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"Forming new wholes": John Donne and June Wayne

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In *The Art of June Wayne*, Mary W. Baskett begins her "introduction to the artist" with this summary statement: June Wayne and her art, she says, has been caught up "in the tensions, and in some cases the surprising compatibility, of real and seeming opposites, cerebration and emotion, innocence and guilt, the ascetic and the sensual, the organic and the geometric, the sacred and the profane."[1] This remark, and most especially Baskett's attention to the "tensions," the "surprising compatibility of real and seeming opposites," and the "sacred and the profane" in June Wayne's art is, to Donneans, strikingly reminiscent of Samuel Johnson's comments over two hundred years ago, in which he said that poetry like Donne's made a point of discovering "occult resemblances in things apparently unlike," and of T. S. Eliot's observation in 1921 that the mind of a poet like Donne was "constantly amalgamating disparate experience."[2] From diverse experiences, a poet

[1]Baskett, *The Art of June Wayne* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969), p. 9.

[2]Johnson's well-known remarks are in his "The Life of Cowley." See George Birkbeck Hill, ed., *Lives of the English Poets*, 3 vols. (New York: Octagon Books, 1967), 1:20. Eliot's equally memorable observation about Donne is in his review of H. J. C. Grierson's edition of Donne and the metaphysical poets (1921). See "The Metaphysical Poets" in *Selected Essays, 1917–1932* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), p. 247. Johnson is, appropriately, one of the three authors who form the epigraph to Baskett's "An Introduction to the Artist" in her book on Wayne (pp. 9–10). The phrase cited from Johnson, familiar to students of Donne, is "Discordia concors." Baskett also quotes Horace ("Concordia discors") and Christoph Ecke ("Alles ist immer noch ganz anders").

like Donne and an artist like June Wayne are, to cite Eliot again, "always forming new wholes."[3]

Let me begin with a few observations on "The Sunne Rising" in anticipation of my remarks about June Wayne's several images on the poem. "The Sunne Rising" is an aubade, a poem or song of the morning spoken (usually) by one lover to another. There is a longstanding tradition behind Donne's aubade, and as we know he was likely influenced by one or more poems of Ovid.[4] But Donne's poem is, from the outset, not spoken to a lover but to the sun, and in a particularly rude and characteristically Donnean way: "Busie old foole, unruly Sunne, / Why dost thou thus, / Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us?" (1–3).[5] About this opening—and, indeed, the entire poem—Coleridge exclaimed, "Fine, vigorous Exultation! Both Soul & Body in full puissance!"[6]

Coleridge is probably right: the soul and body *are* in "full puissance," powerful and fully on display in this poem, and what is also on display is the speaker's persistent assertion of the superiority of his union with his beloved to the conventionally powerful and controlling sun. In an aubade, certainly, the sun *would be* deemed powerful and determining. It is the sun that threatens (and ends) the nighttime harmony and union experienced by the lovers. Here, however, the sun is put down as an "old foole" and a "[s]awcy pedantique wretch" (5), a figure that should be irritating schoolboys and other ordinary mortals to get on with their business, instead of being a nuisance to the speaker and his beloved.

The audacity and hyperbole of the poem are two of its most striking features—the determination of the speaker to minimize the role and effect of the all-powerful sun and his equal determination to elevate the status of the union established by the lovers. It has sometimes been observed that the poem is more about the antagonistic relationship established between the speaker and the "unruly Sun" than it is about the

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[3]Eliot, p. 247.

[4]The forthcoming Variorum volume of commentary on the *Songs and Sonets* will make clear the indebtedness to Ovid.

[5]For the text of the poem, I am citing John T. Shawcross, ed., *The Complete Poetry of John Donne* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 93–94. The poem is reproduced above, p. 184.

[6]George Whalley, ed., *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 219.

man and woman, and that is partially true. But the elevated language is almost entirely focused on her or on the union of the two lovers, and only secondarily on the speaker himself. As a consequence, we have what Wilbur Sanders calls "a state of tremendous and exuberant stimulation" about love, an "exaltation of feeling which heightens and sharpens every faculty and demands space to fling up its heels and knock its head against the stars."[7] Sanders's description, with its focus on love, "exuberant stimulation," and an "exaltation of feeling" that lifts the lovers and readers into another sphere, is especially apt in anticipation of two of Wayne's lithographs of "The Sunne Rising" (see Gallery, fig. 6, p. 185, and fig. 7, p. 186), both of which show the lovers in a realm of their own making, far beyond the constraints of a busy and mundane world.[8]

The focus of the first stanza is largely on the two lovers together—as they are indeed, in the real or imagined situation, still in bed together—and the opposition posed by the sun and time. Stanza two continues to offer the perspective of the male speaker, but his attention is mainly on *her* worth. He could easily shut out the sun—i.e., close his eyes—he says, except that in closing his eyes he would lose sight of her. The brightness of her eyes, he implies, exceeds that of the sun, and in her rests all of the wealth of "the'India's of spice and Myne" (17).

The poem ends—beginning at the end of the second stanza and throughout the third—by representing the "contracted" world of the lovers in bed, a microcosmic world that proves superior to the macrocosmic world of "Kings" (19), "States," and "Princes" (21). Poems about mutual and satisfying love are as old and familiar as perhaps any kind of poetry we can think of. What makes "The Sunne Rising" distinctive and engaging is its relentless extravagance, as if the speaker is consistently trying to top his own claims about who she is, what she represents, what their love can and will do. Sanders, writing a little more than ten years after the publication of Wayne's Donne lithographs, captures in words what I believe Wayne has captured in art. The building

[7]Sanders, *John Donne's Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 73.

[8]In his essay in this volume, Jonathan Post rightly notes some similarities among the lithographs of "The Anniversarie," "The Good Morrow," and "The Sunne Rising" printed in Wayne's book on Donne, each of the lithographs placing the lovers in an extraterrestrial sphere illuminated by the sun, or stars, or bright halos (pp. 213–215).

of hyperbole after hyperbole, exaggeration after exaggeration, he observes, creates "hyperbole so monumental that it simultaneously offers us the preposterous richness of the experience."[9] Maurice Evans, commenting several years before Wayne's (1959) work, says that "The Sunne Rising" is an "intensely personal record of an experience which obliterates everything else, transporting the lovers, for the moment, to a world of perfection."[10] Both comments acknowledge what Wayne represents so well in her several lithographs of "The Sunne Rising," images that transport us through visual hyperbole to an extraordinary, even "preposterous," richness of experience.

Wayne was particularly engaged by "The Sunne Rising," more so than was the case with most other poems in Donne's canon. It is a little difficult to make a precise count of Wayne's images of Donne since on occasion essentially the same image was reproduced in different media or with very slight changes. The recently published *June Wayne: The Art of Everything*, a *catalogue raisonné* covering the years 1936–2006, offers the most comprehensive information about Wayne's engagement with Donne during the 1950s. There are, most obviously, the 15 lithographs that appear in *John Donne Songs & Sonets / Lithographs by June Wayne*, created in response to 14 poems and the funeral effigy.[11] Altogether, Wayne works with 21 poems during the period of her intense interest in Donne, 20 Songs & Sonets plus the elegy "To His Mistress, Going to Bed," and creates about 50 images. Of the poems, her favorite appears to have been "The Anniversarie," which prompted eight different illustrations. Next in number is "The Sunne Rising," in response to which there are six images. Before focusing on the image found in Wayne's book on Donne, I want to look at the sequence of images on "The Sunne Rising" *not* in the published collection. (One of these, produced in 1958 with crayon, ink, and ink spray, was part of two

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[9]Sanders, p. 72.

[10]*English Poetry in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1955), p. 173.

[11]This edition, printed by Brüder Hartmann in West Berlin in 1959, is limited to 110 copies (plus 13 copies that went to museums, collections, or collaborators). See Robert P. Conway, *June Wayne: The Art of Everything. A Catalogue Raisonné 1936–2006* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), p. 143.

exhibitions and is listed in the artist's database, but the drawing has not been located nor is there any available photograph.)[12]

The first of Wayne's prints based on Donne's poetry also marked her return to stone lithography after working in other media. That first print was produced in 1956 and prompted by the final couplet of "The Sunne Rising" (see Gallery, fig. 7, p. 186):

> Shine here to us, and thou art every where;
> This bed thy center is, these walls, thy spheare.
> (29–30)

Wayne herself called this "[m]y finest expression of the Donne imagery," further noting that the "image is quite wonderful" but that "the printing and the paper are not up to the same standard."[13] More important for the present purpose, it bears an important relationship to the lithograph that Wayne includes in her book on Donne. Here, as in the later, published lithograph, the lovers are in a universe of their own creation, the sun almost literally shining to the "everywhere" embodied in the two figures sweeping across the entire print and nearly obscuring the other, less significant world represented in the lower right corner. In his poem, Donne would have us understand that the lovers are a world unto themselves, so much so that the sun's shining to "us" is the sun shining to "everywhere." The lithograph also dramatically represents the lovers as their own illuminated world, shining in the sun's bright glow with the rather more darkened earth largely irrelevant and, literally, set aside to the corner. The cosmological orientation of "Shine Here to Us, and Thou Art Every Where," as Wayne titles the piece, is underscored in the image of the sun and the still illuminated nighttime stars. In the middle of this universe and overwhelming all other images are the reclining lovers, eyes still closed, and in the loving embrace Donne surely wanted his readers to imagine as well.

This lithograph brilliantly captures the hyperbolic otherworldliness I alluded to earlier, where from the poem we are to understand that not only is she "all States, and all Princes, I," not only is theirs a "contracted" world, but indeed, compared to them "Nothing else is." In Wayne's

[12]See Conway, p. 146.
[13]Conway, p. 121.

lithograph "Nothing else is," or, at least, nothing seems worthy of our attention save the lovers reclining in their own planetary sphere.

A second image, not shown here, is more modest, made in ink and ink spray.[14] Taking as its title "This Bed Thy Centre is" (30), the drawing aims especially to represent extraordinary illumination, the kind of light that would be evident if indeed the bed is the sun's center. This image, like the first, shows reclining lovers, their heads positioned to the left of the drawing not, as in "Shine Here to Us," to the right. In contrast to the very dark background of "Shine Here to Us," "This Bed Thy Centre is" consists of white and gray tones, the brightness of the illumination flooding over the whitened faces and figures of the lovers. About this image, Wayne commented:

> I was working for the configuration, also for the light, how much there would be. . . . When there is very bright light, when something is illuminated heavily, there are no darks, so there's not that much contrast. The lack of contrast makes a surface more luminous, so here my tones don't go all the way to black.[15]

A third image is striking for its dissimilarity from the other images of "The Sun Rising," and it is, perhaps, the most representational of any of Wayne's lithographs on Donne. The title of this piece, "She Is All States, and All Princes, I," is taken from line 21 (see Gallery, fig. 8, p. 187).[16] This image again features embracing lovers, but the setting is a more natural one, the unclothed lovers on what appears to be a rock formation or ledge with a tree and other vegetation in the background. The figures are elongated and intertwined. The man is sitting upright, the woman reclining and leaning against his right shoulder. He wears Wayne's iconic mushroom as a cap, and his eyes are fiercely open.[17] As different as the

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[14]See Conway, p. 124.

[15]Conway, p. 124.

[16]See Conway, p. 125.

[17]Baskett comments instructively on the particular appeal of the mushroom image for Wayne:

> The humble mushroom, embossed on her lithographs, penned on her drawings, is one of her favorite and most ubiquitous symbols, conveying an admixture of both delight and death.

image is from any of the others Wayne created in response to "The Sunne Rising," the close and loving embrace takes us back to the profession of mutual love both implicit and explicit throughout the poem. There are obvious differences, of course, as in the lithograph the man is seated upright, the woman in a reclining position, their togetherness represented in a world outside the close confines of a bed and bedroom. Those differences suggest that Wayne is here most attentive to individual lines and less interested in the specific context in which those lines appear in the poem. It is as if the line "She is All States, and All Princes, I" has been appropriated for a purpose largely apart from the circumstances of the poem itself. The lines *fit* the image but the image says comparatively little about the poem. This way of using Donne's poetry and lines leads me to a point that can be made more persuasively by considering a final image of "The Sunne Rising" *not* in the Donne/Wayne book.

That image is entitled "These Walls, Thy Spheares" [*sic*], taken from the final words of the poem.[18] Done in ink and charcoal, the drawing represents a couple, kneeling while facing each other and with hands clasped, their bodies enclosed by spheres in a halo-like effect. The drawing seems clearly inspired by the final image of the poem, where the sun is urged to do its work within the walls, the "spheare," of the bedroom. It is also clear that, apart from this poem in particular, Wayne found the image of a kneeling couple one that had resonance for a number of poems. We see similar images in the lithograph of "The Good Morrow" in the Donne/Wayne book, an etching titled "One Roome, an Every Where" (also from "The Good Morrow"), both a preliminary

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> Its slender stem and fleshy, pneumatic umbrella promise a female and gastronomic attractiveness. At the same time, it is ugly, saprophytic and poisonous and it has most recently become metaphorically representative of the atom bomb. The richness of these antithetical references makes the mushroom peculiarly appealing to her. It is quick to grow, quick to decay. To June Wayne, the mushroom has become the present. Hence a whole race of "mushroom people" with mushroom cap heads inhabit her work (9).

[18]See Conway, p. 135.

study and a color lithograph of "The Anniversarie," and a color lithograph titled "We'are Tapers too" (from "The Canonization").[19]

The existence of these similar images evoked by different poems, along with the kind of image we see in "She is All States, and All Princes, I," invites attention to the distinction June Wayne made between her various drawings and lithographs of Donne from 1956 to 1958 and the collection of fifteen lithographs that became part of the book *John Donne Songs & Sonets / Lithographs by June Wayne*. For the earlier drawings the titles and lines are almost invariably apt, but they are also at times somewhat arbitrarily associated with a poem. Hence, largely the same image of a kneeling couple might be identified with particular moments in "The Good Morrow," "The Sunne Rising," "The Anniversarie," "The Canonization," or other poems. Or a line from "The Sunne Rising" might lead to an image that, while engaging and apt, has comparatively little to do with the poem itself. Wayne herself acknowledged the occasional arbitrariness when she later reflected on her decision to produce a book. "For the rest of '57, when I was in Paris," she says,

> I made prints with Marcel [Durassier] that referred to John Donne, but they were individual prints, on this or that poem. When I came back to the States, I realized that it was sort of cowardly to take lines from his poetry for my titles, because I could have used any title. I could have said "Love on the Beach in Santa Monica," and who would know the difference? I felt that I should face Donne squarely. I had derived energy from him, but now I was proposing that I really engage the text and make a suite for which that particular text is responsible for what I've done in print. I wanted to prove that, even though there were hundreds of years between us, there was a true collaboration between me and John Donne.
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> There was too much of me in the first iteration [i.e., the various drawings prior to the book]. Whatever my problems were at that time, there was a larger process presenting itself; a more rigorous and overt collaboration was implicit in that

[19]These four images are shown in Conway, pp. 134, 135, 127 and 124. Most of the figures show the male figure kneeling on the left, the female figure on the right. Only in "One Roome" are their positions reversed.

> body of work. To do a *livre d'artiste* (Donne/Wayne) seemed the right vehicle, an art form with a long tradition to which I might bring some nuance of my own.

"Actually now," she concludes," forty-five years later, is when I should have done that book: maybe I should do it again. It would be a lot less romantic."[20]

I think Wayne is right in her assessment, both of the individual treatments of previous images and of her strongly romantic reading of the *Songs and Sonets* in the late 1950s. "The Sunne Rising" lithograph reproduced in the book (fig. 6) is in some ways reminiscent of "Shine Here To Us, and Thou Art Every Where," as each locates the lovers in a world beyond an earthly plane. At the same time, what the final image adds that we do not see in any of the previous lithographs is an extraordinary and compelling sense of movement that encapsulates the image of the embracing lovers, still prominent in the middle of the lithograph but now accompanied by swirling images of halos or heavenly light, or the Milky Way, or otherwise illuminated cosmological forces. This image is the one that most compellingly both responds to "The Sunne Rising" and focuses on what Wayne sees as its thematic and figurative center. We still have what previous lithographs emphasize: embracing lovers compared to whom nothing much seems important, "Nothing else is." And we have here, as in "Shine Here To Us," the lovers as a controlling cosmological entity in the large center of the world seen in the image as a whole. But here, the visible elemental world evident in "She is all States and all Princes, I" and the earth that occupies a small degree of our attention in "Shine Here To Us" are nowhere present. Even the sun itself is not clearly evident, or if it is judged to be there somewhere in the background, it is diminished to a much more modest presence, barely distinguished from other illuminating entities, much as the speaker of Donne's poem makes sure that the sun is put in its place verbally as an inconsequential "[b]usie old foole."

The various Wayne lithographs, different though they are, are responsive to the imagery at the heart of "The Sunne Rising." A thorough reading of all of the particulars of the poem requires that we consider diverse images such as "windowes," "curtaines," schoole boyes,"

[20]Quoted in Conway, p. 119.

"Court-huntsmen," the Indias, kings, states, princes, "[t]his bed"—but ultimately those images are introduced to discount them, to deny them any lasting significance because they are part of that nothingness beyond the lovers themselves. June Wayne's art—all of the lithographs I have referred to here—puts the lovers front, center, and above. In her admittedly romantic reading of Donne's love poems, apart from the world of two lovers, almost literally, "[n]othing else is."

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