Glorified Bodies and the "Valediction: forbidding Mourning"[1]

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The imagistic structure and much of what might be called the "argument" of Donne's famous "Valediction" depend heavily on two bodies of material which appear to be, at least at first glance, totally unrelated to one another. The first is the theology of glorified bodies, of bodies as they are to be in perfected form when resurrected on Judgment Day. It now seems strange that such a theology could even exist since there is and necessarily can be no experiential basis for it, but this fact did not trouble earlier religious writers at all. Many of them, including Donne himself, were confident that they knew, and knew rather precisely, what to expect at their own resurrection. The second body of material, now less esoteric to many readers than it once was, is alchemy. However unrelated or even antithetical to scholastic theology alchemical literature appears to be, there is in fact considerable duplication in imagistic usage because of the fact that works of alchemical theory regularly refer to the metaphoric "death" of a metal and to its "resurrection" in a glorified and golden state. A number of symbols appear in both systems of thought; gold, thinness, airiness, circles and/or spheres, the sun, and symbolic arithmetic are among them. The parallelism at times becomes so close that it would be impossible to tell whether alchemy or theology is being talked about if a given passage were to be read without some context as a guide. Some writers, moreover, are quite deliberately talking about both subjects simultaneously. Since this conflation of subjects was intentionally made in earlier times, I have found it impossible to separate out the two contributory parts. In what follows, I cite the evidence for glorified bodies, whether human or metallic or both, as the case demands.

Donne's poem, to begin with, while not a "divine" poem in any ordinary sense of the term, depends on an article of Christian faith,

specifically the eleventh article of the Creed: "I believe . . . in the resurrection of the dead." It is in discussion of that belief that one finds why virtuous men can and *should* pass mildly away and what they anticipate themselves to be in the ultimate future. The first term of Donne's initial simile—

> As virtuous men passe mildly away,
> And whisper to their soules, to goe,
> Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,
> The breath goes now, and some say, no[2]

—quite clearly presents a standard contrast of the kind that divines, as well as poets, liked to make. John Baker, expounding the Creed, writes that

> they that are wel perswaded in minde of the resurrection of their bodies, can not but at the last houre of death depart ioyfully & merrily out of this life. . . . But they that are not fully perswaded of this true article die very vnwillingly, & with griefe & sorrowe of minde.[3]

Ben Jonson, in a two-line epigram "Of Death," arrives at a similar conclusion:

> HE that feares death, or mournes it, in the iust,
> Shewes of the resurrection little trust.[4]

It is, of course, precisely a confident trust in the resurrection and in the reunion of body and soul then to occur which allows virtuous men to pass mildly away, and it is, implicitly at least, a mistrust of that event which produces mournful friends more concerned with literal "breath" than with—Donne's pun in obvious—*anima*, the soul as well as the breath.[5] The initial contrast, then, is between proper and improper ways of viewing death, ways which in turn are dependent on belief or disbelief in the resurrection.

This first stanza therefore relates not only to the poem's title, "farewell," but also to the second term of the initial simile:

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

"Layetie" and its implicit contrast—the "priests" or possibly, as in "The Canonization," the "saints" of love—combine with "prophanation" to continue the religious imagery. But with the images

of "melt," "floods," and "tempests," the context of alchemy also becomes important.[6] Nicholas Flammel, who caused some "hieroglyphical figures" to be painted on an arch in St. Innocent's churchyard in Paris, explained that the figures might represent two things:

> First, the *mysteries* of our future and vndoubted *Resurrection*, at the day of Iudgement, and comming of good *Iesus*. . . . And secondly, they may signifie to them, which are skilled in Naturall *Philosophy*, all the principall and necessary operations of the Maistery.[7]

These "operations" include a "killing" of the metal by reducing it to its constituent parts and restoring it to life in a reconstructed but more perfect form.[8] The alchemical process, whether for humans or metals, begins with "dissolution," which some, according to Flammel, call "*Death* . . . and from hence are proceeded so many *Allegories* of *dead men*, *tombes*, and *sepulchres*." Others, he continues, "have called it . . . *Mollification* . . . *Liquefaction* . . . because that the *Confections* are melted."[9] At this point, unhappily for the practicing alchemist, the parallels temporarily ended. It was always possible to "flood" or ruin an experiment and thereby to cause a "tempest" or, as Donne has it in the "Nocturnal," a "chaos."[10] In God's alchemy, however, resurrection is assured.

What the first simile suggests, therefore, is that just as the body and soul of virtuous men bid farewell in confidence of reunion and just as metals must die if they are to be raised to the level of gold, so Donne and his love must unmournfully endure a farewell—in the language of Petrarchanism, a death—because their day of resurrection will also come. The third stanza supplies additional details by extending this kind of parallelism. Virtuous men are to saintly lovers and to superlunary motions as sad friends are to lay lovers and to sublunary movings of the earth.

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

The stanza may allude, as C. M. Coffin once thought, to Old Philosophy and New, and, as John Freccero argued, it surely depends upon ideas of *anima* and breath.[11] Most importantly, however, the stanza refers to the portents long expected to herald the arrival of Judgment Day and the resurrection of the dead. The evidence for this fact is of several kinds.

First of all, there are biblical passages which describe apocalyptically the events of the last days. According to Haggai, God is to "shake the heavens, and the earth" (ii.6). According to St. John, when the seventh angel of Revelation poured forth his vial, "there was a great earthquake" (xvi.18). St. Matthew reports Christ's own prophecy that "the powers of the heavens shall be shaken" (xxiv. 29), and St. Luke's parallel account stresses the same events:

> And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. (xxi.25-27)

Biblical passages such as these must have been of considerable interest to those seventeenth-century men who, like Godfrey Goodman and the Donne of the *Anniversaries*, thought that they had lived in that last age of all when these happenings would soon occur.[12] Such passages would have been doubly familiar even to a man of contrary persuasion because they played an important part in the liturgy. The church year celebrated by Dean Donne at St. Paul's began with Advent season, the preparation for Christmas and the first coming of Christ. One part of that preparation, however, included a reminder that the last coming was at hand. The Gospel lesson for the first Sunday of Advent in the Roman rite and for the second Sunday in the Anglican was therefore the prophecy of final events just quoted from Luke. Upon such texts, moreover, Advent and Christmas sermons were customarily preached. Some of these homilies simply stress the terrors of the last days; the first sermon of Taylor's *Golden Grove*, for example, is devoted almost exclusively to the spectacle of seeing "the earth rent with convulsions and horrid tremblings" and "the stars . . . rent into threads."[13] Others, in ways rather like Donne's poem, link these physical details to states of mind or of soul. Ephraem mentions the quaking of earth and the trembling of heaven in order to ask where then shall be the baits of pleasure?[14] Gregory the Great forbids mourning to those bidding farewell and argues that only laity will grieve:

> They who love God, therefore, are entreated to be glad and to rejoice because of the end of the world,

> since him whom they love they shall soon find and that which they have not loved is passing away. Far be it that any of the faithful . . . should grieve over the stricken world. . . . Let those who have planted the roots of their hearts deep in the love of the world grieve over its ruin, those who seek not the life hereafter nor even suspect that that life exists. . . . As we have said, he moves the tempest, and the earth cannot abide. What, therefore, will it do when he moves the heavens?[15]

These suggestions from the liturgy and sermons of Advent would have been confirmed by still another fact known to Donne. Whitsunday or Pentecost is the last of the principal festivals of the liturgical year. It concerns the last great act which Christ performed, the sending of the Holy Ghost as a Comforter for all men until Judgment Day and Christ's return. And, like the opening stanzas of Donne's poem, Pentecost is strongly associated with *anima*, the breath or spirit or soul. In Joel ii.28-30, one of the Old Testament lessons for the day in the Anglican rite, God promises, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh. . . . And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth." In place of the customary Epistle, the account of Pentecost given in Acts ii.1-3 was read:

> 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 as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.

Romans heard both these passages and, in addition, sang the great hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*.

Finally, even outside the context of Bible and liturgy, Donne's images of heaven and earth must have suggested an eschatological concern, for even Plato knew of those prodigies which accompany the ending of things. Anticipating the completion of the *annus magnus*—a great year composed of 36,000 normal years, a year perhaps measured off, as Freccero has suggested, by the thirty-six lines of Donne's poem—Plato envisaged "the greatest of all the changes which take place in the heavens" and described "a great earthquake" as well.[16] For Plato, of course, the spheres would begin their cycles anew and time would again revolve; for

Christians, they would stop. Aquinas' explanation of this difference in belief is, as I hope later to show, relevant to Donne's poem.

> It would be contrary to the order established in things by divine providence if the matter of lower bodies [the world and its inhabitants] were brought to the state of incorruption, so long as there remains movement in the higher bodies [the spheres] . . . . the resurrection of human bodies will be delayed until the end of the world when the heavenly movement will cease. . . . Empedocles . . . stated that the soul would return to the same body at the end of the great year.[17]

Each of Donne's first three stanzas thus depends in greater or less degree and more or less explicitly upon the resurrection of the dead on Judgment Day at the end of time. All imply a concern for the kind of existence which pertains to that resurrected condition. And all, therefore, presume some knowledge of the theology of glorified bodies, the theology which describes the post-mortal reunion of body and soul. In essence, that theology is simple, stating only that we shall be made like Christ in body as well as soul. John Baker, whose comments on unmournful death were quoted earlier, says no more than that our bodies "shall hereafter be made immortall" and that they shall "much excell the bodyes which we nowe beare."[18] Henry Bullinger adds that they shall be "free from all evil affections," and Otho Wermullerus—in a tract Myles Coverdale thought important enough to translate—says that these "glorified bodies" shall possess "pureness, perfect strength, immortality, and joy."[19] Elnathan Parr gives a more extended, if still quite general, description:

> The bodies of the Just shall bee Immortall, Incorruptible, Spirituall: not in substance, but in quality or condition; not needing meanes of bodily nouriture, not subject to infirmities, but powerfull . . . voyde of all deformity, and vncomelinesse; glorious, of perfect stature; without the vse, though not without the difference of Sexe.[20]

Even in the early church, however, a need was felt to establish precisely how our present body differs from the resurrected body and from Christ's. Tertullian, for example, singles out three qualities of resurrected bodies in particular, one of them being "impassibility."[21] St. John Damascene mentions "subtlety."[22] Ambrose

refers to "clarity."[23] By the time of Aquinas and Bonaventura, these attributes had been codified and—with some terms arguable as to exact meaning—agreed upon.[24] They are, in the order of Aquinas, impassibility, subtlety, agility, and clarity. The fundamental meanings of these terms are easy enough, as a few later writers can show.

1. *Impassibility*. Peter Martyr: "Vnto the saints after resurrection, there is appointed an impassibilitie: for they shall not be corrupted nor diminished with anie passions, sorrowes, or diseases." Robert Bolton: "Impassible . . . from an exquisite temper and harmony of the Elementary qualities freed everlastingly from all possiblity of any angry contrariety and combate."[25]

2. *Subtlety*. John Woolton: Subtilty is . . . perfect power of the senses. . . . [Bodies] should come as neere the propertie of spirites as possibly they might . . . reteyning still their corporall nature and substance." William Nicolson: "All grosseness and feculency shall be transparent as the sun, and shall as near come unto the nature of a Spirit, as it is possible for a body."[26]

3. *Agility*. Thomas Morton: "The faculties of the soule and body be more able, ready, and quicke in performing their seuerall duties and functions." John Smith: Bodies shall be "full of agilities and nimbleness to move upwards and downwards." William Bucanus: "Heauinesse and weight shall be no hindrance . . . whereby it shall come to passe that we shall be rapt with such a nimble motion of our bodies, to meet the lord in the air."[27]

4. *Clarity*. Thomas Worthington: "The bodie dying, is pale, darke, obscure, but shal rise most faire, cleare, and glistering, the glorie of the soule redounding into the bodie." Gasper Olevian: "For this cause the bodies of the faithful are called clarified bodies, of the clearenes of the heauenlie light wherewith they are enlightened." Amandus Polanus: "Our bodies . . . shall be mightie and glorious with admirable brightnes."[28]

Combine these attributes, and one emerges with the joy of Bishop Joseph Hall:

> Who can but rejoice in spirit, to foresee such a glorious communion of perfected saints? to see their bodies with a clear brightness, without all earthly opacity; with agility, without all dulness; with subtlety, without grossness; with impassibility, without the reach of annoyance or corruption?[29]

The rejoicing of the scholastics and of later readers of "the School" such as Donne was no less sincere, one assumes, than Bishop Hall's, but it was probably tempered by the realization that not all of these attributes of glorified bodies were completely understood. "A hot dispute here is among the *Schoolmen*," as Henry Jeanes correctly observed.[30] Is the impassibility of resurrected bodies "*intrinsecall* or *extrinsecall*"? For the one, Jeanes informs us, are Scotus and Durandus; for the other is Suarez. On the one hand, "it is well observed by *Estius*" that post-mortal clarity is slightly visible even in this life because of the soul's "impression upon the body, making the countenance serene and cheerefull"; on the other hand, "what the *Schoolmen* speake concerning the flowing of the *Clarity* of a glorious body from the soule, is to be understood *warily*," and only "*Suarez* giveth a very good interpretation of it." Concerning agility Jeanes records no substantial differences of opinion, though Hugh of St. Victor had earlier mentioned much vain argument about it,[31] but subtlety was the most difficult term of all.

In the first place, there was disagreement concerning the name, Bonaventura preferring *penetrabilitas* to *subtilitas* and Thomas Worthington, "Penetrabilitie" to "subtlety."[32] Gregory the Great well illustrates why both terms were possible for the same quality. In "that heavenly Country, that society of blessed citizens," he writes, "hearts . . . are transparent by pureness." Their "very brightness itself is reciprocally open to them in each other's breasts, and when the countenance of each one is marked his conscience is penetrated along with it."[33] This kind of "penetrability" was completely orthodox, but it could and did degenerate into the heterodox opinion that the resurrected body, because so subtle and penetratable, is not flesh. An early heretic, identified by Gregory and by Donne as Eutychius, the Bishop of Constantinople, had argued—in Donne's words—that glorified bodies were "so

rarifyed, so refined, so attenuated, and reduced to a thinnesse, and subtlenesse, that they were *aery bodies*."[34] Aquinas reports that "certain heretics said that the body will remain at the resurrection, but that it will be endowed with subtlety by means of rarefaction, so that human bodies in rising again will be like the air or the wind."[35] Worthington, discussing "Penetrabilitie," approaches, perhaps too closely, this heretical position:

> Not that the bodie shal be changed in substance, from a corporal, into a spiritual substance, but the same substance rising to glorie, shal be changed in qualitie, and haue the power of a spirit, to penetrate another bodie. As our Sauiour rising from death, penetrated the monument wherein he was buried . . . so likewise other glorified bodies of Sainctes, shal penetrate and passe through the solide firmament or anie other bodies, by the power of this spiritual qualitie .[36]

And nearly all divines who discuss the resurrected body were concerned lest lay readers misunderstand. Nicolson warns that "subtility . . . is not so to be understood, as if the bodies of the Saints should be turned into an airy body," and Peter Martyr argues that subtlety "must not so be vnderstood, as though the bodies of them that rise againe should be conuerted into spirit, & that it should be airie or elementall . . . so as they may penetrate all things."[37] Bolton denies that "our bodies shall be turned into spirits," Woolton denies that they "become ayery," and Donne reports the heresy of Eutychius only emphatically to reject it.[38]

Because, then, of the difficulty of the term "subtlety," the airiness of glorified bodies was well known to orthodox and heterodox alike. So also was its golden quality. Isaiah quotes God as saying that when Babylon is finally destroyed, "I will make a man more precious than fine gold. . . . I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place" (xiii.12-13), and Job announces that when God "hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (xxiii. 10). Gregory, pondering such passages in the influential *Moralia in Job*, makes a useful distinction. "Fine gold," he says, can refer only to "the holy Angels." "But for just men, so long as they are in this corruptible flesh with the conditions of mortality, 'gold' they may indeed be, 'fine gold' they cannot be in any wise." Gregory also interprets Job's statement that wisdom is equalled by neither gold nor crystal (xxviii.17) as a reference to the glorified bodies of the saints. For though those bodies

> glitter with such wonderful brightness, and shine through with such extraordinary transparency, yet that Wisdom [i.e., God], by a likeness of Which they have all that they are, they "cannot equal." Therefore it is well said, *The gold and the glass cannot equal it.*[39]

Hence it happens that "gold" regularly appears in Aquinas' discussion of resurrected bodies. Commenting on their integrity, he finds occasion to observe that "true gold is what has the form of gold whence gold derives its proper being." Concerned with subtlety, he says that "we speak of subtlety in the sun and moon and like bodies, just as gold and silver and similar things may be called subtle." Explicating clarity, he refers to Gregory and to Job for a comparison to "gold or chrystal."[40] Hence also, perhaps, there occur Donne's distinctions among clay, glass, and gold in the "Epitaph on Himself":

> till us death lay
> To ripe and mellow there, w'are stubborne clay,
> Parents make us earth, and soules dignifie
> Vs to be glasse, here to grow gold we lie.

Add to the golden airiness of resurrected bodies three further facts: that in "the end of the world," the righteous shall "shine forth as the sun" (Matt. xiii.40-43); that the sun's perfect working on subterranean matters was thought to produce gold, the alchemical symbol for gold and sun therefore being the same: ☉; and that Origen not only argued that the resurrected body would not be flesh but, in one of the most famous heterodox opinions ever recorded, that because that body would be perfect, it would necessarily be spherical in shape.[41] From these materials the imagery and meaning of the rest of Donne's poem were very probably derived.

First of all, the parallelism of earlier stanzas is extended one final time by the introduction of worthy and unworthy lovers:

> Dull sublunary lovers love
> (Whose soule is sense) cannot admit
> Absence, because it doth remove
> Those things which elemented it.
>
> But we by a love, so much refin'd
> That our selves know not what it is,

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

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

Sublunary lovers are necessarily dull. They lack clarity not only because their souls, being sense, can admit no ab-sense, and not only because dullness is always present unless, as Worthington earlier put it, "the glorie of the soule [is] redounding into the bodie," but also because, being sublunary, they are restricted to an imperfect state of development. To quote Aquinas again, "it would be contrary to . . . divine providence if the matter of lower bodies were brought to the state of incorruption, so long as there remains movement in the higher bodies." Donne and his love, superlunary or higher bodies by implicit contrast, are very much in motion, however, as the movements of the compass are shortly to prove. Yet because they are higher bodies, already they approach the glorified condition. They are so much refined, like gold, that they possess in part the subtlety of penetration and are "inter-assured of the mind." Because their souls, not being sense, *can* admit absence, the clarity of glorified bodies is foreshadowed, the soul's impression on the body, quoting Jeanes again, "making the countenance serene and cheerefull." Since these lovers care less eyes, lips, and hands to miss, there is a suggestion of that post-mortal state wherein, as we learned from Parr, one is "without the vse, though not without the difference of Sexe." Richard Lovelace, who rewrote Donne's poem under the title "To Lucasta, Going Beyond the Seas," recognized and made more explicit the import of Donne's lines:

So then we doe anticipate
Our after-fate,
And are alive i' th' skies,
If thus our lips and eyes
Can speake like spirits unconfin'd
In heav'n, their earthy bodies left behind.[42]

The temporary climax of the development is the last line of the sixth stanza wherein the resurrection imagery of gold, subtlety, and airiness—latent within all earlier parts of the poem—at last

emerges in the comparison, "Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate." The line is of very considerable importance; it points the way, I believe, to a proper understanding of Donne's conclusion.

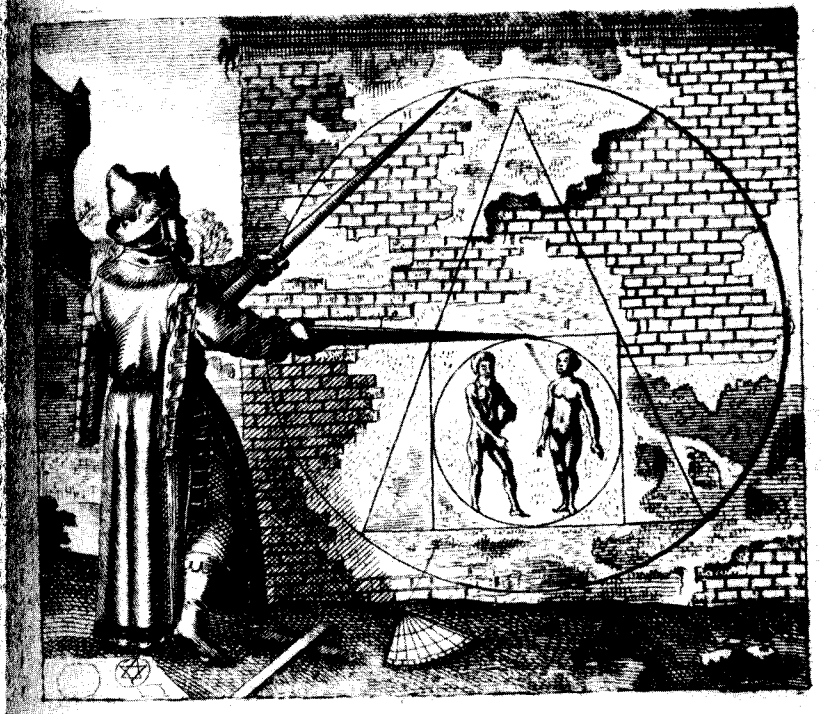
Of the many deaths and resurrections described by alchemists, one was crucial. Any metal, it was said, might be refined to the level of gold, but only the death and resurrection of gold itself could produce the philosopher's stone, that magical instrument which, by assimilating all things to itself, could transmute anything into a "gold" more perfect even than gold. The recipe for the glorification of gold always began with the same instruction: prepare the metal, the most subtle and ductile of all, by beating into the thinnest possible plates.[43] Donne does not list the next steps in the process, but he obviously knew and expected his readers to know what they are. Gold, like man, is composed of body, soul, and spirit, the three of which must be separated from one another so that the "body" may be further separated into its four elements and so that all parts may then be recombined in resurrected form. Since gold is circular, its symbol being ⊙, since body, soul, and spirit are three or "triangular," and since the elements are four or "quadrangular," the whole process may be numerically and geometrically described. "Tell me, then, what is this art?"

> A point which suddenly goes in a circle,
> Wherein quadrant and triangle stand.
>
> There is made from the masculine and feminine a round circle. And from that circle extract a square. And from that square extract a triangle. And from this triangle make a round circle. And for certain you will have the philosopher's stone.[44]

A compass, clearly, will at this point be a useful tool, and Donne, like the sage in the accompanying plate, has one conveniently at hand.[45]

> If they be two, they are two so
> As stiffe twin compasses are two,
> Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if th'other doe.
>
> And though it in the center sit,
> Yet when the other far doth rome,
> It leanes, and hearkens after it,
> And growes erect, as that comes home.

Fac ex mare & fœmina circulum, inde quadrangulum, hinc triangulum, fac circulum & habebis lap. Philoſophorum.



EPIGRAMMA XXI.

Fœmina masque unus fiant tibi circulus, ex quo
Surgat, habens æquum forma quadrata latus.
Hinc Trigonum ducas, omni qui parte rotundam
In ſphæram redeat: Tum Lapis ortus erit.
Si res tanta tuæ non mox venit obvia menti,
Dogma Geometræ ſi capis, omne ſcies.

Such wilt thou be to mee, who must
Like th'other foot, obliquely runne;
Thy firmnes makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begunne.

Freccero explained Donne's compass in terms of astronomy, demonstrating from the astronomical precision of "rome," "erect," "home," and "obliquely" that what is described is the apparent motion of the wandering stars. Because that motion is a spiral, reconciling circular movement (the motion of the divine) and rectilinear movement (the motion of animals), he was able to conclude that while Donne moves rectilinearly both out and in (to end where he "begunne") and circularly round about (to draw his "circle just"), Donne was not being inconsistent but, rather, was describing a love neither totally divine nor merely animalistic but mixed and therefore human in nature.[46] Freccero's evidence is irrefutable, but his conclusion nevertheless requires qualification. As it stands, it does not appear to me to be consistent with the hyperbolic wit characteristic of Donne in general nor with the import of the imagery of death and resurrection of this poem in particular. Earlier, I suggested that Donne and his love, though mortal, had approached the glorified condition of the saints. But the suggestion was false, for what Donne claims is not to have approached but to have excelled it. As for "just men," to refer again to Gregory, "so long as they are in this corruptible flesh with the conditions of mortality, 'gold' they may indeed be, 'fine gold' they cannot be in any wise." Yet Donne has achieved the finest possible gold—so fine, in fact, that it is "ayery." Its subtlety, moreover, has become so great that not a "breach" but an "expansion," apparently over any necessary distance, can occur. What is actually approached, therefore, is an attribute said to pertain, if at all, to one and only one body. The attribute is "ubiquity"; the body is Christ's.[47]

And that, of course, is the marvellously hyperbolic point. Donne makes it explicit by means of alchemical terms. Already as golden as mere mortals can be, these lovers nevertheless refine themselves into airy plates, and they are, after a death caused by valediction, to be resurrected by the compass into the philosopher's stone itself. And that stone, most truly considered, is not metal at all. Instead, it is God, "the greatest Spagyric Philosopher."[48] The stone's power is said to be such that "it heals all dead and living bodies." "Its mother is a virgin, its father knows no woman." It is "the Philosopher's Stone, our King and Lord of Lords," and

you are to honor "the tomb of our King, for unless you do, you will never behold him coming in glory." "Because of the insight which their art gave to them, the Ancient Sages knew all about the resurrection of the body and the redeeming work of Christ." And, finally,

> Christ, that blessed heavenly Stone, extends the quickening influence of His purple Tincture to us, purifying us, and conforming us to the likeness of His perfect and heavenly Body. . . . For our temporal death, which is the wages of sin, is not a real death, but only a natural and gentle severing of body and soul.

For those able to read the symbols, the philosopher's stone ultimately is no myth. It exists, and on Judgment Day it will transmute those of us who lie in the grave "to grow gold." This is a fact, as one alchemist concluded, "fraught with reverential and unspeakable awe (like the sight of the final chemical transformation)."

Donne avoids the bathos but not the conclusion, for by becoming the Stone, this couple also becomes not love's "saint" but love's "god." To the gods all things are possible, and Donne's compass can therefore trace two movements, not one. It does indeed describe a spiral path like the movement of the heavens to be shaked on Judgment Day, for this love affair is no more bloodlessly angelic than the one celebrated in "The Canonization." Yet the poem's last two lines do appear to stress not the more or less roundness of a gyre but the perfect roundness of a just circle, and the stress appears to emphasize a self-contradictory juxtaposition to Donne's ending not on the circumference just drawn but at the center where he began. These last lines, in short, appear to present a circular oxymoron. They thus suggest the paradoxical circle which is God, whose center is everywhere, whose circumference is nowhere, whose point—like the Stone's—suddenly and perpetually goes in a circle.[49] This ancient definition of God, known to and used by Donne,[50] has the great advantage of enabling Donne to be at the center, where he began, and on the circumference, where he draws his just circle, at precisely the same time. It enables him and his love to be as distantly separated as center and circumference can possibly be and yet never actually apart. And it works admirably to characterize this love. Eminently human though that love be, it is also infinitely great, "and whatsoever is so," as Donne once

wrote, "is Circular, and returns into itselfe, and is everywhere beginning and ending, and yet nowhere either."[51]

That such a conclusion is consistent with Donne's purposes is supported not only by the self-conferred divinity already alchemically established but also by the fact that Donne often associates circles with the doctrine of the resurrection upon which so much of the poem has depended. The death of the martyrs "was a birth to them into another life, into the glory of God; It ended one Circle, and created another; for immortality, and eternity is a Circle too. . . . Of this Circle, the Mathematician is our great and good God."[52] "Christ is our Zodiake: In him we move, from the beginning to the end of our Circle. And therefore, as the last point of our Circle, our resurrection determines in him, in Christ." In the resurrection "Christ makes up his circle; in this he is truly *Alpha* and *Omega*, His comming in Paradise in a promise, his comming to Judgement in the clouds, are tied together in the Resurrection." "To be now co-heire with the Son of God, is such a Circle, such a Compasse, as that no revolutions in this world . . . can be called or thought . . . any Point in respect of this Circle." Finally,

> Christ establishes a Resurrection, *A Resurrection there shall be*, for, that makes up *Gods circle*. The *Body* of Man was the first point that the foot of Gods Compasse was upon: First, he created the body of *Adam*: and then he carries his Compasse round, and shuts up where he began, he ends with the *Body of man* againe in the glorification thereof in the Resurrection.

Virtuous men pass mildly away because they are aware of this compass wielded by God. Virtuous lovers do not even pass; the divine compass being theirs, of their own power they end where they began.

From first to last, then, glorified bodies have provided the primary materials for the poem. Awareness of this fact is useful, of course, in glossing this line or that but in many cases does not seriously affect our understanding of the poem's individual images. Individual images, however, even if notorious compasses, are important as they help to develop the structured unity of, or determine our total response to, the entire poem. And that, ultimately, is why glorified bodies are important. Upon them the poem's organization and our final attitudes depend. Beginning with a reference

to virtuous death, the poem develops itself by means of the resurrected bodies of God's saints and concludes, so hyperbolically that the conceits of Petrarch or even of Dante's *Vita nuova* seem pale in comparison, by conferring upon mere mortals the body of God, the most glorified Body of all. And we, therefore, face a limited number of possible conclusions. Either Donne, grown megalomanic, seriously claims to be God and thereby forfeits our serious attention. Or, grown blasphemous, he has perpetrated merely a monstrous—though enormously witty—joke. Or, grown desperate because of the tired hyperboles of the Elizabethan sonnet tradition, he has defended his intensely human love in a seriously witty way, one which suggests that a true union of bodies and of souls is the needed solace for our imperfect singleness and, for some at least, an enviable approach to the perfect oneness of God. Of these alternatives, only the last seems reasonable to me. I therefore suggest, in a conclusion admittedly supported only in part by this essay, that we are to end with a realization that Donne is concerned, here as elsewhere, to render in hyperbolic and witty terms the curious state in which we mortals exist and that, in order so to do, he is willing to employ whatever means—however ingenious, exaggerated, or, to some, even blasphemous—that he and, presumably, his audience could command.

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NOTES

1 I would like to acknowledge at the outset a very large debt to Professor John Freccero. We first discussed this poem together sometime in 1959, and we continued to work on it in subsequent years. I reported the results of my research to him, some of which, particularly that which dealt with alchemy, he was able to use in his excellent article, "Donne's 'Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,'" *ELH*, 30 (1963), 335-76. On the other hand, it was he, not I, who first suggested that the theology of glorified bodies, my principal concern, might be worth investigation, and, of course, my article is directly dependent on his. Our mutual indebtness long ago became too great for any exact reckoning, but I believe that mine is the larger of the two.

2 *The Poems of John Donne*, ed. H. J. C. Grierson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912).

3 *Lectures of I[ohn]. B[aker]. vpon the XII Articles of our Christian Faith* (London, 1584), sig. Z2^{r}. Cf. [Alexander Nowell,] *A Catechisme* (London, 1614), sig. D8^{v}-E1^{r}, John Mayer, *The English Catechism Explained* (London, 1635), p. 264.

4 *Ben Jonson*, ed. Herford and Simpson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1925-1952), VIII, 37.

5 See Freccero's discussion of *pneuma*, pp. 357-63.

6 Freccero, pp. 365-66.

7 *His Exposition of the Hieroglyphicall Figures* (London, 1624), pp. 34-35.

8 See, e.g., *Hermetic Museum, Restored and Enlarged*, tr. A. E. Waite (London: James Elliott, 1893), I, 9 ("there is exhibited in our work a twofold resurrection of the dead"); I, 35 ("gold and silver . . . can effect nothing until they are raised from the dead"); II, 255 ("it is by means of putrefaction and decay that it attains the glorified body of its resurrection").

9 Flammel, pp. 78-79. Cf. *Splendor Solis .Alchemical Treatises of Solomon Trismosin*, tr. J. K. (London, n.d.), pp. 30-31, 38; *Hermetic Museum*, I, 40.

10 Cf. Giano Lacinio, *The New Pearl of Great Price*, tr. A. E. Waite (London. James Elliott, 1894), p. 331. The statements in this paragraph concerning alchemy are, I believe, widely acknowledged. for a general survey, see John Read, *Prelude to Chemistry* (London: Bell, 1936).

11 C. M. Coffin, *John Donne and the New Philosophy* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1937), p. 98; Freccero, pp. 360-61.

12 See Victor Harris, *All Coherence Gone* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1949).

13 *Works*, ed. Heber and Eden (London: Longman, Green, 1883), IV, 17.

14 Quoted by M. F. Toal, ed. and tr., *Patristic Homilies on the Gospels* (Chicago : Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955), I, 15.

15 *Homilia in Evangelia*, I (*PL*, 76.1079-81).

16 Plato, *Politicus*, 270C, 272E .Freccero, p. 355.

17 *Summa Theologica*, III (Supplement), Q.77, A.1.

18 Baker, sig. $X4^{v}$, $Z4^{v}$.

19 Bullinger, *Decades*, ed. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1849), p. 173; Wermullerus, *The Hope of the Faithful*, in *Remains of Myles Coverdale*, ed. Pearson (Cambridge. Cambridge Univ. Press, 1846), pp. 179-80. For other brief or general discussions, see James Ussher, *A Body of Divinity* (London, 1647), p. 447; Henry Hammond, *A Practical Catechism*, 15th ed. (London, 1715), p. 301; Jeremy Taylor, *Works*, II, 722.

20 *The Grounds of Divinitie* (London, 1615), p. 282.

21 *De resurrectio carnis*, LVII (*PL*, 2.880).

22 *De fide orthodoxa*, IV (*PG*, 94.1225).

23 *In Epistolam ad Corinthos*, XIV (*PL*, 17.271).

24 *Summa*, III (Supplement), Qq. 82-85; *Commentaria in IV Sententiarum*, Dist. XLIX, Pars II, Sect. ii, Aa.1-4.

25 Peter Martyr, *The Common Places*, tr. Martin (London, 1583), pt. III [each part is separately paginated], p. 359; Bolton, *Mr. Bolton's Last and Learned Worke of the Foure Last Things*, 3rd ed. (London, 1635), sig. $K2^{r}$.

26 Woolton, *A Newe Anatomie of Whole Man* (London, 1576), sig. $F4^{r}$. Nicolson, *A Plain and Ful Exposition of the Catechism* (London, 1663), p. 78.

27 Morton, *A Treatise of the Three-fold State of Man* (London, 1629), p. 638; Smith, *An Exposition of the Creed* (London, 1629), p. 628; Bucanus, *Institutions of Christian Religion*, tr. Hill (London, 1606), p. 462.

28 Worthington, *An Anker of Christian Doctrine* (Douai, 1618), p. 443; Olevian, *An Exposition of the Symbole of the Apostles*, tr. Fielde (London, 1581), p. 248; Polanus, *The Substanec* [sic] *of Christian Religion* (London, 1600), p. 380.

29 *Works*, ed. Wynter (Oxford, 1863), VIII, 188. Most of the writers mentioned in notes 25-28 discuss more than one, though not always all four, of these qualities.

30 *A Treatise Concerning the Fulnesse of Christ* (London, 1656), p. 369. Subsequent quotations are from pp. 369-71.

31 *De Sacramentis*, II.21 (*PL*, 176.606).

32 Bonaventura, Dist. XLIX, Pars ii, Sect. ii, A.3; Worthington, p. 443.

33 *Morals on the Book of Job*, tr. anon. (Oxford, 1845), II, 377.

34 Gregory, *Morals*, II, 166-68; Donne, *Sermons*, ed. Potter and Simpson (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1953-1962), III, 114. Donne's sermon discusses "*the qualities*

of *bodies* in *the resurrection*" but "not in the intricacies, and subtilties of the Schoole" (p. 117). The passage from Gregory must have been well known since it appears in Aquinas' *Catena aurea* as a gloss on John x.27; John x.27, in turn, was part of the Gospel lesson for Low Sunday and for St. Thomas' day, commenting on which John Boys mentions the "*Eutychian* heretikes" (*An Exposition of the Festival Epistles and Gospels . . . The First Part* [London, 1615], p. 50).

35 Aquinas, III (Supplement), Q.83, A.I.

36 Worthington, pp. 443-44.

37 Nicolson, p. 78; Peter Martyr, III, 359.

38 Bolton, sig. K3[r]; Woolton, sig. F4[r].

39 Gregory, *Morals*, II, 372, 378.

40 Aquinas, III (Supplement), Q.80, A.4; Q.83, A.1; Q.85, A.1.

41 On the alchemical symbol, for gold, see W. A. Murray, "Donne's Gold-Leaf and his Compasses," *MLN*, 73 (1958), 329-30. The evidence for Origen's heresy is all secondary and very possibly unreliable, but it was extremely well known; see Henry Chadwick, "Origen, Celsus, and the Resurrection of the Body," *HTR*, 41 (1948), 83-102.

42 *The Poems*, ed. L. H. Wilkinson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1953), p. 18. See also the rewrite by Katherine Phillips, "Friendship in Emblem, or the Seal," in *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period*, ed. George Saintsbury (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905), I, 529. The poem begins,

> The Compasses that stand above [in the emblem]
> Express this great immortal love
> For friends, like them, can prove this true,
> They are, and yet they are not two.

43 See, e.g., *Hermetic Museum*, I, 88, 204, 350; II, 180; *The Works of Geber*, tr. Russel (London, 1928), p. 15; Basil Valentine, as quoted by Read, p. 205; Benedictus Figulus, *A Golden and Blessed Casket of Nature's Marvells*, tr. A. E. Waite (London: James Elliott, 1893), p. 47; *Splendor Solis*, p. 91.

44 Figulus, p. 334; Arnaldus, as quoted in W. J. Nelson, "An Alchemical Manuscript by Arnaldus de Bruxella," *Osiris*, 2 (1936), 347.

45 The emblem is reproduced, courtesy of the Rare Book Room, University of Wisconsin, Madison, from Michael Maier, *Secretioris naturae secretorum scrutinium chymicum* (Frankfurt, 1687), p. 61. C. G. Jung, *Psychologie und Alchemie* (Zurich: Rascher Vevleg, 1944), p. 183, reproduces the emblem also (p. 122), reproduces a comparable plate from James Thaler's *Viatorium spagyricum* (p. 119), and cites the *Tractatus aureus* for a prose explanation (pp. 122-23). Cf. also Maier's *De Circulo physico, quadrato* (Oppenheim, 1616).

46 In view of words like "stiff," "comes home," "firmness," and "erect," this love would appear to be very human indeed. Freccero, correctly noting that "erect" must here apply to the woman rather than the man, argued against "erotic interpretations." N. Bailey, however, defines not only "erectores *Penis*" ("a Pair of Muscles which cause the Erection of the Yard") but also "erectores *Clitoridis*" ("Muscles inserted into the spongeous Bodies of the *Clitoris*, which they erect in Coition"). See *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (London, 1726).

47 Luther and some of his followers were Ubiquitarians; see *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. Cross (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958), s.v. "Ubiquitarianism."

48 Figulus, p. 13. The quotations which follow are, respectively, from Figulus, p. 41; Lacinio, p. 126; *Hermetic Museum*, II, 279, 255; Lacinio, p. 274; *Museum*, I, 103-11, 113.

49 Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1958), p. 183, provides some references for this definition of God. See also Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, tr. Trask (New York: Routledge

and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 117n, and Georges Poulet, *Les Métamorphoses du Cercle* (Paris: Plon, 1961).

50 *Sermons*, VII, 247: "God is all Center . . . and so, all circumference." Donne has various kinds of divine circles; see *Sermons*, IV, 96; VII, 52, 397: IX, 110, 407; *Devotions*, ed. J. Sparrow (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1933), pp. 123-24; *Divine Poems*, ed. Gardner (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), pp. 29, 33.

51 *Essays in Divinity*, ed. Simpson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1952), p. 38.

52 *Sermons*, II, 200. The following quotations are from *Sermons*, IV, 68, 355; VIII, 250-51, 97. Cf. also IV, 51-52; V, 294; VI, 173-75; VIII, 335-36.