

Bring It to the Bash

or the Modest Newsletter with Bash Stuff, Which Is the Whole Point Anyway

Donne's View of Women, Metaphysical Equality, and Other Problems

By Rachel Bauder

At the outset, I must admit that the title to this piece should have been "other problems." Regardless of the point at which one begins to analyze Donne, certain features of his poetry are impossible to avoid. Even a starting-point as apparently irrelevant as Donne's misogyny precipitates the inquirer into the recurring theme of unity in love; and this itself then introduces Donne's curious way of tangling and untangling metaphorical problems and paradoxes. Perhaps, then, it is forgivable if we begin by talking about Donne's view of women and from there proceed to a more comprehensive understanding of his work.

The first thing to be said, of course, is that one should not talk about Donne's view of women, but his view of this woman or that woman. If ever a genre set forth the Idea of Woman as a univocal, universal category wholly divorced from the sundry flesh-and-blood inhabitants of the earth, it was the Petrarchan tradition; and that tradition was not Donne's.[i] Donne reacts repeatedly against the worn-out conventions regarding the fair sex. In the place of the ideal Woman (whether she be Laura or Beatrice) he offers us this particular woman who is faithful, that one who is false, this who triumphs, that who wheedles, this disdain, that patience, this remorse, that ecstasy, this life and that death. When his praise is extreme, it is not extravagant; when his criticism is brutal, it is not condescending. In all cases Donne seems to assume a kind of natural equality between himself and the woman he addresses. This equality does not derive from any doctrinaire philosophical speculations about the relationship between Men and Women, but rather from an intuitive understanding of what it means to love and be loved in return.

To be loved or not to be loved--one may divide Donne's poems into these two categories and notice that, when the speaker is not loved, his retaliation against the woman is bitter.[ii] The kinds of women that receive the brunt of his criticism include those who pursue only money ("The Curse"), who deceive and break oaths ("The Message," "A Jet Ring Sent"), who are unfaithful to him ("The Apparition"), and who treat him unkindly or do not value him as an end ("The Funeral," "The Damp," "The Blossom"). The harshness of Donne's critique of such various women is an evidence of the very un-Petrarchan equality he sees between himself and the disdainful object of his desires: his lady is not so high above him as to escape being dragged through the mud when she deserves it.[iii] While Donne's retaliation itself is a mark of equality, his praise is yet another, and perhaps a better, manifestation of the same. In the poems in which the speaker finds himself loving and being loved simultaneously, "equality" between the lovers almost becomes a tautology, for they cease to be two entirely distinct beings. They become unified and identified, as in "The Ecstasy" (32):[iv]

Love these mixed souls doth mix again,
And makes both one, each this and that...

and "A Valediction" (30):

Our two souls therefore, which are one,

Though I must go, endure not yet
 A breach, but an expansion,
 Like gold to airy thinness beat.

and "The Dissolution" (41):

And we were mutual elements to us,
 And made of one another.

To love is to unite apparently distinct beings into one. Humans have wrestled with the explanation of this phenomenon from as early as the pre-Socratic period of Greek philosophy and from still earlier times, as early as the poetic line "They two shall be one flesh" appeared in the Book of Genesis. In his own poems Donne continues the long conversation on the subject, but his unraveling of two-being-one leads him into various metaphysical problems. This is not surprising, for Donne is one of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets, and as such he exercises the special right to stretch the logic of his metaphors out to the last trembling poetic-philosophic fiber (which sometimes has the effrontery to snap with a sting). How far can Donne stretch the idea of unity? If two are one and therefore equal, like the two "legs" of a compass, how can separation and distinction (the kind that Donne portrays in "A Valediction," for example) really exist between them? Are the lovers one in soul or body or both? And what, after all, is the relationship between soul and body? An examination and comparison of "A Valediction" and "The Ecstasy" may help the beginning Donne reader to probe the complexity of this poet's mind. Even for those who do not probe so deeply, however, the attempt to follow Donne's poetry results in a reinvigorated attention to the problems of the human condition, the nature of love, the possibilities of metaphysical equality, and-if we may end where we began-the un-Petrarchan portrayal of women who receive what they earn from the pen of the poet.

Endnotes:

[i] This is not a criticism of the Petrarchan tradition. The univocal type of the exalted Woman serves a useful purpose in literature, just as the type of the foreboding Father or the insatiable Tyrant. My point is merely that those who object to the univocal treatment of women and tyrants have little reason to criticize Donne, for his women are as various as his states of mind.

[ii] This is not always true. Poems such as "Love's Deity" and "The Broken Heart" are not retaliations as much as they are merely complaints.

[iii] Even when the speaker expresses an ardent desire for revenge (as in "The Message," "The Apparition," or "The Will"), he clearly regards it as a leveling of the scales, a kind of restoration of equality.

[iv] All references are taken from the Norton critical edition: Clements, Arthur, ed. (1992). *John Donne's Poetry*. (2nd ed.) New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

Here are the questions for Donne's poems "The Valediction" and "The Ecstasy":

Q1: Donne was not a poet to waste his titles. What is a valediction, and what is ecstasy? Is there a tension between the two? Do the titles match the poems?

Q2: Donne describes ecstasy in lines 41-48 of "The Ecstasy." Does this description agree with the usual mystical definition? How does it compare with Donne's descriptions of the two lovers' souls in "A Valediction," lines 17-35? What is kept distinct, and what is united?

Q3: In "The Ecstasy" how does the union begin? Is this ironic? To what does Ecstasy ultimately lead? Is this ironic? How does this compare with Donne's attitude toward the body in "A Valediction," lines 13-16? Is there a paradox here or only an apparent contradiction?

Q4: What is the "subtle knot" of line 64 in "The Ecstasy"? Can body and mind ever be separated? What is the (elaborate) analogy that Donne is trying to draw out between the individual mind and body as opposed to the identification of two individuals' minds and bodies? Are both "The Ecstasy" and "A Valediction" saying the same thing?

Q5: Divinity and humanity are sometimes hard to keep apart. Only one step removed from the problem of two-being-one is the problem of Three-being-One. Donne's later poems are primarily religious, but his use of paradox and his method of untangling remain the same. Would the kind of logic (or ana-logic, analogy) that he employs in "A Valediction" and "The Ecstasy" help him or his readers to grapple with the mystery of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the tension between free will and Divine sovereignty, grace and merit, etc.?

Pieter Bruegel the Elder cc. 1525-1569

by Jill Ross

Pieter Bruegel lived during the rise of the Protestant Reformation. Bruegel entered this world during Michelangelo's hay day and shortly after the death of Raphael and Hieronymus Bosch. The events leading up to and encompassing his lifespan coupled with his geographical location (namely the Netherlands), affected him as much as one would expect. Consequently, his art depicts the harsh, rugged life of Northern Europeans rather than mirroring the near utopian art of his southern contemporaries. Observing the hypocrisy of clergyman and 'upstanding citizens,' Bruegel crafts gruesome works to expose the folly of the mass and the masses. Bruegel portrays humanity "like most of us, in short, they freeze in the winter, sweat in the summer and are foolish in all seasons."

Bruegel's official apprenticeship occurred under the eye of Pieter Coecke van Aelst, a distinguished artist from Antwerp who had traveled in Italy. Though under Coecke's tutelage, Bruegel's works lacked the Italian style Coecke imitated. Judging from Bruegel's works, Bruegel appears to have entered into the apprenticeship of the deceased Bosch. In fact, many revere him as the second Bosch. Interesting to note, one merchant signed Bruegel's name to a Bosch work, *The Human Tree*, to increase its value. Perhaps, in the end the apprentice was greater than his master. Bruegel's attention to detail, acute perspective, and ingenious landscape technique elevated him above Bosch.

Bruegel's art tended to develop in stages through his career. In the first stage, young Brueghel (in his late 20s) worked as a designer for the engravings of Hieronymus Cock. Through these sketches, Brueghel's acclaim arose. With his artisanship attested, Bruegel (without the h) turns to paintings. In his earlier paintings Bruegel tended to produce works teeming with people (and sometimes fantastic creatures) in a grand landscape. Sometimes these pictures imported biblical events into contemporary settings. Other times, the canvases contained contemporary people living out Dutch proverbs. Yet, in his later years, Bruegel filled less of the page with crowds of people, and focused on a few (or six in the case of *The Blind Leading the Blind*).

Common Symbols of Bosch and/or Bruegel:

Bagpipe	Gluttony, Discourse (though scholars aren't certain)
Blue	Deceit, lying
Cat	Cruelty, the devil
Cherries	Unchastity
Egg	The source of life, life
Fish	Voraciousness, Christianity, Roman Catholic Church
Fruit	Sex, licentiousness
Goat	Prurience, lust
Gyroscope	World -A gyroscope is a child's toy that looks like a world with a cross on it.
Gyroscope w/ a person	State of Humanity
Half-moon	Heresy
Head	Folly, hotheadedness
Horse	Unbridled rage, lust
Jug	Gluttony
Mirror	Pride
Owl	Heresy, evil
Peacock	Pride
Rabbit	Fertility
Stringed Instrument	Love, unchastity

Questions:

In what aspects was Bosch's influence on Bruegel more pronounced?

In what ways did Bruegel diverge from Bosch?

Specific to Bruegel's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*

Consider the list of symbols above (At the Bash we will also take time to discuss Bruegel's use of some Dutch proverbs).

Where does one's eye gravitate?

Where is Saint Anthony located in the picture?

How does he appear compared to the rest of the picture?

Study the large head. What are the statements Bruegel is making in that small space?

What is in the back ground?

What effect does the shading have on the drawing?

What's Up? Arnold and Eliot Juxtaposed

by Joel Zartman

<p>T. S. Eliot. <i>Christianity and Culture</i>. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1976.</p>	<p>Matthew Arnold. <i>Culture and Anarchy</i>. Ed., Samuel Lipman. New Haven: Yale, 1994.</p>
<p>Arnold is concerned primarily with the individual and the “perfection” as which he should aim. It is true that in his famous classification of “Barbarians, Philistines, Populace” he concerns himself with a critique of classes; but his criticism is confined to an indictment of these classes for their shortcomings, and does not proceed to consider what should be the proper function of “perfection” of each class. The effect, therefore, is to exhort the individual who would attain the peculiar kind of “perfection” which Arnold calls “culture,” to rise superior to the limitations of any class, rather than to realise its highest attainable ideals (94).</p> <p>We do not find, for instance, that an understanding of music or painting figures explicitly in Arnold’s description of the culture man: yet no one will deny that these attainments play a part in culture.</p> <p>And if we do not find culture in any one of these perfections alone, so we must not expect any one person to be accomplished in all of them; we shall come to infer that the wholly cultured individual is a phantasm; and we shall look for culture not in any individual or in any one group or individuals, but more and more widely; and we are driven in the end to find it in the pattern of society as a whole. . . . People are always ready to consider themselves persons of culture, on the strength of one proficiency, when they are not only lacking in others, but blind to those they lack (95).</p> <p>It does not follow from this that there is no meaning in speaking of the culture of the individual, or of a group or class. We only mean that the culture of the individual cannot be isolated from that of the group, and that the culture of the group cannot be abstracted from that of the whole society; and that our notion of “perfection” must take all three senses of “culture” into account at once (96).</p>	<p>Culture is then properly described not as having its origin in curiosity, but as having its origin in the love of perfection; it is <i>a study of perfection</i> (31).</p> <p>The moment this view of culture is seized, the moment it is regarded not solely as the endeavour to see things as they are, to draw towards a knowledge of the universal order which seems to be intended and aimed at in the world, and which it is a man’s happiness to go along with or his misery to go counter to,—to learn, in short, the will of God,—the moment, I say, culture is considered not merely as the endeavour to <i>see and learn</i> this, but as the endeavour, also, to make it <i>prevail</i>, the moral, social, and beneficent character of culture becomes manifest (32).</p> <p>The pursuit of perfection, then, is the pursuit of sweetness and light. He who works for sweetness and light, works to make reason and the will of God prevail. He who works for machinery, he who works for hatred, works only for confusion. Culture looks beyond machinery, culture hates hatred; culture has one great passion, the passion for sweetness and light. It has one even yet greater!—the passion for making them <i>prevail</i> (47).</p> <p>The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have labored to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the <i>best</i> knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light (48).</p>