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BEING AND BECOMING

A BACKGROUND TO THE LOVE POETRY OF JOHN DONNE

*"Feelings live in man; but man lives in his love. This is not a mere metaphor, but reality itself: love does not stick onto the I which then only makes the Thou its 'contents', its object, love is in between the I and the Thou."
(Martin Buber)*

*"For love is not an object 'which' makes one stagger; not weight 'which' hangs itself on beings; not even the ground 'which' the falling body hits. Love is the staggering itself; not a destination but strength; not a state to arrive at but continuous motion."
(László F. Földényi)*

*"Being is intelligible only in terms of Becoming"
(Herakleitus)*

I.

By way of introduction, I would like to explain the title which may sound a trifle pretentious for such a short essay, since Donne-criticism evaluates a number of intellectual and artistic phenomena as backgrounds to Donne's poetry: the Petrarchan tradition, Neoplatonism, the New Philosophy of the age, Counter-Reformation or Mannerism are the most common of these. I shall rely on some of these approaches, but I want to refrain from repeating too many of the established

critical opinions. Instead, I would like to offer the metaphysics of Giordano Bruno as a possible background, and it is also in the light of some elements of Bruno's philosophy that I wish to treat Donne's connection to Mannerism.

As for Donne's works, I limited my scope to his love poetry for the simple reason that regardless of the generalizations philosophical in nature, the focus of this essay is on Donne's approach to love. When reading through the fifty-five poems of *Songs and Sonnets* I found it hard to account for that feeling of constant tension radiating even from the poems celebrating love. Though the collection may be unsystematic and the pieces may have been written on the spur of the moment, they are characterized by a unity of tone which makes it a fair suggestion that beyond the versatility there must be an approach that can somehow be generalized.

My primary concern here is this approach, and what may lie behind it. Thus I allowed myself some disproportionateness on the one hand, and some philological inexactitude on the other. This latter stands in that I do not make any attempt to pin down direct influences when bringing together the philosophical and artistic tendencies of the late sixteenth century, nor when claiming that a very similar attitude can be discerned in Donne's approach to love and in Bruno's metaphysics. My claim is simply that behind the shift that took place in the arts in the decades generally referred to as the age of Mannerism, a late phase of Renaissance art (and regardless of the dubious nature of such labels, the shift itself is quite tangible) there also lies a shift in metaphysical conceptions. Such connections may not have sufficiently surfaced in the age to take the form of direct influences, yet unfolding them may help in interpreting works or understanding the approaches that formed them. Thus, I am not even concerned about the extent to which Donne was familiar with Bruno's thought.

Incidentally, it seems quite impossible that he would not have been familiar with it. The scholarship of the past few decades seems to have been giving increasing importance to the influence of an intellectual elite usually referred to as the Northumberland Circle, the members of which not only knew about Bruno's philosophy, but were in some respects moving along the same lines (as opposed to the dons who dismissed Bruno from Oxford after he defended the Copernican astrological conception in a public debate in 1583). Donne himself was also in a loose and occasional connection with the Northumberland Circle. John Haffenden's lengthy introduction to William Empson's *Donne-studies* thoroughly explores these connections and possible influences, and shows how

Bruno's thought was present in the intellectual climate in England among a certain group of people, which included John Donne¹.

As my interest is not in the unfolding of such connections, but merely in a metaphysical conception (the relation of Being and Becoming) that seems to have appeared (or, rather, reappeared) in Europe roughly in the half century that embraces the twenty-eight years when Bruno and Donne were contemporaries, at no point of this essay do I wish to look at direct influences. I am only concerned with an approach or spirit that I think becomes manifest in the shift that took place in the arts and thinking of the age.

And thus the mentioned disproportionateness: to draw a brief outline of the approach that I believe appears in Bruno's metaphysics and Donne's love poetry, and of the background this approach evolved from, I shall have to deal just as much, if not more, with the mentioned theoretical shifts and their aesthetic consequences or manifestations, as with Donne himself.

This topic evolved from the process of trying to formulate what I felt to be the 'message' of Donne's love poetry in any generalizable way. Thus, I will leave many aspects of Donne-criticism virtually unmentioned and attempt to show instead how the Mannerist context and Bruno's thought might help to answer questions that may arise when reading Donne. The answer given may well be a very simple one - when speaking of love, one cannot help phrasing commonplaces, as a critic remarks² - but the reading itself will hopefully explain why I think it is not unimportant to repeat and emphasize such an answer, simple as it may be.

II.

It seems a critical commonplace that much of the tension of Donne's poetry springs from his vacillation between bodily and spiritual love and that this is the dichotomy he is constantly trying to synthesize. Yet this issue may lead much farther and can be broadened into the question of the attainability of the perfection of the human condition. Full human satisfaction is not only imagined in the terms

1 Cf. John Haffenden, "Introduction" in: William Empson, *Essays on Renaissance Literature* Vol. 1: *Donne and the New Philosophy* ed. John Haffenden Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

2 Földényi F. László: "Az elvesztett egyensúly. A szerelemről." IN: Ortega y Gasset, Jose: *A szerelemről* Ford. Gilicze Gabor. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 1991 p.9.

of love in love poetry - the subject quite naturally offers itself for such an expansion.

A strive for infinity and perfection are basic human desires and they are among the topmost things sought in love. Love is thus likened to divinity; it is given a divine role in the sense that the lover hopes to achieve absolute fulfilment. The washing together of aspirations for infinity (immortality), for reaching God and for fulfilment in love is an age-old phenomenon. According to Plato's Diotima, Eros is a *daimon* and *daimons* are intermediaries between the divine and the human. Plato also speaks of Eros as the desire for the eternal possession of Goodness or as the desire for immortality³. Perfection and infinity in love or God are the tokens of happiness.

Yet in our human, bodily existence we are neither perfect nor infinite. We are spurred by desires, we are bound to change, we are victims of chance and of the multiplicity of the world, we stand defenceless against the twists and turns of fate. Transcending ourselves or our relationships into a realm of mere spirituality thus seems to be something of a paradox, one we nevertheless constantly try to resolve. It is this problem that the confrontation of bodily and spiritual love amounts to in the final analysis. No wonder that in accordance with the conventions of Neoplatonic love poetry that Donne at once drew on and drew away from, he himself often sets up this parallel between love and God, "Since all divinity is love or wonder" ("A Valediction: of the Book"). Thus to find a synthesis between bodily and spiritual love, to resolve the dichotomy that so often denies us access to that divine perfection is an issue that concerns our general chances of happiness and fulfilment. The issue is not merely amorous, but truly metaphysical: it amounts to the question of how we can Be without constantly being annihilated by existential anxiety, or, to say the least, constantly unsettled by a torturing dissatisfaction and fear.

I feel it is this very question *Songs and Sonnets* as a whole circles around. (Of course, not in any theoretical way - and I think the unsystematic nature of the poems in itself has significance which I will later mention.) The art of the Renaissance, very generally speaking, had the means to handle this question, to find ease for pains and hopes for aspirations because it was created in a well ordered universe, in a firm belief of universal harmony. (Which of course is not to say that for instance Sidney did not *experience* pain or joy with the same intensity

3 cf. Plato: *Symposium* esp. 202e, 206a, 207a.

as Donne - yet he for some reason never allowed the same degree of nervousness to enter his poetry.) In Donne's age, however, signs of the falling apart of this harmony started to show. I would first like to summarize what the disruption of the universal order meant for the art-theories of the age.

The Renaissance and its art is usually thought of as the triumph of balance, harmony and synthesis. Yet around the middle of the sixteenth century there were actually two opposing trends in art theory. One of these major trends was the still powerful school of rhetorics, the central concern of which was the theory and practice of effective, fine and high-level composition and expression in speech and writing. It emphasized proportion, clarity, elegance, loftiness, logical reasoning and imitation. Beauty, as a separate concept did not have any role whatsoever.

Beauty only came to the foreground with the rise of Florentine Neoplatonism. For Ficino it is already the symbol of perfection, the reflection of the divine in this world, the visible aspect of truth. The existence of beauty is here due to some divine creative act. Applied to the arts, thus, the artist creates on the basis of a metaphysical inspiration, the *furor poeticus*, and not merely on the basis of practicing his learned profession, the *ars*, and his achievements are not only determined by how well he has learned his profession, as the rhetorical school had it. According to Ficino, the artist creates by conjuring up in matter those ideas that God had planted into his mind and if he has the capability to do this, his art will harmonize with nature.

Despite the differences, the two schools of thought led to similar principles as they appeared in practice: proportionate and harmonious expression and composition, clarity and imitation - though in rhetorics this latter meant the imitation of details, while in Neoplatonism it meant that of ideas. The formal discipline of humanist rhetorics was given philosophical basis by the metaphysical approach to beauty.

The Aristotelian tradition that has enjoyed a certain continuity since the Middle Ages and in Italy actually reached its peak in Renaissance humanism⁴, gave a new slant to metaphysical speculations. Giorgio Valla translated Aristotle's *Poetics* in 1498 and in some thirty years' time it entered the aesthetic consciousness. Its influence shifted the emphasis to the moral and educative role of poetry as opposed to the Neoplatonist spiritualism and metaphysics. The Aristotelians

4 cf. Kristeller 38-74 esp. 39, 56.

worked for giving poetry human and worldly objectives⁵. For them imitation meant the imitation of human and natural reality. This, however, did not contradict the imitation-theory of the ideal beauty. In fact, the coexistence of the two concepts helped in creating the coexistence of ideal beauty and a high degree of realism in the Renaissance artifact.

This is one of the basic feature of the Renaissance synthesis, unifying the Neoplatonist, rhetorical, and Aristotelian traditions and stopping the composition from becoming either empty imitation of detail on the one hand, or empty and hardly comprehensible juggling with form on the other hand. What it achieved was an ideal beauty harmonizing with reality⁶.

This synthesis created an aesthetic realm of beauty which also meant the creation of a new concept of the world. A new order, as it were, which was held together by the formal rules of beauty, by proportion, by the Neoplatonic theories of harmony. The flesh-and-blood suffering man of Gothic art was here placed into a coherent space and perspective. The Renaissance created a cosmos the proportions of which were determined from a fixed view-point.⁷

When we speak of 'realism' in the Renaissance, we must never lose sight of the fact that this was a meticulously created, a constructed realism. 'Reality' and 'nature' are by no means definitive terms. The dominant cosmological conceptions of the age did not differ from those of the Middle Ages, yet on these very same grounds a new art could flourish, one that seems to have been the product of a quite different world. This phenomenon may require a lengthier explanation - here I shall only raise a point or two that can aid my more restricted theme.

The revitalization of classical antiquity and the upsurge of scientific inquiry are no doubt two important factors. Renaissance artists had an increasing knowledge of the anatomy of the body and of the geometrical laws of composition. Yet the humanists learned not only from nature. They were seeking the norms of formal perfection in the texts of Quintilian and Cicero.⁸ The influence of rhetorics and antiquity thus had far-reaching consequences. Baxandall shows in a fascinating work how the way humanists thought and spoke about art was conditioned by the Latin they wrote in and by the classical rhetorics they were practicing. He argues that the system of concepts available for talking about art

5 cf. Vasoli 89-91.

6 Apart from the annotated sections, this summary is based on Klaniczay's essay.

7 cf. Sypher 54-60.

8 Vasoli 31

inevitably focuses the attention in describing and evaluating the artifact, and the "highly formalized verbal behaviour bears, with little interference, on the most sensitive kind of visual experience.⁹

The ideas of Leon Battista Alberti may perhaps serve as an illuminating example of this constructed reality. Among *quattrocento* humanists who put forth significant art-theories, he was perhaps the most rational and scientifically minded. His writings call for an art that is based on naturalism and scientific observation of the material world. According to him, the artist's task is the precise imitation of nature, but this must be paired with the attempt to make it beautiful. Beauty in Alberti is described as the ordered harmony of the parts, and as this is not always found in nature, the artist must select the most beautiful and appropriate parts of his theme and coin them together into a perfection that nature had unsuccessfully attempted to create. Alberti is repeating, in somewhat simplified and mathematicized terms, an Aristotelian precept and arrives at denying the role of individuality from the artist's part.¹⁰ For even the selection the artist was to carry out was to be determined by the strict rules of composition. Alberti's creed was nature, but not as we see it in its accidental multiplicity, but rather as he conceived of its underlying, intrinsic laws, which were the target of imitation and which laws he arrived at by mathematical and geometrical calculations. It is in this sense he is exemplary of how the Renaissance geometrically constructed a reality and selective created nature.¹¹

It is also Alberti who in his *De Pictura* establishes the importance of the idea of 'composition' in painting and his concept derives from rhetorics, where this was a technical term long before it would have been applied to the visual arts. He is, for example, "treating the art of Giotto as if it were a periodic sentence by Cicero." *Compositio* is perhaps the most influential term of Alberti. The emphasis on it shows a definite approach to the arts that are to imitate the world as the Renaissance saw it. Both in rhetorics and painting this emphasis shifted from *disso-lutum*, which was understood as undisciplined style, to *compositum*.¹²

9 Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators* cf. eg. 47-50. Quotation from 7.

10 Cf. Blunt 10, 20-25. Alberti is simplifying Aristotle inasmuch as he arrives at a typical beauty by arithmetical equations, while in Aristotle there is a role for the faculty of the imagination, or at any rate, for more creativity of the artist's own.

11 Cf. Baxandall, *Reneszánsz szemlélet*, p.129. Though his example is not Alberti, Baxandall explicitly states a like conclusion.

12 Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators* 131-139. Quotation from 131.

For as to the world, the cosmos was perceived to be a similar *compositum*. The Christainized Ptolemaic and Aristotelian cosmology, that has gone through some simplification but has remained essentially the same since the Middle Ages, offered a finite universe¹³, harmonically ordered with its perfect correspondences between the spheres, between the different levels of the macrocosm and the microcosm. The Renaissance, constructing its aesthetic realm, perfects perspective and geometrical composition to represent this divine order of things. Divinity itself is expressed in the harmony and symmetrical compositions of the paintings and statues that populate the churches. One can even sense this refined order in the structure of sonnets, say by Spenser, Sidney, or even Shakespeare, where the argument or the point of wit depends on a well-balanced correspondence of similar and opposing concepts.¹⁴

We can thus see that on the basis of the medieval cosmological model the Renaissance was constructing a world, a coherent space, a universe that can be defined by "orthogonal lines converging towards a vanishing point.¹⁵ At this point the universe (and in a like manner, the universe of the painting as well) is closed down. The aesthetic realm corresponds - as it seems it duely should, in this frame of mind - to the finite universe one is tempted to see as bubble within bubble, where everything is well-ordered and perfectly functioning in the eternal tranquillity of the Great Chain of Being.

The point of the matter is that such a finite cosmos *is* comprehensible - like the space of Renaissance art - for the human mind; it is definable and habitable, all phenomena find their niches, and where these niches may lie is deducible with basically complete certainty. As C.S. Lewis puts it,

the spheres of the old [astronomy] present us with an object on which the human mind can rest, overwhelming in its greatness, but satisfying in its harmony, ... Dante never strikes that note [of the baffling and the alien], ... Pascal's *le silence eternel de ces espaces infinis* never entered his mind. He is like a man being conducted through an immense cathedral, not like one lost in a shoreless sea. The modern feeling, I suspect, first appears with Bruno. With Milton, it enters English poetry, when he

13 Cf. Tillyard 5 and 23.

14 Sypher, 62, states this point with far more, and perhaps somewhat arguable, definitivness when he says that symmetrical structures characterized the syntax of literature as well. Rhetorical training and habit no doubt justifies this, yet when put against the test, I found his point more tangibly applicable to the whole structure of a poem than merely to its syntax.

15 Sypher, 71.

sees the Moon riding "Like one that had bin led astray / Through
Heav'ns pathless way."¹⁶

III.

I quoted Lewis at such lengths because it were these lines that led me to look into Bruno from this aspect and his thought did appear to me to be just as sound a basis for mannerist art as the medieval model was for the Renaissance. Before moving on to elaborating this, I must here mention that in my view this modern feeling entered English poetry just as much with Donne as with Milton. Numerous lines can be found in his works that are very similar to what Lewis quotes from Milton. And though Lewis may discard Donne's significance¹⁷, Donne did see very well that "The world's proportion disfigured is" (*An Anatomy of the World*, 302).

The essence of the modern feeling seems to be just this: the disfigured proportion of the universe, the disruption of the earlier self-confident proportions and harmony. It is this that seems to become manifest in mannerist art. I shall now mention some features of mannerism that I find applicable to Donne.

Of the key term *furor* would have to be twisted a little for such an application. *Maniera*, however, does not need any rough twisting to be applied to Donne, and furthermore, what is understood by this term marks an all-important shift in the arts.

The concept was developed by Vasari who, just like Alberti, saw the fundamentals of painting in the imitation of nature, but he also believed, and explicitly stated, that art can supersede nature. Alberti did not deny that perfect imitation may be insufficient for the creation of perfect beauty, but Vasari went as far as claiming that there can be a direct opposition between the two.¹⁸ The word *maniera* refers to an individual style, traits by which an artist can be told apart from others. To achieve this, the artist needs to have recourse to invention instead

¹⁶ Lewis 99-100.

¹⁷ Lewis devalues Donne's lyrics in his essay "Donne and Love Poetry in the Seventeenth Century." in: Gardner.

¹⁸ Cf. Blunt 77-78.

of, or rather above, imitation. This idea marks the beginning of a less scientific and more free artistic creation.¹⁹

It is at this point that it will be seen why it is so important to be aware of the fact that the Renaissance *constructed* a world with a mind conditioned by classical rhetorics, science, and medieval cosmology. As the new science evolved and began to shatter the old cosmology the construction of the Renaissance began to be altered. What served as a sound basis for imitation started to collapse and thus art-theories moved on to emphasizing invention instead. Imitation (in whichever version or understanding of the term) can only be confident, can only in fact function, where there is a solid object to be imitated. If the object to be represented is the world (and in the system of the corresponding micro- and macrocosms, representation of the *whole* is unavoidable even in the smallest details), then the world must not be elusive, incomprehensible - it must be characterised by the mode of Being instead of continuous Becoming. Invention seems to be a much more suitable artistic counterpart to the mode of Becoming. If the constructed order of the Renaissance falls apart, imitative representation loses the ground from under its feet, and as a consequence, when there is no longer anything tangible enough to represent, the artist may feel freer to invent instead. Of course the issue is far more complex than the above phrasing suggests, and good mannerist art was by far not merely the inventive phantasmagoria of the mind, nor did its theories propose an *inventio ex nihilo*. Nor is, as I shall try to show in the case of Bruno and Donne, Being very simply replaced by Becoming.²⁰

The increasing importance of invention can easily be detected in Donne's poetry as well: one of the first things any reader of his poems is confronted with is his unusual, witty way of arguing, or his inventive, surprising logical processes.

The category of *grazia*, another mannerist key term, is important not only because it can be grasped in Donne, but also because it may direct us to where mannerism was turning its inventive powers. This term refers to a new conception of beauty - a spiritual beauty that is hidden behind perceptible reality, one that does not depend upon rules or ration, but is something undefinable and enigmatic, only understandable for the elect. Bruno, in *De gli eroici furori* (1585), his most Neoplatonic work which is a treatise on love, containing sonnets and

19 Cf. Klaniczay 44-47.

20 Vasari's work was published in 1550, seven years after Copernicus's, but naturally it would be in vain to search for cosmological roots to Vasari's concept of invention. My speculations and conclusions concern a theoretical, not an actual connection.

their explication in prose, states in a very similar vein that beauty and art have no prescriptive rules - there are as many rules as works, which is also to say that the number of rules is infinite. (This, as it will be seen, is something that follows quite naturally from Bruno's metaphysical and cosmological views.)

Donne's poetry can be linked to *grazia* on several points. One is that *grazia* can only be grasped by the elect. Alvarez shows that the formal features of Donne's poetry were not explicitly based on any aesthetic principle, and that these formal features were a way of his saying "Wits only!" His audience (in his lifetime mainly made up of his friends) was one that understood his obscurity - a circle of the "understanders"²¹, the elect who could grasp this wavering, inventive concept of artistic beauty.

A more important link of *grazia* to Donne is the hidden spirituality involved in the term. His love poetry is praised not on the account of this, but rather because of his bold treatment of bodily love and his wit. Murray Roston devoted a book to showing that, like in mannerism, in Donne as well, the disturbance and tension is not so much the mark of insecurity than of the "dislodgement of physical reality by a religious faith that finds its satisfaction in the emotional, rather than the empirical world."²² He convincingly argues that the intent of wit is to reveal a "divine order of the universe which unites the apparently disparate."²³ He proves that Donne's circular logic which often demolishes itself is the rejection of the Renaissance idol of reason and logic, and that "the complex movement of the poems ... is constructed with extraordinary subtlety specifically in order to create a springboard for the leap into the mysterious or the transcendental."²⁴ This deeper meaning of wit and of the curious logic of the poems does very much resemble what is behind the term of *grazia*.

This is an important connections for two reasons. One is that it directs attention to the fact that regardless of his more mundane tones and his sense of dissatisfaction, the spiritual aspiration is always there in Donne's love poetry. The other is that it shows a turning away from physical reality and the empirical world. This may sound somewhat contradictory about a poet who uses metaphors taken from sciences and who treats bodily love in such an outright fashion, yet it does help in explaining the background of his devices and approach,

21 Cf. Alvarez 22-32.

22 Roston 46-47.

23 Roston 76.

24 Roston 74-75.

his own contradictions and tensions. For the turning away from the empirical is quite a logical shift, once the *ordo geometricus* which so far constituted reality seemed no longer tenable. Perceptible reality no longer offers assurance for the individual or rules for the arts. Hence invention, the infinite number of rules, and hence the leap beyond perceptible reality, hence the twisting and turning inside-out of the logical processes that so far offered access to the spiritual.

Plato himself had stated that only what is modelled after firm Being can be beautiful.²⁵ When discussing whether the "model" after which the world was created is characterised by Being or Becoming. He says that if the master looks upon the model that exists in a changeless way (i.e. in the mode of Being), his creation shall be beautiful. Beauty is not possible where the object of creation is characterised by Becoming. Renaissance composition seemed to have accepted this as its underylying principle, just as it shared Plato's precept according to which God created order out of disorderly motion because He thought that order is by all means superior.²⁶

The mannerist concept of beauty thus consequently follows, and is consistent with, the shift from imitation to invention - citing Plato's ideas also shows that underlying this shift is the perception of the world as being in the state of Becoming rather than of Being. Thus we also find here a strong case for giving up reliance on the empirical world which no longer offers a fixed superstructure for art to work with, and also find the explanation of the leap beyond reason that mannerist art manifests. *Grazia* is a conception of beauty that differs from any imitation of an ordered Being; instead it is out to uphold a spiritual reality by positing its ever-changing rules in the flux of Becoming.

But to move back to the disruption of proportion: it is first of all in the works of such mannerist artists as Parmigianino, El Greco or Tintoretto that one can grasp the dissolution of the coherent space of the Renaissance. Sypher shows how for instance in *The Long-Necked Madonna* the relation of the background and the foreground of the picture is undecipherable because of its ambiguity. Well known mannerist techniques, as the narrow and winding spaces, the serpentine lines spiralling nervously in upward directions are also very far from the Renaissance harmony. The over-all effect of these compositions is dissonance and dynamism. Similarly in literature - like in Donne or some Jacobean dramas - the

25 Cf. Plato *Timaeus* 28a, b.

26 Cf. Plato *Timaeus* 30a, b.

logic of the rhetorics is not based on sequences and transitions, but instead it circulates between extremes, it surprises us with unexpected stresses and rhythms which are determined more by psychological than by compositional considerations. In his description of mannerism Sypher quotes Montaigne: "There is no permanent existence, either of our being, or that of the objects."²⁷

Thus, mannerism disrupts the well-ordered space of the Renaissance, its perspective, its fixed vanishing points to where the lines are so assuredly running and from where the world can be viewed as a coherent and comprehensible construction. Beauty now denies the rationalized harmony and becomes something elusive and exceedingly spiritual, oscillating in an unintelligible space. To me it seems that this unintelligibility really means that the stable and closed composition of space of the Renaissance was opened up into infinity. And the thinker who blew up the bubbles of the spheres, opened the closed cosmos and gazed into the infinity of the universe was Giordano Bruno.

IV.

Bruno went much farther in the new philosophy or new science than Copernicus, who only claimed that the Earth revolves around the Sun, but left the universe to be a closed sphere. As opposed to him, Bruno announced that the universe is of infinite space in which countless stars are scattered with countless planets around them - and this experience of infinity is the basic feature of his whole philosophy.

But what does this experience of infinity mean for the arts and for the individual? For such an infinity also implies a human loss: this stand, on the first level, in the fact that our treasured significance in the universe infinitely lessens

²⁷ For comparison of mannerist painting and language, cf. Sypher 108-128. Quotation from 121.

It may be worth mentioning here that as to the rhetorics of metaphysical poetry, opposing opinions exist. Rosemond Tuve in her famous *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1947) argues that Donne's logic and rhetorics follows Ramist precepts and thus are very much straightforward. Without wanting to indulge into this debate, I must take sides with those critics who refute this. In the context of my essay, Donne's use of opposites, paradoxes, of an often self-destructive logic seems to be a formal feature that is well grounded in his general approach.

(On the use of contraries see also footnote 41 below.)

and, on the second level, in that we become completely vulnerable to the accidents of the infinite multiplicity. And these implications carry the further danger that what Lewis calls the "significant form" - i.e. the stability of the medieval model that conditioned the Renaissance to create its self-confident and orderly composition - falls through our fingers like dust. The facts of the history of the arts seem to prove just this: the closed sphere of the aesthetic realm of the Renaissance was torn apart and the space of mannerist art became just as inconceivable as the category of *infinity* is for the human mind. The language of literature and the theories of art seemed to have been moving in the same direction. If so far there existed a closed and static form of wholeness, the implications of Bruno's universe had to replace this with the open and dynamic form of infinity.

The vital question that arises here is how, if at all, can any synthesis be found in the constant dynamism and openness of infinity. And this is by far not merely a theoretical question. For the issue at stake is whether there exists any kind of arrival, fulfilment for man. As opposed to the medieval model where permanent Becoming only characterised the state of affairs within the low sphere of the Earth, here this Becoming characterises the whole universe. And where can this permanent Becoming solidify into Being in an infinite universe? Where can human fulfilment and happiness become more, or more valid, than the passing moment?

With these problems we are back at the initial question concerning the constant and torturing dissatisfaction radiating from *Songs and Sonnets*. It is these above questions Donne's love poetry forces one to consider, for this poetry is mannerist at least in the sense that instead of the security of Being it exposes itself to the insecurity of Becoming in, if we like, Bruno's infinite space.

V.

It is at this point that I must turn to Bruno in a little more detail, for I think his metaphysics implies an answer of a kind to the above questions. There seems to be no need to evaluate the whole of Bruno's philosophy - not only because his oeuvre was left unfinished, or because what he did finish is itself not without contradictions, there being apparently no strong intention in Bruno to create a whole, closed system of thought, but also because for the conclusion I would like

to draw concerning the relation of Being and Becoming the examination of his metaphysical work, *De la Causa, Principio ed Uno* is entirely sufficient. Not only is this work the most explicit exposition of his metaphysics, but it is also here that Bruno makes the first steps towards the bringing down of Neoplatonic subordinations and scales of being.²⁸

The basic question Bruno seems to be facing here is the immanence or transcendence of the primal cause of the universe. In the second dialogue of the five constituting the work he distinguishes an immanent and a transcendent cause in order to later unite them. The first he calls *principle*, which is something immanent, i.e. it works to create things from within them and remains present in the result. The second is what he calls *cause*, which is something transcendental, i.e. it works to create things from the outside and it remains outside the result. Cause and principle are united in his central term of the *world-soul*, which Bruno explains by an analogy from the arts: the cause and the principle of the artifact is the idea or form the artist bears in his soul even before setting down to work. This idea is a cause because it ontologically precedes the artifact and it creates it, and is a principle because it remains present in the result.

Before moving on, one must notice here the strict correspondence of this thought, at least in its terminology, to Vasari's. When dealing with *maniera* and invention, Vasari refers to an idea in the artist's soul that is the prefiguration of his work independent of nature. The inventive artist follows this idea instead of imitating nature. Invention in mannerism thus finds a counterpart, or a very similar conception, in metaphysical terms in Bruno's *world-soul*.

This world-soul contains the idea of all things in the universe and thus it is a cause and principle of it. The world-soul is not something external to the universe: Bruno situates it as something within the material world, inherent to it. One important consequence of this is that if the form of things derives from the world-soul, than all existing things partake in the functioning of the world-soul, just as it partakes in the existence of all things - which is also to say that all things contain this soul. Thus life on the one hand is universal, on the other hand it is eternal. If everything is animated by the soul, then there is no annihilation, only transformation into new forms: the universe is characterised by Becoming.

28 Cf. Nelson 7-8. It is also here that Nelson shows how debatable Felice Tocco's results are in pinning down any system or historical development in Bruno's thought, which Tocco attempts in his *Le opere latine di Giordano Bruno e confrontate con le italiane*.

At this point it may seem that the inherent, potential form is superior to matter, but Bruno does not settle for any hierarchies, he is out to describe an all-embracing Oneness. Thus he proceeds to establish matter as no less substantial than form. Changes, he says, only concern the outer form of things, the individual forms are mere accidents. The matter Bruno posits is an abstract entity, the common concept of the matter of all individual things (just like the world-soul, which is the common concept of all realized forms). According to Aristotle, matter is only a potential which is realized by form and thus the cause of things is the formulation of matter - it is form that is the truly existent of the two. Bruno turns this idea around, though in a peculiar way. The universal matter he posits (*supra-sensual matter*) is the ultimate container and emitter of all forms, not merely a potential, but also the truest reality. Matter, that is capable of creating all forms from within itself, is thus no different from the world-soul, the consequence of which is that matter and form are united into one, which is the One substance of the universe. These speculations are not only significant because they mark a turn in the history of philosophy by restoring life and activity to matter²⁹, but also because it unites possibility and reality as well, which points to the understanding of Being and Becoming in the terms of each other. "As potency, matter is not only predicable of the sensuous world, but of the intelligible world as well, for even in intelligible objects, *being or act implies the power to be*"³⁰ - this is Nelson's comment, which I would like to further interpret and remind that since everything involves a soul, this "being" is within everything and as a consequence the continuous realization of the potency, i.e. continuous Becoming "implies the power" for Being. Which is also to say that Being is constituted by Becoming.

Bruno arrives at his final unification more gradually than I have implied in this very simplified summary. It is only in the fourth dialogue that he creates the term *supra-sensual matter* in which forms exist not in a determinate and sequential way but indeterminately and simultaneously. With this concept Bruno reaches the level of abstraction that can only be conceived of as Existence itself. Thus Bruno has reduced everything to a single cause or substance without positing any transcendent divinity. Yet he was no atheist. In his system, in the final analysis,

29 This evaluation was made by Carrière, qtd. by Szemere in: "Bevezeto tanulmány" pp.41-42.

30 Nelson 246. Italics mine.

divinity is equated with Existence, for if his Oneness was to be absolute enough, it had to include God as well.³¹

Bruno was pushing to higher and higher levels of abstraction, giving his abstractions objective existence, and was expanding his terms all the way into infinity where they coincided in Oneness. He was "attributing an actual infinity to the universe by virtue of the immanence in it of the first cause operating from within as 'principle'."³² Though never stated in Bruno (for a reason I shall presently mention), it seems to me a quite tenable conclusion that in his zeal of unification he also arrives at equating Being and Becoming. His system has many important philosophical implications (for instance pantheism) but here I am only concerned with this relation of Being and Becoming.

There are two paths leading from this work: if we only gaze upon the whole, the One, we arrive into a world without Becoming, change or motion, unified into a fixed and frozen Being where multiplicity has no reality. But if we look at the mechanism that runs this world, we find a universe where this being is defined by the continuous dynamism of Becoming. In his passion for the One Bruno finally walks the former path - when he grants objective reality to unified existence, he renders multiplicity unreal. Yet in what he creates enroute, the latter world-view is inherently present. In his Oneness reality equals possibility, and though the ultimate substance (Existence) is unchanging, what constitutes it is the infinite possibility of Becoming. The infinite space that contains the worlds is, as he term it, just as well contained by all worlds.³³ It may appear odd to argue the case of Becoming in a work the ultimate aim of which is to uphold Oneness, i.e. changeless Being, but I believe Bruno's concept of infinity calls for just such an argument. Though he emphasizes the primacy of the One over multiplicity, there is a very strong element of mutuality in the relationship of the two. *It is this very relation that makes infinity possible*: if the multiplicity of the worlds, the motions, the accidencies would not, in Bruno's words "embrace" the Oneness, if Becoming would not embrace Being, we would again need a transcendental point beyond the universe. Yet if we can speak of "beyond" the cosmos is again closed and we cannot speak of infinity. This, perhaps, is the highest level of Bruno's uniting of contrary concepts: his One is grasped in Infinity. This One is the whole of

31 Though my conclusions are different, the analysis of Bruno's work was aided by Szemere's studies.

32 Sidney Greenberg, *The Infinite in Giordano Bruno* qtd. by Nelson p.14.

33 Cf. Bruno 123-124.

Existence, with reference not only to the countless stars, but also to life in general. It is thus that while positing a world of changeless Oneness, with his concept of infinity he defines Being by constant Becoming.³⁴ For Bruno life is not only the product of the universe; the universe as a whole is also the expression of life, in the infinity of both. To him the whole universe, God included, truly pulsates to the same rhythm, merged and sustaining itself in the affirmation of an infinite Existence.

VI.

It is a similar mechanism, a similar relation where the ultimate arrival to the One is only possible, is in fact defined by, being enroute in the world of multiplicity that I think is present in Donne, to whom I now turn. I would like to modify Sypher's claim that in mannerism, or in Donne "there is no Being but only Becoming"³⁵ by saying that in accordance with the analysis above, here Becoming is the mode of Being. In the attempt to show how this applies to love poetry I will enlist some features of *Songs and Sonnets* that I see as justifying this point.

The first of these features is one I have already alluded to and which explains the necessity of generalizing my arguments: it is the fact that Donne does not philosophize about love in any systematic way. This is not very much in keeping with the drift of Elizabethan love poetry; Spenser or Sidney carefully organized theirs into a coherent whole. As opposed to this, Donne's love poetry appears to be a random collection, the pieces springing forth from a concrete situation or a momentary emotion. If this can be taken as an expressive feature, it expresses that the principle of multiplicity is the ruling one in human emotions, as opposed to the constant divine aspirations of Petrarchan or Neoplatonist love poetry.

34 In passing one may mention that Bruno has been held to show affinities with mysticism. Evelyn Underhill, though she does not mention Bruno at all, in the second chapter of her book *Mysticism* (London: Methuen, 1911) states as a *differentia specifica* of mystic thinking that to it Being and Becoming are not mutually exclusive categories; instead, this mode of thought conceives of them in genuine unity.

Bruno's connections to the hermetic school of mysticism are thoroughly analyzed by Frances Yates in her *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1964)

35 Sypher 172.

It is not at all unimportant to briefly examine Donne's relation to this Neoplatonic tradition because to a Neoplatonist conception the higher and higher spheres of being which contain a lesser and lesser degree of multiplicity (being in time and space) and which are the more real the higher we go³⁶ always offer a sense of assurance or universal consolation that Donne seems to lack. Yet this relation is not at all clear-cut. Alvarez calls Donne "anti-Petrarchan", but even he rushes to add that Donne was in no "strict formal opposition to anyone else's aesthetics."³⁷ Anti-Petrarchan at first sight surely does not seem to be the right word for a bulk of poems where we so often run into the idea that the absence of the beloved equals death, where we encounter attitudes of complaint, attacks on the tyranny of love or the unwillingness to objectify the theme to the extent to feel sympathy with other lovers, where we are so often caught up in floods of tears or winds of sighs - for these are all characteristics of Petrarchan love poetry. Neither does Donne refrain from the glorification of love or the beloved, or from the aspiration for the divine through love.

Yet regardless of such similarities, the tone of *Songs and Sonnets* is so markedly different from that of Petrarchan love poetry, that it may even appear to be its disruption or disintegration (and here I am not only referring to Donne's prosody, which is quite evidently a new voice in the tradition). In Donne we find flippancy, cynicism even, we find the accusation and the depreciation of love and women, sentimentality and its smoothly flowing lines are replaced by masculinity and harsh rhythms of ordinary speech. Yes, there is idealization, but Donne is always an equal partner to his beloved and his treatment of physicality also speaks of a more outright relationship.³⁸

Donne apparently used what the tradition of Petrarchan and Elizabethan poetry had to offer - the existence of these conventions was essential to him to be able to deviate from them - but the superstructure of this poetry (i.e. a Neoplatonic world-view) was not satisfactory enough for Donne to offer him a system whereby he would have wanted to discipline his form or sooth his emotions.

No doubt, Neoplatonic terminology and aspirations are very often there in the poems. But beside that there is also something else. AS A.J. Smith so fittingly

36 Cf. the summary of basic Neoplatonist ideas in: Philip Merlan, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960) 1.

37 Alvarez 41.

38 Cf. Redpath 47-88.

phrased it: "Between [Neoplatonic love] and Donne's figure of ecstasy there is a world of difference - the human world."³⁹

And this is the second point in question. For the human world is a world of multiplicity, of change, of Becoming, and Donne is the poet of this world of Becoming. In the Neoplatonic conception of love the beloved is somebody who either leads the mind into divine realms or has such frustrating attraction on the senses that distracts the mind from these realms. Either way, love is somewhat a theological question, putting a qualitative difference between the elements of human nature. Love is a desire for union, but such union or fulfilment is a static entity leading to a merely intellectual contemplation through which we are drawn into a final union - with God. Love thus really becomes full when it rises above the senses and passions, free of particular circumstances, into a stasis beyond time.⁴⁰ Donne's impatience, passion, scorn, masculinity, intimacy and sharp sense for the particular circumstances and situations is very far off from such a stance. "Lovers'Infiniteness" may be a poem showing how Donne does not wish to settle for such stasis.

This poem quite tangibly demonstrates how the relation of the lovers is not to be imagined as a still, centric point, but rather as constant motion. The paradox the poem is trying to overcome is that the speaker wants to have all of the lady's love, yet at the same time wants it to continually increase. This problem in itself points to that of attaining permanence in the happiness of love, Being in the state of Becoming.

In lines 31-32 Donne term what seems to him to be the misconception about "Love's riddles":

... we will have a way more liberal,
Than changing hearts ...

The mere changing of hearts (celebrated by Sidney in his poem "The Bargain") is a static approach to love that, as the poem demonstrates, denies infinity. If they give all their love, nothing will remain to be given the next day; such a relation can at most be a closed unit of wholeness that disallows increase. For should it increase, "This new love may beget new fears (l. 18); if the lady has given all her love, then any new love in her may only be created "by other men".

³⁹ A.J. Smith. "The Dismissal of Love" in: Smith 106.

⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid* 98-106.

Wholeness is a static category, as opposed to which infinity is by definition a dynamic one. The last lines instead of the exchange of hearts thus suggest

... to join them, so we shall
 Be one and one another's all.
 (ll.32-33)

It is through this that the previous argument makes sense:

...though thy heart depart
 It stays at home, and thou with losing sav'st it.
 (ll.29-30)

Just like Bruno, Donne also very often, like in these lines, has recourse to paradoxes, unites opposites in order to uphold a fixed point as a state of motion.⁴¹

In that bitter poem entitled "Love's Alchemy", attacking both the bodily and the spiritual aspects of love, Donne goes as far as discarding any "centric happiness". In a dynamic line of masculine attitude he claims that he has "loved, and got, and told" all there was about love and he has been convinced that there is no hidden mystery to be found. The conceit that stretches through the first stanza likens this Neoplatonic-sounding essence to the Elixir alchemists seek in vain for "tis imposture all". The words "hidden mystery" call to mind the mystery the soul has access to in ecstasy, a highly spiritual state Donne in another poem ("The Ecstasy") finds unsatisfactory in itself, and it is this he here bitterly calls "imposture". His reasons for it are significant As the *Elixir Vitae* of the alchemists was supposed to prolong life, so do "lovers dream a ... long delight". But the

⁴¹ This use of opposites would deserve a more detailed explanation here, but the passages quoted from Roston in section III are sufficient allusions to its importance.

Bruno, in the fifth dialogue of *De la Causa* demonstrates Oneness by showing how opposites coincide in unity. This procedure of argument apparently has a long tradition - it came to Bruno from Nicholas of Cusa, but the use of paradoxes already had an eminent role in pre-socratic philosophy (presumably as a way of expressing unresolvable dichotomies, or as a way of resolving them). Underhill in her book on mysticism (cf. footnote 34 above) claims that to the mystic Pure Being reveals itself through the process of evoking contraries in the flux of Becoming. Unity through antinomies is a method that appears in such modern 'mystics' as Blake or W.B. Yeats as well.

This theme is beyond the scope of this essay; yet I would like to remind that Being and Becoming are themselves contraries, the interplay of which upholds Existence as understood by, I believe, Bruno in his metaphysics and by Donne in his wit.

alchemists never found the Elixir - at best they accidentally produce "Some odoriferous thing, or medicinal". Likewise, love's delight will not be very long either. The conceit faces what I think is a logical impossibility in a life of ecstasy. This is a state defined by being different from the ordinary, and should it become permanent it will also come to be the ordinary and thus cease to be ecstasy. Here the hidden mystery is thought of as something that can produce only momentary wonders, joyous by-products of life, as it were. It is not there to prolong life or to stay with the lovers for good.

This is no wonder. The approach I am suggesting implies that there is no "centric happiness" for in infinity there is no centre to arrive at - in the words of Bruno, "quintessence is vanity".⁴² If one was to imagine such a centre spatially, it would no doubt lie halfway between bodily and spiritual fulfilment - just as bodies need to ascend to the state of Spirit and the lovers' souls must descend to the senses in lines 61-62 and 65-66 of "The Ecstasy". In "Love's Alchemy" Donne mocks both bodily and spiritual love and thus does away with the whole geometry that is built around a centre.

The lines

That loving wretch that swears
'Tis not the bodies marry, but the minds
Which he in her angelic finds
Would swear as justly, that he hears
In that day's hoarse minstrelsy, the spheres.
(ll. 18-22)

refer with outright cynicism to the music of the spheres that one is supposed to hear when passing from a lower sphere to a higher one. Here Donne is mocking any 'ascent' through love and thus love's spirituality. But the body has no more to offer either: his scorn is expressed by such overtly sexual lines as "... deeper digged love's mines" or the closing words calling women nothing "but mummy, possessed." The word "possessed" may again be of significance. As "Lover's Infiniteness" showed, the infinity of love requires more than mere possession. Possession is again static, but what is more, it is one-sided. As opposed to that, the merging the previously analysed poem suggested implies continuous mutuality.

⁴² In Bruno's dialogue *De l'Infinito, Universo e Mondi* qtd and trans. by Nelson, p.227.

"The Ecstasy" in a way could be a counter-poem to "Love's Alchemy". Here Donne does conceive of a hidden mystery but, as mentioned, this alone does not suffice: the soul must descend

"T'affection, and to faculties,
Which sense may reach and apprehend
(ll. 66-67)

The Neoplatonic fulfilment of love is likened in the next line to "a great prince" who "in prison lies", which metaphor is quite suggestive of how Donne, in his own way, urges to open up the closed and static spiritual universe of an earlier age, of an earlier approach to love, into the infinite multiplicity of the sensual world. Donne in this poem utilizes great poetic vigour to show how this does not mean surrender to the accidents of passion and desire.

I do not wish to argue that Donne was the exponent of the new science and the new philosophy. While critics are divided on this point, Donne's lamentations over the disfigured world are quite telling in themselves. Yet his approach to love is very different from that of his predecessors. My point is that this difference seems very much to resemble the difference between the universe of the medieval model and that of Bruno. The first instance of this resemblance, which I have been trying to show so far, is that as opposed to earlier ideals, Donne conceives of love as something that is not static and closed but dynamic and open. These are perhaps strange adjectives to be applied to love. The following features I would like to mention will specify and translate them into the terms of human relations.

The features now in question are mutuality and the dramatic element in Donne's lyrics. It is hard to treat them separately, for the dramatic element Pierre Legouis uncovered⁴³ stands in hidden dialogues stretching through the poems and it is first of all this element that is responsible for the feature of mutuality.

Legouis's analyses show how in many poems there always seems to be present a mute listener, whose only indirectly audible reactions shape the logic and, primarily, the emotional attitude of the speaker. He carefully points out how Donne "succeeds in creating a voluptuous atmosphere and calling up in it two flesh-and-blood human beings who act in relation to each other."⁴⁴ Legouis is not

⁴³ Pierre Legouis, *Donne the Craftsman* (Paris, 1928). A part of this work is reprinted in Gardner.

⁴⁴ Legouis, "The Dramatic Element in Donne's Poetry" in: Gardner 41.

alone with his opinion (most of the critics I have consulted emphasize this point). Smith, analysing "Air and Angels", comes to a similar conclusion without bringing up the dramatic element. He writes that this poem really amounts to saying that

"love is neither the worship of form, nor the admiration of beauty, but something that needs an answering love to give it substance ... the proper object of love is not disembodied form, but another human being, and that love is not love even then unless it is returned and mutual.⁴⁵

There are other similarly good examples of this mutuality. In the last stanza of "The Will" there is what seems to be an ontological argument:

... but I'll undo
 The world by dying; because love dies too.
 Then all your beauties will be no more worth
 Than gold in mines where none doth draw it forth
 (l. 46-49)

The lady who neglects both love and the speaker of the poem annihilates "all three" - i.e. love, the wooer and herself. And "all three" can clearly only exist in the mutuality of the lovers' relationship and awareness of the other - Existence requires *relation* and relation requires motion, not fixity.

The "Valediction..." poems show the same kind of awareness, and the conceits of "A Valediction: forbidding Mourning" spatially define this kind of relation. Both in the famous compass conceit and in stanza six which runs

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
 Though I must go, endure not yet
 A breach, but an expansion,
 Like gold to aery thinness beat

we find movement not towards some "centric happiness" but movement away from such a centre. Here we no longer have aspiration for some centric point or "hidden mystery"; instead the bondage granting their love is proposed as the space stretching between them and tying them together even if they be apart. This bondage, this space is not to be imagined as a sphere containing the lovers (or, to allude to Bruno again, it contains, "embraces" them only inasmuch as they

45 A.J. Smith "The Dismissal of Love" in: Smith 128.

also embrace it), but as one they create between themselves - no matter how far they may "roam", as long as there is awareness of the other, this bondage will be sustained. Love is not merely an inner state of the heart but a dramatic bondage between two people which responds and moulds to their movements, which does not tie one up in static wholeness but allows infinity in the mutuality of movement, which dynamism is the very thing upholding the bondage. Just like in Bruno, Being is only possible, Existence is only what it is, as the absolute container of Becoming which constitutes this Being.

One may argue that it is no wonder that the "Valediction ..." poems speak of such a relationship: it is merely due to the poetic situation, which is parting and the fear over it. And this is where I come to my last point.

There are numerous poems in *Songs and Sonnets*, some of the "Valediction ..." poems among them, that speak of fulfilled love, yet even these poems rarely escape a degree of fear, tension or bitterness. It must be treated as a significant fact that some of Donne's most beautiful pieces of fulfilled love are set in a situation of parting. I read this contrast of theme and situation as Donne's awareness of the fact that

... of the stars which boast that they do run
 In circles still, none ends where he begun.
 All their proportion's lame, it sinks, it swells.
 (*An Anatomy of the World* ll. 275-277)

I chose these three lines not only to demonstrate that Donne knew he was living in a universe that had lost its earlier calm proportions, but also because it shows that this amounts to continuous change, sinking and swelling, and that there is no guarantee that the perfect shape of the circle will be completed. No guarantee other than "Thy firmness" which "makes my circle just, / And makes me end, where I begun." ("A Valediction: forbidding Mourning" ll. 35-36) For Plato the science of Eros was astronomy⁴⁶ and Neoplatonist lovers did gaze at the stars just as much as at their beloved, but the firmness Donne here calls for no longer has much to do with the stars, for there is no longer much to accept from

46 Plato, *Symposium* 188b.

them. This firmness now is entirely a human endeavour, granted by the awareness of the relation.⁴⁷

But as Donne very well knows, we are only human and bound to sin. He knows that we are forever vulnerable to our own and to others' passions and thus this firmness is not merely a spiritual/astronomical issue. In "Woman's Constancy", regardless of the more playful tone of the poem, there is the admission that the only constancy of women is their inconsistency and that he "... could / Dispute, and conquer ..." but he himself abstains to do this because, as the last line states, he may chose to be just as inconsistent. He knows that though

... this place may thoroughly be thought
True paradise, I have the serpent brought.
(*"Twickenam Garden"*, ll. 8-9)

And this is perhaps one of the sources of Donne's love poetry: his awareness of our weakness, due to which the seeds of our despair and failure are always there with us, that the human soul is not any frozen or firm Being but much rather something alive and always Becoming. That love is more than a spiritual affair: that it must not only be contemplation but something that is constantly *done*, that is interdependence, a bondage; a drama which needs actors and an action formulating between them. I think it is the awareness of the danger and the responsibility inherent in such a relationship that makes him place his poems of fulfilled love in a situation of parting, that unsettles even his most positive pieces. For no drama can be conceived of in stasis.

47 Compare how different even Shakespeare's awareness is when he in sonnet CXVI claims that love "is an ever-fixed mark" and that "Love's not Time's fool". True, Donne also has such claims when e.g. in "The Sun Rising" he argues with the Sun and affirms that "This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere" (l. 30). Yet even in such a counter-example as "The Sun Rising" he as it were gives himself away. His claim is no triumph, but rather a desperate assertion in the face of facts he is well aware of - the poem opens with a typically Donneian strong line, suggesting debate and tension rather than self-assuredness:

Busie old foole, unruly Sunne,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers seasons run?"

(ll. 1-4)

VII.

When Bruno animates the whole universe and makes its governing principle immanent, he universalizes life, which is a way to overcome the fear of death. Donne also animates love by mobilizing and dramatizing the Neoplatonic contemplation partly also to overcome the fear that the static approach to love denies its infinity. And this is by far not only due to some mundane sense of realism. For Donne strived for the spiritual no less than his predecessors - nor was, similarly, Bruno an atheist, even is his universe consummated the transcendental. Their approach is not any kind of a surrender to the merely earthly, though there is an increased awareness of multiplicity. Yet neither of them give up on capturing infinitude in man's life. It is only the approach that makes them stand apart from their predecessors: as the infinite space and the countless worlds in it embrace each other in Bruno, Donne's infinite love is also granted by the mutual motion and awareness of the lovers.

Donne seems to have been too sensitive, too frank, too restless to have been able to neglect that infinity is by definition open and dynamic, to have been able to do away with the experience that this is a world of change and continuous Becoming. But neither did he settle for this endless instability. To my mind the solution Bruno and Donne offer is very similar: they uphold a firm Being defined as Becoming; the only fixed point is Existence as such, with all its turmoil and drama oscillating within this Oneness.

In this lies the answer to the basic question of this essay. The examples of Bruno and Donne show that after the collapse of the Renaissance synthesis a radically new concept of balance appeared, and that Bruno's metaphysics and Donne's love poetry both show the attempt at achieving this new synthesis. Balance or synthesis are perhaps not the best expressions - what they offer as a fixed point (Being) is one that is sustained by the ceaseless change and dynamism (Becoming) within it. It is a synthesis that can boldly take on the unsettling idea of infinity and can conceive of this idea as the fulness of the human condition.

Roston, moving along different lines, gave a description of Donne's world-view that seems strongly to support these speculations:

Within [Donne's] view of the world, the spiritual ideal was not to be attained by a calm rung-by-rung ascent on the ladder of love, nor by a gently circular movement from the mundane to the divine, but rather the tortuous path which

about must and about must go, a path beset by traps and twisting contradictions.⁴⁸

It is equally manifest in the twisted syntax and logic, in the emotional versatility and in the unceasing restlessness of Donne that his way of grasping the infinite, the spiritual, the ultimate Being, was his going about and about on his tortuous path - an intense and dramatic living of continuous Becoming.

If there is ever to be a fixed point (be this the fulfilment of love or the infinite sphere of the universe), within it there must forever oscillate every element that constitutes the world, every portion of the soul that makes us human - our fears and passions and fallibility just as much as our spirituality.

What stops such a universe, such a love from falling apart into fragments of chance, as one learns from Donne's poetry, is the awareness of interdependence, the awareness that the bondage of love can never be static, that love is a drama to be acted out every moment, that its rules are immanent in the mutuality of movement, in a permanent Becoming that constitutes Being.

For only this immanent rule of mutuality and awareness can ever grant, constitute that firmness without which one cannot run perfect circles. And if existence in such flux, in such a constantly dramatic mode is felt to be beyond man's power, and yet we cannot surrender our fate to mere chance, we must remember Donne's call to suffer this flux:

Be more than man, or thou'art less than an ant
(*An Anatomy of the World* l. 190)

Even if what I claim to be the essence of Donne's approach to love sounds like a truism, I am quite convinced that it is worth repeating it. For if we wish to be more than the ant that is the victim of chance, we cannot miss to continuously learn and re-learn this truism, to continuously be aware of and re-live this drama.

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