John Donne Journal,
Vol. 4, no. 1 (1985)

Will the Real John Donne Please Rise?

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Patricia Pinka, *This Dialogue of One: The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne* (University: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1982), 193 pp.

Terry G. Sherwood, *Fulfilling the Circle: A Study of John Donne's Thought* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1984), 231 pp.

A. J. Smith, *Literary Love: The Role of Passion in English Poems and Plays of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), 184 pp.

John Carey argued in 1980 that since Donne's "sermons may be seen as the fulfilment of all that the poems yearn toward . . . it is strange that the early, unregenerate Jack Donne and the grave Dr. Donne of St. Paul's should have been seen . . . as dissimilar" (*John Donne: Life, Mind and Art*, New York, 1980, pp. 124-25). Terry Sherwood now maintains the existence of an "essential Donne" (p. 190), whose thought is of fundamental consistency, "the various elements" of which are "essentially rooted at the beginning" (p. 69), and he sees *Death's Duel*, the famous last sermon, as the nearly inevitable conclusion not only to the life of Donne but also to the thought. Criticism being what it is, there need be no undue surprise that Carey and Sherwood are writing about two personalities so very different from one another that their "Bodies" (the title of Carey's fifth chapter and of Sherwood's third) incarnate antithetical minds and attitudes. "Ambition" (Carey's third chapter) is as crucial in the one account as "Suffering" (Sherwood's fourth) is in the other, and Donne supplies handy references for both sides. "We are not sent into this world to Suffer, but to Doe"

(Carey, p. 60, quoting from a sermon); "Donne insists on 'my sufferings . . . my flesh'" (Sherwood, p. 128, quoting from another). Quotations are important for A. J. Smith as well. Roughly one-tenth of the words on page 106 are his own; the rest come from Petrarch, Sidney, Spenser, and Donne. This example admittedly is extreme but is indicative of Smith's frequent assumption that merely to quote is to establish a point. Even conflicting quotations, moreover, in this case are not troublesome since "Walton's dyptich of the two Donne's [*sic*], the rake and the religious, half persuades us to expect such a division in his poetry," and "we scarcely need ask ourselves what strange alchemy metamorphosed the sceptical wit . . . into a celebrant of mutual love" (p. 119). One of these Donnes thus goes conveniently into a chapter called "The Course of Altering Things," the other into "Beyond All Date." Patricia Pinka picks up, as it were, where Walton and Smith leave off. Here, to be sure, are "Witty Lovers" and "Mutual Lovers"—though they are not quite the same as their counterparts in Smith—but also to be reckoned with are the "Parodists," "Cavalier Petrarchans," "Hedonists," "Platonic Lovers," "Dreaming Cynics," and a solitary "Negative Lover" as well. None of these Protean figures, however, is the real Donne, much less the essential one, for all are "speakers," "voices," "masks," from whom consistency is neither to be expected nor, for that matter, necessarily to be desired. Presumably there is an identifiable author waiting somewhere in the wings, but Pinka's interest is in the *dramatis personae* on stage.

Because of, rather than despite, its multiplicity, Pinka's is the easiest of these books to describe. The idea is to comment on as many as possible of the *Songs and Sonnets*; Pinka perhaps would have liked nothing better than to begin with the first of them, proceed to the last, and ignore all unitive principles other than those inherent in autonomous poems. The major voices or personae, seven in all, often are no more than an organizational device. There can be no quarrel with this, especially since one can—and Pinka sometimes does—see one poem more clearly by looking at another one not quite like it. In this case, however, the arithmetic necessary to divide the poems into chapters often leads to the seemingly mechanical proliferation of sub-categories and thence to a kind of fascination with numbers. "Two groups of lovers and a single speaker create the extremes on the spectrum of love in the *Songs and Sonnets*: the Hedonists . . . the Platonic Lovers . . . and a Negative Lover" (p. 50). Pinka counts six poems for Hedonists

and two for Platonists. There are ten for Dreaming Cynics, but of these "Twicknam Garden" supplies "the only pastoral setting" (p. 98). In nine poems for Mutual Lovers, a "breakdown of exclusiveness occurs in only three" (p. 126). "The narrator" (of "The Undertaking") "says he is worthy of canonization . . . subtly underscoring his value by setting his utterance in ballad meter—the only one in *Songs and Sonnets*" (p. 67). "Narrative dominates the poem"—here, "The Apparition"—"in actual lines (eleven of seventeen)" (p. 92). In "Love's Deity," "twelve of the twenty-seven predominantly end-stopped lines rhyme" (p. 46). In "The Anniversary" there are "many references to time (eighteen in the first stanza alone)" (p. 122). These tallies sooner or later become impediments, not aids. Other numbers, potentially helpful, are promised but seldom found. The speaker of "Love's Deity" is reminiscent of "numerous rejected lovers in thousands of lyrics" (p. 46); Pinka footnotes three minor examples on which to base a contrast to Donne. Conventions of the *aubade* are mentioned, Ovid is cited from time to time (usually from Helen Gardner), Ernst Curtius provides the *topos* of the world turned upside down, and Petrarch's name occurs with some frequency. These efforts to suggest a tradition, however, are but half-hearted gestures. The Index is often incomplete—Curtius, for example, can be found only by looking up *adynaton*, next by reading page 96, and then by turning to a footnote on page 176—but it is sufficiently accurate to indicate how very few authors and poems Pinka cites and how small a context for Donne is supplied.

Explications are indeed the substance of the book. Some of them appear to have been deliberately curtailed so as to comment on only a few significant details or to follow no more than one of a poem's major threads. Discussing "The Computation," for example (pp. 30-32), Pinka works primarily with the mathematics and the "ironic perspective" of computing the twenty-four hours of a day as if they each were equivalent to a hundred years. The account of "Goe and catch" (pp. 78-80) traces the process whereby a cynic modulates his expression of attitude towards women, his listener, his worlds—both "real" and "imagined"—and himself. Other poems receive fuller treatment, though Pinka never pretends to be exhaustive. "The Canonization" is examined stanza by stanza (pp. 126-32) with remarks, *inter alia*, on the dramatic situation, the speaker's initial ironic disparagement of himself (he is "a self-described paralytic"), his use of "auricular figures" such as *chiasmus* and of puns such as "die," his "deft treatment

of Petrarchan commonplaces," his "witty self-defense" (especially in the employment of "audaciously comic comparisons"), the proofs whereby he "canonizes and metamorphosizes himself," and "the *coup de grace*" administered "when, as a saint of love, he orders his friend to make supplication to him." Reactions to these explications necessarily will vary. For whatever they are worth, here are some of my own: I cannot see that anything is gained by analyzing "The Sunne Rising" as a formal oration complete with *exordium*, *narratio*, and so on (pp. 114-17). I doubt that the "epigrammatic form" of the final couplet of "Twicknam Garden" "makes it particularly mnemonic" (p. 102). "The hissing *s*'s and trailing *k*'s that orchestrate this horrifying tale" (p. 90—the poem is "The Apparition") do not strike my ear so loudly, nor do I understand how it can be true that "The Apparition" "is a sonnet, although certainly not a quatorzain." On the other hand, my response is different when Pinka comments on inverted images of Eucharist and transubstantiation in "Twicknam Garden" (p. 100), notes manipulations of the "pronoun of oneness, *we*" in "The Good Morrow" (p. 109), and of the "royal *we*" in "The Anniversary" (p. 125), or extracts the force of Latin roots from "negotiate" and "unperplexe" in "The Exstasie" (pp. 134-35). My students might disagree with me about these particular examples, but they and I would be better prepared for class if we read the appropriate parts of Pinka first.

Only "The Farewell to Love" is granted much space by A. J. Smith, who often assumes that his reader already knows many, possibly most, of Donne's poems sufficiently well to reconstruct the contents from their titles. "Such poems," he writes (p. 95), "as 'The Curse,' 'The Indifferent,' 'Love's Usury,' 'The Apparition,' 'Love's diet,' 'The Will,' 'A Valediction: of my Name in the Window' . . . open a young man's world in which women may be carelessly tried, enjoyed and discarded, and a lover risks no greater humiliation than the loss of his manly independence in an abject slavery to his own desires." "The attitudes he tries in Elegy 1 or 'Woman's Constancy' aren't denied in 'The Good Morrow,' 'The Anniversary,' or 'The Canonization,' even though he may now claim a more singular bond with a woman" (p. 116). When Smith breaks off breath-taking sentences of this kind to examine "The Farewell," it is not because of the poem's notoriously difficult syntax nor the added complications posed by its textual problems. He lingers for stanza by stanza comment in this case because the poem serves as a palinode which Smith needs to move from the

self-centered, cynical rake to the exponent of a love which is "mutual" (pp. 119-30, *passim*) and "mature" (p. 124, *e.g.*). "Here" –specifically "The Canonization," stanza three–"is the escape from the dilemma of 'Farewell to Love,' which the poet didn't reckon with when he renounced his search for a bliss such as 'no man else can find'" (p. 122). This particular "shift" (another recurrent word) is one of several, moreover, which are fundamental to Smith's thesis and to the organization of the book. An earlier one occurs from the worlds of *Troilus* ("Time's Fools," chapter two) and *Othello* ("The World's Great Snare," chapter three) to that of *Antony and Cleopatra* ("Crowning the Present," chapter four)– from, that is, two forms of amorous disillusionment to one of "monumental sublimity" (p. 84). A later shift divides Donne's optimistic statement, "We can die by it, if not live by love" ("The Canonization") from Webster's "bleak" conclusion in *The White Devil* ("Drawing to Destruction," chapter seven) that "Love itself offers nothing here to live by" (p. 159). Equally strong, as Smith sees it, is Milton's conviction in *Samson* ("Manhood Recovered," chapter eight) that "when sexuality becomes a means to gain advantage there can be no mutualness"; indeed, that for Samson, the "recovery of manhood is the dismissal of love" (p. 179). Since the chapters on the two Donnes are indispensable for the general framework, it is appropriate that Donne provides epigraphs for all of the essays but one. Webster misses out, but even here "we might count it more than bizarre coincidence that the same year, 1612, saw the appearance of works by Donne and by Webster which so persistently and radically put our worldly lusts in pawn to change and death, and leave love no hold upon the world at all" (p. 158). It also is fitting that "The Farewell" appears in every chapter as a kind of *leitmotif*.

In "early" poems by Donne, Smith is no less willing than Pinka to hear and see various speakers who often contradict one another. Donne "personates a lover" (p. 101) and implies a "*mise en scène*" (p. 99). One encounters "vivid little episodes" (p. 98), a "vivid little scene" (p. 104), "a little drama" (*ibid.*). In "later" poems, however, some consistency, if no less drama, can be noticed. "Some of the finest of Donne's love poems speak for lovers who assure themselves that they are a whole world to each other" (p. 120). "In the poems which assume mutual love the lover's progress from fantasy to reality, intelligible idea to sensible actuality, marks his discovery of a state in which mind and body aren't separate" (p. 129). As it turns out, Smith himself is engaged in a progress

whereby he gradually points to a nexus for the two Donnes. Not that there is an "overall design," a "finality," an "absolute end"; on the contrary, "every poem is its own moment" (p. 116). "The poems make their own categories" (p. 117). But if "Donne's love poetry is held together" by none of the grand philosophies of love, it nonetheless originates from "a coherent reading of human nature, and a consistent temper of mind" (p. 116).

For this temperament Smith tries out various labels. "We should look for Donne's kind among the new thinkers of the age, the sectaries of scepticism, empiricism, stoicism, naturalism" (p. 115). He cites (*ibid.*) with evident approval—witness the reference to "sceptic naturalism" on the same page—Bredvold's 1923 article on "The Naturalism of Donne" (*JEGP*, XXII, 471-502), but it is not immediately clear whether Smith himself would go so far as to say, as Bredvold did, that Donne "refers constantly to nature . . . as the justification of individual desires, as the denial of all universal moral law" (Bredvold, p. 480); this statement, I should say in fairness to Smith, is not quoted by him). In any case, "scepticism" is the term preferred. Donne is a "sceptical pragmatist" (p. 117) who regularly employs "sceptical wit" (p. 110) and looks with a "sceptical eye" (p. 101), thus "letting us see the habit of a sceptical mind" (p. 127). This preference is, on the whole, unfortunate. Especially because of the reference to Bredvold, the unwary reader may begin to think of Bredvold's work on the alleged scepticism and fideism of Dryden (*The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden*, Ann Arbor, 1934; rpt. Oxford University Press, 1957) or, if not that, of Greek Pyrrhonism and Sextus Empiricus or possibly of Cornelius Agrippa and Montaigne. John Carey, of course, insisted that his reader think of precisely such matters ("The Crisis of Reason," chapter eight, especially pp. 232-34). But aside from the potential implications of "sceptic naturalism" just cited, Smith appears to suggest rigorously philosophic uncertainty only when, searching for an apt comparison to Webster, he remarks that Donne's *Metempsychosis* "is an exuberant attempt to carry through thoroughgoing sceptical relativism" (p. 153). Elsewhere, by "sceptical temper" Smith evidently means no more than that Donne regularly discounts untested generalities in favor of the verifiable particularities of experience. More specifically, since experience not only can but must ground itself upon sensory data (Pyrrho, of course, questioned the reliability of even that kind of information), one must at least begin with the physical, with bodies. The question is whether or not to try to stop there. Smith refers to

various attitudes taken on this issue in the poems. One extreme might be represented by "Love's Alchemy" with its scorn for "That loving wretch that swears, / 'Tis not the bodies marry, but the minds" (quoted by Smith, p. 107). At the other limit, "'The Undertaking,' which some manuscripts entitle 'Platonic Love,' does claim that in this unique instance the poet has got beyond the outside appearance to the beauty of the virtue within, and loves that quality for its own sake, regardless of the difference of sex" (p. 128). These statements, one assumes, were written by Jack Donne and an incipient Dr. Donne. In between is the author of a letter to Sir Henry Wotton: "You (I think) and I am much of one sect in the philosophy of love; which, though it be directed upon the mind, doth inhere in the body" (quoted by Smith, p. 117). Here also is the author of the poems of mutual love. "There seems particular point in the way that Donne's poems move from idea to body" (p. 128). "The relation of body to mind in love is finely observed" (p. 130). "Love's Growth" is the poem with which Smith concludes because in "this poem love enlarges itself" and does so exactly because "love is not pure but a mixed state of spirit and sense" (*ibid.*). Donne's changing views are contradictory in appearance and to some extent in fact, but they are "true" to "experience," in some sense autobiographical, and they result from a skeptical mind.

For Terry Sherwood, "Love's Growth" is the place to start, not end. The plan—after an introductory chapter which itself describes the organization of the book—is to give an account of Donne's epistemology and psychology with illustrations from and applications to prose and poetry alike. "Reason" (chapter two) and the sensory experience of "Bodies" (chapter three) are fundamental to this account, and Sherwood finds a convenient example of their interdependence in "Love's Growth." As he sees it (pp. 27-31), the poem depends on a "co-ordination between analogy and paradox." By means of the first, Donne "takes pains here to plant man in the natural world, beginning love's growth in sexuality revived by the spring sun." By means of the paradox that "each spring adds new heat immune to winter's abatement," Donne "leaves man . . . both in and out of nature, in and out of natural time." The point, moreover, is that "it is reason that finds" man in both places; "experience collapses unlikeness into likeness, leaving the sorting out to reason as part of the soul's necessary apprehension of sensory experience." This summary does scant justice to the analytical complexity present at even this early stage of the

book, but it may serve to point toward a stand which Sherwood adamantly takes. For him, there is no doubt about Donne's "flat rejection of ultimate scepticism . . . refutation of scepticism . . . rejection of scepticism" (pp. 30-31) nor about "the breadth and frequency of Donne's attack on naturalism" (p. 75). Recent "distortion" of Donne's own views, and there has been "much" of it, "stems from Louis I. Bredvold's still influential assertions"; "in Bredvold's lengthened shadow," predictably enough, "is the recent discussion by John Carey" (p. 208, n. 22). But, distortion or not, "to affirm that Donne strongly endorses reason," as Sherwood understates, "is to face a long line of dissent arguing for Donne's scepticism and fideism" (p. 35).

What Sherwood proposes as a replacement cannot be briefly described with any more justice than that just given to his remarks on "Love's Growth," but in simplistic terms, the epistemology might be termed Scholastic rationalism and the psychology called Christological pathos. Analysis of experience by the light of reason precedes and results in understanding and, consequently, faith; acquisition of belief leads in turn to action in conformity with faith and thence to the necessity of being acted upon, of "suffering" for Christ's sake. Rational martyrdom, not the oxymoron it may seem to be, is the teleological purpose of life, the ultimate criterion by which to gauge human experience—even though only one perfect exemplar can be found—since to aim for anything less is to set one's sights short of the fullness and fulfillment of human existence. Divine creation is the logical beginning of this line of thought and, because of the Fall, recreation is the anticipated end. God so imprinted the divine image in man and the world that "man's 'Form, and Essence' is his 'Reason, and understanding'" (p. 62, quoting a sermon). This internal faculty operates on "the body as an object of knowledge" (p. 63) to achieve a "vision of truth" which "looks through the actual body" (p. 101) and well beyond it. "The body thus stood on the boundary between outer and inner, the effigy of both the soul and the outer world. Man necessarily must know the nature of that effigy" (*ibid.*). "Self-knowledge," in turn, "finds joy in suffering, in penitential sorrow for sin and in affliction as evidence of God's favour" (p. 103). Hence, "in martyrdom lies joy, the natural end to Donne's theology of suffering" (p. 127). Donne himself closely approached this "measure for the unfulfilled as well as the fulfilled self" (p. 129) in the *Devotions*, meditating on what he supposed, mistakenly as it happens, to be his dying days. As a result, "in Donne's seventeenth prayer, upon

the ringing bells," we ourselves can "come close to the essential Donne" (pp. 189-90). In *Death's Duel*, "a point close to the Omega of [Donne's] circle of time" (p. 197), the process is as complete as in earthly terms it could have been: "the event of Donne's delivery and the sermon itself, taken together, represent a coherent and fulfilling conclusion to his life and thought" (p. 193).

Even as a portrait of Dr. Donne, this picture will seem seriously out of focus to those accustomed to reading the *Devotions* and the sermons from a so-called "Augustinian" or "Protestant" point of view which stresses the primacy of faith over reason. A number of "modern critics," as Sherwood says, "have argued that the theological basis of Donne's religious intensity lies in an Augustinian tradition of spirituality and in anti-Thomistic Renaissance scepticism and fideism, both of which are supported by Reformation attacks upon reason" (p. 36). Correcting this view is necessarily more difficult than opposing Bredvold and Carey because it requires the removal of distortion not only about Donne himself but about Augustine as well. Sherwood, however, evidently is better trained—perhaps by himself—in the principles and history of formal theology than literary critics sometimes are. He is well aware, for example, that apparently two Augustines rather than one were being read in the Renaissance. The extreme instance of duality, though Sherwood does not in fact cite this example, perhaps is the Augustine used by Arminius in building his case for free will and the other one cited by Calvin in his proofs for predestination. Sherwood does not ask the real church father to stand up, but he calls attention (p. 35) to the fact that "Augustinian spirituality" does not preclude the existence of an "Augustinian concept of reason" and thus can speak of "the rational elements in [Donne's] sermons, which are congenial to both Augustine and Aquinas." Sherwood often is quite adept in dealing with, blending in fact, theological history and Donne's own pronouncements, as in this example:

> Donne's 1629 encapsulation of his basic epistemological assumption bears repeating: "by our senses we come to understand, so by our understanding we come to beleeve" (*Sermons*, IX, 357). This statement conforms to Aquinas's notion that all knowledge begins in sensory knowledge, from which reason abstracts the universal characteristics and governing universal principles, a Natural Law "imbedded in nature" and comprehensible to all men.

> As Donne puts it, the "light" of reason enables man to "discerne the principles of Reason" (*Sermons*, VII, 310) in the natural world. Rational knowledge of principles structuring the natural world is a necessary precursor to faith, since man can determine certain truths about God on the basis of these principles:
>
> > The *reason* therefore of Man, must first be satisfied . . .[there follows additional material quoted from *Sermons*, III, 358].

Within this general context Sherwood is able to place and take the time to read a number of poems of very different kinds. Some of them, inevitably, are introduced as barely more than illustrative examples, briefly discussed, but also included are more or less self-contained sections on, for example, the Prince Henry elegy (pp. 30-34), the verse epistles (pp. 79-86), and *The Anniversaries* (pp. 86-93). In the four chapters of Part II, moreover, Sherwood gives fairly extensive demonstrations of how Donne's thought informs the art of "A Valediction: of Weeping," the *Holy Sonnets*, "Goodfriday, 1613," and the *Devotions*. The only possible surprise among these entries is the "Valediction," but for Sherwood the poem "has a special importance in Donne's work"—and for his own thesis, it might be added—because of its emblematic presentation of "Donne's notion of the body and its temporal suffering" (p. 134). Beginning with the total contrast of creation and annihilation, Sherwood works his way back and forth between the specific language of the poem and its appropriate backgrounds, including alchemical—specifically Paracelsian—literature. Special attention is given, for example, to "the coinage imagery";"ever complicated by the twists and turns of Donne's wit," this language "constantly cuts back to the Paracelsian alchemist as creator" (p. 139). The "emblemes" (l. 7) of the tears also are explained in considerable detail, among other reasons because "interpretation of emblem completes the poem's examination of human powers: of the lady's failed spiritual powers, which the speaker is trying to revive; and of his understanding, earlier crippled, now regenerating" (pp. 141-42). In these pages, and they are representative of all four of these chapters, a great deal of imaginative vigor is at work.

Even so, a second objection to Sherwood's portrait of Donne is that it would seem to make implausible, if not impossible, the existence of the libertine or "rakish" poems, but that turns out not

to be the case. Like Pinka—or, for that matter, Smith—Sherwood recognizes the existence of various quasi-dramatic speakers. For him, however, some of these personae are false witnesses. Unquestionably and deeply human characters who argue, often skeptically and in one sense irrefutably on the basis of their immediate and personal experience, they yet are misinformed or misguided about the meaning of experience or merely confused by it. "In a word, the Christian is defined by right reasoning, the sinner by perverse reasoning. A similar principle describes the personae of the love poetry" (p. 39). "Donne's naturalistic and libertine poems conspicuously dramatize, both for the individual and the community, the consequences of separating the body's experience from spiritual control" (p. 72). Naturalism undermines itself with its transparent delusions so as to be self-destructive as well as socially and spiritually disruptive. In "Going to Bed," "the substitution of sexual exhilaration for spiritual freedom deludes the speaker" (p. 74). In "The Anagram," "the mockery darkly bruises naturalism with its own socially disruptive sexuality, prescribing physical revulsion as the only defence" (*ibid.*). "The glib libertinism of 'Communitie,' 'The Indifferent,' and 'Confined Love' accepts only an inverted community based on the selfish and impermanent mutualities of sexual use" (pp. 74-75). In "Change," "the macrocosm is ransacked for misleading correspondences, expressing a reductive naturalistic mentality that denies the spirit" (p. 75). By way of contrast, in "The Exstasie," the speaker "begins and ends with the lovers' bodies. But here the body serves first the soul" (*ibid.*). For Sherwood, certainly no less than for Smith, "one of Donne's primary occupations in the love poetry is to examine how consciousness of the body takes shape in human experience" (p. 79). Sherwood, however, discovers criteria for evaluation of the changing "shapes" of a kind against which Smith argues and with which Pinka is not concerned.

The third objection to Sherwood's position is that some readers may feel a bit dizzy from continual tergiversation. Sherwood himself is always looking "back" to "early" work in order to assess it from "later" formulations of thought. The justification is that "although [Donne's] mature works conduct this investigation"—into epistemology in this case—"with more confidence, his sense of direction always remains the same" (p. 63). "Donne's interest in the epistemological questions relating to his notion of the body emerges more forcefully in his middle years, but the assumptions are present earlier in the love poetry" (p. 71). "Even Donne's

earlier works characterize suffering as the pervasive and inescapable condition of human life. However, in his later works suffering and affliction are divine agents" (p. 102). "The exemplary power of suffering is one theme throughout his career; it reaches fruition in the sermons in his Pauline refrain from Colossians 1:24, in which members, following Christ's pattern, suffer for the Body" (p. 110). The comprehensive view thus retrospectively achieved is described in this way:

> Hindsight from the sermons shows Donne's thought seeking its centre in the suffering Christ. In the love poetry, the soul hardened or softened in the experience of love, the struggle for clear-eyed self-recognition, and the active force of suffering all prepare for the fretful interior vision in the *Holy Sonnets* . . . The more public funeral poems modulate this interior cast with a broadened sense of shared public experience: the speaker recognizes in himself the shared suffering for the loss of public exemplars. In the sermons the broader public dimension takes into itself the vivified personal vision of Christ, refusing to separate personal experience of the suffering Head from the participation in his Body, the Church. (pp. 116-17)

Here, as elsewhere, Sherwood is admirably frank with his readers. Whether they will be as willing as he to look over Donne's shoulder so often and so rigorously is, of course, a different matter, but dissenters should be well warned in advance that except on this issue of hindsight—and for it I can see no help—Sherwood argues from a heavily fortified position. His thesis and its parts cohere wonderfully together; traditions and contexts abundantly illuminate Donne's words with great substance and richness; the words themselves are pondered deeply and subtly explained. This is a profoundly interesting study. It may even be true.

The advantage of taking these books together is no doubt obvious, but it will do no harm to observe that they demonstrate again the endless fascination of a mind and art which so powerfully evoke both speculative thought and imaginative response.

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