1. **Give an account of John Donne as a metaphysical poet.**

Or

Bring out the distinctive features of Donne's poetry.

Metaphysical poetry was a kind of revolt against the excessive sentimentalism and romanticism of the 16th century poetry. It disproved of the sugared melody and romantic writing.

Donne gave English poetry a touch of intellectuality, dramatic push and scholarly taste. Donne and the other metaphysical poets did not write poetry about imagination and natural beauty. Donne's poetry expresses his own intellectual, spiritual and deep experiences. Along with Donne, the other poets of metaphysical school are Richard Crashaw, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan and Abraham Cowley.

It was Dryden who first coined or used the term metaphysical for Donne's poetry and after him Dr. Johnson confirmed Dryden's judgment. John Donne's poetry is not metaphysical in the subject matter rather in the technique and style that Donne affects metaphysics. The peculiar features of metaphysical poetry are as: the metaphysical poets want to say something that has never been said before. 1. They play with words and ideas to give a fresh look to the subject matter. 2. They make excessive use of figures of speech especially conceits. Their similes and metaphors far fetched comparisons drawn from unfamiliar sources. 3. The imagery used by them is logical and intellectual rather than sensuous or emotional. 4. Their rhythm gives jar and jolt to the reader.

Metaphysical poetry displays a fusion of emotions. As John Donne analyses an emotion thread bare, and he achieves the unification of sensibility. Donne applies a logical tone to prove that his poetry has a

purpose and meaning. Thus he unifies emotion and reason and gives an interesting quality to his poetry.

A metaphysical poem is always closely woven. It is well said that a metaphysical poem is an expanded epigram. The verse of a metaphysical poet is more like a limiting frame in which words and thoughts are compressed. Concentration, in fact is the characteristic feature of John Donne's poetry. Metaphysical poetry is full of conceits and witty descriptions. Conceit is a kind of simile or metaphor where the poet tries to compare two vastly different images. In his poem Valediction Forbidding Mourning the poet declares that the lovers are like two legs of a compass.

"If they be two, they are two so,
As stiff twin compasses are two".

Next in the Flea the poet makes the conceit that the Flea is a holy temple of love. The beloved should not kill it. As it will be triple murder. "Three sins in killing three". All these conceits are drawn from unfamiliar sources, such as religion, philosophy, geography, physical, science and chemistry. Actually, the metaphysical poets, "were men of learning and show their learning was their main efforts" in poetic composition.

Metaphysical poetry is argumentative in nature. John Donne develops his thoughts on the basis of logic and arguments. He pleads his ideas ib the manner of a clever lawyer. For example, in "The Good Morrow", Donne Says,

"If two loves be one, or thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die".

The originality of ideas is combined with original expression and diction in metaphysical poetry. The vocabulary is drawn from the world of trade and commerce, art, theology, science and scholarly books. Abrupt

beginning seems to be the most favorite device of the metaphysical poets. Their main desire is to shock, surprise or startle the reader. In other words, there is enough of drama in Donne's poetry "Batter my Heart" is a holy sonnet but the entire tone of the poem is dramatic. Conceit is loaded on conceit while the entire tone makes the poem just a drama of ideas.

Donne creates the effect bombastic hyperboles 'Hyperbole make speech more effective, they beautify and emphasize it in Rhetoric which is the art of speaking and writing effectively' in his poetry such as poems "Canonization" similarly in "The good Morrow" the poet clams that he and his beloved are like the two hemispheres of the earth.

"Where can we find two better hemispheres?
Without sharp North, without declining West".

Donne and his followers reacted against the sweetness and the harmony of the school of Spencer. The metaphysical poets deliberately avoided conventional poetic expressions. The metaphysical poets employed very 'prosaic' words as if they were scientists or shopkeepers. The versification of the metaphysical was rough and jerky that poetry did not have honeyed smoothness of Elizabethan poetry. It is said that Donne said straight what he had to say without regard to the conventions of poetry. He violated all the rules of rhyme, rhythm and meter and versification.

In short, the metaphysical poetry is quite different from the juicy and sensuous lines of Spencer and others. Is the hard, rugged and intellectual poetry with tremendous concentration and poetic use of strange conceits? These things, besides keep learning, turn the metaphysical poetry into a kind of mental, physical, strange and hard for the ordinary reader.

2. **Bring out Wit in Donne's poetry.**

Donne has been called a wit by several critics like Coleridge, Pope and Dr. Johnson. Dr. Johnson describes the wit of Donne as a combination of dissimilar things, a discovery of occult in the things apparently unlike. He says that Donne has combined different things which surprise the readers. This interpretation of wit is too wide and too philosophical.

Let us then first turn to Donne's putting together the dissimilar things or finding resemblance in the things apparently unlike. In the poem, The Good Morrow the poet expresses the ides that he and his beloved constitute the one whole world and puts it in following lines:

"Where we can find two better hemispheres,

Without sharp North, without declining West".

In trying to convey the intensity of their love, the poet compares himself and his beloved to two hemispheres which make a whole world as globe. And he brings in the North and the West to show the freezing cold of the north and the decline is indicated by declining west. Thus, Donne puts the two heterogeneous ideas together. In another poem, ' Go and Catch the Falling Star' the poet tells that it is impossible to find a faithful women. Here is another example of combination of dissimilar things in the poem, 'Thicknam Garden' where poet equates his love with a spider and his jealousy with a serpent of the paradise. In 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' the poet's love letters and his beloved become the source of knowledge for priests for lawyers and for statesmen. The poet goes on to mention latitudes and longitudes and eclipse.

In 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' occurs a notorious comparison of the things apparently different. Here the poet compares himself and his

beloved to the two legs of pair of compasses. He says, "If they be two, they are two so

As stiff twin compasses are two,

Thy soul the fixed foot makes no show

To move, but doth, if the other do".

There is no earthly or terrestrial connection between the two lovers and compasses. The connection is yoked together indeed by violence.

'Wit' as popularly known or understood, means an intellectual capacity by which one makes amusing remarks and says things which make others laugh. In this sense, wit is associated with humour. But what distinguishes wit from humour is its intellectual quality. In Donne, we have plenty of wit. There are different types of wits in John Donne's poems as ironical wit, satirical wit and paradoxical wit. This wit is found in songs and sonnets in the elegies and in satires. Donne's wit is all pervasive.

Exaggeration is one of the ingredients of his wit. Donne's use of exaggeration to write witty poems can be given with reference to the poem "The Flea" the poem has trivial subject but it is wit which has made it a popular poem. Here he has performed a kind of miracle, made a fire without sticks, build a house without bricks and created something out of nothing. The poem is generally admired not for self expression, self revelation or sincerity but for its sheer wit. Donne has written twenty seven lines of witty arguments on an unpromising subject as Flea. If the beloved kills the flea, she will be committing suicide, murder and sacrifice. It shows Donne's brilliant wit.

In the poem, The Sun Rising the poet wittily says that he can eclipse and cloud of the sun with a wink and the brightness of the eyes of his beloved might already have blinded the sun. He says that because of his beloved he can bring together east and west.

"Thy beams, so reverend and strong

Why shouldst thou think?

I could eclipse and cloud them with a winke,

But that I would not lose her sight so long."

He has got all the wealth of the world in the shape of his beloved the end of the poem makes another witty remark. He says that the sun need not warm the whole world; he can warm the whole world by warming the bed room of the lovers.

In 'The canonization' he also ha presented some conceits showing his wit. The poet calls himself the one end and his beloved the other fly. He says that they ate two tapers whop die at their own cost.

"Call her one, mee another flye,

We're Tapers too, and at own cost die."

The two lovers are Phoenix because they combine both sexes in them. In the poem 'Anniversary' the poet considers his beloved and himself to be subject and king so they need not fear treason.

In his satires too, Donne uses his capacity to mock and ridicule. In his satire I he mocks at the poets and lawyers. In the satire II he mocks at the false religion. In the poem he is not merely witty but passionately witty or wittily passionate. Satire IV he mocks at the follies and futilities of those whom Donne saw in the courts. Satire deals wittily suitors and the law officers.

In fact we can not deny the title entitled to John Donne 'Monarch of Wit' in his poems there is a variety of mood. His wit ranges from the gay and playful mood to bitter and cynical. It expresses his poetic sensibility and his attitude to his life. Donne's wit is no trick of fashion. It arises from a deeper source-- his very attitude to life-- and is an expression of his wisdom. His poems reflect his poetic intelligence, his ability to fuse thought and feeling.

3. **Discuss John Donne as Love poet:**

Or

The appeal of Donne's love poetry is at once human and spiritual. Discuss.

The greatest of John Donne's love poetry is largely due to the fact that his experience of passion ranged from the lowest depth to the highest reaches.

Donne's reputation as a love poet rests on his fifty five lyrics which were written in different periods of his life and Published in one volume called 'Songs and Sonnets' they are literary experiments-explorations of love relationships from the man's point of view.

Donne's love poems cover a wide range of feelings from extreme physical passion to spiritual and express varied moods. It ranges from a mood of cynicism and contempt to one of faith and acceptance. Donne' greatness as a love poet arises from the fact that his poetry covers a wider range of emotions than that of any previous poet, and that it is not bookish. His love experiences were wide and varied and so is the emotional range of his love poetry.

There are three distinct strains in Donne's love poetry (1) First; there is the cynical strain and his attitude towards women and their love. (2) Secondly, there is a train of conjugal love to be noticed in the poems like "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning", addressed to his wife Anne More. (3) Thirdly, there is the Platonic strain of poems like, "Canonization" in which love is treated as a holy passion not different from the love of a devotee for his Maker. Between in cynical realistic strain and the highest spiritual

strain, there are a number of poems which show one endless variety of mood and tone. More often than not, a number of strains and moods are mixed up in the same poem. This makes Donne as love-poet singularly original, unconventional and realistic. Whatever may be the tone or mood of particular poem, it is always an expression of some personal experience and therefore it is presented with remarkable force sincerity and seriousness. Each poem deals with a love situation which is intellectually analyzed with the skill of an experienced lawyer. Donne is realistic enough to realize that love to be "a satisfying passion must be a mutual relationship". One sided love is not accepted to him. In "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" accepted to him. In addressed to his wife points out that physical separation does not effect the union of spirits. Donne's treatment of love is both sensuous and realistic. He does not completely reject the pleasure of the body even in poems where love is treated as the highest spiritual passion. This emphasis on the claim of the body is another feature which distinguishes his love poetry. According to Petrarch poets, "Love merely of the body, is not love but lust and lascivious. Bur Donne is realistic enough to realize that bit can not also be of the soul alone, it must partake of the soul and the body. It is the body which brings the souls together, and so the claim of the body must not be ignored. The beloved must not hesitate to surrender and give herself without the fear of losing chastity and soul to her lover even though they be not married.

Donne tells us very little about the beauty of the women he loves. He writes exclusively about the emotion of love and remains silent about its cause. For Example, in The Blossom" the grace and delicacy fo his beloved may be guessed from the fact that she has been likened to a tender flower. In this respect, he is different from other love poets of his times in whose poems we get detailed catalogues of the physical charms of their objects of love.

Neither does Donne accepts the contemporary view that Marriage alone sanctifies (bless) the sexual act. Delight in one another is mutual and physical union is its proper. Donne's love poetry is not about the difference between marriage and adultery, but about the difference between lust and love. The sexual act without the sexual act without love is merely lust and covets whether within or outside marriages, according to the poet, with true love sex is something holy even outside marriage.

There is no doubt that his attitude towards women in his early poems one of contempt and he calls the women non steady in love as in the poem, "Go and Catch a Falling Star" he emphasizes the impossibility of finding a faithful women.

"Though she were true, when you met her,
And last, till you write your letter.
Yet she will be
False era I come, to two, or three".

However, we can not agree with C S. Lewis when he says that "Contempt for woman is the dominant note of Donne's love poetry."

In fact Donne was an innovator of new type love poetry. His treatment of love was anti Petrarchan. The love songs and sonnets sequences of Spencer, Sydney, Watson, Davidson and Drummond described the pains and sorrow of love, the sorrow of absence, the pain of rejection, the incomparable beauty of the lady and her unwavering cruelty. They seldom dealt with the joy of love and the deep contentment of mutual passion. John Donne was the first English poet who challenge and break the supremacy of Petrarchan School of poetry and or tradition. Though sometimes he adopts the Petrarchan devices yet the imagery and rhythm, the texture and the colour of the bulk (size) of his love poetry are different.

To conclude, Donne as a poet of love is unconventional, realistic as well as philosophical. There are no descriptions of physical beauty in his love songs. Infact, it is not the 'degree' but the 'kind' the 'unique' and 'sublime' and now 'blizzard' love poetry of Donne which ha made it to carve its own place on the Urn of English love poetry.

4. Discuss the conceits of John Donne:

A conceit is essentially a simile. As in a simile, so in a conceit also there is comparison between two dissimilar things yoked together with force. A comparison becomes a conceit when we are made to concede likeness. While being strongly conscious of unlikeness. As Dr. Johnson pointed out much earlier; a conceit is a highly exaggerated, fantastic, and absurd comparison.

Helen Gardner the writer of the book "The metaphysical Poets" point out that a brief conceit is like a spark made by striking two stones together. John Donne's poetry has enough of such sparks. But more characteristic of him is the extended or elaborate conceit. In an extended conceit the comparison is not confined to any single point. It is confined to fresh point of likeness constantly forced upon the attention of the readers. In the poem, 'Valediction: forbidding Mourning' the poet uses such a beautiful conceit while comparing two lovers to the two legs of a compass.

"If they be two, they are two so
As stiffe twin compasses are two,"

A conceit is highly fantastic and exaggerated comparison which is fanciful imagination brought on the scene from far fetched ideas.

If we examine a few examples, the nature of John Donne's conceits would be clear. In Valediction: Forbidding Mourning two lovers are likened to the two legs of a pair of compasses. The head of the pair is one even when the legs are apart. One leg remains fixed and

the other moves around it. The lover can not forget the beloved even when separated from her. The two lovers meet together in the end, just as the two legs of the pair of compass are together again as soon as the circle has been drawn. The superiority of the true and spiritual love is further established by bringing in the famous conceit of the pair of compasses. The lovers are united together.

Similarly in The Flea the poet shows every kind of consequences from the fact that a flea bites him after sucking his mistress's blood. He will not let her kill the creature in which their blood has mingled and which is, therefore their bridal bed, "the temple of their marriage".

"This Flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed and marriage temple is".

In another poem 'Good Morrow' the poet is content with the world of love; he desires to some other world. Each of them is separate world, and yet the two worlds of the two lovers are fused and united into a single world.

"Where we can find two better hemispheres
Without sharp North, without deckling West?"

Their two faces are like two hemispheres and together they make a complete world. In a way, the two hemispheres of the two lovers are like two faces of the lovers are better than the geographical hemispheres. The sharp North and declining West symbolize death and decay.

In the Sun Rising the poet calls her beloved:

"She is all states, and all princesses, I nothing else is."

The lovers little room is a world in itself. For the poet, his beloved is equal to all the states and kingdom of the world, and in possessing her, he considers himself as rich as all the kings and princes. They are all in all to each other.

"Shine here to us, and thou are everywhere

This bed is thy center is these walls, thy sphere."

The riches of the outside world are nothing as contrasted with the glory and wealth of love. Love is all sufficient, and none, not even kings and princes are so happy or so rich as true lovers in possession each other. Therefore the sun should, in the future, shine on them alone, for in this way, it would be giving light and heat to the entire world.

Sometimes the conceits are so odd that we lose sight of the thing to be illustrated. With him love is spider which dropped into the wine of life turns it to poison.

Donne certainly makes use of the familiar and hackneyed conceits also. For instance; a lover gives his heart to his beloved (The Message); the beloved is a murderer who kills her lover by her cruelty. The lover may die happily if the beloved responds to his love. But there are many conceits which had never before found their way into poetry, and some of them are really startling or fantastic. Thus the lover is a whole world to his beloved and she is a whole world to him. They are two hemispheres who constitute the world. The lovers can eclipse and cloud the sun with one wink. The lovers are the Eagle and Dove and Phoenix myth has more wit by the, they are also two relics found in the grave to be immortal.

To sum up, the use of conceits is an integral part of Donne's poetic technique. To the average reader of poetry, Donne is best known by his use of conceits which are the blend of far-fetched ideas, images, similes, metaphors and hyperboles. Conceits come naturally to Donne's mind he did not have train or force himself to find conceits though we have to strain ourselves in order to understand them. He introduces a conceit and then elaborates it or he modifies it, alters it, and twists it and so no. most of conceits show his fertile and inexhaustible wit which is their source. The play of his wit sometimes results in giving stress. Conceits were no

doubt used by poets prior to Donne. But they did not use conceits in such abundance, nor were their conceits so bold, daring, and original.

5. **What do you understand by Metaphysical Poetry? Merits and Demerits of metaphysical poetry:**

Or

Explain diction and verification of metaphysical poetry with Donne's achievement and originality:

Meta means "beyond" and physics means "physical nature". The word metaphysical has been used for Donne and his followers however the term is unfortunate one for it implies a progress of dry reasoning, a speculation about the nature of universe, the problems of life and death etc. the term itself has full fledged branch in philosophy "Metaphysics" dealing with God and his creation beyond physical world but the poetry of Donne does not explain any philosophical system of the universe rather it is concerned with emotion and personal experiences as any other poetry. No doubt, there is much intellectual analysis of emotion and experience known as unification of intellectuality, but this by itself can not be called metaphysical. But the poetry of Donne is not metaphysical as far as its content is concerned.

Donne's poetry may be called Metaphysical only for its technique or style. It is heavily overloaded with conceits which may be defined as the excessive of similes and metaphors drawn from the most far fetched, remote and unfamiliar sources. Poets have always seen similarity between dissimilar objects and used similes and metaphors to convey

their vision of that similarity. The peculiarity of the metaphysical lies in the fact that:

1. They use figures of speech excessively.
2. Their similes and metaphors are often far fetched and are drawn from the most unfamiliar sources.
3. Their characters are elaborated to the farthest world.
4. The relationships they think are not clear.
5. Their images are logical and intellectual, rather than giving importance to feeling and emotions.

In their conceits Donne and his follower constantly bring together the abstract and the concrete, remote and the near. They bring together the spiritual and the mental, the finite and infinite. He seeks for originality and newness and he achieves it in different ways. The metaphysical poets, in John Donne's words desired to say what they hoped had been never said before. They tried to be singular in their thoughts and writings. They played with thoughts as the Elizabethan has played with words. He seeks it through the use of far fetched and fantastic conceits. Dr Ramakrishna rightly remarks "he will have nothing to do with the easy and familiar mythological imagery; he turns out the company of gods and goddesses and rejects the spoils of Greek and Latin poetry. He sues the natural language of men not when they are "excited" but when they are engaged in commerce or in scientific speculation. It is a new vocabulary, a vocabulary with no 'associative value' and quite different from the poetic language of the Elizabethans. He wants to convey meaning exactly and precisely. We do not find in him any of the 'sugared melody' he violates every known rule of rhyme, meter and versification. His rhythms give a jar and jolt to the reader. His witticism startles and surprises us; he is never so well

expressed. He surprises us and arrests attention both by the content and style of his poetry.

Dr. Johnson says that the metaphysical poets were men of learning and to show their learning was their sole motive. A whole book of knowledge might be compiled from the scholarly explanations of Donne and Cowley alone. The metaphysical were learned, and intelligent men of rich and wide experience engaged in the various fields of life.

In short, in Donne's poetry there is always an intellectual analysis of emotion, and the emotion concerned is analyzed thread bare (unnecessarily). Of course, he gives arguments in support of his points of view like a lawyer. This results in "unification of sensibility" and this is praiseworthy.

6. **John Donne as lyric poet:**

   Donne is one of the greatest and best lyricists in English language. His genius was essentially lyrical and the lyrical strain penetrates even in his longer poems such as the anniversary and progress of the soul.

In the anniversary poet by Donne to celebrate the first anniversary of his loves for Anne More, his sweet heart. His beloved's heart is full of misgivings about his life. So, the poet represents their love for each other as pure, spiritual, platonic, and existing between his soul and hers, without any sexual desire.

Time's decay wears away all material and non material things in the universe. Its decaying effect fell upon kings, their favourites, beautiful women, and all other material beings. The poet then says to his beloved that only their love has no decay and end.

Donne wrote a large number of lyrics in the form of elegies, songs and sonnets, satires and anniversaries etc. The theme of all his lyrics, barring a few occasional and miscellaneous pieces, is love, in the earlier stage of lyrics the theme or the central figure of his lyrics is woman and in the later stage is God. Though his theme of his lyrics is love yet his emotional field of these lyrics is very wide and wider than any other poet. John Donne is a founder of new kind of lyrics, which for want of a better name are called metaphysical lyrics. In his lyrics there are dramatic and personal touches. The credit for dramatizing the English lyric must go to John Donne. As has been well said, every lyric of Donne is a personal piece of drama. A lyric is an expression of emotion; it is highly subjective affair, while

drama is the most objective of the arts. His rhythm, his cadence (tempo), the movement of his verse, the change in keeping with change in thought and emotion is Donne's greatness. In this respect again, he closely resembles Robert Browning. One aspect of his originality is that he imparted to the lyric measure and stanza forms that flexibility and expressiveness which dramatist of the day impaired in dramatic blank verse. His rhythm is colloquial; he alone as an English lyricist ha succeeded in capturing the directions.

The Anniversary:

The poem was composed by Donne to celebrate the first anniversary of his love for Anne More, his sweet heart. His beloved's heart is full of misgivings about his life. So, the poet represents their love for each other as pure, spiritual, platonic, and existing between his soul and hers, without any sexual desire.

Time's decay wears away all material and non material things in the universe. Its decaying effect fell upon kings, their favourites, beautiful women, and all other material beings. The poet then says to his beloved that only their love has no decay and end.

He adds that only spiritual love lives in their two souls. So when their bodies are dead and buried their soul shall ascend to the heaven. Deprived of their bodies, they shall shine more brightly and love each other freely. He further says that only he or she can destroy their love world by turning unfaithful to the other. They should also love each other fearlessly and nobly and celebrating the anniversary of their love they should live happily to attaint the age of sixty.

When they live happily to attain the age of sixty, they may celebrate the golden jubilee of their love.

The poetic feeling is genuine and sincere. All his effort is to present his love as platonic. The poem's imagery belongs to nature and to the European society of his times. Now, the most beautiful image is of that the love flowing between the poet and his beloved as a river.

: On His Mistress

In the first eighteen lines an appeal to his wife in the name of the sufferings they have undergone and all the oaths they took to remain faithful to each other. He says that she should not adopt dangerous methods of showing her love and passion for him by accompanying him in disguise of a boy –servant. In case, he assures her, he dies abroad alone, his soul will return to her.

In the lines, Donne praises the beauty of his wife and assures her from undertaking the risk of the cruel winds on the sea and assures her that the lovers may be physically away from each other, but they remain spiritually united. Donne warns his wife against the danger of lusty Frenchmen who are passionate and suffer from sexual diseases. There are also immoral Italians and drunkard Dutchmen the best course for her is to stay in England through out her life.

In the last ten lines, the poet asks his wife not to feel sad on account of her separation from him and not to have bad dreams. She should hope for good fortune and wait for his safe return. The poem is remarkable piece of realism and reveals Donne's sincere and passionate love for his beloved.

The Flea:

Jon Donne believed that love poetry of thought and ideas was just nonsense. Basically love was something physical, sexual pleasure, a union of male and female. Union of the bodies of the lover and beloved is precondition to the spiritual love flea is one of such poem where Donne emphasizes the need of physical union.

The flea could inject its teeth into the body of the beloved and none would take as a sin crime. On the other hand, poor love would be denied his right of sexual union. Donne's originality lies in the fact that his interest is not in the Flea but finding of love relationship.

The flea is dramatic lyric where the lover makes a strange plea to his beloved to consent for a sexual relationship with him. Donne says that his beloved should note that first it sucked his blood and then came his way, their blood is mingled in this body as they do in sexual intercourse yet it is not considered the loss of honour or maidenhood; there is no shame, no loss and no loss of virginity in this case.

"Confess it, this can not be said

A sinne or shame, or loss of maidenhood."

As the beloved approaches to kill the flea, the poet warns her as their two bodies are mingled in the flea and it is their marriage. She would murder three lives and sacrilege by killing the flea. She would kill the poet herself and destroy their marriage temple.

The Sun Rising:

The sun rising is dramatic lyric in the form of a dialogue between the poet and the sun. The poet's beloved is the silent listener present in the background. The time is the early morning when the sun is rising in the east and setting is provided by the sun lit bedroom where the poet lies with his beloved.

"Busy old fool, unruly sun

Why does thou thus

Through windows and through curtains call in us".

The sun rising is love lyric which stresses the self sufficient nature of love. Generally the sun has been glorified and considered as God but Donne's attitude is different. Therefore the readers wonder when he calls the sun a busy old fool.

The poet tells the sun that, if he so desired he can dim all his glory by a wink and suggest the possibility of brightness of his beloved's eyes having blinded his own.

"Thy beams, so reverend, and strong

I could eclips and cloud them with wink

If her eyes have note blinded thine".

The riches and the glory of the outside world are nothing as contrasted with the glory and wealth of love. Love is all sufficient. No kings, no princes are so happy or so rich as true lovers in possession of each other. Therefore the sun should in future shine on them alone.

Good Morrow:'

Good Morrow opens in the abrupt colloquial manner, which at once startles and captures attention and which is so characteristic of Donne.

The first stanza describes the contrast between a life without love and a life of an all absorbing passionate love. The world of love is spacious and as good as the physical world and in some respects it is even better.

This fine love is not merely a solution of a new day. But the discovery of something more real and stranger than anything they have known an absorbing love. Hence it begins with ordinary reality in which love makes all past experience seem childish, any former love becomes only am platonic dream of this new love. Now that their souls have wakened to a new day and, a new life, they become absorbed in one another: no voyager or map reader can find a

world more wonderful than they find in each other. This world includes two hemispheres without sharp North and without declining west. Though one in love they are tow beings yet they have become one in heart and soul. The relationship between one object and the other is made intellectual rather than verbal thus the poem provides a fine instance of that unification of sensibility.

Valediction: Forbidding Mourning

The speaker explains that he is forced to spend time apart from his lover, but before he leaves, he tells her that their farewell should not be the occasion for mourning and sorrow. In the same way that virtuous men die mildly and without complaint, he says, so they should leave without “tear-floods” and “sigh-tempests,” for to publicly announce their feelings in such a way would profane their love. The speaker says that when the earth moves, it brings “harms and fears,” but when the spheres experience “trepidation,” though the impact is greater, it is also innocent. The love of “dull sublunary lovers” cannot survive separation, but it removes that which constitutes the love itself; but the love he shares with his beloved is so refined and “Inter-assured of the mind” that they need not worry about missing “eyes, lips, and hands.”

Though he must go, their souls are still one, and, therefore, they are not enduring a breach, they are experiencing an “expansion”; in the same way that gold can be stretched by beating it “to aery thinness,” the soul they share will simply stretch to take in all the space between them. If their souls are separate, he says, they are like the feet of a compass: His lover’s soul is the fixed foot in the center, and his is the foot that moves around it. The firmness of the center foot makes the circle that the

outer foot draws perfect: “Thy firmness makes my circle just, / And makes me end, where I begun.”

Form

The nine stanzas of this Valediction are quite simple compared to many of Donne’s poems, which utilize strange metrical patterns overlaid jarringly on regular rhyme schemes. Here, each four-line stanza is quite unadorned, with an ABAB rhyme scheme and an iambic tetrameter meter.

Commentary

“A Valediction: forbidding Mourning” is one of Donne’s most famous and simplest poems and also probably his most direct statement of his ideal of spiritual love. For all his erotic carnality in poems, such as “The Flea,” Donne professed a devotion to a kind of spiritual love that transcended the merely physical. Here, anticipating a physical separation from his beloved, he invokes the nature of that spiritual love to ward off the “tear-floods” and “sigh-tempests” that might otherwise attend on their farewell. The poem is essentially a sequence of metaphors and comparisons, each describing a way of looking at their separation that will help them to avoid the mourning forbidden by the poem’s title.

First, the speaker says that their farewell should be as mild as the uncomplaining deaths of virtuous men, for to weep would be “profanation of our joys.” Next, the speaker compares harmful “Moving of th’ earth” to innocent “trepidation of the spheres,” equating the first with “dull sublunary lovers’ love” and the second with their love, “Inter-assured of the mind.” Like the rumbling earth, the dull sublunary (sublunary meaning literally beneath the moon and also subject to the moon) lovers are all physical, unable to experience separation without losing the sensation that comprises and sustains their love. But the spiritual lovers “Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss,” because, like the trepidation (vibration) of the spheres (the concentric globes that surrounded the earth in ancient astronomy), their love is not wholly physical. Also, like the trepidation of the spheres, their movement will not have the harmful consequences of an earthquake.

The speaker then declares that, since the lovers’ two souls are one, his departure will simply expand the area of their unified soul, rather than cause a rift between them. If, however, their souls are “two” instead of “one”, they are as the feet of a drafter’s compass, connected, with the center foot fixing the orbit of the outer foot

and helping it to describe a perfect circle. The compass (the instrument used for drawing circles) is one of Donne's most famous metaphors, and it is the perfect image to encapsulate the values of Donne's spiritual love, which is balanced, symmetrical, intellectual, serious, and beautiful in its polished simplicity.

"The Canonization"

Summary

The speaker asks his addressee to be quiet, and let him love. If the addressee cannot hold his tongue, the speaker tells him to criticize him for other shortcomings (other than his tendency to love): his palsy, his gout, his "five grey hairs," or his ruined fortune. He admonishes the addressee to look to his own mind and his own wealth and to think of his position and copy the other nobles ("Observe his Honour, or his Grace, / Or the King's real, or his stamped face / Contemplate.") The speaker does not care what the addressee says or does, as long as he lets him love.

The speaker asks rhetorically, "Who's injured by my love?" He says that his sighs have not drowned ships, his tears have not flooded land, his colds have not chilled spring, and the heat of his veins has not added to the list of those killed by the plague. Soldiers still find wars and lawyers still find litigious men, regardless of the emotions of the speaker and his lover.

The speaker tells his addressee to "Call us what you will," for it is love that makes them so. He says that the addressee can "Call her one, me another fly," and that they are also like candles ("tapers"), which burn by feeding upon their own selves ("and at our own cost die"). In each other, the lovers find the eagle and the dove, and together ("we two being one") they illuminate the riddle of the phoenix, for they "die and rise the same," just as the phoenix does—though unlike the phoenix, it is love that slays and resurrects them.

He says that they can die by love if they are not able to live by it, and if their legend is not fit "for tombs and hearse," it will be fit for poetry, and "We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms." A well-wrought urn does as much justice to a dead man's ashes as does a gigantic tomb; and by the same token, the poems about the speaker and his lover will cause them to be "canonized," admitted to the sainthood of love. All those who hear their story will invoke the lovers, saying that countries, towns, and courts "beg from above / A pattern of your love!"

Form

The five stanzas of “The Canonization” are metered in iambic lines ranging from trimeter to pentameter; in each of the nine-line stanzas, the first, third, fourth, and seventh lines are in pentameter, the second, fifth, sixth, and eighth in tetrameter, and the ninth in trimeter. (The stress pattern in each stanza is 545544543.) The rhyme scheme in each stanza is ABBACCCDD.

Commentary

This complicated poem, spoken ostensibly to someone who disapproves of the speaker’s love affair, is written in the voice of a world-wise, sardonic courtier who is nevertheless utterly caught up in his love. The poem simultaneously parodies old notions of love and coins elaborate new ones, eventually concluding that even if the love affair is impossible in the real world, it can become legendary through poetry, and the speaker and his lover will be like saints to later generations of lovers. (Hence the title: “The Canonization” refers to the process by which people are inducted into the canon of saints).

In the first stanza, the speaker obliquely details his relationship to the world of politics, wealth, and nobility; by assuming that these are the concerns of his addressee, he indicates his own background amid such concerns, and he also indicates the extent to which he has moved beyond that background. He hopes that the listener will leave him alone and pursue a career in the court, toadying to aristocrats, preoccupied with favor (the King’s real face) and money (the King’s stamped face, as on a coin). In the second stanza, he parodies contemporary Petrarchan notions of love and continues to mock his addressee, making the point that his sighs have not drowned ships and his tears have not caused floods. (Petrarchan love-poems were full of claims like “My tears are rain, and my sighs storms.”) He also mocks the operations of the everyday world, saying that his love will not keep soldiers from fighting wars or lawyers from finding court cases—as though war and legal wrangling were the sole concerns of world outside the confines of his love affair.

In the third stanza, the speaker begins spinning off metaphors that will help explain the intensity and uniqueness of his love. First, he says that he and his lover are like moths drawn to a candle (“her one, me another fly”), then that they are like the candle itself. They embody the elements of the eagle (strong and masculine) and the dove (peaceful and feminine) bound up in the image of the phoenix, dying and rising by love. In the fourth stanza, the speaker

explores the possibility of canonization in verse, and in the final stanza, he explores his and his lover's roles as the saints of love, to whom generations of future lovers will appeal for help. Throughout, the tone of the poem is balanced between a kind of arch, sophisticated sensibility ("half-acre tombs") and passionate amorous abandon ("We die and rise the same, and prove / Mysterious by this love").

"The Canonization" is one of Donne's most famous and most written-about poems. Its criticism at the hands of Cleanth Brooks and others has made it a central topic in the argument between formalist critics and historicist critics; the former argue that the poem is what it seems to be, an anti-political love poem, while the latter argue, based on events in Donne's life at the time of the poem's composition, that it is actually a kind of coded, ironic rumination on the "ruined fortune" and dashed political hopes of the first stanza. The choice of which argument to follow is largely a matter of personal temperament. But unless one seeks a purely biographical understanding of Donne, it is probably best to understand the poem as the sort of droll, passionate speech-act it is, a highly sophisticated defense of love against the corrupting values of politics and privilege.

"The Relic"

"The Relic" is a lyric poem consisting of three stanzas of eleven lines each. As with numerous other English Metaphysical lyrics, the stanza form and rhyme scheme are unusual and perhaps unique. The pattern of five rhymes in each stanza is *aabbcddceee*, while the meter of lines is complex and somewhat irregular but basically iambic and effectively supplements the poem's thematic development. The four weighty iambic pentameter lines that conclude each stanza reinforce a change of tone from flippant or cynical to serious.

John Donne relies heavily on a first-person speaker who comes across as both worldly and spiritual, each quality being carried to an extreme. At the beginning, the speaker projects himself into the future when, long after his death, his bones are disinterred to make room for

another burial. The macabre image of a disturbed grave contrasts with another more pleasant image. The grave digger, Donne asserts, will discover a bracelet of bright hair about the bone of the speaker’s forearm. The hair represents the mistress, the “she” of the poem, just as the bones represent the speaker. Once the remains have been discovered, the perspective shifts from the speaker to the grave digger. The sexton may leave the grave without further disturbance, thinking that the “couple” is a pair of lovers who used the device of the hair so that at Judgment Day their souls might meet at the grave and enjoy a visit. This conceit is understood only if the reader knows the medieval and Renaissance conception of Judgment Day, in which believers thought that souls would go about seeking their scattered body parts at the time of the Apocalypse in order to reunite them and experience the resurrection with both body and soul intact.

The second stanza introduces another possibility more in keeping with the poem’s title. Donne suggests that the sexton may do his work during a time when “mis-devotion” rules, that is, when worship includes the adoration of relics. If that happens, he will take the bones and the hair to the bishop and the king, who will make them objects of adoration. The woman’s hair will remind a later age of Mary Magdalene, and the speaker’s bones will suggest “something else.” After they have become relics, they will be credited with miracles performed during their lives, and people of the later period will want to know what miracles they performed. At the stanza’s close, the speaker promises to explain them. The third stanza represents the speaker’s view of the miracles they accomplished, expressed for the enlightenment of a later age. He asserts that they loved well and faithfully but that their love had nothing to do with differences of sex. Their constant love was instead entirely chaste, subdued, and so mysterious that they themselves did not understand it. At the conclusion, however, another abrupt shift in thought occurs, changing the poem into a compliment. The speaker asserts that he would surpass all language if he told “what a miracle she was.”

John Donne "Elegy 16: On His Mistress"

Elegies do not have to be only funeral poems: in ancient Rome "elegy" meant a poem written in a specific kind of metre, which could be about death as well as about love. For instance Ovid's *Amores* are elegies. Donne dropped the metre requirement which would not have worked out in English and imitated Ovid in writing love elegies. Even though we've been taught for the last five decades or more to avoid biographical readings, I cannot help but read the poem through what we know about Donne's troubled courtship of his future wife. The lovers depicted in the poem apparently have to keep their love a secret and they are in fear of the wrath of the lady's father. Now the speaker has to go abroad and the lady has apparently formed a wild notion to accompany him dressed up as a boy page. (Some ladies apparently did attempt it.) The whole poem is the speaker's attempt to talk her out of it.

The poem begins with a series of imploring requests, recalling all the troubled circumstances of their courtship: the necessity to hold back their love, spies and rivals, "thy father's wrath" and so on. Now the poet uses all them to swear by them in order to ask his mistress not to do something that dangerous. She should stay back and remember him, and if she should die before he comes back, her soul is going to call his soul and he is going to die too. Her beauty is not mighty enough to calm the raging seas and she should remember the fate of Orithyia, whom Boreas, the god of north wind loved and inadvertently killed. (I don't think it's the most popular version of the myth.) Moreover, she should not dissemble anything, even with good intentions. Then Donne indulges in some national stereotyping, warning his lover that the notoriously amorous Frenchmen will recognize her as a woman and "know her" in the biblical sense, while the homosexual Italians will want to pursue her as boy. He does not specify what the Dutchmen will do to her except for calling them "spongy, hydroptic", i.e. drinking all the time, so maybe his point is just that they are not pleasant to be with and she's better off at home. England is the only gallery worth of her, through which she can walk until she is called to be presented at court. In the meantime, she still should hide her love, and especially don't frighten her nurse with her nightmares about her lover being killed and dead. Instead she should foresee for him a better fate, unless God thinks having been loved by her was enough happiness for him.

Batter my Heart Three Pardoned God.

The speaker asks the "three-personed God" to "batter" his heart, for as yet God only knocks politely, breathes, shines, and seeks to mend. The speaker says that to rise and stand, he needs God to overthrow him and bend his force to break, blow, and

burn him, and to make him new. Like a town that has been captured by the enemy, which seeks unsuccessfully to admit the army of its allies and friends, the speaker works to admit God into his heart, but Reason, like God's viceroy, has been captured by the enemy and proves "weak or untrue." Yet the speaker says that he loves God dearly and wants to be loved in return, but he is like a maiden who is betrothed to God's enemy. The speaker asks God to "divorce, untie, or break that knot again," to take him prisoner; for until he is God's prisoner, he says, he will never be free, and he will never be chaste until God ravishes him.

Form

This simple sonnet follows an ABBAABBACDDCEE rhyme scheme and is written in a loose iambic pentameter. In its structural division, it is a Petrarchan sonnet rather than a Shakespearean one, with an octet followed by a sestet.

Commentary

This poem is an appeal to God, pleading with Him not for mercy or clemency or benevolent aid but for a violent, almost brutal overmastering; thus, it implores God to perform actions that would usually be considered extremely sinful—from battering the speaker to actually raping him, which, he says in the final line, is the only way he will ever be chaste. The poem's metaphors (the speaker's heart as a captured town, the speaker as a maiden betrothed to God's enemy) work with its extraordinary series of violent and powerful verbs (batter, o'erthrow, bend, break, blow, burn, divorce, untie, break, take, imprison, enthrall, ravish) to create the image of God as an overwhelming, violent conqueror. The bizarre nature of the speaker's plea finds its apotheosis in the paradoxical final couplet, in which the speaker claims that only if God takes him prisoner can he be free, and only if God ravishes him can he be chaste.

As is amply illustrated by the contrast between Donne's religious lyrics and his metaphysical love poems, Donne is a poet deeply divided between religious spirituality and a kind of carnal lust for life. Many of his best poems, including "Batter my heart, three-personed God," mix the discourse of the spiritual and the physical or of the holy and the secular. In this case, the speaker achieves that mix by claiming that he can only overcome sin and achieve spiritual purity if he is forced by God in the most physical, violent, and carnal terms imaginable.

AT THE ROUND EARTH'S IMAGINED CORNER

Donne tells the heavenly angels to fire up Judgment Day. Like the conductor of a symphony, he commands them to blow their trumpets in all parts of the world. The trumpets will awaken the souls of all dead people. The souls will be reunited with their bodies, like it says in the Bible.

Naturally, the collection of all deceased people in the world is going to include both good and bad folks. According to the Christian tradition, on Judgment Day, the good will be separated from the bad, which explains why the speaker wants everyone to wake up.

Then he tells God, essentially, "Wait, I didn't mean I wanted Judgment Day *now*. We've got to let those dead people sleep for a bit." Also, the speaker wants time to mourn for the dead and for his own sins. He worries that if he hasn't repented enough for his sins, he had better do his repenting on earth, before it's too late.

He asks God to teach him how to repent so he can be in the *good* category on Judgment Day. If God would only teach him repentance, the effect would be the same as if God had signed a pardon with his own blood. But here's the twist: according to Christian beliefs, God *already* signed this pardon (metaphorically speaking) when he sent Jesus to earth to shed his blood for humanity's sins.

The English writer and Anglican cleric John Donne is considered now to be the preeminent metaphysical poet of his time. He was born in 1572 to Roman Catholic parents, when practicing that religion was illegal in England. His work is distinguished by its

emotional and sonic intensity and its capacity to plumb the paradoxes of faith, human and divine love, and the possibility of salvation. Donne often employs conceits, or extended metaphors, to yoke together "heterogenous ideas," in the words of Samuel Johnson, thus generating the powerful ambiguity for which his work is famous. After a resurgence in his popularity in the early 20th century, Donne's standing as a great English poet, and one of the greatest writers of English prose, is now assured.

The history of Donne's reputation is the most remarkable of any major writer in English; no other body of great poetry has fallen so far from favor for so long. In Donne's own day his poetry was highly prized among the small circle of his admirers, who read it as it was circulated in manuscript, and in his later years he gained wide fame as a preacher. For some 30 years after his death successive editions of his verse stamped his powerful influence upon English poets. During the Restoration his writing went out of fashion and remained so for several centuries. Throughout the 18th century, and for much of the 19th century, he was little read and scarcely appreciated. It was not until the end of the 1800s that Donne's poetry was eagerly taken up by a growing band of avant-garde readers and writers. His prose remained largely unnoticed until 1919.

In the first two decades of the 20th century Donne's poetry was decisively rehabilitated. Its extraordinary appeal to modern readers throws light on the Modernist movement, as well as on our intuitive response to our own times. Donne may no longer be the cult figure he became in the 1920s and 1930s, when T.S. Eliot and William Butler Yeats, among others, discovered in his poetry the peculiar fusion of intellect and passion and the alert contemporariness which they aspired to in their own art. He is not a poet for all tastes and times; yet for many readers Donne remains what Ben Jonson judged him: "the first poet in the world in some things." His poems continue to engage the attention and challenge the experience of readers who come to him afresh. His high place in the pantheon of the English poets now seems secure.
Donne's love poetry was written nearly 400 years ago; yet one reason for its appeal is that it speaks to us as directly and urgently

as if we overhear a present confidence. For instance, a lover who is about to board ship for a long voyage turns back to share a last intimacy with his mistress: “Here take my picture” (Elegy V). Two lovers who have turned their backs upon a threatening world in “The Good Morrow“ celebrate their discovery of a new world in each other:

> Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
> Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown,
> Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

The poetry inhabits an exhilaratingly unpredictable world in which wariness and quick wits are at a premium. The more perilous the encounters of clandestine lovers, the greater zest they have for their pleasures, whether they seek to outwit the disapproving world, or a jealous husband, or a forbidding and deeply suspicious father, as in *Elegy 4*, “The Perfume”:

> Though he had wont to search with glazed eyes,
> As though he came to kill a cockatrice,
> Though he have oft sworn, that he would remove
> Thy beauty’s beauty, and food of our love,
> Hope of his goods, if I with thee were seen,
> Yet close and secret, as our souls, we have been.

Exploiting and being exploited are taken as conditions of nature, which we share on equal terms with the beasts of the jungle and the ocean. In “Metempsychosis” a whale and a holder of great office behave in precisely the same way:

> He hunts not fish, but as an officer,
> Stays in his court, as his own net, and there
> All suitors of all sorts themselves enthral;
> So on his back lies this whale wantoning,
> And in his gulf-like throat, sucks everything
> That passeth near.

Donne characterizes our natural life in the world as a condition of flux and momentariness, which we may nonetheless turn to our advantage.” The tension of the poetry comes from the pull of divergent impulses in the argument itself. In “A Valediction: Of my

Name in the Window," the lover's name scratched in his mistress's window ought to serve as a talisman to keep her chaste; but then, as he explains to her, it may instead be an unwilling witness to her infidelity:

> When thy inconsiderate hand
> Flings ope this casement, with my trembling name,
> To look on one, whose wit or land,
> New battery to thy heart may frame,
> Then think this name alive, and that thou thus
> In it offend'st my Genius.

Donne's love poetry expresses a variety of amorous experiences that are often startlingly unlike each other, or even contradictory in their implications. In "The Anniversary" he is not just being inconsistent when he moves from a justification of frequent changes of partners to celebrate a mutual attachment that is simply not subject to time, alteration, appetite, or the sheer pull of other worldly enticements. Some of Donne's finest love poems, such as "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," prescribe the condition of a mutual attachment that time and distance cannot diminish:

> Dull sublunary lovers' love
> (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
> Absence, because it doth remove
> Those things which elemented it.
>
> But we by a love, so much refined,
> That our selves know not what it is,
> Inter-assured of the mind,
> Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Donne finds some striking images to define this state in which two people remain wholly one while they are separated. Their souls are not divided but expanded by the distance between them, "Like gold to airy thinness beat"; or they move in response to each other as the legs of twin compasses, whose fixed foot keeps the moving foot steadfast in its path:

Such wilt thou be to me, who must
Like th' other foot obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begun.
A supple argument unfolds with lyric grace.

The poems editors group together were not necessarily produced thus. Donne did not write for publication. Fewer than eight complete poems were published during his lifetime, and only two of these publications were authorized by him. The poems he released were passed around in manuscript and transcribed by his admirers singly or in gatherings. Some of these copies have survived. When the first printed edition of his poems was published in 1633, two years after his death, the haphazard arrangement of the poems gave no clue to the order of their composition. Many modern editions of the poetry impose categorical divisions that are unlikely to correspond to the order of writing, separating the love poetry from the satires and the religious poetry, the verse letters from the epithalamiums and funeral poems. No more than a handful of Donne's poems can be dated with certainty.

The *Elegies* and *Satires* are likely to have been written in the early 1590s. "Metempsychosis" is dated August 16, 1601. The two memorial *Anniversaries* for the death of Elizabeth Drury were certainly written in 1611 and 1612; and the funeral elegy on Prince Henry must have been written in 1612. The *Songs and Sonnets* were evidently not conceived as a single body of love verses and do not appear so in early manuscript collections. Donne may well have composed them at intervals and in unlike situations over some 20 years of his poetic career. Some of them may even have overlapped with his best-known religious poems, which are likely to have been written about 1609, before he took holy orders.

Poems so vividly individuated invite attention to the circumstances that shaped them. Yet we have no warrant to read Donne's poetry as a precise record of his life. Donne's career and personality are nonetheless arresting in themselves, and they cannot be kept wholly separate from the general thrust of his writing, for which they at least provide a living context. Donne was born in London between January 24 and June 19, 1572 into the precarious world of English recusant Catholicism, whose perils his family well knew. His father,

John Donne, was a Welsh ironmonger. His mother, Elizabeth (Heywood) Donne, a lifelong Catholic, was the great-niece of the martyred Sir Thomas More. His uncle Jasper Heywood headed an underground Jesuit mission in England and, when he was caught, was imprisoned and then exiled; Donne's younger brother, Henry, died from the plague in 1593 while being held in Newgate Prison for harboring a seminary priest. Yet at some time in his young manhood Donne himself converted to Anglicanism and never went back on that reasoned decision.

Donne's father died in January 1576, when young John was only four, and within six months Elizabeth Donne had married John Syminges, an Oxford-educated physician with a practice in London. In October 1584 Donne entered Hart Hall, Oxford, where he remained for about three years. Though no records of his attendance at Cambridge are extant, he may have gone on to study there as well and may have accompanied his uncle Jasper Heywood on a trip to Paris and Antwerp during this time. It is known that he entered Lincoln's Inn in May 1592, after at least a year of preliminary study at Thavies Inn, and was at least nominally a student of English law for two or more years. After sailing as a gentleman adventurer with the English expeditions to Cadiz and the Azores in 1596 and 1597, he entered the service of Sir Thomas Egerton, the lord keeper of England. As Egerton's highly valued secretary he developed the keen interest in statecraft and foreign affairs that he retained throughout his life.

His place in the Egerton household also brought him into acquaintance with Egerton's domestic circle. Egerton's brother-in-law was Sir George More, parliamentary representative for Surrey. More came up to London for an autumn sitting of Parliament in 1601, bringing with him his daughter Ann, then 17. Ann More and Donne may well have met and fallen in love during some earlier visit to the Egerton household; they were clandestinely married in December 1601 in a ceremony arranged with the help of a small group of Donne's friends. Some months elapsed before Donne dared to break the news to the girl's father, by letter, provoking a violent response. Donne and his helpful friends were briefly

imprisoned, and More set out to get the marriage annulled, demanding that Egerton dismiss his amorous secretary.

The marriage was eventually upheld; indeed, More became reconciled to it and to his son-in-law, but Donne lost his job in 1602 and did not find regular employment again until he took holy orders more than 12 years later. Throughout his middle years he and his wife brought up an ever-increasing family with the aid of relatives, friends, and patrons, and on the uncertain income he could bring in by polemical hackwork and the like. His anxious attempts to gain secular employment in the queen's household in Ireland, or with the Virginia Company, all came to nothing, and he seized the opportunity to accompany Sir Robert Drury on a diplomatic mission in France in 1612. From these frustrated years came most of the verse letters, funeral poems, epithalamiums, and holy sonnets, as well as the prose treatises *Biathanatos* (1647), *Pseudo-Martyr,* (1610), and *Ignatius his Conclave* (1611).
In the writing of Donne's middle years, skepticism darkened into a foreboding of imminent ruin. Such poems as the two memorial *Anniversaries* and "To the Countess of Salisbury" register an accelerating decline of our nature and condition in a cosmos that is itself disintegrating. In "The First Anniversary" the poet declares, "mankind decays so soon, / We are scarce our fathers' shadows cast at noon." Yet Donne is not counseling despair here. On the contrary, the *Anniversaries* offer a sure way out of spiritual dilemma: "thou hast but one way, not to admit / The world's infection, to be none of it" ("The First Anniversary"). Moreover, the poems propose that a countering force is at work that resists the world's frantic rush toward its own ruin. Such amendment of corruption is the true purpose of our worldly being: "our business is, to rectify / Nature, to what she was" ("To Sir Edward Herbert, at Juliers"). But in the present state of the world, and ourselves, the task becomes heroic and calls for a singular resolution.
The verse letters and funeral poems celebrate those qualities of their subjects that stand against the general lapse toward chaos: "Be more than man, or thou'art less than an ant" ("The First Anniversary").

These poems of Donne's middle years are less frequently read than the rest of his work, and they have struck readers as perversely

obscure and odd. The poems flaunt their creator's unconcern with decorum to the point of shocking their readers. In his funeral poems Donne harps on decay and maggots, even venturing satiric asides as he contemplates bodily corruption: "Think thee a prince, who of themselves create / Worms which insensibly devour their state" ("The Second Anniversary"). He shows by the analogy of a beheaded man how it is that our dead world still appears to have life and movement ("The Second Anniversary"); he compares the soul in the newborn infant body with a "stubborn sullen anchorite" who sits "fixed to a pillar, or a grave / ... / Bedded, and bathed in all his ordures" ("The Second Anniversary"); he develops in curious detail the conceit that virtuous men are clocks and that the late John Harrington, second Lord of Exton, was a public clock ("Obsequies to the Lord Harrington"). Such unsettling idiosyncrasy is too persistent to be merely wanton or sensational. It subverts our conventional proprieties in the interest of a radical order of truth.

Donne's reluctance to become a priest, as he was several times urged to do, does not argue a lack of faith. The religious poems he wrote years before he took orders dramatically suggest that his doubts concerned his own unworthiness, his sense that he could not possibly merit God's grace, as seen in these lines from *Divine Meditations 4*:

> Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lack;
> But who shall give thee that grace to begin?
> Oh make thyself with holy mourning black,
> And red with blushing, as thou art with sin.

These *Divine Meditations*, or *Holy Sonnets*, make a universal drama of religious life, in which every moment may confront us with the final annulment of time: "What if this present were the world's last night?" (*Divine Meditations 13*). In *Divine Meditations 10* the prospect of a present entry upon eternity also calls for a showdown with ourselves and with the exemplary events that bring time and the timeless together in one order:

> Mark in my heart, O soul, where thou dost dwell,
> The picture of Christ crucified, and tell
> Whether that countenance can thee affright.

The *Divine Meditations* make self-recognition a necessary means to grace. They dramatize the spiritual dilemma of errant creatures who need God's grace in order that they may deserve it; for we must fall into sin and merit death even though our redemption is at hand; yet we cannot even begin to repent without grace. The poems open the sinner to God, imploring God's forceful intervention by the sinner's willing acknowledgment of the need for a drastic onslaught upon his present hardened state, as in *Divine Meditations 14*:

> Batter my heart, three-personed God; for, you
> As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
> That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
> Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.

The force of the petition measures the dire extremity of his struggle with himself and with God's adversary. Donne pleads with God that he too has an interest in this contention for the sinner's soul: "Lest the world, flesh, yea Devil put thee out" (*Divine Meditations 17*). The drama brings home to the poet the enormity of his ingratitude to his Redeemer, confronting him bodily with the irony of Christ's self-humiliation for us. In *Divine Meditations 11* Donne wonders why the sinner should not suffer Christ's injuries in his own person:

> Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side,
> Buffet, and scoff, scourge, and crucify me,
> For I have sinned, and sinned, and only he,
> Who could do no iniquity, hath died.

Donne's religious poems turn upon a paradox that is central to the hope for eternal life: Christ's sacrificing himself to save mankind. God's regimen is paradoxical, and in *Divine Meditations 13* Donne sees no impropriety in entreating Christ with the casuistry he had used on his "profane mistreses" when he assured them that only the ugly lack compassion:

> so I say to thee,
> To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assigned,
> This beauteous form assures a piteous mind.

In *Divine Meditations 18* he resolves his search for the true Church in a still bolder sexual paradox, petitioning Christ as a "kind husband" to betray his spouse to our view so that the poet's

amorous soul may “court thy mild dove”: “Who is most true, and pleasing to thee, then / When she is embraced and open to most men.” The apparent indecorum of making the true Church a whore and Christ her complaisant husband at least startles us into recognizing Christ’s own catholicity. The paradox brings out a truth about Christ’s Church that may well be shocking to those who uphold a sectarian exclusiveness.

Wit becomes the means by which the poet discovers the working of Providence in the casual traffic of the world. A journey westward from one friend’s house to another over Easter 1613 brings home to Donne the general aberration of nature that prompts us to put pleasure before our due devotion to Christ. We ought to be heading east at Easter so as to contemplate and share Christ’s suffering; and in summoning up that event to his mind’s eye, he recognizes the shocking paradox of the ignominious death of God upon a Cross: “Could I behold those hands, which span the poles, / And turn all spheres at once, pierced with those holes?” (“Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward”). An image of Christ’s degradation is directly imposed upon an image of God’s omnipotence. We see that the event itself has a double force, being at once the catastrophic consequence of our sin and the ultimate assurance of God’s saving love. The poet’s very journey west may be providential if it brings him to a penitent recognition of his present unworthiness to gaze directly upon Christ:

> O Saviour, as thou hang’st upon the tree;
> I turn my back to thee, but to receive
> Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
> O think me worth thine anger, punish me,
> Burn off my rusts, and my deformity,
> Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace,
> That thou mayest know me, and I’ll turn my face.

A serious illness that Donne suffered in 1623 produced a still more startling poetic effect. In “Hymn to God, my God, in my Sickness” the poet presents his recumbent body as a flat map over which the doctors pore like navigators to discover some passage through present dangers to tranquil waters; and he ponders his own destination as if he himself is a vessel that may reach the desirable places of the world only by negotiating some painful straits:

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are
The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar,
All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them.

By this self-questioning he brings himself to understand that his suffering may itself be a blessing, since he shares the condition of a world in which our ultimate bliss must be won through well-endured hardship. The physical symptoms of his illness become the signs of his salvation: “So, in his purple wrapped receive me Lord, / By these his thorns give me his other crown.” The images that make him one with Christ in his suffering transform those pangs into reassurance.

In Donne’s poetry, language may catch the presence of God in our human dealings. The pun on the poet’s name in ““ registers the distance that the poet’s sins have put between himself and God, with new kinds of sin pressing forward as fast as God forgives those already confessed: “When thou hast done, thou hast not done, / For, I have more.” Then the puns on “sun” and “Donne” resolve these sinful anxieties themselves:

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
But swear by thy self, that at my death thy son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, thou hast done,
I fear no more.

For this poet such coincidences of words and ideas are not mere accidents to be juggled with in jest. They mark precisely the working of Providence within the order of nature.

The transformation of Jack Donne the rake into the Reverend Dr. Donne, dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral, no longer seems bizarre. To impose such clear-cut categories upon a man’s career may be to take too rigid a view of human nature. That the poet of the *Elegies* and *Songs and Sonnets* is also the author of the *Devotions* and the sermons need not indicate some profound

spiritual upheaval. One reason for the appeal of Donne in modern times is that he confronts us with the complexity of our own natures.
Donne took holy orders in January 1615, having been persuaded by King James himself of his fitness for a ministry "to which he was, and appeared, very unwilling, apprehending it (such was his mistaking modesty) to be too weighty for his abilities." So writes his first biographer, Izaak Walton, who had known him well and often heard him preach. Once committed to the Church, Donne devoted himself to it totally, and his life thereafter becomes a record of incumbencies held and sermons preached.

Donne's wife died in childbirth in 1617. He was elected dean of St. Paul's in November 1621, and he became the most celebrated cleric of his age, preaching frequently before the king at court as well as at St. Paul's and other churches. 160 of his sermons have survived. The few religious poems he wrote after he became a priest show no falling off in imaginative power, yet the calling of his later years committed him to prose, and the artistry of his *Devotions* and sermons at least matches the artistry of his poems.
The publication in 1919 of *Donne's Sermons: Selected Passages*, edited by Logan Pearsall Smith, came as a revelation to its readers, not least those who had little taste for sermons. John Bailey, writing in the *Quarterly Review* (April 1920), found in these extracts "the very genius of oratory ... a masterpiece of English prose." Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, in *Studies in Literature* (1920), judged the sermons to include "the most magnificent prose ever uttered from an English pulpit, if not the most magnificent prose ever spoken in our tongue."
Over a literary career of some 40 years Donne moved from skeptical naturalism to a conviction of the shaping presence of the divine spirit in the natural creation. Yet his mature understanding did not contradict his earlier vision. He simply came to anticipate a Providential disposition in the restless whirl of the world. The amorous adventurer nurtured the dean of St. Paul's.