

LOVE, WOMEN AND CONCEITS IN DONNE'S SONGS AND
SONNETS AND PETRARCH'S CANZONIERE

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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Love, Women and Conceits
in Donne's Songs and Sonnets and Petrarch's Canzoniere

by

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A thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

One of the most discussed questions of twentieth century John Donne criticism is the poet's relation to the work of Francis Petrarch and the Petrarchan tradition. One view, epitomised by Herbert Grierson, tends to emphasize Donne's youthful reputation as a cynical and rakish personality. His poetry, reflecting this personality, is viewed as highly original and thoroughly contrary to the idealistic love poetry of Petrarch and his followers. Another critical view, concentrating more on the poetry of Donne and less on his reputation and personality, acknowledges a definite Petrarchan presence in Donne's Songs and Sonnets and believes Donne's originality is in his innovative use of Petrarchan situations, themes and conceits rather than in a rejection of those Petrarchan elements.

This thesis does not attempt to label Donne a Petrarchist or an anti-Petrarchist, because such labels are unrepresentative of Donne's relation to Petrarch and limit a full appreciation of both poets. However, part of this thesis can be seen as a study of the development of this critical debate and how it affects the perception and understanding of both Donne's and Petrarch's poetry.

Most discussions of Donne's Petrarchism relate his work to the innumerable "Petrarchists" who followed and imitated Petrarch. Petrarch's reputation has been damaged by association with the often inferior work of his imitators and

to be shared characteristics, thus achieving a greater appreciation and understanding of both poets.

Introduction

The dominant poetic force in Europe, including England, during John Donne's lifetime, was Petrarchism. The Canzoniere, Petrarch's collection of poems chronicling a lover's unrequited love for Laura, "appealed to the English Renaissance with an intensity unparalleled by any other foreign poet."¹ The trend toward Petrarchism, as the movement to write poetry influenced by Petrarch is called, began in England with Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey. Much of the poetry that both men contributed to Tottel's Miscellany in 1557 consists of adaptations, paraphrases or translations of Petrarch.² Later poets, such as Sidney, Spenser, Watson and countless others, "steeped themselves in Petrarch's texts" and produced sonnet sequences on the theme of unrequited love between mournful lovers and obdurate heroines with names like Stella, Fidessa, Diella and Coelia.³

The relation of John Donne's Songs and Sonnets to the Canzoniere and the Petrarch-influenced poetry of his time has

¹ Mario Praz, The Flaming Heart (1958; rpt. Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1966), p. 264.

² Sidney Lee, Elizabethan Sonnets, (New York: Cooper Square, 1964), 1, xxx. Lee's book offers an excellent account of Petrarch's influence on Elizabethan poetry as well as a large selection of that poetry.

³ Lee, 1, p. xxxiv. The obdurate ladies are the creation of, respectively, Sir Phillip Sidney, Bartholomew Griffin, Richard Linche, and William Percy.

been one of the more dominant questions of this century's Donne criticism. Before the twentieth-century, criticism of the Songs and Sonnets centred almost solely on the merits of Donne's rugged verse and accomplished wit.⁴ Much of twentieth-century criticism has concentrated more on the extent of Donne's originality in relation to the Petrarchan tradition. The dominant attitude at the start of the twentieth-century was that Donne rejected the Petrarchan tradition to write progressive and innovative poetry that appeared to have more in common with contemporary poetry than Elizabethan poetry. The first major instance of this approach to Donne is found in the work of Edmund Gosse:

Donne was, I would venture to suggest, by far the most modern and contemporaneous of the writers of his time. He rejected all the classical tags and imagery of the Elizabethans, he borrowed nothing from French or Italian tradition.⁵

Gosse's main reason for declaring the Songs and Sonnets untraditional is revealed in his biography of Donne The Life and Letters of John Donne. Gosse, an inexact biographer at best, views Donne's love poems to be autobiographical summaries of youthful romances, unlike the fictional,

⁴ For considerations of early Donne criticism see A. J. Smith, ed., John Donne: The Critical Heritage, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975) and Raoul Granqvist, ed., The Reputation of John Donne 1779 - 1873, (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1975).

⁵ Edmund Gosse, The Jacobean Poets (London: John Murray, 1899), p. 64.

Petrarchan-inspired sonnet sequences of poets like Sidney and Drayton. This argument has a self-serving purpose for Gosse. In writing Donne's biography Gosse was faced with the problem of having very little biographical information for the years 1592 and 1602. His solution was to turn to the Songs and Sonnets to fill in the blanks:

It will be our business in the present biography to break up this inchoate mass of verses, and to redistribute it as carefully as possible, so as to let it illustrate the life of its author.⁶

Such an approach to biography has justly fallen into disrepute, but the critical association between Donne's life and his love poetry is extremely prevalent in early twentieth-century criticism.

Herbert Grierson, the first influential Donne scholar of the twentieth-century, is also the one most responsible for the labelling of Donne as an anti-Petrarchan. In 1912 Grierson released his edition of Donne's poetry that is usually recognized as the most authoritative text of the complete poetic works.⁷ Grierson's general portrait of Donne is of a cynical wit, defiant of Petrarchism, yet, sometimes tentatively, and perhaps unwillingly, dealing in Petrarchan attitudes and themes. Grierson declares that "the Petrarchan

⁶ Edmund Gosse, The Life and Letters of John Donne (1899; rpt. Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1959), pp. 60-61.

⁷ Herbert J. C. Grierson, ed., The Poems of John Donne, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912).

love, which Shakespeare treats with light and charming irony, the vows and tears of Romeo and Proteus, Donne openly scoffs."⁸ Later, in Grierson's discussion of the poems he feels were written for Ann More, Lady Bedford and Mrs. Herbert (respectively "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day," "Twickenham Garden," "The Primrose"), he allows a definite Petrarchan influence:

It ["A Nocturnal"] is a highly metaphysical yet sombre and sincere description of the emptiness of life without love. The critics have, I think, failed somewhat to reckon with with this stratum in Donne's songs, of poems Petrarchian in convention but with a Petrarchianism coloured by Donne's realistic temper and impatient wit.⁹

There is no need to exaggerate the situation, or to reflect on either her [Lady Bedford] loyalty or or his to other claims, to recognize that their mutual feeling was of the kind for which the Petrarchian convention afforded a ready and recognized vehicle of expression.¹⁰

The poem ["The Primrose"] is doubtless, as Mr. Gosse says, 'a mystical celebration of the beauty, dignity and intelligence of Magdalen Herbert' - a celebration, however, which takes the form (as it might with Petrarch) of a reproach, a reproach which Donne's passionate temper and caustic wit seem even to touch with scorn.¹¹

Grierson's final summation of the poems that he believes to

⁸ Grierson, The Poems, ll, xi.

⁹ Grierson, The Poems, ll. xxii.

¹⁰ Grierson, The Poems, ll, xxiii.

¹¹ Grierson, The Poems, ll, xxiv.

have been written for Mrs. Herbert characterizes Donne as an uneasy Petrarchan:

Any uncertainty one may feel about the subject arises not from their being love poems, but from the difficulty which Donne has in adjusting himself to the Petrarchan convention, the tendency of his passionate heart and satiric wit to break through the prescribed tone of worship and complaint.¹²

In 1921, in the introduction to his Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century, Grierson is less willing to credit Petrarch with any influence on Donne when he notes that "Donne's treatment of love is entirely unconventional except when he chooses to dally half ironically with the convention of Petrarchan adoration."¹³ In 1929 Grierson is even more insistent on Donne's independence from Petrarchism:

But in lyrical and elegiac poetry the great rebel against the tradition of Petrarchan idealism, the 'mincing poetry' which Hotspur hated, was John Donne; and a reader of some of Donne's elegies and songs will feel that he has indeed passed from one extreme to another, has quitted the peaks of self-abnegation and adoration to immerse himself in the mud-baths of sensual passion and cynical scorn of woman.¹⁴

Grierson later adds that "Passionate sincerity of feeling

¹² Grierson, The Poems, ll. xxv.

¹³ Herbert J. C. Grierson, ed., Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century (1921; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. xix.

¹⁴ Herbert J. C. Grierson, Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century (London: Chatto and Windus, 1929), pp. 143-144.

redeems the sensuality and cynical savagery of [the] poems."¹⁵ Later, in 1947, Grierson comments that "Young Jack Donne was in revolt against the whole [Petrarchan] convention, not only the sugared sonnets in which it flowed ..., but against the whole creed of chivalry and woman-worship"¹⁶ and that Donne "smashed the Petrarchan convention with its sugared diction, and brought love-poetry some way back to nature."¹⁷

It is hard to exaggerate the influence that Grierson had on subsequent Donne scholarship and the attitudes that that scholarship projects. He is probably the most respected and studied of Donne's editors and his criticism did much to determine the development of twentieth-century Donne scholarship. While other critics advocated similar views of Donne's relation to Petrarchan poetry, most critics who support the idea of Donne's being positively influenced by Petrarch usually cite Grierson as the person most responsible for the view of Donne as an anti-Petrarchist.¹⁸

¹⁵ Grierson, Cross Currents, p. 144.

¹⁶ Herbert J. C. Grierson and J. C. Smith, A Critical History of English Poetry (London: Chatto and Windus, 1947), p. 97.

¹⁷ Grierson and Smith, p. 99.

¹⁸ Lu Emily Pearson, Elizabethan Love Conventions (1933; rpt. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 223 and Silvia Ruffo-Fiore, Donne's Petrarchism: A Comparative View (Firenze: Grafica Toscana, 1976), p. 124 both cite Grierson as their sole example of the view of Donne as an anti-Petrarchist.

While Grierson identifies Donne's revolt from Petrarchism in the elements of "cynical scorn of woman" and "sensual Passion", J. B. Leishman believes that it is Donne's outrageous and witty employment of those elements that signify the real revolt. Donald Guss, in the book John Donne: Petrarchist, derides this approach to the poems and complains that Leishman, in "considering many of Donne's lyrics to be unemotional displays of wit, reduces them to mere bagatelles."¹⁹ Leishman views poems like "The Indifferent," "Go and Catch a Falling Star" and "Love's Alchemy" as examples of Donne "displaying his wit" and "cocking snooks at the Petrarchan adoration and Platonic idealism of Spenser and the Sonneteers."²⁰

Certain that Donne's only interest in Petrarchism is as a foil for his wit, Leishman finds it hard to reconcile this to the use made of Petrarchan elements in a poem like "The Damp":

It is curious to find Donne, who in his younger days had so deliberately and contemptuously rejected the Courtly and Petrarchan tradition, now, in his middle years, playing with such conceptions as those of murder and massacre, of the giant Disdain and the enchantress Honour.²¹

¹⁹ Donald L. Guss, John Donne, Petrarchist (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1966), p. 193.

²⁰ J. B. Leishman, The Monarch of Wit 2nd ed. (1951; rpt. London: Hutchinson House, 1955), p. 144.

²¹ Leishman, p. 168.

Leishman also views the "colloquial diction" directed at the sun in "The Sun Rising" as Donne's way of "cock[ing] a snook at the Spenserian and Petrarchan conventions", yet he praises as "far profounder" and "more deeply felt" the "idea that he and his beloved are a world in and for themselves," yet this notion is one of the common conceits of the Canzoniere and Petrarchan poetry.²²

The position that Mario Praz advocates in the debate concerning Donne's relation to Petrarch is difficult to establish and, indeed, he has been cited as a supporter for both sides of the question.²³ After asserting that Shakespeare gives the "only genuine" declaration of non-conformity with the Petrarchan tradition, Praz, in his next paragraph, declares that Donne shows "even more" freedom from the tradition than Shakespeare.²⁴ Praz then declares that although Donne "led the reaction against Petrarchism in England" he also remained somewhat Petrarchan since "no matter how strong one's personal reaction is one cannot avoid belonging to a definite historical climate."²⁵

²² Leishman, p. 186.

²³ See Ruffo-Fiore, p. 110 and Guss, p. 190 both of whom cite Praz as declaring Donne a Petrarchan and R. W. Hamilton, "John Donne's Petrarchist Poems," Renaissance and Modern Studies, 23 (1979), p. 45 for a contrary view of Praz's stance on the question.

²⁴ Praz, pp. 279-280.

²⁵ Praz, p. 280.

One of Praz's statements concerning Petrarch serves to illuminate not only Praz's own evasive attitude toward Donne's Petrarchism, but also the stance taken by others who declare Donne to be anti-Petrarchan:

His [Petrarch's] personality seems to have become fixed in the mind of his readers from the very beginning. He is the creator of a poetic language as permanent as the classical orders of architecture: interpretation of his work can vary only within very narrow limits. One must either accept him as he is, or reject him: there is no possibility of presenting him from a different angle.²⁶

While critics like Leishman and Praz recognize Donne's use of Petrarchan elements such as the rejected lover and the numerous hyperboles and conceits that are common in the Canzoniere, they usually consider them simply as vehicles for Donne's wit or as targets of irony and ridicule. Seeing cynicism, outrageous humour and wit as the chief elements of the Songs and Sonnets they conclude that Donne does not "accept" Petrarch and, therefore, must "reject" him. Despite Praz's remarks, there are critics who can see both Petrarch and Donne "from a different angle" and whose work supports the other side of the Donne/Petrarchan debate.

The reaction against the labelling of Donne as anti-Petrarchan begins as early as 1931. In the book Elizabethan Love Conventions Lu Emily Pearson responds to Grierson's

²⁶ Praz, p. 264.

comments on the subject:

Sympathetic and discerning as Grierson is in his examination of the poems of John Donne, he does not, I believe, quite appreciate the fact that the poet is, on the whole, independent of the revolt against Petrarchism, that he simply reflects another phase of the Renaissance attitude toward love.²⁷

In anticipation of one of the more pervasive arguments in the debate, Pearson asserts that Donne's main use of Petrarchan conventions is to examine "what might have happened if the thought behind the conceits were carried beyond the conventional portrayal of it....He did not, therefore, discard conceits or satirize them because they were shallow or ridiculous. Rather, he sought to go beyond their conventional ideas, beyond the usual portrayal of love in order to find what is lurking in the shadows."²⁸

Clay Hunt's 1954 book Donne's Poetry emphasizes Donne's original use of Petrarchan themes and conceits:

Even in his early verse Donne was far from a die-hard opponent of the conventions of the Petrarchan tradition - in fact, he used almost all of the Petrarchan machinery at one time or another in his love poems, and sometimes used it without any suggestion of ridicule.²⁹

Hunt emphasizes that Donne does not reject Petrarchan

²⁷ Pearson, p. 224.

²⁸ Pearson, pp. 225-8.

²⁹ Clay Hunt, Donne's Poetry (1954; rpt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 7.

elements, but manipulates them, and tries to create something new from them and suggests that even his satire of them is in keeping with the convention: "In fact, by the time Donne began his literary career, the tendency to poke fun at the artificiality of the Petrarchan conventions had already become simply another of the Petrarchan conventions."³⁰

This concept of Donne's use of convention for the writing of original poetry is also supported by Helen Gardner:

Donne's vividly dramatic imagination transforms what are in many cases stock themes of European love-poetry and has disguised the extent to which his inspiration is literary and the nature of his originality.... The old Petrarchan theme of the love-dream... is transformed by the brilliant stroke of bringing the lady herself into the room just as the dream reaches its climax of joy.³¹

The first major examination of Donne's relation to Petrarchism was Donald Guss' John Donne, Petrarchist which is most responsible for the trend to take Donne's Petrarchism more seriously. Through a comparison of the Songs and Sonnets to the vast output of the Italian Petrarchans, Guss discovers that the majority of the attitudes, situations, conceits and themes of Donne's love poetry have substantial precedent in the work of the Italian Petrarchists.

³⁰ Hunt, p. 7.

³¹ Helen Gardner, ed., John Donne: The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1965), p. xxi.

More pertinent to the purpose of this thesis is Silvia Ruffo-Fiore's book Donne's Petrarchism: A Comparative View which studies the Songs and Sonnets in direct relation to Petrarch's Canzoniere. Again the conclusion drawn from the study is that Donne's poetry does not represent a rejection of Petrarch, but "shows that Donne's greatness as an innovator lies in his 'imitation' of Petrarch, in his discovery of latent and undeveloped possibilities of treating love within the Petrarchan mode itself."³² Ruffo-Fiore's treatment of the Donne/Petrarchan debate is most important in that it presents the first extensive study of Donne's relation to undiluted Petrarchism and the work of the convention's most appropriate representative, Petrarch himself.

The most recent work concerning Donne's relation to Petrarchism reflects the growing acceptance of the belief that Donne is positively influenced by Petrarchism. In his 1979 article "John Donne's Petrarchist Poems," R. W. Hamilton's opening remarks reflect the present state of the debate:

There are three possible approaches to Donne's relation to the Petrarchist tradition. The general view, now somewhat outmoded, is that Donne is as little of a Petrarchist as it was possible for a Renaissance poet to be. The more accepted current views are that the Songs and Sonnets, considered as a whole, is a thoroughly Petrarchist sequence, or that alternatively, there are specific poems among the Songs and Sonnets, those especially which treat of the situation of the unrequited lover, which are

³² Ruffo-Fiore, p. 11.

peculiarly Petrarchist.³³

The acceptance of a Petrarchan element in Donne had become wide enough by the late 1970's that Leonard D. Tourney felt confident enough to write : "That Donne's poetry is part of that great European tradition has now been thoroughly established."³⁴ This statement takes much for granted and cannot be seen to represent the definitive and undisputed attitude towards Donne and Petrarchism. To declare any attitude, theory or interpretation concerning Donne's poetry as "thoroughly established" is to ignore the complexity of Donne's work and to dismiss a vast amount of valid criticism. While perceptions of Donne's poetry may change, there are still very few perspectives on it that are thoroughly established.³⁵

³³ R. W. Hamilton, "John Donne's Petrarchist Poems," Renaissance and Modern Studies, 23 (1979), 45.

³⁴ Leonard D. Tourney, "Donne, The Countess of Bedford, and the Petrarchan Manner," in New Essays On Donne, ed. Gary A. Stringer (Salzburg: Universitat Salzburg, 1977), p. 45.

³⁵ For example Trevor James, The Metaphysical Poets (Beirut: York Press, 1988), pp. 46-7, states that while Donne is indebted to Petrarchism as shown by "his extreme use of hyperbole for emotional emphasis" his "break with Petrarchism is obvious." James takes for his examples "The Indifferent" in which he notes that the "attack upon Petrarchism is obvious" and "Love's Deity" which he terms an "ingenious assault upon Petrarchan conventions." Also see Barbara Estrin, "Donne's Injured 'I': Defections From Petrarchan and Spenserian Poetics," Philological Quarterly, 66 (1987), pp. 175-93 who argues that Donne deals with rejected love more realistically than Petrarch by refusing to accept solace in art and instead deals with the pain by acceptance.

Considering the importance of Petrarch in the debate over Donne's Petrarchism, the amount of criticism dealing directly with a comparison between the work of Francis Petrarch and John Donne is modest. While almost every substantial critical work on Donne makes some effort to consider Petrarch's influence, little work has been devoted exclusively to the question. Ruffo-Fiore's book has been, up until now, the only major study to deal exclusively with the relation between Donne's love poetry and Petrarch's. The majority of criticism regarding the subject involves a comparison of Donne's love poetry to the much larger area of Petrarchan poetry as opposed to Petrarch's own poetry. This approach does not allow Petrarch an unbiased hearing, nor does it permit Petrarch's serious, undiluted "Petrarchism" to serve as a standard of comparison.

Petrarch, unfortunately, has become a victim of his fame. Petrarch's name has become associated with an enormous amount of poetry that has little of his creativity and genuineness of feeling. Recognizing that the sonnet form, the complaint against a heartless mistress and a collection of conceits and oxymorons were the most readily identifiable aspects of Petrarch's technique, many aspiring love poets seized them as the starting point in composing their verses of unrequited love:

Unfortunately, many "Petrarchan" writers progressed very little beyond the start, and so their sonnets remained full of living deaths and delicious pains,

of lovers tossed on stormy seas who burned and froze out of season, full of images indeed that had long been common property in the European tradition by Petrarch's time and which continued to circulate, enhanced by the prestige of his name, to the eventual, inevitable detriment of his literary reputation.³⁶

This present work presents a comparison of Petrarch's Canzoniere and Donne's Songs and Sonnets. Such a direct comparison has rarely been done and Ruffo-Fiore has offered any major work in the area. This present work is more complete than Ruffo-Fiore's in that it deals with a far greater number of poems, consults a larger and more up to date body of criticism and often offers new conclusions regarding Donne's poetic relationship to Petrarch. Isolated, the Canzoniere are generally free of the excesses and insipidness that are often associated with "Petrarchism". The Petrarchan lover in the Canzoniere is not always as subservient to Laura, acquiescent to his tearful fate, nor as idolizing of women as is so often assumed. Likewise, the caustic lover portrayed in several of the Songs and Sonnets often speaks more from a defeated idealism than from inherent cynicism - the same kind of defeated idealism that causes the Petrarchan lover in the Canzoniere also to refer cynically to women and love. Through a close examination of the poetry in both the Canzoniere and the Songs and Sonnets and reference to the relevant

³⁶ Stephen Minta, Petrarch and Petrarchism (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1980), p. 55.

criticism, this study shows that the attitudes, themes and language of Petrarch and Donne's love poetry are not so dissimilar as often represented. It is, in many ways, a look at tradition and the individual talent - how Donne employs the attitudes, situations, themes and conceits common in the Canzoniere and treats them in distinctive ways. Comparison of both poets' works creates an awareness of poetic strengths that are often hidden when dealing with each poet individually. Donne is discovered to have a great inventiveness with traditional elements and Petrarch to deal in passions and attitudes that create an emotional depth not usually associated with unrequited love. The comparison does not denigrate either poet's individual abilities, but creates a new awareness of them from a different perspective.

CHAPTER ONE: LOVE

Petrarch's Canzoniere is a collection of three hundred and sixty-six poems, mostly sonnets, and apart from an occasional piece dedicated to political or religious matters the vast majority concern the Petrarchan lover's relationship with Laura. The lover's passion for Laura absorbs most of his emotional energy and dictates the highs and lows of his life experience. The very sight of Laura sends him into sensual ecstasy while her absence creates a desperate and frustrating void; her glance engenders flames of passion and yearning while her scorn brings chills of defeat and anger. So strong is the Petrarchan lover's devotion to Laura that it continues unabated even after her death. His love is most remarkable in that it is totally unreciprocated.¹

While there are obvious inherent limitations in situations and experiences dealing with an unreciprocated love

¹ There are certain poems in the Canzoniere that hint at a once reciprocal relationship between the Petrarchan lover and Laura. In CLXXII, the Petrarchan lover complains that the envy of others drove Laura to reject him though she "once enjoyed my adoration." In LX, the lover speaks of a time when Laura "did not spurn my eyes." Laura's usual disdain for the Petrarchan lover is revealed as "less hard" as time moves on, but he expresses fears in CLXXXIII of losing even the small smiles and gazes that his persistence has gained. Perhaps the poem that is most suggestive of a mutual relationship between the Petrarchan lover and Laura is CCXIX where the lover awakes to "salute" his love and, thereby, suggests that she had spent the night with him. So although there is some slight suggestion that Laura was not perpetually opposed to her lover's attentions there is no evidence that she ever considered him anything other than a benign annoyance.

theme, Petrarch manages to deal with a wide variety of emotions and attitudes. While the satisfaction, warmth and sharing tenderness of a mutual love relationship are absent in the Canzoniere, a vast number of the emotions and feelings associated with love are explored.

The poems in the Canzoniere are not simply incessant cries of hopeless adoration, but deal in numerous less prominent emotions and feelings. Whether it be the shame of loving an unyielding woman, the frustration of waking from a sexual dream to be alone, the lust aroused by Laura's beauty, the warm ecstasy of meeting Laura's eyes or brushing her arm in passing, the desire to escape a painful and hopeless love, the devastation and emptiness occasioned by Laura's death or the ultimate hope of seeing her again in the afterlife; all are present in the collection. Clearly, while the theme of unrequited love constrains Petrarch to a narrower spectrum of emotions and situations than a mutual love would, he does exploit the possibilities of that unrequited love.

Donne's Songs and Sonnets, independent of the restraints of dealing purely with unrequited love, offers a far more extensive range of relationships and situations than the Canzoniere. As Helen Gardner notes in John Donne: The Elegies and The Songs and Sonnets, we "can find almost any and every mood of man in love with woman expressed memorably and

vehemently in his poetry."² In Donne's collection there are poems which celebrate a loving mutual relationship ("The Anniversary", "A Valediction: of Weeping", "Sweetest Love"); some relate a satisfactory physical relationship ("The Sun Rising", "Break of Day"); other poems which portray an outward cynicism and disenchantment with love and women ("Love's Alchemy", "Song: 'Go, and Catch'"); and some poems are humorous pleas for promiscuity ("Confined Love", "The Indifferent"). While it is clear that Donne's poems have pronounced fundamental differences from Petrarch's work there are also important points of similarity. In each Donne poem there are images, conceits or attitudes that have ample antecedent in the Canzoniere. For example, Donne regenerates Petrarch's theme of the amorous dream into the preface for an actual sexual encounter in "The Dream," and Petrarch's seas of tears, gales of sighs and lover's world are employed in a poem of mutual love like "A Valediction: of Weeping". These examples show how elements of Petrarch's poetry that were used to evoke the frustration and pain of unrequited love are treated in an original manner by Donne who makes them properties of both sexual and mutual love.

While elements of the Canzoniere can be found in Donne's poems that are least characteristically Petrarchan, Petrarch's presence can be even more directly felt in those poems

² Gardner, The Elegies, p. xvii.

involving the unrequited lover. The Petrarchan "complaint against love is a thematic element in over a quarter of the Songs and Sonnets."³ In such poems as "Twickenham Garden", "The Blossom" and "The Triple Fool" we find a lover who is:

... as abject as any petrarchan. He suffers from her refusal of love, more pain from having his lament sung; he is broken hearted, dying, dead, of her hardheartedness or scorn; he laments or complains that his faithful love, which seeks only marriage with her, is cheapened by her lightness. Or he cries out on the capricious tyranny of Love himself, who has killed him by making love where he cannot possibly get a return, and where the woman is insulted by his love; or whose usurpations have perverted the first primal state of nature in which love for love was the innate condition.⁴

However, it is as inaccurate to label Donne an imitator of Petrarch on the evidence of such poems as "Twickenham Garden" and "The Triple Fool" as it is to declare him in revolt against Petrarch in poems such as "Love's Alchemy" and "Song: 'Go and Catch'." Donne's work is neither completely independent of Petrarch's influence, nor is it simply a flat imitation of Petrarch's attitudes and techniques. Donne's originality lies in his ability to develop Petrarch's attitudes, conceits and situations into new possibilities and unexplored directions. This relationship between Petrarch's poetry and Donne's is evident in a comparison of each poet's

³ Theodore Redpath, ed., The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 50.

⁴ A.J. Smith, John Donne: The Songs and Sonnets (London: Edward Arnold, 1964), p. 49.

treatment of the love theme. "Twickenham Garden"⁵ is one of the poems that best exemplifies Donne's use of elements of Petrarch's poetry. R.W. Hamilton, in his article "John Donne's Petrarchist Poems," describes "Twickenham Garden" as being "wholly a poem in the Petrarchan tradition."⁶ Helen Gardner notes that it is "a highly individual variation on a stock theme going back to Petrarch: the contrast between the beauty of spring and the misery of the lover whose mistress is unkind."⁷ As Gardner points out, the poem serves particularly well to illustrate Donne's ability to express individual artistry within a tradition.

⁵ This poem has attracted as much critical attention for its biographical implications as for its artistic merit. Twickenham Garden was the home of Donne's patroness, Lady Bedford, from 1608 to 1618 (Redpath, p. 336). This connection has led Leishman, in The Monarch of Wit, p. 169, to conclude that the poem "was certainly written for the Countess of Bedford". Similarly, Grierson states that there can "be little doubt that it is to her," meaning Lady Bedford, that the poem is addressed (The Poems, vol. 11, p. xxii). Certainty, however, is a rare attitude in anything concerning Donne. Nevertheless, the number of times the title "Twickenham Garden" (or some variation of it) occurs in various manuscripts does give it some authority and, therefore, implies some involvement with Lady Bedford. The most likely connection has been put forward by Helen Gardner who suggests that the poem was a result of a subject proposed by Lady Bedford or "a subject on which Lady Bedford and Donne competed" (The Elegies, p. 251). Redpath accepts Gardner's explanation as possible, but adds that the poem could also be indicative of a love relationship, even of the humblest kind, between the poet and his patroness (Redpath, p. 337).

⁶ Hamilton, p. 58.

⁷ Gardner, The Elegies , p. 215.

"Twickenham Garden" concerns the plight of a lover who is spurned by a married woman. The Petrarchan nature of the poem is announced in its very first line, as we find the lover afflicted with blasts of sighs and surrounded by pools of tears. In this state of melancholy dejection, the lover retires to a familiar garden that is awakening to the thaw of spring. While the spring presents to the lover's eyes and ears "balms as else cure everything," its virtuous and healing effects are negated by the lover's misery.⁸ He even feels that the beauty and brightness of spring are mocking him and he wishes that the "grave frost" of winter would come and forbid the "trees to laugh" at him.⁹ The contrast of nature with the unrequited lover's despondency is common in Petrarch's works such as in CCLXXX:

I never saw a place where did rise
 So clear what I would see and could not see,
 Nor where I was at such liberty,
 Or filled the sky with such amorous cries;
 Nor did I ever see valley display
 Such thick recesses made for sighs....¹⁰

The theme also occurs in canzone CCCI where Petrarch remarks sorrowfully that the vale is filled with his lamenting words, the river swells with his tears, the air is

⁸ Redpath, p. 273.

⁹ Redpath, p. 273.

¹⁰ Francis Petrarch, Sonnets and Songs. trans. Anna Maria Armi (New York: Pantheon Books, 1946), p. 403.

warmed by his sighs and that the "woods, fishes and pretty birds" that once pleased him now only leave him numb.¹¹

The lover in "Twickenham Garden" condemns himself as a "self-traitor" who has "betrayed himself by loving one who does not love him."¹² He describes how his love has such a negative effect that it even has the ability to turn all things into excrement and poison.¹³ The lover further emphasizes the perverse and self-defeating nature of his love by noting that he has ironically made the beautiful garden a "True Paradise" by bringing with him "the serpent" in the form of his envious and despairing love. Just as the serpent brought evil into the garden of Eden so does the lover's unrequited love destroy the beauty and goodness of Twickenham Garden for him. Both of Donne's images of a spider-like love and a bitter paradise are found in Petrarch's canzone CLXXIII where he moans:

My weary soul has left my heart alone
To seek her paradise on earthly scene.
Then finding it of sweet and bitter full,
What in the world is woven, spider-wise,
She sees: and with herself and Love she sighs,
Who has such heated spurs, such frozen pull.¹⁴

¹¹ Petrarch, p. 423.

¹² Ruffo-Fiore, p. 47.

¹³ Gardner, Elegies, p. 215.

¹⁴ Petrarch, p. 265.

Fearful of the disgrace that his lamenting and tearful state creates, the lover in "Twickenham Garden" pleads with Love to allow him to pass down the Chain of Being from a sorrowful man to a groaning mandrake or a weeping fountain. In these incarnations, his moans and tears would not seem conspicuous. Bitter and despairing over his love, yet unable to bring himself to leave the place that reminds him of his love, "the most the poet can hope for is to remain in the garden, but insensible to both its benefits and to the bitterness of not being able to accept them."¹⁵

The situation that the lover in "Twickenham Garden" discovers himself in is hardly a new one to the Petrarchan lover. The ideas of pleasure in pain and of being drawn to a place that produces despair, but which is acceptable because it brings the lover close to his beloved, have Petrarchan antecedents. In sonnet LXXXV the lover declares:

I always loved and I love dearly still,
And to love even more each day I learn,
That darling place where weeping I return
Time and again when Love disrupts my will.¹⁶

Similarly, in sonnet CCXXI he asks:

What destiny, what force or what deceit
Leads me again disarmed to the same field

¹⁵ Hamilton, p. 60.

¹⁶ Petrarch, p.141.

Where I am always beaten?¹⁷

In canzone XXIII the Petrarchan lover finds that his love turns him into "a barely living baffled rock" and then into a fountain and stream of tears.¹⁸ And in sonnet CCXLIII, he declares himself to be a "stone" and Laura a "paradise."¹⁹

All these images find echoes in "Twickenham Garden." Donne's poem, however, extends the Petrarchan idea of the lover's being transformed into a fountain by giving that fountain the properties of a touchstone for lovers. The lovers go to it with "crystal vials" to taste his tears, which subsequently serve as a test to their mistresses' sincerity, "For all are false, that taste not like mine."²⁰ In these particulars, Donne is seen to extend the one-dimensional images of Petrarch to create poetry of greater expressiveness and complexity. What are merely bitter lovesick tears in Petrarch become "love's wine" in Donne and the fountain which is simply a stony embodiment of the Petrarchan lover is transformed into a place of pilgrimage for doubting lovers to test their mistresses' fidelity. Although the love imagery in "Twickenham Garden" is Petrarchan in essence, there is in Donne's poem an intricacy which is quite foreign to Petrarch.

¹⁷ Petrarch, p. 323.

¹⁸ Petrarch, p. 29.

¹⁹ Petrarch, p. 347.

²⁰ Redpath, p. 273.

Donne's fountain is a kind of moral Delphi for lovers, and its waters are a love's wine of truth. Petrarch's fountain is but a monument to a rejected lover and its waters merely tears.

The end of Donne's poem reveals a mixture of bitterness and irony. It dismisses the poetic ideals that women's eyes reveal what is in their hearts and that their tears reveal their thoughts. Instead, he declares that woman is a "perverse sex" of whom none are faithful except the one he loves, whose very faithfulness to another, ironically, is what causes his pain and "kills" him. Although the Canzoniere is usually noted for its idealization of women, the disillusioned sentiments of "Twickenham Garden" are sometimes expressed by the Petrarchan lover. Sonnet CLXXXIII offers a condemnation of the unpredictable and fickle nature of women when it declares that a "woman is by nature a frail thing;/ And I know well that an amorous state/ Within a woman's heart lasts a little time."²¹

Both the Petrarchan lover and Donne's lover, through bitterness and similar misfortune in love, are led to condemn women for their fickle natures, though neither is able or willing to free himself from that love. The lover in "Twickenham Garden" is transfixed to his lover's garden for fear of losing even that contact with her while the Petrarchan lover lives in dread of Laura's changing moods and "some

²¹ Petrarch, p. 275.

unhappy chance" which may cause her to lose even the pity she has for him.

In "Twickenham Garden" we find Donne's lover in the role of the Petrarchan lover who must weep and sigh for a love he cannot win. He finds that, despite the cheerful mockery of nature around him and the despair the spring garden inspires through its associations, he is drawn to it. His love also causes him to wish for a Petrarchan transformation into a senseless mandrake or fountain and drives him to rail against the fickleness of women. The original aspects of Donne's poem come in his "un-Petrarchan suggestion that it is the woman's fidelity to another which is the cause" of his pain and his development of device of the lover's transformation.²² "Twickenham Garden," in its situation and tone, is perhaps the most Petrarchan of the Songs and Sonnets, yet, it is distinctly original in its inventive use of the lover's metamorphosis.

Poetry, as an instrument of seduction and also as a means of alleviating the pain of rejected love, is the subject of "The Triple Fool." The poem offers an intriguing look at Donne's use of Petrarch for it not only employs some of his conventions, but treats them in a humorous and almost mocking way. The poem satirizes Petrarchan conventions while recognizing the painful emotions they represent.

²² Redpath, p. 50.

There are three aspects of "The Triple Fool" that find precedent in Petrarch: the poet suffering from unrequited love; the feeling of shame and pain because of his situation; and his use of "the time honored Petrarchan remedy for a broken heart, writing love complaints."²³ The opening lines of the poem are a declaration of the poet's Petrarchan stance:

I am two fools, I know
For loving, and saying so
In whining poetry;
But where's the wiseman, that would not be I,
If she would not deny?²⁴

This idea of feeling a fool for loving an obdurate woman and then feeling ashamed of writing of that love is not new. The situation is found in Petrarch's sonnet I which was written after many of the other poems in the collection were completed

²³ Patricia Garland Pinka, This Dialogue of One: The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1982), p. 47.

²⁴ Redpath, p. 130.

and serves as an introduction to them.²⁵ The opening of Donne's poem sounds rather like a condensed version of Petrarch's poem, which condemns his love for Laura as his "first youthful error," and which claims that the fame he received for chronicling that love in verse makes him "feel ashamed of my own name;/ Of all my raving the harvest is shame."²⁶

The critical connotation of the word "whining" used by the lover to describe his poetry can be taken as a "satirical shot at flabby Petrarchism."²⁷ Since the lover's poetry is clearly of the Petrarchan variety the word more likely represents a humorous attack on conventional love poetry in general, and the peevish tone of some Petrarchan poetry in particular. Despite this, the lines are hardly a condemnation of the Petrarchan attitude for the lover declares that if his

²⁵ The Canzoniere is the product of a very long period of writing, selecting, editing and ordering. The poems in the collection were first begun as individual pieces as early as 1327. The idea of a collection was not developed by Petrarch until 1342 and between that year to his death in 1374 the poet performed the task of putting the work together. In the first form of the collection it was the present sonnet XXXIV that served as the introductory piece. Sonnet I was probably not written until the year 1347 and it was not until the completion of the second form of the collection, sometime around 1351, that it served as the introductory poem. For more information see: E. H. Wilkins, The Making of the "Canzoniere" and Other Studies (Rome, 1951) and Aldo S. Bernardo, Petrarch, Laura, and the "Triumphs" (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1974).

²⁶ Petrarch, p. 3.

²⁷ Redpath, p. 130.

poetry had caused his mistress to reciprocate his love he would certainly rather play the "fool" than the "wiseman" to gain that result.

The idea of writing poetry as a means of securing a lady's affections is substantially represented in the Canzoniere. In LXXIII the lover declares:

Canzone, I feel my pen already tired
Of this long and sweet reasoning with her,
But my thoughts are not tired my talk to share.²⁸

And in LXXIV he wonders at all the poetry he has written to entice Laura to love him:

I am...
... tired because my feet do not yet fail
After following you in every part,
Wasting so many steps without avail,
From whence derive the paper and the ink
That I have filled with you....²⁹

Just as the poet in "The Triple Fool" is unsuccessful through his verses in securing his lady's love, so too does the Petrarchan lover despair in his poetry of ever enticing Laura to love him:

Love used to conquer men and Gods by force...
But neither my dear lord nor his dear notes
Nor my weeping, or praying, can make Laura
Pull out of life or martyrdom my soul...
... with verses I try a deaf, stiff soul

²⁸ Petrarch, p. 127.

²⁹ Petrarch, p. 127.

Who respects neither force of love, nor notes.³⁰

Realizing that he has failed to win his lady through his verses the lover in "The Triple Fool" again turns to poetry, but this time in an effort to allay his pain: "Grief brought to numbers cannot be so fierce;/ For he tames it, that fetters it in verse."³¹ A similar sentiment is found in Petrarch's canzone CXXVII when the lover says:

But I will tell the tale I find designed
Within my heart, which I always pursue,
By love's own hand, with all the pain I bear;
For my sighs and despair
Have their relief in speech, so has my rue.³²

The originality of "The Triple Fool" appears in the second stanza of the poem when the poet finds that his efforts to soothe his pain through verse are annulled when a songwriter sets his words to music. The composer, by setting and singing the poet's work, not only delights his listeners, but also frees the poet's grief from the restraining bonds of verse:

Some man, his art and voice to show,
Doth set and sing my pain,
And, by delighting many, frees again

³⁰ Petrarch, p. 343.

³¹ Redpath, p. 130.

³² Petrarch, p. 199.

Grief, which verse did restrain.³³

This renews the lover's pain and makes him feel more sorrowful and foolish than ever. While Petrarch examined the use of poetry as a means to relieve the misery and the shame produced from the world's reading of a lover's misery, the introduction of the songwriter and music rekindling the lover's sorrow are original touches by Donne. Donne's lover's hopes for the curative powers of poetry are destroyed when his verses are sung back at him. It is the addition of such details that saves the poem from being merely a Petrarch imitation and gives it a distinctive quality.

Also present in "The Triple Fool" is an approach to unrequited love that is "light-hearted and less self-pitying" than Petrarch's.³⁴ The assertion that the speaker is a "triple fool" certainly hints that the lover does not take himself as seriously as the Petrarchan lover does. While his experience was surely painful it is not one that he will spend his life deploring, but rather one he has learned a lesson from. The irony that the lover's misery is intensified by his poetry rather than appeased by it gives the poem a dark humour that is absent from Petrarch's work.

Tired of continually pleading for love and receiving nothing but rejection, Petrarch's lover often tries to escape

³³ Redpath, p.130.

³⁴ Ruffo-Fiore, p. 92.

the suffocating passion he has for Laura. This conflict between his desire to free himself from Laura and his continual inability to do so is often portrayed as a struggle between the lover and his heart. The Petrarchan lover "freely gives his heart to a lady who, unappreciative of his devoted gift, reciprocates with cruelty and coldness."³⁵ All that the lover receives in return for his heart are rejection and anguish. The lover persists in his devotion, despite the obvious futility of his constant petitions, until he realizes that all his efforts are in vain and he tries to retrieve his heart. "For a time he may succeed in regaining his heart, only to give it back again; or he may delude himself into thinking he has retrieved it, only to find that it was with the lady all the time."³⁶

In sonnet CCXLIII the Petrarchan lover complains that his heart wishes to leave him to go to Laura who only laughs at it while he is left "worn out by crying and by living." In canzone CCIX the lover bemoans his self-defeating situation:

I often marvel at the stubborn way
I still go on, never able to break
The fair yoke that in vain I try to shake;
And the farther I go, the nearer stay.³⁷

Also, in canzone CCXLII the idea of the separated heart and

³⁵ Ruffo-Fiore, p. 12.

³⁶ Ruffo-Fiore, p. 12.

³⁷ Petrarch, p. 309.

the lover's attempt to free himself from Laura are combined:

Look at that hill, o heart, my weary fool:
 We left there yesterday one who had once
 Some sympathy for us, then blamed her glance,
 And would draw out of our eyes a pool.
 You return there, for I love solitude,
 y if the time at last has grown more crude,
 O companion and prophet of my ill.
 - Now you, forgetting your own soul's welfare,
 Talk to your heart as if it were with you,
 Poor wretch, full of vain and silly sighs!
 For, in departing from what you must woo,
 You went away and it remained with her
 And hid itself within her beauteous eyes.-³⁸

In "The Blossom" Donne links the idea of the separated heart with the unrequited lover trying to leave his beloved. Like the Petrarchan lover, who has left his lady in an effort to escape his "vain and silly sighs," Donne's lover too is planning to take a journey to overcome his hopeless love. The lover sympathizes with his "poor heart" that has laboured unsuccessfully to find its nest in a "forbidden or forbidding tree,"³⁹ but realizes that it would be a waste of time to present further petitions. While the lover knows that a trip away from the lady and an effort to forget her are sensible ideas, he also knows that his heart "lov'st to be/ Subtle to plague thyself" and will object strongly to being taken from

³⁸ Petrarch, p. 347.

³⁹ According to Gardner the word "forbidden" is used in Petrarchan poetry when the obdurate lady is married. See Elegies, p. 219.

the lady.⁴⁰ The lover imagines the argument that his heart will use to stay with his beloved. The heart starts first by asserting that it does not make any difference to it if the body leaves because "spiritual love is its business and that business, which is no concern of the body any how, must be pursued in the vicinity of the lady."⁴¹ Besides, the heart continues, London may offer "various content/ To the eyes, ears, and tongue and every part," but it holds no attraction for the heart.⁴² The body is essential to the full enjoyment of London, but the heart, in its distracted state, would only be a bother. The heart logically argues that since itself and the body both have their own satisfactions and desires each should go its own way without interference.

Knowing that his heart is strong-willed, the lover in Donne's poem allows it to remain with the lady, but warns that "A naked thinking heart, that makes no show,/ Is to a woman, but a kind of ghost."⁴³ The woman, having no heart of her own, would be unable to appreciate or recognize a lover's heart. He concedes that with a little practice she may recognize and enjoy physical love ("some other part"), but certainly not the spiritual love that the heart hopes for.

⁴⁰ Redpath, p. 277.

⁴¹ Hunt, p. 47.

⁴² Redpath, p. 277.

⁴³ Redpath, p. 277.

Doubting that his arguments have made any convincing impression the lover entices the heart to join him in London in twenty days when it will find him fresher and happier for being in pleasant company rather than staying with it and "her." He implores the heart to try to cheer itself while he is away and promises that in London he will give it to "another friend" who will not only appreciate his mind, but his body too.

A comparison between the Petrarchan relationship of the lover to his heart and Donne's depiction of that relationship is a revealing one. The Petrarchan lover is fully aware of his hopeless and self-defeating love and tries to end it by travelling far from Laura and taking his heart with him. However, he only fools himself into thinking he has escaped with his heart as it has hidden itself in Laura's "beauteous eyes." The Petrarchan lover's resolve to free himself from his unrequited love is too weak to be successful and it is clear that he will soon rejoin his heart in worship of Laura. While being realistic enough to realize that his passion for Laura is useless and destructive, Petrarch's lover is still unable to convert that realization into positive action. He remains completely controlled by his devotion to Laura and a slave to his own heart.

Donne's lover assumes a less submissive and decidedly more realistic attitude toward his love situation. Like Petrarch's lover, he has fallen in love with a woman, offers

her his heart, and is rejected. Discovering that the lady is heartless and unable to recognize his love Donne's lover decides to give up his courtship and go to London. His aim is to forget his heartless mistress and find a woman who will satisfy his body as well as his mind. Wanting to give his heart as well as his body to his future lover Donne's lover tries to persuade it to go along with him. In "The Blossom" Donne makes an ingenious use of the Petrarchan idea of the separated heart. Donne's lover still loves the lady who rejected him. Naturally he must overcome that love, manifested in his heart, and his desire to be near her, before he can leave. However, even when he is able to leave, his feelings for the lady will remain fresh for some time. Thus, in a sense, his heart will still be with her. After twenty days in London, in the company of friends and lovers, his love for the woman who rejected him will begin to wane. This will give the heart less reason to stay with her and allow it to return more freely to the lover's body. In this way Donne's lover is able to do what the Petrarchan lover can never do: he is able to free himself from his hopeless love, recover from it, retrieve his heart and move on to the hope of a more satisfying relationship. Donne takes a common Petrarchan situation, that of the lover's attempt to free himself from a hopeless love, develops it dramatically, gives it a richer and more logical relevance and, by allowing the lover to retrieve his heart successively, gives it a more positive

resolution.

Another aspect of "The Blossom" that reveals a development from Petrarch is its "frank expression of sexual desire."⁴⁴ The heart of Donne's lover may be willing to stay at home, hoping for love from his lady, but the lover himself is sexually aroused and needs satisfaction for both his body and his mind. He is clearly willing to take his sex without love, but also wishes his heart were with him so that it too could find diversion and satisfaction. This assertion of sexual desire is much stronger in Donne's work (for example "The Dream", "Epithalamion Made at Lincoln's Inn" and "To his Mistress Going To Bed") than in the Canzoniere and gives Donne's poetry a more sensual and realistic quality.

In Petrarch's Canzoniere the lover often hopes to free himself from his devotion to Laura and discover a higher love with God. Petrarch's lover finds himself driven to renounce his unrequited love for Laura as a "self-destructive obsession" and to plead with God to forgive his folly and accept his love. In canzone CCCLXIV he laments:

Twenty-one years Love held me in his fire,...
Now I am tired and reprimand my soul
For that error of mine that nearly slew
The seed of virtue; and my final role,
Supreme God, I devoutly offer you.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Redpath, p. 278.

⁴⁵ Petrarch, p. 513.

In canzone LXII he pleads:

Father of heaven, after the wasted days,
After the nights spent in a raving mind
With the cruel desire, my heart's mad chase
After the beauty for my grief designed,
Let it please your pure light that I return
To other life and to more worthy ends.⁴⁶

Donne's "Farewell To Love" is an interesting employment of the Petrarchan renunciation of love. It appears to be both sincere and tongue-in-cheek: it is Petrarchan in its theme and at the same time deals in rather un-Petrarchan ideas and attitudes. The poem's title promises a Petrarchan dismissal of love, yet it develops into a wish for more enjoyment and longer hours of love. Further, the "renunciation" in Donne's poem is based on less spiritual grounds than that found in the Canzoniere.

The poem opens with Donne's lover admitting that while he was still young and inexperienced in matters of love, he held love in unrealistic awe and reverence. Time and experience though, leave him "as a disillusioned Petrarchan lover who has wisely found profane love to fall short of any of his ideals."⁴⁷ He condemns "idealizing notions of love and one's mistress as mere projections of inexperience" and declares that once our desires are fulfilled they "wax lesser"

⁴⁶ Petrarch, p. 99.

⁴⁷ Ruffo-Fiore, p. 57.

and the false illusions of love are betrayed.⁴⁸

The second stanza brings the Petrarchan lover into the world of sexual experience. Extending the Petrarchan disillusionment with the folly of unrequited love and beautiful, but unkind, mistresses, Donne brings his lover's grievances into the bedroom. Here the lover finds that the sex he longed for leaves him with "A kind of sorrowing dullness to the mind." Sexual love not only fails to match the lover's expectations, but even its pleasure is seen to create negative reactions.

The final two stanzas of the poem catalogue a series of grievances against sexual love: it is only a momentary pleasure; orgasm leaves one dulled in body and mind; each act of sex supposedly takes a day off one's life; and finally, as life is short one is actually forced to procreate in a desperate attempt to insure our posterity. While all these considerations seem like reasons enough for abandoning sexual love, and while the lover regrets the adverse effects of sex and wishes he could give it up, he simply cannot. Donne's lover certainly does not like the idea of suffering dullness of mind and losing a day off his life, but finds the struggle to abstain from sex more distressing. Wishing he could be more like the cocks and lions, who he notes are "jocund" after

⁴⁸ A.J. Smith, "The Dismissal of Love," in John Donne: Essays in Celebration, ed. A.J. Smith (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 114.

sex, Donne's lover continues his sexual activities despite his desire to stop.

This pattern of disillusionment, renunciation and continued devotion is similar to that experienced by the Petrarchan lover in his love of Laura. Both Petrarch's lover and Donne's lover have obsessions which, despite their efforts, they cannot rid themselves. One cannot stay his sexual instincts any more than the other can deny his love for Laura. Donne's replacement of unrequited love with physical love does not negate Petrarch or serve as evidence of Donne's rejection of Petrarch, but rather reinforces the concept of "the Petrarchan code, behavior, and language [operating] in Donne as the basis for creative adaptation."⁴⁹

Since the Petrarchan lover's love for Laura is unrequited and he is denied a mutual spiritual and physical relationship with her, many of the poems in the Canzoniere deal with the lover's fantasy life. Through his imagination the Petrarchan lover develops dreams and fancies in which Laura comes to him in gestures of love and acceptance. The lover's frustration gives rise to these amorous dreams which, ironically, often bring increased frustration to his waking hours.

The Petrarchan lover, bothered and disturbed by his frustrated love, spends nights where "sleep has been banished"

⁴⁹ Ruffo-Fiore, p. 59.

and "all rest is withdrawn."⁵⁰ His sleep is often disturbed as his dreams cause him to "watch," "burn" and "weep" for Laura. The lover's nights are tormented and tearful because he wakes from his passionate dreams only to find darkness and a cold, hard bed. His is a "sweet grief" because he dreams of a fulfilled love with Laura, which is sweet, but wakes to the knowledge that it is all only a dream with little chance of coming true.

Donne's poem "The Dream" "is a variation of the Petrarchan sonnets on the lover's nocturnal imaginings."⁵¹ Like the Petrarchan lover, Donne's lover is awoken from a passionate sexual dream, but instead of waking to darkness and frustration he discovers that a woman, the object of his dream, has awoken him with her eyes. "She is the distant figure half-divine, whose presence strikes her lover dumb:...Donne's lady is so much of a flesh-and-blood presence, that she can be invited to 'act the rest'."⁵² Donne's lover is, of course, delighted to find such a fortunate disturbance of his sleep and assures her that she has not ended his dream, but rather continued it. He reasons that since the time, the girl and mood are right that they should complete his dream in reality.

⁵⁰ Petrarch, p. 325.

⁵¹ Ruffo-Fiore, p. 66.

⁵² Praz, p. 190.

In his effort to persuade the lady to consent to his amorous wishes, Donne's lover flatters her by comparing her first to an angel and then, noting that she could read his thoughts and know his dreams, she must be greater than an angel.⁵³ This comparison of the girl to an angel is suggestive of Petrarchan idealization, although in Donne's poem the lover's purpose is altogether different from the Petrarchan lover's. Petrarch's lover expresses his utter devotion to and worship of Laura, but gains nothing for his efforts since Laura is never present to be affected by his praise. Therefore, the Petrarchan lover is selfless in honouring Laura. Donne's lover, by contrast, has something definite to gain through his flattery - he hopes he can lure the girl into bed with him to satisfy his aroused passion. While Petrarch's poems often deal in worshipful idealization Donne's poem deals in pragmatic idealization. While the language remains the same, the motivation is quite different.

"The Dream" shows how Donne "extends the Petrarchan concept of love by adding the body to the mind, by supplementing the dream, a product of the lover's imagination, with reality."⁵⁴ Passion is at the root of both lovers' dreams, but while the Petrarchan lover must find satisfaction

⁵³ According to Aquinas, reading thoughts is beyond the power of angels so the girl, in reading Donne's thoughts, is greater than the angels. See: Grierson, Metaphysical Lyrics, p. 129.

⁵⁴ Ruffo-Fiore, p. 67.

for his passion in the realm of fantasy, Donne's lover bridges the worlds of Petrarchan fantasy with fleshy reality.

In sonnet CCXI the Petrarchan lover tells us of the date when he first saw Laura:

In thirteen hundred twenty-seven, I,
At the first hour, in April's sixth day,⁵⁵
Entered the labyrinth, and lost my way.

Then in CCCXXXVI we are told that it was on exactly the same date twenty-one years later that Laura died:⁵⁶

... in thirteen hundred forty-eight,
On the sixth day of April, the first hour,

⁵⁵ Petrarch, p. 311.

⁵⁶ The seeming coincidence that the Petrarchan lover's first sight of Laura and her death should both occur on an April 6 has induced much critical interest. Of special importance is the fact that in sonnets III and LXII the first meeting between Laura and the Petrarchan lover is said to take place on Good Friday. This creates an inconsistency for Good Friday in 1327 fell on April 10 and not on April 6. This suggests that the date April 6 is intended to have a significance to the Canzoniere that supersedes historical accuracy. Indeed, the date is very important to Christianity. April 6 is considered to be the day that "man was created and Adam sinned" (Bernardo, p.11). The date and the number six itself also have great significance in connection with Christ's crucifixion. Christ, who "initiated the 'sixth Age' of the world," was crucified on April 6 "at the sixth hour." See Kenelm Foster, Petrarch: Poet and Humanist (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), p.55. It is also interesting to note that April 6, 1348 was Easter Sunday. This sets the lovers' meeting, by Petrarch's manipulation of dates, on Good Friday, and Laura's death on Easter Sunday. These dates effectively emphasize and give deeper significance to the two major events of the Canzoniere by associating them with two of the most pivotal events in the Christian story.

That blessed soul left here her mortal weight.⁵⁷

Most of the poems in the Canzoniere from CCLXVII on concern Laura's death and the Petrarchan lover's reaction to life without her. To the lover Laura's death was an event of great personal anguish and acute loss. In canzone CCLXVIII he mourns: "My lady died and my heart did remove;.../ Every joy of my life disappears."⁵⁸ He later speaks to the world:

Ah, orphan world, unkind!
How right it is that you should weep with me;
For all the good you had, with her did flee.⁵⁹

Her death leaves him feeling less than a man, and dejected in a desolate world: "I have become like a beast of these woods/ ... In a world like a desert on a cliff."⁶⁰ His sorrow is such that he would gladly accept any other misfortune in order to have Laura back:

I am all stirred, I find myself so void,
That I envy the most pitiless fate:
Such torment and affright gives me my state.⁶¹

As Donald Guss notes in John Donne: Petrarchist:

Petrarch's hopes were always misleading,

⁵⁷ Petrarch, p. 473.

⁵⁸ Petrarch, p. 381.

⁵⁹ Petrarch, p. 383.

⁶⁰ Petrarch, p. 429.

⁶¹ Petrarch, p. 421.

his love always tormenting; but now that Laura is dead his previous unhappiness seems to have been a joy. Now he is naked and desolate: the fires which, at best, were hot torments, are out; the hopes which were always false have deserted him.⁶²

Many of the feelings expressed towards Laura's death are found in Donne's poem "A Nocturnal upon St Lucy's Day" which is a "ceremonial poem in remembrance of a beloved lady's death."⁶³ The setting of the poem is midnight of St Lucy's day, the shortest, and therefore, the blackest day of the year. The lover paints a desolate picture of the dark and lifeless atmosphere of his surroundings:

The sun is spent, and now his flasks
Send forth light squibs, no constant rays;
The world's whole sap is sunk:
The general balm the hydroptic earth hath drunk,
Whither, as to bed's-feet, life is shrunk,
Dead and interr'd...⁶⁴

⁶² Guss, p. 101.

⁶³ Guss, p. 101. Like "Twickenham Garden," this poem has been seen as concerning Lady Bedford. The Countess' name was Lucy and some feel that the poem was written with her in mind. Gardner suggests that the poem is a "gesture of compliment to the Countess" (The Elegies, p. 251). Grierson asserts that if "Twickenham Garden" was written for the Countess, which he believes it was, then so must have "A Nocturnal upon St Lucy's Day" since "Lucy was the Countess' name, and the thought, feeling, and rhythm of the two poems are strikingly similar" (The Poems, ll, xxii). Redpath looks to the subject matter of the poem rather than its title and suggests that it "refers to some illness of Donne's wife (for instance in 1611) or to her death in 1617" (p. 338).

⁶⁴ Redpath, p. 299.

The death of the beloved in Donne's poem has left the lover's world worse than even the Petrarchan "desert", for it is a dark, lifeless and barren land. Yet even the sun and earth, in the devastation the lover perceives them in, "seem to laugh" when compared with the condition his despair leaves him in.

In stanza two Donne's lover invites lovers who will invariably come with the next spring to study him as the result of love's "new alchemy." He describes himself as the product of negativity - "absence, darkness, death" - who "is reborn into a wholly negative existence."⁶⁵ Through the death of his beloved, Donne's lover becomes "the grave/ Of all, that's nothing."

The lover is then caught up in the memory of himself and his mistress as they were in life together. He tells of times when their tears were enough to drown the world, for lover's are to themselves the world; how they needed and received each other's complete attention to maintain order in their lives; and how absences could part their bodies, but not their souls (so that they became mere "carcasses" when apart). The lover also admits that the pain from all of their tears and separations seems petty beside his "feelings of utter negation" since his beloved's death.⁶⁶ This sentiment echoes

⁶⁵ A.J. Smith, ed., John Donne: The Complete English Poems (Harmonsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 392.

⁶⁶ Smith, John Donne: The Complete, p. 392.

Petrarch's canzone CCXCVIII when the lover concedes that the pain of Laura's death makes him "envy the most pitiless fate."⁶⁷ Both lovers agree that the suffering caused by the death of their beloved is far worse than any they experienced while she was alive.

Donne's lover then goes on in stanza four to explain how the death of his beloved has dehumanized him. Petrarch's lover declares that Laura's death leaves him like a "beast" in the woods, but Donne's lover is even further dehumanized by his loss. His grief and desolation leave him less than man, less than beast, and less than the plants and stones. He is even less than "an ordinary nothing" such as a shadow, for he is the "first nothing" and the very quintessence of nothingness.⁶⁸

In stanza five, Donne makes use of the Petrarchan image of the sun for the beloved. The lover notes that while other lover's "lesser sun" (the real sun) is entering the constellation of Capricorn ("the goat"), in order to "fetch new lust" for them, his "sun" will never return.⁶⁹ Donne's lover mourns the fact that "while the 'lesser sun' will ultimately revive the world's life and the virility of lovers,

⁶⁷ Petrarch, p. 421.

⁶⁸ Redpath, p. 300.

⁶⁹ The goat represents the zodiacal sign of Capricorn and is "notoriously the most lustful of animals" (Redpath, p. 303).

for him there can be no renewal since his greater sun is dead, but only a self-dedication to night after St Lucy's Day."⁷⁰

Donne's "Nocturnal" reiterates ideas that are in Petrarch's poems dedicated to the dead Laura. As in Petrarch the lover is dehumanized by his loss; he senses a draining of life from the world around him; he discovers that all his previous pain is nothing to the pain of his beloved's death; and just as the Petrarchan lover longs for death in order to join Laura and cease his suffering, Donne's lover keeps a vigil for his love and vows to "prepare towards her." Donne's poem, contrary to Petrarch's poems, concerns the death of a mutual lover; but both poems express similar reactions to the loss of the particular love interest, no matter the physical nature of the relationship. The poems examined in this chapter have revealed a relationship between the poems of Petrarch and Donne that goes beyond precise delineations of Donne's being either purely anti-Petrarch or being purely derivative of Petrarch. Both positions find equal support from the Songs and Sonnets and, therefore, cancel each other out as being the only authoritative response regarding Donne's relation with Petrarch.

Donne's treatment of the love theme has many similarities to Petrarch's: the lover despairing over an obdurate mistress; the lover alleviating his sorrow through verse; the lover who

⁷⁰ Redpath, p. 393.

fears floods of tears and gales of sighs; and the lover whose life is inalterably bound to his mistress. At the same time there are also important differences from Petrarch in Donne's treatment of love. The lover in Donne's poems often reveals a greater self-will, is moderate in his despair and in his idealism of love and women and is more practical in regards to how he uses (or abuses) his love and heart. Perhaps the most important and pronounced difference in Donne's treatment of love is his introduction of a sexual existence for the lover. In Donne's poems, the bedroom is not a place for frustration and dreaming, but rather another stage where his lovers can act. However, these differences do not amount to an attack on Petrarch. Viewed in conjunction with the similarities between the poets they reveal how Petrarchan love themes provide a basis for Donne's poems. Far from rejecting Petrarchan love, Donne grants it more life, a broader outlet for expression, and a greater depth and variety. Thus, Donne's treatment of Petrarch's love conventions can be seen as their logical progression and not their death.

CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN

To many critics the aspect of John Donne's poetry that distinguishes it sharply from Petrarch's is its cynical and unfeeling attitude toward women.¹ The Petrarchan lover is viewed as the undaunted idealist whose only purpose is to hail the beauty and virtue of his personal goddess, Laura, while Donne's lovers are viewed as flippant, self-consumed and cynical rakes to whom women are nothing more than objects of pleasure and desire. Even in those poems that celebrate a mutual love Donne's lovers are accused of ignoring the feelings of the woman while narcissistically revelling in their own.² Although there is some justification for these views on both poets, such views also represent an unbalanced conception of their work.

The Canzoniere, as a record of the Petrarchan lover's desire for Laura, is naturally full of praise for her beauty and virtue. The dominant theme of the collection is the superior nature of Laura's physical and spiritual endowments. Laura, as seen through her lover's eyes, is an "angelic form,"

¹ For example see Grierson, The Poems, II, pp. xi-xii; Grierson, Cross Currents pp. 143-146; and J.E.V. Crofts, "John Donne: a Reconsideration," in John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Helen Gardner (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), pp. 77- 89.

² See Crofts, and C.S. Lewis, "Donne and Love Poetry in the Seventeenth Century," in John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Gardner, pp. 90-99.

"divine spirit" and a "loving sun".³ She is declared to have been "born in paradise,"⁴ to be capable of overpowering the rays of the sun,⁵ and of being a person whose virtuous beauty "At once brightens the night, darkens the air/ Makes honey bitter and makes absinth sweet."⁶ Laura is, in short, the sum of human perfections.

While extravagant claims are commonly used in the Canzoniere's portrayal of Laura it would be erroneous to suggest that it presents a completely idealized image of her. Although the subject of the Petrarchan lover's reverence and adoration "Laura remains for him a real woman."⁷ Carlo Calcaterra points out that "the characteristic quality of Petrarch's contribution to literary history, a quality his successors would attempt to imitate, is his dramatization of love as a conflict between reality and the ideal."⁸ Pinka rightly points out that Petrarch "does not fully commit himself to the idealized world of his metaphors" and maintains

³ Petrarch, p. 145.

⁴ Petrarch, p. 195.

⁵ Petrarch, p. 321.

⁶ Petrarch, p. 317.

⁷ Leonard Forster, The Icy Fire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 3.

⁸ Ruffo-Fiore, p. 119. Ruffo-Fiore further points out that "it is in the extension and development of this essentially Petrarchan quality that Donne makes a significant contribution to the Petrarchist tradition."p. 119.

"enough critical appraisal of the lady to indicate that Petrarch understands even the absurdities of his passion."⁹ Even Grierson admits that Petrarch's love poetry has elements of both "the transcendently spiritualized love of Dante" and "the quite frankly sensuous love" of Boccaccio and that "they came at times into conflict with one another."¹⁰

The realism of the Canzoniere is a result of this mating of the sensuous Laura and the spiritual Laura. As much as the Petrarchan lover praises Laura as the pinnacle of human perfection she does remain human. He has love for her physical self as well as her spiritual self and this physical aspect limits the idealism. Laura is not only a figure for adoration, but is a woman "whose beauty intoxicates him and whose physical presence excites him."¹¹ It is not Laura's spiritual perfection which leaves the Petrarchan lover sleepless and bothered, but rather his frustration at not enjoying her physical perfection.¹² When Petrarch's lover becomes weary of Laura's continual rejection of him he endeavours to free himself of her¹³ and when he is deepest in despair he often wonders whether his continued devotion has

⁹ Pinka, p. 29.

¹⁰ Grierson, p. 134.

¹¹ Forster, p. 3.

¹² For example, see XXII and CCXXIII.

¹³ For example, see CCXLII and CCXLIII.

any rational hope or meaning.¹⁴ As will be made apparent later, this sense of frustration and futility sometimes causes the Petrarchan lover to erupt into passages of derision and cynicism. The lover's state, therefore, is not one of unrealistic devotion and perpetual adoration in the face of rejection. The Petrarchan lover realizes the hopelessness of his love and feels frustrated in his inability to free himself from it. The anger and cynicism that results from this mixture of love and disappointment are of a kind with that which afflicts many of the lovers in Donne's Songs and Sonnets.

The criticism of Donne's treatment of women in his poems is distinctly divided. One position, mostly pre-1950, characterizes the male lover in Donne's poems as one who cares little for the feelings of his mistress and who instead concentrates on celebrating his own experience of loving. Such criticism sets Donne's lovers in opposition to the often adoring and attentive Petrarchan lover. One of the main proponents of this view is J.E.V. Crofts who writes of Donne:

Even the mistress of his most passionate love-verses, who must (one supposes) have been a real person, remains for him a mere abstraction of sex: a thing given. He does not see her - does not apparently want to see her; for it is not of her that he writes, but of his relations to her; not of

¹⁴ For example, see LXII and CCCLXIV.

love, but of himself loving.¹⁵

C. S. Lewis asserts that Donne does not speak of love at all, but rather analyses the effects of love, standing aloof from the emotion itself while intellectualizing its trimmings:

In one way, indeed, Donne's love-poetry is less true than that of the Petrarchans, in so far as it largely omits the very thing that all the poetry is about. Donne shows us a variety of sorrows, scorns, angers, disgusts, and the like which arise out of love. But if any one asked "What is all this about? What is the attraction which makes these partings so sorrowful? What is the peculiarity about this physical pleasure which he speaks of so contemptuously, and how has it got tangled up with such a storm of emotions? I do not know how we could reply except by pointing to some ordinary love-poetry."¹⁶

The image we get of Donne's poetry from criticism such as above is that it presents love not as a sharing intimacy between two people, but rather as an intellectual experiment meant to satisfy only the curiosity and lust of the male speaker. Kenneth Muir encapsulates the stance when he states that a common critical opinion of Donne is that "he was an

¹⁵ Crofts, p. 82.

¹⁶ Lewis, pp. 96-97. These remarks recall Dryden's consideration that Donne "perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softness of love." As quoted in John Donne's Poetry, ed. A. L. Clements (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), p. 106.

egocentric sensualist who ignored the feelings of the woman."¹⁷

With the publication of Joan Bennett's "The Love Poetry of John Donne," critical opinion of Donne's treatment and conception of women has gained a more balanced appreciation.¹⁸ The trend has continued into the 1970's and 1980's through the works of critics like Silvia Ruffo-Fiore, Iqbal Ahmad, Ilona Bell and Marie Cornelia.¹⁹ New ways of looking at the poetry, its influences and intentions, not only challenge the idea of Donne as a cynical sensualist, but, ironically, cast him among the tenderest and most ironic of poets.

"Sweetest Love" is a poem of consolation and assurance at parting in which a lover relieves his mistress' fears that he is leaving her for another woman, tries to quell her tears of sorrow at his leaving and gives her confidence of his return. Almost every line of the poem echoes with the lover's "voice responding subtly and feelingly to the woman's

¹⁷ Kenneth Muir, ed., Collected Poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949), p. XXIX.

¹⁸ Joan Bennett, "The Love Poetry of John Donne," in Seventeenth-Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert Grierson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938), pp. 85-104.

¹⁹ Ruffo-Fiore, pp. 23-38; Iqbal Ahmad, "Women in Donne's Love Poetry," Essays on John Donne: A Quater Centenary Tribute, ed. Asloob Ahmad Ansari (Aligarh Muslim University, 1974); Ilona Bell, "The Role of the Lady in Donne's Songs and Sonnets," Studies in English Literature, 23 (1983); Maria Cornelia, "Donne's Humour and Wilson's 'Arte of Rhetorique'," Ariel, 15 (1984).

presence."²⁰ The opening lines themselves are of a rare tenderness and reveal a perceptiveness of the woman's feelings that sets the tone for the rest of the poem:

Sweetest love, I do not go
For weariness of thee,
Nor in hope the world can show
A fitter love for me...²¹

After thus setting her mind at rest with regard to his faithfulness and love, the lover deals with his mistress' fear that he will not return to her. He elegantly assures her that just as the sun sets and always comes again so will he unquestionably return to her. Having relieved his mistress' greatest doubts and fears about his feelings for her, the lover tries, in advance, to alleviate the loneliness and sorrow she will feel during his absence. By employing the conceits of the two-in-oneness of lovers and lovers' deaths through parting he begs her not to extinguish his soul through her sighs nor to kill him by weeping away his "life's blood." He further implores her not to think of any ill or danger coming to him, lest her thoughts may create scenes out of which destiny create reality. Through these arguments Donne's lover urges his mistress to be happy while he is away and to think only of the time when he returns and they will be

²⁰ Wilbur Sanders, John Donne's Poetry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 12.

²¹ Redpath, p. 257.

together again. His thoughts and concerns are not centred on his voyage nor his own personal safety, but are entirely concerned with his mistress' peace of mind and happiness. He is clearly aware of the woman's fears and apprehensions and far from being unresponsive to them concentrates his efforts on relieving them.

In "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" the lover is again about to depart from his mistress and again uses their last moments together in an effort to cheer her. All of the male's efforts are directed toward making the scene of his departure as calm and quiet as possible. He first tells his love that just as the souls of "virtuous men" leave them so calmly that "their sad friends" do not know when they have died, so too must they preserve the dignity and sanctity of their love by not allowing outsiders to know of it through "noise, tear-floods, and sigh-tempests." A similar argument is found in stanza three in which the speaker compares the parting of ordinary lovers with other natural calamities, such as earthquakes, which cause great "harms and fears." He then compares the parting of himself and his mistress to the "trepidation of the spheres" which "Though greater far, is innocent." The lover's point is that his parting from his lady, like all significant events, should be "unheralded by fanfare and unattended by terrors."²² His plea is another

²² Doniphon Louthan, The Poetry of John Donne (New York: Bookman Associates, 1951), p. 48.

effort to make the scene of his farewell as free from tears and sorrow as possible.

The remainder of the poem characterizes the special nature of the lovers' relationship. They are so "Inter-assured of the mind" that unlike "dull sublunary lovers" their relationship does not depend on the presence of "eyes, lips and hands." Distance has no detrimental effect on their love for their souls are one and separation causes their souls not to "breach", but to expand "Like gold to airy thinness beat." The poem ends with Donne's famous comparison of the lovers' souls to the feet of a compass. The male assures his lover that even if their souls are not really joined as one they are two only as "stiff twin compasses are two." The female's soul is the "fix'd foot" which "leans" and hearkens after" the roving male soul when it is far away and "grows erect, as that comes home."²³ The woman's fidelity and love, that are as firm

²³ Thomas Docherty in John Donne, Undone (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 74, treats the compass image purely as having sexual and phallic connotations that could intimate either homosexual or heterosexual intercourse. This would be reasonable if Donne had employed the compass legs to represent human legs, a penis and a vagina, or even two penises. The fact remains that the compass legs are clearly stated to represent the lovers' souls. The inclusion of the phrase "grows erect" does conjure up sexual images and there can be little doubt that Donne intends such associations either as a risqué joke for his circle of readers or, possibly, to suggest a balance of physical and spiritual love into the relationship presented in the poem. As A. J. Smith notes in John Donne: The Complete English Poems (p. 406) the compass image itself had long been "a common emblem of constancy in change." A usage very similar to Donne's can be found in Guarini's madrigal XCVI from 1598 that serves as a reply to mistress' fears that her departing lover will forget her: "I am ever with you, moved about but fixed; and if I steal from you the lesser I leave you the

as the stationary foot of the compass, make the male return to her and end his travels where he had begun.

Although the lover's arguments presented to pacify his mistress in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" may seem elaborate, the poem remains sincere "because of its tone of tenderness and absolute assurance."²⁴ This poem, along with "Sweetest Love" and the companion piece "A Valediction: of Weeping," presents a man assured of his mistress' love and who is, in turn, deeply in love with his mistress. His concern is not for himself, but with comforting his lover's distress at his departure, assuring her of his love and faithfulness and appeasing her concerns for his safety. None of these actions are consistent with the character of an unfeeling sensualist who would be more likely to blow his mistress a kiss, tell her to cheer up and then wink goodbye while thinking of all the foreign beauties he is sailing to. Far from ignoring the feelings of the woman, the man in these poems proves by his words and actions that the woman's

greater. I am like the compass in that I fix one foot in you as my centre, while the other suffers all the turns of fortune, but cannot do other than turn around yourself." (As quoted in Leishman, p. 231). Donne himself uses the image again in "Obsequies to the Lord Harrington" (see Smith, The Complete English Poems, p. 259, ll 105-110) and in numerous of his sermons (see Heather Ross Asals and P. G. Stanwood, eds., John Donne and the Theology of Language Columbia: University of Columbia Press, 1986), pp. 248-253. For more information see Josef Lederer, "John Donne and the Emblematic Practice," RES, XXII, July 1946, pp. 182-200.

²⁴ Gardner, The Elegies, p. XXI.

feelings merit a concern that excludes even the consideration of his own doubts and fears.

The Donne poems just examined present male tenderness during the highly emotional situation of parting in which feelings and attitudes tend to be accentuated and expressive. Yet, there are numerous other poems that detail the expression of a mutual and tender love in response to the love itself rather than under the stimulus of any stressful situation. These poems reflect a loving relationship in which the male and female enjoy equal rule and influence in their world of love. Although the speaker in these poems is usually male, the reader is still fully aware of the female's presence and that what is being said is indicative of her feelings and attitudes as well as his:

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
 Did, til we loved?...
 And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
 Which watch not one another out of fear;
 For love, all love of other sights controls,
 And makes one little room an everywhere.²⁵
 ("The Good-Morrow")

She is all States, and all Princes I,
 Nothing else is:
 Princes do but play us....²⁶
 ("The Sun Rising")

Call us what you will, we are made such by love;
 Call her one, me another fly,

²⁵ Redpath, p. 227.

²⁶ Redpath, p. 232.

We are tapers too, and at our own cost die,
 And we in us find the Eagle and the Dove.²⁷
 ("The Canonization")

Alas, as well as other Princes, we
 (Who Prince enough in one another be)
 Must leave at last in death, these eyes, and ears,
 Oft fed with true oaths, and with sweet salt
 tears;
 But souls where nothing dwells but love
 (All other thoughts being inmates) then shall
 prove
 This, or a love increased there above,
 When bodies to their graves, souls from their
 graves remove.
 And then we shall be throughly blest,
 But we no more than all the rest;
 Here upon earth, we are Kings, and none but we
 Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be:
 Who is safe as we, where none can do
 Treason to us, except one of us two.²⁸
 ("The Anniversary")

Where, like a pillow on a bed,
 A pregnant bank swell'd up, to rest
 The violet's reclining head,
 Sat we two, one another's best.²⁹
 ("The Ecstasy")

As each of these examples clearly shows, Donne's poetry
 is not merely an egocentric display of male opinion and
 emotion without regard for the female's feelings.³⁰ These

²⁷ Redpath, p. 237.

²⁸ Redpath, p. 210.

²⁹ Redpath, p. 71.

³⁰ John Carey, in John Donne Life, Mind and Art (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 94-130, claims that Donne's constant referral to himself and his lover as kings and princes is a desperate attempt, through poetry, to claim a majesty and control over his life which his unfortunate marriage denied him. By creating a poetical kingdom of love Donne is allowed to fulfil the overwhelming ambition in him.

examples are dominated by plural references such as "we," "we two," "us," "our," "and the labelling of both lovers as "Kings" and "Princes." Singular pronouns such as "I," "me" and "mine," which would stress only the male presence and attitude, are conspicuously absent. In this way, despite the fact that the male is the speaker in these poems, the reader is fully aware of the female's presence. It is as if the male draws the female to his side and is continually pointing her out to the reader, seeking and receiving her approval for his statements. The male, therefore, is not acting as an individual expressing individual thoughts, but as the couple's spokesman, reporting the state of their union.

The fact that the speaker is usually male in Donne's poetry should not be considered as evidence of a disregard for the female voice and opinion. That the voice is so often male should be considered as natural when coming from a male writer and not be misinterpreted as a symptom of male chauvinism. The male voice and point of view should be expected from Donne just as the female voice and point of view is expected and accepted from Christina Rossetti or Sylvia Plath. Donne explicitly employs a female voice for at least two of his poems ("Break of Day" and "Confined Love") and this

Similarly, J.B. Leishman, in The Monarch of Wit, pp. 209-212, feels that Donne is trying to recompense for the life his marriage denied him in the real world by poetically granting himself and his wife dominion over the world of love.

should stand as proof enough of his willingness to represent the female point of view. Far from alienating or ignoring women in his poetry Donne often goes out of his way to give them voice and to achieve "an emphatic, imaginative, and varied response to the lady's point of view."³¹

The poems examined so far have had a fairly innocuous quality. They have either concentrated on the merits of love and the beloved or at worst, in Petrarch's case, have questioned the extremes of love. Yet, there is another element in both collections that questions the faithfulness of women, derides their pride and vanity and accuses them of being scornful and heartless. The critical problem in dealing with this element is again a result of the generalizations made of each poet's work. Since much of the Canzoniere is concerned with the Petrarchan lover's passion for Laura the instances when he does criticize her or women in general tend to be overlooked and consumed by the imbalance of adoration. The proportion of bitter or cynical poems in the Songs and Sonnets is far greater than that in the Canzoniere; and Donne, especially when set against the entire school of Petrarch's more idealizing imitators, is bound to be seen as in revolt against Petrarch himself. It is from the basis of these observations that critics like Grierson deduce Donne's great originality and anti-Petrarchan stance in his cynical

³¹ Bell, p. 113.

disregard of women. An examination of each poet's work reveals that they are far closer in temperament and in their views on women than such an argument would suggest.

The Petrarchan lover is not always as stoic in his frustration or as unquestioningly adoring of Laura as the majority of the poems would indicate. In sonnet CCI, for example, the lover looks back in anger on the day that he first saw Laura:

And I never remember that past day
Which made me rich and poor in the same point,
Without being by wrath and anguish joined,³²
Distressed by shame and amorous dismay....

Having been rejected by Laura, the Petrarchan lover blames her inability to love him on the fact that she spends all of her love and affection on herself. Several poems reveal Laura glorying in her own beauty and vainly studying her own reflection. In XLV Petrarch's lover complains that his image has been cast out of Laura's eyes by the one she sees in her mirror. Standing before her mirror she pleases her "proud and sour self" while Petrarch's lover is left in his "sore need."³³ In a companion poem (XLVI) Laura is accused of having desire only for herself and of being tied to a mirror that is her "flattering cage." In the same poem, Petrarch's lover compares Laura's various features to gold, pearls, and red and

³² Petrarch, p.293.

³³ Petrarch, p. 73.

white flowers that to him are "only twigs poisonous, sour,/ That on my breast and on my sides I tie."³⁴ Even the god of love, petitioning on the lover's behalf, cannot convince Laura to stop admiring herself long enough to answer her lover's pleas. These two poems, XLV and XLVI, portray Laura as a "beautiful, impassive object, cold and indifferent to the suffering she occasions, one 'whom pity never makes pale.'"³⁵

While the Petrarchan lover's attitude toward his unrequited love is usually of a grieving and despairing nature, it sometimes is the source of vehemence and anger. In sonnet LX Petrarch's lover curses Laura, whom he presents in the guise of a laurel tree,³⁶ not only because of her rejection

³⁴ Petrarch, p. 73.

³⁵ Sara Strum-Maddox, Petrarch's Metamorphoses (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), p.15.

³⁶ The laurel has a great symbolic significance to the Canzoniere which it derives from Ovid's story of Apollo and Daphne. In the story Cupid gains vengeance on Apollo for a teasing given him by that god of poetry and music. He shoots Apollo with an arrow to excite love. Another arrow, to repel love, he shoots to the heart of Daphne. The result is that Apollo is immediately filled with love for Daphne who cares for nothing but forest sports. In order to escape a particularly passionate appeal from Apollo, Daphne calls to her father, the river god Peneus, for help. Peneus complies by transforming his daughter into a laurel tree. Apollo is, of course, aggrieved by the change in his beloved, yet he does not abandon her. He declares that if Daphne cannot be his wife, she can at least be his tree. To honour her he declares that he shall wear a wreath of laurel for his crown as shall victorious Roman generals on their way to the Capitol. He also declares that just as his head is forever young and his locks uncut so shall the laurel tree be perpetually beautiful.

From this story Petrarch found the laurel to be the perfect symbol for the Canzoniere. The word laurel itself is much like the name Laura and allows for numerous plays on words. It is also employed as a symbol for unrequited love,

of him, but also because of the fear that his reporting that rejection in his poetry might cause other lovers to lose faith in love:

What will be the retort of those who sigh,
If my new rhymes had made them hope in love
And now, because of her, have lost their path?
- May neither poet pluck her boughs, nor Jove
Honour her; and the sun display his wrath,
So that all her green leaves be dead and dry.³⁷

In sonnet XLIV, the lover accuses Laura of being a pitiless and heartless creature, incapable of being moved by true emotion:

But you, whom pity does not make more pale,
Who always have your screens cunningly set
Against the aims of Love that always fail,
Can see me by a thousand tortures torn,
And not a tear is fallen down as yet
From your fair eyes, but only wrath and scorn.³⁸

Finally, in CLXXXIII, the Petrarchan lover's disappointment at not securing Laura's love, doubled with his fear of losing

the unrequiting mistress, poetic glory and the eternal beauty of the mistress.

For the complete story of Apollo and Daphne see Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. Frank Justus Miller (1916; rpt. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 35-43. For discussions of Petrarch's use of the Apollo and Daphne story see Sturm-Maddox, pp.9-38; M. Cottino-Jones, "The Myth of Apollo and Daphne in Petrarch's Canzoniere," in Francis Petrarch, Six Centuries Later: A Symposium, ed. A. Scaglione (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 1975), pp. 152-176.

³⁷ Petrarch, p. 97.

³⁸ Petrarch, p. 71.

the small favours he is already granted, develops into a general attack on women's constancy:

A woman is by nature a frail thing;
And I know well that an amorous state
Within a woman's heart lasts little time.³⁹

The cynicism toward women seen in this poem is of a kind which will also be found in Donne's work. It is not a cynicism bred from a rejection of the ideal, but from a disappointment that it has no parallel in reality. While Petrarch's lover praises Laura's beauty and virtue, he is not blind to her vanity or pride; while constantly desiring her love, he also decries her persistent rejection of him as the mark of a pitiless and scornful woman; and while usually in a state of agitation or dejection, his submission to these emotions sometimes flares into an embittered and caustic attack on Laura or the fickle nature of women's love. In the face of such evidence, to portray Petrarch as a poet whose work is merely an idealization of love and women is to ignore a portion of his work that repudiates or modifies that position.

In dealing with the cynicism present in some of Donne's love poems the problem becomes the reverse of that found in Petrarch. There is little problem in discovering the cynicism in poems like "Go and Catch" or "Woman's Constancy." The task then is to discover, through a close look at the poems

³⁹ Petrarch, p. 275.

themselves, the origin of that cynicism and whether the speaker is truly a hardened cynic or merely a frustrated idealist who uses cynicism as a mask for his disappointment and a defence against his pain. In many instances a substantial argument can be made for the latter interpretation and Donne can again be seen as not so much renouncing Petrarchan ideals, but rather responding to them in a more ironic fashion.

For Grierson "Go and Catch" is an expression of "youthful cynicism" in which "love, and constancy, and women" are at the mercy of Donne's wit.⁴⁰ It is true that the poem "openly scoffs" at the Petrarchan ideal and declares that of "all miracles,... a constant woman is the greatest, of all strange sights the strangest," but this does not represent the only view of the poem.⁴¹ Silvia Ruffo-Fiore sees the lover in the poem as "unknowingly swearing his fidelity to an ideal whose meaning has become lost to the real world."⁴² Maria Cornelia views the poem as a prime example of Donne's "augmenting beyond all reason until the results are ridiculously comic."⁴³ Another critic, Ilona Bell, believes that "Go and Catch" is a poem in which "empathy informs the witty, lusty braggadocio

⁴⁰ Grierson, The Poems, ll, XI.

⁴¹ Grierson, The Poems, ll, xi.

⁴² Ruffo-Fiore, p. 30.

⁴³ Cornelia, p. 35.

that enables the speaker to defend himself, to foresee and preempt rejection."⁴⁴ Each of these observations has something to offer to the complete understanding of the poem and are valid reminders that to accept a one-dimensional view of the poem is to be unresponsive to its complexity.

"Go and Catch" is a dramatic monologue in which the speaker is wittily declaring the impossibility of discovering a woman both beautiful and faithful. He may be ruminating to himself or to one friend, but he is most likely performing for a circle of friends, amusing them with his wit and moving them to laughter with his exaggerations. A man, he declares, could as easily catch a falling star, impregnate a mandrake root or uncover the mysteries of time and the universe, as discover a woman "true" and "fair."⁴⁵

This cynical banter dictates the misogynistic tone of the first two stanzas. However, in stanza three, there comes a momentary, but very definite, shift in tone which casts

⁴⁴ Bell, p. 116.

⁴⁵ Donne's Problem VIII "Why are the fayrest falsest," from his Paradoxes and Problems, similarly denies the existence of a woman that is beautiful and faithful. This Problem, like "Go and Catch," can be viewed as a cynical attack on women if taken at face value. Interpreting it through reference to its tone and fantastic arguments (comparing women to bells and gold) the Problem is revealed more as an exercise in wit and humour. As Helen Peters notes in her edition of Paradoxes and Problems: "Like most of his writings, the Problems appear to have been written to satisfy, and with their dark humour to entertain, Donne and the friends to whom he sent copies." See Helen Peters, ed., John Donne: Paradoxes and Problems (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. xliv.

doubts as to the sincerity and genuineness of the speaker's earlier cynicism. The speaker says that if someone does find a woman who is both fair and true, he would go to her for "Such a pilgrimage were sweet."⁴⁶ It is in this line that the speaker's more idealistic, romantic and personal self is revealed. For an instant, the witty, cynical and cavalier public speaker is eclipsed by the thoughtful private man who reveals an unexpected desire for the ideal he publicly ridicules.

Yet as quickly as this revelation arrives it is as quickly gone. Not wishing his sentimentality and secret idealism to be exposed the speaker reassures his audience of his "youthful cynicism":

... I would not go,
 Though at next door we might meet;
 Though she were true, when you met her,
 And last, till you write your letter,
 Yet she
 Will be
 False, ere I come, to two, or three.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Carey views the word "pilgrimage" in this poem as an example of Donne's association of love with religion. Donne does tend to express a myriad of love experiences through the language of religion. Religious images such as angels, relics, saints, martyrs, souls, heaven and Mary Magdalen, can be found in practically all of the Songs and Sonnets. This mating of secular poetry with religious imagery suggests that Donne was preoccupied with religious thought and tended to associate love, in all its degrees and forms, with the satisfaction and the pain he experienced in his religious experience. See Carey, pp. 37-59.

⁴⁷ Redpath, p. 118.

If not for the inclusion of the line "Such a Pilgrimage were sweet," the poem "Go and Catch" would have to be viewed as a virulent and relentlessly cynical poem against the existence of a woman who is both beautiful and faithful. The inclusion of the line produces a balancing effect on the views expressed by the speaker. He is revealed to have a desire for the ideal, but his inability to satisfy that desire through experience leads to his cynicism. The speaker, like the Petrarchan lover, is only a qualified cynic. He is a man who has sufficiently experienced life to despair of the ideal, but whose longing for the ideal creates a cynicism bred from frustration and false hopes.

"Woman's Constancy" is another poem in which the speaker's pose of cynical disregard for women and their ability to remain faithful is revealed as a defence.⁴⁸ The cynicism is a shield to guard against the time when the

⁴⁸ Bell suggests that the poem has a woman speaker, but I have opted for a more conventional reading. Bell's reading would, indeed, be a further instance of Donne's ability to sympathize with and voice female concerns. The problem is that her reason for attributing a female speaker is weak. She declares that when the speaker condemns the listener as a "Vain lunatic" the listener is consequently defined as a male who is under the influence of Luna, the female moon. This argument ignores the idea that the speaker may simply be insulting the listener as insane. Theodore Redpath (p. 132) suggests that the word lunatic could be interpreted as "fickle creature" by being influenced by a moon that has so many changing phases. Bell's reasoning also ignores the fact that although Luna may be female one does not have to be male to be moonstruck. Since there is no indisputable evidence that the speaker is female I feel that the speaker should be considered to be the sex of the poem's writer, male.

speaker's hopeful expectations may be destroyed. The entire poem, from the sarcastic opening of "Now that thou hast lov'd me one whole day" to the closing insult of "vain lunatic," appears to be a mocking degradation of women's ability to love faithfully, but a closer look at the wording of the poem reveals a less obvious attitude.

The situation presented is that of the male asking the female, after they have spent their first night together, what excuse she will employ in the morning to back out of the relationship. Without waiting for an answer the speaker lists a series of possible, but extravagant excuses:

Wilt thou then antedate some new-made vow?
 Or say that now
 We are not just those persons which we were?
 Or, that oaths made in reverential fear
 Of Love, and his wrath, any may forswear?
 So lovers' contracts, images of those,
 Bind but till sleep, death's image, them
 unloose?
 Or, your own end to justify,
 For having purpos'd change, and falsehood, you
 Can have no way but falsehood to be true?⁴⁹

The purpose of his putting forward these excuses would seem to be to show the female that the speaker is quite prepared to battle any argument that she will offer him, but this idea is destroyed by the concluding lines of the poem:

Vain lunatic, against those 'scrapes I could
 Dispute, and conquer, if I would;
 Which I abstain to do,

⁴⁹ Redpath, p. 132.

For by tomorrow, I may think so too.⁵⁰

The question that arises after reading these lines is why did the speaker try and defuse all the lady's possible reasons for ending the relationship when he admits that he may wish to do so himself? The answer lies in love's psychology. Arnold Stein believes that:

...The apparent reversal may conceal a deeper reversal, by which the speaker invents an obviously false speech in order to prevent an actual speech that might be quite decently plausible, but could hardly hope to escape an embarrassing comparison with the speech already on record. In other words, the speaker, while pretending to "abstain," may be disputing and conquering.⁵¹

Patricia Garland Pinka believes that "the retaliation sounds more like a threat than a denunciation. Perhaps it is the speaker's ploy to keep her; his psychological stratagem to make her want what she cannot have."⁵² Ruffo-Fiore states that the speaker's final renunciation is a means to secure the relationship: "Unlike Petrarch, who pitifully begs his lady not to leave him, Donne's speaker tries to convince her he doesn't care. But not because he loves her less. Perhaps his

⁵⁰ Redpath, p. 132.

⁵¹ Arnold Stein, John Donne's Lyrics (New York: Octagon Books, 1980), p. 104.

⁵² Pinka, p. 83.

is a much sounder method for keeping his lady."⁵³

As the three critics cited indicate, contrary to appearances, the speaker's address to his lady in "Woman's Constancy" is more defensive than offensive. If the speaker really does not care whether the lady stays with him or not, then his speech has no point for each lover would expect and want nothing more than a one-night stand. In that situation the speaker would be more upset if the lady were not gone in the morning. The lover's speech, though, does make sense as a means of stalling the woman's leave-taking of him or of bracing his heart against the pain when she actually does leave him. From the speaker's point of view the ending can be seen as putting up a brave front in a potentially crushing situation. The attitude toward women's constancy in the poem should not be viewed as the speaker's true opinion, but rather as an expression of what he hopes will be untrue.

One of Donne's seemingly most powerful condemnations of women and love is "Love's Alchemy." Taken literally, the poem is indeed a very bitter and vindictive assault on women and both spiritual and physical love. Pinka, for example, sees the "lover" in the poem as arguing "for the validity of his cynicism" and commemorating "his disillusionment, his guilt, and his pain in evangelistic addresses to young innocents."⁵⁴

⁵³ Ruffo-Fiore, p. 33.

⁵⁴ Pinka, p. 64.

Such a literal view of the poem does not recognize the satiric aspects of the work, nor does it consider the function of employing such an outspoken and negative narrator.

Various critics, such as Arnold Stein, Clay Hunt and J.B. Leishman, have seen beyond the surface meaning of "Love's Alchemy" to reveal a poem which is not a denunciation of women, but a satirical attack on those who swear to find happiness in the extremes of either sensual or spiritual love. As Stein notes, the poem "is a lyric satire that purges the mind by making two extremes destroy each other."⁵⁵ The lover who seeks happiness in purely sexual love is compared to the alchemist who finds a certain pleasure in minor discoveries, but who still never finds "the Elixir" he is striving for. This kind of lover dreams of "a rich and long delight," but instead receives "a winter-seeming summer's night."⁵⁶ Satisfaction, the speaker assures his listeners, cannot be found in a purely sexual relationship.

In stanza two it is the "loving wretch" who hypocritically declares it is his lover's mind that he is attracted to that is the speaker's target. Such a man, declares the speaker, would as emphatically swear that he could hear the music of the spheres on his wedding day. As a final outrageous argument he declares that those who

⁵⁵ Stein, p. 173.

⁵⁶ Redpath, p. 196.

announce that they find woman's mind "angelic," but not her body, are deluding themselves, for a woman has no mind:

Hope not for mind in women; at their best
Sweetness, and wit, they are but Mummy,
possess'd.⁵⁷

The difficulty in recognizing the satirical nature of "Love's Alchemy" is the tone of the poem. In poems like "Go and Catch" and "Woman's Constancy" there is a humour and lightness that hints at the subtler nature of their message. In both of these poems the speaker's vulnerability is glimpsed behind his words and he is found to yearn secretly for the thing that he professes to denounce. In a satire such as "Love's Alchemy" the underlying intent is more difficult to recognize. There are outrageous claims, such as the denial of minds in women, but there is no humour or vulnerability on the part of the speaker. Yet it is through such a deadpan and hyperbolic look at the philosophies of purely physical and purely spiritual love that the satire is effective. The poem is not proof that Donne believed women to be mindless, but "as a deliberately exaggerated, provocative and paradoxical expression of what always remained his conviction, namely, that in love the physical and the spiritual were ultimately inseparable."⁵⁸ Donne himself says as much in a letter he

⁵⁷ Redpath, p. 196.

⁵⁸ Leishman, p. 152.

wrote to Sir Henry Wotton: "You (I think) and I are much of one sect in the Philosophy of love; which though it be directed upon the minde, doth inhere in the body, and find pretty entertainment there."⁵⁹ By illustrating the absurd views that following an extreme love philosophy can engender, Donne's poem is indirectly arguing for a reasonable balance between the two extremes.

Perhaps the most discussed and interpreted of all Donne's poems is "Air and Angels." As Wesley Milgate relates in " 'Air and Angels' and the Discrimination of Experience," the poem has gained a rather negative reputation:

The notion that there is a disparity between men's love and women's, and that woman's is in some way inferior to men's, have disturbed some critics in their remarks upon the poem. They have used phrases such as these: "the quiet insult at the end"; Donne brushes the conception of love he has established in the poem "aside with a witticism"; "lofty speculation" changes to a "cheap gibe"; the close of the poem is "touched with cynical humor" or manifests a "blandly insolent matter-of-factness."⁶⁰

The question that must be addressed in regards to "Air and Angels" is whether or not the end remarks of the poem are a reversal of attitude, thereby making the poem an extravagant

⁵⁹ As quoted in Leishman, p. 152.

⁶⁰ Wesley Milgate, " 'Air and Angels' and the Discrimination of Experience," in Just So Much Honour. ed. Peter Amadeus Fiore (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972). p. 164.

insult to women.

The speaker begins the poem by asserting that when he first encountered his mistress he discovered in her the ideal of love which he thought only existed in his mind:

Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
Before I knew thy face or name;
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame
Angels affect us oft, and worshipp'd be;
Still when, to where thou wert, I came
Some lovely glorious nothing I did see....⁶¹

Not content to love some "glorious nothing," the speaker recognizes that his love must not be focused on a spiritual and abstract ideal, but must also be allowed a physical home:

But my soul, whose child love is,
Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing
do,
More subtle than the parent is
Love must not be, but take a body too;
And therefore what thou wert, and who,
I bid Love ask, and how
That it assume thy body, I allow,
And fix itself in thy lip, eye, and brow.⁶²

For his love to be real it must attach itself to the woman's physical self as well as her spiritual self. By finding a home in his lover's "lip, eye, and brow" the speaker's love is able to exist on earth.

The speaker's love, which was unsatisfied in worshipping a "shapeless flame" and "glorious nothing," and which then

⁶¹ Redpath, p. 196.

⁶² Redpath, p. 196.

moved on to worshipping his lady's physical charms, soon finds that even they are insufficient:

Whilst thus to ballast love I thought.
 And so more steadily to have gone,
 With wares which would sink admiration
 I saw I had love's pinnacle overfraught;
 Every thy hair for love to work upon
 Is much too much, some fitter must be sought;
 For, nor in nothing, nor in things
 Extreme, and scattering bright, can love
 inhere....⁶³

"Whereas at first the lover's devotion was set upon a nothing, a defective object, now in his mistress's body it is set upon too much, something excessive."⁶⁴ The speaker's love needs a more moderate object to attach itself to, something that can accommodate both his spiritual esteem and his physical desire.

It is this search for the "fitter" home of his love that turns the lover's attention to the idea of how angels take bodies to manifest themselves on earth:

Then, as an Angel, face, and wings
 Of air, not pure as it, yet pure, doth wear,
 So thy love may be my love's sphere....⁶⁵

For an angel to appear on earth, it must take for its body the material substance that is nearest to it in purity: air. Though "pure," the air body of the angel is not so pure

⁶³ Redpath, p. 196.

⁶⁴ Milgate, p. 164.

⁶⁵ Redpath, p. 196.

as the angel itself, for it is material and not spiritual. In this relation between angels and their bodies of air the lover finds the answer to the problem of where his love can find a fit home: "Man's love, also, must find for its body what is nearest to it, the love of woman."⁶⁶ Unsatisfied with living in the extremes of either idealistic spiritual love, or passionate physical love, the speaker's love finds a home in the love of his mistress.⁶⁷

Thus far, the poem is a "serious and uncynical, even idealistic, inquiry into the nature of love between men and women; and the woman has been paid hyperbolic compliments."⁶⁸ It is not until the final three lines that there arises any controversy concerning the intent of the poem:

Just such disparity
As is 'twixt Air and Angels' purity,
'Twixt women's love, and men's, will ever be.⁶⁹

As pointed out previously it is because of these lines that many critics consider the poem an insult to women. The end of the poem is sometimes taken as a "calculated surprise" and a "surprising reversal" of the evocation of perfect love

⁶⁶ Helen Gardner, The Business of Criticism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959). p. 67.

⁶⁷ This idea of satisfactory love coming only through a balance of physical and spiritual love is also found in "The Primrose" and, in a more tangled way, in "Love's Alchemy."

⁶⁸ Gardner, The Business, p. 68.

⁶⁹ Redpath, p. 196.

which concerns the majority of the poem.⁷⁰ However, an examination of these lines in consideration of the Renaissance ideas regarding equality between men and women reveals them to be far less offensive than supposed.

In the sixteenth century and earlier the idea "that men's love is superior to women's was to the theologians, the scholastics, and the Neo-Platonists alike - to everyone, indeed -literally matter of fact."⁷¹ Not only was woman's love deemed inferior to men's, but women themselves were deemed inferior to men. In Leone Ebero's Dialoghi d'Amore, which Gardner assures us Donne knew well, the male lover, Philo, discourses to his mistress Sophia:

... the spiritual loves the corporel world
as a man loves a woman, and the corporel
loves the spiritual world as woman loves
man. Suffer me to say, O Sophia, that the
love of man, who gives, is more perfect
than that of woman, who receives.⁷²

In The Holy State, Thomas Fuller notes that "the soul of man is planted so high, that he overshoots such low matters as lie levell to a woman's eye."⁷³ In Spenser's Fairie Queene things "imperfect" and "mortal" are deemed feminine while

⁷⁰ Leonard Unger as quoted in Gardner, p. 69.

⁷¹ Milgate, p. 167.

⁷² As quoted in Gardner, The Business, p. 73.

⁷³ As quoted in Milgate, p. 167.

those things "perfect" and "immortall" are deemed masculine.⁷⁴ As Gardner notes: "In light of the all-pervading belief that the word 'masculine' means 'perfect,' and the word 'feminine' means 'imperfect,' the closing statement of "Air and Angels" loses its sting."⁷⁵ Given this background, what appears to the twentieth-century reader as a direct insult to women to the sixteenth-century reader would appear a more than fair statement. The concluding lines of "Air and Angels" must not be considered a reversal of the ideas presented through the rest of the poem, but as an extension of them and a means of ending the poem "in the most complimentary, and indeed truly loving way possible."⁷⁶

Clearly the critical commonplace that Donne's lovers are distinct from the Petrarchan lover due to their cynical and unfeeling attitude toward women is too general a statement to be true and relies heavily on a one dimensional interpretation of both poets' work. Each has a complexity in his poetry that defies his being cast into the simplified and unfair roles of Petrarch the idealist and Donne the Cynic. The Petrarchan portrait of Laura contains too many flaws to be considered the work of a purely idealizing artist. The Petrarchan lover's anger from rejection, the accusations concerning Laura's

⁷⁴ As quoted in Gardner, The Business, p. 73.

⁷⁵ Gardner, The Business, p. 73.

⁷⁶ Milgate, p. 167.

vanity, the struggle to cease his consuming love and his attack on the fickle nature of women's love assure us that however glorified his conception of Laura, the Petrarchan lover is fully aware that she is a human creature and not a goddess.

There has also been ample evidence that there is a greater tenderness, vulnerability and appreciation of women and their feelings in Donne's work than he is usually given credit for. Even those poems that have long been used as proof of Donne's cynical nature have been shown to have a complexity and subtlety of feeling that makes terming them as merely cynical seem simple and unappreciative of the artistry they involve. Obviously the conception of women is different between Donne and Petrarch, but they are not so far apart as has often been assumed.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCEITS

One important aspect of both Donne and Petrarch's work is the use of conceits. A conceit is defined by Professor Schelling as an "effort on the part of the poet to deck out his thought in striking, apt and original figures of speech and illustration," and as "any conventional device of the poet - fancy, figure, or illustration - used to give individual, transcendent expression to the thing he has to say."¹ The conceit is a way for the love poet to "recapture his ecstasy through the veil of ordinary life."² Since the poet's experience is personal "he must find something symbolical of his emotion if he is to describe it to another mind."³ It is through conceits that Petrarch is able to characterize passionate yearning as an intense fire, and Donne is able to compare the death of a mistress to the end of the world.

Conceits enable the poet to extend beyond the limiting possibilities and mundane realities of everyday life of the real world to create an independent world of love that has its own natural events and its own laws of life and death. This lovers' world is exclusively peopled by the lover and his beloved, and the female serves as this microcosm's life-giving sun. Both the conceits of the lover's world and the

¹ As quoted in R. M. Alden, "The Lyrical Conceit of the Elizabethans," Studies in Philology, 14 (1917), p. 130.

² Pearson, p. 38.

³ Pearson, p. 38.

female as that world's sun are common in the work of Petrarch and Donne.

The lover's microcosm, in which the male's life and happiness are commanded by the moods and emotions of his beloved, is central to the Canzoniere. The outside world co-exists with the lover's world, but is seen as distinct and isolated from it. It often only has value as a background by which the poet can define the state of the lover's world. In sonnet CCXIX Petrarch contrasts the world outside and the natural sun with the world of love and its female sun:

The early singing and weeping birds
In the valleys at dawn resound so tender,
And the murmur of crystal water-words
On brooks lucid and liquid, fresh and slender.

She, whose face is of snow, whose hair of gold,
In whose love never were deceits or chances,
Awakes me with the sound of loving dances
Combing the white fleece of her lover old.

Then I wake up and I salute the Dawn
And her Sun, and the other I love more,
Who dazzled me and does it as before.

I saw them both sometime shine on the lawn
In the same moment, the same point and hour;
One extinguished the stars, one the sun's power.⁴

The parallels between the two worlds are quite clear. For once, the lover in Petrarch's poems seems to have been reciprocated in his love and he wakes to greet the morning in an unusually cheerful mood. He notes how the birds sing, the

⁴ Petrarch, p. 321.

brooks murmur and the sun shines. Yet, despite the sun's efforts, it cannot outshine the lover's personal sun, his mistress, who is able to eclipse even nature's own light. Nature's beauty and light are viewed merely as complementary to the greater beauty and light of his mistress.

The happy world presented in sonnet CCXIX is not indicative of the lover's usual state in the Canzoniere. Although the lover may sometimes describe his delight as his starry eyes "sparkle and move" admiringly over the heaven that is Laura's brow (CLX), it is more common for him to complain that when Laura "lets roam her scornful eyes" she deprives him of her light and plunges him into dark despair (CLXXIX). For example, in IX, the lover complains that as long as Laura, his sun, refuses his love the winter shall never pass into spring:

When the planet that keeps track of the hours
Returns to Taurus and that house adorns,
A vigour falls from the resplendent horns
That dresses all the world with flaming flowers;

And not only what is before our eyes,
The shores and hills, with many blooms he fills,
But inside, where the days never arise,
He makes pregnant of him the earthly rills,

So that one fruit and the other be won.
Thus she who among women is the sun
Does in me, moving her eyes' beam that burns,

Create actions and thoughts and words of love;
Yet, no matter the way she likes to move
Them, springtime for me never returns.⁵

⁵ Petrarch, p. 11.

Sonnet XLI details the tumultuous effects created in the lover's world as a result of the absence of Laura:

When from its proper place is seen to move
The tree that Phoebus loved in human form,
Vulcan over his work does sweat and storm
To renew the fierce lightnings dealt by Jove,

Who now thunders, now sends snow and now rain,
No more Caesar than Janus is his care,
The earth sheds tears, the sun cannot remain,
Because he sees his beloved elsewhere.

The cruel Mars and Saturn their boldness resume,
The cruel stars; and Orion in arms
The luckless pilots' shrouds and rudders breaks;

Aeolus is felt by us in all his gloom,
By Juno, Neptune too, when she forsakes
Us with that face that even angels charms.⁶

While Laura is seen to affect the very universe in XLI her influence is more specific in CCXVI:

I weep all day; and at night, when the poor
Mortals can take a rest after their fears,
My ills are doubled and I weep still more;
Like this I spend my time in shedding tears.

With this grim humour I consume my sight,
My heart with sorrow; among animals
I am so much the last, that Love appals
Me at all hours and exiles me from quiet.

Alas! going from one sun to other sun,
From one to other shade, I have now run
Most of the course of this death known as life.

I grieve for others' fault, not for my strife;
Because she sees me, Pity, torn by doubt,

⁶ Petrarch, p. 69.

Burn in this fire, yet does not help me out.⁷

The conditions in the lover's world in the Canzoniere usually contrast unfavourably with those in the real world. While the outside world rests quietly after a weary day, the Petrarchan lover is condemned to continue the tearful hours of his day. His world is persistently assaulted by storm clouds and is almost always shrouded in a misty gloom; and when the real world is awakening to a new spring the Petrarchan lover is left to his eternal winter. Despite occasional glimpses into a happy and bright lover's world the Petrarchan lover is otherwise perpetually condemned to a sorrowful existence. With little exception, almost the exact opposite situation is true of the lovers in Donne's Songs and Sonnets.

The poem from the Songs and Sonnets that is closest to Petrarch in its treatment of the separate world of the unrequited lover is "Twickenham Garden." The sad lover goes to his mistress' garden to "seek the spring," but finds instead that the beauty and pleasantness of his surroundings only make his world seem all the more unbearable by comparison. His emotional state would best suit the winter, and the spring's beauty and renewed life seem to mock him. Yet he remains in the garden because it reminds him of his mistress. Memories of his mistress drive him deeper into his

⁷ Petrarch, p. 317.

own sorrowful world, and, therefore, the bright world of nature and the dark lover's world of unrequited love are forced to co-exist while remaining forever apart. There is little originality on Donne's part in dealing with the conceit of the lover's world in "Twickenham Garden." As was seen in an earlier chapter he does develop the metamorphic images used by Petrarch, but his use of the particular conceit of the lover's world is rather conventional.

"The Sun Rising" presents a more original employment of the conceits of the lover's world and the girl as that world's sun, and is more typical of how Donne deals with Petrarchan conceits. Lying in bed the lovers are awakened by the rising sun. The male, annoyed at the intrusion of light, condemns the sun as a "Busy old fool" who has no right to bother his mistress or him for "lover's seasons" are independent of the sun's motion.⁸ Asserting that love knows no seasons, climates, months or hours, "which are the rags of time," he tells the sun to mind its own business. The sun's duty is not to interrupt lovers, but rather to "chide/ Late schoolboys, and sour prentices," to rouse court huntsmen to ride and ants to harvest.

Finding it insufficient to insult the sun and tell it its business, the male proceeds to denigrate its powers. He mocks the sun by declaring that he could eclipse its light

⁸ Redpath, p. 232.

merely by winking his eyes, if only he could stand to lose sight of his mistress so long. Furthermore, the eyes of his mistress grant him enough light to render the sun superfluous, and possibly even blind it with their brilliance. The lady is all the sun that the lovers' world could ever need.

The rest of the poem details the male's efforts to prove to the sun that the lovers' bedroom is its domain and that its job to warm the world is accomplished by warming them. The lovers embody "all States, and all Princes," all kings and the "Indias, of spice, and mine." Thus, the sun's duty is to them and to no one else: "This bed thy centre is, these walls thy sphere."

The application of the girl as the light giving sun to the lovers' world in "The Sun Rising" remains essentially unchanged from its use in the Canzoniere. Donne's lover, like Petrarch's, declares that the only sun he needs is his mistress, who is far more powerful than the real sun. The only real difference is that the girl in Donne's poem lights a world of mutual love, while Petrarch's poems have Laura unknowingly shining on an otherwise dark world of frustration and defeat. The real contrast between the poets comes in their use of the lovers' world conceit. The lover in Petrarch's poems envies the warmth and light of the outside world since his world of love is forever deprived of those things when its sun, Laura, is absent. Conversely, the lover in Donne's poem complains that nature's sun is too much with

him. His world has all the light and warmth it needs from his mistress, and any outside help is strictly interference.

In "The Sun Rising" Donne employs a far more literal view of the conceit of the lover's world than Petrarch does. Petrarch employs the conceit simply as a means to contrast the unrequited lover's misery with the life and light of nature, and to illustrate how that lover can live a mentally dark existence even while walking through a summer's day. Donne litters his lover's world with princes, kings, states, spices and mines. This endows it with a substance and reality that Petrarch's lacks. The outside world of "The Sun Rising," with its schoolboys, huntsmen, and apprentices, also has a greater realism and visual quality than found in the Canzoniere. It creates an effective comparison between the calm, loving, timeless world of the bedroom and the more chaotic clock-driven world outside.

"The Anniversary" is another of the Songs and Sonnets that applies Petrarch's conceit of the lover's world to a stable, mutual love situation. The poem is a celebration of the day that the lovers first met. The male speaker immediately distinguishes between the lover's world and the natural world by noting that the world of love remains unaffected by the decay of age:

All Kings, and all their favourites,
All glory of honours, beauties, wits,
The Sun itself, which makes times, as they pass,
Is elder by a year, now, than it was
When thou and I first one another saw:

All other things to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay....⁹

While all else "to their destruction draw", the lovers, in their own world and bound by their own laws and seasons, "hath no decay." Since they constitute their own world their "love is alone exempt from time and makes them unique, superior to all the world's honours and riches and even to the sun."¹⁰

Despite his assurance of his love's "everlasting day", the speaker's thoughts turn to death in stanza two. Like princes in the real world they too, "Who Prince enough in one another be," must die. Yet, while death may separate their bodies, "Their souls, permanently filled with their love, will, in heaven, continue to love with the same or even greater intensity than now."¹¹ Even in death, they will remain united in love.

Returning to the present moment on earth, the speaker develops the conceit of the lover's world. Declaring his mistress and himself kings, with each other as their only subjects, he argues that since treason in their world can only be committed by one of them they are forever safe in love. Happy in their isolation, the lovers announce the second year of their reign and anticipate being together for "Years and

⁹ Redpath, p. 210.

¹⁰ A. J. Smith, John Donne: The Songs and Sonnets, p. 55.

¹¹ Redpath, p. 211.

years."

As in "The Sun Rising," and the Petrarch poems mentioned thus far, "The Anniversary" presents a clear separation between the lovers' world and the natural world outside. The difference between the poetry of Petrarch and Donne is once again illustrated in the relationship between the two worlds. While the lover in Petrarch's poems is almost perpetually gazing out from a dark frustrating world into one of light and beauty, the lovers in "The Anniversary" thrive in a stable, sharing, and self-sufficient world of love that contrasts favourably with the unstable outside world of decay and change. Change is one thing that will not affect the world of love in Donne's poem for it will survive even the death of the lovers. Donne's treatment of the conceit is again more literal than Petrarch's and the detail of making the lovers kings over their own world endows it with a concrete quality and a realism that is missing in the Canzoniere. Donne grants the lovers' world a substance and definition that allows it to be recognizable to, if not accessible to, the outside world. Just as the lovers have their own sun in the form of the mistress, they also experience distinctive weather phenomena that are related to the quality of their love relationships. Extreme emotions caused by unrequited love or merely the parting of lovers induce sighs and tears in the natural world, but in the lovers' world such events are far more disastrous. In the lovers' world tears can produce

flooding waters and sighs can develop into storm force winds. Just as floods or hurricanes are significant events in the real world, tears and sighs have a similarly significant effect in the rather closed system of the lovers' world. But tears and sighs are not the only dangerous things in this small world: passion can have the unfortunate side effect of igniting the lover's heart into fiery balls, and obduracy can reduce a young lady to an icy statue.

The various conceits of tear-floods, sigh-tempests, fires of passion and icy ladies are the backbone of Petrarch's Canzoniere. In his painful desire for Laura, the Petrarchan lover will rain bitter tears and have them swept around in winds of his sighs to create storms of passionate, yet unrequited love. Seeing his beloved, the lover may be consumed by fires of love, be cooled down considerably by an ice glance from Laura, or be chilled by her aloofness. Examples of these conceits are found in sonnet XVII:

A rain of bitter tears falls from my face
And a tormenting wind blows with my sighs
Whenever toward you I turn my eyes,
Whose absence cuts me from the human race.

It is true that the mild and gentle smiles
Do soothe the ardour of my strong desire
And rescue me from my martyrdom's fire
While I intently look upon your guiles;

But my spirits become suddenly cold
When I see, leaving, the acts I behold
Stolen from me by my stars' fateful ray;

Loosened at last by the amorous keys,
The soul deserts the heart to seek your breeze,

And in deep thought it tears itself away.¹²

In canzone LXVI, the lover's rejected heart, his sighs, and his tears are compared to damp weather:

And in my heart that grows colder than ice
I have amassed from heavy thoughts a fog
Such as will rise at times out of these valleys
Gathered and closed against the loving winds
And all encircled by stagnating rivers,
When from the sky slowly descends the rain.¹³

Canzone LV reveals that not only do the lover's tears fail to extinguish the fire in his heart, but instead carry the flames higher:

That fire which I believed had been put out
By the cold weather and years that run,
Anguish and flame renew with passion...

... Though I shed thousand and more tears,
the mark
Of grief comes to the eyes out of the dark
Where the heart keeps concealed and spark and
stone;
Not as it was before, but mightier grown.

What fire could be stilled and forced to die
By the water that from my sad eyes falls?¹⁴

Taken out of context, Petrarch's employment of floods of tears, gales of sighs and burning hearts seems ridiculously melodramatic, but within the lovers' world they are reasonable

¹² Petrarch, p. 19.

¹³ Petrarch, p.103.

¹⁴ Petrarch, p. 91.

and appropriate. In the lovers' world it is love that defines the natural order and any event that disturbs that order, such as the rejection of love, will have a significant effect. Tears for love, in the world of love, can quite believably cause a flood, and passion can come in the form of a searing flame in the heart.

A study of Donne's treatment of Petrarch's various conceits of tears, sighs, fires and ice reveals how he treats conventional devices in an original manner without ridiculing or effacing them. There is often an element of parody and humorous exaggeration in his treatment of these various conceits, but never does Donne extend parody and humour to mockery or disdain to suggest a cynical disregard for the conventions.

"The Computation" concerns a Petrarchan lover itemizing the trials and "deaths" he has endured since his lover left the day before. Equating one hour in the natural world to one hundred years in the lovers' world, he declares that of all the years his mistress has been away "Tears drown'd one hundred, and sighs blew out two." In other words, the lover spent about three hours weeping and sighing for his estranged mistress. By treating the Petrarchan conceits literally, Donne is able to parody Petrarch's love conventions. Although the poem treats the conceits humorously, it does not represent a revolt against them. The poem uses exaggeration of the already hyperbolic Petrarchan conceits to create an humorous,

but not vindictive, parody.

"The Canonization" presents interesting uses of several of Petrarch's conceits. The speaker in the poem is arguing in defense of his love affair, which someone, perhaps a concerned friend, has suggested he should abandon. The speaker, intent on keeping his mistress, asks what harm his love is doing:

What merchant's ships have my sighs drown'd?
 Who says my tears have overflow'd his ground?
 When did my colds a forward spring remove?
 Wher did those heats which my veins fill
 Add one man to the plaguy bill?¹⁵

Considering that each question the speaker asks in this passage relates to the conceits of sigh-tempests, tear-floods, and hot and cold passions, it appears that the speaker could be talking to a Petrarchan lover who fears that his friend will become a fellow victim to the usual fates of a spurned Petrarchan lover. By taking the conceits literally and applying them to actual experience, (that is, experience in the natural world and not the lover's world), the speaker calms his listener's anxieties. He is able to defeat his "listener's serious objections by turning them into laughter."¹⁶ By applying the phenomena of the lover's world to the possibilities and limitations of the outside world, the

¹⁵ Redpath, p. 237.

¹⁶ Pinka, pp. 128-129.

speaker is able to show that his love affair is harmless. The irony of the situation is that the speaker parodies the conceits of the lover's world in order to defend that world.

Perhaps the most interesting treatment of the Petrarchan sighs and tears is found in Donne's "Love's Diet." Recognizing that Love's food is a lover's own sighs and tears, the speaker sees that Love has grown fat on excess of both from the speaker himself. In an effort to free himself of a painful love, and Love of its "burdenous corpulence," he put Love on a diet of "discretion." To get Love back in condition the speaker limits the number of loving sweets he may have: he reduces Love to one sigh a day, cuts down his ration of tears, burns all the letters he dictates to his mistress and disparages her notes to him as merely form letters that she sends to a list of lovers. In this way the speaker is able to reclaim his "buzzard love", and fly from woman to woman and relationship to relationship without being burdened with an excessive love.

In "Love's Diet" Donne plays with Petrarch's conceits in a manner that would be out of place in the Canzoniere. The sighs and tears of the Petrarchan lover are transformed from badges of pain to the meat and wine of a corpulent god of Love. The situation, in which the lover must diet away his excessive love, grants the conceits a humorous quality. The Petrarchan dilemma of the unrequited lover is treated in a

playful way that enhances its dimensions rather than ridicules its sincerity.

In the natural world when a lover is separated from his beloved it is not unusual that he will keep a memento (e.g. a painting) of her to continue feeling her presence. Simple and practical methods are, of course, unthinkable in the lover's world. In the lover's world the image of the mistress can be seen in the lover's own eyes where her likeness has been indelibly etched since he first saw her (hence his feeling that he sees her everywhere) or in his heart, where her engraved image rests as a permanent reminder of his devotion. These conceits of the mistress' image on the lover's eyes or heart are consistently used in the Canzoniere to characterize the lover's obsession with Laura, and are developed and treated more literally by Donne in the Songs and Sonnets.

That Laura's image is etched on her lover's heart from the first day he sees her is evident in sonnet CLVII, where he laments of when "That ever-cruel, ever-honoured day/Laid so deep in my heart her image true."¹⁷ In sonnet XCVI he notes that while he is "overcome by the long wait/ and by the endless battle of my sighs", he is forever enslaved by "the enchanting face that in my breast/ Is painted."¹⁸ In canzone

¹⁷ Petrarch, p. 249.

¹⁸ Petrarch, p. 151.

C, the speaker laments that:

...the face and words that remain here
Magnificently carved inside my heart,
Make my eyes fond of weeping more and more.¹⁹

In LXXV, he speaks of Laura's "lovely eyes whose sparkling gem/ Is always in my heart with its strong glare."²⁰

In canzone XXX, the Petrarchan lover notes that Laura's "fair face" and hair pleased him so much when he first saw them that he keeps them in his eyes "and always shall." In CLVIII, he explains that he wishes to escape his amorous pain, but he is forever reminded of it by Laura's image on his eyes:

Wheresoever I turn my tired eyes' stare
To subdue the seduction that inspires
Them, I find a fair lady painted there
By someone who makes green all my desires.²¹

Just as in the use of the picture on the heart conceit, Petrarch's use of the picture on the eye conceit is not a literal one, but merely a hyperbolic way of expressing Laura's constant presence in the thoughts and affections of her lover. The existence of the pictures is never assumed or asserted, but they are used in metaphorical ways to relate to the reader just how fixated the speaker is with Laura.

As has been suggested above, Donne's innovation of the

¹⁹ Petrarch, p. 155.

²⁰ Petrarch, p. 129.

²¹ Petrarch, p. 251.

conceits of pictures on hearts and eyes is to treat them literally, and then to create dramatic situations around them. In "A Valediction: of Weeping" it is the actual reflection of lovers in each other's eyes that creates the images in the tears they shed at parting. The images on the tears are then used as a basis for the argument of the poem. While looking at his beloved the speaker notices that each of his tears are stamped with his mistress' image and, in this way, given value. The tears are not only fruits of their grief, but also emblems of the pain their separation will cause. The tears and images, falling and breaking on the ground, resolve to nothing and are symbolic of the emptiness and "death" each lover will experience when apart. The lover's world enters into the poem in stanza two, when the lover points out that just as a ball, covered in copies of "Europe, Afric, and an Asia," becomes a globe, so too do the tears, bearing his mistress' image, become worlds. When the lady and the lover cry, their tears mix to overflow their tear-worlds. "Thus the woman creates, and destroys his heaven and earth, his very existence."²² In this way, the lover's world is in real danger of being destroyed by his parting from his beloved.

In the final stanza the lover tries his best to comfort his mistress. Arguing that in their world she has a power comparable to the moon's on the earth's tides, he entreats

²² Pinka, p. 35.

her not to weep him dead in her arms or "To teach the sea, what it may do too soon."²³ He also tells her not to allow the wind to find examples in her sighs and thus create hazardous sailing. In an effort to stop her sighs and tears he tells her that since they "sigh one another's breath/ Who'er sighs most, is cruellest, and hastes the other's death."²⁴ The conceits operate in this poem with a greater significance than they do in the Canzoniere. They are not simply devices of decorative language, but, given their literal treatment, are pivotal to the arguments and emotions of the poem.

"Witchcraft by a Picture" is another poem in which Donne treats the conceit of pictures on hearts and eyes in a literal fashion. At the moment of parting from his lover, the speaker looks into her eyes to see his own image drowning in her tears. He remarks that if she practised the magic of killing people by making and destroying pictures of them, she could easily now do so to him. By kissing away her tears, he takes away the worries of his drowning through magic. He then leaves his mistress and, once gone, the only picture left to his lady is the one on her heart. This he believes to be free from harm, for if her heart is true it will be "from all malice free" or, if not, it is still safe for she cannot harm

²³ Redpath, p. 253.

²⁴ Redpath, p. 253.

it without harming her own heart.

"Witchcraft by a Picture" is a very interesting employment of the picture conceits. The pictures are not only treated literally, but assumed to have some power. The conceits are not simply sentimental hyperbole, as in the Canzoniere, but have valid functions in suggesting the kind of relationship between the poem's lovers. The speaker is obviously unsure of the lady's affections and takes no chances by leaving any of his vulnerable images lying about for her to work her magic upon. By treating the images as pliable, substantial realities Donne elevates their functional value from mere lovesick fantasies in the Canzoniere to a motivating force that not only helps express emotion, but instigates both emotion and action.

A novel use of the picture on a heart conceit is found in "The Broken Heart." In this poem the lover is once again unsuccessfully soliciting the love from a cruel mistress. The lover enters the poem as a cocksure young rake who can "devour" ten mistresses in less than an hour. He then encounters a woman that he can truly love and not just lust after. Her rejection of his sincere passion shivers his heart into a hundred pieces. The heart, unable to love again because of its shattered condition, now only reflects a "hundred lesser faces" of women he can "like, wish, and adore," but whom he cannot love. Only a whole heart is worthy to carry the picture of the speaker's true love and when that

heart is broken it can no longer reflect that love's image or be capable of true love. Thus, Donne gives an inventive twist to the Petrarchan conceit of pictures on the heart and develops it artfully.

In "The Damp," the speaker confronts his mistress and projects imaginatively ahead to the day when he will die for love. His friends, desirous to know the cause of his death, will subject his body to an autopsy. When they view his heart they will find her picture there as proof of her guilt in causing his death. Her crimes will not stop there, for once his friends see her image on his heart, they too will die for love of her. In this way, the lady shall be guilty not only of murder, but of massacre. The speaker later goes on to tell her that such victories over him and his friends are not only unworthy of her, but offer no pleasure to anyone. If she wants a real victory she can enjoy and boast about, she should try hand to hand combat in his bed where, he assures her, "Naked you've odds enough of any man."

Each of the poems looked at which employ the conceits of pictures on hearts and eyes do so in a way that is an extension of Petrarch's application. Petrarch used the conceits as a means to express how the Petrarchan lover's obsession with Laura causes him to ache continually for her and to feel her presence everywhere. In the Songs and Sonnets, the conceits have a greater significance, are treated in a more literal fashion and are more instrumental in the

action of the poem. In "A Valediction: of Weeping," the pictures in the lovers' eyes are actually there and not just in the imagination of a solitary lover. Their presence suggests a succession of related conceits that form the basis of the poem. In "Witchcraft by a Picture," the pictures on both the mistress' eyes and heart are endowed with a threatening existence that grants them a significance and existence not seen in Petrarch. In "The Broken Glass," the pictures on the lover's heart are treated literally, as symbols of the quality of love afforded to the ladies pictured there. The speaker's true love would have consumed his entire heart, but since her rejection shattered it, it can only reflect the numerous images of lesser loves who can only command a small portion of the speaker's love. In "The Damp," the image on the lover's heart is so real that it can not only be seen by others, but has the power to kill them. In each instance, the conceits are transformed by Donne into more effective poetic tools than Petrarch forges and creates from them situations and logical extensions that are not found in the Canzoniere.

One of the more distressing characteristics of the lover's world is that the lover himself is often the victim of the conceit of death from unrequited love. The lady, as "the spirit that animates his microcosm," his world's sun,

has power over the lover's existence.²⁵ Denied her presence, the lover is much like the real world without its sun: an entity merely biding time till its ultimate extinction through deprivation. Such, of course, is the position of the unrequited lover in the Canzoniere. Denied a fulfilling mutual love, continually being rebuffed by Laura and finding his life bereft of its most precious joys and desires, the lover is in a state of living death. Forever receiving scorn in return for his loving pleas the Petrarchan lover is in a constant fear that his unrequited love will cause his early death.

In sonnet XXXVIII, the lover complains that the effect of being denied the sight of Laura's eyes because of her veil is not only the destruction of all his joy, but the hastening of his death:

Orso, there never was a pond or rill,...

Nor other obstacle that I will blame,
Whatever most annoys the human eye,
As a veil that obscures her look's dear flame
And seems to say: - Now weep until you die. -

And that lowering of eyes which smothers all
My joy - be it humility or pride -
Will be the cause of my early downfall.²⁶

In canzone XXXIX, the lover notes that he must flee "the onslaught of the eyes/ In which my death and Love lodge" so

²⁵ Ruffo-Fiore, p. 100.

²⁶ Petrarch, p. 65.

as "Not to be near that one who is my death."²⁷

Fully aware that it is Laura's obduracy that is causing his suffering and leading him by degrees toward death, in sonnet CCLVI, the lover looks to the afterlife for his vengeance:

I would I could take vengeance against her
Who by looking and speaking has me slain,
Who, to increase my grief, hides and flees where
I am put out of her sweet eyes' disdain.

She consumes hour by hour my weary soul,
Sucking my hard existence clean away,
Roaring upon my heart with a lion's call:
Rushes to meet her threat, there to succumb.

It would indeed be a surprise to me
If weeping, talking, embracing its dear
It should not break her sleep; if she will hear.²⁸

Similarly in sonnet LXXXII the lover declares that he has ended up hating himself and his tears. For vengeance he demands to die and have Laura's name written on his tombstone for everyone to recognize her as his scornful mistress. Thus, Petrarch's death conceits involve not only dying for love, but also revenge. The desire for a punishment of the mistress often extends to, and is even committed from, the afterlife. The problem is that Petrarch's resolve to punish his lady is either very weak, such as in CCLVI, when his vengeance melts into an assault of kisses and embraces, or it is impotent, as

²⁷ Petrarch, p. 67.

²⁸ Petrarch, p. 361.

in LXXXII, when placing Laura's name on his tombstone as his murderess is the cruellest punishment he can think of. Fortunately, the lovers of the Songs and Sonnets do not go to their deaths so willingly, or inflict such ineffectual vengeance when they do die.

In "The Damp" Donne develops some interesting variations on the conceit of death for love. The poem's rejected lover imagines a possible scenario arising from his love-induced death. The lover's friends, curious to find the cause of his untimely death, perform an autopsy to expose a picture of his mistress on his heart. This remarkable discovery clearly points to that particular female's guilt in the lover's untimely death. Already dead from association with his cruel mistress, the lover fears that his friends will be affected with a "sudden damp of love" and also die for love of her.

After cataloguing the deaths possible from rejected love the lover hopes that his mistress will be less reluctant to give him her favour. He declares that the deaths of himself and his friends would be "poor victories" and that a greater conquest would be won in defeating her own "disdain" and "Honour," the qualities that keep her from his embraces. He argues that instead of killing him through rejection, that she should "kill" him as a woman, naked and in bed.

Donne's originality in "The Damp" lies in two areas. First, he treats the death from love conceit in a more literal manner than Petrarch. While the lover's death in the

Canzoniere may be real enough to warrant a tombstone, Donne's lover is granted an autopsy.²⁹ This reveals that an heartless woman was indeed the cause of his demise. The lady's power to kill is so genuine that even the lover's unfortunate friends fall victim to her lethal charms. The second innovation comes in the lover's use of the concept of his love-induced death as a weapon of seduction. He argues that his death is not only pathetic and senseless, but also below his mistress' abilities and integrity. What is in the Canzoniere merely an imaginative way of expressing a fatal attraction to a scornful mistress or a petulant and feeble form of revenge, evolves in "The Damp" into the basis for a renewed attempt at seducing the offending lady. By describing his death as an unfortunate event that can be more happily played out in bed, Donne's lover removes the self-pitying and pathetic nature of the conceit and even grants it a humorous quality that is lacking in the Canzoniere.

In "The Funeral," the lover is speaking from his deathbed, where he lies a victim of unrequited love. Wound around his arm is a wreath of hair which has been presented to the dying lover by his uncaring mistress. He implores the person who will shroud his body not to remove the hair, for

²⁹ While the autopsy is an innovation on Petrarch's use of the death for love conceit, it does not originate with Donne. Both the ideas of the autopsy and the discovery of the mistress' picture as the cause of death were previously used in two strambottii (89 and 126) by Serafino. See Guss, p. 76.

he attributes to it the powers of his "outward Soul" and the properties to preserve his body from death's decay.

Our initial impression of the lover, therefore, is of the perfect Petrarchan lover, gracefully submitting to unrequited love's death sentence and gallantly flattering his lady executioner even as his breath fails. He seems to be the traditional "lover willing to accept a subservience to his elevated mistress."³⁰ Then suddenly doubt assails him. He considers that the gift of hair may not have been so beneficially intended, but rather as a symbol of his pain "As prisoners then are manacled, when they're condemn'd to die."³¹ This new consideration leaves the lover undecided as to the lady's true design in the gift of hair. Still unresolved the lover asks that the wreath of hair be buried with him anyway for since he is love's martyr the hairs may be taken as relics by unsuspecting lovers and breed idolatry. Also, by taking the hair to the grave with him, the lover determines that he is able to dignify the lady for either way she intended the gift, for by doing so he is "either ascribing to it the preserving power of the soul, or taking part of her to corruption with him."³²

The lover in "The Funeral" is typically Petrarchan in

³⁰ Arthur F. Marotti, John Donne, Coterie Poet (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p. 219.

³¹ Redpath, p. 267.

³² Gardner, The Elegies, p. 223.

his unfortunate situation of dying for love, yet is uncharacteristically detached in his consideration of his predicament and the lady who placed him in it. The lover knows that a "reasonable man does not humbly die for love while worshipping a lock of his lady's hair" or submit unquestioningly to his fate.³³ This doubt qualifies the lover's attitude toward his mistress: he is Petrarchan enough to die for love, yet objective enough to question whether the lady he is dying for is really worth the sacrifice. His duality of purpose in burying the hair grants him the distinction of both gallantly submitting to a typical Petrarchan death while simultaneously enacting a Petrarchan vengeance.

Another poem that details a deathbed vengeance is "The Will." The death conceits are again granted literal interpretation and the lover's death is so imminent that he proceeds to make his will. The lover's disillusionment with his lover's world is reflected in his cynical bequests to the outside world. Each beneficiary receives something which proves as useless, insulting or superfluous as his mistress held his love to be. The sea is given his tears, which will prove as noticeable to it as a new lover to a woman with twenty others; his pensiveness goes to clowns, who have about as much use for it as his mistress for his love; and his

³³ Guss, p. 62.

"brazen medals" go to the hungry, who will find the gift as inappropriate as his chaste mistress deems his love. This witty cataloguing of his will continues until the lover declares what he ultimately hopes to achieve through his death. By his death, the lover is able to free himself of his mistress, the lover's world and Love itself. The lady will be deprived of his worshipping attention, her "beauties will be no more worth/ Than gold in mines, where none doth draw it forth," and her graces "no more use shall have/ Than a sundial in a grave."³⁴ His world of love will be destroyed by his death since it depends on his existence and Love cannot be worshipped by a dead lover.

"The Apparition" is perhaps Donne's most dramatically effective poem. Again, the lover presented is fearful of his eventual death from unrequited love, but unlike the lovers in "The Will" and "The Funeral," he does not mask his pain and resentment behind gallantry or subtle vengeance. This particular lover defiantly confronts his mistress while she languishes in bed with a sleeping sexual partner and accuses her of his murder. He then promises supernatural vindication for his death:

When by thy scorn, O murd'ress, I am dead,
And that thou thinks thee free
From all solicitation from me,

³⁴ Redpath, p. 122.

Then shall my ghost come to thy bed....³⁵

The soul of the Petrarchan lover, in a similar situation in CCLVI, is also bent on vengeance, but at the sight of Laura falls to weeping and embracing his love. His anger and pain fade into the hope that Laura will awake to hear yet another of his love pleas. In the end, the avowal of vengeance, amounts to little more than empty threats. This is not so with Donne's lover. His visitation to his mistress' bed creates in her feelings of terror and helplessness as she is unable to turn for aid to her new sexual partner who shrinks from her, believing that she is seeking more sexual favours. Bathed in a "quicksilver sweat," she is left by her rejected lover to wonder what form of vengeance he will take. His threat of vengeance is even more effective than any violence he could commit, for now she is left to imagine any variety of cruel punishments which could come at any time. In this way, the lover leaves his mistress to "painfully repent" for his death. The vengeance in "The Apparition" is clearly the most effective and vindictive of any conceived in either the Canzoniere or the rest of the Songs and Sonnets.

Despite his use of the same death for love conceits as Petrarch, Donne's treatment of them is fairly different. By granting the conceits a literal existence, he gives them greater visual and descriptive possibilities. The autopsy of

³⁵ Redpath, p. 106.

"The Damp," the deathbed monologue of "The Funeral" and the actual will in "The Will," are all made possible by treating the conceit of death for love literally and none of this has precedence in the Canzoniere. The vengeance that is hoped for, but never realized in the Canzoniere, is transformed into a powerfully dramatic encounter in "The Apparition," and the conceit is brought to employed to greater poetic potential. In many ways, Donne's use of Petrarch's death conceits in "The Apparition" is indicative of his use of them in all the poems cited. His treatment of them does not indicate rejection or revolt, but rather a development and extension of them.

While the absence of the lover's mistress eventually causes his premature death for love, the death of the mistress herself has a far more devastating effect. Just as the real world would become a lifeless barren rock without its sun, the lover's world without its mistress, is affected in a like fashion. The poems in the Canzoniere, from CCLXIV to CCCLXVI, concern the period after Laura's death, and several relate the ruinous effect it has on the lover's world.

In CCLXVIII, the lover tearfully laments that since Laura's death his sun is gone, and his world, characterized as a weeping orphan, has become a dark place devoid of happiness:

What shall I do? What do you counsel, Love?
It is now time to die,
And I have waited longer than I would.
My lady died and did my heart remove;
To follow it and fly,

I must disrupt my years' long servitude;
 To see where she stood
 I cannot hope, and to wait is distress;
 Now every happiness
 Is turned by her departure into tears,
 Every joy of life disappears.

Love, you feel this, therefore with you I groan
 In my pain deep and dark;
 I know that for my suffering you grieve,
 Our suffering; because against a stone
 We did shatter our bark,
 And then we saw our sun darken and leave.
 What could relieve
 With words, or equal my unrest of mind?
 Ah, orphan world, unkind!
 How right it is that you should weep with me;
 For all the good you had, with her did flee.³⁶

In CCCXXVI, the lover rails at death for its cruel intrusion
 on his world:

Now you have done the utmost of your power,
 Merciless Death; now you have ruined the rich
 Kingdom of love and ravished beauty's flower,
 Put out its light and flung it in a ditch;

 Now you have raped our life and you have thrown
 Every charm away....³⁷

Similar sentiments are expressed in CCCXXXVIII, when the lover
 describes how Laura's death caused the light, life and good
 to pass out of his world:

Death, you have left the world without its sun,
 Gloomy and cold, Love blind and without arms,
 Loveliness bare, and sick all beauty's charms,

³⁶ Petrarch, p. 381-383.

³⁷ Petrarch, p. 457.

Myself distressed and by this load undone....³⁸

In CCCLII, the lover addresses his dead mistress, telling her of the effects of her death:

On your departure Love departed too,
And Courtesy, the sun fell from the sky,
And death began to have a pleasant taste.³⁹

The changes that take place in the lover's world as a result of Laura's death are significant. As dark and cheerless as his world was when Laura lived and rejected him, it becomes even more inhospitable after her death. With Laura gone, the world loses its beauty, it is cast into a dark and gloomy desolation; love deserts it and death appears as a pleasant alternative to continued existence.

All of the devastating effects associated with Laura's death can also be found in the poems concerned with a mistress' death in the Songs and Sonnets.⁴⁰ "A Fever" is interesting in that its action takes place before the actual death of the mistress. Sitting by his lady's sickbed, the

³⁸ Petrarch, p. 475.

³⁹ Petrarch, p. 489.

⁴⁰ The most pronounced use that Donne makes of these effects is in "The Anniversaries" both of which were written to commemorate the death of Elizabeth Drury. Donne presents the girl's death in much the same way as Petrarch presents the death of Laura, including the girl as the essence of the world, the dead world, the decay of nature and the loss of the world's sun. See John Donne, The Epithalamions Anniversaries and Epicedes, ed., Wesley Milgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 20-56.

lover projects beyond her death to the effects that event would have on him. In a perverse effort to entertain her, he first asserts that her death would spoil his enjoyment of women and cause him not to celebrate her in verse because she was one. Perhaps sensing that not being immortalized in verse is not sufficient encouragement to live, the lover expresses the idea of the mistress being the essence of his world. He declares that she cannot die, for to do so she would have to leave the world behind, which would be impossible since the world would vapour away with her last breath:

But yet thou canst not die, I know;
To leave this world behind, is death;
But when thou from this world wilt go,
The whole world vapours with thy breath.⁴¹

His argument is based on the Petrarchan conceit of the lady being the sustaining force of the lover's world.

The third stanza of the poem argues that if the lady does die, she, being the world's soul, would leave the world a mere carcass on which even the most beautiful women would seem mere ghosts of her while her companions in death, "corrupt worms," would be as "the worthiest men." In stanza four he notes that while various "wrangling" philosophic schools have put forward numerous theories as to what fire will destroy the world, he believes that they should look no further than his lady's fever. The poem ends as the lover realizes that despite all

⁴¹ Redpath, p. 293.

of his arguments, his lady may very well die and he vows that he would rather hold her for one hour than own all that will exist through eternity.

Although "A Fever" centres around a mutual love, the threat of the loss of that love puts the poem's lover on equal ground with the Petrarchan lover. The world that Donne's lover knows he will inherit through his mistress' death is very much the same as that of the Petrarchan lover without Laura. His world will become a barren, lifeless "carcass" deprived of soul and beauty, which have existence and power only through his mistress. The death of a mistress renders the worlds of mutual love and unrequited love finally equal.

The desolate world that the lover fears in "The Fever" becomes a reality in "A Nocturnal upon St Lucy's Day."⁴² In this poem, the lover's mistress has already died and the effects of that event are evident in his world. The lover's world is deprived of light, moisture, and life because of the lady's death. Without his mistress his world cannot renew itself in spring as the real world does, but is condemned to a loveless, lifeless winter. The lover himself has been reduced to a thing less than beasts, plants, and stones. He has become "every dead thing,... re-begot/Of Absence, darkness, death; things which are not."⁴³

⁴² This poem is looked at in detail in chapter one.

⁴³ Redpath, p. 299.

"The Dissolution" examines another lover's reaction to the death of his mistress. When she lived the mistress and the lover formed equal halves of their lovers' world. The elements that composed their world, "fire of passion, sighs of air,/ Water of tears, and earthly sad despair," which were once shared between the two, now, by her death, all go to him.⁴⁴ His fires of passion, which increased at the lady's death, now grow greater with the increase in his bodily elements for their fuel. He is sure that his death will be speeded by his life's elements being so quickly used up through his increased passion. His soul, by being so eagerly and willingly released, may even overtake his lady's soul. Death holds no fear for the lover, but is anxiously anticipated as the time when he will again be with his mistress.

In the death of their mistresses both Donne's lover and the Petrarchan lover "find their worlds have turned rank without their ladies to give meaning and purpose to their existence."⁴⁵ The lover's common conceit, that lovers are a world unto themselves, "which enunciates their self-sufficiency, turns [into]... a cry of despair over the emptiness, and barrenness of a world without their women."⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Redpath, p. 296.

⁴⁵ Pinka, p. 146.

⁴⁶ Pinka, p. 146.

In death each lover's world is finally reconciled to the other.

Despite the fact that Petrarch deals almost exclusively with the world of unrequited love and Donne often deals with the world of mutual love, both worlds are defined in essentially the same terms. In each, love attempts to make its own rules regardless of the real world's authority; the boundaries of each world extend only to the distance the lovers are separated; the worlds' storms and calms are found in the passions and emotions of the lovers; and their worlds' suns are found in the persons of their mistresses. In other words, the conceits that define each lover's worlds are the same regardless of how disparate the nature of the love each world harbours.

While Donne may deal with the same conceits that are familiar from the Canzoniere, he does not always treat them in a similar fashion. Petrarch employs his conceits simply as decorative and hyperbolic means to express the emotions involved in the love story he is telling. While Donne also uses conceits for this simple purpose, they are more often given a greater development and function in the Songs and Sonnets. By granting the conceits a literal existence, Donne wrests from them a poetic value that is inherent in them, yet dormant in their use in the Canzoniere. The loving world that Donne creates has its own monarchy and government in its couple; tears of parting or grief can drown the world; an

excess of sighs and tears can create a fat god of love; pictures on hearts can not only be seen, but have the power to kill all who see them; death for love is real enough to initiate the writing of a will or the performance of an autopsy on the fallen lover; and the death of a mistress can vapour away the world's existence. By applying his imagination to Petrarch's conceits, Donne is able to liberate the images, humour, power, hyperbolic absurdity and the truth that they often simply suggest in the Canzoniere. Donne's contribution to the Petrarchan conceits, therefore, is not in the diminishing of or addition to their numbers, but of bringing the existing ones a richer and more developed expression.

Conclusion

As a rebel against Petrarch and the tradition he inspired, Donne is a failure. The majority of his poems rely far too heavily on the themes, situations, attitudes and conceits of that tradition to bear a rebel's stamp. This is not to deny or even depreciate Donne's originality, for much of his originality stems from the imaginative way that Donne develops and utilizes elements of Petrarch's poetry. Practically every poem in the Songs and Sonnets contains an image, situation, conceit or theme that has precedent in the Canzoniere, yet the vast majority of these images, situations, conceits and themes have been furnished with innovations by Donne. The lover being awakened from an erotic dream to awaken, not to silence and darkness, but to the object of the dream; the employment of sighs and tears, not simply as the badges of rejected love, but also as the foodstuffs of an obese god of love; the turning away from an unrequited love and succeeding in staying away to find another love; being the deceased victim of unrequited love and actually subjected to an autopsy; all of these examples reveal how Petrarchan elements serve as the basis for developments in the Songs and Sonnets. These examples reveal that Donne's interest in Petrarch is not as a mere imitator, but as a developer of their valid poetical use, who does not deride nor simply ignore the foundations of the Canzoniere, but exploits them in an innovative way to reveal their fuller potential.

While a comparison between the Songs and Sonnets and the Canzoniere reveals Donne's debt to Petrarch it also allows a unique perspective on Petrarch's work. Petrarchan love is often thought of as being one-dimensional in its unfailing adoration of an unyielding mistress. The comparison in chapter one of how Donne, who deals with "almost any and every mood of man in love", treats love in the Songs and Sonnets and how Petrarch treats it in the Canzoniere reveals an interesting relationship between the two.¹ Unrequited love is an important element of Donne's Songs and Sonnets and many of the poems deal directly with love for an unyielding mistress and the accompanying symptoms of floods of tears and gales of sighs. A cynical attitude toward women bred from the frustration and anger of rejection is also a common element in both collections, although it is usually overlooked in Petrarch. Likewise, many of the poems in the Canzoniere treat, within the framework of unrequited love, emotions and situations that Donne treats in terms of mutual love. Lust is treated by both poets through the sexual dream, although Donne's lover awakens to a more satisfactory reality; the parting of lovers in both collections remains a painful and stressful situation; and the death of the beloved creates similar feelings of devastation and desolation in both the requited lover and the unrequited lover. The only major

¹ Gardner, The Elegies, p. xvii.

difference between the kinds of love in both love collections is also the most fundamental: the Canzoniere deal with unrequited love and many of the Songs and Sonnets deal with mutual love.

The treatment of love in the Canzoniere and the Songs and Sonnets is also closer than implied by the respective identification of them with unrequited love and requited and/or cynical love. Amid the undoubted idealism and adoration for Laura that are the prevalent attitudes in the Canzoniere there is also evident an undercurrent of cynicism and resentment that results from the constant denial of the love the Petrarchan lover celebrates. This is the same sort of cynicism that the lovers in Donne's "Go and Catch" and "Woman's Constancy" experience and which has often been used as evidence of Donne's revolt against Petrarchism.

As shown in chapter three one of the most significant points of comparison between the Songs and Sonnets and the Canzoniere is their use of conceits. The gales of sighs, rains of tears, worlds of love and light-giving mistresses used by Petrarch to describe the love and mistress of the Canzoniere are the same conceits used by Donne. The main difference between the poets is in their use of the conceits. Petrarch uses them simply as a decorative means to embellish the emotions he describes in his poetry. Donne uses them not only for their descriptive purpose, but he also gives them a literal quality that allows him to use them not simply for

their descriptive value but also as a means to develop action in the poetry. In the Canzoniere the lover may die for love, but in the Songs and Sonnets the lover dies and the death is real enough to entail the performance of an autopsy and making of a will. Despite the extension of the conceits Petrarch is not negated, but rather is used as a model for original development.

Through comparison both Donne and Petrarch are found to have strengths that are often ignored in the discussion of Donne's relation to Petrarchism. Donne is revealed as an innovative and inspired employer of tradition, not its nemesis, while Petrarch is found to have expressed many of the cynical and misogynistic attitudes that are often thought to be the cornerstones of Donne's revolt against Petrarch. This study has shown that both poets are far closer in their attitudes towards love and women than is usually recognized and that the extreme conceptions of Petrarch the idealist and Donne the cynic are unjustified generalizations.

This study has also shown that to distinguish Donne as either Petrarchan or anti-Petrarchan is to set limitations on both the poems themselves and on our ways of interpreting them. To do so would be to take much of the mystery, fun and pleasure out of the reading of Donne and, even, the reading of Donne scholarship. Leonard Foster states that "some of the most out-spoken anti-petrarchists are also among the most

skillful petrarchists."² This offers the best summation of Donne's Petrarchism - as an anti-Petrarchist he is a very fine Petrarchist.

² Foster, p. 66.

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