

THE NATURE OF MAN,
AN ANALYSIS OF DONNE'S SONGS
AND HOLY SONNETS

A THESIS

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speculating PREFACE about the nature of things.

One of the remarkable things about Donne's poetry is that, seemingly in any age, it remains avant garde. One rather suspects that this verse is as close as it is possible to come to literary abstractionism; certainly, Donne's symbolism is as far removed from the traditional poetic imagery as Picasso's Seated Woman is from Whistler's Mother. Further, if there had been jazz in Donne's time, one supposes that Donne may have been chief among its exponents. More apropos, perhaps, one rather imagines that, if there had been a "beat generation" in his day, Donne may have been among the most "beat." Like the "beat's," Donne's search is a quest for beatitude (whence the appellation "beat") and peace. Like the young men of our own time, Donne had a fervent desire to experience, to know; he pursued a disturbed quest for truth in an age of shifting values; and he was shaken by soul-deep doubts of his own worth or identity.

Some critics seem to doubt that Donne ever gets around to formulating a philosophy, that his claim to fame lies elsewhere. For example, Mrs. Joan Bennett feels that "Donne and the poets most influenced by him were not speculating about the nature of things." Although Mrs. Bennett is not alone in this opinion, it seemed ill-considered to me. Other critics, including E. M. W. Tillyard, believe

that Donne is speculating about the nature of things, specifically about the nature of man. Considering Donne's evident intellect and known history, I was inclined to agree with the latter point of view.

These things, then, the divergency of critical opinion regarding Donne's philosophy, Donne's timeliness, his apparent influence on contemporary poets, and his unique position among English language poets, prompted me to devote this study to the poetic works of John Donne, especially to the Songs and Sonnets and the Holy Sonnets. My purpose is to discover the nature, the methods, and the doctrines which constitute Donne's philosophy in these poems.

Feeling that "The Extasie" revealed and provided the key to Donne's philosophy in the secular poems, Dr. Charles E. Walton, Department of English, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, suggested I take that poem as the basis for my investigation. In general, then, I have followed this pattern of organization: Chapter I, a discussion of the characteristics of metaphysical poetry and the basis of Donne's philosophy; Chapter II, an over-simplification of the elements which constitute Donne's philosophy in the secular poems (my purpose here is not primarily to draw conclusions about the how or why of Donne's philosophy, but to provide evidence from which conclusions may be drawn); Chapter III, a full consideration of "The Extasie" and

conclusions regarding the secular poems; Chapter IV, an investigation of Donne's holy poems and the philosophy of love and the nature of man as Donne ultimately conceives it in his poetry; Chapter V, a summation of the problem with a statement of the conclusions I have drawn as a result of my study.

I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Charles E. Walton for his assistance and his suggestions during the research and composition of this study; and to Dr. Green D. Wyrick, also of the Department of English, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, who was the second reader of this thesis, for his helpful suggestions.

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D. E. Z.

THE NATURE AND DIVISIONS OF
SOME OF THE MISTAKES
Vaine lunatique, against these scrapes I could
Dispute, and conquer, if I would,
Which I abstaine to doe, 32
For by to morrow, I may think so too.
--Woman's Constancy 32

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CHAPTER I

THE NATURE AND DEVICES OF DONNE'S METAPHYSICS

Stand still, and I will read to thee
A Lecture, love, in Loves philosophy
-- A Lecture upon a Shadow

Donne's poetry is generally considered to be metaphysical, but to each person who uses it the term may suggest something different. For example, the term may be used simply to designate the poetry of certain seventeenth century poets who departed from the prevalent traditions and conventions of Elizabethan poetry. Or, it may be used to characterize the works of those poets who investigate the abstractions of Man and God, the material and the spiritual. In a still more limited sense, the term may be reserved to indicate that poetry in which the poet attempts a fusion of thought with image and of idea with emotion.

To H. J. C. Grierson the term meant that which "has been inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence."¹ An abstruse statement such as this is as near as many critics come to a definition. One must, therefore, turn to the implications of the statement.

¹ H. J. C. Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century, p. xii.

As its prefix suggests, metaphysics is a philosophy beyond or on the further side of physics. Metaphysical beliefs, unlike those of the physical sciences are not provable, for metaphysics deals in the realm of the abstract, in supposition of what may or what must be the nature of things in the spiritual realm; it does not deal in concrete fact and formulae. Metaphysics, then, is the investigation of the spiritual nature of man, his soul, and his soul's relation to other souls, to the universe, and to his God. For Donne at least, metaphysics is a philosophical approach to the study of man; and as such it is essentially a moral and religious investigation.

The term, metaphysical poetry, suggests a kind of verse which is best defined by an investigation of its characteristics, for it is not enough to say that this poetry deals with metaphysical concepts. There are aspects of this poetry which distinguish it from other poetic styles. Although various critics lay more emphasis on one than on another, these aspects are the use of complexity of attitudes, conceit, imagery, a restricted subject matter, a restricted kind of verse, and frequent use of the paradox.

Samuel Johnson, in applying the term metaphysical to poets of the seventeenth century, places great stress upon the witty intelligence these poets display. In the life of Cowley, he writes: "But wit . . . may be more rigorously

and philosophically considered as a kind of discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike."² Johnson seems not to have cared for the metaphysical poets, but he made a valuable contribution to criticism with this definition of the metaphysical image and his use of the term, discordia concors, the critical forebear of today's conceit. Contemporary critics feel that the conceit is a matter of pre-eminent importance. T. S. Eliot, for example, remarking in language much like Johnson's writes: "The conceit itself is primarily an eccentricity of imagery, the farfetched association of the dissimilar, or the elaboration of one metaphor or simile."³ Other critics, including Ransom, Tate, and Brooks, feel that the conceit is the metaphysical poem. John Crowe Ransom writes that the definition of conceit is the definition of metaphysical poetry: "For the critical mind Metaphysical Poetry refers perhaps almost entirely to the so-called 'conceits' that constitute its style. To define the conceit is to define small-scale Metaphysical Poetry."⁴ According to Allen Tate, the conceit

² Samuel Johnson, Prose and Poetry, ed. by Mona Wilson, pp. 798-99.

³ T. S. Eliot, "Donne in Our Time," A Garland for John Donne, ed. by Theodore Spencer, p. 16.

⁴ J. C. Ransom, The World's Body, p. 136.

is "an idea not inherent in the subject, but exactly parallel to it, elaborated beyond the usual stretch of metaphor into a supporting structure for a long passage or even an entire poem."⁵ Cleanth Brooks states the idea more firmly when he writes: "We cannot remove the comparisons from their [the metaphysical poets'] poems, as we might remove ornaments and illustrations attached to a statement, without demolishing the whole poem. The comparison is the poem in a structural sense."⁶

Leonard Unger offers another point of view. While acknowledging the importance of the conceit, Unger emphasizes complexity of attitudes. He says: "Although the poems may differ among themselves in various respects, they do, with few exceptions have in common the feature of complexity of attitudes."⁷ Unger's statement seems to establish a valid criterion, for complexity definitely is a characteristic of metaphysical poetry.

These statements by Eliot, Ransom, Tate, Brooks, and Unger generally characterize contemporary opinions of

⁵ A. Tate, "A Note on Donne," On the Limits of Poetry, p. 331.

⁶ C. Brooks, Modern Poetry and the Tradition, p. 15.

⁷ L. Unger, Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism, p. 67.

the nature of metaphysical poetry. It is necessary, however, to look into other characteristics as well, for it is difficult to separate one from the other. The wit, in a contemporary sense, arises from the use of conceit and imagery, hyperbole, urbane and scientific language, and startling comparisons drawn from science and learning. The conceit is an integral part of most of this poetry. A comparison, usually startling in its nature, of dissimilar objects or abstractions, the metaphysical conceit is, according to Grierson, "ingenious, erudite, and indiscriminate, not confining itself to the conventionally picturesque and poetic" and rejecting "nothing as common or unclean."⁸ The imagery is drawn from many places and is frequently startling and surprising because it does depart from the traditional "nice poetic image" and becomes not infrequently bizarre and arresting.

Perhaps the most inclusive summary of metaphysical poetry is Grierson's comment:

It lays stress on the right things -- the survival one might say the reaccentuation of the metaphysical strain . . . in contrast to the simpler imagery of the classical poetry . . . the more intellectual less verbal, character of their wit compared with the conceits of the Elizabethans; the finer psychology of which their conceits are often the expression; their learned imagery; the argumentative,

⁸ Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics, pp. xlii-iii.

subtle evolution of their lyrics; above all the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination which is their greatest achievement.⁹

Grierson lists most of the attributes of metaphysical poetry. Most significant of these is his last item, the "blend of passion and thought" concept, which is certainly one of the outstanding characteristics of Donne's poetry.

The metaphysical poetry, then, connotes certain distinct characteristics. Its subject matter, for example, is drawn from facets of love and death; and its form, using the term in a very free sense, takes the form of the devout verse, the eulogy, the elegy, the love song, or, as in Donne's holy sonnets, the prayer. Further, it is characterized by wit, learning, subtlety, and subjectivity.¹⁰ It is characterized by a tendency to turn feeling into thought;¹¹ that is, things ordinarily apprehended in thought are brought within the realm of feeling, or things are transformed into thought without ceasing to be feeling.¹² The style is characterized by "extravagant metaphor."¹³ It is

9 Ibid., p. xv.

10 R. L. Sharp, From Donne to Dryden, the Revolt Against Metaphysical Poetry, p. 42.

11 Ibid., p. 38.

12 T. Spencer, A Garland for John Donne, p. 58.

13 R. L. Sharp, From Donne to Dryden, the Revolt Against Metaphysical Poetry, p. 41.

often replete with original expression and experimentation, especially with regard to stanzaic form and line length.¹⁴ It is characterized by direct and forceful language¹⁵ in an attempt to rid poetry of the imitation, superficiality, facility and sensuousness of verse in the Petrarchan or Spenserian manner¹⁶ in what appears to have been an attempt to bring poetic language within the realm of the conversational, to catch the rhythm of ordinary, spoken discourse.

That Donne is intellectual as well as intellectually sensuous and that he is sophisticated, urbane, cynical, and shocking; that he is witty, in both an Elizabethan and a modern sense, and inventive are important aspects of the man and his work. That he is aware of the new learning is certainly obvious from a cursory reading of the Songs and Sonnets. For these poems, he draws from many areas of learning and science, old and new: mathematics, geometry, astronomy, astrology, cartography, and medicine, among others. In these poems, however, Donne is not interested in the immediate social or philosophical effects of this learning. Rather, he is interested in using it as a vehicle for

¹⁴ R. L. Sharp, "Some Light on Metaphysical Obscurity and Roughness," Studies in Philology, XXXI (October, 1934), pp. 515-518.

¹⁵ Sharp, From Donne to Dryden, p. 47.

¹⁶ Sharp, "Some Light," p. 498.

the expression of his ideas. He uses this learning as a tool in his technique, as a basis for a great deal of imagery.¹⁷

Three other devices common to Donne's poetry are the telescoped image, the dynamic image, and the paradox. The telescoped image appears to have been a convention of the times, a device which Donne adapted to his own use. The seventeenth century was the age of analogy, and basic to this analogical atmosphere was the man-universe (microcosm-macrocosm) concept in which the nature of the universe was found in miniature in man. This same telescoping technique Donne uses at times to enlarge the scope of an image or at other times to diminish it. In "The Flea," for example, the scope of the image is reduced from the lovers to the flea; but in "A Valediction: of weeping," the image is enlarged from a tear, to a flood, to a sea.

Donne lived in an age that was still influenced by Medieval thought and thought processes, as any age is the product of its past. One of the important heritages his age received from its past lay in its concept of the Chain of Being with its several planes and correspondences (or equivalences) between the elements of these various planes.

¹⁷ Cf. C. M. Coffin, John Donne and the New Philosophy, for a full discussion of Donne in relation science.

The correspondences were, to the Middle Ages, almost mathematical formulae that revealed the truth of the order, harmony, perfection, and unity of creation.¹⁸ The equivalences within the correspondent planes were more than merely Johnson's heretofore mentioned "occult resemblances." They were real. They were more than figures of speech; they were accepted as truths. E. M. W. Tillyard explains the situation in these words:

Modern astronomers, hating the asteroids for being so many and so obstructive, have named them the vermin of the sky. To use this is no more than a metaphor with an emotional content. To the Middle Ages the observation would have been a highly significant fact, a new piece of evidence for the unity of creation; the asteroids would hold in the celestial scale of being the position of fleas and lice in the earthly. The Elizabethans could take the matter either or both ways.¹⁹

Whether or not the analogy was accepted as fact or as metaphor, the technique was, nevertheless, present and very much a part of Donne's time.

Finding correspondences within the planes of the Chain of Being was essentially a telescoping technique. It was a convention which Donne at times treated in a conventional manner. For example, in The Extasie, he writes:

18 E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, p. 92.

19 Loc. cit.

"Wee [the souls] are / The intelligences, they [the bodies] the spheres." Donne finds correspondence between these two aspects within the human being (the microcosm) and the same two aspects (the intelligence and the sphere) within the celestial being (the macrocosm). The analogy is, therefore, traditional in manner and pattern, based upon concepts in the Chain of Being.

Many of Donne's poems contain instances of telescoping, but two poems in particular adequately illustrate his use of this technique. In "A Valediction: of weeping," two lovers are about to be separated. The man is to sail to a foreign shore, and he entreats the lady not to weep lest her tears teach the sea to drown him and her sighs teach the winds to do him greater harm than simply to blow him across the sea. The poem begins with the tear as nothing more than a tear: "Let me powre forth / My tears before thy face, whil'st I stay here." But the tear is more; it is a kind of coin: "For thy face coines them, and thy stampe they beare, / And by this Mintage they are something worth." The telescoping begins in these lines. As the tear is shed, it reflects his lady's face, even as a coin is stamped with an impression in minting and becomes, thereby, a thing of some value. Yet the tear is still more. It is a sign of grief:

For thus they bee
Pregnant of thee;
Fruits of much grieffe they are, emblemes of more,

When a teare falls, that thou falls which it bore,
 So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers
 shore.²⁰

Donne has now enlarged the image with a variety of associations of pregnancy, childbirth, separation, all and nothing. When the tear falls, it separates the two lovers; and being apart, they are nothing.

In the second stanza of the poem, Donne telescopes each tear into a world. Because each is round and contains the lady's reflection and because she is the speaker's all, the tear is a world. Their mingling tears dissolve this reflection -- the lover's world -- as the deluge from heaven dissolved the earth. The speaker, by implication then becomes an earth; and she becomes a heaven. Their tears become first a deluge, then an ocean flooding his world: "Till thy teares mixt with mind doe overflow / This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolved so." In the third stanza, the maid becomes a moon which draws the tide of tears:

O more than Moone,
 Draw not up seas to drowne me in thy spheare,
 Weepe me not dead, in thine armes, but forbear
 To teach the sea, what it may doe too soone; . . .
 (ll., 19-22)

²⁰ John Donne, The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne, ed. by Charles M. Coffin, p. 30. All quotations from Donne's poems are from this edition.

In addition to the sexual associations of these lines, this woman, more than moon, draws up his tide of tears which may drown him as the sea may. Their sighs then become winds; their weeping, a storm. The poem ends with a purely figurative image. Each of the lovers sighs so strongly that he takes the other's breath away and "hastes the others death."

This poem illustrates Donne's imaginative enlargement of a small thing which, by itself is relatively barren, at least undirected in meaning. Through telescoping, Donne makes the tear something beyond but analogous to itself. Not only are its physical bounds altered, but its intellectual range is also changed. It becomes "pregnant" with meaning through association and connotation. On first reading, the resemblances between the objects may seem occult, as Johnson might say; but without them, the poem could hardly have escaped sentimentality, a quality which Donne's intellectualism precludes.

"The Flea" is a poem conceived in a different vein. Its subject is perhaps not of the same high level as that of the preceding poem, but it too is based largely on the telescoped image. The poem concerns a man and his attempt to seduce a somewhat reluctant maid. The would-be seducer bases his argument upon these events. The man in the short drama uses the flea as a symbol of himself and the maid. As the flea is, they are. It drew blood from each of them and

swelled, satisfied, without shame or sin. The flea, he says, is three lives in one. If she should yield, they could be satisfied, too. If she should become pregnant, then they would have produced a swelling of three lives in one, like the flea; and they would, in a sense be married as they are in another sense already married in the flea.

Donne's telescoping of conceits is an imaginative and witty device, but he maintains a rational basis in the discovery of resemblances and in their development. The image reveals the range of material from which Donne draws his analogies and the "imaginative distance"²¹ that separates the things he unites. There is always justification for the choice and use of his comparisons, whether the justification is actual or imaginative.

Donne's telescoped conceits are, therefore, of two kinds: the expanded conceit which extends a comparison, and the condensed conceit which develops his thought by a "rapid association or sudden contrast."²² With the compass image, "The Valediction: forbidding mourning" exemplifies the use of the expanded image. Williamson explains that: "The expanded conceit is successful when the idea and figure

21 G. Williamson, "The Nature of the Donne Tradition," Studies in Philology, XXV (October, 1928), pp. 422-23.

22 Ibid., p. 423.

become one, and the condensed conceit when the image is the very body of the thought."²³ The Extasie, in which the image and the thought are one, illustrates the use of the conceit. George Williamson continues:

the conceit, with its wit and surprise and bias of reason, suited Donne's mind, with his many-sided interests, and his poetic nature. Grierson's belief that shock, surprise, and contradiction in evolution, language, and imagery constitute the essence of Donne's poetry bears witness to the importance of the conceit . . . From analysis Donne's conceits achieve synthesis.²⁴

The conceit, then, is effective because of its intellectual, imaginative, and witty character. It forces the reader to apply his own intellect, to draw comparisons, to make sudden shifts in association, and to be aware of several levels of interpretation at once.

The dynamic image, a basic metaphysical image, is, according to Brandenburg, the imagery of motion, describing the manner in which things act or interact. Unlike the static imagery which describes the appearance, taste, smell, or feel of an object and is comparable to painting, the dynamic image is comparable to the dance. This image is not based upon the impressions of the senses; instead, it is

23 Loc. cit.

24 Loc. cit.

based upon a similarity of actions.²⁵ The end of the dynamic image is to make clear mental or psychological action by expressing it in terms of physical action. Donne uses these dynamic images when he goes through the steps of philosophy or of reasoning, or when he is describing a psychological state. It is through the use of such imagery that Donne achieves the peculiar blend of passion and thought which has become the mark of his poetry.

In distilling, then, the essence of what a metaphysical poem is, three things are generally noted: first, language; second, conceit; third, complexity. One must, however, add a fourth, the paradox; for the paradox is structurally Donne's philosophy. As the metaphysical poem is built around the conceit, Donne's philosophy is built around paradox. Donne's concept of man is a concept of duality, matter and spirit. Man is not actually one; he is two. He is a body and a soul, a dichotomy. The reconciliation of these opposites is the problem Donne sets for himself, a problem he solves temporarily in The Extasie and permanently in the holy sonnets.

²⁵ A. S. Brandenburg, "The Dynamic Image in Metaphysical Poetry," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LVII (December, 1942), pp. 1039-45.

CHAPTER II

LOVE IN THE SECULAR POEMS

Dear love, for nothing lesse than thee
Would I have broke this happy dream,
 It was a theame
For reason, much to strong for phantasie . . .
 --The Dreame

Within the secular poems, Donne shows man in a state of relatively free existence, a human condition for the most part unencumbered by theories of life. Instead of abstraction, Donne presents life itself; instead of disputation and dialectic, although the latter is an important feature of his technique,²⁶ he writes of primary human emotions. In doing so, he develops four themes of love: sensual love, which is physical in nature and devoid of spirituality; spiritual love, devoid of sex or other physical aspects; integrated love, which has become both spiritual and physical simultaneously; and Petrarchan love, which is conventional and not of major importance. In addition to these love themes, Donne employs a sustained analogy of love and Christian theology. This comparison is a significant feature of the secular poems; it reveals an important attitude of Donne toward love and toward the condition of the human being.

²⁶ J. Bennett, Four Metaphysical Poets, p. 18.

In the majority of the secular poems, Donne unfolds the theme of sensual love. Brazen, unromantic, realistic in detail and dramatic in situation, this concept of love is in direct contrast to the sweet, bitter-sweet Petrarchan concept of love; and it is quite the opposite of spiritual love. The tone of the verses is bitter, never sweet; cynical, never romantic; bombastic, never quiet. Within these verses, Donne writes of a gentle disbelief in woman's fidelity, as he does in "Goe, and catche a falling starre"; of an utter disillusionment, as in "Loves Alchymie"; and of the rage of thwarted love, as in "The Apparition." Not even feminine beauty nor goodness escape the poet in this mood. In "Communitie," Donne writes with biting maliciousness:

Chang'd loves are but chang'd sorts of meat,
 And when he hath the kernell eate,
 Who doth not fling away the shell?
 (ll. 22-24)

In many of these poems, Donne views love not as a fanciful kind of emotion that would cause one to burst out in lyrical joy, for love is not a delightful thing. Rather, as in "Loves Alchymie," it is an agitation. Because these lovers think too much and feel too little, and because their sensibilities are not attuned to refined feeling, they never realize a quiet, contented repose; they are too nervous. Like the lovers in "The Prohibition," they are never mentally at rest, even in their most passionate embrace.

Yet, within this group of poems, Donne evolves a variant theme, delight in love, a real excitement and enjoyment of mutually responsive love-making, as in "Elegy XIX." In addition to a delicious anticipation, there is a sureness of love, illustrated in "Lovers Infiniteness," and the grudging realization that love must admit interruption, as in "Breake of Day." Throughout these poems, Donne reveals the nature of the selfish, exclusive love of those who mutually love on a physical basis.²⁷

A second theme in the secular poems is spiritual love, a theme which is highly Platonic in character. Following the principles of the Platonic doctrine, Donne explains that love is a spiritual thing above body and above sense, the unreal materials of life. Spiritual love results from the employment of the intellect, the mind, or the soul, which is the reality of man, so that man can join and commune spiritually with his loved one. Spiritual love becomes an intellectual contemplation of souls, not the sensual use of the body, although Donne stresses the necessity of the body as the means to the end.

Several of the poems illustrate this theme. For example, in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," in which Donne shows the unity of lovers' souls through the medium of

²⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

his much-discussed compass image, he presents a picture of love which is much different from that in "A Valediction: Of Weeping" in which the love described is dependent upon the senses. In "Forbidding Mourning," Donne writes of lovers who are on the verge of imminent separation:

As virtuous men passe mildly away,
 And whisper to their soules, to goe,
 Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,
 The breath goes now, and some say, no.

So let us melt, and make no noise,
 No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,
 T'were prophanation of our joyes
 To tell the layetic our love.

(ll. 1-8)

Here, there is no sad farewell, no prophanation of emotion; there is merely a quiet acceptance of separation. Donne continues:

Moving of th'earth brings harmes and feares,
 Men reckon what it did and meant,
 But trepidation of the sphaeres,
 Though greater farre, is innocent.

(ll. 9-12)

In these lines, essentially a telescoping of the preceding stanzas, Donne refers to concepts of astronomy. One must recall that in the Copernican theory, the earth, once thought to be stationary, was said to move about the sun. The Copernican theory, then, was a revolutionary concept, one that was responsible for much concern in Donne's time.²⁸

²⁸ Cf., C. M. Coffin, John Donne and the New Philosophy.

Donne's analogy is between the upsetting influence of this concept and the upsetting character of bodily death. The trepidation was an uneven, sideward movement of the spheres of the universe in pre-Copernican astronomy.²⁹ This movement was accepted as natural, and it excited no great concern. The analogy is, then, between this movement and the movement of the souls. Donne emphasizes that the motion of the trepidation was greater than the earth's but more natural. Like the soul's movement, it was not an occasion for "tear-floods" or "sigh-tempests," as death should not be:

Dull sublunary lovers loved but not dependant upon,
 (Whose soule is sense) cannot admit
 Absense, because it doth remove
 Those things which elemented it.
 These of unrequit (ll. 13-16)

Earthly lovers, those whose love is not Platonic, cannot endure a separation because a division would preclude physical contact. Donne characterizes the earthly lover, as he did in "The Flea," as one whose "soule is sense." In "The Extasie" In the next stanza, Donne presents an essential thought in almost the exact wording of "The Extasie":

But we by a love, so much refin'd
 That our selves know not what it is,
 Inter-assured of the mind,
 Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse.
 These of unrequit (ll. 17-20)

29 Coffin, op. cit., p. 98.

To these lovers, the bodies are not important. Theirs is a love dependent upon the minds and the souls, not upon the bodies:

Our two soules therefore, which are one,
 Though I must goe, endure not yet
 A breach, but an expansion,
 Like gold to avery thinnesse beate.
 (ll. 21-24)

Their souls are one. A separation of their bodies would not cause a breach of their souls, for their souls are as a compass, an image replete with dual meanings. Like the lovers at one point in "The Extasie," these two have discovered a spiritual love predicated but not dependent upon their bodies.

The theme of unrequited love does not assume a position of very great importance in these verses; it has little to do with the Donne's philosophy. Love unattainable is a Petrarchan convention which Donne treats in an un-Petrarchan manner, as he does, for example, in "The Blossome." In "The Undertaking," the life of the unsatisfied lover is an ideal, an end in itself which is beyond the reach of most men.³⁰ More often, however, it is accompanied by a sense of incompleteness, as in "The Relique"; a reluctant acceptance of the situation, as in "Twickenham Garden"; or the intention, as

³⁰ Bennett, op. cit., p. 25.

in "The Blossom," to give love "to another friend, whom wee shall finde / As glad to have my body as my minde."

Lastly, Donne arrives at a statement of love involving mind and body. In these poems, he resolves the dichotomy of man's constitution and finds a love that satisfies the relation between mind and body, as in "The Good Morrow"; that discovers the security of such a relationship, as in "The Anniversarie"; and that establishes the unity of lovers, as in "The Extasie," wherein Donne establishes an integrated love uniting body and soul. He maintains that lovers must be "inter-assured of the mind," joined in spirit and intellect in a love which transcends mere sex. In this unity of both physical and spiritual elements, he leaves Platonism behind; and his philosophy becomes Pauline rather than Platonic.

Donne suggests that human love is a great mystery which few people come to understand. His understanding of the human condition, of the dichotomy which constitutes man's essential being, results in his conception of integrated love. In "The Dissolution," Donne writes:

Shee 'is dead; And all which die
 To their first Elements resolve;
 And wee were mutuall Elements to us,
 And made of one another.
 My body then doth hers involve,
 And these things wereof I consist, hereby
 In me abundant grow, and burdenous,
 And nourish not, but smother.

(ll. 1-8)

Donne involves the individuals with the four primary elements which the ancients recognized; he makes the individuals an element of each other. In this way, he arrives at a perfect unity of their bodies and of their spirits. Donne predicates love upon the body and suggests that love is composed of elements of the body. He writes in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" that the bodies are "those things which elemented it [love]." In this passage, then, he develops his belief that spiritual love is dependent upon the body; and he indicates that without elemental physical love, spiritual love could not be. Further, however, he conceives the proposition that man achieves perfection (simultaneous use of all his facilities) only by combining the physical and the spiritual into an integrated love.

If one were to make an algebraic substitution for the steps of Donne's progression to his solution to the problem of love, one may see, perhaps more clearly, the nature of the paradox and the nature of his reconciliation of the dichotomy:

1. sensual love = matter (body and sense)
2. spiritual love = spirit (soul and intellect)
3. integrated love = matter and spirit

The paradox consists of opposites, body and soul; his solution is to integrate them into a united whole. It is important to note that sensual love becomes the first step in the direction to integrated love. As previously

indicated, Donne never belittles the importance of the body in awakening the soul to spiritual love; furthermore, he never belittles the importance of the body within integrated love.

An infusion, as it were, of the Platonic and Christian principles of his philosophy, Donne's use of the comparison of the elements of human love with the elements of theology is an elaboration which assumes an important position in the secular poems. The analogy is, in fact, a specific application of the general moral and ethical principles which constitute his philosophy. Donne writes of man's love of woman as something analogous to a mysterious, religious experience. He frequently uses the term love in this special, narrow sense to indicate an emotion like that of the devout in religion. Further, he uses this analogy throughout the secular poems in developing each of the themes of love. Invariably, he indicates that this experience is one which only a few come to realize because of its mystical nature. Regardless of the particular theme he is developing, Donne suggests that these few are the saints of love who have achieved initiation into love's mysteries. Within the church of love which Donne thus establishes,

there are many who are uninitiated.³¹ These are the laity whose ignorance and misunderstanding cause them to profane the saint's emotion.

In all but the poems on the sensual love theme, there are two opposing forces within the church of love: spiritual love and physical love. In "The Extasie" Donne reveals the basic doctrines of the church and the manner by which one may become cognizant of the supreme mysteries of the faith. In "The Good-Morrow," he contrasts these two kinds of love as he relates the experience of two lovers who suddenly discover the joy and wonder of spiritual love: "I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I / Did, till we lov'd?" With these dramatic lines, Donne leads the reader to anticipate a poem dealing with the excitement of physical love. But he continues: "were we not wean'd till then? / But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly? / Or snorted we in seaven sleepers den?" In these lines, he describes a physical love. This new love must, then, be of a different nature.

³¹ The present author uses the expression, church of love, simply as a descriptive phrase to characterize Donne's comparison of love with theology and Christian religion. Donne employs this analogy in many of his secular poems as he draws parallels between these seemingly diverse experiences. Many poets, of course, find a similarity between the devotion of love and the mysteries of religious worship. Donne's usage is inclusive in range and inseparably a part of the whole poem; it is not, in other words, mere decoration. One must note that in the non-secular poems, Donne reverses the analogy to compare religion and theology (divine love) with human love. This usage is further discussed in a later chapter.

The lover can hardly believe the wonder and the joy of the love that he and his mistress have denied themselves. They have been wasting their time on naive diversions when they might have been enjoying a true love. Instead, they have been practicing a simple, lustful relationship. They have been as if asleep and out of things.³² As if in a dream, their sexual pleasures have been unrealities: "If ever any beauty I did see, / Which I desired, and got, t'was but a dreame of thee." The lover sees that the women he has sexually known were not real because he did not know their souls. These women were merely physical, shadowy suggestions of the reality which is his real love.³³ The reality is not only sensually perceptible, but it is also perceptible to the mind and the soul.

In the next stanza, Donne suggests the nature of these two kinds of love as his lovers experience the "revelation" of true love and experience the intellectual awakening by which they become aware that love is not lust. Their new love does not force either of them to question the other's constancy because their attraction is strong enough to over-power the desire to seek satisfaction elsewhere. In

³² Clay Hunt, Donne's Poetry, Essays in Literary Analysis, p. 54.

³³ Ibid., p. 55.

each other, they possess the world; indeed, their room is their entire world. Their love is at once a sensual and transcendental spiritual satisfaction:

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
 And true plaine hearts doe in faces rest,
 Where can we finde two better hemispheares
 Without sharpe North, without declining West?
 (11. 15-18)

Such a love is faithful, guileless, and stable, involving no need for suspicion, dalliance, or deceit.³⁴ Their love, now not merely lustful as their earlier experiences had been, shows them a better world without earthly changes in climate and temperature and lustful changes in partners, and without the corruption of alteration and mutability. Hopefully, they say their love is immortal:

Whatever dyes, was not mixt equally;
 If our two loves be one, or thou and I
 Love so alike, that none doe slaken, none can die.
 (11. 19-21)

Spiritual love, then, is not subject to mutability but is, to the contrary, immutable; and its dissolution is not possible. Love cannot, under these circumstances, be dissolved, because there is no contrariety in its elements.³⁵

A poem which very fully illustrates the minuteness to which Donne carries the analogy of erotic and religious

³⁴ Ibid., p. 56.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

experience is "The Canonization." Simply to examine this usage, one may exclude the first two stanzas. Donne begins in the third stanza an examination of physical love, which by the end of the verse he has caused to assume the quality of spiritual love. The first four lines admit the lust of the person who is speaking:

Call us what you will, wee are made such by love;
 Call her one, me another flye,
 We're Tapers too, and at our owne cost die,
 And wee in us finde the 'Eagle and the Dove.
 (ll. 19-22)

The fly and the taper are both symbols of lust and of the shortness of life. These two lovers are compensating for their relationship in their own way. They are unlike others in that they are a mixture of sense and spirit, "the 'Eagle and the Dove." Their union is not only physical but also mysterious.³⁶ Donne writes: "The Phoenix riddle hath more wit / By us, we two being one, are it." These lovers illustrate the Phoenix riddle in that, like this mysterious bird, they are two sexes in one: "So to one neutrall thing both sexes fit . . ." In their sexual union, they make one sexless thing. Wittily playing upon the words, Donne next submits this love to an intense analogy involving Christian theology. Although theirs will be a sexual death, these lovers can like saints be martyrs to their faith:

³⁶ Donne, The Poems, II, p. 16.

Wee can dye by it, if not live by love,
 And if unfit for tombes and hearse
 Our legend bee, it will be fit for verse.
 (ll. 28-30)

A legend, of course, is the story of a saint's life. The hearse was a canopy constructed over a tomb, the burial place of someone who has accomplished something material in life and who has received public approbation for it. These are conditions which a martyred saint probably could not meet. A saint's life is a subject for verse, in the Petrarchan tradition a more lasting and fitting memorial. The lovers, too, would find immortality in verse. The image suggests also another characteristic attitude of Donne's lovers, their isolation. Since they alone are acquainted with love's mysteries, society does not recognize them, as it does not recognize a living saint. They will eulogize their love and isolation themselves: "And if no peece of Chronicle we prove, / We'll build in sonnets pretty roomes . . ." Returning to the more superficial, a chronicle is the antithesis of a legend, for the former is a history of vainglorious worldly achievement. If these lovers have done nothing worldly that can be chronicled, then, perhaps they have done something that can be put into legend and sung about in sonnets (hymns). When society acknowledges the worth of the lovers and their love by singing their hymns, then the lovers will have become glorified, canonized:

love. . . . As well a well wrought urne becomes of a paradox,
 The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombes.
 And by these hymnes, all shall approve Donne can
 Us Canoniz'd for Love: . . .
 result: the paradox only by (11. 33-36)

In these stanzas, Donne employs the conventions of the
 church, the legends, the hymns, the beliefs, and the rituals
 of the saints, and finally the canonization itself to draw
 his parallels.³⁷ It becomes clear, then, that Donne either
 states or implies much of the ritual and doctrine of the
 Catholic Church in his metaphor.
 Certainly, however, one must not over look the
 double-dealing, as it were, of these lines from "The
 Canonization" in particular or of the metaphor in general;
 the sexual puns (on such words as dye, martyr, urne, half-
acre tombes, and canonized, for example) are deliberate and
 calculated. One must recognize the tension Donne creates by
 making his image operative on several levels at once, for
 this technique reveals that in making this analogy of love
 and theology Donne has a greater purpose than simply wit.
 This purpose is one which occupies Donne from the first
 secular poem to the last holy sonnet; it reveals, therefore,
 Donne's characteristic attitude or his vision of truth,
 which is that man must be aware of every level of his being.
 With his concept that spiritual love grows out of physical

37 Hunt, op. cit., p. 81.

love, Donne orients himself within the center of a paradox, for these two loves are antithetical in nature. Donne can resolve the paradox only by making use of a system of morality which emphasizes the achievement of the "Good life," the virtuous life that might lead one to the Eternal Good or to the Eternal Beauty. Essentially, Donne is concerned with the ageless problem of body and spirit, material and ideal, earth and heaven. In "The Extasie," he rationalizes a solution to the problem with its concomitant physiological, psychological, and metaphysical aspects.

"THE EXTASIE": AN EXPLICATION

Love's not so pure, and abstract, as they use
To say, which have no Mistress but their Muse
--Loves Growth

"The Extasie" is primarily a study of the paradox of man, but the poem is also an analysis of love. In both respects the poem concerns a reconciliation of opposites, for man, a unit of one, is composed of disparate things: body and soul, the material and the spiritual. Because of man's dual constitution, he is prone to develop one side of his nature at the expense of the other. He is likely to become primarily a materialist or primarily an idealist. He becomes chiefly concerned with things of the senses or, conversely, with things of the spirit. He tends to become only half of what he is capable of being. In "The Extasie," Donne endeavors to reconcile these opposites in such a way as to leave the basic unity of man intact, or to establish such a unity, without sacrificing one of the opposites to the other.

This problem is, of course, one that has intrigued men since ancient times. It is one of the archetypal themes of religion and morality, and it is one of the basic themes of literature as well. Man, when he reaches a certain

cultural level, seems always to arrive at the place where he needs to explain his existence, to explain the force outside himself which is responsible for his and the world's existence. He seems to find the idea of an accidental or spontaneous generation of the universe untenable. He knows, or needs to know, that there must be a responsible force. If for no other reason than for his own comfort, he evolves the idea of God, of the material and the spiritual, the natural and the supernatural, the explicable about which he frequently conjectures, and the conjectural about which he is frequently quite explicit. He fashions a soul for his body, the eternal within the mortal, and establishes himself in a never-ending attempt to reconcile the two. To placate his senses as well as his spirit, to harmonize the mortal body and the divine soul is ever his constant struggle.

"The Extasie" is Donne's attempt to reconcile these disparate aspects of man's being in relation to love. It is an attempt to integrate physical and Platonic love into a love that satisfies both the body and the soul. Donne achieves a solution to the paradox of love by means of a three-step progression. First, he examines the nature and characteristics of physical love. Second, he analyzes Platonic love. Third, he combines physical and Platonic

love into a love that includes physical gratification and spiritual satisfaction at one and the same time. levels.

Donne usually treats one or another of these three kinds of love separately in a poem, although in each case one usually has the over-tones of another because he seldom if ever makes a complete separation of one from the other or of thought and emotion. In no other poem, however, does he so completely analyze, co-ordinate, and correlate these loves as in "The Extasie." This poem becomes, then, a kind of standard by which the treatment of love in the other verses may be analyzed and placed in Donne's total concept of love. It provides the key to his philosophy of love in the secular poems. The key is this: love is a two-one-two phenomenon; that is, love begins with a man and a woman, two physical beings. In their physical, lustful love, they become one. This unity, however, is a fleeting thing; it will last only so long as man and woman remain physically close. This physical unity may excite their two souls which may, through a mysterious process, become united in a single spiritual entity completely devoid of sex. But, Donne maintains, this spiritual relationship, though ideal, is impossible to sustain. The souls will return to the two bodies. Now, however, love is an alloy incorporating the two bodies and the two souls into a commodity that transcends basal lust. Their love is now a mysterious phenomenon which operates on

these two levels at once. It is neither wholly physical, nor is it wholly spiritual, but partakes of both levels.

Donne believes then that man is neither wholly physical nor wholly spiritual but that he is an agent of both in one. This concept reveals Donne working within the paradox of lust versus spirituality in love. It is a familiar paradox which can be set up in any number of ways: material/spiritual, concrete/abstract, emotion/intellect, body/soul. Donne always works within this paradox, the reconciliation of opposites, which is one of the great philosophic problems, not only inherent in metaphysical poetry, but also in the seventeenth century, the conflicting philosophies of which, and the tenor of this philosophic thought, gave rise to metaphysical poetry.

A Platonic concept, ecstasy is a quasi-religious, trance-like state in which a mystic loses personal consciousness and receives divine knowledge or insight. It is a form of madness, according to Plato, in which a person merges himself with the infinite and, under this inspiration of "divine frenzy," becomes conversant with the true wisdom and the true knowledge of that which is infinite.³⁸

Ecstasy, "the special gift of heaven, and the source of the

³⁸ Plato, "Phaedrus," The Works of Plato, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, p. 388.

chiefest blessings among men," may be passive and trance-like or orgiastic in nature.³⁹ In either case, it takes the individual out of himself so that he becomes established and enraptured in the divine.⁴⁰ This madness, superior to sanity because the former is of divine origin, the latter only of mortal,⁴¹ is the ancient prerogative of the mystic who, like the poet, seeks divine revelation, for "there is no invention in him until he has been inspired, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state he is powerless and unable to utter his oracles."⁴² The ecstatic trance causes him to forget earthly interests and to become rapt in the divine so that only the intellectual functions remain active as the body lies like a dead carcass.⁴³ One must not, however, overlook the purely sexual kind of ecstasy, for one may interpret "The Extasie" on a solely physical level. One may, for example, argue without too much fear of refutation that the poem is a wittily disguised plea for seduction. In "The Canonization," as

39 Ibid., p. 401.

40 G. Rattray Taylor, Sex in History, p. 247.

41 Plato, op. cit., p. 402.

42 Plato, "Ion," The Works of Plato, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, p. 287.

43 Tillyard, op. cit., p. 71.

well as in "The Extasie" and other poems, one is conscious that Donne invariably operates on various levels simultaneously and that he involves all levels of human experience from the most basal lust to highest degree of spirituality. Whichever kind of love Donne treats, he never completely separates one from the other, for he seeks to discover the oneness of man. Consequently, when Donne speaks of a spiritual love, his imagery is replete with references and implications of physical love. When he writes of physical love, there are over-tones of spirituality and, at times, of theology. Therefore, "The Extasie" is both a statement of the nature of man and an argument for seduction.

The poem opens with an image that is almost Oriental in its lush sensuousness. It suggests spring with its grassy meadows, flowered hills, and general voluptuousness. In fact, it suggests a hedonistic splendor of sense impressions, all of which are erotic in nature, highly physical and sensual, an image of sex and pregnancy. The dominant characteristic of the image is the quiet, restful, yet almost seething fertility of the scene with its swollen fruitfulness.

The image accomplishes a great deal, largely by association. It depicts the whole area of sense perception, or the physical and bodily man and his worldly environment:

Where, like a pillow on a bed,
 A Pregnant banke swell'd up, to rest
 The violets reclining head,
 Sat we two, one anothers best.

(ll. 1-4)

The words in the simile are chosen for their erotic associations, connotations which relate the words to each other and to the over-all impression in a tightly conceived development. The word pillow, for example, suggesting rest and physical comfort, is related to bed, which suggests these same things and, in addition, suggests a setting for physical love. (The image also suggests feminine and masculine genitalia in the "Pregnant banke" and the "violets reclining head," respectively.) Pillow is related, then, to head in the third line; to banke, the major term of the simile, in the second line; and, because of a similarity in shape to pregnant and swell'd. Pregnant, banke, and swell'd are related through their connotations and through pillow to bed, which is in turn related to rest and to reclining.

The entire image is one of love, birth, union, fertility. The word pregnant provides the dominant associational basis of these lines with its suggestion of birth, propagation, and generation. This word leads these lines into those which are to follow, for there is more than a physical pregnancy; there is more than the world of sense. Pregnancy, then, must be observed on two levels: (1) the purely physical concept; (2) the spiritual understanding to which the physical leads.

In lines 5-12, still a picture of union and generation, the purely physical begins to disappear; and the ideas presented become more distinctly metaphysical, as well as Platonic, in nature. The sensuality of the material world and the sexual relationship begins to alter, to assume a new character and a different value. The hedonistic sensuality begins to give way to the Platonic wisdom of later lines. Here, the way begins to open for the discovery of Platonic insight:

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

These lines present two images: the grafting of the hands and the twisting of the eye-beams. The first means simply that the two were holding hands, and that their joined hands were so far the only thing that made them one, that united them. The balm or moisture enters too with its sexual connotations. The second image, however, is more complex than this. The eyes were believed to emit beams which picked up the image of whatever was beheld. The beams carried this image to the eye itself. The image of a loved one was carried to the heart which, as a result, became

heated and released spirits into the blood. With the release of these spirits, the soul became activated.⁴⁴

In the image presented, the lovers' eye-beams twisted; that is, as they looked into each other's eyes, their eyes were threaded on a double string of eyebeams, double because each one's eyes gave out a beam. The pictures or reflections in the eyes were their only propagation; that is, love was their only propagation. In addition, the reflections in the eyes are upside down, as the lovers would be in the sex act; this, then, is a kind of coitus by the eyes.⁴⁵ Love was an experience which was thought to be engendered in the eyes.⁴⁶ This image, then, is another indication of pregnancy, of the oneness of the lovers.

The eyes in beholding the lover have set in motion the process for the release of the souls. Ultimately, the lovers would gain the knowledge which can be attained by the mind only when it is apart from the instruments of sense perception.⁴⁷ At this point, however, the souls are

⁴⁴ Hunt, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-63.

⁴⁵ Cf., William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, III, ii, 67-69. "It [love] is engender'd in the eyes, / with gazing fed; and fancy dies / In the cradle where it lies."

⁴⁶ Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ A. Taylor, Platonism and Its Influence, p. 32.

uncertain, being newly freed from the senses; and they merely hang suspended:

As 'twixt two equal Armies, Fate
Suspende uncertaine victorie,
Our soules, (which to advance their state,
Were gone out,) hung 'twixt her and mee.
(ll. 13-16)

On one level, of course, these are physical souls, the appurtenances of sex; on another level, however, these are real souls. In the complete silence which pervades the scene, there is no bodily activity, no sensual distraction, to disturb the souls; and they are soon drawn together in intellectual contemplation. The bodies, meanwhile, without their intelligences, lie as if dead. Body and soul are separated into distinct entities:

And whil'st our soules negotiate there,
Wee like sepulchrall statues lay;
All day, the same our postures were,
And wee said nothing, all the day.
(ll. 17-20)

The word negotiate implies some kind of intellectual activity. The souls are conferring, bargaining, discussing their state and relationship outside the body. (The image, again, goes in both directions and operates on the merely physical level as well as on the spiritual.) Wee refers to the bodies. Sepulchrall suggests death and burial; a dismal color; or a low, and hollow tone. Statues are mere representations of the human figure. The bodies are "sepulchrall statues" because their souls, the activating forces, have

left them. Postures suggests an attitude or a position, and, particularly in this context, a state or a condition. These lines, then, present the condition of the bodies, silent and deathlike, throughout the day as the souls commune between them.

In lines 21-23, Donne presents a transition from the more concrete to the more abstract theory of life and love:

If any, so by love refin'd,
 That he soules language understood,
 And by good love were grown all minde,
 Within convenient distance stood,
 He (though he knew not which soule spake,
 Because both meant, both spake the same)
 Might thence a new concoction take,
 And part ferre purer then he came.

The phrase, "so by love refin'd," refers to a person refined in the same manner and to the same extent of these two.

Such a person knows the distinction between body and soul, and he can separate the merely physical from the spiritual.

The word refin'd further implies the process by which a metal is separated from its ore, leaving the pure metal and the useless slag. Good love, of course, is the kind of love that Donne is examining. It implies a person who transcends gluttony and sensuality and is concerned with wisdom and virtue, or it designates a person who at least makes the physical aspects of love a means to the ultimate perfection and realization of the spiritual. Good love is not possible

to the sensuous individual.⁴⁸ A person who is aware of such a love is above materialism, and he is more concerned with the intellect and the soul, with thought and perception, than he is with the body, with sense and feeling. Such a person is not one who loves sights and sounds, fine tones, colors, and forms per se, or the artificial products made from them, for one who is concerned with these things is incapable of seeing or of loving absolute beauty.⁴⁹ A person who is "grown all mind" and distinguishes between the body and the soul, who is refined into pure metal, might, with looking on the scene and listening to the souls, depart more knowledgeable than he arrived.

The poem so far has been fairly literal. At least it has considered concepts that were current in Donne's time, for it has dealt primarily with the concepts of body and soul, material and spiritual things. Now, however, Donne shifts the accent to a complete paradox: love, and the relationship of the body and soul in love and to love. The

(11. 27-37)

⁴⁸ Plato, The Republic, trans. by Benjamin Jowett. Sensualists "never pass into the true upper world, thither they never look, nor . . . find their way, neither are they truly filled with true being, nor do they taste of pure and abiding pleasure . . . they fatten and feed and breed, and, in their excessive love of delights, they kick and butt . . . and kill one another by reason of their insatiable lusts." P. 486.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 280.

poem henceforth becomes more personal, and, as Donne begins his analysis of this intellectual and paradoxical problem, examining and stating his theory of the reconciliation of these opposites, the poem also becomes more Pauline than Platonic.

The ecstasy "doth unperplex" because, now, the lovers are able to behold absolute beauty and absolute good. In this state, the soul has rare insight into the infinite truths. With this new, inspired knowledge, the lovers discover that they can solve the problem, as Donne finds a way by which the struggle between the body and the soul can be resolved in an integrated unity, into a love that includes sex but is essentially neither matter nor spirit but a mixture of the two:

This Extasie doth unperplex
 (Wee said) and tell us what we love,
 Wee see by this, it was not sexe,
 Wee see, we saw not what did move:
 But as all several souls contain
 Mixture of things, they know not what,
 Love, these mixt soules doth mixe againe,
 And makes both one, each this and that.
 (ll. 29-37)

Tillyard suggests that the word unperplex has two meanings: to enlighten and to unravel the strands which bind the body and the soul.⁵⁰ In the ecstatic state, the soul and the body are completely separated, and the soul is educated,

⁵⁰ Tillyard, op. cit., p. 71.

enlightened, with true knowledge. The vision enables them to see that it was not sex that moved them. The vision, with its analogy between theirs and common souls, shows them that they were in fact ignorant of what did move them.⁵¹ Physical love has led them, however, to the vision by which they were enabled to understand the true nature of love: that love is essentially above sex. Through sexual love they have reached a love which is based upon the soul.⁵² Despite the disparity of their two souls, this love has joined them into a single, new entity which is better than either was before:

A single violet transplant,
 The strength, the color, and the size,
 (All which before was poore, and scant,)
 Redoubles still, and multiplies,
 When love, with one another so
 Interinanimates two soules,
 That abler soule, which thence doth flow,
 Defects of loneliness controles.
 (11. 38-44)

The new soul, interinanimated by love, redoubles and multiplies into an abler soul which cures the defects of the single, independent souls. Together they make an entity superior to their earlier state. The unperplex idea, paradoxically, leads to this further perplexing, the joining of the souls. One must not, however, over look the physical implications of this image. If one takes the "single

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 72.

⁵² Hunt, op. cit., p. 84.

violet" to mean the male sexual organ, then Donne presents here the whole act of intercourse; and he does it with no uncertain deliberation. This, of course, is further evidence of his desire to discover the oneness of man.

At this point, Donne has presented disparate kinds of love: one purely sensual, the other spiritual. He has not yet resolved the differences between the two, nor has he yet joined them in a satisfactory relationship. He has shown, however, that one has the characteristics of the other within it. To resolve the dichotomy, Donne abandons Platonism, which is itself largely responsible for the paradox. The first step toward resolution comes in the poem when the souls realize that they should not abstain from their bodies, when they realize that in fact they do not have to abstain;

Wee then, who are this new soule, know
 Of what we are composed, and made,
 For, th'Atomies of which we grow,
 Are souls, whom no change can invade.
 But O alas, so long, so farre,
 Our bodies why do we forebeare?

(ll. 45-50)

On the physical level, these lines are a continuation of the image begun above; and the new soul is the new life conceived in the act of love. On the spiritual level, the souls come to realize that they unalterable, immutable, incorruptible, and that they need not forebear their bodies

from fear of corruption. They are, of course, a true essence which is by its very nature incorruptible.

The next step is to realize the true relationship that exists between the body and the soul. The soul is the intelligence, the moving force of the body. The soul, therefore, is the governor; the body is the governed:

They're ours, though they're not wee, wee are
 The intelligences, they the spheare.
 We owe them thanks, because they thus,
 Did us, to us, at first convey,
 Yeeled their forces, sense, to us,
 Nor are drosse to us, but allay.
 (ll. 51-56)

The concept that each sphere of the universe is governed by an intelligence, a celestial spirit, is a Platonic one.

Donne's analogy involves the macrocosm-microcosm concept and is used in a metaphorical sense as Donne points out that even celestial quintessence is moved by an inseparable intelligence. The body, then, must not be separated from its motivating force. Still on the physical level, these lines are a continuation of the argument for seduction; the protagonist insists that they should make good use of their bodies since they are after all not drosse but allay.

Further, the stars were believed to directly influence the lives of men:

On man heavens influence workes not so,
 But that it first imprints the ayre,
 So soule into the soule may flow,
 Though it to the body first repaire.
 (ll. 57-60)

As the stellar influence must pass through the air before it reaches man, so must a soul pass through the body before it can join another soul. Both levels of interpretation meet in these lines, and Donne achieves a beautiful unification of divergency. The souls (on both levels of interpretation) owe the bodies a debt of gratitude because the bodies brought them together. The function of the body is a sense function, and through the body the souls first became aware of each other. With the souls, the bodies make an alloy, a base metal mixed with a finer one. In order to realize itself, the soul must have the body.

Finally, Donne achieves a reconciliation of the opposites:

As our blood labours to beget
 Spirits, as like soules as it can,
 Because such fingers need to knit
 That subtile knot, which makes us man;
 So must pure lovers soules descend
 T'affections, and to faculties,
 Which sense may reach and apprehend,
 Else a great Prince in prison lies.

(ll. 61-68)

Body and soul must meet in the knot which the "fingers" of the spirits have knit. If this meeting is not fulfilled, the soul cannot realize itself. On the physical level, Donne relates in these lines the process by which pregnancy and the conception of new life occur. In order to create life, that embryonic "subtle knot, which makes us man," the

lovers must use their bodies, else the soul (again on both levels) lies imprisoned like a great prince.

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

(ll. 69-72)

The book image suggests a transmutation from something concrete and material to something intangible but nonetheless real. A book, until it has been read, is actually nothing. Until it has been conveyed to the mind by way of the senses and transformed there into thought and idea, it is just a barren thing composed of scraps of paper, printed words, and, perhaps, a cloth binding. So it is with the body. Until it has been used, until it has been transformed by way of the senses, it is nothing. Until the senses awaken the soul imprisoned as ideas are imprisoned in the book, the body is, as the book was, a barren thing. As the letter means nothing until the spirit gives it life, the body means nothing until the spirit gives it direction. The image reiterates Donne's belief that the soul is dependent upon the body and is awakened and made aware through the action of the body and the perceptions of the senses. The body is the book; the soul is the idea contained, the reality.

Throughout his philosophy of love, Donne has never discredited the importance of the senses. Love is first a bodily phenomenon. If it were not for the body and the

sense, the soul could not be released; and true love could never be realized. The physical aspects of love are the means to the ultimate perfection and realization of spiritual love. The body is important in Donne's concept of integrated love, love that is physical and spiritual at once through the transformation of the sexual into a spiritual relationship with a concomitant interdependency of body and soul throughout the experience. In this way, Donne rationalizes a solution to the paradox. The physical aspects of love remain much as they were in simple lust, but a metaphysical change will have taken place, a change which alters the end of love, not the visible means. Integrated love is a transcendent one in which both the body and the soul participate. Here, then, Donne resolves the paradox with Pauline wisdom, for love's mysteries are the union of lovers' souls and the transformation of a sexual relationship into a spiritual relationship⁵³ with the interdependency of body and soul.

Ultimately, then, Donne reaches a conclusion in respect to secular love. After investigating physical love and finding it lacking because man is an inconstant creature and because it imprisons the soul so that it cannot find its own nature, Donne analyzes Platonic love. He

⁵³ Hunt, op. cit., p. 85.

indicates this latter is too ideal, a state impossible to maintain because of man's mixed constitution. He finds neither of these loves alone satisfactory. He rejects the first because it is too material; he rejects the second because it is too ideal and ignores the body, leaving it as a useless drag on the soul. Donne's resolution to the dichotomy is to combine the two. He believes that it is possible, in fact necessary, for man to have a love that includes sex but does not exclude spirit.

THE POET IN PRAYER

Ye are twins, yet truth a little older is;

He's not of man, nor worst, that speaks the

--Satyre III

... is the ques-
 tions which result in the divine poems. A man whose
 natural propensities lean toward the divine, he finds the
 spiritual truth of the relationship of body and soul in God.
 In his dealings with his God, Donne finds a mystery and an
 awe stronger and, in a sense, more real than any
 could be in the relationship of man and man. In
 his relation to his God, Donne achieves his
 concept of the nature of man; the only process
 of a man who has discovered his death
 and the certainty of God's help. Yet, the
 struggle of the serenity usually the result of
 faith. For Donne knows the weakness of his
 state of obduracy. From his susceptibility
 inherent in man's duality,
 which is easily lost. With these
 ... before God; his pure

CHAPTER IV

THE POET IN PRAYER

though truth and falshood bee
Neare twins, yet truth a little elder is;
Be busie to seeke her, beleeve mee this,
Hee's not of none, nor worst, that seekes the
best.

--Satyre III

Donne reaches the final step in his philosophy, a progression which begins in the secular poems, in the questionings which result in the divine poems. A man whose natural propensities lean toward the divine, he finds the mystical truth of the relationship of body and soul in God. In his dealings with his God, Donne finds a mystery and an awe which are stronger and, in a sense, more real than anything possible in the relationship of man and woman. In treating man's relation to his God, Donne achieves his mature statement of the nature of man; the holy sonnets are, in fact, the prayers of one who has discovered the truth of his own being and the certainty of God's being. Yet, these poems display little of the serenity usually associated with such certitude, for Donne knows the weaknesses of humanity and the dangers of complacency. From his own experience, he knows the dangers inherent in man's duality; he feels that God once found is easily lost. With these attitudes, Donne is not a dissembler before God; his purpose in the holy

sonnets is to concentrate all the powers of man's being -- the spiritual and the sensual -- in the act of prayer.⁵⁴ Without losing his sense of mystery, Donne makes his relationship to God more immediate and personal through physical analogy.

These holy sonnets are, then, an immediate and personal religious experience in which Donne finds that he must submit his will to the will of God. With some interpolation and with recognition of the dangers of over-simplification, one can plot the movement of Donne's thoughts from a questioning of God's love (Sonnets I-VII) to a demand for God's love (Sonnets VII-XIV) to a holy fear of God's love (Sonnets XV-XIX):

Sonnet I. I am your creation, Lord. Shall I be permitted to decay with sin? You can prevent it if you will.

Sonnet II. Why, Lord, do you let the devil tempt me? You know how weak I am.

Sonnet III. I wish that all my suffering were not in vain. I shall repent; then I shall knowingly suffer as I did not realize I suffer in sin.

Sonnet IV. My soul is black with sin. There is only one way I may become clean -- I must wash myself in the blood of Christ.

54 F. Kermode, John Donne, p. 38.

Sonnet V. O, Lord, my body and my soul are black with sin. Lord, burn me clean. I stand before You in my

Sonnet VI. My time for death is come, and my body and my soul will be separated. I wish my sins would fall away from my soul as my body shall. If that should happen, then I should be righteous and purged of evil.

Sonnet VII. But after I die it is too late. Lord, teach me how to repent before it is too late.

Sonnet VIII. I must turn in my grief to God. He put the grief in my soul.

Sonnet IX. Lord, why should I be damned? Why is sin so foul in me simply because I can reason? Why do You threaten me? O, I cannot dispute with You; I can only hope You will forget my sins.

Sonnet X. Now I can begin to hope, for now I begin to see. Death, you cannot kill me. I see that we wake eternally after one short sleep.

Sonnet XI. I have sinned; I sin daily. Christ has died for me; God has suffered on my account.

Sonnet XII. But I am unworthy. I am the weakest of creatures. I have sinned; yet Christ died for me.

Sonnet XIII. My soul, look into my heart at the picture of Christ's suffering and crucifixion there. How wicked I am; how beautiful and pitious is Christ.

of the Lord.

Sonnet XIV. My God, I love You. In spite of my wickedness You must love me too. I stand before You in my nakedness. I never shall be holy, never chaste, unless You love me and force me to be righteous.

Sonnet XV. O, my soul! What love is God's that He should build a temple in thy breast! What love that He has given His son for us! What love that He should make man like Himself; but what greater love that in Christ He should make Himself like man.

Sonnet XVI. Christ gives me conquest over death. He gives me a legacie of love.

Sonnet XVII. Lord, she whom I love has died, and her soul is flown to You. I have found Thee, too; but though You have quenched my thirst, I thirst yet. Why should I beg more love when I have all? because the danger is that the world, the flesh, the devil may put Thee out of me.

Sonnet XVIII. In order that this may not happen, show me Thy Church, Lord, that I may love and worship Thee through it. Is Thy church in Rome, or Germany, or here? Or must I find it for myself? Show me, Lord.

Sonnet XIX. I am too inconstant. A ceaseless war between the flesh and the spirit goes on inside of me. One day I am too evil to look to heaven; the next I would court the Lord. I shake as with an ague; my best days are those when I shake with fear of the Lord.

Within these sonnets, then, one sees a progression toward holiness. This movement leads to this final truth: man's will is free, and man is free to choose. Man can elect to follow the demands of the body, in which case he is damned to hell; or he can attempt to succeed to heaven. God is there, and He will accept man; but the effort, the movement, the determination, and the surrender must come from man. God lowered Himself to man's level once; He will not do it again. Therefore, man must raise himself to God. Because this upward striving is not easy, Donne pleads, begs, demands, defies, submits, falters, questions, and accepts. Only after these very human paroxysms of fear and love can Donne say, "I have found myself, for I have found my God."

Donne's overwhelming preoccupation in these sonnets is love, but love far different from that in the secular poems. In order to witness this alteration, one must note the areas of similarity and difference in the two groups of poems. At the outset of such a comparison, one must mark two significant areas of similarity. First, the secular poems, like the holy sonnets are actions, not the reports of actions. Second, all of man's powers are concentrated in the act of love. In the secular poems, Donne analyzes man's love of woman, a relationship upon which man desires to impose a spirituality. In the holy sonnets, Donne

investigates man's alliance to God, a relationship which is spiritual. In God, the only constancy.

The spiritual attitude toward love of woman results from several causes. It is a convenient analogy which helps man to raise himself from his worldly estate. It is also a traditional poetic concept, and, one suspects, it is natural enough for the man in love to idealize his emotion and his loved one. The ideal view of love, however, is more strongly entrenched than this, for it is externally imposed, from various motives, upon love by organized Christianity; it is a view sanctioned and propagated by the church. Yet, Donne treats this love of man for woman in a bitterly cynical vein in the secular poems. The reasons for this are not difficult to discover. Being mortal, woman is subject to all of the insecurities and errors of passion and pride which seem to exist inherently with the human condition. Man, likewise, is mortal; and his love is subject to the vagaries of human behavior. It remains doubtful, therefore, that he can achieve a true spiritual love of woman, or even that he desires it, or having attained it, that he can sustain it. Donne's recognition of the human being's inconstant nature gives rise to his doubts of the possibility of ideal human love. The doubts in turn are responsible for his cavalier attitude toward woman and love in the secular

... to travel, ... turns, snatch, plot, he is, forget, . . .

poems. They are also largely responsible for his putting his faith in God, the only constancy.

As suggested above, man tries to lift his love of woman above the merely physical milieu in which it is conceived by recognizing both a physical and a spiritual love. The last of these he associates with the noblest thing he knows -- his God. The fact remains, however, that woman is mortal; and being mortal she is fickle. In his relationship to God, on the other hand, man finds no fickleness except in himself; and Donne's certain knowledge of God's reality provides the assurance of the holy sonnets. In these verses, Donne realizes his own moral weakness and the awful constancy of the Lord. Therefore, when Donne comes to write the divine poems, he leaves his cynicism behind; and his doubt of woman in the secular poems is replaced by an assurance of God in the holy sonnets.

One notes that the methods of Donne's thought do not change in that interval of maturation which separates the non-secular from the secular verses. For example, his use of the language of love is the same in both groups of poems. Other techniques of diction, however, also remain constant. Noteworthy is the diction of excited thought. One example may serve to illustrate this latter usage. In "Loves Usury," Donne writes, "Till then, Love, let my body raigne, and let / Me travell, sojourne, snatch, plot, have, forget, . . ."

In Sonnet XI, he uses the same technique: "Spit in my face you Jewes, and pierce my side, / Buffet, and scoff, scourge, and crucifie me," Most characteristic, however, is Donne's use of the language of love. In Sonnet XVIII, "Show me deare Christ, thy Spouse," for example, Donne shows the church as the bride of Christ, a conventional metaphor which provides him with material for an intensely personal, and characteristically Donnean, treatment:

like adventuring knights
 First travaile we to seeke and then make love?
 Betray kind husband thy spouse to our sight,
 And let myne amorous soul court thy mild Dove,
 Who is most trew, and pleasing to thee, then
 When she's embrac'd and open to most men.
 (ll. 9-14)

A human husband such as this would be at best a cockold; his wife, a harlot; the action, adultery; her partner, a sinner. These, however, are concepts of human behavior. When they are transplanted to divinity, they cease to be human. Reciprocation between the poet's "amorous soul" and Christ's church is not adultery, then. It is not a sin; rather, it is the means to man's salvation. Christ is universally generous; He has not selfishly established His church. On the contrary, this bride is meant to be pursued, embraced, and loved by man, as passionately as he would court and seek the favor of a beautiful woman. In other sonnets, too, Donne employs this language of love, notably in Sonnets XIII, XIV, XVII, and XIX. This use is anticipated in Satire III,

which shows that even in his early career Donne believed this diction appropriate to religious themes.⁵⁵

A further similarity is Donne's imagery. As Frank Kermode suggests, Donne's practice "is to achieve a vivid image, enforce it with appropriate similitudes, and then pray accordingly."⁵⁶ This technique can be illustrated with any of the holy sonnets, for example, with the first of the series, "Thou hast made me." He states the image in the first two lines: "Thou hast made me, and shall thy worke decay? / Repaire me now, for mine end doth haste." In the octave Donne imagines the approach of death, and he feels despair in his ill preparation for it: "I ruane to death . . . all my pleasures are like yesterday . . . Despair behind . . . death before . . . my feeble flesh doth waste . . . it towards hell doth weith." After thus enforcing the image with thoughts of death, sin, decay, hell, terror, and other corruptions, Donne prays with some hope that one so afflicted may rise again: "Thy Grace may wing me to prevent his [the devil's] art, / And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart." Donne prays that he be made steadfast in the face of temptation and that his heart be made as strong as adamant.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

The method Donne uses here is not far different from that of many of the secular poems. In "The Sunne Rising," he likens the sun to an old and foolish busy-body who is neither as smart nor as important as he likes to think he is. Donne enforces the image variously: the lovers do not need the sun because "Love, all alike, no season knowes, nor clyme, / Nor hours, dayes, months, which are the rags of time." Furthermore, the wealth of the world is really to be found in these lovers' bed because the lovers are all the world. Then comes the "prayer":

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

The steps in this poem are, again, image, enforcement, adjuration; and Donne is as clever in the use of the method in the divine poems as he is in the secular poems.

Cleverness in language and in imagery are significant features of the holy sonnets. Possibly, however, one accepts cleverness in respect to love of woman more easily than he does in respect to love of God. In the holy sonnet, XIII, "What if this present were the world's last night?" Donne writes,

as in my idolatrie,
I said to all my profane mistresses,
Beauty, of pity, foulness onely is
A signe of rigour: so I say to thee,
To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assigned,
This beauteous forme assures a pitious mind.

(ll. 9-14)

Unless one seriously misreads this passage, this is sexual imagery. Reference to the male reproductive organ is, perhaps, a bit indelicate in a holy sonnet, particularly when the image is singled out for comment. In the whole poem, however, when the image is taken in context and in recognition of the poet's purpose (the transformation of sexual into mental activity, and of physical into spiritual activity), then the image becomes comprehensible. In many of the divine poems Donne maintains this precarious balance of cleverness and holy passion, for he proceeds on the assumption that wit is a serious matter.⁵⁷

Since the methods of Donne's thought do not change, the change must obviously be elsewhere. Indeed, the real difference between the secular and the non-secular poems lies in the referent to which Donne's thought is addressed. In the secular poems, this referent is woman. In the non-secular poems it is God. Each of these -- God or woman -- Donne treats with paradoxes peculiar to the situation, but more importantly, in each of these instances he is aware of the major paradox, the dichotomy of man's dual nature. In the holy sonnets, the paradox remains the primary clue to Donne's concept of man.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 39-40.

CHAPTER V

THE SUMMATION

Donne's ultimate concern is the relationship of mind and body. For I could muster up as well as you daily in "The Extasie" My gyants, and my Witches too . . . But these I neyther looke for, nor professe . . . --The Dampne

these diverse and apparently irreconcilable elements. In the div The one thing which provides a feasible solution to Donne's work and which reveals that he had an underlying purpose in his verse is the ever-present paradox. The paradox of life, the disparity within unity, the two things in one that make each the other yet both an entity -- this is Donne's philosophy, his aim, his purpose, and, one may add, his most characteristic technical device. The paradox is the basis of such a poem as "The Extasie"; less seriously, it is the basis of such a poem as "The Flea." It may be the technical basis for a complete poem, or it may arise as the occasion demands in separate lines or stanzas. In any case, the paradox is a method of thought, a way of looking at the world and life and of finding answers to the problems of life and existence. It is an attitude from which Donne could not escape, for he had the entire history of life's paradox about him and focused for him by the Renaissance and the Reformation. He, like other thinking men of his age, was aware of the body and the soul, matter and spirit. From this concept he developed his personal thesis, a religio-moral

humanism which led necessarily and inevitably to refuge in God. *For Donne a negative force, neither did he find*

Donne's ultimate concern is the relationship of mind and body, a relationship he realizes temporarily in "The Extasie," wherein he establishes the interdependency of these diverse and apparently irreconcilable elements. In the divine poems, however, he finally establishes the identity of man in relation to the spirit and matter of the universe and, more directly in relation to the spirit and matter of his own being. That Donne did not arrive at his philosophy suddenly or painlessly is apparent from the poems themselves. Obviously, love is the subject of these verses; but the integrated love of "The Extasie" was reached by gradual steps, not all of them forward. It is possible, however, to see the emergence, without the necessity of specific dates, his final statement of love (the interdependent relation of mind and body within the great presence of God.) This final statement, reached by way of Platonism and Christianity, is his final concept of the nature of man, and the nature of man is the final theme of all Donne's verses.

Donne's philosophy of life is, however, not Platonism, for this is anti-materialistic in its aim and is opposed to man as a physical being. Donne, it has been shown, subscribed to Platonic principles up to a point beyond which his philosophy ceased to be Platonic, for anything

like complete ideation, the idealism of completely abstracted things, is for Donne a negative force. Neither did he find the solution in a narrow concept of Christianity. Donne exalts God as the creator of man, but not as the only true pursuit of man; for that would again deny the physical phenomena. Donne did not deny the physical man; he wished merely to control the material aspects of man's nature. Donne's purpose is to find a way for man to live now, on earth. Therefore, he does not seek his answer in a narrow or limited interpretation of Christianity; he seeks it in a more temperate and humanistic Paulinism which takes into account both the physical and the spiritual. Such a Christianity is a positive force, for it negates neither of man's disparate, constituent parts. Instead, it admits his mixed nature, and gives correspondent value to all human interests, physical and divine, not predominance to one. Donne, thus, reconciles the mortal and the divine in man through a concept of humanized Christianity which incorporates, first, the materialism of humanism and, second, the idealism of Platonic-Christian thought.

This preoccupation with human interests and affairs, with qualities of human nature, and with the subject of the poems themselves reveals what is probably the most important of Donne's theses: that perfection, as far as man can hope to attain it, is the realization and use of

the disparity which constitutes man's unity. "Whatever dyes, was not mixt equally," Donne writes in "The Good Morrow." This idea is an underlying theme of all the verse, for life is a mixture of sense and spirit, of various levels of being. In order, then, for man to perfect himself he must live on all of these levels simultaneously. Self-fulfillment and self-realization of the complete man is the end for which Donne seeks. It is this end which accounts for Donne's never separating thought from feeling, sense from spirit, or mind from matter, or divine from physical love. The profound stimulus of love, whether it is a worldly love or a holy love, is a stimulus which excites for Donne the whole being; and the response to this excitation is one which involves the reaction of man's entire faculties so that the whole man responds simultaneously on every level of his being.

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