

Chapter Five:

A Second Glance: transfigured vision in the poems of John Donne and George Herbert.

Introduction:

concern was speech, and speech impelled us,

**To purify the dialect of the tribe
And urge the mind to aftersight and foresight...**

These words, (spoken by the familiar compound ghost, who is part Dante part Yeats part Milton, to Eliot in the last of the Four Quartets) embody the changeless task of poetry in every generation, which is to give us more than merely outward or momentary sight of our lives. Here Eliot emphasises the “double-vision” of aftersight and foresight, and indeed the simultaneous vision of past and present, the full realisation in a moment of intense awareness, of what he called “the present moment of the past” is both a feature of Eliot’s own poetry and a characteristic he noticed and emphasised in the poetry of others. The role of poet as guardian and purifier of speech, as the one who would enable language to open up new vistas rather than close them down, would become more and more important as the tenor and spirit of the age moved from late mediaevalism towards modernism.

Davies had made the distinction between vision of the surface and vision of the depth:

Sense outsideth knows; the Soule thro’ al things sees:

Sense, circumstance; she, doth the substance view:

Sense sees the barke, but she, the life of trees:

Sense heares the sounds, but she, the concords true.

The poet’s task is to allow the vision of the soul to underly the vision of the senses so that for a moment we see both the outside and the essence.

The old culture had inherited the notion that the two great books we are given to read are the Word and the Works of God. Both these books were revered and read as mysteries, as poetry. Every story in scripture was seen to contain multiple layers of meaning in allegory, symbol, and typology. Understanding the first and literal meaning was just the first step in penetrating the mysteries of God’s word. Likewise God’s works, the book of nature were read in an equally polysemous and symbolic way. Natural philosophers were concerned both to discover the literal content of Gods works, the physical properties of nature, but they were equally concerned to read the symbolism of nature to understand the

truths and meanings being conveyed to man from God through the language of his works. As our culture approached modernity however, it became more one-levelled and literal in its interpretation of the world of exterior phenomena. The observable world around us was to be understood only at the level of what could be measured and observed. The sun and stars to be understood only as physical objects blindly obeying the laws of motion, rather than as the eyes of heaven, the living symbols and celebrations of a light greater than their own. The newly literal reading of a once polysemous nature was the foundation of the new science. A parallel loss of subtlety, a parallel reduction of the multiplicity of symbol and suggestion into a single and literal denotation was taking place in the reading of the other book, the book of the scriptures. Just as the world was being reduced from a love-led dance to Newton's piece of clock-work, so in the same spirit the scriptures were being read less as inspired poetry and more as the clock-maker's manual. It fell to the poets, caught between these two blinkered rationalisms, to preserve and develop the power inherent in language to mean more than one thing. Donne's "double-vision", the experience of seeing at once a surface and a depth, of "staying our eye" on glass" at one moment, and passing through it the next, is mirrored in the action of metaphor in language. When language is used metaphorically we see at one and the same time the literal image, and through it, another reality or experience which the image symbolises. By making metaphors with words that had been relegated to the merely literal, Poets could restore to the imagination the possibility of transcendence. They could suggest by the very form of their art that, just as words are signs of something beyond themselves, so the things to which words point, might also be the signs and symbols of a language, and not simply the parts of a clock.

In the course of this chapter we shall look at the work of two of the so-called Metaphysical Poets, John Donne and George Herbert, considering this vocation of poetry to enable us to see with a "double vision". In Donne we will see how playfulness with language, delighted in sudden reversals of perspective and the discovery in the everyday of metaphors which transform our understanding leads to the deepest perspective shift of all, the movement from our own vision and gazing to the transfiguring gaze that God casts on us. In Herbert we shall see how the poet's power to turn the glassy surface of outer knowledge into a window on the heavens leads us to the possibility of a knowledge transformed by the One who is both the light of heaven and the light of men.

Mapping new worlds, John Donne and the power of Metaphor.

Donne's intellect and imagination delighted in double-visions and multiple meanings. He was fascinated by the representation of one thing within and through another, by the correspondences between inner and outer worlds, by the sudden shifts in perspective and dimension which could be produced by moving suddenly, by means of metaphor between the different worlds his intellect and imagination inhabited. It is not surprising to discover that he was fascinated by the reflections of the great cosmos in the tiny world of an eye or a tear-drop, by the mapping of the *microcosmos* of man onto the huge *cosmos* of the world and the heavens, and fascinated therefore by maps and mapping of all

kinds. He saw especially in the new science of projection whereby the round, three dimensional world could nevertheless be represented in two dimensions on paper, a real model for the way in which his art could re-present our this-worldly experience to include or suggest its hidden other-worldly dimension. This playful but concentrated fascination with representation and mapping extends through both his love poetry and his devotional poetry. Emotional, imaginative, sexual and spiritual insights are all integrated and interlinked in Donne in a way which is perhaps unequalled in any other writer.

These powers and possibilities in Donne's poetry can be opened up by pursuing his inter-connected person/world/map metaphors first through two "secular" and then through two "sacred" poems. We will begin with *The Good Morrow*

**I WONDER by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the seaven sleepers den?
T'was so; But this, all pleasures fancies bee.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dreame of thee.**

**And now good morrow to our waking soules,
Which watch not one another out of feare;
For love, all love of other sights controules,
And makes one little roome, an every where.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let Maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne,
Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.**

**My face is thine eye, thine in mine appeares,
And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest,
Where can we finde two better hemispheares
Without sharpe North, without declining West?
What ever dyes, was not mixt equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die.**

The poem opens in a wonderfully natural and conversational way, with direct language and the rhythms of natural speech (something which was to be lost from English poetry for most of the next century until Wordsworth and Coleridge recovered it in Lyrical Ballads). We are disarmed by the frankness of his opening exclamation and are expecting something very straightforward and literal, when at the close of the first stanza Donne introduces the first of his metaphors of a multi-levelled reality, of worlds on worlds nested within one another:

**If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dreame of thee.**

At their first and simplest level these lines are simply a wonderful combination of amorous boasting and apology. *If* ever any beauty I did see which I desired, might leave the emphasis on the *if*, and let the person to whom this poem is addressed guess she is the first, but the barely concealed pride in Donne's little rider "*and got*" leaves us in no doubt that at the very moment he appears to be apologising for his sexual experience he is actually making a boast of it. *If*, indeed Then comes the brilliant turn whereby he offers his past conquests up to his present love :twas but a dream of thee.

Suddenly, in the midst of this back-handed compliment we have one of Donne's vertiginous shifts of perspective, what was the real world only half a line ago turns out to have been only a dream from which he wakes to and with his present lover, and all the former beauties of his life were like the shadows in Plato's cave, images which beckon us beyond themselves to another and greater beauty from which they drew their grace. Our imagination is prepared in these lines for the worlds on worlds to be encountered by our "Waking Soules" in the next stanza:

**For love, all love of other sights controules,
And makes one little roome, an every where.**

The power of making one little room an everywhere ascribed here to love is of course also the power of the poet, and through him the power of imagination. The whole world can be re-presented recapitulated in a room and its furnishings (an idea Donne develops in *The Sunne Rising*) or in the bodies of two lovers each representing and recapitulating the great world they inhabit as surely as a map. Donne summons the exuberance and adventure of his age of discovery and makes it also mean the adventure and discovery of his loving:

**Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let Maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne,
Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.**

The bodies of the lovers become the maps of worlds yet to be discovered, a conceit he developed in more detail in poems like *On his mistres going to bed*, with a play on discover (O my america, my new-found land how blest am I in this discovering thee) we move then (naturally) from discovery to possession. A lesser poet would have left it here probably with something very obvious about planting the flag, but Donne in another perspective shift moves us first from one possessing another to both possessing a mutual world through to being worlds themselves:

Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one

(a variant reading has let us possesse our world. It is not simply that their love makes a new world which they share, but that each of them as a microcosm of the great world is a world for the other to know and explore. Further, just as the great world of the macrocosm is re-capitulated afresh in the little worlds of Donne and his lover, so they are each in turn re-capitulated in each other, each carrying the others heart, an idea expressed under the image of their mutual reflections in each others eyes:

My face is thine eye, thine in mine appeares,

And true plaine hearts doe in the faces rest,

This wonderfully detailed observation, a bit like Heaney's ear of a raindrop, is the outward image and expression of true lovers inward desire to be to be in some otherwise inexpressible way wiothin one another. The curvature of the surface of the eye then suggests the curvature of the hemispheres of the great world and we return for a second to that macro-level. But this time it is the inner-world of Donne's imaginative fantasy that becomes greater than and forms a critique of the outward and visible hemispheres we inhabit:

Where can we finde two better hemispheares

Without sharpe North, without declining West?

The outer hemispheres of the visible world are subject to change and decay, the sharp north represenring the cold that might freeze the warmth of love, the declining west representing sunset the endo of loves day, and ultimately, as we shall see in the other poems. Death itself. Donne holds out to us as to himself and his lover the tantalising possibility that this world of chanhge and decay might be obly the copy, shadow, or dream of the real world of their lo9ve which transcends it. The imperfect mixture of the elements, in the macrocosm, the humours in the microcosm which make for change and decay, are perhaps re-ordered and perfectly mixed in the new and transcendant world Love makes, but ofcourse in a last tease Donne makes it all hang on anIf, a pretty big if, perhaps the same if with which he closed the first stanza:

If our two loves be one, or, thou and I

Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die.

The notion that lpove can make this little room an everywhere is developed at larege in the Sunne rising another love poem, like the good morrow , in the tradition of the aubade:

THE SUNNE RISING

BUSIE old foole, unruly Sunne,

Why dost thou thus

Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us?

Must to thy motions lovers seasons run?
Sawcy pedantique wretch, goe chide
Late schoole boyes, and sowre prentices,
Goe tell Court-huntsmen, that the King will ride,
Call countrey ants to harvest offices;
Love, all alike, no season knowes, nor clyme,
Nor houres, dayes, moneths, which are the rags of time.

Thy beames, so reverend, and strong
Why shouldst thou thinke?
I could eclipse and cloud them-with a winke,
But that I would not lose her sight so long:
If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Looke, and to morrow late, tell mee,
Whether both the'India's of spice and Myne
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with mee.
Aske for those Kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt heare, All here in one bed lay.
She'is all States, and all Princes, I,
Nothing else is.
Princes doe but play us; compar'd to this,
All honor's mimique; All wealth alchimie.
Thou sunne art halfe as happy'as wee,
In that the world's contracted thus;
Thine age askes ease, and since thy duties bee
To warme the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art every where;
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy speare.

Coleridge said of this poem that it showed a "Fine vigorous exaltation, both soul and body in full puissance" and certainly one feels the bliss of love fulfilled filling the language with a kind of careless glory, a happy splendour before which even the sun in his glory is only a busy old fool. Love fulfilled

has filled the present moment with an experience of such intensity that the passage of time outside that love seems poor and ragged

**Love, all alike, no season knowes, nor clyme,
Nor houres, dayes, moneths, which are the rags of time.**

Donne is here celebrating secular, erotic love, but he was well aware that such ecstasy, in which time itself and the world are for a moment transcended, was a type of that greater awareness of the eternal which arises when the soul is woud by God, and he was not afraid, in a later sermon when he was Dean of saint Paul's to take up again his glorious phrase about the rags of time in relation tp God's mercy, the Divine Quality of which Donne the preacher is the greatest celebrant in English:

We begin with that which is elder than our beginning, and shall overlive our end, the mercy of Godnames of first and last derogate from it, for first and last are but rags of time, and his mercy hath no relation to time, no limitation in time, it is not first nor last, but eternal, everlasting.

(Christmas sermon 1624 Sermons VI p. 170)

In his second verse Donne plays with the analogy between the sun and the eye which we saw was so strong in Davies, introducing a wonderfully impudent reversal of perspective whereby the sight of the sun, the great eye of nature depends on our eyes and not the other way round. Donne and his Lover are the centre fons et origo of a new world and every outer reality depends on them. He has only to blink and the corresponding eye of the sun idclosed:

**Thy beames, so reverend, and strong
Why shouldst thou thinke?**

**I could eclipse and cloud them-with a winke,
But that I would not lose her sight so long:**

In the normal world the light of the sun might Blind our eyes, the eyes of Donne's lover shine so brightluy that she might blind the sun, Donne then shifts perspective and from being luminaries themselves he makes the lovers and their bed into an entire world, reversing the usual microcosm/macrocosm analogy. We are the macrocosm, the great world Donne is saying it is the so-called real outer world which is the tinu and pale imitation:

**If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Looke, and to morrow late, tell mee,
Whether both the'India's of spice and Myne
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with mee.
Aske for those Kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,**

And thou shalt heare, All here in one bed lay.

Donne maps the great world onto his lovers body, in bed with her he has explored the two indias of spice and mine. (The detail of this nice analogy is made more explicit in Loves progress, a journey across the body, here it is just a hint). One little room has indeed become an “everywhere”, and he can boast Nothing else is. He delights in the power of imagination to incarnate the vast into the tiny, a kind of shadow of the incarnation, the worlds “contracted thus.” Ofcourse he is playing, impishly and in a kind of glad wantinness with powerful ideas whose true meaning and proper application he also knew and revered, the answering poem to this conciet of the world contracted to a lovers bed is in the beautiful line on the incarnation in his sonnet to mary:

Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb.

That lovely line from the corona of holy sonnets brings us to consideration of two sacred poems in which donne continues to explore the possibilities in the triple vision which overlays world, body, and map. We will look first at his Hymne to God my God, in my Sicknesse,: opens famously with the beautiful metaphor of music and of life as a tuning of the instrument before we enter the holy room of heaven:

Since I am coming to that holy room,

Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,

I shall be made thy music; as I come

I tune the instrument here at the door,

And what I must do then, think here before.

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown

Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie

Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown

That this is my south-west discovery,

Per fretum febris, by these straits to die,

I joy, that in these straits I see my west;

For, though their currents yield return to none,

What shall my west hurt me? As west and east

In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,

So death doth touch the resurrection.

Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are

**The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar,
All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them,
Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Shem.**

**We think that Paradise and Calvary,
Christ's cross, and Adam's tree, stood in one place;
Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me;
As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,
May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.**

**So, in his purple wrapp'd, receive me, Lord;
By these his thorns, give me his other crown;
And as to others' souls I preach'd thy word,
Be this my text, my sermon to mine own:
"Therefore that he may raise, the Lord throws down."**

This poem opens with the famous and beautiful metaphor of music ,and of life as a tuning of the instrument before we enter the holy room of heaven

**Since I am coming to that holy room,
Where, with thy choir of saints for evermore,
I shall be made thy music; as I come
I tune the instrument here at the door,
And what I must do then, think here before.**

This verse almost stands alone like an opening Chord in a composition as for the rest of the poem donne turns not to music but to map-making and cosmographie for a key to transfiguring his experience. For transfiguration is what this poem is all about, glimpsing the possibility of renewal in the midst of sickness and death, catching a phrase of the music you would never have known to listen faor in the fall of grit and dry seeds which is donnes approaching physical death. After the first stanzas glimpse of heaven by way of p[relude the poem returns to the grim insistence of donnes present experience as a fevered patient, flattened and sweating on his bed, being pored over and prodded by his doctors as though he had already ceased to be human and had become a mere oject, hearing their diagnosis of

steady decline and death by fever. Can poetry and the transfiguring power of imagination release any hope from that?

**Whilst my physicians by their love are grown
Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown
That this is my south-west discovery,
Per fretum febris, by these straits to die,**

Once more a body is a map of the world, pored over and read, this time not in the joy of love-making but in the anxiety of diagnosis. The cosmographer/physicians make a South-west discoverie. In the common symbolism in which this poem participates south stands for heat, the heat of Donnes fever, and West, the quarter into which the sun declines, stands for decline and death. The cosmographers and explorers in the outer-world had been searching for a south-west passage, some narrow streight through which they could sail west into the pacific. The cosmographers of Donnes body have found that south-west passage those narrow straights of fever through which he will pass into death per fretum febris, by the streights of fever.

But having by this metaphor expressed the worst, Donne, by the same metaphor begins to redeem the worst. For the outer cosmographers what lies beyond the streights of their south-west discoverie is not annihilation but the new and unimagined world of the pacific, and in a round world the mariner who sails west into night and declination far enough finds he has arrived in the east, the east of morning and resurrection. So Donne having closed his second stanza with those two hard words to die, goes on:

**I joy, that in these straits I see my west;
For, though their currents yield return to none,
What shall my west hurt me? As west and east
In all flat maps (and I am one) are one,
So death doth touch the resurrection.**

For Shakespeare death was that undiscovered country from whose Bourn no traveller returns. Donne had read in mariners tales of narrow straights whose currents were so swift that any vessel caught and borne by them could never hope to win a way back against them. So in his metaphor the strait of death is one whose current yields return to none. But Donne knows from those same tales that eastern riches and pacific promise were never reached except through narrow straights as he says in a later verse:

**Is the Pacific Sea my home? Or are
The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar,
All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them,**

And so he says of the narrow straits of death

I joy, that in these straits I see my west;

For in his brilliant metaphor he sees how in the flat mercator projection the extreme points of east and west, appear separated at opposite edges of the map but the line of extreme west and the line of extreme east represent the same line and the same space in the real three dimensional world of which the map is a two dimensional image. So equally death seems the extreme edge of the map in the two-dimensional world of our physical experience, but in the three dimensional world of gods reality the west of death curves round to touch the east of resurrection. Our bodies are only the deceptive flat maps of our true selves and when we stand in the true dimensions of heaven then we will know how death doth touch the resurrection.

This fruitful paradox leads him beyond the map-making metaphor to develop in the rest of the poem a whole range of paradoxes on the identity of death and resurrection, paradise and calvarie, christs cross and Adams tree until he reaches this complex poems simple and powerful conclusion:

"Therefore that he may raise, the Lord throws down."

If the hymn mirrors and answers the map metaphors of the good morrow, transposing them from a secular to a sacred key, then it is equally true that the play with worlds and spheres and time which makes up the Sunne rising is revisited and transformed by Donne in Good Friday 1613 riding westwards.

GOOD FRIDAY, 1613. RIDING WESTWARD

**LET mans Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this,
The intelligence that moves, devotion is,
And as the other Spheares, by being growne
Subject to forraigne motions, lose their owne,
And being, by others hurried every day,
Scarce in a yeare their naturall forme obey:
Pleasure or businesses so, our Soules admit
For their first mover, and are whirld by it.
Hence is't, that I am carryed towards the West
This day, when my Soules forme bends toward the East.**

There I should see a Sunne, by rising set,
And by that setting endlesse day beget;
But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall,
Sinne had eternally benighted all.
Yet dare I'almost be glad, I do not see
That spectacle of too much weight for mee.
Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;
What a death were it then to see God dye?
It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke,
It made his footstools crack, and the Sunne winke.
Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,
And tune all spheares at once, peirc'd with those holes?
Could I behold that endlesse height which is
Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,
Humbled below us? or that blood which is
The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,
Made durt of dust, or that flesh which was worne
By God, for his appare'l, rag'd, and torne?
If on these things I durst not looke, durst I
Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
Who was Gods partner here, and furnish'd thus
Halfe of that Sacrifice, which ransom'd us?
Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
They'are present yet unto my memory,
For that looks towards them; and thou look'st towards mee,
O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree;
I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.

Although this is one of Donne's most subtle and complex poems, packed densely with allusions to the science and theology of his day, its basic scenario is clear, and out of the particular moment of journeying which is the poem's occasion Donne brings out and develops dilemmas and paradoxes of universal significance. As with all Donne's poems we are invited to see with a double-vision both an outward and visible journey over the earth's surface and an inward and spiritual journey, a journey of man towards God and God towards man. In the outward and visible world Donne, constrained by business, is riding Westward, a direction which symbolises the journey of all our bodies towards sunset decline and death, westering away from the eastward moment of our morning and birth. The business that forces Donne's body to journey west also stands for the mortality which forces all our bodies along the long day's journey into night. But Donne is constrained, he doesn't actually want to journey west, anymore than any of us want to journey away from our morning into death. While Donne feels outwardly constrained to journey west, in heart and soul he wants to turn east, to turn and face towards the place, outside Jerusalem where the great drama of all our deaths and resurrections takes place. Just as the heavenly bodies are deflected by foreign motions from their true course, so likewise the business of this world diverts us from our true priorities and sets up a conflict between what carries us outwardly and where we are inwardly yearning to be:

And as the other Spheares, by being growne

Subject to forraigne motions, lose their owne,

And being, by others hurried every day,

Scarce in a yeare their naturall forme obey:

Pleasure or businesses so, our Soules admit

For their first mover, and are whirld by it.

Hence is't, that I am carryed towards the West

This day, when my Soules forme bends toward the East.

We may have changed the specifics of our astronomy but we can all relate to Donne's account of how our souls allow pleasure or business to become so much our first mover, that our whole life becomes out of kilter, as we are carried out of our true course. Donne's personal dilemma riding westward while his soul's true form bends towards the east, has become a picture of our whole culture. We are "hurried every day" away from our roots away from the deep springs of truth, away from vision and purpose and love, hurried into triviality, until we are as Eliot would later put it, "distracted from distraction by distraction." But in the midst of his hurried westering the poet's soul yearns towards the east and there his imagination embraces a series of paradoxes which prepare us for the great paradox of God's death which forms the poem's climax:

There I should see a Sunne, by rising set,

And by that setting endlesse day beget;

**But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall,
Sinne had eternally benighted all.**

Then comes the admission that although he longs to turn back from his business and seek Gods face he is in fact afraid to do so. It may be that his business like our everyday hurriedness is something we choose as a way of hiding from God. From here the rest of the poem turns on images of seeing and being seen.:

**Yet dare I'almost be glad, I do not see
That spectacle of too much weight for mee.
Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;
What a death were it then to see God dye?
It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke,
It made his footstools crack, and the Sunne winke.**

Here his earlier conceit of eclipsing the sun with a wink is re-visited as the sun darkens and the earth Gapes at God-s death on the cross. Donne's imagination of a body which could be all kingdoms, of one persons passion affecting the whole cosmos, whose body is mapped out against the stars, and yet crushed to the ground by human malice is here made real by the creators endurance of a passion within his own creation:

**Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,
And tune all spheares at once, peirc'd with those holes?
Could I behold that endlesse height which is
Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,
Humbled below us? or that blood which is
The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,
Made durt of dust, or that flesh which was worne
By God, for his appare'l, rag'd, and torne?**

Then, after his reflection on the terrible figure of Mary standing by the cross, comes the paradox of present absence and piercing vision which is at the very heart of the poem and forms the transition from the speculation with which it begins to the impassioned prayer that ends it:

**Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
They'are present yet unto my memory,
For that looks towards them; and thou look'st towards mee,
O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree;
The line For that looks towards them; and thou look'st towards mee,**

in the hinge upon which the whole poem turns. Up to this point the poem has been about Donne's looking or failing to look towards the East where the crucifixion takes place, but suddenly the tables are turned just as Donne thinks he is contemplating an image of something distant and in the past in his own memory, he finds the image he contemplates is neither distant nor in the past but present and that it is not he who looks, or fails to look, upon Christ but Christ who looks upon him, and just as in this and other poems, Donne had shown how a human gaze looking intently on an outward scene could pierce through its veils and in that piercing glance transfigure it. So he is to discover at this crux of the poem that the gaze of his saviour looking back at him from his imagined image of the cross is ready to pierce and transform him. Suddenly he realises that for all his protestations, he still has his back to the Lord. Here is a profound revision and reversal of the Old Testament archetype of man's encounter with God. There Moses climbs the mountain searching for God and finds that he can only glimpse a God whose back is turned to him so great is the barrier of human sin. But with the coming of God into human flesh in Christ the world is indeed turned upside down. God descends from the mountain to seek for man and this time it is man whose back is turned. Just as Moses was afraid to see the face of God, now Donne is afraid to turn and let God see his face and so he prays instead that even with his back turned the piercing gaze of the crucified will begin to transform and purge him to make him able even to begin to turn and show his face. His fear is that he has lost himself so utterly in the encrustment and deformity of sin, that he will no longer be recognisable to the God whose image he is to bear and yet he longs to be known and so he begins with the fearful image of punishment and correction, the back turned to receive blows but even as he writes the word 'corrections' he discovers in those corrections God's hidden mercy and prays for a burning-off of rust and deformity so that the lost image can be restored. When the last line of the poem comes the word 'turn' has acquired the fullest sense of metanoia, repentance understood as a complete turning around of oneself and so also of one's perspective.

**I turne my backe to thee, but to receive
Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.
O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,
That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.**

Many-storied windowes, Double-vision in Herbert

If Donne gives us those giddy shifts of perspective where the gazer is suddenly the gazed-upon [rather as Heaney did in the Rainstick where at one moment we are playing the pipe and at the next we stand there like a pipe being played], Herbert, is concerned with the intentness of a gaze which transfigures vision. In chapter 1 we remembered Herbert's moment of insight in which we can choose to look beyond the glassy surface of what apparently meets the eye and glimpse the heaven behind it:

A man that looks on glass

**On it may stay his eye
Or if he pleaseth through it pass
And then the heavens espy**

Sometimes it is not simply that we look through the mirror, now become a window, to catch a glimpse of heaven, but that the very light of heaven shines back through that window to transfigure the supposedly ordinary world of our everyday lives. Herbert was especially interested in the way that transfiguring light can shine through our fellow-Christians who become in spite of and perhaps even through the stain of sin with which they struggle, windows on to Christ for us. He explores this idea in the beautiful poem 'The Windows', one of a series in which he reads the everyday features of a parish church, the porch, the steps, the windows, the altar as all carrying a more than literal meaning.

Lord, how can man preach thy eternall word?

He is a brittle crazie glasse:

Yet in thy temple thou dost him afford

This glorious and transcendent place,

To be a window, through thy grace.

But when thou dost anneal in glasse thy storie,

Making thy life to shine within

The holy Preachers ; then the light and glorie

More rev'rend grows, & more doth win:

Which else shows watrish, bleak, & thin.

Doctrine and life, colours and light, in one

When they combine and mingle, bring

A strong regard and awe : but speech alone

Doth vanish like a flaring thing,

And in the eare, not conscience ring.

The question with which this poem opens, is the premier problem of the meeting of the eternal with time of the holy with the sinful, of the Word with the flesh. At first, he seems to imply that such a meeting is impossible;

Lord, how can *man* preach thy *eternall* word?

He is a brittle crazie glasse:

The contrast is made between man the time-bound creature, and the unattainable eternity of the Word. Man is figured as a piece of 'brittle crazie glasse'. In the process of glass-making in the 17th century it was almost impossible to produce the clear flawless sheets to which we are accustomed and there was a trade-off in the process between clarity and brittleness. The crazed or uneven surfaces sometimes made for stronger glass, but as often as not glass was both crazed, in the sense that it distorted what you saw through it, and brittle. And yet, as Herbert casts his eyes towards the stained glass windows of his parish church this image of man as the brittle crazy glass suddenly gives him, in the light that shines through church windows the key to his opening problem of how the eternal Word can shine through man, and in the rest of the poem he meditates richly on what it might mean to be a window through thy grace. In the opening of the next stanza :

But when thou dost anneal in glasse thy storie,

He draws once more on the science of glass-making. Colour is annealed into stained glass not painted on to it. The glass has to be re-heated almost melted, in a sense brought back to its birth and beginning before the colour can be added so that when the glass cools the colours have become part of its very substance. This is a wonderfully rich way of thinking about the life of Christ in the lives of those who are members of His body - 'thou dost anneal in glasse thy storie'. For me to become a Christian is to realise that His story, which is also history is also my story. His birth, his baptism, his walk in the wilderness, his temptation, his sorrow his crucifixion and most gloriously His resurrection, are not just outside me but in me as I am in them. And just as the brittle crazy glass, with its frozen surface, has to be re-heated melted and brought back to its birth in order to be annealed with the colour so I have to pass through the heating and melting of my proud surface and to be born-again and reformed this time with the colour of Christ's passion inside me. [Know ye not that as many of ye as were baptised into Christ were baptised into his death]. The point at which the saving presence and power of the risen Christ, the light that lightens everyone who comes into th world, becomes real for me and for those with whom I might want to share that light is the point where my hurt touches His where the wounds in my life are healed by His stripes, where I let Him share my Good Friday and He gives me a part in His Easter, then suddenly we see the true colours of Christ's story. Herbert seems to be saying in these two verses, that it is just at the point when the otherwise well known and abstract story of Christ, touches base and is made particular in the everydayness and individual colouring of real Christian lives that it suddenly shines out with the colours God intends it to have. Christ meets us through other people. He makes his life 'to shine within the Holy Preachers'. He wants us not to divide the truths we abstractly know and the lives we concretely live, but rather to bring them dramatically together and let each transform the other: 'doctrine and life colours and light in one when they combine and mingle bring a strong regard and awe'. When we reflect on how even the darker colours of our sins and failings given to God annealed and remade by Him can still transmit His light, it is interesting to reflect that 'stained glass' is the one context in all its

use in which the word 'stained' is redeemed to mean something unambiguously beautiful.

Herbert continues to explore the problem of replacing a false shallow or wordy knowledge with a true knowledge which involves the heart as well as the mind and changes lives as well as opinions in *Vanitie* and *the Agonie*. Like Davies in 'Nosce Te Ipsum' Herbert wants to move us away from a too-facile knowledge of the outer world, a knowledge which deadens and de-natures that world because it ignores the other inner world of the human heart and the vital relationship there should always be between the inner and the outer. In a sense we will never have a true knowledge of the outer world, which science attempts to describe, until that outer knowledge is harmonised with a concomitant inner knowledge of the two primal realities of sin and love which are the subject of Herbert's poem 'The Agony'. In some ways one might say that his poem 'Vanity' sets out the problem of human knowledge acquired only with a single vision and 'The agony' offers a solution in a double vision which sees both the outer and the inner.

**The fleet astronomer can bore
And thred the spheres with is quick-oiercing minde;
He views their stations, walks from doore to doore,
Surveys as if he had desing'd
To make a purchase there; he sees their dances
And knoweth long before
Both their full-ey'd aspects and secret glances.**

**The nimble diver with his side
Cuts through the working waves, that he may fetch
His dearly-earned pearl; which God did hide
On purpose from the venturous wretch,
That He might save his life, and also hers
Who with excessive pride
Her own destruction and his danger wears.**

**The subtil chymick can deuest
And strip the creature nake, till he finds
The callow principles within their nest;
There he imparts to them his minde,
Admitted to their bed-chamber before
They appear trim and drest**

To ordinarie suitors at the doore.

Bur his deare God? Who yet his glorious law
Embosomes un us, mellowing the ground

So that we need not say, Where;’s this command?

Poore man, thou searchest round

To find out death, but missest life at hand!

What hath not man sought out and found,

With showers and frosts, with love and aw,

The word 'Vanie' which is the title of this poem, referred in Herbert's day not just to the small emptiness of human vanity in the modern sense of self-preening, but to the bigger and more complete emptiness which lies behind it, to all things done in vain and uselessly. It was a bold stroke for Herbert writing in the midst of all the excitement and self-congratulation of an age of discovery and scientific advance to survey the whole scene with its supposed discoveries and achievements and call it 'Vanie' - emptiness. It was prophetic too. His survey of the science of his day anticipates the science of our own, anticipates the achievements but also the underlying arrogance and the obvious exploitation. His image of the astronomer who, far from being disinterested, not so much studies as surveys with an eye to possession

Surveys as if he had desing'd
To make a purchase there

Anticipates the commercial interest that goes hand in hand with modern science, the staking of claims on the moon, the filing of patents on the human genome. In the second image of the pearl diver risking his life for the greedy jewel merchant, who in turn feeds and serves the dangerous vanity of the rich also links the glamour of exploration with the sordid reality of exploitation. A link with which we are only too familiar. The strange image drawn from alchemy in the third verse of the 'subtle schimick' who can **devest And strip the creature nake, till he find The callow principles within their nest;** in order that he can re-design things to serve his own need **'impart to them his mind'** only too clearly anticipates the stripping down and rebuilding of our given nature which we propose to ourselves in genetic engineering and its prospect of designer babies. Then just as he brings this survey of man's scientific achievements to a climax, Herbert asks the great unanswered question, the question which is still taboo in many scientific communities today; **'what hath not man sought out and found, But his dear God?'** without this other knowledge our science will bring us nothing but cheated promises, emptiness and corruption. And how are we to have this 'other knowledge' of God? Like Davies, Herbert says look within. Echoing Paul he reminds us that this God whom we have chosen to ignore is not a

distant deity, he is not far from each one of us. Indeed His closeness as both the Law-giver and the Gardener of our Souls is brought home in Herberts beautiful new verb 'embosoms'

**What hath not man sought out and found,
Bur his deare God? Who yet his glorious law
Embosomes un us, mellowing the ground**

With showers and frosts, with love and aw,

The final image of the poem is the almost comic picture of the busy scientist searching everywhere for what he thinks is life, finding only death, whilst all the time life is standing beside him with hands open ready to save **Poore man, thou searchest round
To find out death, but missest life at hand!**

Herberts readers would not have needed to be reminded of the text which identifies the life at hand, the poor man missed; 'in him was life and the life was the light of man, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not'.

In The Agonie, Herbert helps us to imagine what it might be like not to miss that life at hand. What it might be like to turn from our empty knowledge of the outer to find a truer knowledge of those two vast and spacious things which are a key to understanding everything else.

**Philosophers have measure'd mountains,
Fathom'd the depths of seas, of states and kings;
Walk'd with a staffe to heav'n and traced fountains:
But there are two vast, spacious thins,
The which to measure it doth more behove;
Yet few there are that sound them, - Sinne and Love.**

**Who would know Sinne, let him repair
Unto Mount Olivet; thre shall he see
A Man so wrung with pains, that all His hair,
His skinne, His garments bloudie be.
Sinne is that presse and vice, which forceth pain
To hunt his cruell food through ev'ry vein.**

Who knows not Love, let him assay
And taste that juice which, on the crosse, a pike
Did set again abroach; then let him say
If ever he did taste the like,
Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,
Which my God feels as bloud, but I as wine.

The first three lines of this poem sum up the apparently impressive but actually empty way of knowing dealt with in 'Vanitie'. From there Herbert turns to deal with what is missing from the empty heart of such merely outer knowledge. **'The which to measure it doth more behove; Yet few there are that sound them, - Sinne and Love.'** Sin and love. How are we to know these things? Our modern age would make the knowledge purely personal and self-contained - a little dip into what we think we know about our private psychology. Herbert has a quite different approach. Our only hope of really knowing ourselves is first by knowing God and letting God know us and the only way we know God, the only possible Place and Person in which we can meet Him is Christ, in Him God meets us in our humanity. Herbert's epistemology is Christocentric. It is from the passion of Christ that we learn both who God is and who we are. In the second stanza of this poem, with its vivid and unforgettable images of Christ's agony in the garden, Herbert is saying that the image of that agony is *both* an image of what Sin does to a person and *also* an image at once of God's astonishing and liberating love, and of the sheer weight of sin. The fact that Jesus had to endure this agony in order to lift the weight of sin from our shoulders, to deliver us from that press and vice, shows how serious a thing sin is. The image of Christ crushed in the press and vice is profound because it expresses not only the pain and pressure of Gethsemane, squeezing the very blood to the surface of Christ's body but also by allusion to that double image of the wine press. The wine press of wrath from the Old Testament 'I have trodden the wine-press alone I will treat them in min anger, and trample them in my fury and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments and I will stain all my raiment', which becomes in Gethsemane as Christ makes it his own blood that stains his raiment, as judgement falls on him alone. The sign now not of wrath but of redemption as Sin is transmuted by love and from this press flows the wine which will be the life of the communicant church. So in his third and final stanza Herbert moves from the contemplation in Christ of sin to contemplation in Christ of that love which redeems sin. He who trod the wine-press alone becomes in this third stanza himself the cask of wine pierced, set abroach, opened, to refresh his people. It is an astonishing and daring image to make the moment the soldier's pike pierces Christ's heart on the cross a vision of the setting abroach of a wine cask. **Who knows not Love, let him assay And taste that juice which, on the crosse, a pike Did set again abroach;** In this final verse Herbert offers a transformation in the kind of our knowledge, in our way of knowing, not by choosing between ways of knowing, but by integrating two ways of knowing, offering us a both and, rather than an either or. This inclusiveness is embodied in the phrase 'Let him assay and taste'. The 'assaying' is that outer and speculative knowledge, the

measuring, the reasoning, the head-knowledge. Tasting is the inner and realised knowledge, the knowledge given not to the sceptical head but only to the committed heart. He calls on the 'poor man' of Vanitie, on the philosophers of his opening stanza, lost as they are in a wilderness of assaying to assay and taste. This moment of assaying and tasting the wine of love flowing from this tree of life is a kind of divine and redemptive recapitulation of the assaying and tasting wickedly and on our own terms in another garden which constituted our fall. The Poem finishes with a wonderful expression of the mystery in both incarnation and sacrament which is God's divine exchange and intercommunion offered to man on the cross

**Love is that liquor sweet and most divine,
Which my God feels as blood, but I as wine.**

Conclusion

It turns out that the task of knowing either ourselves or our world aright, cannot be self-contained human works they require a kind of light and validation from beyond themselves. Davies two poems on knowledge of the world and of ourselves both acknowledge this. The knowledge in orchestra depends on the knowledge of Love figured as the One whose music both creates and redeems the world, and the self-knowledge pursued in Nosce Te ipsum turns out to depend not on the light of our own reason but on another light which floods the soul a light which made the light which makes the day. Donne and Herbert name that Love and know that light as Christ and their engagement with the Gos who meets them in Christ is not simply a matter of private devotion but becomes the essential key to their perception of the world, their power to see through the visible truths to the invisible truths that sustain them. In the next chapter we will see how vaughn, supremely the poet of redemptive light, and seer of the unseen, and Milton whose blindness caused him to re-imagine his entire understanding of the seen and the unseen, both elaborated and mediated their transfigured vision through the power of poetry.

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