CHAPTER FOUR

John Donne

Treatment of Love, Time and Mutability in his Poetry

Why love among the vertues is not knowne
Is, that love is them all contract in one.

John Donne 'To the Countesse of Huntington'

It may be true that the famous essay on the Metaphysical Poets by T.S. Eliot (1921) and H.J.C. Grierson's edition of Donne (1912) have been responsible for a new enthusiasm over his poetry which had been censored too rashly by Dr Johnson. Yet another inducement can well be a certain affinity felt by our century with Donne and his poetry. Such a view is advanced by Gary Waller:

For many twentieth-century liberals his poetry perhaps articulated some of their own aspirations: Donne was born into a persecuted minority, was a bold experimenter, a man who dared to face the emotional consequences of the 'new philosophy', and who explored in his poetry a refreshingly direct sexuality . . .
The personality of Donne's poems, the 'I' whose experience makes up the world of these poems, speaks no less directly than the Poet of Shakespeare's Sonnets. Perhaps more than Shakespeare, Donne has expressed, and not unlike Matthew Arnold -

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,  
The other powerless to be born -

the spirit of the age, the strain of the withdrawing old world and its emotional stability, as well as a tremulous fear of the yet unfathomed new cosmos staring at him with a mindless impersonal gaze.

And new Philosophy calls all in doubt,  
The Element of Fire is quite put out;  
The Sun is lost, and th'earth, and no mans wit  
Can well direct him where to, looke for it.

(The first Anniversary)

There is sufficient reference in his poems to lead some critics off course in presenting Donne's attitude to the two worlds, namely the Ptolemaic world of ordered correspondences and the Copernican discovery of an open universe. It is true that Donne reacts significantly to the powerful current of ideas and shifts in philosophical speculations his age witnesses, and in a way which may be seen as a protest and a disillusioned cynicism. Yet it should not be mistaken that Donne was revolted less by the 'decaying' old world
than he was by the nature of decay which attends on mortality, and that the apprehension of the universal tendency to decay and annihilation was exacerbated — or thrown into kaleidoscopic relief — by the revolutionary world of ideas surrounding him. But it would not be consonant with any of his works, much less *The first Anniversary*, to suggest as Williamson has done, a Donne "suspended between two worlds, the old world of Decay and the new world of Progress". The fact that the 'new Philosophy' has made the old Philosophy irrelevant is not the theme of Donne’s complaint. Rather it is the breaking apart of a harmonious universe of the Elizabethan world picture by the new scientific speculations which has not then produced the correspondent unification of thought and feelings as the 'old' had done which rendered the poet's world so vulnerable to disillusion and cynicism. If the question were asked which world Donne belongs to, the likely answer is that he belongs to the old one, for that is where his sensibility is more at home, if T.S. Eliot's 'dissociation of sensibility' must be seen in the later poets.

That it was a losing battle against the 'new Philosophy' is evident in the conscious bravado of *The Sunne Rising*, where the newly enthroned usurper of the universe is made the butt of the poet's (and the lover's) sullen impatience.
The bitterness of feelings wrecked against the 'unruly' Sun seems to erupt from a deeper sense of displeasure than mere annoyance at being prevented from having love's pleasure indefinitely. Lines such as,

Must to thy motions lovers seasons run? (4)

Thou sunn art halfe as happy'as wee,
In that the world's contracted thus; (25,26)

Thine age askes ease, and since thy duties bee To warme the world, that's done in warming us. (27,28)

This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy spheare. (30)

in addition to an unwilling admission of the power of the sun to invade their microcosm, also slyly convey a petulant desire to hit back, to belittle a recognised champion, a stubborn refusal to be a passive hostage, and a chauvinistic assertion of man's indomitable spirit. Man has lost his place as the centre of the 'spheares', and with it all correspondence is gone too.

Then, as mankinde, so is the worlds whole frame
Quite out of joynt. (The first Anniversary)

Murray Roston's assertion is still stronger. To him,
The Sunne Rising
constitutes a challenge to the New Philosophy itself, provocatively reaffirming in the face of all contrary scientific evidence the preeminence of man in the cosmic pattern, and the impregnability of his inner experience... the challenge emerges not as a mere braggadocio but as a reassertion of man's centrality in the universe, and above all of the inevitability of his inner being.

And Prof Sukanta Chaudhuri draws a humanistic conclusion:

In the midst of a dissolving world-order, the accompanying fragmentation of knowledge, and the grossness, corruption and debility of man's estate, Donne asserts human power and dignity.

Wherever such beautiful hero-making assertions may lead, there is always the danger of overstating the fact: the fact of the poet's purpose, which usually is the expression of an experience. And in Donne's case this is more interestingly demonstrated in the light of T.S.Eliot's observation that Donne's sensibility was the sum of the fusion of his thought and feelings.

The fact that Donne was concerned, not with the battle of ideas of his time, but with the effect of such environment upon his sensibilities, had been observed in the last century by Arthur Symons. He said that Donne was sincere to himself in expressing what he really felt under the burden of strong emotion and sharp sensation... Donne is intent on the passion itself, the thought, the reality.
Indeed, the metaphysical Poets are identified, not so much by the way they employ intellectual conceits as by the way they feed real experience and thought to their intellectual mill. Theirs is not the idealist's sensations of a far-flung contemplation of a something just beyond the reach of mortality; they do not create a new world of poetry where the fancy may forget present pain. But theirs is the constantly self-conscious analytical vivisection of experience and attitudes which make the reading of their poems, especially those concerning sexual relationship, disquieting for the prudish. In fact, no one who has not achieved the fusion of mind and emotion, he who is incapable of coordinating thought and feelings, ideas and life, will never understand Donne. The medieval concept of the body as more susceptible to evil than the spirit is totally alien to Donne's metaphysics. Just as in Keats we find the idea of Beauty and the sensations of concrete experience amalgamated to form a unified sensibility, so do we find Donne unifying gross flesh and ethereal essence.

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

(The Extasie)

The degree of oneness experienced by the poet and his beloved
transcends time and place, as well as individuality, which in itself is significant in the light of increasing individualism and self-centredness in congruence with the 'new Philosophy'. *A Valediction: forbidding mourning*, in that context, becomes particularly more poignant than if it had been a song of farewell:

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 layetie our love.

The simile of the conceit using the body and the soul as illustration of the lovers' union corresponds perfectly to that of the compass which are two yet one:

Our two soules therefore, which are one,  
Though I must goe, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate.

If they be two, they are two so  
As stiffe twin compasses are two,  
Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if the'other doe.

And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth rome,
It leans, and hearkens after it, 
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Herein is the key to the canon of Donne's love poetry: namely, the sincere affirmation and demonstration of love and its power to unify the disparate experiences of body and mind. The concept of man's dual entity, which in the traditional Pauline sense assumes unity only after the body has been transformed into a finer essence, appears to be more at ease in Donne. Here the body and the spirit are not warring forces, but the two sides of a coin. And the question of eschatology does not arise in the poems dealing with love of woman wherein love is impossible without the body to make it an experience:

Love must not be, but take a body too.

(Aire and Angels)

Grierson sees "the suggestion of a new philosophy of love", which is less dualistic and ascetic than the Dantesque or Petrarchan concepts, in the poetry of Donne which is more fully informed by the poet's fullness of experience as a lover. C.S. Lewis thinks of Donne as writing under the uncomfortable weight of the medieval sense of guilt about the sexual encounter. These two apparently contrary views may combine to throw light on the nature of Donne's love poetry. For either of these finds equal voice in the poems. The Canonization is particularly rich in such combination
or fusion of apparently contrary images, called paradox:

Call us what you will, we are made such by love;  
Call her one, me another flye,  
We'are Tapers too, and at our owne cost die,  
And wee in us finde the Eagle and the Dove.  
The Phoenix ridle hath more wit  
By us, we two being one, are it.  
So to one neutrall thing both sexes fit,  
Wee dye and rise the same, and prove Mysterious by this love.

The language Donne uses, by its brevity and directness, helps to give his expressions a certain lightness which can be mistaken for lightness and banter - a rakish lack of seriousness about the experience to make less serious readers believe that Donne is indulging in sexual abandon, that he takes love for fun. But Donne is quite serious about love, about religion also, as Brooks has pointed out. Implied in Brooks' essay on this poem is that Donne cannot be more serious about the metaphor of the Phoenix and death and rebirth.

Unlike Petrarch and a number of other poets writing on love, "Donne never lets us forget the world outside the poem." In fact, "the poem emerges as a speech out of the middle of a moving action, modified by its surroundings and referring spontaneously to them." He knew very well the price he had to pay in terms of secular success as well
as the danger to himself in pursuing the course of love. Indeed, the poem last quoted, perhaps more than any other poem, echoes with biographical spontaneity of feelings. His affair with Ann More and their subsequent deprivation by her irate father and his employer could well have triggered the staccato of fires in the first two stanzas. The quick salvoes of impatience and indignation effectively hammer in his determination to love against all odds:

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

Alas, alas, who's injur'd by my love?
   What merchants ships have my sighs drown'd?
Who saies my teares have overflow'd his ground?
   When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veines fill
   Adde one more to the plaguie Bill?
Soldiers finde warres, and Lawyers finde out still
   Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.

Brooks' lucid exposition of the poem sufficiently states
the conflict between the 'real' world and the lovers' exclusive world of love. Others more materialistic in their attitude to love may scorn his impractical seriousness in love beyond the call of nature and convention. Later in life he himself looked back upon his "prophane love" with a holy fear, as in the Holy Sonnet XIX:

Oh, to vex me, contrarys meet in one:  
Inconstancy unnaturally hath begott  
A constant habit; that when I would not  
I change in vowes, and in devotione.  
As humorous is my contritione  
As my prophane love, and as soone forgott:  
As ridlingly distemper'd, cold and hott,  
As praying, as mute; as infinite, as none.  
I durst not view heaven yesterday; and to day  
In prayers, and flattering speaches I court God:  
To morrow I quake with true feare of his rod.  
So my devout fitts come and go away  
Like a fantastique Ague: save that here  
Those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare.

Evidently Donne swings like a pendulum from one extreme of unifying the spirit and the flesh in the act of love to the other extreme of downright loathing and cynicism. Here Williamson may be right to say of Donne:

But in all his contrarieties of mind he still wanted to make the most of both worlds.\(^{13}\)

The two worlds refer to the old one of harmonious correspondences and the new one of dissociative individualism.
It is only the amazing range of Donne's introspection of his experience (remembering, of course, that to Donne 'thought' amounts to 'experience') which accounts for the apparently incompatible expressions of attitudes in love. Else it is difficult to believe that the poet of The Good-Morrow and Song: Goe and catche a falling starre is the same person. We may consider such lines as the following against others of contrary sympathy in order to appreciate the full implication of the pressure Donne was put upon:

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

(The Anniversarie)

O how feeble is mans power,
   That if good fortune fall,
Cannot adde another houre,
   Nor a lost houre recall!

(Song: Sweetest love)

In Lovers infiniteness the poet tells his 'Deare' to ration out love to him so that he will have infinite love in reserve:

Yet I would not have all yet,
Hee that hath all can have no more,
And since my love doth every day admit
New growth, thou shouldst have new rewards in store.
But Love is not found in the possession of the beloved:

Donne seems to confess in *Loves Alchymie*:

> Some that have deeper digg'd loves Myne then I,
> Say, where his centrique happinesse doth lie:
> I have lov'd, and got, and told,
> But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,
> I should not finde that hidden mysterie;
> Oh, 'tis imposture all.

The deflation of expectation reminds us of Shakespeare's Sonnet 129:

> So, lovers dreame a rich and long delight,
> But get a winter-seeming summers night.

Joan Bennet categorically diagnosed the disparity, saying,

Donne's poetry is not about the difference between marriage and adultery, but about the difference between love and lust.\(^\text{14}\)

And that is where she seems to miss the mark in her attempt to discredit C.S. Lewis's view of Donne as unable to "get rid of a medieval sense of the sinfulness of sexuality for long". Her essay written as 'A Reply to Mr. C.S. Lewis' masterfully shows that Donne has elevated the sexual act to the level of pre-lapsarian innocence, but only so long as the "mysterie" of spirit-flesh unity is maintained. And the condition governing the possibility of the necessary transmutation is not easy to maintain. Lewis does not deny that Donne can get rid of the sense of guilt in the pre-marital or ex-marital sex as long as the power of his love can sus-
tain it; but he denies that he can do it forever. And this is what frustrates the poet-lover: that love is dependent on sense and feelings which are punctuated by time, and thereby suffer change and death, "because love dies too". 15

J.E.V.Crofts studies Donne against the backdrop of London in which the pageant of the aging Gloriana was paling under the light of an intellectual dawn, and her surviving knights and seneschals were revealed as a group of tired and pouchy-faced old men standing about the throne of a dreadfully painted old woman. 16

His presentation of Donne as an angry poet of disillusionment hardly leaves anything to say of the lover whose beloved redeems all women, and whose element is the world's essence:

Oh doe not die, for I shall hate
All women so, when thou art gone,
That thee I shall not celebrate,
When I remember, thou wast one.

But yet thou canst not die, I know;
To leave this world behinde, is death,
But when thou from this world wilt goe,
The whole world vapors with thy breath.

But all this time the poet never forgets that his mind is playing with a dream, that disease and death cannot be stayed even by the most exalted love:

Yet t'was of my minde, seising thee:
Though it in thee cannot persever.
For I had rather owner bee
Of thee one houre, then all else ever.

(A Fever)

Crofts is dealing with the opposite swing of the pendulum when he writes,

Love, when it comes, is not an experience which re-illuminates his life and wipes away the trivial, fond records of youthful apostasy. What we see is not the new man, the lover transfigured, but the coxcomb defeated: the man who in spite of all his cynical profession has gone and fallen in love after all. It is not love that inspires him so much as exasperation at feeling love.  

It is difficult to share the view that Donne, after all, rejects love both intellectually and passionately out of sheer cynicism, only to find himself no match for the power of love.

The problem, as Brooks has pointed out in The Well-Wrought Urn, appears to be the nature of the unity of lovers. To Donne mere Platonic love, however mysterious, is incomprehensible without the bodies sealing the union.

We then, who are this new soule, know,
Of what we are compos'd, and made,
For, th'Atomies of which we grow,
Are soules, whom no change can invade.
But O alas, so long, so farre
Our bodies why doe wee forbeare?
To our bodies turne wee then, that so
Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
But yet the body is his booke.

(The Extasie)

This sense of unity can be carried to such a pitch that
individuality dissolves into a new being which is neither
the he nor the she, but each is the other's self. So in
the tender Song: Sweetest Love, I do not goe:

When thou sigh'rst, thou sigh'rst not winde,
But sigh'rst my soule away,
When thou weep'rst, unkindly kinde,
My lifes blood doth decay.

It cannot bee
That thou lov'st mee, as thou say'rst,
If in thine my life thou waste,
Thou art the best of me.

In their oneness the lovers build 'a world of their own',
sustained by the equality of their love. Shakespeare has
witnessed this union in The Phoenix and the Turtle:

So they lov'd as love in twain
Had the essence but in one;
Two distincts, division none:
Number there in love was slain.

But Donne knew that such "extasie' in love must be condi-
tional. Thus in The good-morrow:
What ever dyes, was not mixt equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can
die.

The amatory pun on the word 'die' here assumes primary
meaning; for Donne is not talking about the death of the
body, but of the death of love with the consummation of
sex. The heaven of such love as depends on sexual orgasm
as its end inevitably crumbles to become its grave. This
is what C.S. Lewis talks about, and Miss Bennet too; that
Donne is troubled by the conflict of love and lust.

The paradox of love, therefore, is that love must be
felt along the nerves, but the experience of love in
flesh results in an uncertain memory (for the mind can
hardly recreate sensory experience), leaving

A kinde of sorrowing dullnesse to the minde.

Easily, too soon, love becomes slave to the senses, de­
pending on the sensual rapture of sex for its embodiment,
only to be deluded of lasting satisfaction.

Ah cannot wee,
As well as Cocks and Lyons jocund be,
After such pleasures? (Farewell to love)

To look for puns on the words 'Cocks' and 'Lyons', however,
may stretch things too far; especially when the sense is
relatively satisfactory in the light of Redpath's reference
to an idea from Galen that only cocks and lions possess priapic virility, unless someone wants to stress the obsessive feeling of guilt after an illicit sexual encounter even before the sweeping flood of pleasure in lovers' bodies clears off.

It becomes a crucial question as to how far Donne succeeds in his poetry in formulating a reliable philosophy of love. Miss Pearson's estimate of Donne as a passionate pilgrim whose sincerity and curiosity succeed in an unflinching revelation of the inadequacy of love to effect a stable unifying experience in the bilateral relationship of man and woman offers a tangible rationale, without admitting defeat. Donne has not given up his search for the elixir which the possession of woman's body does not yield. And in the absence of any systematic dating of his poems except the great dividing line in his life when he, more out of necessity than choice, accepted ordination in the Church of England, the Farewell to love needs not be seen as a parting shot of the fox at the luscious grapes. The entire poem is not about love celebrated in The Anniversarie, The undertaking, and Song: Sweetest love, I do not goe, but about what happens when love abdicates in favour of lust. This is why C.S. Lewis is particularly unhappy about Donne "drawing distinctions between spirit and flesh", seeing that "the more he labours the deeper 'Dun
is in the mire', and ..... The Extasie is a much nastier poem than the nineteenth Elegy". 21 Neither is this an admission of failure to find a satisfying experience in love; for a number of his poems testify that he did achieve a transcendental satisfaction to a degree beyond what 'a shudder in the loins' can possibly explain. As an example, the following couplet,

Wee dye and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love. (The Canonization)

contrasts the happiness of the perfect lovers immediately after having a physical consummation with the hollow experience of lovers who sought love in the physical union:

... ... the thing which lovers so
Blindly admire, and with such worship woze;
Being had, enjoying it decayes;
And thence,
What before pleas'd them all, takes but one sense,
And that so lamely, as it leaves behinde
A kinde of sorrowing dulnesse to the minde.

(Farewell to love)

Evident in such antipathetic poem is the poet's close knowledge of the polarity of experiences, notwithstanding the gentlemanlike portrait of him by Sir Richard Baker as not dissolute, but very neat; a great Visiter of Ladies, a great frequenter of Playes, a great writer of conceited verses," 22
to which H.J.C. Grierson has added colour:

The blood was flowing passionately in his veins. He saw perhaps other sides of life in Italy and Spain than that of the Seminaries. He tasted of the sweets of Italian and Spanish poetry. He awoke to the allurements of pleasure and ambition and came home not at all disposed to become a missionary and a martyr as his brother might almost claim to have been, but more of the Inglese Italianato, not a debauchee like Robert Greene nor a defiant sceptic and enemy of Christianity like Marlowe, but a fashionable, brilliant young law student, avid of pleasure and of worldly advancement....

The picture that emerges of Donne is that of an honest and passionate seeker of a wholesome synthesis of the total experience of love beyond the need of morals and convention to qualify its essence. To that end his love poetry is an experiment in as much as it is a revolt against and a flagrant disregard of convention and sobriety which appear hypocritical to him. Prof. Urmilla Khanna seems to have drawn too sharp a distinction between Shakespeare and Donne in regard to their moral feelings:

Donne delights in the amoral pose that he assumes whereas the tormented lover of the Dark Lady is obsessed with the distinction between purity and corruption, truth and falsehood.

For there are occasions when Donne could well have confessed with Shakespeare's Sonnet 147,
My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which nurseth the disease;
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
Th' uncertain sickly appetite to please.

as in the verse letter To the Countess of Huntington:

Yet since all love is fever, who to trees
Doth talke, doth yet in loves cold ague freeze.
'Tis love, but, with such fatall weaknesse made,
That it destroyes it selfe with its own shade.

He much profanes whom violent heats do move
To stile his wandring rage of passion, Love:
Love that imparts in every thing delight,
Is fain'd, which only tempts mans appetite.

Shakespeare's Platonic ideal suffers lamentable regress
when the poet discovers Cupid's fire too strong in his
mistress's charms, that he must unwillingly rationalize
the erotic impulse in such gross innuendos even Donne
could hardly have written:

Love is too young to know what conscience is;
Yet who know not conscience is born of love?
Then, gentle cheater, urge not my amiss,
Lest guilty of my faults thy sweet self prove.
For thou betraying me, I do betray
My nobler part to my gross body's treason;
My soul doth tell my body that he may
Triumph in love; flesh stays no farther reason,
But, rising at thy name, doth point out thee
As his triumphant prize. Proud of this pride,
He is contented thy poor drudge to be,
To stand in thy affairs, fall by thy side.
No want of conscience hold it that I call
Her 'love' for whose dear love I rise and fall.  (Sonnet 151)

We do not have sufficient evidence to prove Shakespeare's illicit relations with other women. But it is impossible that his wife could be the 'Dark Lady' of his Sonnets, to say which is to admit that there in all probability was a certain female. With Donne we have adequate reason to believe that his erotic fancy had the licence of a happy conjugal relationship which as implied below is jealously patented in a colonial metaphor - in *Going to Bed*:

My kingdom, safest when with one man man'd.

Shakespeare plodded through the painful path of Love before discovering that

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds.  

(Sonnet 116)

And if the love a woman can give through her body were the highest expression of Love, both Shakespeare and Donne concurrently refuse to compromise their ideal of love which they celebrate to the high degree of Petrarchan idolatry.

Thus we should inevitably find Donne sardonic and cynical towards woman as a mere sexual object possessing no other virtues than the exterior beauty which allures men's love. *The Paradox, Loves Alchemie, Farewell to Love,*
Communitie, Song: Goe and catche a falling starre convey sufficiently strongly the disappointment and disillusionment of the poet in the false facade of love assumed by "moving beauties". 'Moving' here means 'which moves an appropriate response in the beholder'. But how easily even the irresistible feeling of being drawn as if by magic or as a moth to the flame, like Duke Orsino's 'appetite', 'sicken and die'!

... the thing which lovers so
Blindly admire, and with such worship wooe;
Being had, enjoying it decayes.

(Farewell to love)

Just as Shakespeare has rung "fancy's knell" in dismissal of courtly love in his Comedies -

Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart or in the head,
How begot, how nourished?
Reply, reply.
It is engend'red in the eyes,
With gazing fed; and fancy dies
In the cradle where it lies.

(The Merchant of Venice, 1.3.63-69)

Donne too bids farewell to love which 'alters' every minute, and whose

... first minute, after noone, is night.

(A Lecture upon the Shadow)
A Lecture upon the Shadow finally relates the progress of love to time by means of the moving shadows lovers make as they walk in the sun. However, the sun and the time it tells are no more than metaphors of the sun of love and the change they embody in the progress of love.

Except our loves at this noone stay,
We shall new shadowes make the other way.

Here it is not so much the sun that intrudes upon lovers' world as it is the sense, the promotion of love's inevitable decay: the fact of love's growth towards its climax being the fact of its decline too.

The morning shadowes weare away,
But these grow longer all the day,
But oh, loves day is short, if love decay.

Just as the hot noon begins the dying of bright day, the heat of love burns up the fuel of love, and

( . . . each such Act, they say,
Diminisheth the length of life a day).

(Farewell to love)

If, as Grierson thinks, the poetry of Donne has attained what he calls 'the true escape from courtly or ascetic idealism' in his treatment of love 'as a passion in which body and soul alike have their part, and of which there is no reason to repent', on the basis of his love for his wife, the only way his poems could be understood is that of Donne.
rejecting the love that is grown all mind and which grows all flesh.

This justification of natural love as fulness of joy and life is the deepest thought in Donne's love-poems, far deeper and sincerer than the Platonic conceptions of the affinity and identity of souls. 26

Grierson, however, observes the possibility that Donne may not have achieved that ideal Platonic 'marriage of true minds' either in life or in his poetry apart from the getting of "pictures in our eyes". A close analysis of poems celebrating the unity of the lovers shows them as testimony to the corporeal basis of communion, while yet quite apart from mere sensuous consciousness. The Ex- tasie has it thus:

Our hands were firmely 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 meanes to make us one,
And pictures in our eyes to get
   Was all our propagation.

In The good-morrow their love, which is so exalted as to be "all pleasures fancies", and which excludes all the worlds besides, needs "one little roome" for "an every where" in which to assemble the two hemispheres of their
eyes in a passionate embrace. What we must infer from these is that the united souls of lovers have no ethereal universe other than what their bodies take for granted. Grierson may not agree with Courthope that Donne has demolished the 'fine Platonic edifice' of idealized love. In his poetry, insisting that Donne has, through the wide range of his experience, come to realize a new philosophy of love which is less dualistic and ascetic than that of Dante; there is, however, little indication in his poems that the transcendental moment of lovers' spiritual union is sustained long enough not to feel the need of tangible experience to authenticate it. A.J. Smith is of this view when, discussing two of Donne's most Platonic poems The Relique and The undertaking, he says, 

there's no hint of transcendence or of ideal forms; if they pose an ideal for lovers it's certainly not a disembodied ideal. Without the moral bias that the word 'sex' has come to earn, A.J. Smith may be understood as saying that Donne conceives of love as a harmonious duality of spirit and flesh when he looks upon Donne as "a poet for whom love is intrinsically sexual." Leo Spitzer, on the other hand, believes that Donne was more intimately convinced of the reality and beauty of the spiritual union than of the necessity
This pro-Platonic view is the corollary of his preference of interpreting the word 'forbeare' as meaning 'endure, to tolerate', in opposition to Legouis' meaning which is 'restrain, control', as well as his equating to 'bodies' the plane of natural existence, and not the act of sex. Yet, this view might gain less support than may the alternative view that whatever degree of extasie the lovers' souls do attain the same has been by virtue of their physical existence, which is the sum total of the argument of The Extasie.

The lovers, mutually attracted to each other by their love, sat on a bank silently, their hands firmly gripping together in a passionate lock. Their searching eyes met, and these too were locked on to each other as if they had been threaded with the beams of their self-seeing sights. Thus bodies were, so to say, united innocently. In such a rapturous moment each had forgotten self in the contemplation of the other in a perfect 'marriage of true minds', while the bodies passively assume statuesque posture. One versed in soul's language and a perfect Platonic lover too (were such a person be and were he present there to overhear the souls conversing) would have learnt new lessons in love for his own edification. And this is what the souls said:

- Their souls' extasie on going out of their bodies, had
revealed to them the true nature of their love. They had had no idea what had moved them to love so purely that sex did not occur to them. Like a violet transplanted, their love, which had suffered deprivation in isolation, had found the secret of their joy's fullness in the interdependence of their two loves whose growth their immortal souls fed—souls that do not undergo change like mortal flesh and blood.—

Had Donne been a Platonist the poem could well have ended here. That it did not, gives occasion to speculate upon the bearing the rest of the poem has on the whole. As for the contested meaning of 'forbear', its bearing on the earlier reference to 'our bodies' seems to suggest a reproof for having so long (i.e. all day) forgotten their bodies. How could they have been so soul-selfishly indulgent as to deprive them of their fair share in love? For they are the planet whose living souls they are; and thus they are obliged to their bodies for their very essence, as souls are begotten by the labours of blood in the subtle knot of pure lovers' souls indwelling their bodies.

The union of lovers must now change its locale, namely, to their bodies, since "prophane men" "will no faith bestow" on such a love which can "forget the He and Shee".

And since only a mystic in love can perceive and appreciate love in the abstract union of souls, love must descend to the body for it to be understood by men of cruder vision.
And when the soul returns to the body, so must love take form in the woman's "moving" body or remain a "Some lovely glorious nothing" incapable of relation or communication.

Having seen and heard the progress of the lovers' souls, the observer is given the assurance that their love would hardly undergo any change (implied—for the worse) by their union in the flesh.

In the light of Donne's more liberal exercise on the incarnate love in his Elegies, Leo Spitzer's distaste for what he calls "Gallic worldly wisdom" in Legouis' reading of the poem as a seductive invitation\(^\text{31}\) looks more like a moral predilection than an analytical conviction. It may not be possible to locate particular biographical incidents to illustrate a pertinent idea that Donne had had a vigorous youth for which the repentant cries of the Holy Sonnets are more than devotional pietism. It has been said of Tolstoy that he felt it more than his tortured conscience could do to allay his sexual vigour in his married life. What C.S. Lewis had said about Donne being troubled by the medieval sense of the sinfulness of sex discussed above might have been more true of Tolstoy than of Donne whose sense of guilt appears to be more engendered by the generic sinfulness inherent in fallen human nature than by any specific act deserving divine censure. That beautiful confession of sin and
prayer for divine forgiveness, *A Hymn to God the Father*, as well as the *Holy Sonnet XIX*, when placed beside the words of another dialectician, a man of unquestioned reputation, St Paul himself,

But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?

(Romans 7:23,24)

will be found not to have needed particulars to call for repentant palinodes.

Th'hydroptique drunkard, and night-scouting thiefe, The itchy Lecher, and selfe tickling proud Have the remembrance of past joyes, for reliefe Of comming ills. To (poore) me is allow'd No ease; for, long, yet vehement griefe hath beene Th'effect and cause, the punishment and sinne.

(Holy Sonnet III)

But for the more religious temperament Donne may be seen as less troubled by the sense of sinfulness of lust than Shakespeare is. Shakespeare's sense of sinning seems to emanate from the thought that his better sense or reason in love has been cheated out of its principles by the weakness of the flesh, so that he feels himself drawn towards sexual love against the will of his reason till reason itself becomes confused.
O me, what eyes hath Love put in my head, 
Which have no coorespondence with true sight! 
Or, if they have, where is my judgement fled, 
That censures falsely what they see aright?

(Sonnet 148)

Making love, in the full modern sense, has no moral 
compunction in Donne's poetry. But the danger and conse­
quence of equating sexual act with the deeper springs of 
love is brought out by Donne in a manner which has often 
been misinterpreted as a rejection or dismissal of love.32 
For Donne to reject love there must needs be another Donne 
who is the very picture of profligacy, the debauched un­
feeling philanderer of Communitie, Confined Love, Loves 
Alchymie, and perhaps of The Dreame too, where women are 
'fruits', 'mummy', 'Loves Myne', and morally neutral. 

And when hee hath the kernell eate, 
Who doth not fling away the shell?

(Communitie)

One is reminded of the Wife of Bath in Chaucer's Canterbury 
Tales:

Are birds divorc'd, or are they chidden 
If they leave their mate, or lie abroad a night? 
Beasts doe no joyntures lose 
Though they new lovers choose, 
But we are made worse than those.

(Confined Love)
In *The Dreame* she is the fire which kindles the primed torch of the poet's love. But *Twicknam garden* is the Eden whose peace is broken by the serpent love. Even the promise of love's increase in spring is foreshadowed by its own dialectical basis of false surmise and unpredictability about love's progress beginning *Loves growth*:

I scarce beleevve my love to be so pure
   As I had thought it was,
   Because it doth endure
   Vicissitude, and season, as the grasse;
   Me thinkes I lyed all winter, when I swore,
   My love was infinite, if spring make'it more.

Love's doom is imminent as it proceeds to mistake the fruit for the tree, as the act - "gentle love deeds" - assumes the name of love and ultimately usurps the centre.

Gentle love deeds, as blossoms on a bough,
   From loves awakened root do bud out now.

If, as in water stir'd more circles bee
   Produc'd by one, love such additions take,
   Those like so many sphæres, but one heaven make,
   For, they are all concentrique unto thee;
   And though each spring doe adde to love new heate,
   As princes doe in times of action get
   New taxes, and remit them not in peace,
   No winter shall abate the springs encrease.

Such hedonism, such apostasy, is not admitted even in the *Elegies* where physical love is celebrated openly - *Loves Progress* (XVIII) and *Going to Bed* (XIX), poems considered
too hot for inclusion in his poems published during his lifetime. Here there is no mistaking the act for the essence of love, but one is the complement of the other. And this is what C.S.Lewis finds himself incapable of accommodating: that Donne is trying to erect "the romantic conception of 'pure' passion" by making spiritual love the justification for the use of the body.  

There is the Donne, the romantic lover and poet, who sincerely believes in the lovers' capacity to sustain their love inspite of universal change and decay, and which is not subject to the post coitus ennui characteristic of love that takes the act too seriously. *Farewell to love* is, after all, inevitable if the lover considers the minute of sensual euphoria yielded by love-making as all that there is in love. The shallowness of such immature love, more like the "countrey pleasures" of *The good morrow* than a rakish debauchery, is dramatically exposed by the simile of children's ephemeral fascination:

But, from late faire  
His highnesse sitting in a golden Chaire,  
Is not lesse cared for after three dayes  
By children, then the thing which lovers so  
Blindly admire, and with such worship wooe;  
Being had, enjoying it decayes:  
And thence,  
What before pleas'd them all, takes but one  
And that so lamely, as it leaves behinde
A kinde of sorrowing dulnesse to the minde.
The Elegies in contrst deliberately immunize themselves against the stings of conventions and opinions in making the god of love the sole arbiter in the art of loving. The poet here is fresh and delights in love in accordance with what his mind finds lovable. The ecstasy of freedom assayed here is not to be fettered by man-made laws and conventions since it has been instituted by Nature itself. To Grierson, Donne's poetry as a justification of natural love in which passion unites body and soul vindicates itself as the alternative to and escape from both the courtly ascetic (and very much hypocritical) idealism and the sensuality and exaggerated cynicism of so much of Renaissance poetry. What to a casual reader may appear to be a playful libertinism in literary exercise, when read in the light of the poet's not all too compromising career in love, will look more like a Miltonic pamphlet against the very institutions that have wrested the law of love and marriage from their natural guardian than a thwarted lover's tantrum of The Canonization. Such a poem is Elegie XVII: Variety. Here beauty is justification for love, and polygamy of the eastern princes made an example of rich loving.

How happy were our Syres in ancient times,
Who held plurality of loves no crime!
With them it was accounted charity
To stirre up race of all indifferently;

... ... ...
But since this title honour hath been us'd, 
Our weake credulity hath been abused; 
The golden laws of nature are repeald, 
... ... ...
Here love receiv'd immedicable harmes, 
And was despoiled of his daring armes.

The same plea is urged in Confined Love:

Good is not good, unlesse 
A thousand it possesse, 
But doth wast with greediness.

The dialectics have gone too far, it seems. For 'possession' as a means solely of alleviating 'greedinesse' does not cure the itch, but ultimately leads to condemnation of woman for failure to afford sustained 'feeling' of love, but leaving

A kinde of sorrowing dulnesse to the minde.

Emily Pearson notices this uncomfortable relegation of woman to an object of love, and by degrees to 'Mummy'.

Woman entered into his analysis simply because she was necessary to complete the emotional experience of love between the sexes. Whether she were dark or fair, beautiful or ugly, did not matter. His interest in her depended entirely upon two things: first, she was the stimulus to the sensations of passionate love, and second, she was necessary to his interpretation of the results of that emotional experience. ... 35
And that says a lot about the nature of Donne's introspective analysis of the experience of love in almost all its variety. Besides a few scattered references to his well-known affair with his wife, Ann, his poems give little scope for investigation of Donne's affair with particular women. The two opposite poles of his reaction to the experience of love, one of ecstatic transcendence of the flesh and another of full-blooded, yet controlled, release of sexuality, naturally pose an inconsistency, unless it were a dichotomy in the love life of the poet—the swing of the pendulum from one extreme of sensuality to another extreme of pious fears. For Donne's life with his hard-won wife had been a happy one; and his attachment to her as a husband and a lover strong enough to suggest that the poems which dismiss or reject love and women had been written before 1600. There had been ample time to have earned his reputation as 'not dissolute but very neat, a great visiter of ladies and frequenter of plays.'

_Elegy XIV: A Tale of a Citizen and his Wife_ is an impish picture of cuckoldry—a euphemistic term for adultery—once coloured brightly by courtly love convention. The licentiousness of the court circle always find suitable and effective camouflage in conventional poetizing. Against such background many Elizabethan love poems which may shock
Victorian sensibility would have been enjoyed by the relatively sturdier sensibility of Tudor and Stuart era. It may thus appear that Donne has been unfairly judged by the standard of another age which learnt to suppress the emotions and thoughts, only to seethe below the surface and ready to erupt is more damaging psychological justifications of its sensuality. The very daring of the cuckolding in Elegie I: Jealousie seems naïve, if not actually innocent:

Fond woman, which would 'st have thy husband die,  
And yet complain 'st of his great jealousie;  

O give him many thanks, he 'is courteous,  
That in suspecting kindly warneth us.  
Wee must not, as wee us 'd, flout openly,  
In scoffing ridles, his deformity;  
Nor at his board together being satt,  
With words, nor touch, scarce looks adulterate.  
Nor when he swolne, and pamper 'd with great fare,  
Sits downe, and snorts, cag 'd in his basket chaire,  
Must wee usurpe his owne bed any more,  
Nor kisse and play in his house, as before.  
Now I see many dangers; for that is  
His realme, his castle, and his diocesse.  
But if, as envious men, which would revile  
Their Prince, or coyne his gold, themselves exile  
Into another countrie,' and doe it there,  
Wee play'in another house, what should we feare?

Donne never asked the propriety of such poetry so long
as it is true in expressing his thoughts and feelings. Here, Donne makes the passion its own law, love its own god. Woman, as Emily Pearson observes, merely serves as the slate on which he records the power of his love. She is hardly a person sharing love with him. She has no speaking part in these poems except one, in Breake of day, which is the Juliet counterpart of this one-way love affair, when like Cressida she chides her man for making business an excuse for rising from her:

Must business thee from hence remove?
Oh, that's the worst disease of love,
The poore, the foule, the false, love can
Admit, but not the busied man.

To her love is not love which has more important thing in mind than love; she can love wherever she is given unreserved love, except where she is second priority.

He which hath business, and makes love, doth doe
Such wrong, as when a maryed man doth wooe.

It is for such sensitive awareness of woman's temperament that Arthur Symons praises Donne:

If women most conscious of their sex were ever to read Donne, they would say, He was a great lover; he understood. 37

Understand them he does well enough in their bliss and in their blight. From the unabashed admiration of her naked body —
Thy body is a naturall Paradise,
In whose selfe, unmanur'd, all pleasure lies.

(Sapho to Philænis)
to the bitter disillusionment in her 'Paradise' - which,
in the notorious Farewell to love,
Being had, enjoying it decayes.
all that he has come to learn is that women's tears are
all false:

Alas, hearts do not in eyes shine,
Nor can you more judge womans thoughts by teares,
Then by her shadow, what she weares.

(Twicknam garden)

and that

No where
Lives a woman true, and faire.

(Song: Goe and catche a falling starre)

"Love enjoyed is like gingerbread with the gilt off", so
C.S.Lewis comments on Farewell to love. So long as sex
is equated with love, and pleasure its essence, woman has
shown her practical wisdom in Breake of day. Why should
not, may not man do the same? If she would change her love
where she finds more devotion (perhaps more satisfaction
too), he too would not be bound to one either. The essen-
tial woman is therefore not the particular 'she' bearing
a name and a distinctive personality, but she of the moment
whose love is true now. Her lover has no faith in her, but is willing to love her for this 'moment of time' - which in reality and for all practical purposes is the only reality he knows and will ever know, and perhaps needs to know - for the next day she would be another's love. Thus in Womans constancy he lifts the veil of romantic illusion:

Now thou hast lov'd me one whole day,
To morrow when thou leav'st, what wilt thou say?
Wilt thou then Antedate some new made vow?
Or say that now
We are not just those persons, which we were?

Consummation of their love has not guaranteed that their oaths of love would be kept. He accuses her of premeditating falsehood even while loving him - of a deft jugglery of time ("Antedate some new made vow") to erase the very existence and reality of this moment and fill the gap with another moment of love (and so on and so on). The invisible idea this arouses of a monster nympho swallowing up an endless chain of lovers and time is not very comforting. Is she capable of sloughing off her present identity like the snake so as to be perpetually fresh and untried? The very concept (or conceit) is staggering for its relentless probing into the deepest recesses of the Freudian syndrome. On the surface, the accusation that sleep (perhaps
just as sleep after one love-making renews strength to love again) releases her from this vow to make another tomorrow is not altogether free from envy.

So lovers contracts, images of those, Binde but till sleep, deaths image, them unloose?

Or, your owne end to Justifie, For having purpos'd change, and falsehood: you Can have no way but falsehood to be true? Vaine lunatique, against these scapes I could Dispute, and conquer, if I would, Which I abstaine to doe, For by to morrow, I may thinke so too.

And the threat and invitation are real enough, provided he is willing. Parting from her for a journey he think of what may hap:

Sweetest love, I do not goe, For weariness of thee, Nor in hope the world can show A fitter Love for mee.

(Song: Sweetest love.)

Inspite of his anger, distaste, and contempt for the bitter reality of the world of loving which is full of briars, he cannot abandon it altogether, not for the irresistible sexual impetus, but for the bright gem of true love that he sees shining among the thorns. The swaggering male chauvinism of Communitie,
Chang'd loves are but chang'd sorts of meat,
And when hee hath the kernell eate,
Who doth not fling away the shell?

of Elegie III: Change,

Women are like the Arts, forc'd unto none,
Open to all searchers, unpriz'd, if unknowne.

Women are made for men, not him, nor mee.
Foxes and goats; all beasts change when they please,
Shall women, more hot, wily, wild then these,
Be bound to one man...

Change is the nursery
Of musicke, joy, life, and eternity.

and the final rejection of the evanescent love afforded by woman in Farewell to love should not be taken as a dismissal of the poet's experienced love of The Anniversarie, The Canonization, and A Valediction: forbidding mourning, where love is more an act of the will than an emotional state subject to the life of the senses.

Dull sublunary lovers love
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.

There is such a close similarity between A Valediction: forbidding mourning and Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 that it seems Donne too has expressed in these poems a love which not merely transcends, but actually modifies and glori-
fies the entire machinery of loving in a human being, which, ununited, expresses itself in such cynical voice of disillusioned distaste as in Loves Alchymie, Twicknam garden, and Farewell to love. And it may be wrong to suppose that Donne is unable to sustain his ideal of love which some believe is a form of Platonism sweetened with the licence of hedonism as expressed in The Extasie for the very reason that these two poles are mutually sustaining, inspite of the poet's claim that the observer shall see "Small change, when we are to bodies gone".

Among those who see a reluctant admission of the vulnerability of human love in a world governed by Time and mutability is Donne, Waller brings Bruno's concept of the moment (the now) as the basic unit of time and eternity to bear on Donne's affirmation of the experienced moment as the only reality. According to Bruno,

we seize our opportunities only 'amid the changes and chances of life', for if 'there were not mutation, variety, and vicissitude, there would be nothing agreeable, nothing good, nothing pleasant.'

Waller, however, rejects D.W. Harding's suggestion that Donne's love poetry voices 'fantasies of permanence' as an escape from the pressures of mutability, and asserts the poet's willingness to be a part of the continually moving reality, for, he says,
it is precisely because of time's passing that love exists and grows. The real fears that transitori­ness, loss, and death can bring are faced clearly, and then calmly set aside. 40

The microcosm of the lovers' unique experience, notwithstanding its exclusiveness, does not really dismiss the existence of the external universe which threatens to relegate their relationship to a mere genetic response. What Donne actually communicates by means of apparent ex­clusion in The good-morrow and The Sunne Rising is the nagging realization that the unruly sun, in obedience to the 'new Philosophy', insists on taking his place at the centre. And poor new man must revolve with his hours and days. The old aged sun is flattered into a pedant by new scholarship, assuming a guardian's duty to which he has been promoted from the drudgery of 'warming the world'. And love knows all too well seasons, days, and hours, as they punctuate the lovers' movements.

Why should we rise, because 'tis light? Did we lie downe, because 'twas night?

(Breake of day)

For I had rather owner bee
Of thee one houre, then all else ever.

(A Feaver)

O how feeble is mans power,
That if good fortune fall,
John Donne

Cannot adde another houre,
Nor a lost houre recall!

(Song: Sweetest love, I...)

And Lovers houres be full of eternity.

(The Legacie)

And it is this irrepressible consciousness of Time
that lends additional poignancy to Donne's poems. As a
man who sincerely sought comfort and stay in the experi­
ence of love which alone promised a stability so much
needed to answer his increasing awareness of corruption,
dissolution and decay of man's estate, his assertion of
love's sufficiency to endure and keep pace with oblitera­
ting Time appears but as a drowning man catching at straws.
For even the most assured certainty of love is not above
the sway of Time's autocracy, but is an integral part of
its materialization. Love, therefore, he admits, is not
an ethereal constancy of undiminishing light, but a motion,
and a growth conditioned by Time's circumstances; and as
such must endure the change and mortality of all flesh by
which alone it takes life and existence. This is the topic
of A Lecture upon the Shadow:

Except our loves at this noone stay,
We shall new shadowes make the other way.

If our loves faint, and westwardly decline;
To me thou, falsly, thine,
And I to thee mine actions shall disguise.

The end of love, though, often comes before the lovers' death: infidelity desperately masking its actions where no love exists any more to take offence! But as long as love is mutually taken for granted, it makes an everlasting day, not by arresting time or by escaping from it, but by a continuous sort of constancy in the ever present 'now':

All Kings, and all their favorites,
All glory of honors, beauties, wits,
The Sun it selfe, which makes times, as they passe,
Is elder by a yeare, now, then it was
When thou and I first one another saw:
All other things, to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay;
This, no to morrow hath, nor yesterday,
Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

(The Anniversarie)

Is this a true and stable experience which can neutralize the crippling effect of Time's passage over man's aspirations? Or is it a mere 'fantasies of permanence', an escape from the 'contemptus mundi' of his times - corrupcio optimi pessima':

And soonest our best men with thee doe goe.

(Holy Sonnet X)
and his morbid fear of the world's physical disintegration? Donne's haunting obsession with universal instability in a way renders his works apt to be interpreted as sceptical of the possibility and worth of virtue in a world doomed to progressive corruption and ultimate disintegration consequent upon the Fall of our first parents, especially of the woman.

There is no health; Physicians say that wee, 
At best, enjoy but a neutralitie. 
And can there bee worse sicknesse, then to know 
That we are never well, nor can be so? 
Wee are borne ruinous . . . . . .

For that first marriage was our funerall: 
One woman at one blow, then kill'd us all, 
And singly, one by one, they kill us now. 
We doe delightfully our selves allow
To that consumption; and profusely blinde, 
Wee kill our selves to propagate our kinde. 
And yet we do not that; we are not men.

(The first Anniversarie)

To say that in The first Anniversarie the life and death of Elizabeth Drury exemplifies the inevitability of corruption and the insurmountability of 'a sense of sin and contemptus mundi' and at the same time claim that she is the transfiguration of the 'celestial potential of man' rather makes the transcendental potential of man weak and unconvincing. That the spiritual aspect is not Donne's
preoccupation in this poem is suggested by Prof Sukanta Chaudhuri, when he says that the life and death of Elizabeth Drury "inspires not triumph but humility", and continuing,

The potential perfection of man, thwarted by the basic circumstances of his being, casts his actual corruption into deeper gloom.

The state of man suffers not merely decentralization and mortification of his divine nature, but a shrinking, a physical diminution, not as quickly but not unlike that of Milton's fallen angels thronging Pandemonium. The picture is not that of Hamlet's disillusioned dissection of the humanistic idealization of man - godlike man reduced to quintessence of dust - but a kind of retro-evolutionary process by which post-lapsarian man has degenerated from a giant multicentenarian to a sickly pigmy consumed by his own lust and intemperance.

Where is this mankinde now? who lives to age, Fit.to be made Methusalem his page? Alas, we scarce live long enough to try Whether a true made clocke run right, or lie.

This living corruption affects the body as well as the mind:

And as our bodies, so our mindes are crampt: 'Tis shrinking, not close weaving that hath thus In minde, and body both bedwarfed us.

(11.152-154)
It may, at this juncture, be asked whether Donne is personally involved than Hamlet in their respective rejections of man's intrinsic worth. In Hamlet's wounded judgment man is a dichotomy of virtue and vice, of godlike intelligence and beauty yet a mere lump of clay, the majestic empyrean firmament with the golden sun turned to a "foul and pestilent congregation of vapours". In truth, Hamlet has lost all faith in existence when the highest and noblest example of man he knows,

Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a man. (3.4.61-62),

his own father and the love that had flowered between him and his mother who

would hang on him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on. (1.2.143,144)
crumble to dust and forgotten in the heat of incestuous embrace. To him to exist means to negate meaning and purpose in life; to remain a moral chameleon capable of saying

there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so. (2.2.248)

He does not reject the humanist's paragon of creation; but he has lost the sweet taste of it in his life. He refuses to be a part of this ambivalent world. He rejects even Ophelia for being a woman in whom love is betrayed,
and he would not trust his love with her or any woman. He has nothing to live for; and he takes his death without fear or regret, but as a blissful rest from the 'harsh world'.

Donne begins from a less exalted premise of admitting the inevitability of the world's corruption as a logical and natural consequence of man's action. There is no way by which man can escape, short of dying.

Thou seest a Hectique feaver hath got hold
Of the whole substance, not to be controuled,
And that thou hast but one way, not t'admit
The worlds infection, to be none of it.

(The first Anniversary)

To be human has no more divine dignity than to be the smallest organism of soulless animalcule to which Faustus would fain be changed. Man has not merely lost his pre-eminence in the universal hierarchy of Correspondence; ruin has worked upon his entire nature which is a part of the disintegrating system.

This man, whom God did wooe, and loth t'attend
Till man came up, did downe to man descend,
This man, so great, that all that is, is his,
Oh what a trifle, and poore thing he is!

(The first Anniversary)

The regular eulogising of Miss Elizabeth Drury in the two Anniversaries as the figure of all perfections due to
pre-lapsarian man concludes with the futility of her virtue in the context of a centreless universe in which 'correspondence' is a misnomer, for,

So, of the Starres which boast that they doe runne
In Circle still, none ends where he begun.

(Thor first Anniversary)

By attributing to Elizabeth Drury the very essence and quality of an immanent Spirit of God, and making her the epitome of spiritual perfection in human form, Donne seems to make her, not just 'the Idea of a Woman', but the archetype of the Original Woman (as she would be, if only she were) untainted by her disobedience. Yet the poem appears to tip the balance against what Louis L.Martz regards as the central theme: the true end of man. And the genius of the poet tends more towards confirming the hopeless state of man than towards imbuing the latter's responsibility to restore the original image in accordance with the view of St Bernard that that Image of God in Man is indestructible, however distorted or maimed. The transcendence of the world's disease by Elizabeth is by no means universal. Therefore, she fails to redeem mankind, even if the poem has been an attempt to that end by typifying the Christ image - mainly because the poet had more reasons to preserve the individuality of Elizabeth Drury by freeing her from the
corrupting elements that make up the body, than to let her purifying essence transform its earthly tenement. The strain is again felt when 'shee', by her death, betrays the hope she inspired.

She, of whom th'Ancients seem'd to prophesie,  
When they call'd vertues by the name of shee;  
Shee in whom vertue was so much refin'd,  
That for Allay unto so pure a minde  
Shee tooke the weaker Sex; shee that could drive  
The poysonous tincture, and the staine of Eve,  
Out of her thoughts, and deeds; and purifie  
All, by a true religious Alchymie;  
Shee, shee is dead; shee's dead: when thou knowest this,  
Thou knowest how poore a trifling thing man is.

The heroic assertion of the Songs and Sonets on the validity of the experience of love has to be valued against this brooding sense of total futility. The only way to any meaning to life is removal from the entire system by separation of the immortal and the mortal parts of man by 'second birth',

That is, thy death; for though the soul of man Be got when man is made, 'tis borne but than  
When man doth die; our body's as the wombe,  
And, as a Mid-wife, death directs it home.

This is not an assertion of life as we understand in a conceptual manner, nor is it a validation of man's intrin-
sic worth as conceived in the mind of Renaissance humanists, if we are to understand by humanism the reliance on and the cultivation of human reason and talents to attain fulfilment in life as opposed to the view that man's pursuit of self-fulfilment must come mainly through spiritual exercise and mortification of the flesh, including renunciation of the world's good.

And that except thou feed (not banquet) on
The supernatural food, Religion,
Thy better Growth growes withered, and scant;
Be more then man, or thou'rt lesse than an Ant.

In this vision of universal curse and anticipation of a transcendent existence in a resurrected life the Pauline thesis of universal iniquity and resurrection may have been a significant base. But it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the word 'identification' is used by Prof Hughes when positing that Donne "will adopt St Paul as a type of himself".46 It is true that significant passages from St Paul's Epistle to the Romans find echoes and direct application:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. (3:23);

For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. (8:19).

This, however, is in the early stage of Donne's poetic career.
Yet it is interesting to evaluate the extent to which Donne has been infused with Scriptures to emerge later as the best preacher of his time, and the penitent poet of some of the most confessed Holy Sonnets.

A comprehensive study of Donne's inside career to this effect has been made by Prof Richard E. Hughes in The Progress of the Soul: The Interior Career of John Donne, written over a period of thirteen years. There Prof Hughes has drawn a clear path of Donne's development from a mood "very like 'existential disappointment'" to "a world of fantasy where the ambiguities and the paradoxes are solved by the unitive experience of love" which he created in his love poetry, and thence to the final and ultimate resolution of the existential debate in the substitution of Christ for "the woman who has failed him as the guide to Paradise". This is a beautiful summing up of a poet's otherwise divergent streams of poetic inspiration. But to call what Donne has found to be a tangible reality of happiness in love a mere fantasy is to make that worthwhile experience subservient to another dimension alien to it. For there is no way we can equate the lovers' sense of bliss with the Paradise offered by Christ. The nearest Donne comes to identifying lovers' pleasures with the word 'Paradise' seems to be with tongue in cheek, conscious of
an innocent blasphemy:

In such white robes, heaven's Angels us'd to be
Receaved by men; Thou Angel bringst with thee
A heaven like Mahomet's Paradise . . .

(Elegie XIX)

It appears not unfeasible, but easily misleading, to seek a definitive and coherent 'philosophy of love' in the entire works of Donne. And to emphasize some poems at the expense of others, as Phillip Mallet thinks, would obviously be improper, it seems better not to look for a carefully composed 'lecture...in love's philosophy', but to accept that Donne expressed different attitudes in different poems according to the mood of the moment.50

It is indeed very attractive to find Donne purified of his 'prophane Love', and filled with a holier but less corporeal Love; Donne "the simulacrum of modern man",51 the perpetual seeker after wholeness.52 And so it would seem that Donne was experimenting with human love as a "prolegomenon to divine love", strongly supported by the sermons of the poet himself.53 And to further identify the "elusive" woman of the Songs and Sonets with "the apprehended light announced by St John",54 and the lover's total satisfaction of The good-morrow with the anticipation of the Church Triumphant in Holy Sonnet XVIII, is to take no little critical licence.
Donne loved, and wrote upon it. His poetry is not about Love as a philosophical concept; it is the record of his loving and his private discursions on his intensely passionate and frustrated experience. His poetry deviates sharply from other love-poetry for its significant refusal to recognize any external motive for loving save his insistent need to be united in flesh and will. And if at one point he is aware of an empty bliss, at another point he finds rewarding achievement of an unqualified sense of unity which even transcends the physical means by which it is attained, as in The undertaking:

But he who lovelinesse within
Hath found, all outward loathes,
For he who colour loves, and skinne,
Loves but their oldest clothes.

If, as I have, you also doe
Vertue'attir'd in woman see,
And dare love that, and say so too,
And forget the Hee and Shee.

Like a man thrown upon the world against his will, Donne revolted against the system which had put him upon the rack of subsistence, even as he was simultaneously enraptured and mystified by the potential he found in man and woman to rise above the sordid business of finding a suitable livelihood. Even while living on top of the world Donne never relaxes his intellectual grip on the world,
but feels it moving. The lovers' bed is no Arden where
"Time travels in divers paces with divers persons". Time
with Donne travels impersonally with the movement of the
Earth, and no microcosmizing may lock out the prying Sun,
the universal Time-keeper.

But Time can really be made subservient to the lovers
as the means by which love is evaluated. From the sarcas-
tic philandering of Loves Vsuby to the ardent affirmation
of constancy in love through Time's revolutions in The An-
niversarie, Donne reveals an inveterate consciousness of
Time so that every act he describes in his poems comes
alive as if it were a direct confession. We are conscious
of a definite past, present, and future here. At times Donne
makes a playful show of his ability to 'eclipse' time as an
external order subject to the will of man's mind.

Love, all alike, no season knowes, nor clyme,
Nor houres, dayes, moneths, which are the rags of time.

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

(The Sunne Rising)

The 'microcosm' here does not mean a seclusion from the mac-
rocasm for the very reason that the lovers are more aware
of time than if they had not loved. It is their heightened
awareness of life and sharpened sensibility that give them the microcosmic panorama of life as their love reveals to them. It is in such arrested moments of time that even a career-loving Donne can say,

All honor's mimique; All wealth alchimie.

just as Antony raises his love for Cleopatra above the glory of an Empire:

Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the rang'd empire fall! Here is my space.

(1.1.33, 34)

Donne was ever conscious of the vulnerability of virtue in a fallen world; and the love he asserted is not without the inevitable consequence of seclusion and deprivation of that world where love is known simply as a commodity. It is ironical that Donne's search for a truly transcending love was at last rewarded by his commitment to the Church he had all along avoided. Yet it must be admitted that even before he confessed a love that identifies itself with the love of God for a sinful world, Donne has confessed to a love that does not depend on mere externals and physical togetherness, a love that transcends time and space, love which

Inter-assured of the mind,
Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to miseo.

(A Valediction: forbidding mourning)
But even when he invokes a more sustaining love —"th'Eternall root/ Of true Love" — his love for these below happens to be the occasion:

O, if thou car' st not whom I love
Alas, thou lov' st not mee.

(A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany)

And to express his newly acquired love for God, Donne has only the usual vocabulary of human courtship:

That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee, and bend
Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.

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

(Holy Sonnet XIV)

The essence of love, whether of woman or of God, is the same to Donne. He says in his Sermon:

Love is a Possessor Affection. ... it delivers over him that loves into the possession of that he loves; it is a transmutatory Affection, it changes him that loves, into the very nature of that that he loves, and he is nothing else.55

How near, one may say, this comes to resemble Keats' description of the Poetical character which has been used to illustrate Shakespeare's treatment of love! And such is
the man whose capacity to love and whose idea of loving may not be circumscribed by a woman's arms, but must take in all men and women in the sweep of the compass. What man can do more in the name of love than to be able to say,

No Man is an Island, intire of it selfe; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee whashed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie were, as well as if a Manor of thy friends, or of thine owne were; Any Mans death diminishes me, because I am involued in Mankinde.

(Devotions upon Emergent Occasions) 56

as Donne has?