CHAPTER II
SCEPTICISM OF JOHN DONNE

I have done one braver thing
Than all the worthies did;
And yet a braver thence doth spring,
Which is, to keep that hid?

Says John Donne in his little poem ‘The Undertaking’. John Donne, a devout Christian wrote love and religious poetry with equal zeal, mingling spiritual concepts in the amorous verse and expressing deep devotion towards God in the religious verse. And thus his life intends a spiritual path right from the beginning and culminates into the Deanship of St Paul earning a reputation of great preacher. His poetical work emerged from experiences and realizations in his life showing the phases and the causes of his mental development. The factors constructing his attitude include his awareness of

“disintegration than of comprehensive harmony, of the clash between the older physics and the metaphysics on the one hand and the new science of Copernicus and Galileo and Vesalius and Bacon on the other” \(^1\).
Donne displays a gap between his thought and sensibility. It is a chasm which he tried to patch up in his poetic work. The fact that Donne is appreciated in the recent time is that his poetry shows a sort of chaos, confusion that a modern mind experiences in everyday life.

Donne who was brought up as a catholic, and then converted into Anglican ranges from sensual elegies to holy sonnets in his poetical career. Donne’s adolescence was over shadowed by the events and activities of the Catholics discomfiture. Though I don’t go deep into the history, a few selected events exemplify that Donne was born and grew in terror in the midst of frequent Catholics’ persecution.

“In effect this meant that it was felony to practice the Catholic religion,---- A report would go round that the Queen’s council had passed a decree for the massacre of all Catholics on a certain night, whereupon terrified families would abandon their homes and pass the night in the fields. Others would hire boats and drift up and down the river. These alarms first occurred in 1585 and persisted until the defeat of the Armada, so they were a feature of Donne’s early adolescence. ----Between the passing of the new anti-Catholic legislation in1585 and the end of Elizabeth’s reign, a hundred priests and fifty-three lay persons including two women, were put to death.”

The result of these things was that Donne expresses his disgust at the English people in his early poems- the Satires and the Elegies. His third satire particularly
“which warns the reader to ‘doubt wisely’ yet to ‘strive so, that before age, death’s twilight, Thy soul rest, for none can work in that night’, reveals, the detachment rather than scepticism of the ex-Catholic.”

Donne’s time stands quite in contrast to the Renaissance. Man began to question regarding natural science like the Copernican theory and justifying the imminent decay of this world. “The Renaissance put the theory of the unrestricted powers in man’s mind. Early Elizabethan poets like Marlowe practiced this sense of immense power of man and expressed it in a work like Tamburlaine. Donne who belonged to the seventeenth century and by this time man began to question and doubt. Donne’s the first Anniversary (1611) is “an example of the shattering impact of this time. The poem exemplifies “the disintegration of the medieval world view and the new scientific discoveries”. With this Donne’s mind also responds the growing political tensions of the age.

“The new philosophy calls all in doubt,
The element of fire is quite put out;
The sun is lost, and the earth, and no man’s wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.
And freely men confess that this world’s spent (205-9)”.

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In 1540 the Copernican theory was accepted that not the sun but the earth moves around the sun. Galileo invented the telescope and confirmed the heavenly bodies. When Martin Luther revolted against the Catholic Church. John Calvin proposed his principle of the importance of the Faith. Thus Donne’s poetry having taken in all these discoveries and inventions raises a doubt in his mind about what to believe, and Donne articulates it in ‘round world’s imagin’d corners.’

Donne’s poetry indicates religious, political and intellectual forces, in a humanistic way. Walton published Donne’s biography entitled Life of Donne in 1640, focussing his personal observations. He compares Donne’s life to St Augustine. Thomas Fuller in his Worthies (1662) and John Aubrey in his Lives (1669-1696) praised Donne as one of the greatest preacher of the age. Donne converts from humour to divine and worldly to heavenly subjects.

The word ‘metaphysical’ was first used for Donne by John Dryden.

“Towards the end of the century, in a fawning dedication to Dorset, Dryden made the oft quoted remark that Donne ‘affects the metaphysics not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses where nature only should reign.”
Gerald Hammond is not satisfied with the criticism regarding Donne written by the critics like Reverend Alexander Grosart, George Saintsbury and Edmund Gosse. In 1870 Grossart Produced Thomas Fuller Worthies. It was though unscholarly; an achievement in the sense contained the complete works of Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Vaughan and Marvell with extensive biographical notes. George Saintsbury though revived interest in seventeenth century poets, his judgements regarding Donne’s poems in 1896 are immature. The reader Studies deep Edmund Gosse’s Jacobean Poets (1896) to find out his precious poetic judgements.

In the twentieth – century the metaphysical poetry was revived in the years 1890 – 1923. Much of the credit for this went to T. S. Eliot. In his essay ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ he says that poets in our civilization should be justified to be difficult.

“But Eliot’s essay was, after all only a review of Herbert Grierson’s anthology, and beyond that essay he had little of interest to say about the metaphysical poets. They were a useful but limited weapon, soon superseded by the Jacobean dramatists and Dante. The great debt of twentieth – century criticism is owed to Grierson. His edition of Donne in 1912, and his anthology Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century, in 1921 were as Eliot said, as much works of criticism as collections of poems. Indeed Grierson’s work in the period 1906-21 embodied
much of the transition from Victorian to twentieth century attitudes towards the metaphysicals.\textsuperscript{6}

Genevieve Taggard’s anthology \textit{Circumferences} (1929) points out that metaphysical poetry is a mindset useful for the best poetry of all ages. She labels the seventeenth century poets as well as the poems of Dunbar, Byrd, Sidney Pope, Gray Blake, Emily Dickinson, e. e. cummings and T. S. Eliot as the metaphysical poets of the scientific mind. She reflects that the great metaphysical poetry has yet to be written:

“For the metaphysical poet, science is the freedom of the universe and in the future our greatest poets may well be poets of this mind. Some Moses striking a rock on the desert Mr. Eliot describes as the wasteland and with his touch liberating a vast unused mentality; the excitement of enormous sweeps, the dizziness of looking in all directions at the surrounding fact.”\textsuperscript{7}

It is true that the metaphysics is a science that studies freedom of the universe which has its own law and order with its illimited, infinite hidden potentialities. The study of the metaphysical poetry is to unlock this power which we call mysticism. Mysticism not only means union with God but it is the key to awaken our spirit,
powers, and potentialities. Science is an experiment where everyday new wonders are worked out, new miracles performed.

Metaphysical is a branch of philosophy and nature of existence, truth and knowledge while mysticism studies belief and experiences of a mystic and the study of the metaphysical poetry is to decipher their realization, their awakening in this field which can surpass every field of life and natural science. Thus mysticism is an energy which affects and transforms mind, body, intellect and the universe. It is a healing power which can lead the universe to peace and order.

“Donne is a metaphysical poet - - - A metaphysical Poet in the full sense of the word is a poet who finds his inspiration in learning; not in the word as his own and common sense reveal it but in the word as science and philosophy report of it.”

But Donne didn’t confine to the metaphysical poetry alone. He wrote classical love poetry too. Donne has reflected one’s own experiences in love’s cosmos. And love has been transferred from sensuous to spiritual and worldly to divine. He therefore says to God in Holy Sonnet XVII

“Here the admiring her my mind did whett
To seek thee God;”

‘Donne wrote love poetry which tells us not about physical beauty of his beloved but about his experiences of being in love. His
poems are the descriptions or analysis of his emotions regarding the role of love in the material world ever conscious of the decay. In *Life of Donne* Izaac Walton presented Donne’s poetic career into two parts. The first related to his early life where the poet young Jack Donne visits ladies and the theatres and composes love poems. The second is related to his later life where he is Dr. John Donne, the Dean of St. Paul who wrote only religious poetry.

The first part as usual focuses his physical love- his love for his beloved. Donne is not interested in the description of his beloved’s exquisite body but he indulges in dramatizing, analysing and illustrating his experience of being in love. He is little charmed by the beauty of her colour and skin instead his fascination towards virtuous soul is prime.

“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;”10

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In Elegy XIX Donne indulges in the sensual delight. His Elegies are similar in theme and tone to the Songs and Sonnets. It is said that his best poems were written before he was twenty-five. Mr. Chambers asserts

“All Donne’s Love-Poems - - - seem to me to fall into two divisions. There is one marked by cynicism, ethical laxity and a somewhat deliberate profession of inconstancy. This I believe to be his earliest style, and ascribe the poems marked by it to the period before 1596. About that date he became acquainted with Ann More whom he evidently loved devotedly and sincerely everafter. And therefore from 1596 onwards I place the second division with its emphasis of the spiritual and deep insight into the real things of love.”

Grierson rejects this division on the basis of her age factor, for Ann was only twelve years old in 1596. As she was immature for courting Donne on the other hand was proposing to some other lady about 1599. Grierson finds it difficult to make a clear distinction between his ‘gayer’ and ‘graver’ nature and his sensuous and religious pieces. Professor Norton states “the truth about Donne” that Donne’s “better angel” and his “worsrer spirit” remain in “a continual contest” all the time. Donne gains the mastery over it in his ‘Poor soul the centre of his sinful earth’.
T. S. Eliot in his ‘A Garland for John Donne’ justifies that we can not divide

“Donne’s life into two periods, one dissolute and irreligious, the other revulsion to intense and austere piety, a division so complete as to suggest an alternation of personality. We agree that it is one and the same man in both early and later life. - - The courtly cynicism was a poetic convention of the time; Donne’s sometimes scoffing attitude towards the fickleness of women may be hardly more than immature bravado; - - that the essential originally of Donne is rather in the Songs And Sonnets, in the Elegies and in the Satires than in the Sermons.”

A. Alvarez in The School of Donne substantiates that Donne applied sophisticated aesthetic theories, so that his contemporaries couldn’t understand him. The fine example of his conceit may be given the lovers as compasses.

Eliot, therefore, in the attempts to prove Donne as modernist defines

“There are two ways in which we may find a poet to be modern: he may have made a statement which is true everywhere and for all time (so far as “everywhere” and “for all time” have meaning),”

As Grierson put it in his The Poems of John Donne. Donne’s love poetry is classical in spirit. Donne’s interest is his theme,
love and woman and the finest note in his poetry is the note of joy. And sometimes he sounded some notes which touch the soul and quicken the intellect. According to Brijraj Singh, Donne’s poetry presents his confusion about what to believe and what is to be discarded? Donne’s is the transitional period. The old and the new conflict with each other. The world is threatened to fragments and Donne seeks in love a glue that will keep the world intact, from shattering. Perhaps sex will serve as bonding between the body and the soul. Donne’s love emerges out of his need that would survive the dissolute of the old world order and the uncertainties of the new. Thus Donne seeking a way out from uncertainties by means of a woman’s love or God’s love is the theme that underlies a good deal of his poetry. Thus I may say that Donne writes his love poetry for delight and at the same time at the background there is confusion and chaos in his mind. It is regarding that the decay of the world is imminent and his union with his beloved will save the world from shattering into pieces. Sex serves as a bonding and gives a sense of relief from uncertainties in the world. Thus either earthly love or love for God emerges out of his necessity to be free from his threat of uncertainties to realize perfect peace and pleasure as the final result in most of his love poems.
Donne, a converted Christian preferred Anglicanism than the sufferings of Catholicism.

“His apostasy no longer matters, except in the realm of art: we wonder whether it touched his poems, and listen for its tremors in their depths. How were they affected by his betrayal of Catholicism and the anxieties that it bred?”

Carey states that his poems Songs And Sonnets express perpetual anxiety about fidelity and falseness. When other young poets of this period clamor for the frigidity and the cruelty of the girls, Donne was interested in ensuring her fidelity.

“Often he reassures the girl: their love will last; their souls are one. But fear lingers, and is what makes the reassurance needful. Behind the rapture is the suspicion that nowhere ‘Lives a woman true, and fair.’ Donne’s entire output as a love poet could be seen as a way of surviving and surmounting this bitter knowledge. --- the shadow of separation and loss is the seed of his restless sexuality.”

Donne rids himself of his own disloyalty to his religion by transferring it to women. His apostasy peeps now and then into his poetry in one way or the other. John Carey justifies Donne’s spirituality or apostasy even while writing his love poetry. For example Donne’s
song ‘Goe and catche a falling starre’, refuses that a woman “true and faire”.

“If thou findst one, let me know,
Such a pilgrimage was sweet.”

John Carey suggests that Donne deliberately uses the word “Pilgrimage” to give “the poetic effect”. Whenever Donne wants to “imagine a state beyond betrayal” he takes the word expressing sanctity. On the whole, Donne’s love poems express “religious perturbations.”

In the same way ‘The Canonization’ shifts from the secular to the sacred the opening of the poem is abrupt where the lover exults in bodily passion. The lover is ready to tolerate ridicule or criticism regarding his old age or ruined fortune. The lover is in different to the spiritual attitude of love.

The world’s activities go on indifferently from the lovers’ world. But the poem takes a new turn where the love theme transforms into spiritual- pious love- the canonization. Both the flies and tapers consume themselves and enjoy there being consumed to death. The image of death is used in the form of the consummation of love. Further
this death image is transformed into the image of resurrection to life, ‘the riddle of the phoenix’. The image of the phoenix-consuming itself to death in flames of fire and rising from its own ashes gives rise to a greater mystery by the lovers. As the lovers two but they become one and that is of neutral sex. Thus there arises the spirit of Martyr Saint where lovers come to see blessings for themselves. The journey begins with the restless lover and ends with the rise of the Martyr Saint.

“And by these hymnes, all shall approve
us Cannoniz’d for Love.”

Donne is revived in the twentieth century by the critics like T. S. Eliot and professor Grierson and ranked as one of the greatest poets. C. S. Lewis finds it easy to see why Donne’s poetry is overrated in the twentieth century and underrated in the eighteenth century.

“The sentiment of Donne’s love poems is easier to describe than their manner, and its charm for modern readers easier to explain. --- As practical philosophers we are living in an age of sexual experiment. I trace in his poetry three levels of sentiment. On the lowest level (lowest, that is in order of complexity), we have the celebration of simple appetite, as in Elegy xix. If I call this a pornographic poem, I must be understood to use that ugly word as a descriptive, not a dyslogistic term. I mean by it that this poem, in my opinion, is intended to arouse the appetite it describes to affect not only the imagination but the nervous system of the reader. ---On the highest or what Donne supposed to be the highest level we have the poems of ostentatiously virtuous love, ‘The Undertaking’, ‘A Valediction: Forbidding mourning’, and ‘The Extasie’. It is here that the contrast between Donne and his
happier contemporaries is most marked. He is trying to follow them into the new age, to be at once passionate and innocent.”

The ‘Extasie’ is typical metaphysical poem and can be interpreted in so many different ways. As Grierson pointed out it a truly metaphysical and Pierre Legouis, a poem of seduction, in fact, it is amalgamation of both. Donne an innovator introduced the Platonic concept of love with religious-mystical state and balanced it with the physical love. Platonic philosophy particularly through Plotinus, with his mysterious idea of the One World Soul with which the human race seeks communion. It is a love poem. Donne accepts the body as a medium to realise soul. When the bodies are united in passion, the two souls could be fused into one. Donne is mainly preoccupied with his own personal experiences.

C. S. Lewis argues on the romantic conception of ‘pure’ love and the distinction between spirit and flesh. Lewis points out that Donne makes distinctions between spirit and flesh which turns to be singularly unpleasant. The result he gives that ‘The Extasie’ is a much nastier poem. Now the conclusion of Lewis attack on Donne is replied by Joan Benett. Benett raises a question that why people write poems about love at all. Joan Benett’s reply to this is Donne
“had felt almost everything a man can feel about a woman, scorn, self-contempt, anguish, sensual delight and the peace and security of mutual love. And he shapes such poems out of all this that we are, as Professor Crofts says, ‘aware of the man speaking in a manner and to a degree hardly to be paralleled in our reading of lyric poetry. Every word is resonant with his voice; every line seems to bear the stamp of his peculiar personality.’ Is this not enough to set him among the great love poets?”

Donne’s poetry presents a panorama of his development. The phases of growth are from immaturity to maturity and worldly to spiritual, where nothing is to blame or to be criticised. His love poetry is a mirror that reflects the changing world and the changes in his own life. Veiled or visible of the past or the present, the social, religious, political, or personal events constitute his love poetry. Though falseness or fidelity, change and death, the apostasy are some of the themes of his love poetry, indeed it is an expression of the complexities of life by a unique personality in the transitional period of the English history. And thus transitional transforms into transcendental is the complete story of Donne’s poetic work.

Faithlessness is pictured in ‘Goe and catche a falling starre’ or in ‘The Indifferent’. The poem ‘Goe and catche a falling starre’ reveals inconstancy of the beloved. Impossibility of a true and
fair woman is the theme. The poet gives instances of the improbable things like catching a falling star or hearing a mermaid singing. But it is impossible to find a woman true and fair. Even time and space prove faithlessness of a woman. As one may go at a far away place or one may grow old but never can find a woman true and fair. Thus inconstancy of love is the theme of the poem.

Bitter disillusionment is at the root in ‘Farewell to Love’. Immediately after a shift is found from cynicism to pure platonic love in ‘The Undertaking’. The poem ‘The Undertaking’ begins with the poet’s discovery of a braver thing that virtue lies in the woman he loves and another braver thing is that he has been able to hide it from the ordinary lovers. An example for its secrecy is in the present age, when the specular stone is found nowhere, learning the art of cutting the specular atone is useless. Yet the poet convinces himself that many others would love it. He exemplifies that the lover who loves colour and skin, loves his oldest clothes. And he who loves the beauty of soul, finds outward loathsome. The theme of the poem is that love of woman is virtue itself but the real love of woman is spiritual rather than carnal. It is divine. The inner loveliness of a woman is the spiritual joy of love. In other words, the poet has gained the knowledge of salvation for the
human soul that it lies in the love of woman and neither in the Bible nor in the prayer of God. The first stanza states one’s own state of mind whereas the last depicts the listener’s portrayal. Thus the poet conveys and convinces that love of woman is virtue and salvation for the human soul.

‘The Good – Morrow’ is the poem of consummated love and continued devotion. In ‘A Feaver’ the poet goes against the literary convention to suggest that the world would not be a dark place after the lady’s death instead it would be evaporated.

“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 vapours with thy breath”.  

The Apparition is a love poem free from any scholastic philosophy or abstract reasoning. The poet addresses to a woman who refuses the advances of the poet. The theme is jealousy in love. The beloved has rejected the love of the poet-lover and shifted her fidelity to another person. The jealous lover threatens her with cruel revenge.
The poem has a playful logical sequence in it. The lover calls his beloved a murderer because her hatred for him is bound to put him to death. She might think that after his death she would be free from his imploring of love. But she is mistaken. After his death, his ghost would follow her everywhere, even to her bed. Thus however his jealousy is an assertion of his deep love for her and it gives strength and vitality to the poet. Thus ‘The Apparition’ breaks convention where the poet expresses his contempt and scorn, and on this basis the poem becomes extremely bitter and mocking.

“When by thy scorne, O murdress, I am dead,
And that thou thinkst thee free
From all solicitation from mee.”

‘The Good – Morrow’ is an example of new love celebration. The poem explores the nature of complex love experience. Two contrast experiences are narrated of which the first is of immature physical love and the second is also of passionate love imbibed with scholastic philosophy which makes it immortal. The realisation of childish love is stated in the first question. With the following three questions the ignorant souls groping in the darkness awake in the daylight. The
second and third stanzas give a complete picture of the awakened souls. This love is not afraid of each other but makes ‘one little roome, an every where.’ A lover is like a sea—discoverer, discovers a world of his or her own. The hearts of the lovers reflect in the faces and the faces in the eyes. Thus the eyes are the mirrors of the hearts and the two lovers are like a globe divided into the two immortal, undying hemispheres. The substance of the poem is derived from the personal experience which leads to the scientific truths and ends with the scholastic philosophy. Using varied methods, Donne concludes that the world of the lovers is better than the geographical one.

“It is clear that libertine poems are the obverse, the counterpart, the necessary context for the poems on constancy. The libertine poems express the fatigue, the cynicism, the flippancy, and the bitterness of the disappointed seeker after the One and True, as Donne very clearly says in his poem ‘Loves Alchymie’.”

The poem Loves Alchymie is another vigorous, passionate, anti-Romantic, anti-Petrarchan love poem. It rejects idolization of the lady—love and that the beloved is a paragon of virtual. The poem opens with the conceit of a mine. The experience of love is compared to a mine and lovers are miners digging deep in it. The conceit is concrete in expressing the relationship between the miners and the lovers but the
lover fails to get loves Alchymie, though he digs loves mine till he gets old.

The poet compares love with Elixir and a lover with a chemist who glorifies his ordinary medicine as panacea and proves himself to be imposter. So lovers dream a rich and long delight but practically get a winter- seeming summer night.

The poet comes to a sort of sarcasm that love is only a vain bubble for which we give up our easy. Comfort or honour, yet the servant cannot get that experience of love. When a beloved says that it is not the bodies marry but the souls, the lover listens that heavenly music in the hoarse music of the Church. However he realises ultimately that woman’s love is nothing but of flesh.

“Some that have deeper digg’d loves Myne then I,
Say, where his centrique happiness 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:”

Donne asserts immortality of love in ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.’ As the title suggests the poet forbids mourning of his
beloved and finds her in the state of happy, joyous mood on his return.
The poem opens with the attitudes of the virtuous people in contrast to
the laymen. While the virtuous people take death as separation of soul
from the body and so meet death happily, the common man hesitates to
meet death. The poet elaborates this image of death as separation of
lovers like the virtuous people. Thus the lovers will become the ideal of
the laymen by melting or separating from each other without any sign
of sorrow- either of tears or sighs or any noise.

The lovers separation is like trepidation of the earth which
brings harms and fears but in far sighted it is innocent. The poet
justifies that the ‘dull sublunary’ lovers’ love cannot admit absence, for
they are sensible to realise that separation of the bodies is not separation
of souls. On the contrary common men are unable to understand what is
inter-assured of the minds, so they miss the physical presence of each
other. The two souls of the lovers are one and therefore passing away of
one of them is not a ‘breach’ but an expansion of thin layer of gold.
And if at all the lovers’ souls are two, they are like the two feet of a
compass. The beloved being the fixed foot stands erect with the lover’s
foot. Thus her firmness helps to complete his circle in a right way and
in these end is his beginning. In other words, he finds his beloved on his return full of love happiness and joy as he left her.

“Further, his love is beyond the ordinary love and includes the soul (love to Donne always involved the entire being); thus, separation by death is not a “breach” but an “expansion” – ‘Like gold to airy thinness beat.’ The most striking image in this poem is that of a pair of compasses: the mistress who stays alive is the “fixt foot” around which, the dead soul revolves and which invisibly, circles with it. The poem ends:

‘Thy firmness drawes my circle just, 
And make me end where I begunne.’

The circle in Donne’s poetry is always a symbol for infinity. ---

The power and beauty of Donne’s poetry is its synthesis of emotion, passion, and thought. ‘The Anniversarie’, which was presumably written to his wife, Ann, is a triumphant expression of confidence in love. In the opening stanza of this poem Donne contrasts the mutability of kings, courts and even the sun with their love:

“Only our love hath no decay;

This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday,

Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.”\textsuperscript{24}

Shifts in Donne’s love poetry occur from inconstancy to constancy and from constancy to spiritual love. The poem ‘Aire And Angels’ depicts the soul-body relationship. Donne describes the experience of passionate love in terms of the divine and the experience of the spirit, the divine in terms of love of the flesh. The passion is in perfect blend with his agile intellect. There is a balance between abstraction and concrete. Thus for instance in ‘Aire And Angels’ when the lover finds her beauty too dazzling to love, the angels emerge in the poem:

“Donne was always passionately interested in angels as we shall see. - - - He uses their divine mysteriousness to adumbrate mysteries in human love which are common and baffling. - - - We talk about ‘meeting the girl of our dreams’, and that turn of phrase assumes, as Donne does that somehow we knew and loved her before meeting her. Donne’s previous visions of the girl, though, are not dreamy but holy. - - - The comparison of girl to angel is never at risk of being a compliment, as it would be in standard Elizabethan poetic usage. it communicates a wonder. Research into the divine enlightens Donne’s vision of the human.

The deepening effect of religion on the love-poetry is seen in ‘The Canonization’, ‘The Relique’, and ‘The Funeral’. Wee dye and raise the same, and prove Mysterious by this love. - - -
Donne imagines himself and the girl being invoked saints in future ages. ‘The Canonization’ is usually reckoned to be much later than Donne’s apostasy.”

Donne’s ‘The Relique’ narrates imaginatively the breaking of the lover’s grave after several years of his death. In deed the device for the meeting of souls was a kind of physical contact. Yet here, the physical contacts of the lovers become meaningless. The lovers of ‘The Relique’ only kissed without compassion and never felt the desire to have sexual intercourse. It is the miracle of love without the participation of bodies which no language can describe. There was never the complete negation of bodies. The mystic in Donne, is not confined to the contemplation of the nature of soul in isolation from the body, but of the dialectical relationship between the two. Donne’s success lies in pointing out the perpetual tension caused by the pulls in opposite direction and a search for the resolution into a unified system.

Donne used the device of physical contact for the meeting souls: “A bracelet of bright hair about the bones”. The souls were tied together with this and they have remained together since then. Donne’s poems present a contradictory attitude to love, and even the poems which try to resolve them, a tension between them persists. In fact the antithesis of the body and soul never grows to achieve a
synthesis in Donne’s work. It may be that the antithesis itself is the
ultimate truth in man’s experience of love.

Donne’s ‘The Funeral’ is also a love poem of typical
metaphysical conceit. The mood of the poet is of Fury and anguish
which pervades throughout the poem. The poem opens with the funeral
ceremony of the poet himself which he watches from a distance and
narrates how it should be performed. The poet warns to be buried with
the ‘subtle wreath of hair’ of his beloved with his dead body. It is a
mystery that the poet realises that it is his ‘outward soul’ however his
beloved wants him to experience the pains of a manacled prisoner
condemned to die. Whereas he wants that burying the wreath of hair
would be likely to destroy some part of his beloved. Since the poet has
become Love’s martyr, his idol would be raised. Although she could
save him, she didn’t, therefore the punishment incurred to him was her
wreath of hair would be buried with him, which will give him some
consolation and peace of mind. Donne wrote love poetry before his
ordination. Donne’s love poetry doesn’t offer him peace but he expects
to account him peaceful after his death, it is pious and sensuous
simultaneously.
Donne was a highly learned person, having taken education in Oxford and Cambridge universities didn’t get a degree for his refusal to take the Oath of supremacy. Donne spent a major share of his inheritance on women, literature, pastimes and travel. He visited the continent, Cadiz, Azores, etc. He learnt their language and culture to update him. His brother Henry’s death made him question his Catholic faith. Donne determined to give up Catholicism for his worldly career in England. He prepared himself for the diplomatic career and was appointed to as chief secretary to the Lord Keeper, Sir Thomas Egerton. But his secret marriage ruined his career. He lost his job and lived a retired country life.

He was in communication with King James but his Catholic origin and secret marriage deterred his way of the worldly career, on the contrary the King forced him to accept religious orders. In deserting Catholicism and accepting Anglicanism, it is said that he chose hell. Donne did a wide reading of 1400 authors of controversial divinities. He was seeking true religion in satire III. The poem opens with the mental conflict of the poet, the result of which is his decision to be wise. The poem is a satire on Religion. He calls Religion ‘Mistresse fair Religion’, the image which has been mentioned time to
time till the end of the poem. The period of seventeenth century is of religious upheavals. The poet is torn by the controversies in the Religion, and the poem is a search of the true Religion.

True Religion is always worthy of all souls’ devotion. In the first blinded age that is in the pagan Religion too they followed virtues in life and sought satisfaction. The poet raises several questions regarding Christianity or a true Christian. To a Christian, he calls a desperate coward and encourages him to know his foes. Donne is of the opinion that Catholicism has been borrowed from Rome, it, therefore, is not ours. About protestants he thinks that it is plain, simple, sullen yet unhandsome like a leech. Some accept this new Religion because they are commanded to do so and they take it as only perfect Religion. Not knowing some abhor all Religions thinking all can not be good.

According to the poet truth stands on a huge steep hill. As hard dids give pains to the bodies, hard knowledge endeavours minds, and there mysteries are dazzled like the sun. So one must keep the truth which one has found, for Truth and falsehood are near twins, truth is a little elder. Finally the poet himself feels that he must strive to reach the truth. Man’s laws are not the ultimate word in the religious matter, but on the Day of Judgement not these but the divine law will be practiced.
So man must realise the divine power. The poet gives example of an uprooted flower for a person going astray. The flower at the source of a stream ‘trive and do well’ but those that are uprooted, destroy themselves. Likewise, souls of men which do not cling to the source of religious truth but flow with the streams of different Churches only destroy themselves before they reach God. Man must seek God for himself and realise Him directly in his own soul.

“Is not our Mistresse faire Religion,
As worthy of all our Soules devotion,
As virtue was to the first blinded age?
Are not heavens joys as valiant to asswage
Lusts, as earths honour was to them?”

Donne abandoned Catholicism but his apostasy was not the result of immaturity. On the contrary, according to John it was his ambition, intellect and reaction. Donne was ambitious. He didn’t want the life of an ascetic instead he aspired for a worldly position which he never got.

In 1597 with Egerton’s acquaintance, he prepared himself to accept Anglicanism. In 1610 and 1611 he wrote two anti-Catholic polemics: Pseudo Martyr and Ignatius his Conclave. James himself
published *An Apologie for the Oath of Allegiance* in 1607 and republished in 1608-09 with some corrections. Donne supported the King in *Pseudo-Martyr* and rushed to present a copy to the King. King appreciated the work but refused to offer him any job in the court instead suggested to take holy orders. Donne thought himself unworthy of a clerical career, but finally surrendered to the king’s wishes and was ordained into the Church of England in 1615. Anne died in August 1617. Her death deepened his spiritual zeal and thereby he dedicated himself to religious pursuit. During the period between 1607-1631, he wrote “the Divine poems including the Holy Sonnets.”

Donne’s Holy Sonnets’ represent his conflict like his love poems. Helen Gardner, in this regard, says that

“the love poet creating an image of himself in love; the divine poet creating an image of himself at prayer. - - - they belong in the main to Donne’s melancholy middle years, and are the work of an older and sadder man than the brilliant author of the *Elegies* and the *Songs and Sonnets* – a sense of strain is possibly inherent in their nature.

- - - His mind is naturally sceptical and curious - - - But there is one poem of his youth, the third Satire, which shows that in spite of his temperament the young Donne was genuinely religious - - - to whom the idea of God not only is self-evident but brings with it a sense of absolute obligation.”

27
Donne’s devotions and religious verse reflect his genuine expressions of faith while his sombre spiritual poetry reflects his deep concern with creating a Christian community and having a right relationship with God. He became a devout religious writer in his later career. Donne influenced Anglican divinity. His religious poetry contained of his experiences of seeking God expresses the difficulty of living man in a spiritual and worldly life as well as the specific struggles of the Anglican church of the era.

Donne used planar style but during this period there were a number of poets and playwrights adopted a planar style. It was derived “from medieval didactic and moral verse.”

“- - - The words ‘wit’ and ‘conceit’ occur frequently in contemporary criticism of the emblem books. - - - Donne frequently uses emblems obliquely and allusively, whereas Herbert uses them overtly. The influence of the tradition, however, is found everywhere in both secular and religious writing and not only in verse. Some of Donne’s conceits are taken directly from emblems. The most obvious, again, is the compasses’ image. Compasses represented constancy. - Sometimes, the images show the influence of the Jesuit emblem tradition. In the Holy sonnet, ‘Batter my heart’, the poet implores God to chastise him with the various types of suffering that were illustrated in those emblems in which hearts were drawn with hands hammering them, piercing them with nails and other tortures. Another instance from the Holy Sonnets, Thou hast made me,’ embodies the narrative, idiom
present in Frances Quarles’s emblems, which depict the religious adventures of Anima (the Soul):
I runne to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday,
I dare not move my dimme eyes any way,
Despaire behind and death before doth cast
Such terror”” - - -28

Donne uses emblems, paradoxes and forceful language to derive the right meaning. He uses powers of reasoning to connect the ideas and imaginations to convey the implied message in the poem. Donne uses the patterns of repetition to stress the packed meaning or to exhibit the thought process. If Donne uses emblems, paradoxes, wit and conceit with repetition pattern, he intends to derive the right meaning of his poetry. For instance, the third satire is self evident of his religious temperament.

“But the poem shows that if Donne had rejected the Roman obedience he had derived from his upbringing an unquestioning acceptance of the claim of religion. The argument rests on two assumptions: that the search for ‘true religion’ is the primary duty of a moral being, and that truth exists and can be known. - - - The maxim ‘Doubt wisely’ has for its complement ‘keep the truth which thou ‘hast found’; and the mysteries of religion are likened to the sun, which cannot be looked, at directly, but whose existence is not in doubt: we walk, indeed, in its light.”29
Donne changed himself but the transformation was a gradual one. Donne in his early life wrote the love poetry while his later life is dedicated to the religious poetry. But for this total change no specific crisis is responsible. The period of his religious poetry was of his clandestine marriage, illness, disappointments and financial anxiety. The flow of the religious poetry was the result of a nurtured and matured mind which continued till the end of his life. Donne is the first of the introspective, Anglican, religious poets of the seventeenth century. Donne, despite distinctively Anglican, clarified those Catholic elements in Anglicanism which were repressed but never disappeared.

Donne proved his religious poetry as the perfection of the merely devotional poetry. ‘La Corona’ belongs to 1607; ‘A Litanie’ to 1608; and the ‘Holy Sonnets,’ or several of them to 1609 and 1610. ‘Holy Sonnets’ were written by the time when he accepted ordination. Donne had never ceased to be a Christian, certainly a feeling teased his mind that he had lost God. Accepting Anglicanism, he asserted his conscience in the ‘Holy Sonnets to seek God again. ‘La Corona’ is a cluster of seven poems, each celebrating mysteries of Christ’s life on different occasions.

According to Miss Gardner
“La Corona’ has been undervalued as a poem in comparison with the ‘Holy Sonnets’, because the difference of intention behind the two sets of sonnets has not been recognized. The ‘La Corona’ Sonnets are inspired by liturgical prayer and praise — oral prayer; not by private meditation and the tradition of mental prayer. They echo the language of collects and office hymns, which expound the doctrines of the Catholic Faith, recalling the events from which those doctrines are derived, but not attempting to picture them in detail. --- It is a casuist’s poem and shows faces both of the current debate on the Oath of Allegiance and of Donne’s personal searching of conscience in his years of failure,----- He had conformed to the Established Church and was using his powers in its defence, and had even been offered a means of maintenance in its ministry. 

Donne’s spiritual journey is designed by his divine poetry inclusive of ‘La Corona’, the ‘Litany’, the Holy Sonnets and the final Hymns. According to A. B. Chamber La Corona is designed for the crown that is a “Prayer or Praise” which intends to celebrate the rite. These sonnets are offered on the different occasions of the life of Christ. For example ‘Annunciation’, the seventh is ‘Ascention,’ while in between occur ‘Nativitie,’ ‘Temple’ ‘Crucifying,’ and ‘Resurrection’- all of them suggest the particular occasion in Christ’s life.

“The commentaries agree that this particular story made a number of interesting points. First, it affirmed the double nature of Christ as- a God and a man
simultaneously. As man, Christ journeyed to Jerusalem to observe the feast of the Passover and then returned home in humility and subservience to his human parents. As God, he instructed his elders in the temple with miraculous wisdom and for the first time stated that he had to be about his ‘father’s business.’”

Here to illustrate Christ’s life, A. B Chambers selects some events and represents the whole life. In the third sonnet ‘Temple’ the encounter between Jesus and the learned rabbis in the temple is presented. In “Annunciation” Christ is in Mary’s womb which seems a prison. In “Nativitie” we get the picture of Christ as the child and the king as well. In “Crucifying” the scene is of faith and envy are generated in people by the imminence of Christ. In “Resurrection” Donne’s soul is freed by a drop of Christ’s blood. In “Ascention” Donne refers to first and last Advent. Finally Chambers commemorates the life of Christ as

“since “La Corona” centres on Christ, when the seven sonnets have been completed, it is Christ himself who emerges at the end, who crowns the poem because the crown completes and celebrates the circle of Christ’s own life.”

Stanley Archer in his article ‘The Archetypal Journey, Motif in Donne’s Divine Poems’ traces the end of man’s journey as it is considered “rest through unity with God.” In the first sonnet God is
presented as a power “All changing unchang’d Antient of days.” In another sonnet death brings “our end (which) begins our endless rest”.

Thus ‘La Corona’ suggests Donne’s genuine interest in religion. It’s a poem based on the events in the life of Christ, selected with a view to expose the mysteries and to bring home the eternal truth of human life. For instance usually a contrast is pointed out that the life of nature is cyclic and the life of mankind is non-cyclic. But the funeral ceremony begins with death as the entrance of life and completes the circle of the life and renewal of life. Donne continued his theological studies in the hope of obtaining some public office. After ‘La Corona’, in 1608 he wrote ‘Litanie’, a deeply moving poem on Mrs Herbert. Donne’s ‘Litanie’ is a reflection of his own mind.

“It has the special interest of poems which are the product of a period of transition, when in the process of re-shaping a personality some elements are stressed to the exclusion of others. ‘A Litany’ is remarkable for a quality which is rare in Donne’s poetry, though it is often found in his letters and sermons, sobriety. - - - The ideal which is aspired to is simplicity of motive, ‘evennesse’ of piety, and a keeping of ‘meanewaies’. - - - The rather exaggerated stress in ‘A Litany’ on the compatibility of the service of God with ‘this worlds sweet’ may reflect his need, at this time, to assure himself that the way that appears easier is not for that reason necessarily wrong.”33
About his ‘Litanie’, Donne wrote to his friend Henry Goodyer in 1609 or 1610 that the ‘Litanie’ is a meditation which he wrote during his illness. The means supplication. John Carey points out the way Donne regards reason for it is one of the factors that makes his poetry distinctive. J.B. Leishman takes Donne as an argumentative poet’, but in the crisis of reason and faith, Donne takes the side of faith with the conclusion that argument is futile. Here Carey says that Donne is aware of this contest within himself, he prays in ‘A Litanie’ not to let his mind be blinder by more light; nor faith by reason added lose her sight.

According to Stevie Davies

““That confessional spirit and his awareness of the ticklish nature of any human attempt at veracity, links the sermons with the devotional poetry, which, however, mostly predates Donne’s ordination. The fact that the bulk of his religious poetry (the sonnet-sequence, La Corona, the ‘Litany’, and many of his Holy Sonnets) was composed during the Mitcham’ period, with its melancholia and directionlessness, thwarts any attempt to simplify Donne’s life’s work into the three phrases of juvenilia, love-poetry, and religious poetry. - - - Donne was always, not just self-conscious, but soul-conscious. He knew that your could lose, relinquish, perjure, give, or animalize the soul. All human transactions affected it and might leave an indelible mark”.”34
Thus the ‘Litany’ is an ingenious prayer to God the father for souls an earth. It was the time when Donne writes ‘

“For Oh, to some
Not to be Martyrs, is a martyrdom.”

Donne’s spiritual journey is designed by his divine poetry inclusive of ‘La Carona’, the ‘Litany’, Holy sonnets and the final hymns. Holy sonnets reflect the individuality of his personality. The tone is of assurance and no longer of scepticism. It seems he had experienced God, yet the first holy sonnet expresses his disbelief regarding his own service for God. Not only his Divine meditations but love poems too contain religious and spiritual elements.

“But Donne’s immersion in theology had a more generous and spiritualizing contribution to make to his love poems than this.”

For instance in ‘Aire and Angels’ Donne’s interest in Angels indicates mysteries in human love. Donne’s further three poems ‘The Canonization’, ‘The Relique’ and ‘The Funerall’ exhibit the effect of religion on the love poetry. ‘The Canonization’ hopes the lovers to be canonized after their deaths. The word ‘hermitage’ in the poem invests their love with purity. The second poem ‘The Relique’ ends
with a discovery that his beloved was a miracle, not understood thoroughly.

“All measure, and all language, I should passé,

Should I tell what a miracle she was.”§

‘The Funerall’ reminds us of St. Thomas More whose relics were possessed by the poet and his family. The relics here are the mysterious wreath of hair which expresses his Catholic faith in a secular poem.

“That subtle wreath of hair, which crowns my arme;

The mystery, the signe you must not touché,”¶

The same thinking line, we find in ‘The Will’. The Poet makes a will deed of his subtle and concrete belongings and pleads Love to teach him the skill of loving else his beloved will annihilate Love, the poet and his beloved- all the three. ‘The Will’ reminds Donne’s Meditation XVII which he wrote in later life to be aware of mortality. ‘For whom the passing bell next tolls.’ Donne expresses his love for his wife in the poem ‘A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies day’. The Poem deals with his wife’s death where he takes birth spiritually with his wife with love’s ‘new Alchimie.’

“Since shee enjoyes her long night festival,
Let mee prepare towards, and let mee call
This houre her vigil, and her eve, since this
Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is

This poem ‘A Nocturnall’ is another example of a love poem which provides enough scope to play with some metaphysical concepts. The poem opens with the introduction of St. Lucy Day as the shortest of the year. St. Lucy is regarded as the Goddess of Winter and cold. The unmasking of St. Lucy is compared to the hours of the day. The scene is St. Lucy’s death, the time is of evening, ‘The Sunne is spent’. In the second stanza where the world sap is sunk, Donne gives a conceit of the earth as the beloved and the epitaph her lover. The epitaph is open for study to all the lovers philosophising that in every dead thing love wrought new Alchemy. And that new alchemy of love is ‘He ruin’d mee, and I am re- begot’- life takes birth from nothingness. The last stanza almost inevitably introduces the theme of death and resurrection.

“Surely Mr. Murray is right in arguing that this poem deals with Donne’s love for his wife; its conclusion seems to point the way toward the opening lines of Holy Sonnet 17:
‘Since she whom I loved hath payd her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her soule early into heaven ravished,
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is sett.’”

Thus the period from 1601 to 1615, i.e. from his marriage till his ordination was the period of self-analysis and introspection, when Donne was engaged to know through his debates between God and himself. He wanted to know whether he was worthy, and competent “to enter into Holy Orders.”

Donne’s ‘La Corona’ and ‘A Litany’ are the prayers which he wrote before he took Holy Orders and wrote his Holy Sonnets. Both the poems mirror his “low devout melancholie” state in La Carona whereas the state of “dejection” in “A Litany”. Donne’s Holy Sonnets present a soul striving for salvation.

“I dare not move my dimme eyes any way
Despair behind, and death before doth cast
Such terreur, and my feeble flash doth waste
By sinne in it, which it t’wards hell doth weigh;
Only thou art above, and when towards thee
By thy leave I can looke, I raise againe
But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
That not one hour my selfe I can sustaine,
Thy grace may wing me to prevent his art,
And thou like Adamant draw mine iron heart.”⁴¹

The poet is not afraid of death, instead runs to meet death but terrifies and tembles for his own sins. The Holy Sonnet ‘Hymn to God the Father’ offers a picture of the soul that believes in the mercy of God. The sin of the soul may be great but the mercy of God is the greater. Holy sonnet ‘Thou hast made me’ presents God’s love as an Adamantine power that withdraws the hardest heart. God is addressed as an Adamant who can wing him to heaven and protect from old subtle foe.

“Mysticism of all shades emphasizes man’s innate divinity and sees the union of the soul with the Divine as the goal of spiritual life. Human pursuit of the Divine is often analogized in mystical literature to a journey marked by stages termed- purgative, illuminative and unitive stages of the Mystic Way in Christian mysticism.”⁴²

The poet resigns himself to God as due by many legal rights- God’s servant, sheep temple and His own image. He will despair when he finds that God doesn’t choose though Satan hates him despite his loth to lose him. The significance of Satan’s loth is the poet’s prayer
to God. The poet is not a transformed soul but in the process of transformation which is hindered by Satan.

“‘God’ as John Wisdom points out, is a preposterous notion which calls for our serious investigation because it enriches experience, and because (as the mystics insist) such enrichment results in a transformation of character.”

According to Patrick Grant transformation of character and good works are necessary to have a religious experience. Accordingly Donne changes himself remarkably and this change occurs from a fickle-minded, inconstant lover to a constant lover and faithful husband and then turned into a devout Christian—a great preacher.

The sonnet ‘O might those sighes and tears returne again’ exhibits and contrasts his past and present life. His past having several mistresses and panting for them was a period of sufferance for which the poet repents now. In his present when futility of mourning is realized, he blames himself with vividness. Instead of a prayer to God, here the poet lists his own abuses. On the whole, the poet meditates that mourning with sighs and tears for God may prove fruitful, on the contrary when he has wasted time in vain in committing sins, he has to endure punishment.
“In almost all cultures, sacred poetry involves a characteristic language use, deriving from the two seemingly opposed ways of approach to the Divine: via affirmative and via negative. The two ways are, in fact, complementary and point to the same goal; affirmations may alternate and sometimes mingle with negations.”

Donne appeals “God to smash or melt him” in ‘Batter my heart’. According to John Carey it is the feel of not to feel it. The poem presents his agony and the desperation which is not answered.

“The”Being” of which they speak is to be a “salvation.” That that Being is one, without a second, that it is undivided, without apposition or predicate, without “How” or fashion, these are not merely metaphysical facts but at the same time “saving” actualities. That the soul is eternally one with the Eternal is not a scientifically interesting statement but is that fact upon which the salvation of the soul depends.”

The sonnet ‘Oh my black soule!’

Presents the soul as a pilgrim on a pilgrimage in this material world where it has been corrupted and turned into a black, sinful soul. Now when it has been summoned by sickness, it prefers to be imprisoned. In sestet a solution for salvation of his soul is suggested that if you repent sincerely, you will be granted grace which will turn black mourning into holiness, redness into blushing and redness of
Christ blood into white soul. Thus the pilgrim- the soul completes his pilgrimage in this world and is ready to go back to his Eternal home.

“The goal of mysticism is union with the divine or sacred, The path to that union is usually developed by following four stages: purgation (of bodily desires), purification (of the will), Illumination (of the mind), and unification (of one’s will or being with divine). If ‘the object of man’s existence is to be a Man, that is , to re-establish the harmony which originally belonged between him and the divinized state before the separation took place which disturbed the equilibrium.””

Donne meditates on the harmony between man and God. Man a microcosm of the universe is made up of the soul and the elemental body. Donne urges God to destroy this sinful world to make it new, to re-establish the equilibrium. Donne in the last line of Holy Sonnets V states ‘Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heale?’

“When it (the soul) is wholly united with God and baptized in the divine nature, it loses all hindrances and sickness and inconstancy and is at once renewed in a divine life.”

This renewal of the soul in a divine form is pointed out in the sonnet ‘This is my playes last scene’. Donne is counting down the span of life from mile to inch and pace to point when death separates the immortal soul from the mortal body. The elemental body is mixed
up with the four elements of the nature while the soul purged of evil takes a flight after a short visit with God, to settle in Heaven. But here instead of the divine life in the material world, the soul takes her first seat in heaven.

“Again, though religious feelings and ideas are from the beginning intimately bound up with social evolution and come to exercise their sway over the more important phases of social activity, religion can not be explained merely as a social phenomenon. The history of religion shows an exuberant variety of creeds and cults, as well as of individual moods and attitudes. Accordingly the individual element is an indispensible part of every religion; mysticism, which is essentially the reaction of the individual, vitalizes what has been a social product and tradition; without it, religion fails to be a constructive factor. Consequently, to say that religion is the most effective means of social control is an understatement; religion is, furthermore, and above all, the supreme expression of individual freedom and self-experience. A host of thinkers, beginning with Comte and Mill and especially including the exponents of social Christianity, have emphasized the social implications of religion.”

In *At the round earths imagin'd Corners*, Donne depicts the picture of the Last Judgement when the souls are to rejoin their resurrected bodies and face the judgement of God. Donne urges God to teach him how to repent and secure his grace for it is as good as Christ crucification for the redemption of human souls. As it is true that religions affects social phenomena, on a par with the reaction of an
individual vitalizes social tradition. Hence Donne’s urge for God’s grace at the same time everybody’s remembrance the Last Judgement contributes to construct sound society from sound individuals.

Mysticism indicates that The maxim of the intuition is that “the secret way” takes him “inward.” It demands “Withdrawal from all outward things” and retreat into the soul. It is called “mysticism as introspection” where man turns inside and refines himself.

Otto defines introspection. Donne in his Holy Sonnet VII at the round earth’s imagin’d corners points out that whose eyes behold God will never taste deaths woe. According to Otto “sinking down into the self in order to reach intuition” and there you find in the “depth of the self”, “the Infinite, or God”. Man doesn’t look “upon the world but only into the self”. Otto asserts that “For the final vision” you don’t need the world but “only God and the soul” prove true.

“The dramatic element in Donne’s life and in Donne’s poetry is most important and we must have some taste for drama in order to understand and appreciate it. This dramatic element in Donne is, as I have insisted, closely connected with his detachment and his fundamental scepticism. In a sense, he could only lose himself, only escape from his continually recurring awareness of the nothingness of life, by playing a part, and during the thirteen years that followed his dismissal from Egerton’s service in 1602 until his ordination in 1615 he was without a part. “And then
“the stage upon which he was mounted was but a stage.”

A number of poems of Donne are in the form of the dramatic monologue where the poet speaks to some silent listener, though he never replies or participates in conversation. For example ‘Death be not proud’, the whole sonnet is a dramatic monologue with Death, where Death is personified to emphasize nullification of his powers and eternity of soul. Mysticism lies here is the thought of eternity gives exuberance of ecstasy which overflows in each and every line of the poem.

“For these whom thou thinkst, thou dost overthrow,

Die not, poore death nor yet canst thou kill mee;

‘One short sleep past, we wake eternally,

And death shall be no more, death thou shaft die;”

The above lines directly express the poet’s dedication and faith in God. Donne’s Holy Sonnets 6 ‘Death Be Not Proud’ is addressed to death. The poet justifies triviality of death which is generally regarded as the end of life. It is the bitter truth of life that one who takes birth, has to die, has to come to dust, sooner or later, today or tomorrow. But for Donne, Death is not mighty but ‘poore’; not dreadful
but pleasant from which flows much more pleasure than sleep or rest. Donne substantiates that our best men who go with you to give rest to their bones and souls delivered. Donne asserts that as death is the source of happiness the great people die early for the next birth. Here the poet implies the philosophy of the Resurrection Day in the Bible. Further the position of Death is deviated from a mighty king to an obedient slave to Fate, chance. King’s and desperate men reside with poison war and sickness. Opium or other drugs are but a transformed form of death which makes us sleep. Donne, as in the beginning, warns Death not to be proud. In all philosophies in the world, Death is compared with sleep, in sleep man doesn’t remain time –conscious and therefore a long span of time may be felt short. So the poet feels that as man takes birth, life becomes eternal and Death dies there.

Donne tries to obliterate the distinction between life and death, when in the world, over importance is attached to death. Death, therefore, is considered as mighty, dreadful and horrible. Donne accepts inevitability of death. But at the same time justifies triviality or insignificance of it. A common saying is man is mortal but according to Donne the world is eternal, the soul is immortal and Death only transforms the four elements of a body. A person takes next life and
Death is no more there. Death dies there to make the life eternal and survive for a long time.

“The Cross, then, is central to Christian mysticism. Thomas Kempis assures us;

‘You cannot escape it, whithersoever you run. For wheresoever your go you carry yourself with you. And shall always find yourself. Turn upwards or turn downwards, turn inwards or turn outwards: everywhere, you shall find the cross.’”

Donne’s sonnet Spit in my face yee Jewes’ “is an example of seventeenth century devotional poem. Donne wrote it in seventeenth century but it is relevant in twentieth century too. The poem reconstructs the event for the past and the present and gets ready for the challenge of crucification. The poem raises a question regarding our acceptance of lonely suffering like Christ. The poem gives “the turbulence of a man coming to realise the paradox,” it may be an answer to this question or one’s own reflection of “his own sinfulness” or the experience of God’s love. The sonnet is divided into three parts. The first evokes “the scene of crucifixion”. The second presents the speaker himself on the cross. It represents will. At the end the speaker is awaiting for God’s love. The poem gives a panorama of faith and contemplation, and offers a salvation of the crucification.
“The mystics, whose lives attempt truly to follow a way is discovered only through the care and self-scrutiny of which Donne’s poem gives a sense, and they conclude, like him, that resignation to the power of Another in faith is the single means of human salvation. Otherwise, they remain with Donne’s speaker in the middle, analytical section of the poem which shows that the paradox of the human situation is heightened but not resolved by analysis. The strange love’ to which the Poem’s speaker looks for release is not itself available to the poems images, and remains mysterious. At the end, he is left waiting on it, and the imagery rather presents the tension of faith that precedes contemplation.

John Donne, in an age of doubt affirmed in theory what faith might mean---. We share in this cross by accepting affliction and the fact of our separation from God. - - - ‘The man to whom such a thing happens has no part in the operation. He struggles like a butterfly pinned alive into an album.’

Donne admires God’s ‘strange love’ for mankind.

“Oh let me then
His strange loves still admire:
Kings Pardon, but he bore our punishment.”

Donne contemplates what would happen if this were the world’s last night. His answer to his own question is Christ assures pity to entire human beings. The sonnet ‘Batter My Heart’ assures the same faith in God. It is expressed through the different images of God as the Tinkler, the Saviour and the Lover who would save him from vices to turn chaste and delightful.
The sonnet ‘Batter My Heart’ is a sort of confession of Donne of his past sins from which he wants to be liberated. The title itself suggests that the poet calls upon the God and His Trinity sons to batter his heart because he is sure that he will not get rid of his sins easily. But the graceful God still follows gentler ways to improve him. God knocks breaths, shines and tries to mend him. But the poet asked not to be merciful but follow harsh ways to punish him. It is not only confession but one’s own realisation that even in future he will not escape from the clutches of the present sins. He admits that he is an usurpt town by sins and it has no end. Now the poet has become a beloved of God who is usurped and forcefully betrothed to God’s enemy i.e. sin. Here Reason of mankind is the viceroy, the deputy of God who is supposed to defend human being from committing sinful deeds. But the poet feels that even Reason is captived and proved weak and untrue, yet the poet loves God deeply and whole heartedly. Apart from this engagement, the poet urges God to divorce him from the clutches of sin. He requests to untie or break that marital knot and take him to God. He asked God to imprison and enthral him for except God he will never be free. He will never be chaste except God ravishes him from the world by death.
The poem is full of mystic elements. The concept that the poet’s heart is full of sins and his request to God to liberate him from that sin, is not new. But the method of liberation suggested by him to God is significant. The poet is harsh with his own sinful heart and asks God to follow harsh treatment instead of gentler ways. He expresses his anguish regarding his past sinful deeds and at the same time he is helpless to control his sins in present time. Duality of mind brings him to the point where he yearns God to take him from the world by death to purify him. Thus the purification of the soul and God the Purifier is the main concept of the poem. For that purification the ways of man and the ways of God are justified in the whole poem. God’s omnipotent nature is justified where the poet accepts that except God, the poet’s soul will never be freed. Reason that gives the right judgement is the vice roy of God in man. In other words the virtues in human being make him realise the true path of life.

“Twas much, that man was made like God before.

But, that God should be made like man, much more”.

The flow of love for God is continued in the sonnet ‘Wilt thou love that God’ where Donne reminds that Man is the temple of God and the spirit of God dwells in us. The memory of Christ’s
crucifixion makes mankind aware that man was made like God at the same time the redemption should be commonly offered up to mankind.

“Author and mystic Evelyn Underhill recognizes two additional phases to the mystical path. first comes the awakening, the stage in which one begins to have some consciousness of absolute or divine reality. Purgation and illumination are followed by a fourth stage which Underhill, borrowing the language of St John of the Cross calls the dark night of the soul. This stage, experienced by the few, is one of final and complete purification and is marked by confusion helplessness, stagnation of the will, and a sense of the withdrawal of God’s presence. It is the period of final “unselfing” and the surrender to the hidden purposes of the divine will. Her fifth and final stage is union with the object of love, the one Reality, God. Here the self has been permanently established on a transcendental level and liberated for a new purpose.”

Evelyn Underhill points out the five stage of the soul to the mystical path. The awakening purgation, illumination the dark night of the soul and union-of these five stages Donne seems to have experienced the first two. With consciousness of divine reality, Donne has an awareness of his own imperfections and finiteness This spiritual path leads him to become an ascetic. Donne passes through this purgative stage of self-discipline not only of external behaviour but egoic passions too.
“Here the admiring her my mind did whet
To seek thee God; so streams do shew their head;”  

Patrick Grant explains that the Church remains uneasy with its mystics, because whether “Understandably, the church has often been “uneasy with its mystics,” because whether false or true, in both the situations they are dangerous. If false they misguide and if true they proclaim institution’s inadequacy. On the contrary the mystics are also “uneasy with ecclesiastical authority”, they, therefore, try “to avoid heresy”. Likewise Donne’s sonnet

‘Show me dear Christ’ is marked by scepticism, uncertainly, and confusion.

“A catholic could not have written, as Donne was to write when he had already been three years in Anglican orders. The important about this much-disputed sonnet, in which Donne asks that he may be granted a vision of the true church, is not that it implies any ‘disloyalty’ to Anglicanism but that it reveals the lasting disorientation his apostasy entailed.”

Donne’s search for the true religion is found in the sonnet ‘Show me dear Christ’. The poet urges God to disclose before him the true Church. The last sonnet ‘Oh, to vex me, assures that fear of God saves man from committing sins and makes life happy and beautiful.
‘The Cross’ is not a meditation on the passion. It is the emblem poem; an analysis and interpretation of a symbolic figure. ‘The Cross’ symbolizes the crucification and such sacrifice is positively expected from the future generations.

“For when that Crosse. Ungrudg’d; unto you stickes,
Then are you to your selfe; a crucifixe;
Let crosses, soe, take what hid Christ in thee,
And be his image or not his; But hee,”

Patrick Grant, in his Literature of Mysticism in Western Tradition traces true faith in God, and justifies it as the “might of God”, “spirit with God”, functions “in God and with God”. Donne, a born Catholic became a devout Anglican but in the journey a sort of mental conflict or scepticism is pointed out. Donne’s Satire iii attempts to “seeke true religion”. The search for the true religion is continued in the Divine Meditation ‘Show me deare Christ.’

Donne’s scepticism is also seen in his love poetry where he rebukes his beloved for her unfaithfulness. Faithlessness alludes his own confused state of mind, his dilemma. But in fact, it suggests his effort to introduce one Church, a sense of toleration. Somehow Donne
was resolved and became faithful to Anglican Church, towards the end of his life.

His resolve and firm faith in this spiritual journey brings Donne to the point of purgation where there is a colloquy between Donne and God. “A Litany” is a fine example where he prays God to purge him before death.

“From this red earth, o father, purge away
All vicious tinctures, that new fashioned
I may rise up from death, before I’m dead”

A.N. Dhar in his Mysticism Across Cultures, marks “Human pursuit of the Divine” by three stages, termed as “purgative, illuminative and unitive stages of the Mystic Way in Christian Mysticism”.

The goal of spiritual life is the union of the soul with the Divine. These three stages are characterized as the ascetic, the contemplative and the third in which God may be seen face to face. But sometimes these three stages intermix and assimilate with one another. AccorK. S. Ramaswami Sastri in his The Evolution of Indian Mysticism points out that mysticism passes through “the mind by a consciousness of the Divine.” Donne wrote ‘Hymn to God, my God, in my sickness’ during Donne’s grave illness in 1623. As he anticipates
his return to God, the soul is to be tuned for participation in the divine melodies.

“Since I am coming to that Holy roome,

Where, with thy Quire of Saints for evermore,

I shall be made thy Musique; As I come

I tune the instrument here at the dore,

And what I must doe then thinke leve before.”

Donne’s last poem ‘Hymn to God the Father’ though is woven around the central idea of eternal damnation, it concludes in complete repose and peace of mind.4

“St. Augustine calls it the eye of the soul. The soul is divine and can therefore attain God by purity and devotion. The transmutation of the iron of the senses into the gold of the life of the soul will be only by the alchemic touch of Love which purges all evil and dowers all good and illumines the soul and gives the sweet gift of beatitude which is the spiritual union of the Eternal Bridgroom and the Eternal Bride. The tranquil love becomes a rapturous and ecstatic love.
“He that loveth not knoweth not God for God; is love.”

61(I john.iv.8)

Donne’s holy sonnets plead for purgation through punishment, repentance, forgiveness and grace. The soul has been corrupted by Satan, for his sins. The fire of lust and envy has burnt his world here to fore. The poet requests God Earnestly to mend his soul like a pot, to liberate him from his enemies and to ravish him to make pure.

For Christians, mysticism means to be Christ like. Jesus is the perfection of human potentials Christian Mysticism has a Strived for the pursuit of holiness. Through purgative, illuminative and unitive ways. 50 illuminations mean the love of God which produces the emotion of ecstasy, rapture Jacob Boehme says regarding the Love of God

“Understand then what Heaven is: It is but the turning in of the Will into the Love of God. Wheresoever thou findest God manifesting himself in Love, there thou findest Heaven without travelling for it so much as one foot. And by this understand also what hell is, and where it is. I say unto thee, it is but the turning in of the Will into the Wrath of God.”62
Donne experiences the love of God, in the Holy Sonnet xv ‘will thou love God, as he thee!’ and another sonnet xvi ‘father, part of his double interest’:

“The laws abridgement, and thy last command
Is all but love; Oh let this last will stand!”

Donne asks his own soul whether he loves God as God loves us because the grace and the love of God cleanse the soul in Christ’s blood and the red soul transforms into white, i.e. the soul assumes the angelic form clad in white light. Donne when in his grave illness in 1623 wrote ‘Hymn to God my God, in my sicknesse’, he expresses his love of God as

“Look Lord, and Find both Adams met in me;”

Donne’s last poem ‘A Hymn to God the father’ expresses his realization of God’s assurance of pardon and the soul’s reposing in peace of mind while meeting death. Thus Donne’s realization of union with God is very rare. The Holy Sonnets provide another sketch of Donne’s mind. Donne’s journey motif is well stated by Stanley Archer, but my observation is that for Donne life is pilgrimage and the soul, a pilgrim.
“Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
Treason?”

The soul, a pilgrim has committed treason to his ruler in foreign land. The poet reminds himself his own titles and relations with God as ‘thy sonne’, ‘thy servant’

“‘Thy sheepe, thine Image,’ and
‘a temple of thy Spirit divine’.”

About the land of God, Donne presents-

“‘with a fiery zeale of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heale.’”

The soul is the resident of heaven about this the poet says-

“‘Then, as my soule, to heaven her first seate, takes flight,
And earth borne body, in the earth shall dwell,
Impute me righteous, thus purged of evill,
For thus I leave the world, the flesh, the devil.’”

The purity of the angels the poet puts in the words –

“you whose eyes,
Shall behold God, and never tast deaths woe,”
Donne thinks that churches are best places for prayer but to meditate and see God light in the physical world proves useless.

“Churches are best for Prayers, that have least
To see god only, I goe out light of sight;
And to scape stormy days, I chuse
An everlasting night.”70

Donne secures God’s promise that to liberate him he will seek the grace of Christ.

“But sweare by thy self, that at my death thy sonne
Shall shine as be shines now, and here to fore;
And, having done that, Thou haste done,
I feare no more.”71

Thus Donne presents the journey motif in his Divine Poems. Donne also presents a picture of the Day of Judgement in vivid forms as its excellent example is found in the sonnet ‘At the round earths imagined corners’. Donne’s revelation of God and the soul as Father- Son relationship can be interpreted in different ways. There are also a number of stages in evolving the soul’s inherent qualities. With it God’s grace Christ’s Crucification for the salvation of mankind are penetrated at every now and then, through out his holy sonnets. Thus Donne’s metaphysical poetry has many angles and different dimensions which can not fit into a small chapter.
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