond all human capacity, showing a willingness to forgive him wholeheartedly. God even reveals a passionate

²⁰⁰Harding, op. cit., p. 429.

²⁰¹Ricks, op. cit., p. 190.

desire for the narrator. For example, as the narrator begs for God's love and mercy in Sonnet V ("Oh my blacke soule! now thou art summoned"), Sonnet VI ("This is my playes last scene"), and Sonnet VII ("I am a little world made cunningly"),²⁰² God demonstrates His forgiveness in a different way in each instance. For example, in Sonnet V, God reveals His forgiveness through Christ's blood, and in Sonnet VI, He shows forgiveness through self-purification; while in Sonnet VII, He demonstrates that forgiveness comes by purification in His fire.²⁰³ In Sonnet VIII, "At the round earth's imagin'd corners blow," the narrator, thus, further entreats God to show His love in forgiveness, combining all three of the themes to be found in Sonnets V-VII: "Teach mee how to repent; for that's as good / As if thou 'hadst seal'd my pardon with thy blood."

God passionately encourages the narrator between Sonnets VIII and IX, as he finally comes to a comprehension of the meaning of redemption.²⁰⁴ In this sonnet, "If poisonous minerals, and if that tree," he converses in a positive mood, recognizing that God's mercy and sacrifice will allow him freedom from damnation. When God continues to reveal his

²⁰²Ibid., p. 191.

²⁰³Loc. cit.

²⁰⁴Ibid., p. 189.

intense devotion and love for the poor, sinful poet between Sonnets IX and X, the positive mood continues in Sonnet X "If faithful soules be alike glorified."²⁰⁵ There is hope, one thinks, in the following lines of Sonnet X: "Then turn / O pensive soul, to God, for He knows best / Thy true grief for He put it in my brest." God so completely demonstrates His love for the narrator between Sonnets X and XI that finally, in Sonnet XI, "Death be not proud, though some have called thee," he joyfully renounces death. Through his own personal love affair with God, he has come to realize the meaning of redemption.²⁰⁶ Fear, the controlling emotion in the preceding group, seems now to have vanished in the following lines of Sonnet XI:

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe,
For, those, whom thou thinks'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.

Between Sonnets XI and XII, God, in a sense, has married the narrator, who now has a feeling of complete security in his relationship, this security being very similar to that experienced by a couple who have been united in Holy wedlock. In the third group that consists of Sonnet XII ("Wilt

²⁰⁵Ibid., p. 191.

²⁰⁶Loc. cit.

thou love God, as he thee"), Sonnet XIII ("Spit in my face yee Jewes"), Sonnet XIV ("Why are wee by all creatures waited on"), and Sonnet XV ("What if this present were the worlds last night"), God no longer is like a flirtatious girl friend, merely showing an interest in him, and the narrator has found complete security in his love and contemplates this marriage with God. He seems to have a feeling of deep satisfaction, realizing that God does love him. He rejoices in the physical body as a means by which forgiveness or love can come about.²⁰⁷ The love of God, not the fear of God, inspires Sonnet XIII, "Spit in my face yee Jewes." Much more than revealing the sin of cruelty to Christ, it reveals the love and mercy of God for man.²⁰⁸ The narrator, here, finds God's love to be more nearly perfect than man's even in its highest form: hence, he contemplates the nature of divine love in Sonnet XIII:²⁰⁹

Oh let mee then, his strange love still admire:
Kings pardon, but he bore our punishment.
And Jacob came cloth'd in vile harsh attire
But to supplant, and with gainfull intent:
God cloth'd himselfe in vile man's flesh, that so
He might be weake enough to suffer woe.

In Sonnet XV, "What if this present were the world's last night," the narrator considers, again, the deep love of God

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 190.

²⁰⁸ D. L. Peterson, "John Donne's Holy Sonnets and the Anglican Doctrine of Contrition," SP, LVI (July, 1959), 510.

²⁰⁹ Andreasen, op. cit., p. 238.

for man. However, he is no longer exultant as he was in Sonnet XI as he wonders how God could love him so intensely, poor, foolish, sinful, lowly human that he is. The following lines from Sonnet XV are the narrator's ultimate assurance of the love of God:²¹⁰

Marke in my heart, O Soul, where thou dost dwell,
The pictures of Christ crucified, and tell
Whether that countenance can thee affright,
Tears in His eyes quench the amazing light,
Blood fill his frowns, which from his pierc'd head fell.
And can that tongue adjudge thee, unto hell,
Which pray'd forgiveness for His foes fierce spite?

It is apparent that the narrator's emotions are quite different in each of the preceding groups of sonnets. In the first group, I-IV, he is frightened, because God has treated him coldly and cruelly. This group focuses upon the emotion of intense fear. In the second group, V-XI, God's reaction to the narrator is one of flirtatious encouragement and gradual devotion, the narrator's emotion slowly changing as his fear is quieted by thoughts of the incarnation. Finally, he reaches a state of joyous exultation in Sonnet XI because of God's passionate advances, realizing that through his lover he will at last overcome death. When he finds a complete security in his relationship with God in the third group, XII-XV, a complete and trusting love becomes the controlling emotion.²¹¹

²¹⁰Peterson, op. cit., p. 512.

²¹¹Ricks, op. cit., p. 192.

Although these sonnets are controlled by different changes in emotion, the poems in these three groups are similar in Donne's use of particular words and ideas. Moreover, a change in emotion is inherent in the Elizabethan sonnet sequence, enabling one to detect an emotional development, as the narrator's opinion upon the subject changes completely from the beginning to the final sonnet. However, in order to maintain a smooth transitional effect from point to point in this emotional variance, the poet, thus, repeats devices or phrasing in each poem, perhaps in the reappearance of an image, a tonal quality, or a group of words. At any rate, the Elizabethan sonnet sequence is held together by the particular similarities that Donne demonstrates in Holy Sonnets. For example, Sonnet II and XII reveal a similarity in that both possess words that allude to Satan as a thief.²¹² The following lines are taken from Sonnet II:

Why doth the devil then usurp on me?
 Why doth he steal, nay ravish that's my right?
 Except thou rise and for Thine own work fight,
 Oh I shall soon despair, when I do see
 That thou lov'st mankind well, yet wilt not choose me,
 And Satan hates me yet is loth to lose me.²¹³

The following lines from Sonnet XII are very similar in their reference to Satan as a thief, although the tone of the sonnet has changed to one of love:

²¹²Ibid., p. 191.

²¹³Ibid., p. 192.

And as a robb'd man, which by search doth find
 His stol'n stuff sold, must lose or buy it again:
 The Son of glory came down, and was slain,
 Us whom He had made, and Satan stol'n, to unbind.²¹⁴

One should also note the similarities in Sonnets III and XV, concerning the youthful pleasure and vanities of which the narrator finds himself guilty; e.g., in Sonnet III:

In mine Idolatry what showers of rain
 Mine eyes did waste? what griefs my heart did rent?
 That sufferance was my sinne, I now repent;
 'Cause I did suffer I must pain.²¹⁵

Although the ideas are similar in Sonnet XV, the tone changes from that of fear to love:

No, no; but as in my idolatry
 I said to all my profane mistresses,
 Beauty, of pity, foulness only is
 O sign of rigour: so I say to thee.²¹⁶

Sonnets IX and XIV are also repetitious in their naming of lower creatures and other objects. For example, one notes the negative tone in Sonnet IX, as the creatures cause the narrator to feel low and menial:

If poisonous minerals, and if that tree,
 Whose fruit threw death on else immortal us,
 If lecherous goats, if serpents envious
 Cannot be damn'd; alas! why should I be?²¹⁷

In Sonnet XIV, the tone changes and becomes more positive as

²¹⁴Loc. cit.

²¹⁵Loc. cit.

²¹⁶Loc. cit.

²¹⁷Loc. cit.

the animals remind the narrator that he is higher and mightier than they:

Why are wee by all creatures waited on?
 Why do the prodigal elements supply
 Life and further from corruption?
 Why brook'st thou, ignorant horse, subjection?
 Why dost thou bull, and horse so sillily.²¹⁸

In both Sonnets VI and XI, the narrator speaks of the final judgment and the last night on earth. Although the thoughts are similar, the tones are quite different; e.g., the negative tone in Sonnet VI is evident:

This is my play's last scene, here heavens appoint
 My pilgrimage's last mile; and my race
 Idly, yet quickly run, hath this last pace,
 My span's last inch, my minute's latest point,
 And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoint.²¹⁹

The tone is one of complete joy in Sonnet XI, as the narrator speaks of death: "For, these, whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow / Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me." As the preceding examples reveal definite changes in the narrator's emotions caused by God's reaction to him between the sonnets, God seems to have so-encouraged the narrator between Sonnets XV and XVI, that he falls into a state of physical and mental frenzy, desperate for union with his lover, God.

Sonnet XVI, "Batter my heart, three person'd God," introduces the fourth sonnet grouping, with both negative and

²¹⁸ Loc. cit.

²¹⁹ Loc. cit.

positive tones, because the narrator must be judged by God and punished for his sins, although only through God's punishment of sins can the narrator become purified. Sin, awareness of sin, judgment, and punishment, therefore, are the four themes in this sonnet. One recalls that in the beginning of the sonnet sequence, the narrator feared punishment; now, in Sonnet XVI, he longs for God to punish him.²²⁰ He longs for punishment, just as a lover might long for sexual intercourse with his mistress; i.e., he desires copulation with God. Donne, therefore, reveals to the reader the difference between the lusty, selfish love of human beings and the miracle of God's love. God, the narrator's lover, can never give too much. Rather than finding inconstancy as in human love, the narrator finds freedom in God's love.²²¹ In Sonnet XVI, he wonders at this difference between human love and the divine love of God. This quality of wonderment is much more intense than that expressed in the former contemplation of God's love in Sonnet XV, because God now has inspirited or induced him more forcefully; e.g., in Sonnet XVI, the narrator pleads:

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

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 193.

²²¹ Andreasen, op. cit., p. 237.

This sonnet shows a courtship between the narrator and God. He begs God to court him, not as a mild, gentle lamb, but as a battering ram. The narrator feels that his sins are so black that God must use tremendous force in order to bring about his salvation. He cannot become pure without violence; he cannot become one with God without physical and forceful rape. This sonnet suggests a background of personal experience that seems actually to be happening, as Donne stresses such words as now, here, and this, emphasizing as well all personal pronouns.²²²

Just as the love affairs in Donne's Songs and Sonnets pleased and disgusted his narrator, so does the love affair with God. There is in this poem a conflict of the physical and spiritual. The narrator must be ravaged by God in order to be strong; he must be enraptured by God in order to be pure. Thus, he appears to be begging lustily to a lover, speaking naturally and often unpoetically, but always with deep urgency. Finally, the narrator ceases when he is physically and mentally exhausted. His lover, God, does not prove to be so relaxed and willing as his former mistresses nor so completely satisfying and giving as the narrator's wife. Hence, the narrator despairingly wonders at his ability to cope with such a lover as God.²²³ Therefore, God does not respond to the narrator with the

²²²Gardner, John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 130.

²²³Loc. cit.

complete ravishment that the narrator desires, leaving the poet in a somewhat hopeless mental state as well as physically exhausted.

The last three sonnets that appear only in the Westmoreland MS. may or may not be considered as a part of Donne's original sequence. He relinquished these at a later date as a favor, and, rather than being considered as an initial part of the sequence, they probably should be considered only as a personal epilogue affixed to the group.²²⁴ Nevertheless, in one respect, they may be considered as an integral part of the sequence. Between Sonnet XVI and Sonnet XVII, God has shown signs of jealousy. In this jealousy, He is afraid to commit himself fully to his lover, the narrator, who has revealed himself as an unfit person because his mind is not entirely upon God. Sonnet XVII, "Since she whome I lovd, hath payd her last debt," is thought to be concerned with Donne's dead wife, relating to the context of the sequence in the sense that God has ravished her as a lover; hence, this ravishment has resulted in a climax represented in the wife's death, and now she is in union with God. However, further and even more definite relationship to the poet's own experience with God reveals the poet's wife as his physical, passionate lover before he has fully realized his spiritual love in God.

²²⁴Ricks, op. cit., p. 193.

Thus, God is simply jealous of the wife.²²⁵ Donne's account of death of this physical lover or wife is similar to that which occurred in the sonnets of Petrarch after his mistress has died. Donne, like Petrarch, seeks a divine love. The narrator implies that God killed his wife so that the narrator's own love would become more spiritually oriented; God, thus, turns the narrator's love from his wife to God, Himself. Consequently, Donne reveals God as a jealous lover, not wishing to share his love with any worldly object or person. However, the narrator defends God's act in the death of the wife, stating that he, the narrator, had allowed his love of the material and worldly to enter into his own sinful life. God destroyed the narrator's wife, then, to prevent the narrator from not loving God, the narrator's new lover, with all his heart. God realizes that the narrator's salvation can only come through his complete love.²²⁶ The narrator's God is a jealous lover, one who wants no competitor. In a letter that Donne wrote to his Mother after a daughter had died, he mentions this God, this jealous lover:²²⁷

God hath seemed to repent, that he allowed any part of
your life any earthly happinesse, that he might keep your
Soul in continuall exercise, and longing, and assurance

²²⁵Ibid., p. 194.

²²⁶Andreasen, op. cit., p. 235.

²²⁷H. Gardner, "Another Note on Donne 'Since She Whome I Lov'd,'" MLN, LII (October, 1957), 565.

of comming immediately to him. . . . His Purpose is, to remove out of your heart, all such love of this world's happinesse, as might put Him out of possession of it. He will have you entirelie.²²⁸

In Sonnet XVII, the poet alludes again to this same jealous lover:

And dost not only fear lest I allow
My Love to Saints and Angels, things divine,
But in Thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Lest the World, Flesh, yea Devil put thee out.

Thus, it is clear that Christ has found the poet's wife as a lover, a lover he has ravished into a state of supreme bliss. Now, he finds Donne's narrator a lover who will, someday, ascend into heaven or into this divine state of being with God.²²⁹

As the narrator considers God's jealousy in Sonnet XVII, a positive, almost triumphant emotion seems to develop within the narrator. Between XVII and XVIII, as God gently, rather lovingly rebukes the narrator for his inattentiveness, the poet is aroused and physically inspired. He rationalizes that, if God is so completely selfish and jealous toward other people and things in the poet's life, God must love him greatly. Very often a lover encourages the other in a relationship to become jealous; something is, indeed, wrong if one person in a love affair never shows jealousy of any sort at any time. This

²²⁸Quoted in ibid., p. 565.

²²⁹Ricks, op. cit., p. 194.

jealousy of the lover causes the narrator (in XVIII) to express another kind of relationship, one full of sex images characteristic of a lusty romance:²³⁰

Show me deare Christ, thy spouse.
And let myne amorous soule courte thy mild Dove,
Who is most trew, and pleasing to thee, then
When she's embrac'd and open to most men.

Finally, in XIX, "Oh to vex me contrayes meete in one," Donne concludes his account of the narrator's courtship. Between Sonnets XVIII and XIX, God expects too much of the poor man, demonstrating that He wants the narrator to love Him only, with all his heart, strength, and soul. The narrator has an entirely different attitude toward the subject of the sequence in the final sonnet, varying greatly from his attitude in the first. In the beginning, the narrator had been intensely frightened; he hesitatingly has courted God, as one who is shyly afraid to become acquainted with a good catch. As God realizes the narrator's attraction to Him, He encourages the narrator through the love to be found in his redemption. But, now, the narrator sees the awful calamity of the sin which still threatens him. Realizing his human qualities, the narrator knows that he will have many bad times which may cause him to be unfaithful; nevertheless, he hopes, and in this spirited hope, he is less fearful than in the earlier sonnets; e.g., in XIX:²³¹

²³⁰ Loc. cit.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 195.

I durst not view heaven yesterday
 In prayers, and flattering speeches I court God:
 Tomorrow I quake with true fear of His rod.
 So my devout fits come and go away
 Like a fantastique Ague: save that here
 Those are my best days, when I shake with fear.

The entire sequence illustrates one of the poet's better days when he fears God, for in this fear, he courts God and seeks redemption. Only when he is in this mood of fear does he turn his mind from worldly things to a contemplation of God.²³²

This day with God is only a better day, however; it is not a good day. If the narrator would experience a good day, he would experience complete love and ravishment by God, and this physical rape by God could only come through the climax of death. Donne resembles a man standing on a huge, towering cliff gazing at the rocks below, wanting desperately to jump, yet not quite daring.

Thus, the sonnet-cycle ends. It is closely related to the traditional Neo-Platonic ending in the sense that no physical ravishment between the two lovers ever occurs. Neither sonneteers Sidney, Spenser, Drayton or Daniel, nor Donne, the intensely searching poet of the seventeenth century, is able to satisfy his lust. Donne's attempt to produce a completely spiritual and divine love is also a failure, as was Shakespeare's. Neither the spiritual nor the physical entire in itself can result in a satisfying relationship. Shakespeare

²³²Loc. cit.

could not produce a completely gratifying love affair with an angelic boy, nor is Donne able to satisfy his physical and spiritual needs by means of a relationship with God. It is impossible, because body and soul cannot be separated. Since there is an extreme variance in emotional progression throughout the sequence, illustrating many different feelings and many more different shades of a particular feeling, the entire cycle is held together very ingeniously by only the slightest similarity of a particular tonal quality, an image, or a group of words. Perhaps, this very subtlety of which Donne is so capable, hides the fact that it follows a distinct pattern; and although Donne would probably be the first to state an opinion against the conventional Elizabethan sonneteers, it seems very evident that he used that particular pattern of the Elizabethan sonnet sequence as the basis for his Holy Sonnets.

CHAPTER V

RELEVANT RELATIONSHIPS

The sonnet sequence in the Elizabethan period was a cycle composed around one subject, usually that of the fiery passion of a lusty, young man for a desirable woman.²³³ The sequence was also narrated by a male in soliloquy, but presumably talking to a mistress, the mistress revealing such physical beauty that the narrator devotes many sonnets to a description of particular portions of her body, such as hair, lips, eyes, skin, and other features of her anatomy. The mistress also portrays an intellectual beauty, rising above the base, material world to that of the spiritual. She treats the narrator with an attitude of cool indifference, almost with loathing at times. As her nature is one of cold cruelty, the nature of the narrator is that of an amorous, swooning young man, hopelessly in love. At first, the narrator is unsure of his feelings, but as his passions surge, he develops an intense, fiery spirit within each sonnet. When the narrator recognizes this passionate desire to be of a purely physical nature, a conflict develops within him. This conflict concerns a serious moral issue as the poor, love-sick narrator attempts desperately to maintain the honorable character of his mistress and

²³³Going, op. cit., p. 400.

himself. In the sonnet-cycle, the narrator speaks of occurrences between his mistress and himself and often speaks directly to her. Although the woman does not actually reply, the reader is aware of what is happening between the two, by various reactions of the narrator. He soars to heights of joy in one sonnet and sinks to the depths of despair in another, each sonnet registering his reaction to his mistress's particular attitude and also revealing his emotions of hope, passion, joy, hate, fear, frustration, and despair. The final outcome of the traditional Elizabethan sonnet sequence proves reason to be a conquering force. The narrator is resigned to forsake passionate thought that could lower his self-dignity and her honorable character. Thus, he accomplishes a typical Neo-Platonic relationship, winning a spiritual victory over himself, while his mistress stands haughtily aloof and proud in virtuous glory.

Sidney's Astrophel and Stella, Drayton's Idea, Spenser's Amoretti, and Daniel's Delia follow this pattern, each with a similar Neo-Platonic ending. The individual sonnets are satisfying poems in themselves, and, at the same time, each fits appropriately into the sequence. Throughout the cycle, sonnets are linked by similar words, themes, or ideas; however, the poet produces variety by emphasizing a different controlling emotion within each sonnet. The sonneteers also developed the dramatic monologue with a man's speaking to a woman whose reply

is not audible. Although the mistress is never heard, the reader is able to read her mind through the actions and words of the poet. Thus, definite actions occur between each sonnet, providing the narrative basis for the next, thus producing a cycle or series of sonnets.

Shakespeare developed a sonnet sequence different from the traditional Elizabethan style in that he addressed his sonnets to an idealized man, rather than to an idolized woman. Just as the emotions of the narrator in other sonnet-cycles change, so do the emotions of Shakespeare's narrator. He also becomes joyful, angry, sarcastic, jealous, and full of despair. Shakespeare also utilized the dramatic monologue, addressing his sonnets to one who does not audibly reply but whose actions and attitude the reader comprehends well in the content. Similar themes run through the sequence, linking the sonnets and revealing Shakespeare's personal contempt of the despicable position of being a popular actor and playwright, a bitterness toward growing old, an envy of contemporary writers with more sophisticated craftsmanship, much anger and disillusion with the inconsistencies of mankind, an anxiety over his place in society, and finally a repudiation of the whole business of love and sex.²³⁴

²³⁴Cruttwell, The Shakespearean Moment and Its Place in the Poetry of the Seventeenth Century, p. 3.

Later, Donne adapted the Elizabethan sonnet sequence to meet his own needs,²³⁵ his use of the dramatic monologue device being evident in such love poems as "The Flea," "The Canonization," and "The Anniversary." While the Elizabethan sonneteers gave vivid accounts of beautiful mistresses, describing in detail their physical and intellectual beauty, Donne introduces his narrator in the secular poems as a skilled debater, arguing for sexual satisfaction in "The Flea" and revealing little concern for his abstract mistress who listens to his argument but who is not able to reveal her description or personality. Moreover, as the Neo-Platonic sonneteers often seem to be speaking in soliloquy, Donne also indulges in dramatic performance, enabling the reader to envisualize a stage upon which are particular actors creating vivid action. Rather than the indifferent mistress as a center of attention as was the case in the former Elizabethan sequences, Donne's narrator does not allow his mistress to contribute an idea or opinion, cleverly forcing observation upon himself alone. For example, in "The Canonization," the reader observes a play, consisting of a sensual and erotic relationship between a man and a woman. Here, Donne's narrator is even debating with one observer as he attempts to defend passionate love-making. As Donne matures and develops deeper convictions toward the concept of love, he

²³⁵A. Stein, "Structure of Sound in Donne's Verse," p. 24.

continues to employ the dramatic monologue in composing a much more convincing love poem in "The Anniversary." The nature of the mistress continues in the abstract; however, the narrator's relationship to her is one of more serious involvement, now concerning the spiritual as well as the physical qualities of love. He does not arrive at a completely Neo-Platonic type of relationship as do the other Elizabethan sonneteers but merges the Neo-Platonic concept of everlasting love with the Christian concepts of redemption and salvation to arrive at a satisfying relationship with his mistress.

Finally, in the Holy Sonnets, Donne employs the technique of the Elizabethan sonneteers even more obviously. This series of nineteen sonnets begins with a narrator whose thoughts are troubled. As he writes to ease his distressed condition, each sonnet is fitted into the entire cycle by a particular theme, word, or idea. Each also forms an effective and fulfilling poem in itself.²³⁶ As the narrator contemplates the subject of the sequence, his emotion changes from intense fear, to bitter hatred, passionate love, and frustrating despair, each sonnet being controlled by a different reaction, thus producing an interesting variety. Because Donne considers God to be the basis for true love, God and the narrator's relationship to God becomes the subject of the cycle.²³⁷ In

²³⁶Ricks, op. cit., p. 195.

²³⁷Durr, op. cit., p. 222.

Holy Sonnets, Donne's narrator courts God with the same lusty, emotional fervor that was used to court mistresses in the earlier secular love poems. Thus, the poet perceives God as the beautiful mistress and himself as the tormented and agonized suitor, similar to the structure established in the earlier Elizabethan sonnet sequences.²³⁸ Donne also uses the dramatic monologue, addressing his sonnets to a lover, God. God answers Donne's narrator, causing his reaction in the succeeding sonnet. Thus, although God does not actually speak to the narrator, the reader clearly understands God's reaction by means of the content of the following sonnet. While Donne feels that copulation with God is necessary in order to attain to spiritual beauty and perception²³⁹ (the word copulation implying spiritual as well as sexual intercourse), this act with God, nevertheless, is extremely alarming for the narrator to contemplate, because it would inevitably exalt itself in death. Feeling that he must be purified in God, however, the narrator begs lustily for union with God, as a lover begging for sexual response, with the climax of the sequence occurring in Sonnet XVI, as the narrator realizes that he must be battered, beaten, and violently seized by God before he can stand proudly and virtuously as a man.²⁴⁰ However, God does

²³⁸ Fausset, op. cit., p. xxii.

²³⁹ Hughes, op. cit., p. 515.

²⁴⁰ Gardner, John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 131.

not respond to the narrator with the passionate seizure that he demands, but leaves him in a hopeless, depressed, and weary condition. As the cycle concludes, Donne relates the sequence to a typical Neo-Platonic ending inasmuch as sexual intercourse does not occur: i.e., Donne's narrator is no more able to satisfy his physical desires than are Sidney's, Drayton's, Daniel's, and Spenser's. Nor is Donne's narrator any more able to produce a satisfying relationship with God, the perfect and divine, than Shakespeare's narrator with an angelic boy; neither Shakespeare nor Donne can separate body from soul. Although Donne detested the conventional Elizabethan style of writing, this evidence, nevertheless, relates the Holy Sonnets to the pattern of the traditional Elizabethan sonnet sequence.

4.

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