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The Making of Elizabeth Drury: The Voice of God in "An Anatomy of the World"

Yameng Liu

In debating the symbolic purport of Elizabeth Drury as a persona in Donne's "The First Anniversary: An Anatomy of the World,"[1] critics seem reluctant to take some crucial statements in the poem literally. It has been suggested that the young lady be read as representing Queen Elizabeth, the Virgin Mary, Christ, the Church, Astraea, Wisdom, or simply "a symbol of the highest spiritual potentialities of mankind"[2]—so various have the suggestions been, in fact, that she is virtually precipitated into an identity crisis of the worst kind. And yet no reading appears to be willing to accept what Donne says she is in the concluding part of the poem, that is, a linguistic construct or a "name" which initiates a poetic discourse:

> Here therefore be the end: And blessed maid,
> Of whom is meant what ever hath beene said,
> Or shall be spoken well by any tongue,
> Whose name refines course lines, and makes prose song. (ll. 443-46)

Unambiguous as the line "Of whom is meant what ever hath beene said" is, Donne hastens to add "*Or* shall be spoken well by any tongue," thus leaving us in little doubt that "Elizabeth" is meant to be the poem itself in its entirety, and much more, for the proper noun subsumes also *whatever* shall be "spoken well by *any tongue*." If the subject matter or the speaker loses its specific relevance to the utterance, then the only reasonable conclusion we can make, it seems, is that the name "Elizabeth Drury" signifies simply a well-articulated *discourse* or *enunciation*, a "song," to use Donne's own word.

Actually, this is not the first time in the poem that "song" as a signified is being coupled with the name "Elizabeth" as a signifier. In the beginning of "An Anatomy of the World," when the deceased girl is compared to a "Queen" who "ended here her progresse time" and "to heaven did clymbe," it has already been declared that "Shee's now a part both of the Quire, and Song" (l. 10). Yet a difference exists here between the two usages of the word: the "Song" in line

10 refers to the heavenly hymn, presumably composed by God, while the "song" in line 446 stands for the poetic discourse of humanity in general; the parallel and contrast of the two are so elaborated towards the end of the poem that they come to dominate much of its conclusion:

> . . . if you
> In reverence to her, doe thinke it due,
> That no one should her prayses thus reherse,
> As matter fit for Chronicle, not verse,
> Vouchsafe to call to minde, that God did make
> A last, and lastingst peece, a song. He spake
> To *Moses*, to deliver unto all,
> That song: because he knew they would let fall,
> The Law, the Prophets, and the History,
> But keepe the song still in their memory.
> Such an opinion (in due measure) made
> Me this great Office boldly to invade.
> Nor could incomprehensiblenesse deterre
> Me, from thus trying to emprison her.
> Which when I saw that a strict grave could do,
> I saw not why verse might not doe so too.
>
> Verse hath a middle nature: heaven keepes soules,
>
> The grave keeps bodies, verse the fame enroules. (ll. 457-74)

The privileging of poetry over history, and especially the analogy between God and the poet, between the Mosaic "song" and Donne's own "verse," unmistakably echo Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defence of Poetry*.[3] Seeing "holy David's Psalms" as "nothing but 'songs,'" and paying only lip service to the creator of nature, Sidney, in one of the more distinctive voices of this highly heteroglot treatise, deems it none too "saucy" to "balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of nature":

> give right honor to the heavenly Maker of that maker, who, having made man to his own likeness, set him beyond and over all the works of that second nature: which in nothing he [man] showeth so much as in poetry, when with the force of a divine breath he bringeth things forth far surpassing her doings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam.[4]

The irreverent comparison of a far superior poetic "second nature" with the "doings" of what was created by "the heavenly Maker" is, of course, in the tradition of what Ronald Levao terms "the grand Renaissance analogy of the poet and the creating God,"[5] which was chiefly an Italian tradition, and its assumptions were so resisted in sixteenth-century England that Sidney should predict in the *Defence* that his arguments would "by few be understood, and by fewer granted."[6] Yet whereas Sidney wonders aloud "whether by luck or wisdom, we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him [the poet] a *maker*," one who ranges "freely . . . only within the zodiac of his own wit," "not only to make a Cyrus, . . . but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world,"[7] Donne comes unabashedly forward to claim that title by comparing himself to the maker of the Mosaic song, even to the maker of man and the world when he describes his own creative act of "emprisoning her" as bringing the divorced soul (in heaven) and body (in the grave) together in that "middle nature" of a verse and as making the "fame" out of the amorphous chaos of the utter "incomprehensiblenesse."

Until the end of the poem, however, Donne's assumption of a God-like speaking voice has been largely indirect and implicit. In his "effort" to forestall a refutation to the assertion that the world is already "dead" and "putrified," he raises the potentially embarrassing question himself in the introductory part of the poem so that, ostensibly, it could be dealt with before causing any trouble:

> Let no man say, the world it selfe being dead,
> 'Tis labour lost to have discovered
> The worlds infirmities, since there is none
> Alive to study this dissectione. (ll. 63-66)

Yet this is obviously only one part of *the* question his assertion invites: even without the hint offered by what is being asked, it is already inevitable that the reader would wonder, the world being dead, who is alive out there to *perform* the "dissectione" in the first place. And once the assertion is being directed to the identity of the anatomist or the capacity in which he undertakes to perform the grand anatomy, the divine nature of the poet-speaker begins to suggest itself. For unless the poet-speaker is so well detached from the dead world as to be able to have a God-like, cosmic perspective or stature, he would never be in a position to know what happens in heaven ("Where, loth to make the Saints attend her long, / She's now a part of the Quire, and Song"), to continue to speak with fluency and eloquence while the world has lost its "sense and memory" and has "speechless growne" (ll. 28-30), or indeed to diagnose and dissect the whole world in such an authoritative way, *without* invoking, like Milton, the "heavenly Muse."

The sense of *immediacy* or *originality* that the masterly voice in the poem conveys is pivotal to our eventual perception of the poet's self-apotheosis. If, until the end of the poem, this sense is only implied through the absence of the inspiration from or intervention by a heavenly Muse, in the conclusion it is emphatically heightened through the virtual elimination of Moses's *active* role in the creation of the Deuteronomaic song. In one of the rare—and ironical, I should say—agreements concerning Donne's *Anniversaries*, critics concur in viewing the concluding passage of "An Anatomy of the World" as the speaker's assumption of the role of Moses, or "his invasion of the prophetic office."[8] Barbara Lewalski speaks for all when she claims that what we have in the conclusion is a "final identification the speaker makes of himself—as a latter-day Moses whose song is an analogue of the Mosaic song in Deuteronomy 32."[9] Yet Donne himself makes it clear that the composer or maker of what is called the "Mosaic song" is God, and God alone: "God did make / A last, and lastingst peece, a song. He spake / To *Moses*, to deliver unto all, / That song . . ." (ll. 461-64). God was the speaker, the dictator, the sole maker, whereas Moses was at most a listener, a transcriber, a deliverer, not in a position to take any credit for the song. And his attribution of the making of the song wholly to God is further clarified when in his *Essays in Divinity*, he insists even more explicitly that the "Heavenly song" is that "which onely [God] himself compos'd."[10] The song, moreover, is pitted against the "Prophets" at the latter's expense in the poem: God made the song, we are told, "because he knew they would let fall, / The Law, the *Prophets*, and the History, / But keepe the song still in their memory" (ll. 464-66, emphasis added). The Law, the History and especially the Prophets are all ineffectual in fulfilling God's purpose, as the transience of these institutions makes it impossible for them to be compared with the eternal "song." With Moses thus being shown in a comparatively trivial or even negative light, the "great Office" the speaker is said "boldly to invade" (l. 468) can refer only to the "great Office" of God rather than the conspicuously demoted office of the Prophet. Or, in other words, the analogue between the song and the verse can only be parallelled by an analogue between the maker of the song and the composer of the verse. In no sense does the speaker identify himself with Moses or claim the Mosaic commission.[11]

The recognition in the poem of a self-conscious apotheosis on the part of the speaker-poet, and of the poem-song as the creation of this deified figure, makes available a fresh perspective from which many of the thorny and controversial problems arising in the reading of the poem can be attacked. One of the textual recalcitrants critics have found in the poem is the obvious yet hard-to-justify collapse of the lineality of the temporal sequence in lines such as "*Sick* world, yea *dead*, yea *putrified*, since shee / Thy'ntrinsique Balme, and thy preservative, can never be renew'd thou *never* live" (ll. 56-58, emphasis

added) or "This man, so great, that all that *is*, *is* his / Oh what a trifle, and poore thing he *is* ! / If man were anything, he's nothing now" (ll. 169-71, emphasis added). To anyone subject to the tyranny of the space-time continuum, the world cannot be sick, dead, and putrified at the same moment, for that would mean the merging of the past, the present and the future. Similarly the world cannot have lived once and yet never lived, or man's state before and after a fundamental change, in two different temporal settings, cannot be described with the same grammatical tense, which is the present tense. Yet the ordinary time-space frame of reference is utterly irrelevant to God in his infinity and eternity: in the all-encompassing consciousness of the deity who is at once "the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Revelation 22:13), all, indeed, is present. In this sense, Donne's disregard for the rules of grammatical tense could well be seen as yet another device he uses to foreground, as well as to confirm, the divine status of the speaker.

This new perspective also helps to de-problematize the numerous logical inconsistencies concerning the characterization of Elizabeth Drury and her function in the structure of the poem. As the poem has it, she is at once the singer and the song: "Shee's now a part both of Quire, and Song"(l. 10); the name and the namer:

> . . . untill
> A prince, expected long come to fulfill
> The ceremonies, thou unnam'd hadst laid
> . . . . . .
> Her name defin'd thee, gave thee forme and frame,
> And thou forgets to celebrate thy name . . . (ll. 33-38);

the glue that cements all the parts of the world into an organic body and the preservative of its cadaver: "The cyment which did faithfully compact / And glue all virtues . . . . shee / Thy'ntrinsique Balm, and thy preservative" (ll. 49-57); the soul and the heart of the world. And the violent clash between the two images in "She to whom this world must it selfe refer, / As Suburbs, or the Microcosme of her" (ll. 235-36) baffles any attempt at visualizing spatially the way she is related to the world. The logical confusion around Elizabeth Drury is such that it is little wonder the impression one gets from the reading should be a poem, as John Carey has observed, "cut loose from any semblance of sense," floating "upwards in aerobatic extravagance."[12] Yet the way her making flies in the face of conventional notions about decorum, rationality and logic might well serve to demonstrate, again, the creative omnipotence and logical transcendence of the god-like poet, and the apparently unjustified hyperbole in characterizing the deceased young woman as the Holy Spirit and the savior would not appear so "blasphemous" or disconcerting if we place her

in the context of the "world" as the poet's imaginative creation and of the "song" as a constructed discourse. Here it is important to make a distinction between the "world" created by the poet-god and the world created by the Biblical God, and to see that what is being offered in the poem is not a versified Biblical version of creation, nor is it even a near parallel to this version. Rather, it is basically an alternative account of the myth of the creation of the world, brought forth "with the force of a divine breath" by the Sidneian poet-god, with "no small argument to the incredulous" of the Biblical account of *fall* and *redemption*. Just as for Sidney, the poet is a *maker* who, "disdaining to be tied to any subjugation [to nature], lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the . . . Chimeras,"[13] so Donne in the poem directly calls attention to the inventive or constructive nature of the girl: "She whom wise nature had *invented* then / When she [the *wise* and therefore the contemplative 'Another nature' the poet grows in the process of his creative 'invention'] observ'd that every sort of men / Did in their voyage in this worlds Sea stray, / And needed a new compasse for their way "(ll. 224-27, emphasis added). Sidney's suggestion is plain: since the nature created by God is "brazen" or otherwise seriously defective, it is necessary for the poet-maker to create an alternative nature that is better than the old one or "quite anew." And what Donne reaches in the above-quoted lines is roughly the same conclusion: Christ's mission having completely failed, it depends on the poet-god to "invent" a "new compasse" to guide the new world with or to offer redemption for the fall of the old world. Elizabeth Drury as the guide or savior in the world created "quite anew," in fact, is a chimera without the negative connotation of the word, a creature of imagination whose idealized characterization is deliberately based on the most flagrant arbitrariness, exaggeration and incongruity, so as, among other things, to mark the poetic nature off as distinctive from the nature created by God.[14]

The identity of Elizabeth Drury as a creature and denizen of the poet's creative nature is further strengthened by the fact that "shee" cannot even be defined as a symbol in the precise sense of the term. A symbol requires as its basis an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or stands for something else. Yet in Donne's poem, ostensibly occasioned by the anniversary of the young woman's premature death, all we have is an empty, disembodied name: virtually no relationship whatsoever has been established between "Elizabeth Drury" in the poem and the particular individual in real life. As Donne points out in defending himself against accusations of blasphemy,

> my purpose was to say as well as I could: for since I never saw the Gentlewoman, I cannot be understood to have bound my self to have spoken just truths, but I would not be thought to have gone about to

> praise her, or any other in rime; except that I took such a person as might be capable of all that I could say.[15]

This is actually a prose restatement and clarification of what has been said in lines 443-46 of the poem. "Elizabeth Drury," according to this statement, must not be understood as referring to the dead girl: the proper name in the poem has ceased to be a sign with a stable referent, and has become instead a mere signifier dissociated from the signified, signaling the *absence* rather than the *presence* of "the Gentlewoman" whom Donne "never saw." The poem, moreover, has been written not "to praise her" (therefore not intended to be in epideictic mode), but for the express purpose "to say as well as I could," that is, to generate a well-articulated discourse, or to compose a "song" as melodious as possible. And in order to do so, it is necessary that Donne "took such a person," or non-person, as would serve as the initiator or origin for the poem yet would not bind him to the factuality of "truths."[16]

That the poem or the "song" should originate from what in fact is an empty signifier is in full accord with God's way of creating the world and man out "Of nothing" (l. 156), and here we seem to be approaching the shady, carefully guarded core of Donne's view on poetic creation. By virtually eliminating the office of the heavenly Muse or of the Prophet, and by foregrounding his denial of any specific referentiality to the name "Elizabeth Drury," Donne appears to be suggesting that just as it was the nothingness that gave rise to God's desire to create the world, so the impulse of poetic creation springs from *absence* or *void*. In other words, for Donne, poetic creation is, in the final analysis, a creation *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, the genesis of the world as the poet sees it is a complex process of simultaneous creation and destruction, or of creation in destruction:

> For, before God had made up all the rest
> Corruption entered, and deprav'd the best:
> It seis'd the Angels, and then first of all
> The world did in her cradle take a fall,
> And turn'd her braines, and tooke a generall maime
> Wrong each joynt of th'universall frame.
> The noblest part, man, felt it first; and then
> Both beasts and plants, curst in the curse of man.
> So did the world from the first houre decay,
> That evening was beginning of the day,
> And now the Springs and Sommers which we see,
> Like sonnes of women after fifty bee. (ll. 193-204)

To say that "the world from the first houre decay" is to suggest that man is born to *being* and *ruin*, to *life* and *death*, at the same time, or is "borne ruinous" (l. 95), to quote Donne himself. And for Donne, this built-in ruin in creation is an *active* principle, a satanic saboteur bent on undermining the whole creative project. "How witty's ruine! how importunate / Upon mankinde! It labour'd to frustrate / Even Gods purpose" (ll. 99-101).

The way the purpose of God as creator of the world is frustrated by this congenital ruin is amply illustrated throughout the poem, and stressed repeatedly in such key passages as

> We seeme ambitious, God's whole worke t'undoe
> Of nothing he made us, and we strive too,
> To bring our selves to nothing backe; and we
> Do what we can, to do't so soone as hee. (ll. 155-58)

Not so explicitly elaborated, yet emphasized nonetheless with equal force in the text, is the way this "witty" ruin manages to frustrate the purpose of the poet as the maker of the "Song." Donne means this poem to be whatever "shall be spoken well by any tongue," or whatever will enable him to "say well as [he] could," the emphasis being laid on the well-constructedness of the enunciation. Yet the textual elements turn out, as if at the instigation of some satanic seducer, to be so contrary that they threaten to subvert the entire signifying system of the articulation with illogicalities and inconsistencies. In the beginning of the poem, the ascension to heaven of Elizabeth's "rich soule" is said to be *celebrated* by all those who know they have also a soul ("When that rich soule which to her Heaven is gone, / Whom all they celebrate, who know they'have one"). Soon, however, we have "And thou [the world] forgetst to *celebrate* thy name [Elizabeth]" (l. 38, emphasis added): the repeated use of the same word "celebrate" seems deliberately to court attention to a glaring self-contradiction, therefore to highlight the rebelliousness of the wayward words. The same can be said of "palace" used as a metaphor in two nearby contexts. In lines 7-8, when Elizabeth Drury is compared to a "Queen," it is clearly understood that she is a heavenly queen with her royal palace in the heavens, and her life on earth is merely a journey: "When that Queen ended her progreese time, / And, as t'her standing house, to heaven did clymbe." In a puzzling reversal in line 36, however, it is *this* world that is said to be her "Palace" ("thee [the world] her Palace made"). And even more conspicuously, no sooner has the voice in the poem justified the necessity to tell the "new world" the "diseases" of the now defunct old world than there emerges a countervoice undercutting what has just been said:

Yet, because outward stormes the strongest breake,
And strength it selfe by confidence grows weake,
This new world may be safer, being told
The dangers and diseases of the old:
For with due temper men do then forgoe,
Or covet things, when they their true worth know.
There is no health; Physitians say that we
At best, enjoy, but a neutralitee.
And can there be a worse sicknesse, then to know
That we are never well, nor can be so? (ll. 85-94)

To know or not to know, this becomes indeed the question. For if the creatures of the "new" world are still susceptible to "outward stormes," "forraine Serpent" (l. 84), self-confidence or pride, they are after all not so fundamentally different from their extinct counterparts in the "old" world. And if the "worst sicknesse" is to *know* that we have never been well and will never be well, what's the point of letting the new world know about the "dangers and diseases of the old"?

In a similar vein, Donne's effort to endow the hollowed signifier "Elizabeth Drury" with the highest moral and spiritual values gets thwarted by the text itself:

She of whom th'Auncients seem'd to prophesie,
When they call'd vertues by the name of shee,
She in whom vertue was so much refin'd,
That for Allay unto so pure a minde
Shee tooke the weaker Sex, she that could drive
The poysonous tincture, and the stayne of *Eve*,
Out of her thoughts, and deeds; and purifie
All, by a true religious Alchimy;
Shee, shee is dead. (ll. 175-83)

For all her alleged ability to drive the "poysonous tincture" and the "stayne" of Eve out of her "thoughts" and "deeds" and to purify other people, her own mind is actually alloyed with impurities when she "tooke the weaker Sex" (ll. 178-79). While it is hard to understand how impurity in mental constitution could lead us to purity in thoughts and deeds, the deconstruction of this moral paragon is given a finishing touch when the necessary condition for the young lady to "fit" her virtues onto others is analogized to that for serpents to hurt people with their poison:

But as some Serpents poison hurteth not,
Except it be from the live Serpent shot,
So doth her vertue need her here, to fit
That unto us; she working more then it. (ll. 409-12)

This comparison, as outrageously sinister as it seems puzzling, is after all not so difficult to understand if we take the secret workings of the "witty" ruin into consideration. The enthusiastic elevation of "shee" to the divine status of the soul and spirit of the world, in fact, is always counterbalanced or subverted in the text by devastating, parapraxes-like misogynic put-downs ("One woman at one blow, then kill'd us all, / And singly, one by one, they kill us now" [ll. 106-07]). Just as the "song" is vulnerable to the "witty" ruin, so the "girl" is by no means immune against subversion.

All this fits in with a larger textual pattern in which the purpose of the poet as the composer of the "song," or as the maker of "Elizabeth Drury," is so constantly frustrated that instead of the idealized situation in which Sidney's poet-maker can create as he pleases, freely delivering his "golden" world into a "brazen" one, Donne's creative act turns out to be more a process of interacting with and overcoming a co-existent destructive tendency, and his poem more a treatise on the *difficulty* or *problem*, than one on the ease or success, of creation. The problem involves troubles not just in the making of well-articulated sense, but in the closure of sense, as Donne indicates when he calls the reader's attention to the way he is forced to impose an artificial ending to a discourse that otherwise would threaten to become an endless, "stinking," series of speech parts:

But as in cutting up a man that's dead
The body will not last out to have read
On every part, and therefore men direct
Their speech to parts, that are most effect;
So the worlds carcasse would not last, if I
Were punctuall in this Anatomy.
Nor smels it well to hearers, if one tell
Them their disease, who faine would think they're wel.
Here therefore be the end. (ll. 435-43)

There is no way of being "punctuall" in saying what one has to say, just as there is no way of being accurate in meaning what one intends to mean. And similar to the "ambitious" human beings who hope "Gods whole worke t'undoe," the biased readers or listeners are quite finicky about what they are hearing or being told. Donne's creation is therefore constrained instead of free-wheeling,

and it differs considerably from what Sir Philip Sidney conceives in his *Defence*.

On the face of it, this lack of Sidney-like serenity on the part of Donne's poet-god might be seen as reinforcing pessimistic interpretive stances such as Carol M. Sicherman's suggestion that in "The First Anniversary," "confusion and inconsistency increase until at last he [Donne] emerges into the realization . . . that this world 'is not worth a thought,'" and that the poem "succeeds simply as an eloquent expression of the anguished discovery of failure." [17] Yet the message one gets from the concluding lines, especially from the way Donne describes the Mosaic song and the analogy he draws between God's song and his own verse, fails to sustain such a dark reading. What Donne stresses is, instead, that just as the Deuteronomaic song adds to and eventually replaces the "Law, the Prophets, and the History" people in the Biblical world have "let fall," so the verse, finished despite or maybe because of all those difficulties, is what counts in the poetical world he creates. Here the key word is *memory*: it is the special mnemonic quality of the "Song" that enables people to keep at least a substitute for the law, the history and God's prophets "in their memory" (l. 466), and since "Shee" is identified in one sense with the poem itself, it is again the same quality of the "Verse" that enables the "twi-light of her *memory*" to stay, and a simulacrum of the ideal world once animated and filled by her to remain:

> For there's a kind of world remaining still,
> Though shee which did inanimate and fill
> The world, be gone, yet in this last long night,
> Her ghost doth walke; that is, a glimmering light,
> A faint weake love of vertue and of good
> Reflects from her, on them which understood
> Her worth; And though she have shut in all day,
> The twi-light of her memory doth stay;
> Which, from the carcasse of the old world, free,
> Creates a new world; and new creatures be
> Produc'd. (ll. 67-77)

By now another crucial design in the poem should be quite clear: what the law, the history, and the prophets were once to the Biblical God, the "virtue," the "good" and "shee" as a protean persona are to Donne the poet-god. God (as Donne sees him) redeemed the inevitable loss of his law and prophets with the "song"; in a parallel manner, Donne undertakes to redeem the inevitable loss of all "shee" represents and the unavoidable death of the ideal world with his "verse." That so "presumptuous" an attitude should have been adopted by the future dean of St. Paul's Cathedral might sound odd or even incomprehensible.

Yet it should be remembered that the poem was composed at a time when, as Michael McKeon points out, the "replacement" in England "of religious by literary spirituality" finds its "origin," when the "poetic justice" started to operate "not as a representation of the divine but as a replacement of it," and art began to assume "those tasks that traditionally were performed by religious belief."[18] It was a time, in short, when the "rise of the aesthetic" entailed "a humanizing of Spirit, an internalization of divine as human creativity."[19] Framed in this historical context, Donne's assertion of the privileged status of the poet as the only *maker*, and of the vital redemptive function of poetry as the only permanent and reliable bearer of divine values in whatever conception of the world, should hardly strike us as in any degree extraordinary.

University of Southern California

Notes

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[1] John Donne, "An Anatomy of the World," *John Donne: The Epithalamions, Anniversaries and Epicedes*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 22-35. Subsequent references are to this text.

[2] W. Milgate, General Introduction, *John Donne: The Epithalamians, Anniversaries and Epicedes*, p. xxxv.

[3] The perception of a special relationship between Sidney and Donne dates back to Donne's own time, when Ben Jonson paired the two names together in his comments on literary apprenticeship. Recently, Jon A. Quitslund offers a succinct yet well documented discussion on this subject in his "Sidney's Presence in the Lyric Verse of the Later English Renaissance," *Sir Philip Sidney and the Interpretation of Renaissance Culture*, eds. Gary F. Waller and Michael D. Moor (London: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 110-23. Quitslund identifies "a number of allusions to and transformations of Sidneian models among Donne's poems," laying special emphasis on what he sees as Donne's efforts to step out of the shadow of a major predecessor and to strike out on his own. Although Quitslund's discussion limits itself on the lyrics only, my reading of the "First Anniversary" suggests that Donne's indebtedness to Sidney extends to other genres also, and the same sense of belatedness was clearly at work when Donne came to reflect on poetics.

[4] Sir Philip Sidney, *Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. Robert Kimbrough, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), pp. 106, 109. In writing his *Defence*, Sidney was, of course, constructing a poetic heterocosm through polyphonic articulation of a multiplicity of differing voices. Yet this does not mean that all the conflicting voices have the same acoustic value. And since this is no place to make a full-scale comparison of the poetics of Sidney and Donne, since what concerns me here is just how

Sidney's conception of artistic creation illuminates or otherwise relates to Donne's in the poem under discussion, my attention is focused on what has been taken as a more stentorian voice in the *Defence*, to the disregard of the less distinctively heard sound or countervoices.

[5] Ronald Levao, *Renaissance Minds and Their Fictions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 168. Levao's study of how the deepest tensions of Renaissance thought animate and "haunt" diverse texts of this period, his suggestion that the power and contingency of human construction is a central concern of Renaissance poetics and letters, and especially his provocative interpretation of Sidney's *Defence* are, I think, very helpful in our reading of Donne's poetry in general, his "First Anniversary" in particular.

[6] Sidney, p. 109.

[7] Sidney, pp. 107-09. The emphasis is mine.

[8] Kathleen Kelley, "Conversion of the Readers in Donne's 'Anatomy of the World,'" *The Eagle and the Dove*, eds. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 156.

[9] Barbara Lewalski, *Donne's Anniversaries and the Poetry of Praise* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 236.

[10] John Donne, *Essays in Divinity*, ed. Evelyn M. Simpson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1952), p. 92.

[11] Levao contends in his reading of the *Defence* that for Sidney, the poet is "not really inspired," as "Sidney is interested in a poetic grounded in the human mind, and inspiration would compromise its autonomy" (pp. 137-38). The same can be said, apparently, of Donne's insistence on the poet's creative immediacy.

[12] John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 101.

[13] Sidney, p. 108.

[14] That it is characteristic of Donne to base his poetic conception on what seems to be "violence" of signification, or on arbitrary "yoking" of otherwise unrelated signifiers, has been a perennial topic in Donne criticism since Dr. Johnson. An especially interesting recent discussion on the subject can be found in Peter L. Rudnytsky's "'The Sight of God': Donne's Poetics of Transcendence" (*Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 24 [1982], 185-206). Starting from his observation of a "failure of conjunction" in Donne's best-known lyric poems, and of a general "tendency to respond to the sundering of the realms of matter and spirit . . . by a subordination of the body to the soul," Rudnytsky identifies what he terms a "poetics of transcendence," which informs both Donne's love poetry and his religious writings and receives its most extensive elaboration in the "Anniversary" poems. Although having as its conceptual framework the faith/science problematics ("Donne's 'poetics of transcendence' was essentially a rearguard holding action attempting to recover the grounds of religious belief in the face of the advances of science"), Rudnytsky's study reaches a number of conclusions akin to those of my reading (the *Anniversaries* must be seen as "fundamentally concerned with the status of metaphor," for instance). The similarity in the general discursive thrusts of the two readings is clearly seen from the following passage, which Rudnytsky quotes from Donne's *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, for what Donne says here not only lends support to the perceptions of a "poetics of transcendence," but

helps to throw light on the way Donne's poet-god composes his "song" or to solve puzzles such as why "Elizabeth Drury" could at once be the originator of the poem, the poem itself, the poetic discourse in general and still make sense:

> My God, my God, thou art a direct God, may I not say a literall God, a God that wouldest bee understood literally, and according to the plaine sence of all that thou saiest? But thou art also (Lord I intend it to thy glory, and let no prophane misinterpreter abuse it to thy diminution) thou art a figurative, a metaphoricall God too: A God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions, such spreadings, such Curtaines of Allegories, such third Heavens of Hyperboles, so harmonious eloquutions, so retired and so reserved expressions, so commanding perswasions, so perswading commandments, such sinewes even in thy milke, and such things in thy words, as all prophane Authors, seeme of the seed of the Serpent, that creepes, thou art the Dove, that flies.

[15] Milgate, p. xxxii.

[16] Donne's emphasis on the articulating process or on well-articulatedness as a principle of artistic creation is, again, traceable to Sidney's *Defence*. Levao points out that for Sidney, "the only real 'poesie' is poetic making itself." See Levao, p. 150. And A. Leigh DeNeef's quite different approach in his "Rereading Sidney's *Apology*" (*JMRS* 10 [1980], 155-91) leads him to a similar observation: Sidney implies that "it is not the artistic product that is significant, but the process, the art by which that product is made, be it a concrete ethical action, a man, or a poem" (p. 163). DeNeef, however, seems to attach too much importance to Sidney's passing reference to "the heavenly Maker of that maker." In his insistence on the need to have a solidly logical interpretation of the *Defence*, or to establish the Biblical God as a totalizing center for the unification of the diverse thoughts in Sidney's poetics, he sees Sidney's poet-maker as a mere "part of the Poem of God" or a mere "spokesman of the divine Maker," without at the same time explaining how this alleged subordinate or secondary status of the poet in the Sidneian poetics can be reconciled with, for instance, the subversive comparison of the poet as the maker of a new, "golden" nature with God as the creator of the old, "brazen" one. In the case of Donne's "An Anatomy of the World" the Biblical God has in fact been reduced to a mere poetic persona.

[17] Carol M. Sicherman, "Donne's Timeless Anniversaries," *Essential Articles for the Study of John Donne's Poetry*, ed. John R. Roberts (Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1975), p. 375.

[18] Michael McKeon, "Politics of Discourse and the Rise of the Aesthetics in Seventeenth-Century England," *Politics of Discourse*, eds. Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 36-37, 49. Levao, on the other hand, sees the general poetic ethos of the Renaissance period in a slightly different light: "Cusanus, Sidney and Shakespeare may be interpreted as tracing a progression from theologically oriented confidence to increasingly anxious probing" (Levao, p. xxiii).

[19] McKeon, p. 49.