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"Just such disparitie": The Critical Debate about "Aire and Angels"

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Although critics have not lavished on it the extensive amount of critical attention they have given such poems as "Valediction: forbidding mourning," "The good-morrow," "The Canonization," and "The Extasie," "Aire and Angels" is clearly one of Donne's most controversial poems. No other poem in Donne's canon has been given so many completely contradictory readings. Theodore Redpath speaks for any number of baffled readers when he claims that the poem is "notoriously one of the most difficult of the *Songs and Sonets*."[1] More specifically, Leonard Unger says that "because of its manner of development, because of its subject, and because of the numerous distinctions of ideas made within a poem of moderate length," "Aire and Angels" is "perhaps the most complex of all Donne's poems."[2]

The earliest critical comment on "Aire and Angels" is that of Coleridge, who, in 1811, in the margin of his copy of Donne's poems, wrote, "The first Stanza is noble—& reminds me of Wordsworth's *apparition* poem ['She Was a Phantom of Delight']. The 2nd I do not understand."[3] During the one hundred eighty years since then, scholars, editors, and critics of Donne's poetry have been unable to reach a consensus about the meaning of the poem; and they too, like Coleridge, have been especially troubled by the second stanza. The major critical crux in the poem, in fact, has always been the apparent disparity of tone between the last six or perhaps three lines and the rest of the poem.

Maybe it is the difficulty and complexity of the poem that has frightened away a goodly number of critics, who, in their books on Donne's poetry, only briefly mention the poem and/or refuse to be drawn into the controversy over it. For instance, the following books, all centrally concerned with Donne's poetry, have very little on the poem: J. B. Leishman's *The Monarch of Wit* (1951); Clay Hunt, *Donne's Poetry* (1954); A. Alvarez, *The School of Donne* (1961); Murray Roston, *The Soul of Wit* (1974); Silvia Ruffo-Fiore, *Donne's Petrarchism* (1976); Patricia Pinka, *This Dialogue of One* (1982); John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (1981); and Dennis J. McKevlin, *A Lecture in Love's Philosophy* (1984).[4] This list is, by no means, complete.

A brief historical survey of representative critical comment on the poem from H. J. C. Grierson's edition of Donne's poems (1912) to the present will perhaps

reveal what led one fairly recent critic, Peter De Sa Wiggins, to maintain that the critical debate about "Aire and Angels" "might lead one to wonder if such an entity as 'the poem itself' exists at all" and to observe that, although critics agree on individual lines and even on where the crux in the poem lies, "interpretations manage nonetheless to look as if they could not have arisen from scrutiny of the same object."[5]

1912-1950

Most of the pre-1950 critics who wrote on "Aire and Angels," as well as many thereafter, fall into two very broad categories—(1) those who read the concluding lines of the poem as a cynical statement that seems completely at variance with the tone of the rest of the poem and (2) those who defend the concluding lines as expressing purely conventional Renaissance love theory and, therefore, as not meant to be offensive toward women and not inconsistent with the general tone of the poem. Grierson, for instance, observes that "Aire and Angels" is "touched with cynical humour at the close,"[6] and, likewise, F. R. Leavis in *Revaluation* (1936) calls attention to the difference between "the gravely gallant and conventional exaltation of the opening to the blandly insolent matter-of-factness of the close."[7]

Joan Bennett, however, in her reply to C. S. Lewis's "Donne and Love Poetry in the Seventeenth-Century,"[8] rejects Lewis's claim that Donne is "contemptuous" of the lady in line 25 ("So thy love may be my loves spheare") and argues instead that "Aire and Angels" is "an account of Donne's search for, and final discovery of, the true object of love," which is that "love can last if it be for something which, though expressed in the body, is yet not the body," and that he discovers in the Thomistic doctrine of angels assuming air the perfect analogy he needs. For Donne, she maintains, the point of the comparison is that "the air-body of the Angels is neither nothing, nor too much," but is "just sufficient to confine a spirit on earth," just as woman's love for man is "a resting-place for his spirit." Furthermore, Bennett disagrees with Leavis's comment above about the conclusion of the poem and argues that it appears insolent only if one isolates the final couplet from the rest of the poem.[9]

J. B. Leishman, however, in *The Metaphysical Poets* (1934) maintains that in "Aire and Angels" Donne "regretfully admits that absolutely perfect love between man and woman is not possible" because "even the purest kind of love between man and woman must always be dependent on some kind of sexual feeling" and, therefore, is "less pure than the ideal." He concludes that in the poem Donne "seems to regret the existence of that physical basis of love which elsewhere . . . he accepts as a necessary condition."[10]

Kerby Neill (1947), in reply to Leishman, agrees with Bennett and argues that the speaker, "looking for some fitter thing in which to fix his love" than the physical beauty of his lady, "turns to something that is between the materiality of her

physical beauty" and the immateriality of "'the 'nothing' of the purely spiritual"—which is the lady's *love* for her beloved. He insists, though, that the speaker concludes that the "disparity between the purity of the air and the greater purity of the angels who assume such bodies is the same as the disparity between the love of man and the love of woman": in effect, the speaker, according to Neill, claims that the woman "cannot love him as he loves her" because "no woman can love as purely as a man."[11]

Frank Huntley (1948), however, thinks that Neill misses the point when he equates man's love with angels and woman's with less pure air. Huntley insists that, for the speaker, "the mystery of love... is not that there is a difference between their loves but that they become so perfectly one." The central problem of the poem is "to resolve the disparity between the soul and the body"; "to shorten the span of difference," Donne "equates the soul with angels (intelligence) and the body with air," thereby reducing "the wide disproportion between the soul and the body to a narrow disparity which exists between air and angels—physical lust being only slightly less pure than the souls that are joined by it." Huntley claims that, in the conclusion of the poem, Donne holds that "only such a disparity as is between air and angels' purity . . . separates the two kinds of love which can exist simultaneously 'betwixt' men and women like us."[12]

George Williamson in "Textual Difficulties in the Interpretation of Donne's Poetry" (1940) joins the chorus of those who deny that the last three lines of the poem are cynical, pointing out that such a reading depends upon equating men with angels. He maintains, on the contrary, that Donne "merely generalizes the disparity between air and angel's purity into the difference between the love of man and the love of woman; it is a difference in corporeality, but it does not favor man." What Donne means, according to Williamson, is that "women and angels are alike in having to put on corporeality in their relations with men." Williamson concludes, therefore, that "Aire and Angels" is a platonic love poem that endorses the same essential philosophy found in "The Extasie."[13]

1951-1959

Critical debate on "Aire and Angels" heated up considerably during the 1950s and was dominated by the disparate interpretations of Helen Gardner and A. J. Smith.

Gardner's most extensive commentary on the poem appears in *The Business of Criticism* (1959) in which she maintains that "Aire and Angels" is not "a fully coherent and expressive work of art." After reviewing the thinking of the Schoolmen on how angels assumed air in order to be visible to men, Gardner says, "The difficulty of the poem does not lie here," nor, she adds, "is there any real difficulty in following its argument, once we recognize the theological flavour of the language, and if we use other poems by Donne to help us." In fact, she finds

no major obstacles to understanding in the first twenty-five lines of the poem, but the last three present problems. She writes, "Up to this point [line 25] the poem has seemed to be a serious and uncynical, even idealistic, inquiry into the nature of love between men and women; and the woman has been paid hyperbolic compliments." But "now, suddenly, the point seems to be that women are inferior to men. Are we to think that we have been conducted through these labyrinths to receive this slap in the face at the end?" She continues, "We are asked to accept that Donne has written so tenderly, with such refinement of language, in order to deceive us and to shock us by a turn, which we have had no reason to anticipate, at the end." "If this is a joke," she maintains, "it is a bad one. Calculated surprises are not necessarily witty. This sounds like the intellectual equivalent of pulling away a chair from under a person about to sit down, which has never been regarded as a very witty stroke." Gardner insists that in "Aire and Angels" the tone of "impassioned reverie and intellectual seriousness requires something better than a point scored off women" and that "a surprise is only justified in art, if, when it comes, we see that we should have expected it, and if it puts what has gone before in a fresh light."[14] She maintains that, if Leonard Unger in *Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism* (1950)[15] is right in suggesting that "the reversal" and "calculated surprise" in the last three lines are simply "witty" with ironic overtones, then the poem is "artistically trivial." She concludes that perhaps Donne has simply failed "to solve a formal difficulty," noting that the first stanza is "a finer musical whole than its second," or perhaps he had said all he had to say and just "tacked on" the last three lines, which accounts for why the poem is not wholly successful.[16]

In two essays, "Two Notes on Donne" (1956) and "Sources of Difficulty and Value in the Poetry of John Donne" (1957), A. J. Smith, taking a position quite different from that of Gardner, finds nothing seriously flawed or inconsistent about the poem but rather praises its "simulacrum of consistent logical inquiry" and its "impersonal probing of alternatives," as well as the "slight, complimentary love-plot on which the poem is threaded." Like the majority of critics who preceded him, Smith sees the final six lines as the main source of difficulty in the poem. He observes that the resolution of the poem is presented in an analogy "so exceedingly fine-spun that its distinctions at first appear meaningless; whose whole appeal, moreover, is to popular points that we cannot now hope to take spontaneously." Donne, according to Smith, concludes that neither purely spiritual nor purely physical love "is in keeping with the propriety of love" and that "the only proper vehicle for his love" is his lady's love for him, since "an unreturned love is no love." This position, as we have seen, is generally accepted by most critics. Smith further maintains, however, that the specific intention behind Donne's comparison of the purity of angels and that of air is to show that there is very little difference between the two kinds of purity, "for both are pure, though air is less pure than the angel which assumes it." He notes, however, that Donne "has hinted that he is actually showing the difference between the particular loves in question," his and that of

his lady, and that, "given this, the rest of the poem provides the meaning." Smith argues that the only difference between man's love and woman's love is that the man's love came first and compels his mistress's love by its ardor: "he loves unprompted, but she loves only in return for love," just as angels wear the passive, but perfectly responsive, air they take up and mold for their purposes; thus it is only in this "mere passivity, or initial neutrality," that women's inferiority lies. Smith believes that the distinction between the purity of air and angels is "closely analogous to that between the love of a sex which will love only in return for love, though well enough then, and one which conceives of love for a specific object and works to compel an answering love." Acknowledging that both kinds of love, active and passive, have their worth, Smith points out that the active love practiced by men is superior. He maintains, however, that the poem does not add anything new to traditional love theory or to the philosophy of love; rather its success is in its wit.[17]

In addition to Gardner's and Smith's interpretations, three other extended comments on the poem made in the decade of the 1950s should be briefly considered.

Doniphan Louthan in *The Poetry of John Donne* (1951) sides primarily with those who argue that "Aire and Angels" does not conclude on a cynical note. He insists that, although the poem is "complex in structure," it is nonetheless "unified in tone," in spite of "all its intricacies and involvements." Louthan argues that the speaker's love "exists (inheres) in the less ethereal love which his beloved manifests towards him" and that her love is less ethereal precisely because "its object is less ethereal." He maintains that Donne is saying that "the disparity which exists between air's relative purity and angels' absolute purity will always exist between women's love and men's (because of the qualitative differences in object)" but that, "paradoxically, the disparagement of women is at the expense of men"; thus "humility, not cynicism, is in evidence here: women's romantic love is inferior, but only because its object is inferior."[18]

In his edition of the *Songs and Sonets*, Theodore Redpath presents a very thorough paraphrase of the poem; but then, without further argument or qualification, he claims that the speaker says, "As a matter of fact, the perennial difference between male and female love *is* that women's love, though pure like air, is not quite so pure as men's love, which is as pure as an angel."[19]

William Empson in "Donne the Space Man" (1957) agrees with most other critics in admitting that "Aire and Angels" is a very difficult poem. He says that "probably it has done more than any other to make the unspecialized reader think Donne rather a cad." Empson holds that, if the poem ends in a sneer against women, it is not "a brutal sneer" and points out that, throughout most of the poem, it is the lady, not the speaker, who is the angel. He insists that between stanza one and stanza two the speaker obviously goes to bed with the lady since "nothing else gives any point to the dramatic drop in the exalted tone" and "at any rate this saves him

from being self-righteous about his purity." Empson becomes even more inventive: "After becoming accustomed to her body he still regards it as somehow unearthly, like an angel's," but then he "gets an uneasy feeling that he mustn't be overwhelmed by its brilliance, because he needs to protect his other interests." Empson believes the conclusion much more complex than most critics have even imagined. He argues that Donne "neither intended to call women purer than men nor men purer than women," but rather "what he meant to do, when he added a second verse to his first splendid one, was to say something very teasing about purity." According to Empson, Donne "meant the reader first to accept the final epigram as a platitude in favor of men, then revolt against this view and realize that it might be in favor of women, then realize that the only truth told is about an actual unlikeness between the sexes." He concludes that Donne, therefore, in stanza two is merely making a joke and being clever: "Indeed, there could be no point in arranging the words so as to make possible the present disagreement among critics except to make evident confusion of the conception of 'purity.'" Empson realizes, however, that his view does not make the ending of the poem very good, but he maintains that it saves one "from having to regard the end of the poem as bleakly mean-minded."[20]

1960-1969

In 1960, A. J. Smith in "New Bearings in Donne: *Aire and Angels*" repeats many of the points already expressed in his two previously published essays on the poem, stressing again that the attitudes towards love that Donne strikes in the poem are stock ones and noting, in particular, that Sperone Speroni, more than fifty years earlier, in his *Dialogo di Amore* had argued the same issue that occupies Donne's attention in the poem. Smith shows that, although Donne brilliantly handles Renaissance commonplaces and thereby produces an excellent and witty poem, "Aire and Angels" essentially makes no contribution to the philosophy of love. In contrast to Helen Gardner, who claims that the poem is flawed, Smith leaves no doubt that he considers the poem a major artistic success. He praises the poem lavishly, calling attention to its "clean precision" and the "intermittent splendour" of its diction; "the subtle modulations of its rhythms and phrasing, ripe for musical setting"; its "controlled mastery of expression, so complete that the intricate stanza-pattern appears to reproduce the exact structure of the complex idea"; its "fineness" and "pungent elegance" that "holds the imagination like a good fugue"; its "adult detachment"; and the "cool forensic sanity" of its tone.[21]

In "Theory and Practice in Renaissance Poetry: Two Kinds of Imitation" (1964), Smith maintains that the argument of "Aire and Angels" has often seemed obscure to critics because they have failed to understand the "fine-spun analogies from metaphysics and angel-lore" that Donne uses in the poem, and again he turns to Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo di Amore* as especially useful in contextualizing

Donne's arguments. In the Italian dialogue, three poets and a poetess-courtesan debate about whose love is more perfect—that of man or that of woman, and they conclude that "man's love is more ardent and quick to kindle than woman's because although a woman may have great love in her heart, it cannot operate there until the man actuates it, when it returns to her from him." Smith says that in Donne's poem the speaker's love "is neither manifest nor operative until it is given a 'spheare' by his mistress's love in return; an unreturned love lacks the very means of *being* love, which is a mutual condition"; and thus the disparity referred to in the poem "is that between an initiating agent, and the potentially responsive stuff it activates and fashions in its own likeness." For Smith, the poem is "a piece of pure art—an extremely witty, finely written and wholly individual, vivification or realization of a common-place distinction *which it is assumed the reader knows.*"[22]

Joan Bennett in *Five Metaphysical Poets* (1964) agrees with those critics who reject the notion that the poem closes with an expression of cynicism, and she warns that it is Donne's habit "to strike his keynote in the first lines of a poem" and that, "if the reader's final impression is in a different key, he should suspect himself of misinterpreting." According to her reading, the speaker describes his desire for ideal love in stanza one; in stanza two, he finds the ideal manifested in his lady's love for him. The speaker says, in effect, that "the lady's love for him . . . can embody his love for her as the air embodies the angel," that her love "will be a sphere in which his love will rule as intelligences rule the heavenly spheres," and that, since woman is "next below man, just as the human pair are above animals," her love is "as much less ethereal than the man's as air is less ethereal than angelic substance."[23]

Hugh Sykes Davies in "Text or Context?" (1965) challenges Helen Gardner's reading in *The Business of Criticism* (1959) of the last three lines of "Aire and Angels" and argues that they are "intimately and naturally linked with the rest of the poem, and above all with the preceding three lines, both in their meaning and in their phrasing." He disputes Gardner primarily on the basis of syntax, the use of the pronoun *it* (line 23), the use of the word *spheare* (line 24), and the distinction between two kinds of purity as that of thin air and thickened air. Davies argues that Donne is saying that, just as the woman's love is like pure air, his love is like "the less pure air of angelic bodies" and thus "women's love in general is the pure element" while man's love is "'not pure as it, yet pure.'" In other words, for Davies the distinction is not between air and angels but between "two states or conditions of air they assume," and thus *puritie* (line 27) "stands for that which is homogeneous, elemental," whereas its opposite "is that which is heterogenous, compounded" or "thickened" and thus not as pure as "rarefied air" but "still 'pure.'" Therefore, according to Davies, Donne says in the poem that women's love is "the rarefied, the unthickened, unphysical way of loving," while man's "is thickened and is to that extent more physical, more embodied, but still pure in the sense that nothing has been mingled with it"; thus the major paradox of the poem is the phrase "not pure as it, yet pure" (line 24).[24]

In the same year (1965), Helen Gardner retorts by pointing out that Redpath (1956) had already shown how Davies reading of "Aire and Angels" is untenable. She insists that the contrast in the poem is between "the nature of an angel, which is pure spirit, and the nature of air which is pure, but material," and that the point of the poem is that "*man's love* finding itself a fit embodiment in *woman's love*" is like an angel taking on air to make its body.[25]

Also in the same year (1965) W. J. M. Bronzwaer and David W. Lindsay reply to both Davies' essay and Gardner's response. Bronzwaer argues that throughout the poem the reader associates *angel* with the woman and, therefore, in the context, *he* "could not possibly be used" and "the feminine pronoun [is] out of the question for linguistic, historical, and theological reasons"; so only *it* remains and shows up in line 24. He further maintains that Gardner's problem with the conclusion of the poem disappears if one recognizes a chiasmus in the last three lines: "*Angells puritie* goes with *womens love* and *Aire* with *mens*." He also points out that "the syntactic structure of the sentence beginning line 23 also equates *Angell* with *thy love* " in line 25, "that is, the woman's."[26]

Lindsay points out that, although Davies and Gardner disagree about the paraphrasable content of the poem, both consider it a serious and solemn work, whereas, in fact, "Aire and Angels," according to him, is "a joke at the lady's expense." In Lindsay's reading, the first twenty-two lines "work up from nonsensical premises to the most extravagant of compliments," and then the remaining six lines "reveal the hollowness of these compliments, showing that they were paid only to physical beauty." Lindsay points out, however, that the poem should not be seen as trivial simply because it is a joke.[27]

On the other hand, Arnold Stein in *John Donne's Lyrics* (1962) points out that the "ostensible subject" of the poem is "a familiar masculine dilemma of love, the tendency to spiritualize crossed by the opposing tendency to materialize" and observes that the poem has "its own gaiety of wit" even though "the dilemma is accepted as a serious one which the poem will try to resolve." He also explains, in some detail, that the poem is a variation on the sonnet form, with the sestet coming first in each stanza followed by the octave. Stein agrees basically with the usual reading of the first stanza, but in the second stanza, he points out how angelology "provides by analogy a solution to the human predicament—a solution which confirms the necessity of accepting the limitation imposed even upon spirit," and he argues that the answer is that "the mind, in order to express love on earth, must take on impurity; but it is a rare and delicate impurity, like that of an angel's face and wings." According to Stein, "the human mind derives its nature from heaven and aspires to return, but it must perform its office of human love on earth; and the ways, though airy, must be visible to human sight." Man's love, says Stein, is like the angel, whereas women's love is "the sphere in which the celestial body of man's love may reside; or like the angel's face and wings of air, woman's love provides the medium through which man's spiritual love may express itself

on earth." Stein concludes that, in the end, intellect wins out over physical love; there is not a synthesis between the body and soul but rather a "reconciliation drawn up in favor of the intellect."[28]

As one might expect, Donald L. Guss in *John Donne, Petrarchist* (1966) finds that in Donne's argument the real object of his love is neither the lady's soul nor body but rather her love. The poem "conforms to the Neo-platonic consensus that the object of love is union; to Ficino's declaration that love alone wants only itself in return; and to Equicola's statement that the lover wants love from his lady's soul, and sexual satisfaction from her body." However, in "Aire and Angels," Guss says, "these principles are stated with a sharp sense of the lady's inadequacy" and "the interplay between Neoplatonism and skepticism is reflected in a delightful, and most characteristic, manner." Guss finds that Donne's "devotion is perpetually disappointed" and that it is "not really surprising when he finally concludes, with epigrammatic point, that woman's love is ever less pure than man's," a position that "echoes the Renaissance cliché that the lover is more divine than the beloved" but which also "reveals Donne's disappointment."[30]

In *John Donne: Conservative Revolutionary* (1967) N. J. C. Andreasen reads the poem quite differently from those who precede her. She argues that, far from being a slap in the face, the speaker says that the woman's love is "an example of moderation which he should follow, superior to his love because it is better that love be less pure." The final lines are, according to her, "a high compliment," and she paraphrases the argument in this way: "As an angel puts on a body of air in order to manifest himself to men, so your *love* (which is, like air, a mean between nothing but body and total disembodiment) is the object in which my love can succeed in inhering." Andreasen, therefore, maintains that the speaker "solves his problem of discovering a fit object for love to work upon by making it inhere not in the idea of his beloved nor in her physical beauty, but in her *love*." The last three lines, says Andreasen, "explain why this solution is satisfactory": "Men's love sometimes has the purity of an angel--that is, it tends to go toward the extreme of spirituality, which cannot become manifest; or sometimes, on the other hand, it goes completely to the other extreme of corporeality and tries to fix itself in 'things / Extreme, and scatt'ring bright,' which is equally undesirable; in either case men's love is too 'pure' (in the sense of 'extreme') to be satisfactory, as the lover has found from experience; but women's love is more moderate—it too is pure, but with the purity of air; not pure as angels perhaps, but for that very reason corporeal enough to be manifest to human beings"; thus "women's love is a proper kind of love for human beings, who are neither all soul nor all body."

Andreasen maintains that the poem ends, therefore, with the "lover's realization" that "he must adjust his love to the human world" and that "he can learn something about love from the way in which women love." According to Andreasen, the speaker has, in short, "become aware of the importance of the practical charity which characterizes women's love and of his own practical duty

to the woman he loves, an awareness embodied in the metaphor of the angelic intelligence and its sphere." Although he, not his lady, is likened to an angel, he realizes that "even angels have their duties."[30]

A year later, Murray Prosky in a note in *The Explicator* (1968) points out that the ambiguous use of *pinnace* (line 18) (meaning both a small reconnaissance boat and a prostitute) "provides evidence of a mocking undertone in the poem prior to its much debated existence in the last three lines." He points out that, if the reader considers the meaning of *pinnace* as prostitute, then it is the lady's "wares" (line 17), not the poet's compliments, that cause admiration to sink. Prosky maintains that, although the primary meaning of lines 15-20 is complimentary, "the alternative meaning ironically hints at contrary implications," and "the mocking undertone," he points out, "exists in the fact that while Donne is suggesting that his language is inadequate to the ideal, he is also suggesting that real women are also inadequate." He paraphrases the lines this way: "I realized, or materialized, the ideal object of my love to such an extent that she looked like a bawd making a vulgar display of her wares"; and, "consequently, admiration sinks from its ideal object to an object of sensuality and lust." Prosky maintains that the secondary meaning of *pinnace* "lends additional support" to those critics, such as F. R. Leavis, C. S. Lewis, and others, who view Donne's poem as contemptuous of woman yet "have based their arguments on the last three lines only"; he also questions the validity of Joan Bennett's view that the last three lines cannot insult woman because they would reverse the sentiment of the rest of the poem.[31]

In *The Wit of Love* (1969) Louis Martz points out that it may strike one at first that the concluding lines of the poem, "with this emphasis upon the superior 'purity' of men's love to women's love, are not exactly complimentary to a being of such angelic nature," yet, he claims, "when we think of it closely, it is in fact a version of an old Petrarchan compliment." What the speaker says, according to Martz, is this: "If she will extend her love toward him, if she will come down from her angelic status and deign to love a man, then his love for her may move like a planet within her love for him." Martz asks: "But why is her love for him less pure than his love for her?" And he answers: "Is it not because of the *direction* of their two loves: hers downward toward him, and his upward toward a creature of angelic purity?" He concludes, therefore, that Donne "appears to be combining here the Platonizing love philosophy of the Renaissance with an older tradition, the tradition of the courtly lover inherited by Petrarch, in which the lady is a superior being of angelic purity and beauty."[32]

Una Nelly in *The Poet Donne* (1969), after reviewing the various readings that have been given to the last three lines of "Aire and Angels," argues that these concluding lines make the central point of the whole poem and that, "far from being a sudden reversal or a mocking taunt, these lines make a splendid 'shutting up' for the entire poem" and "refer, not to the disparity between the active and passive qualities respectively of the love of men and women," but "to the metaphysical

disparity between the spiritual and material elements present in all human love." Nelly maintains that, in effect, Donne is saying that, "just as an Angel is invisible, is incapable of expressing its beauty in human terms without the help of air—'not pure as it'—so all human love, spiritual also in its origin, is 'deed-bound,' incapable of communicating itself to its loved one, without the help of the body which is, in physical fact, 'loves spheare.'" She further observes that "the gently lyric opening" of the poem and "the carefully balanced structure and the musical flow of the verse are evidence of the fact—rare in the poetry of Donne—that here his intelligence is engaged rather than his heart." Nelly concludes that Donne "is writing about the ideal interdependence of soul and body, an ideal for which his whole being longed, but which his turbulent nature could never attain"; therefore the purpose of his "dispassionate dialectic" is to balance *loves pinnace*, while at the same time it "justifies and explores the ideal ministry of matter in the service of the spirit, or the ideal function of the body in the expression of human love."[33]

1970-1979

A review of criticism written about "Aire and Angels" in the 1970s only confirms that, while commentary on Donne's poem proliferates, agreement on the meaning and tone of the poem seems no closer at hand.

For example, in "The Two Arguments of Donne's 'Aire and Angels'" (1972), John Dean thinks that Helen Gardner's reading of "Aire and Angels" makes the fundamental mistake of treating the poem as if it were a quasi-theological tract dealing with the most ethereal kind of love and argues that, in fact, the poem moves on two distinct levels, the spiritual and the sexual, and suggests that "by explicating both levels one can delineate to what degree the two arguments jar or harmonize into a single poetic narrative." He points out numerous possible sexual references and metaphors in the poem (*doe* [line 10]=copulate, *nothing doe* [line 8]=copulate with the lady, *body* [line 10]=penis, *lip* [line 14]=labium, *eye* [line 14]=vulva, etc.) and finds that these throw the spiritual argument out of balance. Finally the two arguments are "too disparate to coexist harmoniously in the same poem." Dean concludes, therefore, that the two arguments finally lead the reader into "irreconcilable incongruities" and thus the poem "ends half finished and half complete."[34]

On the other hand, Wesley Milgate in "'Aire and Angels' and the Discrimination of Experience" (1972), while finding the conclusion of the poem flawed, calls "Aire and Angels" a truly metaphysical poem because "it studies its subject in large perspectives of time, showing how a passionate experience arises out of the past and opens upon a never-ending future" and because "it presents and defines the contours of human experience in relation to the spiritual substance of the universe itself." Milgate finds it curious that critics are disturbed by Donne's claim that men's love is superior to women's and points out that the notion was "to the theologians, the scholastics, and the Neo-Platonists alike—to everyone indeed—literally matter of fact" and that, "far from being cynical, insulting, gibing, or

insolent, the lover in Donne's poem is straining every ounce of his being to take account of this fact about women's love in relation to men's in the most complimentary, and indeed most truly loving way possible." Milgate maintains that the only difference "is that, while the angel assumes its air-body temporarily, the angelic intelligence is always at its station"; Donne introduces the word *spheare* "primarily to suggest this essential element of permanence in the constitution of perfect love, an idea missing from his basic analogy of angel and its body." Milgate argues that the main point of the poem is that "love can exist only as it is returned." The speaker says that, "though love passes through the stages of wonder and worship, and various kinds of physical attraction and desire, love can find its only appropriate fulfillment when it relates itself to the love that the woman gives in return, not to the woman herself." Milgate, however, finds the last four lines of the poem "thin in poetic texture and almost bereft of the emotional warmth that is realized in, and that vivifies, the rest of the poem" and suggests that "the outcome of the poem is a triumph, not of perfect love, but of intellectual play." He speculates that "for all his virtuosity in stanza-construction" and "delight in intricate craftsmanship," Donne simply "has not room in the second stanza to do all that the poem requires him to do; too many ideas crowd into the last six lines to be properly displayed in climactic imaginative richness." Thus Milgate concludes that, although the poem "falls off poetically at the end," its defects "can be accounted for in purely literary terms," not in terms of the conceit or philosophy.[35]

In contrast, T. J. Kelly in "A Burial for John Donne" (1973) calls the argument of "Aire and Angels" "pseudo-metaphysical" and finds "an almost flippant lightness" at the beginning of the second stanza that supports his "taking the first stanza pretty lightly, too." He notes that the poem, which begins in rather "lavish compliment, turns out, without losing its air of gallantry, to be slightly uncomplimentary." Kelly maintains, however, that the conclusion, like the rest of the poem, shows "a beautifully light, flexible, poised control of so many things at once--a high degree of awareness that never gets smothered in its own multiplicity, a high degree of poetic self-awareness that never falls into self-consciousness," and pays the lady "the supreme compliment of presuming she's intelligent." For Kelly, the poem is not a quasi-theological or Neo-platonic tract but rather "a minor triumph of wit and tone."[36]

Rudolph Almasy in "John Donne's 'Air and Angels' Again" disagrees both with those who see the poem as "the search for and final discovery of the true object and meaning of love" and also with those who see it as moving from "exaltation to insolence." He argues that many critics "have been too eager to assign the poem a definite category and, ignoring the speaker and the intricate maneuvering of his mind, have allowed the category to precede the poem." Almasy argues that in the last three lines the speaker recognizes that his lady's love is inferior to his but is unhappy about the situation: "He cannot be comfortable with this disparity nor

certainly affirm it as necessary to perfect love," yet "neither is he insulting the woman or being insolent." Almasy thinks the speaker's attitude is "one of regret that this disparity exists and will ever be present between these two lovers" and that he "is not satisfied with what love has come to mean for him." Almasy concludes, therefore, that "Aire and Angels" is not one of Donne's "affirmative love poems," because it concludes with an "emphasis on the disparity between man's love and woman's love"; in it there is no "union" or "oneness," only the recognition of the "regrettable disparity" between the love of man and that of woman.[37]

Melissa C. Wanamaker in *Discordia Concors* (1975) discovers that the "tenuous conclusion" of "Aire and Angels" "reflects a *discordia concors*" but confesses her bewilderment about the meaning of the poem: "it is finally difficult," she writes, "to decide whether Donne here believes love of women to be an experience comparably angelic; not altogether disagreeable; or definitely pleasant."[38]

In "Angel Imagery and Neoplatonic Love in Donne's 'Aire and Angels,'" Katherine Mauch (1977) argues that there are three important keys to understanding the poem: (1) the theme of Neo-Platonic love, which moves from sense to reason to spiritual understanding; (2) the pun on "angel" as both the heavenly messenger (body of air and incorporeal essence) and the coin, each corresponding to the three stages of Neo-Platonic love—the coin (sense, with even the association of prostitution), the body of air (reason), and the angelic essence (spiritual understanding); and (3) the dialectic pattern of movement from thesis to antithesis to synthesis, "not between the highest and lowest kinds of love but between the highest kind [the male speaker's] and a lower kind [the lady's]." She maintains that the speaker's change of tone in the conclusion of the poem "does not arise so much from his reflecting upon the baser quality of women's love as from his considering the fact that, while he now knows what is required for an enduring love relationship, he must also accept the fact that a lasting love cannot be the completely mutual kind of love he has sought and had even found—at moments—" since the "bond of total union exists not on earth but in heaven (between angels)." Mauch suggests that the change of tone in the last lines of the poem "might therefore not be insulting, mocking, or even teasing, but rather wistful, or perhaps bittersweet"—an appropriate term "since it suggests a synthesis of feelings."

Mauch further notes that, until line 23, nothing about the lady or her response to the speaker's love is described and that, when it is first mentioned, it is seen "to be analogous to the body of a heavenly angel and therefore to be of the type belonging to the second level of the Neoplatonic ladder." Mauch concludes that Donne may be primarily concerned with saying something important about the nature of human love, not with distinguishing between men's love and women's love. According to Mauch, the poem is about "the experience of finally, after much searching for an escape from oneself in total union with another, accepting the confines of the self and the peculiarly human love that they make possible."[39]

Andrew Brink, on the other hand, in *Loss and Symbolic Repair* (1977) says that "the sad thing about Donne's tactic" in "Aire and Angels" is that "the ideal woman cannot correspond to any real person, so inevitably disillusion sets in," as happens in the second stanza, in which the introduction of the metaphor of the ship makes love "cargo"; and thus "what was light and airy now becomes a heavy burden, too great for Donne's small boat to handle." "Too much hope," Brink claims, "had been placed in this particular woman" and "in this great love" so that Donne "will therefore have to dematerialize the woman into nothing again," which he does wittily in the conclusion of the poem. Brink suggests that in the concluding lines of the poem Donne "seeks a mean between love's extremes—between nothing and too much, with the closing conceit of the soul and substance a deftly clever dismissal of her love as inferior to his own." Brink concludes that, in the poem, Donne "speaks the language of a witty courtier breaking off a transitory affair without being crude about it" and "in so doing he reveals his basic ambivalent response to woman."[40]

In "Aire and Angels," John M. Couper and William D. McGaw (1977) disagree with those who think the wit of the poem is not serious and sincere. They believe that many of the difficulties found in the second stanza disappear if the reader can recognize a "particular personal crisis" lying behind it. They maintain that the sexual connotations of the second stanza make it clear that the speaker has been overtaxed by lovemaking, has allowed his "uncontrollable excitement" to spoil his love, has defeated the lady in orgasm, has found his lovemaking inadequate for such a desirable mistress, and finally decides to reduce her from the level of a love goddess to that of a mere woman so that he can succeed with her. They point out that in the sexual act the lady is "very much a partner" and that "what difference there is between the sexuality of man and woman can be very little." They further argue that in the concluding lines of the poem the mistress is the sphere that the speaker puts on. "There is nothing necessarily profane," they say, "in dealing thus with love," for, "if emphasis is on the carnal side of love it is because ideal love must work carnally too." The speaker, they say, "has genuinely sought and found an excellent woman only to be confounded by his performance" and that "it is precisely because he values her that he must get things right."[41]

Patrick Swinden in "John Donne: 'Air and Angels'" (1979) calls the poem "densely argumentative" and paraphrases the conclusion of the poem this way: The speaker says, "... my relation to you is that of an angel to the purified air that surrounds it; which is like my being the controlling intelligence of one of the heavenly spheres—and you being the sphere. So on the evidence of this last analogy, you give my love a geographical position, a home, and I give your love a sense of direction and purpose. Therefore our loves nicely complement each other. There is no need to argue about who is superior to whom in a situation which, I have suggested, imposes on each lover a different but equal contribution to what is clearly a very satisfactory relationship." Swinden maintains that one of the

major stumbling blocks in the poem is that Donne applies the imagery of angels in the first stanza to the woman but applies it—in a confusing way—to the male speaker in the second. He agrees with Milgate that "there is too much congestion in the last six lines of 'Aire and Angels'": "Donne has tried to shift his ground too rapidly and has overtaxed the powers of his readers' concentration." For Swinden, "it is at this point that critical argument must detach itself from a too slavish attention to the sixteenth-century metaphysical paraphernalia and address itself to the basic question about the poetry: with what degree of emotional conviction, in the course of writing the poem, has Donne swapped angels?"[42]

Peter Dane, however, in "The Figure of the Pinnace in 'Aire and Angels'" (1979) says that the poem explores the central issue of all of Donne's secular poetry, which is, what is love? He argues that, although the argument "largely follows a Neoplatonic line," the poem's "real concern is in no way Platonic." Donne, according to Dane, is primarily "intent on a love actively realized" and the speaker of the poem "rejects not sensual love but unrequited love, whether Platonic or Petrarchan," and insists that "only the lady's answering love can ensure a love relation"—she alone will satisfy him. Thus Dane argues that the movement of the poem is "towards the visible, tangible, actual," yet he maintains that "the mutual love that is to replace the adoration of the lady's beauty is not mundane" but rather "belongs to the realm of angel and sphere, the realm of the perfect, of light, of the immutable." In other words, "this love is not a love of the flesh but a love actualized in the flesh," and thus the poem "does indeed come full circle" by beginning and ending with the body and with love. Dane concludes that, for Donne, "love is the most intimate relation between a man and a woman" and "its closest analogue is the relation between the body and soul."[43]

1980-1989

Not all, but certainly too much of the commentary on "Aire and Angels" in the decade of the 1980s reveals that critics have become even more insistent that the poem lie down quietly on their prefabricated Procrustean beds. Increasingly a number of critics seem to be talking only to each other rather than to a wider reading audience, and they seem, at times, too exclusively interested in demonstrating the range of their own critical sophistication or in dazzling the reader with their tricks of critical wizardry while Donne's poem becomes only a peg upon which random thoughts can be hung.

Peter De Sa Wiggins in an article on "Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's *Trattato dell'Arte della Pittura, Scultura, e Architettura* and John Donne's Poetics" (1981) points out that "Aire and Angels," "despite its powerful fascination, may have caused more woe and gnashing of teeth among students of Donne than any other poem he wrote." He claims that the main issue in the poem is the impurity of the speaker's past behavior, which "calls into question the sincerity of his love," and that "the whole poem right down to the closing lines is concerned with this

problem." According to Wiggins, "the angel metaphor, which enters the poem from the start, is sustained to the end both as a defense against the woman's charge that he is impure and untrustworthy" and also "as a means of persuading her to put her love to good use by redeeming him through a physical, sexual, manifestation of her love," which he compares to the change an angel undergoes when it takes on a body of air. Furthermore, Wiggins argues that, in line 11 of the second stanza (line 25), the word *love* no longer signifies "a passion in search of an object" but "comes to mean the object of a passion," and that in line 11 of the first stanza the word *thou* ceases "to signify an imperfect manifestation of the beloved in other women" and comes "to refer directly to the beloved." Wiggins calls the symmetry of the poem "startling," but adds that "it is to be expected of a poem about harmonious love." The problematic last six lines of the poem, Wiggins says, "become a perfectly consistent development of everything that has been said in the whole poem": "The lover is asking the woman, like an angel, to assume a body, his body, which is like air, less pure than hers, but not totally impure," and then "he, like air, will become her manner of revealing her perfection while she will guide him in her embrace as an angel guides the sphere of its domination." Wiggins concludes that the speaker, "a brilliant sophist," "never quite denies" that his lady "is purer than he," but he says in the closing lines that "women will always love creatures less pure than themselves" because "the object of woman's love—the male sex—will always, like air, be slightly less pure than the object of men's love—the female sex—which is angelic."[44]

In "'Aire and Angels': Incarnations of Love" (1982) Wiggins restates his earlier reading, stressing the poem's dramatic quality and commenting on its structural symmetry: "The first sestet poses the difficulty love must contend with as a passion in search of an object," and the first octave "solves the difficulty by having love discover its object in the person of the woman to whom the whole poem is addressed." The second stanza, he observes, "poses a new problem involving love that has become aware of its object," and the second octave "resolves that problem with a request of the woman that she manifest her love for the speaker of the poem, just as angels manifest themselves by assuming bodies of air." He calls "Aire and Angels" one of "the most optimistic of Donne's love poems" and maintains that the speaker in the poem "engages our sympathy, because his cause is as much our own as if he were defending, not just himself, but all humanity against a charge of being tainted."[45]

In "Donne's 'Aire and Angels'" (1982), E. F. Pritchard claims that "the matter of irony has been the major critical dilemma as regards this poem" and argues that, in the poem, Donne "uses poetic tradition to support his ideas" and even "the very *sounds* of words to persuade the reader." He finds "a web of artifice" around such words as *haire*, *aire*, and *Angells* in lines 19-24 that renders "the final irony" in lines 26-28 "a *necessary* part of the whole." Pritchard argues that irony begins in the second stanza, in which Donne "comically" turns the "Neo-Platonists' ladder

upside down" by fixing "his love in the mistress' body" only to find the "union dissolving as soon as achieved." Donne needs to create a physical existence for his mistress, according to Pritchard, but her hair is a symbol that has spiritual and Petrarchan significances; to transform it into something physical, Donne wishes to substitute *air* for *hair* and does so through the similarity of sounds in each word. Pritchard then suggests that Donne needs to turn *air* into something physical, which he does through the similarity of its sound with *inhere* (or *in-hair*); that the hair-turned-air is indeed physical is confirmed by the association of the sound of *hair* with the sound of *spheare*, a part of the physical world also. Pritchard insists, however, that despite this transformation, the union ultimately dissolves as soon as "philosophical awareness" occurs in line 25, the dissolution occurring obviously because it is unreasonable to try to use *air* as a "more suitable symbol for the mistress' physical nature than her hair" and because "spheres" do not really exist other than as lines on a map. In short, Pritchard maintains (I think) that Donne has rhetorically attempted to make a transformation that is unreasonable and that Donne exposes the unreasonable nature of this transformation in order to show that neither reason nor rhetoric can "encompass the delights and difficulties of love, and the inevitability of parting after union."[46]

In *Donne, Milton, and the End of Humanist Rhetoric* (1985), Thomas O. Sloan sees the action of "Aire and Angels" "as a process of correction, or reconciliation," and disagrees with Smith (1960), who sees the conclusion of the poem as simply a witty use of the Renaissance commonplace about the inferiority of women. Sloan calls the poem "less Platonic than Thomist, and less scholastic than humanist." He argues that the speaker finally discovers that "love can *inhere* in neither extreme, neither in ethereal beauty . . . nor in the fragmented pleasures of sensuousness" and finally comes to realize that "man's love may be like the angel, but the angel's *purity* is itself conceptually ineffectual in this life, beyond merely inciting (forbidden) worship or (pointless) admiration." This is, according to Sloan, "the ultimate discovery" of the speaker, and he notes that "it occurs as a correction to the conclusions's partiality." He further sees the poem as "teetering on the brink between satire and seriousness . . . with an ultimately comic effect." Sloan maintains that the question of the inferiority of woman's love is "quite beside the point"; "though iterated in the final comparison, it is denied by the action of the poem." "What we are left with is Donne's lawyerly *via media* between the ideal and real." Sloan concludes that the reader is required to "piece the ideal and the real together in a final correction to arrive at the anti-idealist doctrine of the poem, balanced as it is against a slightly less forcefully argued antimaterialism, both surveyed by a conclusion that offers a disparity between what it seems to say and what has preceded it."[47]

Arthur Marotti in *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (1986) thinks that "Aire and Angels" may have been written for Lucy, Countess of Bedford and maintains that it is helpful to read the poem against the background of the "encomiastic topoi of

the verse epistles." He points out how the poem uses "the formulae of praise with comic self-consciousness—simultaneously validating and mocking the terms of complimentary amorousness," and "in the final formulation" portraying "men as active and women as passive in love." "Together with the assertions of choice and control earlier in the lyric," Marotti says, "this conclusion reveals Donne's resistance to the kind of humble passivity implicit in the Neoplatonic and Petrarchan stances of complimentary devotion that express the client's acceptance of his dependency in the patronage relationship." Marotti maintains that "the teasing antifeminism" in the conclusion of the poem "would have to have been communicable to a sophisticated reader like Lady Bedford" but "the underlying resentment it implied would have remained hidden, perhaps perceivable only by the poet and by his friends, some of whom were members of the Lady Bedford circle."[48]

In *John Donne, Undone* (1986) Thomas Docherty gives a poststructuralist reading of "Aire and Angels," and I think it instructive to let him speak for himself as much as possible. He begins by suggesting that the male speaker in the poem "exchanges positions with the woman, but with this woman understood metaphorically as angel, and thus the fundamental exchange of positions is of human with divine." He further notes that "Part of the argument of this poem concerns the replacement of the sullied flesh with the purer angel who wears the airy nothing of the human body." Docherty maintains that "The point is that the angelic male figure, descending to love the airy female, requires 'some fitter' vessel or shell for his love." Love "cannot live in an airy nothing (another word sometimes used as slang for female genitals), nor in that other characterization of woman, the inconstant flame" and thus, "For the sustenance of this [male angelic soul], and its child-love, another angel has to be sought, or the woman has herself to become angelic," which is to say that "the female body has to be construed as a 'nothing,' 'idealized' as the pure essence of an angel." Docherty concludes then that "The poem moves from validating the love of this 'airy nothing,' which has to be elemented as the vessel or shell of the female body, towards love of something purer, less elemental or less material: that is, the idealized angelic medium, that pure medium whose integrity is healthily intact, never sullied into fleshy reality."[49]

Bernard Richards in "Donne's 'Air and Angels': A Gross Misreading" (1988) attacks Docherty's comments on the poem and says that his "nonsensical reading" shows that much recent literary theory "dispenses with common sense." He claims that Docherty "has created some alternative scenario of what the poem is about that bears no relation to Donne's meaning or meanings"; "his interpretation" is, in fact, "nothing other than an impertinent critical excrescence." In particular, Richards attacks Docherty's suggestion that *pinnace* in line 18 may be a play on the word *penis* and shows that, not only was the word *penis* not used in English at the time Donne wrote his poem, but the interpretation based on this word "does not produce any sensible, coherent ghostly alien meaning" and requires the reader "to envisage a process flying in the face of reason."[50]

Christopher Ricks in a very jaunty essay entitled "Donne After Love" (1988) takes the view that, although most of the poem is "rangingly ruminative, wondering and wonderful, about men and women and love," the ending of "Aire and Angels" is not witty or teasing but rather is "an offense—against women, against men, against love, and against the poem which it wantonly degrades."[51]

On the other hand, Willis Salomon in "Donne's 'Aire and Angels'" (1988) thinks that most readings of the poem's ending fail to take into account "the importance of the lightness of tone" in line 26, which is achieved primarily by the speaker's return to direct address of the beloved: "The return to direct address in the last six lines asserts in the poem the dynamic, experiential quality of active courtship after twenty-two lines of tortuous metaphysical invention." Salomon insists that, if approached in this way, the poem "becomes neither simply cynicism nor elevated panegyric" but rather "an 'argument' for the relation between two contexts of love: the 'metaphysical,' which defines amatory experience in terms of ultimates; and the rhetorical,' which defines it in terms of concrete situations." In fact, what makes the poem so interesting is that "the expectation of a definition of achieved, perfected love is subverted as the poem closes." Salomon claims that in the ending Donne "pits the elaborate attempts to place love in the abstract against the most concrete implications of the poem's tone and mode of address" and that the poem "does finally arrive at the definition of love sought by its complex dialectical turns." Although the poem acknowledges the disparity between ideal and real love, the recognition is not cynical because Donne "shows how participation in love's ritual provides the fertile basis for the invention and scrutiny of a metaphysic of love."[52]

In "Donne's 'Disparitie': Inversion, Gender, and the Subject of Love in Some Songs and Sonnets" (1989), Ronald J. Corthell presents a "gender" study of the poem in which he claims that the contradictions in "Aire and Angels," such as the source of the angel as both interior and exterior to the speaker, the righteousness or validity of worshiping angels, the shifting pronouns, the uncertain interpretation of the word *pinnace*, etc., somehow reflect the contradictory position of women in the Renaissance, a position that sees women as both whores and saints, simultaneously marginalized and appreciated for their role as mothers at the center of the affective family that was developing during this period. Corthell sees the contradictions in the poem as the speaker's own interrogation of his intentions and thus the "meaning" of the poem resides in its open-endedness: it reflects not only the contradictory position of women but also its own ambiguity and reveals itself to be a "site of contest," as Alan Sinfield calls such works, rather than an entirely subversive or reactionary work of art. Corthell insists that the text can only be properly understood if it is seen in the historical context of the position of women.[53]

Much of the recent criticism of the poem tells us more about the critics that write it and about their critical theories and methodologies than it does about Donne's poem. More than a half century ago, Merritt Hughes warned his

generation of critics of the dangers of "kidnapping" Donne for their own purposes.[54] Perhaps a similar warning should be issued for those who explain Donne's poem in such complicated, jargon-ridden language that even educated and sophisticated readers feel put off and intimidated. If one reflects on the recent critical debate about how we should read "Aire and Angels," one may be inclined to agree with William Empson, who, reviewing Gardner's edition of Donne's love poems in 1972, argued that Donne desperately needs to be rescued (not kidnapped this time) from what he calls "the habitual mean-mindedness of modern academic criticism, its moral emptiness combined with incessant moral nagging, and its scrubbed prison-like isolation."[55]

This survey of the major criticism written on "Aire and Angels" in the twentieth century shows that there is an array of bewildering and contradictory interpretations of the poem, and there are no signs that indicate the debate will end in the near future. It is perhaps understandable and not surprising that two recent editors of Donne's selected poetry and prose, T. W. and R. J. Craik, refusing to enter into the debate about the last three lines of "Aire and Angels," simply gloss the lines this way: "This emphatic conclusion—that men's love is purer than women's—is left to the reader to interpret and judge."[56]

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Notes

[1] Theodore Redpath, ed., *The Songs and Sonets of John Donne. An Editio Minor* (London: Methuen, 1956), p. 31.

[2] Leonard Unger, *Donne's Poetry and Modern Criticism* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1950), p. 42.

[3] *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Marginalia*, ed. George Whalley, Vol. 12, Part 2: Camden to Hutton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 222. I am indebted to Professor Dayton Haskin for pointing out this reference.

[4] J. B. Leishman, *The Monarch of Wit: An Analytical and Comparative Study of the Poetry of John Donne* (London: Hutchinson, 1951); Clay Hunt, *Donne's Poetry: Essays in Literary Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Geoffrey Cumberlage, Oxford University Press, 1954); A. Alvarez, *The School of Donne* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961); Murray Roston, *The Soul of Wit: A Study of John Donne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974); Silvia Ruffo-Fiore, *Donne's Petrarchism: A Comparative View* (Florence: Grafica Toscana, 1976); Patricia Pinka, *This Dialogue of One: The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1982); John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981); and Dennis J. McKevlin, *A Lecture in Love's Philosophy: Donne's Vision of the World of Human Love in the Songs and Sonets* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984).

[5] Peter De Sa Wiggins, "'Aire and Angels': Incarnations of Love," *ELR* 12 (1982), 87.

[6] Herbert J. C. Grierson, ed., *The Poems of John Donne*, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 9.

[7] F. R. Leavis, *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936), p. 12.

[8] C. S. Lewis's essay appears in *Seventeenth Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert Grierson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. 64-84.

[9] Joan Bennett, "The Love Poetry of John Donne. A Reply to Mr. C. S. Lewis," in *Seventeenth Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert Grierson*, pp. 98-100.

[10] J. B. Leishman, *The Metaphysical Poets: Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), pp. 43-44.

[11] Kerby Neill, "Donne's 'Aire and Angels,'" *Expl* 6 (1947), item 8.

[12] Frank L. Huntley, "Donne's 'Aire and Angels,'" *Expl* 6 (1948), item 53.

[13] George Williamson, "Textual Difficulties in the Interpretation of Donne's Poetry," *MP* 38 (1940), 44-45.

[14] Helen Gardner, *The Business of Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), pp. 62, 63, 68-69.

[15] Unger, p. 45.

[16] Gardner, p. 70.

[17] A. J. Smith, "Sources of Difficulty and of Value in the Poetry of John Donne," *Letterature Moderne* 7 (1957), 187-89. See also Smith's "Two Notes on Donne," *MLR* 51 (1956), 405-06.

[18] Doniphan Louthan, *The Poetry of John Donne: A Study in Explication* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951), pp. 108-10.

[19] Redpath, p. 31.

[20] William Empson, "Donne the Space Man," *KR* 19 (1957), 381-83, 389.

[21] A. J. Smith, "New Bearings in Donne: *Aire and Angels*," *English* 13 (1960), 53.

[22] A. J. Smith, "Theory and Practice in Renaissance Poetry: Two Kinds of Imitation," *BJRL* 47 (1964), 228.

[23] Joan Bennett, *Five Metaphysical Poets: Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), pp. 22-23.

[24] Hugh Sykes Davies, "Text or Context?" *REL* 6, no. 1 (1965), 96, 99-100, 105-06.

[25] Helen Gardner, "Correspondence," *REL* 6, no. 1 (1965), 109.

[26] W. J. M. Bronzwaer, "Correspondence," *REL* 6, no. 2 (1965), 102.

[27] David W. Lindsay, "Correspondence," *REL* 6, no. 3 (1965), 106.

[28] Arnold Stein, *John Donne's Lyrics: The Eloquence of Action* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), pp. 141-46.

[29] Donald L. Guss, *John Donne, Petrarchist: Italianate Conceits and Love Theory in the Songs and Sonets* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966), p. 169.

[30] N. J. C. Andreasen, *John Donne: Conservative Revolutionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 211, 213, 215.

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