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"Harmony" in "Donne's "La Corona" and "Upon the Translation of the Psalms"

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In the seventeenth century and earlier, the study of harmony united the disciplines of mathematics, music, astronomy, cosmology and theology. Harmony, in fact, represented the cohesiveness of a universe in which the notes of the musical scale corresponded to the levels of the heavenly spheres. Harmony was also evident in the schematics relating the four cardinal virtues to the four humors, the four seasons, and the four elements. These ideas were often represented diagrammatically by the circle, a popular symbol for God, based upon the well-known twelfth-century definition, "Deus est sphaera cujus centrum ubique." It is no surprise, then, to discover John Donne combining the circle, the elements, musical theory, and theology in sometimes jarring, but almost always ingenious ways in his poetry.

The most profound development of seventeenth-century ideas of harmony in Donne's poetry occurs in those pieces which leap beyond a narrow interest in the musical metaphor. True harmony in "La Corona," for example, exists in its musical structure and its sure sense that Christ, as mediator between heaven and earth, and as truth itself, is the ultimate consonance. This notion can be traced through medieval and Renaissance musical theory, but it found its most complete expression in the sixteenth-century *De Harmonia Mundi*, written by the Franciscan friar Francesco Giorgio, In his work, spiritual understanding, which is a feeling of oneness with God and his creation, is the most important sign of the harmony of the universe. This is not necessarily a musical harmony, but can be explained using a musical terminology. Giorgio's chapter titles, for example, rely on two meanings of "instrumentum," one of which is musical.

> De primo instrumento qui est coelorum globus.
> . . . De secundo instrumento, quod est humana lingua.
> . . . De tertio instrumento scilicet lingua angelica.
> . . . De mentibus angelicus [sic] & beatis, quae & ipsae instrumenta sunt resonantia.[1]

The specifically Christian application of these ideas of universal harmony is simply an extension of the ancient concept of the music of the spheres.

One of Donne's poems represents his most overt use of the musical image. "Upon the Translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sydney, and the Countesse of Pembroke his Sister" is not one of Donne's most notable poems, but it is valuable for demonstrating Donne's facility with a musical vocabulary and his familiarity with the Renaissance musical idiom. "La Corona," as we shall see directly, goes beyond these musical mechanics to deal with a musical ideology and a consideration of harmony in its broadest definition.

"Upon the Translation of the Psalmes" opens with the observation that man's attempts to comprehend God, the incomprehensible, result only in "poore wit":

> Eternall God, (for whom who ever dare
> Seeke new expressions, doe the Circle square,
> And thrust into strait corners of poore wit
> Thee, who art cornerlesse and infinite). (1-4)[2]

Donne decides that instead of endeavoring to understand God, or even to "name" him, he will concentrate on praising one gift from God:

> Fixe we our prayses therefore on this one,
> That, as thy blessed Spirit fell upon
> These Psalmes first Author in a cloven tongue;
> (For 'twas a double power by which he sung
> The highest matter in the noblest forme;)
> So thou has cleft that spirit, to performe
> That worke againe, and shed it, here, upon
> Two, by their bloods, and by thy Spirit one. (7-14)

The "cloven tongue" and the subsequent play on "cleft" are of central musical importance. The tongue was an Old Testament symbol of an individual's profound and intensive worship of

God,[3] thus its connection with the "Psalmes first Author" and musician, David. "Cloven tongue" also appears in a pentecostal context in the New Testament: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:1-4). The "cloven tongue," then, is a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit and, in the poem being considered, inspires as might a Holy Muse. God has "cleft that spirit," that is, divided David's inspiration between the two Sidneys so that they can become the instruments of His will (or the "organ" of His "harmony"). "Cleft" also functions as a musical pun. A Clef, Cliff or Cleff (as it appears in various early spellings) indicates the key of a particular piece of music.[4] In this sense, if God "hast cleft that spirit," He has directed the key of His newest songs, the Psalms. An organ cannot produce harmony without an organist and so Donne writes, "The Organist is hee / Who hath tun'd God and Man, the Organ we . . ." (29-30). Christ, as tuner or intermediary between God and man, allows the Organ, or humanity, to create God's music. Without the Organist, man is only a potential music maker. With Him, man can receive grace and serve as a channel for God's love.

Of the three choirs mentioned in this poem (the earthly, the heavenly, and the spheric), the earthly choir is the only one which provides both voice and instrument, choir and organ:

> Make all this All, three Quires, heaven, earth, and
> sphears;
> The first, Heaven, hath a song, but no man heares,
> The Spheares have Musick, but they have no tongue,
> Their harmony is rather danc'd than sung;
> But our third Quire, to which the first gives eare,
> (For Angels learne by what the Church does here)
> This Quire hath all. The Organist is hee
> Who hath tun'd God and Man, the Organ we.
> (23-30)

The heavenly choir sings a music beyond music, a harmony which "no man heares." In *The Anniversaries* this was a music toward

which man ultimately strove, and in Renaissance thought, it was traditionally considered the true end of harmony. Giorgio, for example, devotes a section of *De harmonia mundi* to "De pausa, quiete, & silentio, ad quad deuenitur adepto iam bono, in quod tendimus."[5] Furthermore, this praise of a silent music led to the concept of "internal singing," often associated with the legend of St. Cecilia.[6]

Another common idea about music was that it was pure motion,[7] deriving most probably from the concept of the music of the spheres, the spheric choir, which in "Upon the Translation" produces dance rather than song. This planetary dance could be seen, but never heard, because it was above the sphere of the Moon.

Like Moses and Miriam (l. 46), Sidney and his sister combine the attributes of music as silent song and music as motion—the music of the angels and the music of the spheres. Moses' role as teacher of a song to be kept in the memory of the Israelites is central in *The Anniversaries*. Here in "Upon the Translation" Moses and his sister Miriam, the celebrant dancer, function together in the third and earthly choir which "hath all." Different from and superior to either of the other choirs is this earthly choir, which, led by Christ the Organist, actually instructs the angels.

Later in the century Thomas Mace was to write of the necessity of an organ in Psalm singing. Read in the context of Donne's poems, Mace's lines take on a compelling new meaning:

> If you will sing songs in Churches well, and in Tune, you must needs have an Organ to sing unto, by which means the whole Congregation will be drawn (or as it were compelled) into *Harmonicall* unity; even so, that 'tis impossible for any person, who has but a common or indifferent Ear, (as most people have) to Sing out of Tune.[8]

For Donne, too, a willing Organ (the Sidneys) was necessary and the organist (Christ) absolutely essential for the proper singing of these Psalms.

Of particular interest to the Renaissance musicologist is a topical matter which surfaces in the latter third of the poem. This is Donne's concern with the inferiority of the Psalms' musical settings in English:

> The songs are these, which heavens high holy Muse
> Whisper'd to *David, David* to the Jewes:

> And *Davids* Successors, in holy zeale,
> In formes of joy and art doe re-reveale
> To us so sweetly and sincerely too,
> That I must not rejoyce as I would doe
> When I behold that these Psalmes are become
> So well attyr'd abroad, so ill at home,
> So well in Chambers, in thy Church so ill,
> As I can scarce call that reform'd untill
> This be reform'd; would a whole State present
> A lesser gift than some one man hath sent?
> And shall our Church, unto our Spouse and King
> More hoarse, more harsh than any other, sing?
> (31-44)

Helen Gardner observes that in these lines Donne refers both to internal dissension about the quality of the Old Version of the Psalms and to the comparison of the Old Version with European versions, notably the French and the German.[9] Mace was to write later that "the singing of Psalms is both a Christian mans Duty, and ought to be his great care to do it well, and no ways flightly or negligently."[10] Ornithoparcus had established stringent rules for the "tuning of Psalmes" in their original Hebrew. Now Donne calls for proper "attire" for the new translations. A Psalm could be disgraced by a careless setting or a harsh and hoarse delivery. As Ornithoparcus had written:

> Let a Singer take heed, least he begin too loud braying like an Asse, or when he hath begun with an vneuen height, disgrace the Song. For God is not pleased with loude cryes, but with louely sounds: it is not (saith our Erasmus) the noyse of the lips, but the ardent desire of the Art, which like the lowdest voice doth pierce Gods eares. . . . But why the Saxons, and those that dwell upon the Balticke coast, should so delight in such clamouring, there is no reason, but either because they have a deafe God, or because they thinke he is gone to the South-side of heauen and therefore cannot so easily heare both the Easterlings and the Southerlings.[11]

In characteristic style, Donne may also intend a pun upon "rejoyce" (36). In a sermon on Psalm 90:14 ("O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoyce and be glad all our dayes")

Donne analyzes the etymology of "ranan," to rejoice. "*Ranan* denotes the externall declaration of internall joy; for the word signifies *Cantare*, to sing, and that with an extended and loud voyce, for it is the word which is oftnest used for the musique of the Church, and the singing of Psalmes."[12] Rejoice, then, is something Donne cannot do if it requires jubilant singing and ebullient melody, for as yet, he says, the appropriate musical setting does not exist.

The text in English does exist, however, since the Sidneys, as translators, have become the facilitators. So Donne ends the poem with a witty play on "translate":

> So though some have, some may some Psalmes
> translate,
> We thy Sydnean Psalmes shall celebrate,
> And, till we come th'Extemporall song to sing,
> (Learn'd the first hower, that we see the King,
> Who hath translated these translators) may
> These their sweet learned'labours, all the way
> Be as our tuning, that, when hence we part
> We may fall in with them, and sing our part. (49-56)

The primary meaning of the word fits in a particularly satisfying way with Donne's earlier reference to the "cloven tongue," associated with the Pentecostal flame, for the immediate gift of the Spirit to the disciples in Acts 2 was that of "other tongues." As translators, the Sidneys must speak in other tongues. Donne, however, plays on another meaning of the word, one which involves the transfer from a physical to a spiritual state. In this sense, the translators will be translated. A third meaning of the word is musically related. In the seventeenth century, translating music referred to something like modern day transposing.[13] In one sense the Sidneys have transposed the Psalms from a key we cannot comprehend into one which we can easily hear. In another sense we will all one day be translated, or transposed into the key which presently we cannot hear, let alone sing. In other words, we will enter a music and be tuned to the key of God's "Extemporall song."

The remaining puns on "part" and "fall" and even "sweet" are somewhat artificial and traditional uses of the musical idiom. Stanley Archer calls them "flat and conventional; to place them alongside a passage similar in meaning from 'Lycidas' . . . is to discover how weak they are."[14] The effect is to convince the reader

that Donne is straining for a complimentary effect. The wit does lead to a tone of artificiality and pretense.

Donne relies upon word-play, pun, and traditional musical metaphors in "Upon the Translation," but in "La Corona" the harmony he is reaching toward is one which may include musical elements, but also one which does not stop with musical considerations.

The "La Corona" sonnet cycle incorporates much of the language of contemporary hymnody. Anthony Low has also pointed out the repetitive, liturgical nature of these sonnets.[15] Even though Donne uses material with obvious musical backgrounds, he does not develop a musical theme or even a musical metaphor. Rather, he bases the cycle on a more deeply felt musical structure: one, in fact, with an archetypal resonance.

The form of "La Corona" is a circular wreath in which the last line of one sonnet becomes the first line of the next. The last line of the last sonnet is also the first line of the first sonnet, so the reader, upon finishing, discovers that he really has not finished at all, but that he is led constantly back to the beginning poem to reexperience Christ's life and death. The implication seems to be that these historical events, which do not vary, are encased in an ever-moving system which causes them to be ever occurring and yet remain already completed.

This circularity and its identification with things eternal were commonplace among Renaissance poets. Donne uses the figure of the circle in this context extensively in his prose and poetry. Harmony itself was often figured as a circle, and the ever-returning nature of the musical scale was believed to be emblematic of its divine roots.[16] A particularly succinct example is offered by Guy Le Fevre de la Boderie, who in *Divers Melanges Poetiques* (1582) writes:

> God be the principle and be the end and the center
> Of my songs: His wise Providence
> Be the argument of my apprenticeship
> And of my Rounds be the Center and the axle.[17]

The association of Christ with music and, most particularly, with rounds has also been observed in iconology.[18]

The seven sonnets included in the cycle relate in surprising ways to the divine qualities which Thomas Robinson had attributed to the seven steps of the musical scale:

> Musicke is none other than a perfect harmonie, whose divinitie is seen in the perfectnesse of his proportions, as, his unison sheweth the unitie, from whence all other (concords, discords, consonancies, or others whatsoever) springeth, next his unitie, his third: (which is the perfectest concord that is in all Musicke) representeth the perfect, & most holie Trinitie; his fift (the most perfect consonance in all Musicke, for that it is the verie essence of all concords) representeth the perfection of that most perfect number of five, which made the perfect atonement, betweene God, and man; His eight, (which as it is, but as his unison,) representeth his *Alpha* and *Omega*: & as what is above his eight, is but a repetition, as from his unison, as it were a new beginning.[19]

The first sonnet of "La Corona" could be considered representative of the "unitie, from whence all other . . . springeth." Without this beginning toward which even the end moves, no circle would be possible, no crown could be created. Furthermore, it is the one sonnet which explores the theme of the poet as self-conscious creator of a crown (his sonnet cycle). Closely linked with this are other crowns, notably Christ's crown of thorns and the crown of glory Donne will be given by God. At the core of the poem, then, is the conviction that God is the "changing unchang'd," who is crown maker, giver, and wearer. The first step is also the eighth, as the sonnet cycle continuously returns the reader to it and here one also finds a strong sense of a "first last end" or God as Alpha and Omega. The fifth sonnet, "Crucyfying," corresponds to the fifth interval in Renaissance music, which was thought to be representative of the five wounds of Christ.[20]

Absent in this scale is any sense of discord. Traditionally, the second and seventh were considered harsh discords, and the fourth was a less intolerable discord.[21] Donne could not, of course, include discordant elements in a cycle whose movement was emblematic of the divine, so he suggests that music associated with God is going to be practically though not essentially different from earthly music. It will express a perfection toward which mortal music can merely yearn.

Relationships between certain formal aspects of the music and poetry of the Renaissance have been observed by Paula Johnson

who comments upon "La Corona" in particular: "In the sonnets of *La Corona* with their overlapping first and last lines, the analogy between segments is skeletal rather than directional, but one important aspect of the relation between the sonnets is the transcendent model emphasizing the last member of the group." This she relates to a Renaissance musical phenomenon called "terminal heightening."[22] But an even more startling analogy can be drawn from the work of Zuckerkandl, a twentieth-century musicologist. In exploring the nature of the musical cycle, that is, the eight tones of the musical scale, he observes that "the distance in pitch from the point of departure increases with every step, but with the eighth tone we are again at the point of departure. Leaving has become returning; start has become goal." In playing a musical scale, he says, "3 [or the third step] like 2, points toward 1, . . . 4 points toward 3 and, across 3, toward 1—all motion from 1 to 5 is . . . an 'away from 1.' With the attainment of 5, however, the view opens in the other direction, in the direction of 8. Tone 5 itself points in both directions—hence the 'knife-edge balance' characteristic of this tone." Zuckerkandl could very well be describing the movement of "La Corona," which cannot be a crown without the event of Sonnet 5, the crucifixion. Sonnets 1 to 4 lead expectantly toward it. Sonnets 6 and 7, the "Resurrection" and "Ascention" begin, thematically, to lead back to Sonnet 1, which cannot be written or understood without the event of the crucifixion behind it. Zuckerkandl continues:

> If we proceed from left to right, the so-called rise in tonal space is at first also a rise along the curve. But after a time, that is, from 5 on, the further rise in tonal space becomes a fall along the curve; the acoustical "down" becomes the musical "up." . . . As the scale is traversed the distance in pitch from the point of departure becomes increasingly great, so that we get farther and farther away from the starting point. But the motion in terms of the tonal forces each time represents an "away from," a departing, only in its first half; in its second half it is a "toward," an approaching.

What occurs in both the musical scale and in Donne's cycle is that the eighth step or sonnet (actually, Sonnet 1) becomes "not simply the higher repetition of the first but the attained goal."[23] In "La Corona" the eighth sonnet is the first, but the richness of reading

the first sonnet after the seventh is the result of having experienced all of the previous sonnets. The crown is made by the reader's return—a burden the first sonnet alone cannot carry. But the first sonnet, read as the eighth sonnet, creates the crown. The prayers and praises have proceeded from poet as maker to return to God as maker, and a renewed sense that the poet, in Christ, can create, accept, donate his crown.

Donne suggests structurally in "La Corona" a truth which appears thematically in the rest of the *Holy Sonnets*: the difference between "movement" and "progress."[24] In this sense, the movement of "La Corona," like the miracle and mystery of the musical scale, expresses a universal rhythm and fits another piece into our understanding of the true meaning of harmony in the Renaissance. This is harmony which goes beyond music, but music's vocabulary can certainly be used to approach a clearer understanding of it.

The individual sonnets in "La Corona" are notable not merely for their places in a cycle of seven, but also for the ways in which they express thematically the concerns evident in Donne's structural scheme. Sonnet 1, for example, uses a language which constantly turns back upon itself. Using paradox, and playing upon several different meanings of "crown," Donne is able finally to suggest both the inadequacy and the richness of a language which attempts to praise God, the incomprehensible.

Helen Gardner cites Donne's scriptural source for the contrast of crowns as Isaiah 28.[25] But other relevant scriptural analogues also exist. To begin with, I Corinthians 9:24-25, provides a succinct analogy: "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." Although Donne describes a crown of bays, that awarded for poetry, and not a laurel wreath for athletics, the import is the same:

> But doe not, with a vile crowne of fraile bayes
> Reward my muses white sincerity,
> But what thy thorny crowne gain'd, that give mee,
> A crowne of Glory, which doth flower alwayes.
> (5-8)

Gardner also notes the "O Sapientia . . ." Advent hymn as a source for Donne's "first last end."[26] The Old Testament source for the concept of sapience or wisdom is the book of Proverbs. Here

wisdom gives a crown: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee. (Alternate reading: She shall compass thee with a crown of glory)" Proverbs 4:7-9.

As many Old Testament echoes exist in this poem as there are New Testament sources. Sonnet 1, as precursor to the Annunciation and Nativity, must be rooted in the Old Dispensation. But as Sonnet 8, it must reflect knowledge and understanding of the crucifixion. It does both, with the crown of thorns coming between the pagan bay crown and the heavenly incorruptible crown. Old and New, prophecy and fulfillment, first and last exist in one place.

Present in the poem is another crown, that of "prayer and praise" which the poet labels his work. This is not a haphazard title, however, since, according to the *OED*, Sidney's *Arcadia* is the source for the primary meaning of *crown* in this poem—verse in which the last line of each stanza is the beginning line of the next stanza. Finally, so many crowns crowd into the poem that the language itself becomes almost inadequate. Donne writes a crown, but does not want a crown; he would rather have another crown, gained by one more crown. To conclude, "The ends crowne our workes, but thou crown'st our ends . . ." (9). Donne recognizes a solution in the midst of apparent linguistic confusion. Christ as the Word becomes the measure of Donne's word. In a way, the language describes what the cycle as a whole performs, a motion which always returns one to Christ.

The penultimate line of Sonnet 1 ("'Tis time that heart and voice be lifted high") suggests both that the poet wants his words to be audibly heaven-reaching and also that he is working "up to" his proper pitch. Hollander has noted the close identification of prayer and music. He also describes Plotinus as using "the phenomenon of sympathetic vibration to explain the efficacy of prayer. . . . The wish to be well-tuned, to have the tension of one's psychic strings . . . tightened up to the proper devotional pitch," which was a typical Renaissance metaphor, could very well be utilized here by Donne, especially since "La Corona" seems to have deep-seated connections with Renaissance ideas of music and harmony.[29]

The origin of the use of puns and word play in hymns dates to the twelfth century. Two early hymn masters, Adam of St. Victor

and St. Thomas Aquinas, have been compared to the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets, all of whom use puns almost reverently.[28] In many ways, Donne's puns and paradoxes point to (and, in fact, celebrate) deficiencies of language in the area of mystery. "Annunciation," the second sonnet of "La Corona," is a most graphic example of repetition, paradox, and pun. The first line, "Salvation to all that will is nigh," repeats the last line of the previous poem and here the end-to-end linking, in its first use in the cycle, purposely serves to disorient the reader. The first sonnet leads to a conclusion which serves as a premise for the second sonnet. Superficially, this appears to be a highly logical, organizational device. But "Annunciation" stresses the impossibility of truly understanding the premise. At the end of Sonnet 1, the availability of salvation for all was presented as the subject of the poet's corona; Sonnet 2, in attempting a further exploration of what appears to be simple fact, finally concludes with another mystery, "Immensity cloystered in thy deare wombe."

The destruction of the reader's expectations of understanding the initial premise begins immediately in Sonnet 2 with the repetition of "all":

> Salvation to *all* that will is nigh
> That *All*, which *al*wayes is *All* every where,
> Which cannot sinne, and yet *all* sinnes must beare
> Which cannot die, yet cannot chuse but die.
> (1-4; emphasis added)

As in Sonnet 1 repetition functions as a sort of literary mantra and finally makes the word itself senseless. These repetitions are combined with expressed paradox, and later lines reveal even more repetition and more paradox:

> Ere by the spheares time was created, thou
> Wast in his minde, who is thy Sonne, and Brother,
> Whom thou conceiv'st conceiv'd; yea thou art now
> Thy Makers maker, and thy Fathers mother,
> Thou'hast light in darke. (9-13)

Zuckerkandl has pointed out that repetition, as an artistic device, functions in different ways in music and literature. Traditionally, it has been thought that the reason repetition soon leads to nonsense in poetry and yet in music becomes an important part of its meaning and pleasurableness is that "music . . . must . . . hold itself in the air by its own pigtail, must give itself its own objective

content." Literature, on the other hand, hooks into an objective reality, which is able to inform its content. In music, repetition allows us to apprehend the passing of time; in poetry, too much leads to a sort of reader hypnosis. Zuckerkandl observes that in music:

> if the tones say the same thing again and again, they disappear as the object of attention; they become merely a medium through which the beating of the wave emerges ever more clearly and strongly. . . . This is actually the situation which we find in primitive music, where often enough a composition consists of nothing but the endless repetition of one and the same brief tonal formula. Repetition is a sort of natural state of music.[29]

The repetition in "La Corona" appears to be functioning in both ways. It hypnotizes to a certain extent, but it also allows an essential truth about the nature of the universe to emerge. By compounding the meaning of the word *all*, by showing both its expansiveness and its limitations, it has become a new word, one which can be seen only as paradox and ambiguity. Both musical and literary repetitions link in its use to suggest that the objective reality of the poem is actually mystery, a mystery which includes an historical yet timeless event. It cannot be approached through the customary use of language and, for this reason, reader expectations of understanding it verbally are thwarted.

One Renaissance musicologist wrote, "And I am subject to Believe, (if in Eternity we shall make use of any Language, or shall not understand One Another, by some More Spiritual Conveyances, or Infusions of Perceptions, than by Verbal Language) that Musick (It Self) may be That Eternal, and Celestial Language."[30] The poet is describing a different time scheme—one which includes "spheares time," but also one which goes beyond it. Thus, "La Corona" also fits Zuckerkandl's description of repetition in music as a way of "clearing our sight for the perception of time as event." Donne connects "La Corona's" musical structure with the music of the spheres and the narrow sense of time connected with it. In other words, Donne encases an historical event governed by the "spheares time" in an eternal and circular scheme. The music of the spheres is both a subsidiary and an image of the music of God. In his study of time in the Renaissance, Quinones notes that for Dante "the clock is . . . the complete circle, representing the

harmony that occurs where 'joy becomes eternal.'"[31] The revolution, the circle, the self-referential nature of paradox and pun, the notion of God as Alpha and Omega, the constant return of the musical scale, then, are all "images" of eternity and proof of a mystery which is finally unexplainable discursively. One is thrown back upon the nature and vocabulary of music, as Donne was to understand it in *The Anniversaries*, but also upon the structures of music as vehicles used to approach a comprehension of universal harmony.

The last lines of "Nativitie" provide a preview of a word which will later appear in musical context in *The Anniversaries*:

> Kisse him, and with him into Egypt goe,
> With his kinde mother, who partakes thy woe.
> (13-14)

Elizabeth Drury will become both "part and partaker" in God's heavenly chorus. Here in "Nativitie" Mary partakes in a more discordant and unmusical sense, but with a part in an earthly song which the events experienced in "La Corona" transform into an eternal music.

Transformation, in fact, is the central theme of the cycle. Here it would be helpful to recall Donne's use of the four elements in *The Anniversaries* and the ways in which the Renaissance mind connected their balance with the attainment of true harmony. Harmony, for the Renaissance man, was not just a musical matter. S. K. Heninger, Jr., has explained the position of the four elements in the concept of harmony:

> The abstract of cosmos was represented . . . most often . . . by the number 4, the tetrad. . . . From a tetrad of qualities [hot, cold, moist, dry] a tetrad of elements is readily derived, and from thence can be extrapolated the numerous tetrads required to explain the variety of items at every conceivable level of creation, whether physical or conceptual. . . . In this way the diversity of God's creation is arranged in a single system determined by number, so that cosmic harmony and proportion and order . . . are achieved. The paradox of God's infinitude and yet His oneness is resolved by palpable example.

Additionally, this tetrad was commonly visualized as circular.[32] All of this serves as background to explain what happens

to the circular tetrad of elements in "La Corona." The fire occurs first as the Christ child's "sparks of wit" in "Temple" and becomes the "Sunne," a pun for "Son." Water, which is required to quench the "strong sober thirst" of Sonnet 1, is found in the living water of moist blood in "Crucyfying" and "Resurrection." Earth appears once as "drossie clay" in "Ascention" to be burnt away by the Sun (Son) or washed clean by the tears of repentance. Air is blown out in "Temple" as the Word—an inextricable linkage of the Son and the Holy Spirit. The elements, in other words, have been infused with the Trinity. Christ is living water, fiery Sun, Breath of wisdom, and these figures work together to create purified and sanctified clay, or earth. Here is new harmony—one which is both created and creator.

With the final sonnet, "Ascention," Donne is able to progress to an "uprising." The direction of "La Corona" as a whole has been toward Sonnet 7, "Ascention," but the ascending (as in the musical scale) involves a return to the original tone, only at a different frequency, one higher and nearer to heaven. From Sonnet 7 one proceeds, enlightened, to Sonnet 1. The reader has been brought to understanding. For the poet the process of writing has brought him closer to Christ and yet also back to earth. He must forever begin again.

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Notes

1 *De harmonia mundi totius cantica tria* (1525; rpt. Paris, 1545), pp. 446-49. For tongue as instrument see Gretchen Ludke Finney, *Musical Backgrounds for English Literature: 1580-1650* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1962), p. 6.

2 John Donne, *The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), pp. 33-35. All further quotations will be taken from this edition. S. K. Heninger, Jr., has noted that "Donne did not dare constrict the circular perfection of God within the narrow confines of human understanding. . . . The esoteric meaning of the squared circle is clearly explained by the diagram on the title page of Michael Maier's alchemical treatise *De circulo physico quadrato: hoc est, auro* (Oppenheim, 1616). The four basic qualities—dry, cold, moist, warm—are placed at the corners of a square. By their interaction, however, they produce the four elements: earth, water, air, fire. These four elements . . . comprise the cosmos, and hence a unity, represented by the inscribing circle" (*Touches of Sweet Harmony* [San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1974], p. 114).

3 Finney, p. 6.

4 James Grassineau, *A Musical Dictionary; Being a Collection of Terms and Characters* . . . (London, 1740), p. 30.

5 Giorgio, p. 466.

6 James Hutton, "Some English Poems in Praise of Music," *English Miscellany II*, ed. Mario Praz (Rome: Edizione di Storia e Letteratura), p. 15.

7 Victor Zuckerkandl, *Sound and Symbol: Music and the External World* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1956), pp. 76-77.

8 Thomas Mace, *Musick's Monument; or a Remembrancer of the Best Practical Musick, Both Diuine and Ciuil, that has euer been known, to haue been in the World* (1676; rpt. Paris: Editions Du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1966), p. 9.

9 *The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, p. 103. See also Anthony Low, *Love's Architecture: Devotional Modes in Seventeenth Century Literature* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 12-26.

10 Mace, p. 5.

11 Ornithoparcus, p. 80. "Art" must be a printer's error for "heart."

12 *Sermons on the Psalms and Gospels*, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1973), pp. 64-65.

13 Mace, pp. 186-89.

14 "The Archetypal Journey Motif in Donne's *Divine Poems*," in *New Essays on Donne*, ed. Gary A. Stringer (Salzburg: Institut for Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1977), p. 184.

15 *The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, pp. xxii-xxiii; *Love's Architecture*, p. 57.

16 Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *The Breaking of the Circle* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1950), pp. 34-63; Finney, p. 34.

17 Quoted by Georges Poulet, *The Metamorphoses of the Circle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1966), p. 5.

18 Kathi Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death: Studies in Musical Iconology* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), p. 317.

19 Thomas Robinson, *The Schoole of Musicke* (1603; rpt. ed. David Lumsden, Paris: Editions Du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1971), plate iv.

20 *The Schoole of Musicke*, plate xxiii, n. 4.

21 Mace, p. 265.

22 *Form and Transformation in Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1972), p. 66.

23 Zuckerkandl, pp. 99-101, 103. Yet another explanation of the circularity of the seven sonnets has been offered by A. B. Chambers, who relates them to the structure of the liturgical year. Chambers observes that "the liturgical time schemes of Christianity . . . offer methods by means of which change is transmuted into changelessness." It is no accident, Chambers infers, that Donne uses seven sonnets, a number which describes the number of canonical hours in a day. About the hours, he notes: "Since the number seven was often a symbol of the infinite, perhaps the seven canonical hours are meant to imply that the liturgical day is an image of the timelessness which that day celebrates. . . . The day as a whole is a reasonably complete summary of what Christ did and does and of what, therefore, every Christian should do. "La Corona: Philosophic, Sacred, and Poetic Uses of Time," in *New Essays on Donne*, p. 144.

24 John N. Wall, "Donne's Wit of Redemption: The Drama of Prayer in the *Holy Sonnets*," *Studies in Philology* 73 (1976), 191, 197-98.

25 *The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, p. 57.

26 *The Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, p. 58.

27 John Hollander, *The Untuning of the Sky* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), pp. 266, 268.

28 Walter J. Ong, "Wit and Mystery: A Revaluation in Mediaeval Latin Hymnody," *Speculum* 22 (1947), 315.

29 Zuckerkandl, p. 219.

30 Mace, p. 272.

31 Ricardo Quinones, *The Renaissance Discovery of Time* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 35, 37.

32 Heninger, pp. 329, 162-72, plates 28-34.