JOHN DONNE AND THE CLASSICAL ELEGY

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JOHN DONNE AND THE CLASSICAL ELEGY

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Denton, Texas
August, 1967
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

John Donne's Elegies have been described as "strange, virile, powerful, often repellent,"\(^1\) as verse which, like satire, holds "a cracked mirror up to nature," as the embodiment of "a particular conventional morality or amorality,"\(^2\) as "drama, extravagance, vivid realism, subtle analogies and syllogistic arguments,"\(^3\) and as "literary comedy" which is able to create "a powerful sense of the fickleness, the instability, the treachery, of physical existence."\(^4\)

Varied in depth and content, Donne's Elegies are, according to many, "united only by their generic title and their metre."\(^5\) Perhaps this belief accounts for the fact that, despite the large body of Donne criticism, the Elegies have been relatively untouched. No critic, with possibly the

\(^5\)Gransden, p. 92.
exception of J. B. Leishman, has dealt extensively with the amatory elegies. And even Mr. Leishman's discussion in his *The Monarch of Wit* is often superficial or inadequate. Studies of individual elegies are also curiously lacking. Some studies, such as Clay Hunt's explication of "To His Mistress Going to Bed," Doniphan Louthan's comments on Elegy XVI, XVIII, and XIX, and Helen Gardner's short study of Elegy V, are helpful. But neither they nor the occasional articles in *Explicator* or *Modern Language Notes* make up for the scarcity of good, sound critical comment on the body of Donne's elegies.

Some critics, notably Herbert J. C. Grierson, J. B. Leishman, and Robert Ellrodt, do discuss Donne's relationship to the Roman amatory poets, particularly Ovid. But most prefer to argue whether the elegies are genuinely felt or autobiographically true. Although Edmund Gosse's view of the elegies as the story of Donne's love affair with a married woman is perhaps the classic example of biographical criticism, more critics than one would imagine prefer to discuss the biographical aspects of the elegies instead of the technical ones. Elegy IX, "The Autunnal," for example, more frequently calls forth speculation on Donne's relationship to Mrs. Herbert than solid critical comment on the elegy itself. The elegies of parting, particularly Elegy XII and XVI, are also interpreted biographically; the dating of these poems and the fact that they may record Donne's partings with
Anne More evoke most of the critical comment. In other words, no thorough study of the Elegies has been made.

In order to understand Donne's contribution to the English elegy, one must know the tradition both of the classical elegy and of the English elegy prior to Donne. In particular, one must see the Elizabethan handling of this poetical form in order to discover how widely Donne's use of the elegiac form varied from that of his contemporaries and how closely in spirit it paralleled the classical elegy.

Of the several books that have been written on the English elegy, most, such as those written by Ruth Wallerstein and John W. Draper, deal with only the funeral elegy. But when one considers that the elegy as it evolved in English literature became an expression of melancholy or lament occasioned by death or the thought of death and allayed by the tranquil consideration of life's mutability, such a restriction is understandable. However, neither the classical elegy nor the Elizabethan elegy was as limited in tone or theme as is the elegy today. The Greek elegy was hortatory, didactic, erotic and threnodic, and the Roman elegy, although it retained some of the diversity of the older form, became primarily amatory. The tone of the classical elegy, particularly the Roman, could range from that of sorrow and lamentation to querulous complaint, bitter denunciation, passionate exultation.

6Charles Mills Gayley and Benjamin Putnam Kurtz, Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism (Boston, 1920), p. 28.
tenderness, and whimsicality. Such diversity of tone and theme was allowable in the classical elegy because its distinguishing characteristic was meter.

But the Elizabethan elegists did not have the distinguishing characteristic of meter, despite Thomas Campion's attempts to establish an equivalent English elegiac form. Consequently, in the Elizabethan period the genre was a very confused one. The name elegy was applied to laments about life in general, to complaints about a fickle mistress, to amatory and non-amatory epistles, to didactic poems, and finally to funeral laments—all of which were more or less justified by classical convention and precedent. Many poets experimented occasionally with the elegy, particularly when they did not wish to be bound by a stricter verse form. But the diversity of the genre was created by many poets, not by one. Barnabe Barnes, the only English writer who employed the elegy to a great extent prior to Donne, wrote almost entirely lover's laments which were Petrarchan in tone and imagery. Ben Jonson and Michael Drayton also wrote several elegies, but Jonson's are again primarily lover's laments and strictly Catullan in inspiration. Drayton shows more diversity in his conception of the genre, writing amatory, didactic, and funereal poems all in epistolary form, but his elegies, published many years after Donne's, are not strictly in the classical spirit. In short, Donne is the only English poet with a considerable body of elegies who uses the full scope
allowed by the classical elegy, and his elegies are more classically oriented in tone and spirit than those of any other English writer.

The elegies, as a major body of Donne's poetry, have been unjustly slighted by critics. In order to correct this imbalance in Donne criticism, this study will examine the whole body of Donne's formal elegies. Despite their diversity, it will be shown that they fall into several broad groupings based on tonal quality and elegiac type. The chapter divisions of this study are based on these groupings: complaintive, lamentive, amatory, and abusive and satiric. Within these chapters, each poem will be discussed individually in terms of theme, tone, imagery, structure, and classical parallels (if any).

By examining Donne's elegies individually and in light of both the Elizabethan and the classical elegy, it will be seen that Donne is the only English poet who utilizes the full scope allowed by the classical elegy. His elegies encompass the broad range of themes and tones allowed by the classical elegy. The first group of his amatory elegies are lover's complaints—by far the most prevalent type of Roman elegy. Donne's lover's complaints, like Ovid's, are dramatic in quality and cynical in tone. They show a lover who complains about his mistress's unfaithfulness or her obtuseness. The poems of the second group are lamentive in tone and particularly concerned with life's mutability. Three
of these, concerned with the parting of true lovers, remind one of the melancholy Propertius. They, like Elegy X, "The Dreame," fall directly within classical elegiac themes, i.e. a lover's lament upon separation and a lover's dream of his mistress. The third group of poems is truly amatory in its appreciation of sensual pleasure. Whether arguing that a woman's most pleasing quality is her "centrique part" or that one should prefer love to war, these elegies are witty and high-spirited. Some of these elegies, such as the witty defenses of inconstancy and the comparison of the soldier and the lover, are directly within classical tradition. Others, such as XVIII and XIX, take a classical type as their basis and then go beyond in both wit and purely erotic sentiment. The last group contains elegies with two different tonal qualities, invective poems in the style of Catullus, and light, satiric, humorous elegies also in the classical spirit. In these poems, Donne seems to be running a scale of literary experiments, like a piano virtuoso displaying his skill for a highly sophisticated audience.

It may be hard to prove Donne's familiarity with any of the classical elegists besides Ovid, the one classical elegist with whom Donne's acquaintance can be proved. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Donne was interested in the classical genres. He not only used the classical elegiac form, but also wrote formal verse satire and epigrams. He was a well educated man, who, although not a classicist, was
interested in classical authors. Since he read Latin, he could have had access to the Roman elegists in either the original Latin or the many English translations available. But whether he knew, or did not know, Catullus, Propertius, or Tibullus, nevertheless, his dramatic complaints to his mistress, his expression of joy in sensual pleasure, his witty defenses of inconstancy, his tender and melancholy farewells to his mistress, and his satirical tale are all sanctioned by classical elegiac tradition.

Since this paper will show that Donne's elegies parallel the classical elegies in spirit, tone, and theme, it will be necessary to do some tracing of the development of the classical elegy, particularly since there is so much popular misconception concerning the genre. The Elizabethans themselves did not wholly comprehend the classical elegy, and to show their misconceptions and misrepresentations of the classical form, one needs a working knowledge of the Greek and Roman elegy.

The origin of the elegy has long been debated by classical scholars. For if the Greek word ἔλεγος, from which the modern word elegy is derived, is interpreted as "mournful song," how does one explain the fact that the earliest Greek literary elegies are not funeral elegies but poems dealing with love and war? The elegy is thought to have originated in the Ionian colonies of Asia minor about the eighth century B.C. as a dirge or similar song of "mournful remembrance"
with flute accompaniment. These early burial songs seem to have been in hexameters with a set refrain of lamentation. The two parts of the verse were probably sung responsively by a double chorus.

The original names for the pentameter, ἔλεγχον and ἔλεγεια, are frequently derived from ἔλεγεῖε, meaning "Woe! Woe! cry woe!" By the fifth century, the accepted meaning for ἔλεγος seems to have been "a song of mourning." Both Euripides and Aristophanes use the word with this meaning in their plays. The first occurrence of the similar word ἔλεγχον appears in a fragment of Critias which was written near the end of the fifth century. One critic, J. C. Bailey, feels that ἔλεγος designated a lament, whereas ἔλεγεια "had no reference to subject, and merely meant a poem in a particular meter, which had been frequently used for elegies." However, he admits that ἔλεγος itself "is occasionally used in this metrical sense, irrespective of subject."
Even though scholars are reasonably sure that the elegy was originally a mournful flute song probably used in praise of the dead, they are unable to explain the fact that the first extant specimens of elegiac poetry are either military or convivial "and such grief as they express is seldom concerned with the dead."\(^{12}\) Georg Luck feels that even if the early elegy was originally a lament, "it must from the very beginning have absorbed thoughts and feelings which revolved around life, not death: joy, not melancholy."\(^{13}\)

The earliest Greek elegists are not exclusively concerned with their intimate, personal feelings. As George Luck says, "They always address their songs to someone, to a friend, a gathering, a political community, an army."\(^{14}\) Most frequently, these earliest elegists used the elegiac meter for urging their soldiers or countrymen to war. The Ephesian Callinus, for instance, uses the elegiac form to exhort his countrymen to war. In his one long piece which survives, Callinus, fearing the threat of invasion by the Cimmerian army, both advises and praises his soldiers.\(^{15}\) Tyrtaeus, a general and administrator of Sparta, employs the elegiac meter for much

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 22.
\(^{15}\)Sellar, *Roman Poets of Augustan Age*, p. 204.
the same warlike, patriotic purposes as Callinus. Because he wished to inspire the Lacedaemonians in the Second Messenian War, a war which they seemingly were unwilling to fight, Tyrtaeus relates both incidents from Sparta's glorious past and also gives advice for the present. More important, he wishes to show the nobility of war and the nobility of a young soldier's death:

It well becomes a young man killed in war
To lie with all his battle-gashes on him;
All that is seen doth honour to his corpse.
But when dogs desecrate the hoary head
And beard and vitals of an old man slain,
That is the height of human tragedy.

Archilochus (734-665 B.C.) used the elegiac form not only for songs of war, but also for poems of travel, of philosophy, and of death. His verses seem to have been composed and sung "in the intervals of fighting when someone had a flute and the poet was called upon for a song." Being a hardened soldier, Archilochus is realistic about war, and in his verses he displays a certain cynicism and contempt for appearances. For instance, he writes of losing his shield:

A perfect shield bedecks some Thracian now;
I had no choice: I left it in a wood.
Ah, well, I saved my skin, so let it go!
A new one's just as good.

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17 Bowra, p. 44. 18 Ibid., p. 54.
19 Ibid., p. 9. 20 Ibid.
He also speaks of war's sorrows in a manner occasionally approximating a lament. In one such piece, he and a companion cannot help weeping about some friends lost at sea.

Other Greek writers viewed the elegy as didactic rather than hortatory. Solon of Athens (c639-559 B.C.) used the elegy to express political and ethical maxims. As a legislator between the rich and the poor, Solon wanted to move the people with his verse, and so for him the elegy was "an elegy of high politics."21 Theognis of Megara (late sixth century B.C.) also utilized this ethical elegy. His personal and didactic elegies express an aristocratic philosophy of life, advocating scorn for the lower classes, honor for the gods, and respect for the Mean.22 Theognis also gives personal advice on such matters as the evils of slander, of intolerance, and of not honoring one's parents.23

Xenophanes of Colophon (565-475 B.C.) used the elegiac form to criticize certain beliefs and institutions of his time. A man of original ideas, Xenophanes wrote on such diverse topics as the theology of Homer and Hesiod and the Olympian games. He felt that these two poets degraded the gods by giving them low moral standards,24 and that the Olympian games were diametrically opposed to the sense of

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21 Ibid., pp. 73-74.  
22 Ibid., pp. 144-156, passim.  
23 Ibid., p. 161.  
24 Ibid., p. 115.
moderation and contentment that was necessary for good citizen-
ship. He even satirized Pythagoras for his belief in the transmigration of souls, saying of him:

Once he was passing by an ill-used pup,  
And pitied it, and said (or so they tell)  
"Stop, do not thrash it! 'tis a dear friend's soul:  
I recognized it when I heard it yell."26

Although the elegy was originally a "song of mourning," few of the earliest Greek elegists wrote laments for the dead. Simonides of Ceos (556-486 B.C.), however, through his elegiac epigrams for the dead and his threnodic elegies, gave the elegy back its original, mournful tone. He wrote elegiac laments for the soldiers who fell in the Persian war and celebrated such victories as Marathon, Salamis, and Platea.27 Like many of the earlier elegiac writers, he, too, saw a certain glory in a soldier's death:

Into the dark death cloud they passed, to set  
Fame on their own dear land for fadeless wreath,  
And dying died not. Valour lifts them yet  
Into the splendour from the night beneath.28

In contrast to the hortatory, didactic, and threnodic elegies are Mimnermus of Colophon's melancholy laments for the swift passing of youth and its pleasures of love. Although Mimnermus wrote some elegies dealing with war and patriotism, he is most famous for his book of amatory elegies

25Ibid., pp. 127-130.  
26Ibid., p. 115.  
27Harrington, Roman Poets, p. 18.  
28Bowra, p. 196.
entitled *Nanno* in honor of the courtesan he loved.\textsuperscript{29} Although no one is sure what the precise character of *Nanno* was, it seems to "have been composed on rather a large scale and to have interwoven episodes of mythology with its amatory matter."\textsuperscript{30} But despite rather diverse elements in *Nanno*, Mimnermus is considered the founder of the erotic elegy.\textsuperscript{31}

The following lines of Mimnermus show his delight in the pleasures of love and of youth as well as his sorrow at "painful age," the destroyer of youth and beauty:

> O golden love, what life, what joy but thine?  
> Come death when thou art gone and make an end!  
> When gifts and tokens are no longer mine,  
> Nor the sweet intimacies of a friend.  
> These are the flowers of youth. But painful age,  
> The bane of beauty, following swiftly on,  
> Wearies the heart of man with sad presage  
> And takes away his pleasure in the sun.  
> Hateful is he to maiden and to boy,  
> And fashioned by the gods for our annoy.\textsuperscript{32}

With Antimachus of Colophon (fl. about 400 B.C.), an innovation appears in the amatory elegy. When his beloved Lyde died, he tried to find solace in the ancient legends that told of the sorrows of love.\textsuperscript{33} By describing the unhappy lovers in mythology, Antimachus created the "objective erotic type" of elegy as contrasted to the "subjective type" introduced by Mimnermus. As James Loeb says, "For Antimachus love is merely a pretext, a theme to which an author

\textsuperscript{29} Harrington, *Roman Poets*, p. 17.  
\textsuperscript{30} Bowra, p. 27.  
\textsuperscript{31} Luck, p. 23.  
\textsuperscript{32} Bowra, p. 18.  
\textsuperscript{33} Luck, p. 25.
need only apply all his imaginative faculties and, even more, all the fruits of his erudition." 

Although the "objective erotic type" of elegy began with Antimachus, the Alexandrians improved it. Masters of an elaborate, erudite, but technically excellent elegy, they wrote both of their own love affairs and those of mythological heroes. Of these writers, the greatest are Philetas and Callimachus. They are praised by Horace and Quintilian, and referred to by Ovid and Propertius as their "masters and models." Unfortunately, of Philetas's works only fifty disconnected lines belonging to different poems have survived. However, it is known that, like other Alexandrian poets, Philetas had a mistress, Battis, in whose honor he wrote elegies. In his elegies, the poet probably recounted mythological stories that were more or less closely connected with his own love affairs.

Although the Roman elegists feel themselves the legitimate successors of Philetas and Callimachus, they fail to say what they owe to them. The extant fragments of Callimachus's works also shed little light on this topic. There seems to be little in Callimachus that resembles the erotic

35 Ibid., p. 66.
36 Aiken, p. 15.
37 Luck, p. 27.
38 Couat, pp. 72-74.
Some of his epigrams are love poems, but only one of them is addressed to a woman. It is an elegant piece of work, a little conventional and playful, and hardly an erotic elegy, although it anticipates a theme that reappears in Propertius, Tibullus and Ovid.\(^{39}\) Only two of Callimachus's elegies have survived intact, Hymn V on the "Bath of Pallas," and the "Lock of Berenice" (known only through Catullus's translation). The first poem was composed for a festival in Argos, and the other, an elaborate, courtly occasional poem, for a queen whose favor Callimachus wished to obtain.\(^{40}\) The Aitia, a four-book work which concerned the origins of cities, games, and religious practices, may also have contained love stories. One that has been reconstructed relates the love adventures of Cydippe and Acontius.\(^{41}\)

Much speculation has occurred about the tone and subject matter of Callimachus's elegies. Luck concludes that from Ovid's occasional references, "We know that erotic themes had their place in Callimachus's verse."\(^{42}\) Sellar, noting the spirit with which Tibullus and Propertius treat their love, says, "It may be conjectured that the Alexandrian elegy, like the Roman based on it, conformed to the original idea of the elegy, and bore to a large extent the character of a

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\(^{39}\) Luck, p. 26.

\(^{40}\) Alfred Körte, Hellenistic Poetry, translated by Jacob Hammer and Moses Hadas (New York, 1929), pp. 116-117.

\(^{41}\) Couat, p. 150.

\(^{42}\) Luck, p. 29.
'querimonia,' either a complaint of the faithlessness or caprice of a mistress, or an expression of that luxury of melancholy so often associated with the sentiment."\(^{43}\)

Parthenius of Nicaea is important not because of his late and rather feeble attempts at the Alexandrian elegy, but because he was brought to Rome as a captive in the Mithridatic War (73 B.C.). There, he introduced Alexandrian poetry with its learned sources to the Romans. His prose booklet, The Sufferings of Love, was to furnish Cornelius Gallus, an important Roman elegist (whose works are not extant) with stories for elegies and epics.\(^{44}\) However, it is easy to overestimate Parthenius's influence on the great Roman elegists. As Korte says, although "the Hellenistic epigram may have offered the Romans a store of effective motifs, we have thus far no evidence of the existence of long poems of subjectively erotic content among the Alexandrians, and it is very likely that they never existed."\(^{45}\)

Whereas the Greeks wrote elegies dealing with war, politics, love, friendship, and death, the Roman elegists used the elegiac form almost exclusively for love poetry. Although the Greeks had dealt with passion and love in their poetry, their amatory elegies tended to be external

\(^{43}\)Sellar, *Roman Poets of Augustan Age*, p. 208.
\(^{44}\)Körte, p. 149.
\(^{45}\)Ibid., p. 150.
and intellectual. The poems of the four outstanding Roman poets who wrote elegies are anything but external and intellectual. Catullus, Propertius, Tibullus, and Ovid all wrote subjective elegies centered on their affaires de coeur with their respective mistresses: Lesbia, Cynthia, Delia and Nemesis, and Corinna. The "personal involvement of the poet" is the new aspect that the Romans added to the elegiac tradition.

The Roman elegiac poets, beginning with Catullus, devoted their fullest efforts to "what hitherto had been regarded as a tenuous literary genre." As conscious craftsmen, they wanted "to raise the elegy to a higher rank, to distinguish it from the epigram and light improvisation." However, Catullus, the first Roman writer of amatory elegiacs, used the elegiac meter for both epigrams and satirical pieces. Of his one hundred and sixteen verses, poems one to sixty are short lyrical or satirical pieces written in various meters; poems sixty-one to sixty-eight are long poems in glyconic, galliambic, hexameter, and elegiac meter; and poems sixty-nine to one hundred and sixteen are epigrams and short satirical or erotic pieces in elegiac meter.

47 Ibid., p. 70.
48 Luck, p. 13.
The short elegiac piece was a recognized genre both for direct abuse and for satirical comment on a person. Such a poem was "compounded of wit, ingenuity, and savage elegance of expression." Most frequently among such verses of Catullus one finds invective poems. In these "vituperative trifles" he inveighs against political figures, untrue friends, false mistresses and immoral men. His language in these poems is colloquial; "frank and often ultra-blunt," it uses "forceful, unconventional words," and it descends to vulgarity. These poems may range in abusiveness from the relatively mild Carm. cviii

Cominius, if the people took a vote
and sent your hoary halo of white hair
with every spot of moral muck still on it
down to the grave I'll tell you what I think:
first off, the tongue that hated all good men
would be cut out to stuff a buzzard's craw
they'd dig out your eyes and throw them to the crows,
your guts to the dogs and to the wolves the rest.

to the extremely abusive Carm. xcvii

you take that guy Aemilius:
he's one of whom you'd say
you couldn't tell which end was up--
a stinker either way

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50 Quinn, p. 38.
51 Karl P. Harrington, Catullus and His Influence (New York, 1927), p. 62.
his ugly mug with foot-long fangs
and gums like rotten leather;
and when he smiles, you'd think it was
a cess-pool in hot weather.

But he's the guy that loves the gals
a Devastating Male--
my God, when will they catch the man
and lock him up in jail?

why, any girl that would so much
as look at him--I'd say
she'd lick the hangman's running sores
and kiss the pus away.54

Catullus's satirical poems are on a slightly higher
poetic level than are the invective poems. In them, "poetry
is just preponderating over purpose as invective or ridic-
cule."55 It is important to realize that at this stage of
development, elegy and satire were closely related forms
and that at first, elegy was the rival of satire and not of
lyric poetry. The genres had common features: both were a
form of "talk or conversation" and both were addressed to an
assumed listener--to a mistress, a friend, a patron, an
enemy, or merely a general listener.56 Catullus's satirical
poems show this correlation between the two genres. Al-
though written in elegiacs, they resemble satire more
closely than elegy. They frequently show Catullus's humorous
bent, being occasionally no more than the relation of an
amusing incident, such as Quintia's attempt to rival Lesbia
or the gossip about Clodius and his sister.

54 Ibid., pp. 112-113.
55 Quinn, p. 36. 56 Mendell, p. 184.
Catullus is, of course, best known for his love poems. Despite the fact that he did not write a complete book of elegies, he was still considered by both Propertius and Ovid as one of their predecessors in the amatory elegy, and Tibullus, who never speaks of other poets, occasionally reworks one of Catullus's poems. As George Luck says:

Catullus . . . is the first Latin poet whose work is dominated by a great passion, the first who has created verse in which this passion lives on forever. . . . We must consider Catullus as the first representative of the erotic elegy in its Roman form.

The Lesbia poems, many of which are written in elegiac meter, are addressed to Catullus's mistress, Clodia, the beautiful but notoriously promiscuous wife of Metelus Celer. In these poems one follows Catullus "through every stage of his passion, from the first rapture of admiration and the first happiness of possession to the biting words of scorn in which he announces to Lesbia his final renunciation of her."

Introspective in nature, Catullus uses his poetry to analyze his overwhelming passion. For example, even though he realizes Lesbia's unworthiness, he still feels himself plagued by the disease of love. He sees that he is degraded by his love for Lesbia, yet he still waits outside her door. He sees her fickleness, her betrayals. He loves and he hates

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57 Luck, p. 47.
58 Ibid., p. 48.
59 Sellar, Roman Poets of Republic, p. 437.
until finally he renounces his love for her, the passionate
love which has so long tried to sustain itself. Tender,
melancholy, and bitter, these elegies utilize the full tonal
quality allowed by the elegiac form. They allow the poet to
speak scornfully, as he does in Carm. lxxxii

when Lesbia's husband's by
oh my!
the dreadful things she says of me!
and he, the silly fool,
is happy as a lark
you stupid ass, you've got no sense

. . . . . . . . . .
where there's talk
there's desire

or despairingly, as in Carm. lxxxvi

. . . . . . . . .
god if you know mercy
. . . . . . . . . .
and if my life was good
let this sickness pass
this death let pass from me

down, under, down the creeping numbness dulls
outdriven out of all my soul delight
I no longer ask that she love me too
or (anyway she can't) that she be pure
for my own health I hope and to lay down
the burden of this filthy foul disease

god dear god grant me this
for I was loyal ever

The elegies of Tibullus, the first real Roman elegist,
still reflect much of the diversity of the Greek elegiac
form, as did Catullus's. Apart from its consistently elegiac
meter, Tibullus's first volume is a mixture of both satire

60 Catullus, pp. 103-104.
61 Ibid., pp. 98-99.
and elegy. However, Tibullus does "incline toward the
elegy." He accepts its conventional situations, its pre-
vailing melancholy tone, and its tendency toward self-
analysis.\textsuperscript{62}

Tibullus's love for Delia, an attractive courtesan,
dominates the themes of the first book. In elaborating upon
his love affair with Delia, Tibullus continually "undercuts"
his hopes for a happy love.\textsuperscript{63} Although he wishes he and
Delia might enjoy the idyllic life of the countryside, he
senses the impossibility of such happiness. For instance
in 1.2, Tibullus describes his dreams of Delia in the coun-
try:

\textsl{... I shall live in the country, and my Delia shall
guard the grain while the threshing-floor treads out
the harvest in the glowing sun. Or she shall watch the
grapes in the full vats as the swift feet press down
the white-shining new wine. She shall learn to tell
the herd; the chattering peasant child shall learn to
play on a loving mistress' lap. Delia will know the
gift to bring for the farmer's god—a cluster of grapes
for the vines, spikes of grain for the cornfield, an
offering of food for the flock ... .}\textsuperscript{64}

Then he completely dissolves them: "These were my dreams,
and now the East wind and the South wind toss them over all

\textsuperscript{62}Mendell, p. 191.

\textsuperscript{63}J. P. Elder, "Tibullus: Tersus Atque Elegans,"
\textit{Critical Essays on Roman Literature}, edited by J. P. Sullivan

\textsuperscript{64}T. E. Page, E. Capps, and W. H. D. Rouse, editors,
\textit{Catullus, Tibullus and Pervigilium Veneris}, translated by
of perfumed Armenia." As Luck comments, Tibullus is "haunted by an ever present sense of loss, of having been robbed of some irretrievable happiness." Neither love nor country life is ever felt as his secure possession.

Many themes traditionally associated with the elegy appear in the Delia poems. In 1.2 Tibullus writes of the lover in front of his mistress's locked door. In another elegy the dreams of the ill poet, left behind by his army, are in ironic contrast to his real situation. Other elegies show Tibullus's realization of the impossibility of happiness with Delia. She is no longer the unsophisticated young girl he first loved. Having thoroughly mastered the art of intrigue which Tibullus taught her, she now uses it against him. Through the help of a lena she sells herself to a wealthy lover.

A new realism pervades Tibullus's second book of elegies, which deal primarily with his love for Nemesis, another courtesan. Tibullus, in "bondage" to his cold, hard-hearted mistress, alternately hopes and despairs. Although he is tortured by Nemesis's infidelities and venality, Tibullus is still "tender and self-abnegative" in his love for her. But Tibullus tires of the city life; he laments

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65 Ibid.
66 Luck, p. 69.
67 Sellar, Roman Poets of Augustan Age, p. 239.
the passing of the Golden Age of innocence. Sadness and despair are the final note of this book.

Yet whether Tibullus is writing of his love for Delia or Nemesis, or of his joy in home and friends, he dreams always of an idyllic pastoral world. His description is not "specific description," such as that of landscape, of season, of weather, of people; rather it has a hazy quality, which allows it to become "the symbol of a world beyond reality, a world not shackled by bonds of time and space." This hazy quality lingers over a Tibullan elegy with its gently shifting themes and moods, over these elegies expressing love's sorrows rather than its joys, and "even when happiness is most complete . . . the sense of its transitoriness."

Although Tibullus and Propertius deal with the same range of themes--love, despair, friendship, and regret, there is a great difference in their poetry. Whereas Tibullus's poetry is a relatively clear, simple, straightforward expression of his love, Propertius's amatory elegies are dramatic, passionately intense, full of abrupt transitions, and numerous obscure mythological allusions.

Propertius's first two books of "subjective erotic elegies" concern his love affair with Cynthia, a beautiful and intelligent courtesan. Their love passes through a

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68 Elder, p. 80.
69 Luck, p. 74.
70 Sellar, Roman Poets of Augustan Age, p. 240.
period of happiness to one "of suspicion and jealousy, to
vituperation, reconciliation, infidelity, and final break." In book one the elegies follow closely the course of the affair, but in book two Propertius adheres less strictly to the chronology of the affair. Instead, each poem represents a situation or mood. Although Cynthia does not figure prominently in book three, some poems do show Propertius's growing disillusionment and his final renunciation of her. Book four contains only two Cynthia poems. In these last books Propertius is less concerned with his love affair than with his poetic achievement and fame as a poet.

Using a technique similar to that of the Greek novelists, Propertius leads the reader through "a series of highly colored events." In these dramatic situations he deals with a wide range of emotions, from passion, tenderness, and joy to sorrow, despair and bitterness. The protagonist that Propertius pictures is a lover who has little control of his attitude toward love. Since love is irrational, Propertius's lover cannot govern himself by philosophy, morality, or logic. He is unable to use his reason. He cannot explain to Demophoon why he is so susceptible to every woman:

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71 Mendell, p. 195.
72 Ibid., p. 201.
73 Luck, p. 117.
You say, But why? I cannot tell you why.
Men gash their limbs with knives--and for what reason?
What frenzy's there? I do not know, not I.
But every man is given a vice by nature;
Mine--this is simple--is to be in love. 75

Since Propertius felt that love was an ungovernable
passion, he tried to make his writing reflect this idea. The
use of violent language and abrupt transitions reflecting
his change of moods helps him achieve a dramatic effect. As
Karl P. Harrington comments, "He carries the reader with him
as he breaks abruptly in upon his own course of thought to
ejaculate a question, or utter a reproach, or enunciate a
principle." 76 For instance, in 1.8 Propertius argues, begs,
and pleads with Cynthia not to go on a journey to Illyria,
and finally ends by wishing her safety on her voyage. Then
abruptly, he says: "She hasn't gone! She's promised me!
She's staying!/ Let those who jeered at me take heed of
that!/ I've won, I've won, and he, my unknown rival,/ has
had his answer, had it clear and flat." 77 This abrupt break
in tone reflects the elation that Propertius felt upon dis-
covering that Cynthia chose not to make her journey after all.

"The particular function of the Roman love elegy was to
give personal form to typical experience," says A. W. Allen. 78

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75 Sextus Aurelius Propertius, The Poems of Propertius,
translated by Constance Carrier (Bloomington, Ind., 1963), p. 90.
76 Harrington, Roman Poets, p. 50.
77 Propertius, pp. 36-37.
78 Allen, p. 129.
Propertius personalizes almost all of the conventional elegiac themes he uses, but the theme which seems to strike a particularly responsive note is that of the imminence of death. In the midst of love-making, Propertius suddenly remembers "eternal night." He visualizes Cynthia's wraith with lips "withered from water drunk underground," her robe charred by fire. He imagines his own death and has visions of Cynthia drowned:

. . . I dreamed I saw you shipwrecked,
I saw your weakening hands clutch at the air
I heard you gasp that you had done me evil;
I saw you dragged down by your brine-soaked hair. 79

Many other conventional elegiac themes are equally individualized by Propertius. For instance he is tender at discovering Cynthia alone,

At dawn, and wondering who was last night's lover,
I entered--and I found her all alone!
alone and never lovelier, even in purple
praying before the Vestals' altar stone 80

cynical in his remarks about the lustfulness of women,

How often you taunt me: Only man is lustful!
You lie. For women, lust is lord no less. 81

and bitter in his final renouncement of Cynthia:

Count every white hair; pull them out each morning
before the glass that mocks your fading face;
and know, like me, that you are barred from heaven,
and see a young usurper in your place!
Cry out, poor shrunken hag, for my forgiveness. 82

79 Propertius, p. 98.
80 Ibid., p. 105.
81 Ibid., p. 148.
82 Ibid., p. 156.
George Luck's statement about Propertius perhaps best sums up his uniqueness:

More than any other Latin, he experiments with himself. . . . Restlessly he analyses his own brooding, self-tormenting eroticism. Each poem is an attempt to preserve a new experiment in its complexity, without the simplification and order given by analytical thought.\(^8^3\)

Like Propertius, Ovid loves and hates, hopes and fears, despairs and exults. But unlike the other poet, Ovid does not attempt to resolve these dichotomies. Rather, he "passes them over with a joke, an ironic remark." By the time Ovid began writing his elegies he had a relatively well developed literary form with which to deal. Many conventional themes and a predominantly melancholy tone had been established. Since Ovid saw no possibility of further development of the deeply melancholy tone and because it suited his temperament, he chose to develop a lighter and more witty tone in his first book of amatory elegies, the *Amores*.\(^8^4\) In the *Amores* \(^8^5\) Ovid writes of his love for Corinna. But unlike the loves of Catullus, Tibullus, and Propertius, Ovid's mistress is

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\(^8^3\) Luck, p. 123.


\(^8^5\) Although the *Amores* established Ovid's reputation as a versatile and polished elegist, he also published a tragedy (*Medea*), imaginary laments of mythological heroes and heroines (*Heroides*), didactic poems (*Ars Amatoria*, *Remedia Amoris*, *Medicamina Faeciei*), a poetic calendar (*Fasti*), a compilation of mythological tales (*Metamorphoses*), and epistolary laments (*Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto*).
a "composite character, a name he uses to represent the numerous women he has known in his youth." In describing his love for Corinna, Ovid accepts all of the established elegiac themes and situations, and then adds some new ones of his own. Ovid is a "slave of love" who complains outside his mistress's locked door, who rejoices in Corinna's love during an afternoon, who denounces the bawd's advice to his mistress, who sees a similarity between love and war, who laments his partings with his mistress, who appeals to the husband to protect his wife more zealously from other rivals. He also adds new situations and themes, praying to the gods to assist Corinna in an abortion, teaching her lovers' secret ways for conversing at a banquet, even cataloguing all the rivers who were ever in love.

The moods of these elegies range from "resignation, sometimes playful, often bitter, to genuine annoyance and heart-felt regret." But the quality which stands out in Ovid is his "merry playfulness." What Tibullus and Propertius took seriously, Ovid takes lightly and gaily. He makes of love, "a merry work of art." Since Ovid never thoroughly identifies with his unhappy lover, he able to be the "expert and the amused spectator." He is less "Cupid's victim" and more "his deputy."

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86 Luck, p. 147.
87 Ibid., p. 149.
88 Mendell, p. 215.
89 Ibid., p. 219.
To give his elegies their witty quality, Ovid uses the unexpected turn, the added surprise. He may, as in 2.7, loudly protest his mistress's accusations that he has been trifling with the maid, and then in the following elegy immediately chastize Cypassis, the maid, for betraying him by her guilty looks. He may make one statement in one elegy and an antithetical one in another elegy. He may argue against a man who does not keep his mistress under guard, as in 2.19

Fool, if you feel no need to guard your girl for your own sake, See that you guard her for mine, so I may want her the more. Easy things nobody wants, but what is forbidden in tempting; He has no heart in his breast who loves with his rival's consent.90

or, as in 3.4, ridicule a man who keeps his mistress under guard

Setting a guard on your wife? How silly, ridiculous husband! She is protected the best whose inclinations are chaste. Only when license exists does continence hold any value; She who keep pure since she just might just as well be impure.91

Or again, Ovid may swear his devotion to Corrina in one poem and later admit the difficulty he has in remaining true. All girls appeal to him. "Out of control," he admits, "I lack will power to keep me aright./ There is no definite One whose beauty drives me to frenzy;/ No: there are hundreds, almost, keeping me always in love."92

91Ibid., p. 73.
92Ibid., p. 44.
Each elegy deals with one well-defined topic. Its progression is clear and straightforward. "Unlike Tibullus, Ovid does not rely on suggestiveness of mood and the delicacy of the verbal music to bind the whole together. He avoids the abrupt, passionate transitions of Propertius." Instead, he usually uses a dramatic, argumentative quality to develop a poem. Beginning with an exclamation of some sort, Ovid proceeds to develop his idea through the use of arguments, each distich representing a step forward in logical progress until at the end of the poem, he dismisses the reader with an epigram or witty tour de force. Since Ovid directs his arguments at another person, either real or imaginary, his language is conversational, a device which again enhances the immediacy and dramatic quality of the elegy.

By the end of the Roman period, the elegy, although including some threnodic and satiric elements, had become predominantly amatory. A whole set of conventional elegiac themes had been established. It was conventional that one's love affair passed from a period of extreme happiness to one of jealousy and suspicion, to infidelity, despair, abuse, and final break. Set conventional pieces included a lament outside the mistress's locked door, a denunciation of the lena, a comparison of love and war, a melancholy parting poem, a bitter condemnation of the mistress's unfaithfulness, and an exultant song of love.

\[92\] Luck, p. 150.  \[94\] Ibid., p. 151.
Introspective in nature, the Roman poets used the elegiac form to analyze their overwhelming passions. They each utilized the full tonal qualities allowed by the classical form. They are tender, melancholy, scornful, bitter, even witty—each in his own way. Whereas Tibullus's elegies are reflective, Ovid's are dramatic, and whereas Catullus is satiric and colloquial, Propertius is melancholy and ornamental. But whether they see love as a dichotomy of love and hate as does Catullus, as an impossible dream as does Tibullus, as an irrational force as does Propertius, or as a merry game as does Ovid—they all give personal expression through the medium of an established form, the classical elegy.
CHAPTER II

THE ELIZABETHAN ELEGY

In the Renaissance, conventions of tragedy, comedy, and epic were well defined by critics. However, neither in English, French, nor Italian literary criticism are the minor genres, such as the elegy, equally well defined. Vernon Hall, Jr., in discussing the Italian poetic genres, says that "since lyrics are hard to handle from the standpoint of social rank, the Renaissance theorists do not attempt an organized theory of poetry."¹ J. W. H. Atkins says of seventeenth century French criticism that "since epic and drama were the most important of the 'kinds,' they were to receive the main attention."² The minor genres fare no better in English criticism. Although several English critics comment on the elegy, they fail to adequately describe the practices of the Elizabethan elegiac writers. As G. Gregory Smith notes, "The comments on the Pastoral, Elegy, Lyric, Satire, Epigram, and other kinds are slight and are, especially in Sidney's

¹Vernon Hall, Jr., Renaissance Literary Criticism (New York, 1945), p. 61.
Apologie and the more formal *artes poeticae* of Webbe and Puttenham, a mere echo of Latin and neo-Latin opinion.\(^3\)

The English elegy, however, did not originate with the Renaissance, either as an imitation of the classical elegists or of neo-classical French or Italian elegists. The elegiac tone or mood, predominantly melancholy and lamentive, existed in English literature long before the classical term *elegy* was applied to it.\(^4\) As Mary Lloyd writes in her *Elegies: Ancient and Modern*, "The melancholy strain has always been . . . notable in English poetry . . . . The elegiac predisposition of the Anglo-Saxon genius is one of the truisms of literary history."\(^5\) Hence, criticism which depends entirely upon classical definitions of the elegy or upon descriptions of the practices of Roman elegists is inadequate.

One might be tempted to say that the English elegy was entirely melancholy in tone until the introduction of the classical amatory elegy in the Renaissance. But such a statement is not true. Among the Old English lyrics such as "Deor's

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\(^4\)The formal classical elegy was distinguished not by its tone or subject matter, but by its metrical form. In classical literature any poem composed in elegiac couplets, i.e. alternating dactylic hexameter and pentameter lines, was an elegy. Since no equivalent metrical form was established for the English elegy, a tone of melancholy has finally become the distinguishing characteristic of the modern English elegy.

\(^5\)Gayley and Kurtz, pp. 401-402.
Lament," "Wanderer," "Seafarer," "Wife's Complaint," and "Ruin," one finds "Husband's Message," which has a definite erotic note. In the period from 1150 to 1500, Gayley discovers elegiac strains (construing elegy in its broadest sense) in many different types of literature. In the "Poema Morale" he finds a melancholy note; in "Pearl," personal bereavement; in Chaucer and his followers, a secular erotic strain associated with the troubadour and court-of-love poetry of the continent. He sees a threnodic element in the popular ballads of England and Scotland and in the miracle plays of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and early fifteenth century. With John Skelton (1460?-1529) one discovers true laments for the dead, such as those for Edward IV and the fourth Earl of Northumberland. Skelton also wrote the whimsical threnodic elegy for Philip Sparrow (in imitation of Catullus' elegy on Lesbia's bird).

George Gascoigne seems to be the first writer to apply the classical term elegy to one of his poems. In 1576, he printed "The Complaynt of Phylomene: An Elegye compyled by George Gascoigne." In his foreward, he says that having done several other works, he remembered that he "had begonne an Elegye or sorrowefull song, called the Complainte of Phylomene."
Although a paraphrase of the Tereus, Procris, Philomela story given in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, this elegy is ultimately didactic. It shows "the results of lust, the suffering of the innocent, and finally the inexorable punishment of sin."\(^{10}\)

Gascoigne's other work entitled an elegy is also a lament. As C. T. Prouty notes, Gascoigne's definition of an elegy must have been comparable to the definition given in Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus*. There the Latin "Elegia" has as its English equivalent "Lamentableness: a lamentable songe."\(^{11}\)

Gascoigne himself validates Prouty's supposition through the title of this poem: "The Grief of Joye: Certeyne Elegies: wherein the doubtful delights of manes lyfe are displaied."\(^{12}\)

In his inscription to Queen Elizabeth, Gascoigne further says:

> Man is oftentymes burdened with great cares, and bearethe continually on his shoulders an untollerable weight of wooes./ Soe that owre age seemethe (unto me) a flyeng chase, continuable hunted with Callamities./ sic\(^{13}\)

"The Grief of Joye" also has a didactic purpose: to show the vanity of youth, beauty, and strength in view of the undeniable reality of death. Since Gascoigne finds that "all joy is implicitly sad by reason of its mortality," he urges the wise man to "scorn the transitory and prepare himself for the eternal."\(^{14}\)

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\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 252.

\(^{12}\)Gascoigne, p. 511.

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 513.

\(^{14}\)Prouty, p. 252.
Other poets besides Gascoigne viewed the elegy as a poem of general lament. Many of the early English elegists seem to have followed "ancient theory more than ancient practice."\(^ {15}\) (Although Horace felt that the elegy was an "expression of sorrow," the usual practice of his contemporaries such as Tibullus, Propertius, and Ovid was to consider the elegy amatory--not lamenting or funereal). Sir Philip Sidney in his "An Apologie for Poetry" in 1583 (one of the first critical comments on the English elegy) also considers the elegy a lament. Just as Gascoigne felt that sorrow and death plagued man and that the elegy was a lament for mankind's plight, so Sidney saw the elegy as a lament not for the dead or for the pains of love, but for the unhappy fate of man. Is it, he asks, in his critical commentary,

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\ldots\text{the lamenting Elegiac, which in a kinde hart would moue rather pitty then blame, who bewailes with the great Philosopher Heraclitus the weaknes of mankind and the wretchednes of the world: who surely is to be praysed, either for compassionate accompanying just causes of lamentation, or for rightly paynting out how weake be the passions of wofulnesse?}^{16}
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The idea of the elegy as a general lament seems to have remained a part of Elizabethan poetical theory. After Gascoigne and Sidney, such writers as Thomas Nashe in *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) and Edmund Spenser in *Teares of the Muses*


(1591) use *elegy* to mean "lament," as the following quotation from Spenser illustrates:

> Now change your praises into piteous cries  
> And Eulogies turn into Elegies.  

Sir John Harington in his defense of poetry (1591) also feels that "the Elegie is still mourning," despite the fact that "lightnes & wantonnes" are "indeed an Objection of some importance, sith, as Sir Philip Sidney confesseth, Cupido is crept eu'en into the Heroicall Poemes." \(^{18}\)

Among the later poets, Drayton perhaps most frequently uses the elegiac form for bemoaning man's unhappy situation. Writing toward the end of the reign of James I, Drayton laments the base times and suggests the only possible attitude to take toward the situation is one of scorn and detachment. "This Isle," he says of England, "is a meere Bedlam, and therein,/ We all lye raving, mad in every sinne." \(^{19}\) The times enforce in Drayton the feeling of the "mad Philosopher,"

Who taught, that those all-framing powers above,  
(As tis suppos'd) made man not out of love  
To make him at all, but only as a thing,  
To make them sport with, which they use to bring

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As men doe munkeys, puppets, and such tooles
Of laughter: so men are but the Gods fool's.20
William Browne's elegies occasionally lament life's cruelty,
and they are not tinged with the cynicism of Drayton's. For
instance, in "An Elegy: On the untimely death of . . .
Mr. Thomas Ayleworth," Browne both laments the death of his
friend and the cruelty of fate which makes the life of man
both short and unhappy:

Is goodness shortest liv'd? doth Nature bring
Her choicest flowers but to adorn the spring?
Are all men but as tarriers? first begun,
Made and together put to be undone?
Will all the rank of friends in whom I trust,
Like Sodom's trees, yield me no fruit but dust?
Must all I love, as careless sparks that fly
Out of a flint, but show their worth and die?21

Not all writers viewed the elegy as a poem of general
lament. Some, like Gascoigne, thought that the elegy might
be a didactic poem. Harington, for instance, felt that an
elegy might be both lamentive and didactic. He defended the
elegy against complaints of "scurilitie and lewdnes,"22 for
he felt that it discouraged rather than encouraged wantonness.
Michael Drayton frequently used the elegy to present informa-
tion. In his "To My Dearely-Loved Friend Henery Reynolds
Esquire, of Poets and Poesie," he gives a critical commentary
on all the poets from "that noble Chaucer," who "first

21 William Browne, Poems of William Browne of Tavistock,
22 Smith, II, 209.
enrich'd our English with his rimes,/ And was the first of ours, that ever brake,/ Into the Muses treasure" to those of his own time. But the most notable example of a didactic elegy is John Davies' Nosce Teipsum (1599), a long scholarly disquisition "upon the human soul and its attributes," which is subtitled "This Oracle expounded in two Elegies." The formidable titles of the two elegies are "Of Human Knowledge" and "Of the Soul of Man, and the Immortality thereof."24

During the time that many writers were applying the term elegy to general laments and didactic poems, several critics, through their reading of both classical and neo-classical elegists, attempted to define the elegy for English writers. William Webbe in 1586 described the Carmen Elegiacum both in terms of metrical pattern and subject matter. According to him, it consisted of "foure feet and two od sillables, viz: the two first feete, eyther Dactyli or Spondeoi indifferent, the one long sillable, next two Dactyli and another long sillable" which was "alwayes vnseperably adioyned vnto the Hexameter, and serueth especially to the handling of loue and dalliances, whereof it taketh the name."25 Although Webbe defines the elegy in the above manner, he admits that

23Drayton, III, 226.
24Weitzmann, p. 438.
the hexameter is hard to render into English. He says, "I haue not seene very many of them made by any, and therefore one or two for example sake shall be sufficient." Several years later, George Puttenham in The Arte of English Poetry (1589) also describes the elegy as a "limping Pentameter after a lustie Exhameter" and elegiac writers as those who seek "the favor of faire Ladies" and "bemone their estates at large & the perplexities of loue in a certain pitious verse." The main proponent of the "classical English elegy" was Thomas Campion. He, like Webbe and Puttenham, defined elegiac verse in terms of classical metrical pattern. To him, such verse was "deriu'd out of our own natural numbers as neere the imitation of the Greekes and Latines as our heauy sillables will permit":

The first verse is a meere licentiate Iambick; the second is framed of two united Dimetres. In the first Dimetre we are tyed to make the first foote either a Trochy or a Spondee, the second a Trochy, and the odde sillable of it alwaies long. The second Dimetre consists of two Trochyes (because it requires more swiftnes than the first) and an odde sillable, which, being last, is euer common.

Campion, after his discussion of the elegiac metre, illustrates

26 Ibid.
the form in a lover's lament. Hence, although he defines the
elegy metrically, he also feels that the appropriate subject
matter for the elegy is amatory.

Needless to say, only to these critics and a few iso-
lated experimenters in the "classical English elegy" did
elegy describe a poem in a certain metrical form. Although
Sidney, Gabriel Harvey, and Barnabe Barnes experimented with
the classical elegiac meter, the majority of writers and
critics agreed with Samuel Daniel's reply in Defense of Rhyme
(1603) that "the Elegiacke . . . is no other then our old
accustomed measure of fiue feet."29 And thus the attempt to
establish what was the distinguishing characteristic of the
classical elegy--its metrical form--failed.

To many Elizabethans, elegy designated a love lyric,
particularly a plaintive love lyric often associated with
the amorous Petrarchan sonnet. Tucked in among the sonnets
of the sonnet cycles of the 1590's, one usually finds one or
more elegies. The inclusion of these elegies as well as
numerous odes, madrigals, and sestines was in imitation of
Petrarch's sonnet cycles.30 In the two cycles to his mis-
tress Laura, Petrarch includes more than just sonnets:

Variety is given to each sequence by the introduction
at regular intervals of other forms of lyrical verse:

29 Samuel Daniel, "A Defense of Rhyme," Elizabethan
Critical Essays, edited by G. Gregory Smith (London, 1904),
II, 377.

30 Sidney Lee, editor, Elizabethan Sonnets (New York,
ballades (ballate), sestines (sestine), madrigals (madrigali), and odes (canzoni).

Although the interruption of the sonnet-sequence by other lyric forms "became, in virtue of Petrarch's example, an habitual characteristic of European sonneteering." Petrarch himself did not include elegies in his sonnet cycles.

One of Plutarch's most famous French imitators, Pierre Ronsard, did include elegies in his sonnet cycle, Amours. In fact, he scattered elegies throughout several of his volumes of sonnets, odes, and hymns. Later, he collected his elegies and put them into four books for the second edition of Œuvres (1567). Even though Ronsard seems to have always regarded the elegy as primarily erotic, some of his early elegies are threnodic, some "rather dry and didactic discourses on literary and erotic subjects," and others, court elegies written at the command of the king. In later editions of his works, however, he gradually culled all the elegies which were not erotic in theme. As Hallowell comments:

Judging from the elegies which he preserved in his definitive edition, Ronsard seems finally to have formulated some criteria for the genre, for he retained all the erotic elegies, some rare funeral elegies, all the elegies containing a personal invective, and finally some elegies which treat of his own melancholy and sadness.

31 Ibid., p. xiv. 32 Ibid., p. xv.


34 Ibid., p. 44. 35 Ibid., p. 45.
It appears possible that he based his final criteria of the genre on the Roman elegy.\textsuperscript{36}

Thomas Lodge's *Phillis*, one of the three sonnet cycles to appear in 1593, included not only forty sonnets but also an elegy and an ode. As Sidney Lee points out, there are many parallels between certain of Lodge's sonnets and those of the first book of Ronsard's *Amours*.\textsuperscript{37} This heavy dependence upon Ronsard is perhaps accountable for the inclusion of the elegy in *Phillis*. Seemingly, no English poet had previously included amorous elegies in his sonnet cycle. They had inserted madrigals, odes, songs, sestines, and other lyric forms, but not elegies. By taking the example given by Ronsard in his *Amours*, Thomas Lodge became the first English poet to include an elegy in his sonnet cycle.

The elegy included in *Phillis* is a plaintive love lyric, occasioned by the poet's having to journey from his mistress. Written in iambic pentameter with alternately rhymed lines, the poem depends for its effect upon a heavy use of apostrophe. The lover addresses "cruel winds," "traiterous floods," joy, life, soul, and death. Although not overly Petrarchan, this elegy includes some of the conventions of the Petrarchan sonnets. The lover is pale because of the pain he suffers, and his eyes are red "through tears that them oppresses."\textsuperscript{38}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{36} Ibid., p. 46.
\bibitem{37} Sidney Lee, pp. lxvi-lxx.
\end{thebibliography}
The most satisfying thing he can conceive of is to die in his mistress's sight before he must depart:

Yea die! Oh death, sweet death, vouchsafe that blessing,
That I may die the death whilst she regardeth!
For sweet were death, and sweet were death's oppressing
If she look on who all my life awardeth. 39

On the whole, this poem has more of the quality of the genuine lament than do most elegies appended to sonnet cycles. Perhaps the difference lies in the fact that this parting poem is not occasioned by the cruelty of the mistress, but rather by a journey that the lover finds it necessary to take. Hence, the lover exclaims against the "wanton queen of change" that wills that "each man tract this labyrinth of life/ With slippery steps, now wronged by fortune strange,/ Now drawn by counsel from the maze of strife!" 40 and not against a beautiful but cruel mistress.

Giles Fletcher included three elegies and an ode in his sonnet cycle, Licia, which was also published in 1593. In writing this volume, Fletcher does not claim to be original. On the title page he says his love poems are written "to the imitation of the best Latin poets and others," 41 and in his inscription to Lady Mollineux, he claims to be merely following the fashion. His Licia is not a real woman. 42 However, the three elegies which are a part of the cycle

39 Ibid., p. 44. 40 Ibid., p. 43.
41 Ibid., p. 75. 42 Ibid., p. 80.
show some originality. Fletcher's elegies are amatory, but not necessarily lamenting. Two of them have a playful, erotic quality. In the first elegy, Fletcher describes how "Love, she and I to sleep together lay." But sleep does not come quickly, for as the lover says, "She feigned a sleep, I waked her with a kiss; / A kiss to me she gave to make me sleep." Later, the woman leaves but Love stays, for she had bound him with a kiss. Only as the poem closes does the lover cry out in his dreams, "Come Licia, come, or else my heart will die."^\textsuperscript{43}

The second of Fletcher's elegies deals with the theme of parted lovers, but again the tone is not melancholy. Instead of moaning, the lover tells of receiving a kiss from his mistress through another girl: "By her / the girl messenger / a kiss, a kiss to me she sent." He also reminds his mistress she should not blame him, for he "kissed but her whom you had kissed before."^\textsuperscript{45} The elegy concludes with the following stanza:

Then send me more / kisses / , but send them by your friend; Kiss none but her, nor her, nor none at all. Beware by whom such treasures you do send, I must them lose except I for them call. And love me, dear, and still still kissing be; Both like and love, but none, sweet love, but me. ^\textsuperscript{46}

The third elegy also concerns parted lovers, but here the lover is disturbed about being separated from his love.

^\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., p. 152.  
^\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., p. 153.  
^\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., p. 154.  
^\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., p. 155.
He says that if tears would express the torments of his heart, if "melting sighs would ruth and pity gain,/ Or true laments but ease a lover's smart," then he would employ such means. But "plaints," tears, laments, and sighs avail him nothing but greater torments. However, one thought gives him comfort: "Greatest joys are tempered with delay,/ Things soon obtained do least of all us please." And so, the lover says, if "the silly 'prentice bound for many years,/ Doth hope that time his service will release," should our hope be any less than his? In conclusion, he says:

Let me conspire and time will have an end,
So both of us in time shall have a friend.

Although many sonneteers included elegies in their sonnet cycles, Barabe Barnes in his Parthanophil and Parthanope (1593) includes more elegies than other sonneteers and ones which best exemplify the close connection between the Petrarchan sonnet and the elegy. The primary difference between Barnes' elegies and his sonnets is the difference in form. The Petrarchan themes and conventions are the same in both genres.

The lover in Barnes' elegies is ever in the sweet bondage of love. There he is like a "fire consumed with his own heat," or an "iron worn away with his own rust." He bears the accompanying characteristics of a Petrarchan lover:

47 Ibid., p. 156.  
48 Ibid., p. 157.  
49 Ibid., p. 158.  
50 Sidney Lee, p. 240.
tears and plaintive laments. Of these he speaks in Elegy VI:

Behind these tears, my love's true tribute payment!
These plaintive Elegies, my grief's betrayers;
Accoutered, as is meet, in mournful raiment!51

Black Sorrow and deep Despair are also his constant companions. In Elegy VIII he begs Sorrow to cease his rage a little. "Ah, Sorrow! Sorrow! never satisfied!" he says in Elegy XIV.52

The cause of all the lover's woe is his beautiful but cruel mistress. "Doves and redbreasts sit for VENUS' rights" in her lovely face," and her "hyacinthine lips" are like rubies.53

Her smooth brows are like "plates of ivory planed" and the light of her clear eyes "surpasseth a star's light."54 But this beautiful woman is hard-hearted. She seems to enjoy scorning her lover. She delights in his pale, wan face: "nought will please her over-cruel eye,/ But black and pale, on body, and in face." Moreover, she

... laughs to hear poor lovers, how they moan!
Joys in the paper which her praises bears!
And, for his sake than sent, that schedule tears!
What but pale Envy doth her heart assail?55

The lover speaks of the fact that, despite his mistress's cruelty, his verse shall make her immortal:

Yet, howsoever, thou, with me shall deal;
Thy beauty shall persever in my Verse!

Even so, her hard heart mars her beauty:

So, though Thou still in record do remain,
The records reckon but thine obloquy!

51 Ibid., p. 243. 52 Ibid., p. 254.
53 Ibid., p. 239. 54 Ibid., p. 262. 55 Ibid., p. 257.
When on the paper, which my Passion bears,  
Relenting readers, for my sake! shed tears.  

In some of Barnes' elegies, the lover less extravagantly praises or complains about his mistress. He displays a realistic; even occasionally cynical, attitude toward her. This change of attitude is perhaps accounted for by the fact that "certain poetic achievements of the Latins--notably the amorous verse of Catullus, Propertius, and Ovid--offered sonneteers suggestions which Petrarch had neglected."  

Barnes may have obtained his ideas and attitudes from the Roman writers directly, or, just as likely, from the Italian and French writers of his century.

In Elegy XX, the lover still laments the cruelty of his mistress. But he finds consolation in the fact that "head iron-hearted Captains" are also wounded with his mistress's dart when they view her. Barnes' combination of love and war is ultimately Ovidian; however, Barnes is perhaps more realistic in this elegy than is Ovid. The following lines concerning captains illustrate Barnes' unusual realism:

O when, I, their haired bodies have beheld,  
Their martial stomach, and oft-wounded face;  
Which bitter tumults and garboils foretelled;  
In which, it seemed they found no coward's place:  
Then, I recalled how far Love's power exceeds,  
Above the bloody menace of rough war!  

Elegy IV is the most dramatic and least sorrowful of all of Barnes' twenty-one elegies. Instead of crying rivers

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56 Ibid., p. 256.  
57 Ibid., p. xvii.  
58 Ibid., p. 261.
of tears, the lover shows some animosity toward his mistress, telling her to beware that he does not finally get his revenge for her treatment of him. As the lover was reading one of his mistress's letters, a "waspish bee" flew in the window and stung him. He removed the bee from his neck, and left her in the window, where she died. Although his neck still smarts, the bee is dead. And so a lesson to thee, dear Lady, says the lover:

Then note th' example of this hapless bee!
And when to me, thou dost thy sting intend;
   Fear some such punishment should chance to thee!59

The classicist Ben Jonson is one of the few writers of amatory elegies whose elegies are not wholly Petrarchan in inspiration. Jonson's amatory elegies are of three kinds: those in which he complains of an unfaithful mistress, those in which he laments a lovers' parting, and those in which he praises a beautiful or virtuous woman. Unlike the elegies of most of the sonneteers, Jonson's elegies tend to be dramatic and to avoid typical Petrarchan imagery.

Some of Jonson's elegies, although not so continuously dramatic as Donne's, do show a dramatic quality. In Elegy XVIII, for instance, Jonson uses rhetorical questions to show a lover's perturbation about his mistress's coldness:
"Can beautie that did prompt me first to write,/ Now threaten,

59Ibid., p. 241.
with those means she did invite?" Or, like Donne, Jonson begins a lover's complaint with a loud exclamation: "'Tis true, I'm broke! Vowes, Oathes, and all I had/ Of Credit lost. And I am now run madde."^61

In his poems of parting, Jonson shows lovers separated by circumstances, not by the unfaithfulness of the mistress. Consequently, the tone of these elegies is usually melancholy and somber. In Elegy XLI, for instance, the lover somberly describes for his mistress the feeling he will have when she has departed. It will be as though "the Sun was here, but forc't away;/ And we were left under that Hemisphere,/ Where we must feele it Darke for halfe a yeare."^62 Sometimes, the lover, although melancholy at parting, takes consolation in the thought of meeting again soon. In Elegy XL, for instance, the lover says that love is never bittersweet until the time of parting arrives:

That Love's a bitter sweet, I ne're conceive
   Till the sower Minute comes of taking leave,
And then I taste it. But as men drinke up
   In hast the bottome of a med'cin'd Cup,
And take some sirrup after; so doe I,
   To put all relish from my memorie
Of parting, drowne it in the hope to meet
   Shortly again . . . .63

As shown by the above quotation, Jonson's use of imagery is usually unlike that of the sonneteers. His elegies are

frequently filled with imagery of law, religion, medicine, and nature. Even though Jonson is generally un-Petrarchan, one of his half dozen elegies is an extravagant praise of his mistress's beauty. In Elegy XIX, the mistress's eyes are "those bright Eyes, at whose immortal fires/ Love lights his torches to inflame desires. Her cheeks are "those pure bathes . . . / Where he doth steepe himself in Milke and Roses."\(^{64}\) In another, rather unusual elegy, Jonson praises a woman for her virtue instead of her beauty. She, by her virtue, makes Love live again:

\begin{quote}
His falling Temples you have rear'd,
The withered Garlands tane away;
His Altars kept from the Decay,
That envie wish'd, and Nature fear'd.\(^{65}\)
\end{quote}

Jonson, although he shows a more classical inspiration than other elegists previously discussed, did not experiment extensively with the genre. And although his elegies are occasionally similar to Donne's, Jonson was not inspired by Ovidian cynicism but by Catullan sentiment. Furthermore, it is quite possible that Jonson's dramatic elegies were inspired by Donne's.\(^{66}\)

The plaintive amatory elegy was frequently associated with the epistolary form, primarily because of Ovid's

\(^{64}\)Ibid., p. 170.  
\(^{65}\)Ibid., p. 173.  
\(^{66}\)One of Donne's elegies, "The Expostulation," is also claimed by Jonson editors since it was among Jonson's poems which were compiled for the 1640 posthumous edition of his Works.
Heroides, a very popular work during the Elizabethan period. 67 Donne himself even attempted an imitation of one of Ovid's epistles in his "Sapho to Philaenis." However, the majority of the elegiac writers during this period did not directly imitate Ovid's idea of having famous mythological characters write impassioned letters to their lovers. Instead, they grafted the epistolary idea onto the plaintive lover's lament.

Many amatory elegies are occasioned by a lover's sitting down to write his cruel mistress who refuses to see him, to answer his letters, or to return from abroad. Barnabe Barnes' Elegy XXI shows this association of the lament and the letter. In this elegy, the lover is writing his mistress, his "sweet Light," whose frown can "transpierce" his soul and "more deeply wound than any lance." Throughout the poem, the lover frequently addresses his letter hoping, for example, that his mistress will look more favorably on it than she has looked on him: "She shall look on thee! and then, with her beautiful eyes bless!" 68 He asks for pity from his mistress, recommends his lamenting epistle, and finally tells his letter to kiss his mistress's hands for him, "since I may not kiss her hands." 69

In Francis Davison's Poetical Rhapsody (1602), one finds several lover's laments associated with the epistolary form.

67 Weitzmann, p. 436.
68 Sidney Lee, p. 262.
69 Ibid., p. 263.
For instance, in "Elegy. To His Lady Who Had Vowed Virginity" the first line of the poem shows the unfortunate lover sitting down to write his cruel mistress:

My trembling hand my pen from paper stays,
Lest that thine eyes, which shining made me love you,
Should frowning on my suit bid cease to move you;
So that I fare like one at his wit's end,
Hoping to gain and fearing to offend. 70

Another elegy, entitled "Elegy, or Letter in Verse." shows a direct equation of the elegy with the epistle. However, the situation of lover and cruel mistress remains the same. The lover's mistress is both his "Fountain of bliss, yet well-spring of my woe." He has been reduced to a "wretched state"; 71 his "drizzling tears trill down apace." And worst of all, he fears that his mistress will not read the letter he is now writing containing the story of his woe:

A trembling fear doth now possess my mind,
That you will not safe vouch these lines to read. 72

Alexander Craig's sonnet cycle, Amorose Songes, Sonets, and Elegies (1606) contains a poem entitled "Elegie to Kala," which is a lover's final letter to his mistress. "Reed this," the lover says,

... and then no more,
this shalbe last of all,
And should been first, if now I could,
my publisht Rymes recall,
But they are gone abrod
up on the winges of Fame.73

His poems have proclaimed his pain, but they did nothing to
change his mistress's "coy disdaine." His mistress saw his
"scalding sighs and sobs" and chose to laugh at him.74 But
the lover will write no ill of the mistress, "though now my
loue be small." And so the lover closes his elegy-letter:

Then sometime friend, farewell;
this is my most reuenge,
To thinke no good, to write no ill,
but last of all to change.75

Other writers viewed the elegy as epistolary in nature,
but not necessarily amorous in sentiment. The most notable
eexample of such a view is Michael Drayton in his Elegies on
Sundry Occasions (1627). These poems, which are in letter
form, regardless of their topic, are regarded by one modern
editor as "seven familiar epistles of the Horatian type made
popular by Ben Jonson."76 Drayton, however, entitled them
elegies. In "To My Dearely-Loved Friend Henery Reynolds
Esquire," Drayton comments critically on all the poets from
Chaucer to those of his own time. Other of Drayton's elegies
read like newsy letters. In his elegy, "To Master George
Sandys," Drayton discusses both his and Sandys' personal
projects. He says that other men will have to give Sandys

73 Alexander Craig, The Poetical Works of Alexander
Craig of Rose-Craig (Glasgow, 1873), p. 121.
74 Ibid., p. 123.
75 Ibid., p. 124.
76 Drayton, V, 213.
news of English politics: "To other men, although these things be free,/ Yet (George) they must be misteries to mee."

He relates that his "forward pen" has again gotten him into trouble and that James I, upon whom he built his trust, has left him "troden lower then the dust." He also advises George on his translation of Ovid, saying that each poem must be as glib as Ovid's "so shall it live long,/ And doe much honour to the English tongue."78

Although today *elegy* designates a "reflective lyric suggested by the fact or fancy of death,"79 this concept of the elegy did not become prominent until the 1730's.80 Actually, few funeral elegies were written before 1600. After Skelton's laments for Northumberland and Edward IV, the next occurrence of any type of funeral elegy was Surrey's poems occasioned by the death of the elder Wyatt.81 However, none of these poems are entitled elegies. Spenser was the first to call his laments for the dead, elegies, as in his *Daphnaida*. An *Elegie vpon the death of the noble and vertuous Dougles Howard* (1591) and in *Astrophel*. A *Pastorall Elegie* (1595). According to Weitzmann, Spenser borrowed the eclogue-elegy scheme from the Alexandrian and Roman pastorals. Yet since

77 Ibid., III, 206. 78 Ibid., p. 207.
80 Ibid., p. 3.
81 Bailey, pp. xxvii-xxviii.
such pieces were not composed in elegiacs, they were not elegies in accord with the Greek and Roman concept of the elegy. 82

Donne himself first used the term funeral elegy in 1611 as the title to one part of An Anatomy of the World written on the death of Elizabeth Drury. 83 He also applied this term to his "Elegie upon the untimely death of the incomparable Prince Henry" (1613). Other elegies of this type soon followed, such as Drayton's "Vpon the three Sonnes of Lord Sheffield, Drowned in Humber" and "Vpon the death of the Lady Penelope Clifton," William Browne's "Elegie on my Muse . . . the Lady Venetia Digby" or "An Elegie On the Lady Jane Pawlet."

In discussing the rise of the funeral elegy, Draper sees three distinct periods and types of elegies, only the first of which falls within the province of this study. These first elegies were "high encomiums with metaphysical devices." 84 Draper says that in the Jacobean and Caroline periods,

Of the pieces called elegies, many are Classical love-poems; and, even in those occasioned by death, this occasion is commonly passed over, so that the writer may laud and magnify the subject's good deeds or indulge in casuistical discussions of immortality and like theological matter: realistic, funeral descriptions are brief and rare. 85

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83 Draper, p. 9.
84 Ibid., p. 40.
85 Ibid., p. 45.
Weitzmann also feels that in the first funeral elegies "the motif is less the sorrow of the poet than an encomium of the departed." These elegies are less reflective poems of mourning and more laudatory poems whose purpose is the perpetuation of the name and fame of the dead person.\(^6\)

The confusion concerning the early English elegy was great. Most of the writers and many of the critics of the time failed to understand that the distinguishing characteristic of the Roman and Greek elegy was its metrical form—not its subject matter. For instance, Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* uses amatory subject matter as his criterion for the elegy. Hence, many of the English "elegiac writers" who "bewail and bemoane the perplexities of love" are sonneteers. His "elegists" include such men as Surrey, Wyatt, Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, and Shakespeare.\(^7\)

Since the ancient elegy included hortatory, threnodic, didactic, and amatory elegies, the Elizabethans had numerous examples from which to draw their subject matter for the elegy. However, the English elegy did not necessarily develop in direct imitation of the classical elegy, even though "no kind of Elizabethan 'elegie' fails to exhibit traits identified also with more than one of the classical elegies."\(^8\)

The general laments about man's unhappy plight

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\(^6\)Weitzmann, p. 440.


\(^8\)Weitzmann, p. 443.
in the world, for instance, were a part of English poetry long before the name *elegy* was applied to them. And although the elegy was originally a lament for the dead, such laments were rare among the Roman elegists. The poems from which Spenser drew his inspiration for laments for the dead were not actually elegies.

The English amatory elegy came, rather frequently, not through direct imitation of the Roman amatory poets, but through imitation of Petrarch and certain neo-classical Italian and French writers. Moreover, the erotic strain which was expressed in antiquity in the amatory elegy, most frequently found its expression in the Elizabethan sonnet instead of in the elegy. What amatory elegies were written were a carry-over from the sonnet. They were appended to the sonnet cycles and contained the same Petrarchan themes as the sonnets. The only way in which they differ from the sonnets is their lack of sonnet form.
CHAPTER III

THE ELEGIAIC COMPLAINT

To turn from any Elizabethan elegist to Donne brings a shock. The tonal range of Donne's elegies is startling. Donne is cynical, impassioned, tender. His imagery is realistic and his language often harsh. There seems to be little resemblance between the rest of the amatory elegies of the 1590's and Donne's. As Edmund Gosse comments:

When we come to consider the relation of the early poetry of Donne to that which was being produced elsewhere in England, so abundantly, during the closing years of the sixteenth century, we shall have to dwell on its curious divergence from all the established traditions of the time.¹

As we have seen, there existed in most of the elegies of Donne's contemporaries a strong Petrarchan element. The mistress was beautiful but cruel, and the woeful lover was continually bemoaning his fate with sighs, tears, and plaintive elegies. These stock Petrarchan characters and gestures are conspicuously absent in Donne's elegies. As Grierson says, "There is no echo of Petrarch's woes in Donne's passionate and insolent, rapturous and angry, songs

and elegies."  

Donne "never adopted the despairing and beseeching tone of the sonneteers, nor, except in satire, did he ever attempt to catalogue his mistress's beauties."  

Rather, the love which Donne describes in his elegies is "the love of the Latin lyrists and elegists, a feeling which is half rapture and half rage."  

Donne's elegies make assumptions about the nature of love and of men and women which are very different from the view of the Petrarchists and neo-Platonists. Love is a delightful sensual pleasure to be enjoyed for its own sake, and variety is the spice which enhances love's flavor. Infidelity is not something to be idealized, but something to be dealt with realistically. Love is not always hampered by a mistress's cold disdain. It may also be beset by a father's wrath, a husband's suspicion, or a black wretch's treachery. Love is a sensual art of deceit to be taught to other men's wives and daughters, who so rapidly become masters of the technique that the seducer soon cries:

I planted knowledge and life's tree in thee,  
Which Oh, shall strangers taste?

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3Robert C. Bald, Donne's Influence in English Literature (Morpeth, 1932), p. 18.

4Grierson, English Literature, IV, 240.

Although Donne's elegies seem to diverge greatly from those of his contemporaries, Donne frequently utilizes what was probably the prevailing Elizabethan concept of the elegy--the lover's complaint. The Elizabethans conceived of this form solely as a melancholy complaint about a mistress's unfeeling rejection of a lover's attentions, but in the classical lover's complaint neither of these subject or tonal restrictions was present. In most of their poems, the Roman elegists complain about their mistress's unfeelingness, her unfaithfulness, her jealousy, her venality, her fondness for artificial beauty, and her suspicious husband or keeper. The tone of these elegies ranges through melancholy, annoyance, and cynicism, to deep bitterness. In short, the poets complain about any aspect of their mistress's appearance, her conduct, or her situation which displeases them. Their complaints take any tone their personality or whim of the moment dictates.

Donne, in utilizing the lover's complaint, adopts not the Elizabethan concept of it, but the Roman. In general, his complaints contain the cynicism and the drama of Ovid's. In these, the reader surprises the characters in the middle of an argument or an involved conversation. He overhears a highly indignant apostrophe, a point-blank question, a caustic remark. And only as the characters continue their actions does the reader discover the
circumstances which called forth the question or the exclama-
tion. 6

"Fond woman," says a character, and the reader is thrust into the midst of a dramatic argument between lover and mistress in Elegy I. So placed the reader hears only the tone of cynical condescension in the lover's voice. He, like the mistress, does not at this point see the conflict between wishing one's husband dead and complaining of his great jealousy. The lover, in order to show the apparent contradiction in his mistress's behavior, depicts in strident colors the imagined deathbed scene of the husband. With exaggerated strokes he paints the dying husband whose skin is peeling from his body, whose breath comes in shallow gasps, and who is not ready to die, but "ready with loath-
some vomiting to spue/ His Soule out of one hell, into a new." If, says the lover, your husband was so dying from poison, you would not weep, "but jolly, 'and frolick bee,/ As a slave, which to morrow should be free." 7

Having thus shown the mistress that she would be happy at her husband's gruesome death by poison, the lover finally reveals two reasons why she should not complain about her husband's jealousy. First, by being jealous, the husband is


7 Donne, p. 79.
swallowing his own death, "hearts-bane jealousie." Jealousy will work as poisonous an effect on the husband as did the poison in the lover's imagined deathbed scene. "O give him many thanks, he'is courteous," says the lover to his mistress. By thus having the lover tell his mistress to thank her husband for being courteous before he tells her what her husband's act of kindness is, Donne gains both surprise and dramatic effect. As it turns out, the husband, by being suspicious, has most kindly warned the lovers what not to do.

Only now, as the lover describes for the mistress what they used to do and what they must do no longer, does the reader receive some knowledge of the lovers' previous relationship and situation. The mistress has an impotent husband, whose "deformitie" they used to openly flout "in scoffing ridles." As the lover continues to enumerate their past actions, in each case he first sketches a little scene void of the lovers. He waits until last to add the main figures and their actions. For example, the lover first describes the invalid husband, and then he delightfully reveals the lovers' actions:

Nor when he the husband swolne, and pamper'd with great fare
Sits down, and snorts, cag'd in his basket chaire,
Must we usurpe his own bed any more,
Nor kisse and play in his house, as before.9

Suddenly, the lover's attitude seems to shift. "Now," he says, "I see many dangers; for that is/ His realme, his

8Ibid. 9Ibid.
castle, and his diocese." The lovers, like traitors, have usurped the husband's own bed. And such a practice is dangerous, for the husband rules his home just as a king controls his realm; a lord, his castle; and a bishop, his diocese. The lover, after saying that he sees many dangers in playing in the husband's house, gives a rather involved comparison before he reveals the basis of the comparison in the lovers' own situation:

But if, as envious men, which would revile
Their Prince, or coyne his gold, themselves exile
Into another countrie, 'and doe it there,
We play'in another house, what should we feare?\(^{10}\)

By so building an idea before he allows the reader to completely comprehend it, Donne achieves dramatic surprise.

The lovers must take an example from the way princes are treated. Like men who wish to revile their prince or "coyne his gold" (sexual connotation), they must "themselves exile."\(^{11}\) They are traitors who must move into another house (just as envious men move into another country) before they are caught and exiled by the husband-ruler. There they can avoid his "household policies," his pitiable plots, and his paid spies (the husband runs his house just as princes run their nations). The lovers can treat the husband-ruler in the same manner that certain Londoners treat their mayor and Germans treat the pope--they can escape his sway.

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\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 80.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
Contrary to the way Donne develops one of his themes in the Songs and Sonnets, here the lovers do not create for themselves a quiet little world isolated from society, impervious to its forces. Instead, they take an example from the corrupt world as to how to carry on their affair. Throughout this elegy, Donne shows his awareness of human baseness just as plainly as Michael Drayton does in his elegies. Kinsmen, greedy in their desire for great legacies, feign tears and deafen the poor husband with their howling cries. The lovers themselves have delighted in openly flouting the husband's malady, in usurping his own bed. The husband is gross and crude. Swollen and ugly, he "snorts" as he sits "cag'd in his basket chaire."\textsuperscript{12} He, like rulers, has plots, policies, and paid spies. Envious men go to other countries to coin illegitimate money and to complain about their prince. Londoners scorn their mayor as the Germans do the pope. Hence, the theme of disloyalty is not restricted to the world of lovers. Donne's images and allusions "extend the range of implication to include . . . glimpses of avaricious kinsmen and then the outer world of city, kingdom and church."\textsuperscript{13}

The theme of a jealous and suspicious husband who impedes lovers' amorous play is used frequently by the Roman elegists. In fact, the situation given in Donne's lover's complaint greatly resembles that in 1.4 of Ovid's Amores.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 79. \textsuperscript{13}Martz, p. 332.
In both elegies jealousy and a husband play an important part. Ovid's opening lines are as dramatic as Donne's: "So, that husband of yours is going to be at the party—Well, I hope he chokes; let him drop dead, who cares?" But Ovid's "leisurely elaboration" is quite different from Donne's "rapidity and concentration." And so is Donne's witty conclusion different from Ovid's more melancholy desire for self-deception. Yet certain lines are similar. For instance, Donne says that the lovers must not "with words, nor touch, scarce lookes adulterate." Ovid, in his elegy, elaborates for sixteen lines on how a lover and his mistress can, through eyebrow movements, facial expressions, turns of a ring, or words written in spilled wine, express their love right underneath the husband's nose.

Although Donne occasionally takes ideas from Ovid's Amores, he seems to have profited more from Ovid's dramatic style. Ovid delighted in dramatic openings, in surprising ideas and expressions. His elegies open with a note of cynicism, a paradox, or a surprising affirmation, as in Amores 1.4, 2.19, or 3.14. Ovid enjoyed adding to his dramatic effect by suppressing transitions and logical connections, or by upsetting the order of reasoning or narration. In 3.7, for example, he attempts to discover the reason for his sexual impotence before he actually reveals his failure:

14Ovid, p. 18.  
15Leishman, p. 56.  
16Donne, p. 79.  
17Ellrodt, II, 306.
Ugly—is that what she is? Inelegant? Quite unattractive? Never, in all my life, object of all my desire? So, when I had her at last, or at least the chance to have had her, There I lay on the bed, useless, a lump of lead.18

All these techniques and devices for building a dramatic quality into a poem, we have just seen Donne use in his first lover's complaint, and we will continue to see him do so throughout the rest of Donne's dramatic elegies.

In both "Jealousy" and "The Perfume," Donne creates rich tableaux in which one vividly sees the deformed and impotent husband, the hydroptique father, the suspicious mother, the gigantic porter. One sees their faces, their gestures, their attitudes. But these characters do not remain static.19 With glazed eyes they search for lovers, suspiciously they embrace a daughter to determine if she is pregnant, or like the Rhodian Colossus they stride to bar the gate. Donne, unlike the Petrarchan elegists, does not merely describe sentiments. From the Latin elegists (particularly from Ovid) he seems to have discovered how to give amorous sentiment dramatic, realistic expression, enriched by individual particulars.20

Although Elegy IV, "The Perfume," resembles Ovid in its desire to surprise, "it is entirely unimitative, entirely English."21 As this lover's complaint opens, the reader finds a highly indignant lover berating his mistress for the humiliation he has just undergone. "Once . . . but once,"

18 Ovid, p. 80. 19 Ellrodt, II, 298.
20 Ibid., p. 296. 21 Leishman, p. 60.
he repeats resentfully, was I found in your company, and now all your "suppos'd escapes" are attributed to me. Using a particularly Ovidian technique, the lover proceeds to describe metaphorically what has happened to him before he tells enough of the situation for the reader to see the metaphor's appropriateness. He compares himself to a thief arraigned at bar, and then he shows in what manner he resembles one:

And as a thief at barre, is question'd there
By all the men, that have beene rob'd that yeare,
So am I, (by this traiterous meanes surpriz'd)
By thy Hydroptique father catechiz'd.22

Just as a thief is questioned by all the men who have been robbed, so the father systematically questioned the lover about each of his daughter's previous misdeeds, which may or may not have been caused by the lover. The phrase "by this traiterous meanes surpriz'd" helps to sustain the dramatic quality of the verse and also to reveal that the lover is so annoyed by the recent turn of events that he can hardly concentrate on what he is saying. The use of "traiterous meanes" is in keeping with the thief image just presented and with a traitor-betrayal imagery pattern which appears in another section of the poem. The fact that one later learns that the accomplice who betrayed the lover was his perfume makes this phrase particularly appropriate and humorous.

22 Donne, p. 84.
In the next six lines Donne creates suspense through the use of parallel subordinate clauses. The lover first dramatically reveals what the father did or said he would do before he tells why the father acted in such a manner.

"Though he had wont to search with glazed eyes,/ As though he came to kill a Cockatrice,/ Though he hath oft sworne, that he would remove/ Thy beauties beauty, and food of our love,/ Hope of his goods," says the lover in the though clauses—all before admitting that he, the lover, was the cause of the father's behavior. Here, "glazed" and "cockatrice" capture the essence of the father's attitude toward the lover. Glassy-eyed, the father habitually searched for the hated and feared legendary serpent—that is, the lover.

In the second though clause, Leishman finds a high-spirited, "almost rollicking exaggeration," but he fails to say how he interprets the phrase "Thy beauties beauty." Grierson says that this phrase may refer to the girl's arms, face and other aspects of her beauty, and hence the father has sworn to mutilate the girl's beauty if she is caught with the lover. But Grierson's preferred interpretation makes "Thy beauties beauty" refer to the girl's inheritance, and so indicates the lover is money hungry. His affection is based solely on his desire for the girl's inheritance.  

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23 Ibid.  
24 Leishman, p. 62.  
Another possible interpretation is to view "Thy beauties beauty" as the mistress's arms and face, but to let "Hope of his goods" have reference to the father. Thus, the father would, in spite of the fact that his chances for prosperity depended upon marrying off his daughter to a rich man, threaten to mutilate her beauty. Despite the father's attempts at hampering their love affair, "Yet close and secret, as our soules, we'have beene,"\textsuperscript{26} says the lover. And Donne, by piling up the adverbial clauses before giving the principal part of the sentence, has given the reader the same feeling of impediment that the lovers themselves felt.

The next section of the elegy, containing twelve lines, concerns a suspicious mother's ruses to discover her daughter's secret affairs. One must realize that these descriptions of the father, the mother, and the porter are all colored by the lover's attitude toward them. The fact that the lover describes these characters accounts for the "rollicking exaggeration" that Leishman finds such an integral part of the poem. The lover cynically describes the mother as "immortal," for she lies "still buried in her bed," but will not die. She takes advantage of her illness to sleep all day in order to spy on her daughter all night. In seeming kindness she takes her daughter's arm when actually she is looking for rings, armlets, or other tokens a lover might have given her. Fearing the girl may be pregnant, the

\textsuperscript{26}Donne, p. 84.
mother embraces her. She names exotic foods to see if the
daughter has such longings, and she notes her "palenesse,
blushing, sighs, and sweats." The mother will even confess
the sins of "her owne ranke lustinesse" in order to make
her daughter confess hers. The climax of the dozen lines
concerning the mother comes in the lover's triumphant words:

Yet love these Sorceries did remove, and move
Thee to gull thine own mother for my love. 

From his description of the mother, the lover turns to
describe the charm of the mistress's brothers. Here Donne's
language imitates the "joy of their skipping movement" to
which one responds "with a natural innocence." But this
joyful picture of the boys turns out to be a trap. Despite
their seeming innocence, the children were just as much a
hindrance to the lovers as were the father and mother, for
they were bribed on the father's knee the next morning to
tell what they saw:

Thy little brethren, which like Faiery Sprights
Oft skipt into our chamber, those sweet nights
And kist, and ingled on thy fathers knee,
Were brib'd next day, to tell what they did see:

The "grim eight-foot-high iron-bound serving-man" that
Donne next describes seems to be an echo of the doorkeeper
that Ovid describes in some of his elegies. In Amores 1.4,

27 Ibid.  28 Ibid., pp. 84-85.
29 Arnold Stein, John Donne's Lyric: The Eloquence of
30 Donne, p. 85.  31 Ibid.
Ovid's doorkeeper is "bound to the links of hard iron," has an "iron heart," will not swing the "grim barrier open," and, the lover feels, should watch "in a jail, guarding some desperate cell," instead of guarding his mistress's door. In Donne's elegy the lover is cowed by the serving man's height, strength, and vehemence. So in order to make the man seem even larger than he is, Donne uses a progression in his imagery. The serving man is first seen as eight feet tall, then as the Rhodian Colossus, and last as enough for all the punishments in hell. But even this extremely fearful creature, though he was hired by the father to spy on the couple, "could never witness any touch or kisse."^33

In the next section of the elegy, Donne uses a pattern of imagery which has been introduced previously, that of treachery and betrayal. Ironically, the lover himself brought with him, as one of his allies, that which betrayed him to his enemy. His perfume, which he felt to be one of his best allies, was a loud perfume and cried out (like a warning) to the father's nose. So through the father's nose were they spied, says Donne wittily. The father, like a tyran (despotic) king that smelled gunpowder and hence feared traitors or betrayal, shivered in his bed. The lover is thus seen as the usurper of the kingdom, the one who plots to overthrow the king. If the smell had not been such a pleasant one, says the lover sarcastically, he would not

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32 Ovid, p. 22.  
33 Donne, p. 85.
have been betrayed. "Had it beene some bad smelle," the father would merely have thought "that his owne feet, or breath, that smell had wrought." 34

The lover, like a soldier, had trained his "silkes, their whistling to forbeare." His silks, like subalterns, had to be taught what not to do on a dangerous mission in enemy territory. Even his shoes "dumbe and speechlesse were." Wittily, the lover says not only that his shoes were pressed down by his weight, but also that they were oppressed by the rule of the tyrant king. However, not his shoes but rather his bosom companion—his perfume—betrayed the lover:

Onely, thou bitter sweet, whom I had laid
Next mee, mee traiterously hast betrayed,
And unsuspected hast invisibly
At once fled unto him, and staid with me. 35

His supposedly sweet perfume has bitterly betrayed him. Most traiterously it seemed to remain closest to him, and yet at the same time it treacherously hastened to inform the enemy of his whereabouts.

Donne suddenly shifts from direct address to the mistress to a direct denunciation of the perfume which has betrayed him. This denunciation contains certain realistic, occasionally vulgar images which remind one of Catullus. But in general Donne is more witty here than anything else. This "base excrement of earth" (the perfume) confuses sense. It allows the "seely Amorous" (the pitiably amorous)

34 Ibid. 35 Ibid. 36 Ibid.
to "suck" in the "leprous harlots breath." It brings upon man his greatest stain, that is, to be called "effeminate." Even though perfume may be loved in the halls of princes, we all know, the lover insinuates, that there outer accouterments are preferred to real substance, and things which seem real are preferred to that which is real.

"Gods, when yee fum'd on altars, were pleas'd well," says the lover, carefully leading up to his unexpected, witty turn: "Because you'were burnt, not that they lik'd your smell." The gods delighted in the burning, i.e. the torture, not in the aroma. In another couplet Donne gives a witty argument concerning perfume:

You'are loathsome all, being taken simply alone,  
Shall we love ill things joyn'd, and hate each one?  

Since all the ingredients which go into perfumes are loathsome, why should one love the perfume produced from such a combination, and yet hate each separate ingredient? Or, the lover again argues wittily, even if perfume is good, "your good doth soone decay;/ And you are rare, that takes the good away." The fact that perfume evaporates, becomes rare, takes the good away from the perfume. That is, its good smell is soon gone.

The lover's concluding comment about perfume shifts the attention from the perfume back to the situation of the mistress and her father. Most willingly, says the lover, would

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37 Ibid., p. 86.  
38 Ibid.
I give my hated perfume to embalm your father's corpse. "What? will he die?" asks the lover suddenly, intimating that the mistress has made some remark about her father's condition which leads the lover to hopefully ask if the father will die. Without this shift back to the dramatic scene, the elegy would be less successful than it now is. These two lines do much to round off the elegy into a composite whole, of which the denunciation of perfume is merely one part.

This elegy demonstrates a structural device common in many of Donne's elegies. As Grierson points out, the structure in the elegies "is not so irregular and unmusical, but is periodic or paragraphic, i.e. the lines do not fall into couplets but into larger groups knit together by a single sentence or some closely connected sentences, the full meaning or emphasis being well sustained to the close." As an example of this kind of structure, Grierson lists lines thirteen through twenty-six of this elegy, those dealing with the suspicious mother. Actually, the structure throughout the elegy is paragraphic. Besides the group of lines devoted to the mother, the six lines concerning the father constitute only one sentence. The section about the brothers and the serving-man takes up twelve and is a sentence in length. The section containing the traitor-betrayal pattern is eighteen lines long, and it is divided

\[39\text{Ibid.} \quad 40\text{Grierson, II, cxlii.}\]
into five sentences. In this section, the sentences are closely knit together by the story and image pattern. In the last group of lines concerning perfume, one finds three sentences. Here the pattern changes: even though each couplet is not a sentence, each couplet tends to contain a witty remark about perfume which is followed in the next couplet by an unrelated, but equally witty remark about perfume. This technique of one witty remark to a couplet is not a common device in Donne's dramatic poems, but it is very common in such witty diversions as "The Anagram." Such a device, although appropriate for light pieces, usually detracts from the overall effect of a dramatic poem. In this case, however, the device is not overworked, and Donne does return to his dramatic situation in the last two lines of the poem in a fairly successful effort to round the elegy out into a unified whole.

In Elegy VII, Donne preserves more of the traditional idea of an actual lover's complaint than he does in either Elegy I or Elegy IV. Here the lover complains extensively to his mistress about her infidelity in a manner paralleling Ovid in his Amores 2.5. In both poems, the lover is the praeceptores amoris, the teacher of the art of love, who has instructed his mistress in love's secret signs.

In the Amores, 2.5 is an ironic counterpart to an earlier elegy, 1.4. In the first elegy, the lover instructs

\footnote{Hallowell, p. 34.}
his mistress on how to communicate with him at a banquet, despite the presence of her husband. She must use the lovers' secret signs—such as nods, facial expressions, eyebrow movements, or words written in wine on the table-cloth. And, more important, she must keep secretly refilling her husband's wine glass so that she and the lover may communicate with each other underneath the husband's nose. In 2.5 one finds the same lover who, not too long ago was the teacher of love, complaining that his mistress is unfaithful to him. "I saw you, I say, and I was perfectly sober, / Though I know what you thought—I was both drunk and asleep," complains the lover. Ironically, the mistress is using the same tricks and secret signs with a new lover that she and the first lover instigated against her husband. But the first lover sees her artful deceits:

I was watching you both, I saw you waving your eyebrows;  
I could tell what you said when you were nodding your head. 
And your eyes were not dumb, nor the scribbles you made on the table, 
Dipping your fingers in wine, each of the letters a sign.42

In Ovid's elegy, the lover is reconciled with his mistress, but Donne's lover is not. The lover in Donne's elegy remains adamant throughout. Donne's lover's complaint simply delineates one mood; it shows an indignant lover berating his mistress for proving untrue—after all the trouble to which he has gone to refine her into "a

42Ovid, p. 46.
Donne's elegy is "a kind of dramatic monologue," whereas Ovid's is more descriptive and epigrammatic.

The opening lines of Donne's elegy immediately attract the reader's attention both through the abusive epitaph the lover applies to his mistress ("Natures lay Ideot") and through the witty interplay of certain words. The lover may call his mistress a common idiot, but ironically she has proved far too smart for him in the art of love. Having gained both the mistress's and the reader's attention, the lover proceeds to elaborate for twenty-four lines (until the fourth to last line of the poem) on how little the mistress knew before he began instructing her in the "sophistrie" of love.

"Foole," says the lover, again showing his contemptuous scorn for the mistress. Before I taught you, you knew nothing of "the mystique language of the eye or hand." Like Ovid's mistress, she did not know the secret language available to lovers. "Nor couldst thou judge the difference of the aire/Of sighes, and say, this lies, this sounds despaire." She was not able to distinguish between a real sigh of despair and a feigned one. She could not "by the'eyes water call a maladie/ Desperately hot, or changing feaverously." That is,

43 Donne, p. 90.
44 Leishman, p. 58.
45 Donne, p. 89.
she could not, by judging the amount or quality of tears, tell whether a person was "desperately hot" because of the disease of love or whether he rapidly alternated between hot and cold, i.e. was fickle. The mistress did not know how to tie up flowers, using the "Alphabet of flowers," so that they might "with speechlesse secrecie/ Deliver arrands mutely, and mutually."\(^46\)

Furthermore, she depended entirely upon her friends' judgments. She knew no tricks of love other than household charms and teaching her husband's name. She did not know the art of conversation. In short, she was nothing until she was taught all these basic niceties, these subtleties in love. And so the lover says:

\begin{quote}
Thou art not by so many duties his,
That from the worlds Common having sever'd thee,
In laid thee, neither to be seen, nor see,
As mine: who have with amorous delicacies
Refined thee'into a blis-full Paradise.\(^47\)
\end{quote}

As Edgar Daniels and Wanda Dean suggest in their article, "Donne's 'Elegy VII,' 22," the best interpretation of the word \textit{inlaid} is not "conceal" as Grierson first suggests but rather "to enclose or reserve (as a meadow) for hay." Such reading would fit in with the word \textit{common}, meaning that "in taking her to wife, the husband figuratively enclosed a portion of ground which had been part of 'the worlds Common,' or public land." This interpretation of both \textit{common} and \textit{inlaid} is supported by Edgar Daniels and Wanda Dean.\(^46\)\(^47\)

\(^{46}\)\textit{Ibid.} \(^{47}\)\textit{Ibid., p. 90.}
inlaid sets up a public versus private cultivation. The lover has taken this private, enclosed land and refined it into a Garden on Eden. Continuing this religious imagery (the mistress as Paradise), Donne makes the lover God-like. The graces and elegant speech that the lover created are his "creatures." The lover imbued the woman with life and knowledge, "which Oh, shall strangers taste?"

"Must I alas," complains the lover both wittily and cynically,

Frame and enamell Plate, and drinke in Glasse? Chafe waxe for others seales? breake a colts force And leave him then, being made a ready horse? These images are quite different in character from those earlier ones of sighs, tears, and the alphabet of flowers. By using realistic imagery here, Donne both disparages the woman and dispels any illusion of romantic love that might have remained. The mistress is the piece of wax that the lover worked in order to make her receptive to his seal, his stamp. Are others, the lover asks, to profit by his work and get to put their seal on her, i.e. claim her as theirs? The lover's teaching of the beautiful art of love is reduced to no more than breaking a colt's force and leaving him "beeing made a ready horse." The mistress is transformed from a blissful paradise into a horse ready and willing to be ridden.

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48 Edgar F. Daniels and Wanda J. Dean, "Donne's 'Elegy VII,' 22," *Explicator*, XXIV (December, 1965), item 34.
49 Donne, p. 90.
50 Ibid.
Elegy XV, "The Expostulation," is an unusual poem in several respects. Unlike other of Donne's lover's complaints, this elegy contains diverse tonal qualities. And while it is still essentially dramatic, it is more dramatic internally than externally. Although the mistress is obviously the one to whom the elegy is addressed, the reader never really feels her presence in the elegy. Hence, this elegy assumes the proportions of an interior dramatic monologue showing a lover's abruptly changing thoughts.

The first section of the poem begins like a typical lover's complaint against an unfaithful mistress. "To make the doubt cleare, that no woman's true,/ Was it my fate to prove it strong in you?" the lover cynically asks his mistress. For twenty-two lines of verse he berates her by using rhetorical questions. For instance, using a Catullan image, he asks:

Are vowes so cheape with women, or the matter
Whereof they are made, that they are writ in water,
And blowne away with wirde?

Who would have thought, he says sardonically, that "so many accents sweet/ Form'd into words, so many sighs ... so many oathes, and teares ... should now prove empty blisses?"

Again he questions her, this time using legal imagery:

Do you draw bonds to forfet? signe to breake?
Or must we reade you quite from what you speake, And find the truth out the wrong way?

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51 Leishman, p. 62.
Abruptly the tone shifts. "O I prophane," says the lover. "Though most of women be/ This kinde of beast, my thought shall except thee." Donne, through this sudden shift in tone, is attempting to simulate the lover's thought process. His love, his extreme jealousy, and circumstance conspired to make him doubt his mistress's constancy. Hence, in the opening section of the poem one saw the lover irrationally berate his mistress for being unfaithful. Suddenly his thoughts turn to her defense. She could not be unfaithful, the lover suddenly realizes. And the tone shifts from cynical to impassioned. For ten lines the lover addresses his mistress as do the lovers their mistresses in the elegies of parting. "I'll thinke the Sunne will cease to cheare/ The teeming earth . . . Or Nature, by whose strength the world endures,/ Would change her course, before you alter yours," the lover ardently swears.

Having exonerated his mistress, the lover's thoughts again turn--this time to the "black wretch" to whom the mistress entrusted their counsels. He is the one to blame. And for making the lover profane their love, he must be cursed. With the pronouncement of the curse, the tone becomes vehement and abusive. The lover asks that the man suffer the fate of Cain, that all eyes shun him, that he deny God three

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54 Ibid., p. 109.
55 Ibid.
times, and that the wolves, vultures, swine, ravens, and the
King's dogs feast upon his corpse. Although Donne's inclusion
of a formal curse in an elegy is sanctioned by classical
tradition, Donne's curse is more Christian than pagan in
spirit. Its origin seems to be in the excommunication rites
of the Roman Catholic church.\textsuperscript{56} Oddly enough, however, the
last lines of the curse seem to be a translation of Catullus' lines 3-6 in Carm. cviii.\textsuperscript{57}

After the lover-priest has cursed the blasphemous
violator of holy love and banished him, the love affair can
be resumed. "Now I have curst, let us our love revive,"
says the lover. By an associational device, the idea of
reviving their love makes the man think of the days of their
first courtship. The mood shifts again as the lover meditates
upon how they first played the game of love. In the manner
advocated by Ovid, he made a practice at the plays of liking
what his mistress liked and of commending the same actors and
mannerisms that she did. Yes, the lover says,"Love was as
subtilly catch'd, as a disease." But he does not leave this
classical idea of "love as a disease" alone. He gives it a
witty and slightly cynical twist: "For though 'tis got by

\textsuperscript{56}\textsuperscript{56}Robert A. Bryan, "John Donne's Use of the Anathema,"

\textsuperscript{57}\textsuperscript{57}John Bernard Emperor, The Catullian Influence in English
chance, 'tis kept by art."\textsuperscript{58} The man who makes this closing remark is not the young romantic that originally fell in love. He is a more mature man who knows that it is harder to keep love than to catch it.

Thus, Donne, in attempting to show the abruptly shifting thoughts of a man who first discovers his mistress is unfaithful, uses four different tonal qualities. The reader follows the lover as he is successively cynical, sincere, abusive, and tenderly witty. In no other elegy does Donne shift his attitude toward his mistress so drastically or so rapidly. But perhaps fewer abrupt tone changes and slightly more shading might have successfully created the complex lover's complaint Donne desired.

Of Donne's lover's complaints, this elegy shows by far the heaviest dependence upon classical authors. Malcolm L. Wilder, in his study "Did Jonson Write 'The Expostulation' Attributed to Donne?" finds in this elegy five passages from Latin authors, three of which are "well-nigh literal translations, and the others, close imitations." Three of these adaptations or translations are from Ovid, one from Catullus, and one from Seneca. John B. Emperor, in The Catullian Influence in English Lyric Poetry, Circa 1600-1650, finds three more adaptations of Catullus which are not listed by Wilder.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{58} Donne, p. 110.  \textsuperscript{59} Emperor, p. 41.
If this elegy could be positively attributed to Donne, his knowledge of Catullus might be definitely established. Unfortunately, both Donne's and Ben Jonson's editors claim this poem, which appeared not only in the 1633 and 1635 edition of Donne's poems but also in the 1640 posthumous edition of Jonson's Works in a section entitled "Underwoods." Arguments for both Donne's and Jonson's authorship are convincing. As Wilder points out, the poem is atypical of Donne in its heavy dependence upon classical authors. But as Gosse notes, if the poem were incorrectly attributed to Donne, it seems improbable that Jonson would have let it appear in both the 1633 and 1635 edition of Donne's works.

In Elegy VI Donne uses the lover's complaint neither for external dramas in which a lover maintains a consistently cynical or indignant tone, nor for internal dramas showing the impassioned state of mind of a lover who has just discovered his mistress is unfaithful. Rather, he employs, with slight changes, a classical elegiac theme: the lover-poet announces to his mistress that he is about to break the bonds of love. Donne, instead of beginning with the lover's announcing his anticipated break with his mistress, opens the elegy with the lover's imploring his mistress not to treat him "as those men serve/ Whom honours smoakes at once fatten and sterve."  

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60 Gosse, Life of Donne, I, 84.
61 Donne, p. 87.
He then moves into the lover's complaint concerning his treatment by the mistress. The lover, like a "giddie flie," was attracted to the "tapers beamie eye/ Amorously twinkling," only to quickly find his wings burned. Having enumerated his grievances, the lover then proceeds to announce to his mistress that if she continues to mistreat him, "My hate shall outgrow thine, and utterly/ I will renounce thy dalliance."  

In the first section of the poem, Donne employs an image pattern of the lover as courtier and the mistress as an influential nobleman. The lover seeks advancement at court, but the mistress enriches him only with words and knowing looks, not with substantial rewards. Do not, the lover implores, put my name in your loving book, if I have no tribute or sway with you. Such services as I offer you, says the lover-courtier, will be worthwhile. So either let me be "Favorite in Ordinary, or no favorite bee."  

In the second section of the elegy, the lover tells of the differences between the mistress now and when he first knew her. Innocently, he begins his recital: "When my Soule was in her owne body sheath'd, / Nor yet by oathes betroth'd . . . . ." Then comes the first slight shift, and the lover refers to the beginning of his affair as the time before he was

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62 Ibid., p. 88.
63 Ibid., p. 89.
64 Ibid., p. 88.
"breath'd" by kisses into his "Purgatory." At that time the mistress's heart seemed "waxe" and her constancy, "steele." But appearances belie. "So, careless flowers strow'd on the water's face,/ The curled whirlpooles suck, smack, and embrace,/ Yet drowne them." By using sound imitative of the whirlpool, Donne enforces the feeling of unpleasantness that he wants to attribute to the mistress. She is the sucking whirlpool that drowns careless flowers, the flame of the candle that burns the wings of giddy flies, the devil who scarcely has to visit people before they are entirely his.

An extended metaphysical conceit in which the mistress's behavior is compared to that of a stream comprises the third section of the poem. Although such elaborately worked out comparisons do not occur in Ovid's Amores, Ovid does have an elegy (Amores 3.6) cataloguing all the rivers that ever were in love. From this elegy Donne might easily have gotten his inspiration for his conceit. In Donne's elegy the mistress is the stream who, with "doubtful melodious murmuring" or "in a speechlesse slumber," keeps to her accustomed course (with the lover). She chides and wrinkles her brows if any bough (any man) stoops to kiss her. But at the same time, if her "gnawing kisses" make "the traiterous bank" (another man) "gape" (open wide his arms to her), "she rusheth violently, and doth divorce/ Her from her native, and long-kept course"

Ibid.
(as mistress of the lover-poet). Her "flattering eddies"\textsuperscript{66} (token overtures) seem to promise return to the channel (the lover-poet), but actually she is flouting him. The channel will thenceforth be dry (void of her presence).

At the conclusion of this long comparison, the lover warns his mistress that, if she is not careful, her "deepe bitterness" will beget "carelesse despaine"\textsuperscript{67} in him. And, he says, if she does move him to scorn, 

\begin{verbatim}
... love dull'd with paine
Was ne'r so wise, nor well arm'd as disdaine.
Then with new eyes I shall survay thee, 'and spie
Death in thy cheekes, and darknesse in thine eye.\textsuperscript{68}
\end{verbatim}

Like Catullus in Carm. viii, Donne's lover warns his mistress of the danger in ignoring him. But whereas Catullus's lover tells his mistress that she will become old and there will be nobody to love her, Donne's lover warns his mistress that her disdain will enable him to see her in a new way. Too much scorn will allow him to see her waning beauty, to see the deaths-head behind the mask of beauty.

As the lover continues to explain to his mistress what his attitude will become, the imagery shifts from secular to religious imagery. Although the lover's hope for future good will bred faith in the mistress and love for her (as a person's hope for an afterlife might cause his faith and love for God), the lover may fall away from loving her, just as

\textsuperscript{66}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{67}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{68}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 88-89.
nations fall away from Rome (from belief in the Catholic church). His hate shall outgrow hers, and he will renounce her trifling (as one renounces his belief in God). "And when I am the Recusant, in that resolute state," he says, "What hurts it mee to be' excommunicate?" In other words, if he refuses to obey the church's authority, what does it matter whether the church has denied him the rights of membership?

Elegy VI is not successful as an artistic composition, primarily because of its delight in extravagant imagery. As Leishman says, it "seems to exist chiefly for the sake of ingenious comparisons." In this elegy, Donne uses isolated metaphors, image patterns, and one extended metaphor which runs for fourteen lines. Here, Donne tends to choose whatever image suits his purpose at the moment, disregarding the total effect of the poem's imagery. Usually, one is able to follow Donne's developing intellectual idea, but in this case the imagery overpowers the ideas. Particularly in the extended comparison one loses track of the over-all theme of the elegy.

With a masterly touch John Donne lifted the Elizabethan lover's complaint from its pitiable state. He transformed the weak, melancholy lover who laments his cruel fate into a strong, defiant lover who berates anyone or any thing that displeases him. This lover may be cynical, contemptuous,

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69 Ibid., p. 89.
70 Leishman, p. 83.
or scornful of his mistress, but he never idolizes her or her beauty. He views love not romantically or sentimentally, but realistically. A mistress is no more than a whirlpool that sucks, smacks, and yet drowns those whom she embraces. And teaching a woman the art of love is no more than breaking a colt and making it a ready horse.

Donne gives to the lover's complaint a new dramatic quality. His best lover's complaints are dramatic tableaux rather than careful analyses of sentiment. In these he creates in bold outline a scene peopled by invalid husbands, foolish mistresses, suspicious mothers, and irrational fathers. He gives glimpses of an outside world which contains avaricious relatives, traitorous men, and crafty rulers. But in some of his complaints, Donne fails to project this dramatic external world of love. Here, the poet addresses his mistress, but in words that reflect primarily his internal, irrational and emotional changes of thought rather than the specific scenes and memories which produced those changes. The better poems are miniature stages on which tread the specific actors in an ever-changing amorous drama; the less successful complaints focus on emotion, mood, feeling created by that action.

To the Elizabethan lover's complaint, Donne gave new imagery and colloquial language. He almost completely disregarded the Petrarchan tears, sighs, and passionate fires. His language is not elevated; it is realistic to the point of being repulsive. A lover does not die. He "with loathsome
vomiting" spues "His Soule out of one hell, into a new."\(^7^1\) Perfume is that by which "the seely Amorous sucks his death/
By drawing in a leprous harlots breath."\(^7^2\) Both Donne and
the lover he created view love, women, and the world through
no rose-tinted glass. If their glass is tinted, it tends to
color both the world of love and the outside world gray at
best.

\(^7^1\)Donne, p. 88.
\(^7^2\)Ibid., p. 86.
CHAPTER IV

THE ELEGIAC LAMENT

Five of John Donne's elegies "deal with human insecurity in a . . . painful, powerful, and somber way."¹ Three of these elegies, occasioned by the parting of two lovers, are lover's laments. In these elegies, destiny, not an unfaithful mistress, a suspicious father, or a jealous husband, conspires against the faithful lovers. They are to be parted by a journey of either the lover or his mistress. Sorrowful and melancholy in tone, these laments become even more somber with the thought of death. Journeys are always dangerous, the sea is uncontrollable and foreigners are uncivilized. In Elegy XVI, Donne stresses the physical dangers that a trip to the continent would present to his mistress. Although the tone of this elegy is not wholly melancholy (because of its witty and satiric elements), still the poem ends with the vividly imagined death of the lover. In Elegy XII, which possesses a very melancholy and lamenting tone, the lover fears, above all, that a prolonged separation will bring an end to his and his mistress's love. Elegy V, "His Picture," stresses the fact that absence will teach the mistress to love more than her lover's physical charms (since he may

¹Martz, p. 332.
return from his expedition all weather-beaten, his body a sack of bones). The lover in Elegy X, "The Dreame," is also concerned with human insecurity. Using the theme of the lover's dream of his mistress, Donne shows a lover who feels that "at best life's taper is a snuff."\(^2\) Elegy IX, although not really a lament, also has a melancholy touch. Despite the fact that this elegy is a beautiful statement of praise for an older woman, images of death and the grave figure heavily in the poem.

In the classical elegiac lament, a lover's sorrow is frequently caused by separation from his mistress. The lover may be forced to make a long and dangerous journey, or, more frequently, the parting may be caused by the mistress's leaving the city with another lover or by the lover's leaving the city to try to escape from his degrading and debilitating love. If, however, the lover and his mistress are genuinely in love, the parting poem is particularly melancholy and lamenting. The lovers may be concerned about the dangers of the journey, particularly the sea, or about the danger of their separation bringing an end to their love.

The Roman elegists always viewed the sea as an avenue to a horrible death and as an obstacle which keeps lovers apart. If, for any reason, the mistress is preparing to make a sea voyage, the lover always tries to dissuade her from going

\(^2\)Donne, p. 95.
by stressing the danger of the sea and the rigor of foreign climates. In 1.8, for instance, Propertius tries to dissuade Cynthia from going to Illyria. He warns her of the danger of the sea: "See from the window how the waves come crashing:/ what ship could live when such a tempest blows?" In 1.17, Propertius curses the sea that persists in plaguing love: "I'd give first place in hell to that first sailor/ who built the first ship and devised its sail/ and found it seaworthy and ventured further." Ovid, in 2.11, laments Corinna's preparing to tread "those treacherous pathways" of the ocean and tries to picture for her the joys of her home and the dangers of a journey abroad.

In Donne's parting poems, twice it is the lover who must journey from his mistress and once the mistress who must depart. Unlike many of the Roman elegies on this theme, Donne's elegies of parting concern lovers parted by circumstances, not by the unfaithfulness of the mistress. In Donne's poems, as in the Roman elegies, parting always occasions thoughts of death. The lover envisions his torn and bruised body after a dangerous journey, he envisions a dream his mistress might have of him treacherously slain in the Alps.

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3 Propertius, p. 36.
4 Ibid., p. 50.
5 Ovid, p. 55.
or he enumerates for his mistress the dangers she would encounter if she accompanied him on a trip to the continent.

Slowly and ominously Elegy XVI opens as a lover says to his mistress, "By our first strange and fatal interview." Almost imperceptibly it gathers force and momentum as the lover becomes more and more impassioned. In his twelve-line apostrophe to his mistress he first calmly begs her and then conjures her, by all that is a part of their love, by all that their love has endured that she "shalt not love by wayes so dangerous." Finally, in the fourteenth line, the lover fully reveals what has called forth his entreaty to his mistress. She wishes to secretly accompany him on a forthcoming journey to the continent, but he wishes her to "be my true Mistris stil, not my faign'd Page."  

In the first fourteen lines of the poem, the lover both sets the dramatic, passionate tone of the elegy and indirectly tells the reader a great deal about the lovers' affair. For instance, the lovers' first sight of one another ("interview") was "strange" and "fatal" because henceforth their fates were joined. It was also fatal in view of the difficulties they later encountered. Their hopes for fulfillment in love or marriage were "long starving." Remorse was begotten in the mistress by the "masculine perswasive force" of the lover's words. Here appears the first of two images concerned with

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6Donne, p. 111.  7Ibid.
sexual intercourse and maternity. As Doniphon Louthan says of this first image, "Whether or not conception occurred in the physiological sense, remorse was begotten by the act—and hence, indirectly, by the words." The lover's urging sexual intercourse begot remorse, just as his actual sexual act may have begotten a child.

By all these things—their first meeting, their desires, their hopes, the mistress's remorse, and hurts inflicted by spies and rivals—the lover calmly begs his mistress. Thus, Donne breaks the long opening apostrophe to the mistress into two sections, the first consisting of seven lines and the second of five. By so doing, Donne is able to show the lover's growing emotionality without losing the interest of the reader. His "I calmly beg" allows both the mistress and the reader a pause in which to consider what the lover has said thus far. In the second group of lines the lover no longer calmly begs but rather conjures his mistress by things which have greatly threatened their love—by her "fathers wrath" and by all pains which "want and divorcement" inflict on lovers. In a dramatic climax, the lover "unswears" all the lovers' vows they ever made together and "overswears" them: "Thou shalt not love by wayes so dangerous." Before revealing what these dangerous ways are, Donne inserts another

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line to build up what the lover feels is the monstrosity of his mistress's proposed act. "Temper, o faire Love," he says, "loves impetuous rage,/ Be my true Mistris still, not my faign'd Page."  

In seeming anticipation of the mistress's protest, the lover says that only if the mistress remains in England will he have the desire to return: "I'll goe, and, by thy kinde leave, leave behind/ Thee, only worthy to nurse in my mind,/ Thirst to come back."  

In the second of the sexual-maternal images, the mistress here nurses her lover's thirst to return just as a mother suckles her infant. As Louthan says, "The thought of being with her again--and nothing but that thought--is capable of slaking (while arousing) his thirst to return."  

Then, as if in answer to the mistress's question, the lover says that if she should die before he returns, "My soule from other lands to thee shall soare."  

Because this reference to the mistress's dying follows the suckling image as well as the earlier implicit reference to sexual intercourse, it seems plausible to assume that the mistress fears she may die in childbirth before the lover returns from his long journey.

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9 Donne, p. 111.
10 Ibid.
11 Louthan, pp. 54-55.
12 Donne, p. 111.
In the next sections of the elegy, the lover attempts to reason with his mistress and to show her why such a journey is dangerous, why she should remain his beloved lady and not become his page. First, he reveals to her the dangers of the sea and the wind. Unlike him, they will not recognize the sovereignty of her beauty. Remember, if you will, the lover says, how roughly the North Wind, Boreas, treated Orthea, the nymph he swore he loved. Whether ill or good befalls us on the journey, he declares, "'tis madnesse to have prov'd/ Dangers unurg'd." Only a fool braves dangers unnecessarily. Rather, accept this consolation, says the lover, that absent lovers "one in th'other be" and hence are never really parted. There is no reason for the mistress to undergo any dangerous journey since she will be with the lover anyway in spirit.

"Dissemble nothing," says the lover, for you will be strange to no one but yourself. You will be recognized as the beautiful woman you are. To emphasize the fact that her disguise would fool no one, he immediately adds: "Richly cloath'd Apes, are call'd Apes, and as soone/ Ecclips'd as bright we call the Moone the Moone." In other words, whether successfully disguised or not, the mistress will still be exposing herself to certain dangers. As this section is developed, the language, and particularly the imagery, becomes

\[\text{\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 112.}\]  
\[\text{\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.}\]
harsher and more vulgar. The lover, in attempting to paint even more forcefully than before an unpleasant picture of possible dangers, now depicts dangers that people—not elements—present.

In this section of the elegy, Donne uses satire to reveal the grave dangers that are inherent in a continental journey. By incorporating satirical elements into his elegy, Donne is not out of step with classical elegists. Catullus, like Donne, felt a kinship between elegy and satire. Here Donne brands the men of France as "changeable Camelions" (because they change their amatory affiliations so frequently), as "spittles of disease" (i.e. hospitals full of disease), and as "shops of fashions"15 (because they are fashionable dressed dandies). As "loves fuellers, and the rightest company of Players," they are "exponents of aphrodisiacs . . . or experimenters in new erotic thrills."16 Thus they are themselves players on the world's stage and hence appropriate company for actors. Wittily and yet tenderly, the lover says that these notorious Frenchmen will quickly recognize the mistress as a woman and not a page, and that they will also soon know her a lass through sexual intercourse. Alas!

To the indifferent Italians it will not matter whether or not they recognize the mistress as a woman, for they are equally amiable to heterosexual or homosexual love. "With such lust, and hideous rage/ as Lots faire guests were vext," will the Italians pursue this most angelic visitor to their land.

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15 Ibid.  
16 Louthan, p. 56.
But none of these dangers, emphasizes the lover, will you have to be displeased by—not even by the "hydroptique" (drunken) Dutch—if you will stay here in England.

"O stay here," entreats the lover, for only England is "a worthy Gallerie" for you. In other words, the mistress is a beautiful art object which only England is worthy to view. There in England she may "walk in expectation, till from thence/ Our greatest King call thee to his presence."\(^{17}\) Here, the meaning of gallery seems to shift to "a long and narrow passageway" in which the mistress walks until Death calls her to his presence. With the thought of the mistress's remaining in England until she is called by death, Donne prepares for the shift from the satiric tone of the previous section into the very somber tone of the concluding section of the poem.

Having seemingly reconciled his mistress to his journeying alone, the lover turns to advising her how to act when he is gone. First he asks her to dream him some happiness, and thus prepares the reader for this return to the vividly imagined dream the lover projects. He implores her not to give their "long hid love"\(^{18}\) away by her looks, by praising or dispraising the lover too much, or by openly blessing and cursing love's force. Do not, the lover says, frighten your nurse by exclaiming:

\(^{17}\)Donne, p. 112. \(^{18}\)Ibid.
Nurse, o my love is slaine, I saw him goe
O'r the white alpes alone; I saw him I,
Assail'd, fight, taken, stabb'd, bleed, fall, and die.
Augure me better chance, except dread Jove
Think it enough for me to'have had thy love.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 112-113.}

In this last section, Donne's imagined scene gives one the feel of Propertius's vividly imagined death scenes. However, where Propertius usually achieves his poignancy through his vivid imagery, Donne here is able to give a dramatic quality to his lines primarily through the use of his monosyllabic verbs. Throughout this concluding section, Donne brings back to his elegy the mournful, melancholy tone typical of the classical elegists when they wrote of lovers' parting. One is dramatically reminded of the fact that the lover himself is vulnerable to many dangers as he is well aware, so well aware that he projects his vision of them into a dream which his mistress might have concerning him. Do not, the lover asks, dream ill happenings for me, for they might come true. Jove might well decide that by having had your love, I have had as much as I deserve in life. By returning to a feeling of ominousness, Donne rounds out his elegy into a finished composition. To this heavy, forboding feeling with which he began, he returns for his final melancholy chords.

Of all the elegies of parting, Elegy XII is the most sombre in tone. In this poem, a lover, faced with the prospect
of parting, attempts to rise above the world of flux and mutability.\textsuperscript{20} From deepest despair, he moves to a tender avowal of constancy. His shifting emotion is seen through his four apostrophes: to Night, Love, Fortune, and his Beloved. When the lover is first confronted with the fact of his mistress's departure, he can conceive of nothing but darkness and void. "Come Night," he says, "shadow that hell unto me, which alone/ I am to suffer when my Love is gone." Dark Night is not comparable to the darkness that the lover feels: "Should Cinthia quit thee, Venus, and each starre,/ It would not forme one thought dark as mine are.\textsuperscript{21}

But even darkness cannot quell the fire of Love. From the apostrophe to Night, the lover shifts to question Love as to why he and his mistress must endure the suffering of parting. Is it because Love, like a cruel victor, must torment those over whom he triumphs? Must they, Love's martyrs, be blinded (by not seeing each other) because Love is blind? Or does Love, the cruel tormentor, take pride in breaking lovers on the wheel? Or is it that the lovers have improperly worshipped the god of Love? Have they forgotten to observe some mutual rite that he wishes observed? Thus, Donne uses three rhetorical questions to show the lover's rising emotion.

\textsuperscript{20}Martz, p. 333.

\textsuperscript{21}Donne, p. 100.
Then he has the lover make an abrupt about-face. The impassioned, questioning tone drops and the lover says sorrowfully, "No, no. The fault was mine, impute it to me." $^{22}$ It cannot be that Love wishes lovers to so suffer, the lover implies. It is upon himself that the lover feels the blame must be placed. Humbly, he admits that previously he loved "for forme," i.e. "love for the sake of love," or love of external form only and not of true, inner substance. For such violations of sacred love, "conspiring destiny" decreed that one must suffer when one truly loves.

The lover, after admitting that perhaps his previous offenses against Love have caused the present punishment, turns to reprimand Love for also punishing his "Dove-like friend" for an offense of which she is not guilty. Love is blinder than himself if he makes the innocent girl share her lover's fate. Only the lover justly deserves to have to expiate Love's wrath. But blind Love, like blind Justice, is not content to merely strike down Favorites, but must also strike down their families, friends, and followers. Such suffering on the mistress's part strikes the lover as grossly unjust—especially since the two of them have already had to suffer and endure so much for their love.

In the next section of the elegy, the lover, by complaining of what the two have already suffered, reveals to the reader something of their past circumstances. As Robin

$^{22}$ Ibid., p. 101.
Skelton notes, the lover's present depth of emotion is in ironic contrast with the very conventional imagery he uses to describe their past situation.\(^2\) Love darted his "fires/ Into our blouds, inflaming our desires,/ And made'st us sigh and glow, and pant, and burn,/ And then thy self into our flame did'st turn."\(^2\) Curiously, the image pattern which emerges in this section of the elegy is similar in nature to the traitor-betrayal pattern in Elegy IV, an elegy of an entirely different tonal quality.

Here the lovers are viewed as "soldiers" assigned to a dangerous mission. They were hazarded to dark and dangerous paths in love, ones which were "ambush'd round with household spies."\(^2\) And, says the lover, "Over all, thy husbands towring eyes/ That flam'd with oylie sweat of jealousie."\(^2\) Despite these dangerous obstacles, the lovers "went on with Constancie." They continued their dangerous mission. They kept their "guards," (were very careful). And so "spy" was set against "spy." Despite the presence of the "foe," they were able to correspond. They even "stole" such treasures as meetings, embraces, kisses, and their "most respects" they covered up ("shadow'd") with seeming indifference. They had many varieties of secret communication--such as "becks, winks, looks," and even "under-boards/ Spoak dialogues with our feet far from our words." Having undergone all this

\(^4\)Donne, p. 101.  \(^5\)Ibid.  \(^6\)Ibid., pp. 101-102.
danger, "must sad divorce," asks the lover, "make us the vulgar story?" Is the end of their mission to be the same as that of many—death by separation?

Again, Donne has used rhetorical questions (seven) to show the lover's growing emotion as he recalls all that he and his mistress have undergone for their love. Here, too, the tone shifts after the rhetorical questions. This time, however, it merely changes in quality from impassioned to determined and does not drop in intensity. Rather than becoming the "vulgar story," says the lover, let our eyes be riveted through our brains, let our arms clasp like ivy, and our fear freeze us together. Here we will stay until Fortune, who would shatter us by separation, strains her eyes open and makes them bleed. It must be Fortune who so wishes to torture us, decides the lover, "for Love it cannot be, whom hitherto I have accus'd, should a mischief doe." "Oh Fortune," begins the lover in his third apostrophe, you are not worth crying out against. Like a cruel and sinful man, "plague enough thou hast in thy own shame." Fortune now, and not Love, is the cruel tormentor of the lovers. No matter, says the lover, my beloved and I have "armes, if not against the cutting strokes of Fortune, at least against any harm that might come from such strokes. Even if Fortune cuts the lovers in two, their souls will

27 Ibid., p. 102.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
not be affected by a parting of the bodies. And, says the lover, descending for a moment to give concrete reassurance to his mistress and himself, "We can love by letters still and gifts,/ And thoughts and dreams." Love is not to be overcome by Fortune: "Love never wanteth shifts."30

In the next section of the elegy the lover details in what ways lovers may overcome Fortune's rending. The brightly burning sun shall make the lover's thoughts immediately hasten to his mistress's beauty. The air shall suggest her softness; the fire, her purity; the water, her clarity; and the earth, her sureness. For she is as permanent in her qualities as the elements. Time will not forget their growing love, says the poet. The spring will not forget "how fresh our love was in the beginning;/ The Summer how it ripened in the eare;/ And Autumn, what our golden harvests were." In order to spite Fortune, the lover says he will not think about winter, "but count it a lost season."31 By thus having the lover compare his love to the elements and the seasons, Donne gives this love permanence. The lover's apostrophe to Fortune helps him finally conclude that love does not depend on time and space. Having thus overcome his doubts at being parted from his mistress, the lover now turns to his mistress and attempts to show her how to view their parting. As the lover begins giving his mistress little bits of philosophy and advice, Donne shifts from

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30Ibid., p. 103.  
31Ibid.
long paragragraphic structure to the use of one completed thought per couplet. The mistress may drown night by hoping for day, for "burthens well born are light." In spite of our separation, says the lover, "Be then ever your self, and let no woe/ Win on your health, your youth, your beauty."  

Tenderly, the lover says to his mistress: "To th'comfort of my Dear I vow,/ My Deeds shall be what my words are now." For eight lines, he avows his constancy and assures the mistress that they can rise above mutability and change. If I cease to love, he tells her, realize that heaven has lost its motion, and the world, its fire. The lover, now firm in his belief in constancy, says that he could say much more to the mistress. But since too much talk often makes suspect that which one would persuade, he concludes:

    Take therefore all in this: I love so true,  
    As I will never look for less in you. 33

Within Elegy V, Donne has etched a man returning from war. His body is a "sack of bones, broken within,/ And powders blew staines" 34 are scattered on his skin. In this elegy Donne concentrates not on the lover's sorrow at parting, but on the fear of death and physical harm which his journey may bring. The lover's carefully imagined picture of himself returning from war allows Donne to make the primary point of the poem: absence shall teach the mistress to love more than the man's physical charms.

32 Ibid. 33 Ibid., p. 104. 34 Ibid., p. 87.
As Elegy V opens, the lover says to his mistress, "Here take my Picture; though I bid farewell,/ Thine, in my heart, where my soule dwels, shall dwell."\[^{35}\] Having thus reassured his mistress of his devotion, the lover quickly passes to melancholy thoughts of death. Looking at the picture, he muses that although it resembles him now, it will be worth more when he is dead. When he and his mistress are both shadows, it will assume a new value because it will reveal what he used to be but is no more. The lover's thought of the destructive quality of death reminds him of the destructive quality of war. When he returns from war, he may no more resemble the picture than if he no longer existed.

For six lines the lover vividly describes how he may look when he returns, weather-beaten and wounded. His hands will be torn by oars and tanned by the sun. His face and chest will be as stiff and wiry (the coarsened quality of the skin or the stubbly beard) as haircloth. His head will be overspread "with cares rash sodaine stormes."\[^{36}\] That is, his hair may have been grayed by the things he has undergone. And his body will be a sack of bones, broken within. If he should so return, the lover wants his mistress to have been forewarned, and he also wants her to be forearmed against any rivals who might "taxe thee to'have lov'd a man,/ So foule, and course, as, Oh, I may seeme then."\[^{37}\]

\[^{35}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 86.}\quad ^{36}\text{Ibid.}\quad ^{37}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 87.}\]
But the picture will say what the physical man was, and the mistress shall say:

Doe his hurts reach mee? doth my worth decay?  
Or doe they reach his judging minde that hee  
Should now love lesse, what he did love to see?  

Donne uses these three dramatic questions to emphasize the fact that the real man is not changed by any external wounds. The lover's "hurts" do not reach her because her love is not based on outward appearance. Her "worth" does not decay because the lover's thoughts for her have not been changed. His hurts do not reach his "judging minde" and so make him love her less. In conclusion, the lover, having shown by the three questions what his point of view is, now proceeds through a vivid metaphor to conclude his point:

That which in him was faire and delicate,  
Was but the milke, which in loves childish state  
Did nurse it: who now is growne strong enough  
To feed on that, which to disus'd tasts seemes tough.  

The lover hopes that his mistress will be able to tell her questioners that her love was young and childish when it had to be nourished by his fair and delicate outward appearance. But now that her love is grown even stronger, it may feed on meat, that is, on the real worth of the lover, his inner substance. As Helen Gardner demonstrates, the last four lines are not an abrupt shift from what precedes them. By saying that the lover's "judging mind" is not affected by his hurts, the mistress anticipates saying that her love is

\[38\text{Ibid.} \quad \text{39Ibid.}\]
now based on the man's true worth. That is, the woman's love is now based on her lover's "judging minde" and not on outward form.

Elegy X, "The Dreame," is a perplexing poem. Critics have interpreted the elegy in terms of Platonic idealism, Aristotelian imposition of form on matter, and semantic dualism. Furthermore, "The Dreame" is atypical of Donne's elegies in several ways. Robert Ellrodt finds that, unlike the rest of Donne's elegies, it has a particularly meditative and introspective turn. In this respect, it resembles the Songs and Sonets. J. B. Leishman, the only critic who discusses Donne's elegies to any extent, omits this poem. Although he makes no comment on his omission, obviously he finds the poem either atypical or difficult to interpret. In another respect this elegy resembles the Songs and Sonets. Of all Donne's formal elegies, only Elegy X is not written in heroic couplets, the generally accepted equivalent for the classical meter. It is instead in alternating rhyming

42 Elias Schwartz, "Donne's 'Elegy X' (The Dreame)," Explicator, XIX (June, 1961), item 67.
44 Ellrodt, II, 297.
quatrain, ABAB CACA, DEDE DEDE, FGFG HIHI, with a concluding couplet. For all these reasons, this elegy will not be discussed in detail, but rather in terms of its melancholy and pessimistic tone and its thematic divergence from the established classical dream poem.

The poet's dreaming of his mistress at night is among the themes occasionally treated by the Roman elegists. Both Propertius and Ovid employed this theme, although never in the manner that Donne does. In 2.26, Propertius dreams of Cynthia shipwrecked, her weakening hands clutching the air, her brine-soaked hair dragging her down. Terror-stricken, Propertius prays to Neptune,

> But as you sank, I saw a dolphin swimming, Arion's lute bearer, your guide to shore, and I, prepared to leap and die beside you, felt terror fade, for I could bear no more.  

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In Elegy 4.7, Propertius dreams of the wraith of Cynthia that returns to stand beside his bed to complain of his unjust treatment of her. As the elegy ends, Propertius says, "And suddenly, her sad complaining ended,/ she was gone, and I stood with my empty arms extended." 46

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Ovid, in Amores 3.5, has a dream which a seer interprets as meaning that Ovid's mistress will desert him. The scorching heat that the poet wished to shun, and could not, was the ardor of love. The white heifer was his love, and the bull.

45 Propertius, p. 98.
46 Ibid., p. 81.
the poet. The raven that picked at the heifer's heart was a bawd trying to corrupt the mistress:

"The time doesn't matter; the fact that the bull, in the end, was deserted
Proves you will lie alone, cold in a desolate bed.

So the interpreter spoke. My heart felt chill and forboding
And the sight of my eyes faced only darkness and night.47

Obviously, these rather simple dream poems are very unlike Donne's extremely involuted interplay of fantasy and reason, but the same melancholy tone pervades both the classical dream poems and Donne's. Donne's elegy, like Ovid's, shows an awareness of the transitory nature of things. It presents a lover eagerly anticipating both sleep and dreams. The lover tells "Image of her whom I love, more than she"48 to depart, so that fantasy may be queen. Whether one conceives of this "image" as a Platonic "idea" which has more value than the substance which it reflects,49 as the Platonic "fairer form" as opposed to the woman's physical beauty,50 or as merely the mental picture of the lady on the poet's mind51--

"The basis of the poem is the thwarting of the poet's physical desire."52 The poet wishes this "image" and his heart which is imprinted with it to depart. His heart "now is growne too great and good" for him (through his beloved's rejection

47 Ovid, p. 76. 48 Donne, p. 95.
49 Lewis, p. 437. 50 Bowers, p. 281.
51 Schwartz, item 67. 52 Lewis, p. 438.
of his physical desires). He is oppressed by "honours" or the Platonic "idea."

The "image" must go, and "reason" with it. Then the lover can enjoy the woman in his imagination, unhampered by their Platonic relationship. Sleep and fantasy can present the lover with more ordinary "joyes" (i.e. physical pleasures). "So, if I dreame I have you, I have you,/ For, all our joyes are but fantastical.

Since all "joyes" in the real world are merely imaginary, if the lover dreams in the world of fantasy that he has her, he possesses her as much as he would in the real world. And by having his mistress in his dreams, he may "scape the paine, for paine is true." Thus Donne creates the opposition between joy which is "fantasy" and pain which is "true." And by possessing his mistress in his dreams, he may escape the pain.

After such enjoyment (possessing his mistress in his dreams), he shall wake and repent nothing but waking up. He shall then make "more thankfull Sonnets" to love than if more "honour, teares, and paines were spent," that is, than if he tried to reach to the Platonic idea or to possess his mistress in the real world. Then in a typical Donnian reversal, the lover begs his heart and the "image" to stay. For "Alas, true joyes at best are dreame enough/ Though you stay here you passe too fast away:/ For even at first lifes Taper is a snuffe." He decides he prefers the waking pain

53 Donne, p. 95.  
54 Ibid.  
55 Ibid.
in the presence of his beloved's image to the less real joy of the dream, for death will make even the image pass away too fast. In conclusion, the lover says, "Fill'd with her love, may I be rather grown Mad with much heart, than ideott with none." That is, "he would rather be mad (temporarily maddened by pain and paradoxically still possessed of reason) than an idiot (permanently bereft of reason, of image, of love)." He prefers "reality" with pain to "unreality" without it.

The power of Elegy IX lies in the fact that Autumnal beauty is "poised so precariously between the gay volatile beauties of youth and the inevitable state of those Donne calls the 'Winterfaces.'" In this elegy, despite the fact that Donne tenderly praises a woman he admires, there is evoked a melancholy sense of the instability and transitoriness of life. Except for its tonal quality, however, this elegy has no antecedent in antiquity. It seems to resemble a courtly, "occasional" poem for a patron rather than a typical Latin elegy. Certainly, Donne's ingenious word play has only imperfect and restrained parallels in the Latin elegy.

Yet the quiet, tender tone is reminiscent of the elegies of Tibullus. In the same manner that Tibullus undercuts his

dreams of happiness, so Donne undercuts his praise of Autumnal beauty by overlaying his poem with images of death and the grave. Despite the fact that Donne so carefully praises Autumnal beauty, there is always in the background the knowledge that Autumnal beauties soon become Winter-faces. In two sections of the poem, Donne allows the images of death and the grave to dominate. In one such section Donne wittily plays with the idea that the woman's "wrinkles" are not "graves," and in the other he vividly contrasts Autumnal and Winter faces.

In the opening couplet of the elegy, Donne makes an assertion which he proceeds to prove throughout the rest of the poem. In the first of each couplet thereafter, Donne makes a statement about youth which he is able to turn to the disadvantage of young beauty and to the praise of Autumnal beauty. The following quotation shows both this opening statement and the manner in which Donne manipulates his witty arguments in favor of admiring an older woman:

No Spring, nor Summer Beauty hath such grace,
As I have seen in one Autumnal face.
Yong Beauties force our love, and that's a Rape,
This doth but counsaile, yet you cannot scape.
It'were a shame to love, here t'were no shame,
Affection here takes Reverences name.62

Donne, by using the word "force" instead of "one cannot help but," may then say that such compelled love is "rape." And, of course, rape is undesirable. Autumnal beauty merely

62 Donne, pp. 92-93.
advises one to admire it, and yet one cannot escape from it. Whereas young love is often secretive and shameful, love for an older woman is not shameful, because affection is now "reverence" and not unruly passion. Donne, in another couplet, takes the concept of fiery and passionate youth and says that her youth was the woman's "torrid and inflaming time," that is, a period of scorching, unpleasant heat. Autumnal beauty, on the other hand, possesses a "tolerable Tropique clyme," a pleasant coolness. Anyone, says Donne, who wishes more heat than comes from this woman's eyes is one who "in a fever wishes pestilence."63

After praising his lady's eyes, Donne next speaks of her wrinkles, saying:

Call not these wrinkles, graves: If graves they were,
They were Loves graves; for else he is no where.
Yet lies not Love dead here, but here doth sit
Vow'd to this trench, like an Anachorit.
And here, till hers, which must be his death, come,
He doth not digge a Grave, but build a Tombe.
Here dwells he, though he sojourne ev'ry where,
In Progresse, yet his standing house is here.64

In this extended section, Donne wittily plays with the words "graves," "death," and "tomb." By saying that one might wish to call "wrinkles," "graves," Donne himself undercuts his tender praise of the woman. In word play after word play, Donne says that his lady's wrinkles are not graves, but that if they were, they must be the graves (marker and marks) of Love. But these graves do not mark the death of

64 *Ibid.*
Love, but the trench to which Love is committed. Here Love will stay until the woman's death, which will, of course, be his death, for she is Love. In the woman's face, Love has built a tomb (memorial) where he dwells, even though he temporarily stays elsewhere.

For fifteen more lines Donne praises Autumnal beauty at the expense of younger beauty. It is "loves timber, youth his underwood." Or, as Donne says in his arguments:

If we love things long sought, Age is a thing Which we are fifty yeares in compassing.
If transitory things, which soon decay, Age must be lovelyest at the latest day.65

Since things long sought after have great value, one should love Age, for one must wait fifty years to obtain it. If all life is transitory and decays, then Age must be loveliest at its latest day. But such loveliness, Donne feels, is in direct contrast to the bleak and dismal faces of the aged. Donne imagines his "Winter-faces" as vividly as he does the returning lover in Elegy V. Their skin is slack, "lanke, as an unthrifts purse; their eyes are sunken. Their mouths are worn out holes, and their teeth are already missing. Nay, says Donne, "Name not these living Deaths-heads unto mee, /
For these, not Ancient, but Antique be."66 To Donne, there is all the difference between the "ancient" woman he admires and the "antique" death's head. But how much difference is there in the meaning of the two words? Donne, by choosing

65Ibid., pp. 93-94. 66Ibid., p. 94.
two words which are really synonyms to make a differentiation between maturity and old age, undercuts his distinction.

From his strong condemnation of "Winter-faces," Donne turns and in a slight reversal says that, although he hates extremes, "yet I had rather stay/ With Tombs, than Cradles, to weare out a day." In this metonymy, Donne picks up his previous reference to the woman's face as the tomb of Love, to make this gentle statement of his preference. In his last lines, he tenderly says that his love will "descend, and journey downe the hill,/ Not panting after growing beauties, so,/ I shall ebbe out with them, who home-ward goe."\(^{67}\) Donne here acknowledges that those in their Autumnal season are ever so surely approaching death. But in tender praise, Donne forgets the "Winter-faces," saying that together he and his Autumnal beauties will slowly proceed homeward.

Although Donne's lover's complaints tend to be cynical and dramatic in a particularly Ovidian manner, these five laments possess a melancholy tone which is as characteristic of Propertius and Tibullus as it is of Ovid. In the face of lovers' separations and impending death, Donne is profoundly affected by life's insecurity. He, like other Elizabethans, finds that life is short, men are base, women are fickle, parting is painful, and love is fleeting. But whereas the Elizabethan lament is always a simple tune, Donne's laments are complex symphonies. Donne takes this basic vocabulary

\(^{67}\) Ibid.
of human insecurity and creates from it a somber and dramatic labyrinth of life and love, pain and parting, parting and the dark foreboding of death where man endures the great tragic dramas of the human spirit.
CHAPTER V

THE EROTIC ELEGY

The erotic elegy, one of the clearly recognized forms of the classical elegy, is concerned with the erotic and sensuous aspects of love. Ovid, for example, in Amores 3.7 talks of being impotent despite a lovely girl's efforts to arouse his desire; Propertius, in 2.15, joys in the naked body of his mistress, in holding her close, in possessing her. A frequent theme of the erotic elegy concerns a lover's admission that, despite his sworn devotion to his mistress, he finds himself susceptible to the charms of all women. His passion is "all-embracing."¹ Another theme of the erotic elegy shows a lover's desire to make love with his mistress rather than to war with other men. The lover discusses the rival claims of love and war, but always he finds himself fit only for the warfare of love. A third common variant of the erotic elegy is the boudoir poem. In such an elegy, the lover, having triumphed over husband and rivals, now lies in bed with his love. He is enchanted both by his mistress's presence and by the sensual pleasure of love. He may, as Propertius does, anticipate the pleasures that his night of love is to offer him. He feels his mistress's tunic as he rips it away.

¹Ovid, p. 45.
He sees her "light ripe breasts," and he envisions a long night locked close in love with his mistress: "O let us love until we are each other--/ we on whom Pate these few swift hours has smiled . . . . Strain closer to me, lock me in a nearness/ that will not fail when time would have it gone."²

Donne, in his erotic elegies, adapts these three themes to suit his own taste and temperament. Whereas the Roman elegists are reluctant to admit their susceptibility to all women, Donne in Elegy III and Elegy XVII creates a philosophy of change which is justified by natural law. To him, change and variety in love are both purifying and life-giving. In Elegy XX, Donne states his preference of love to war. In this elegy directly imitative of Ovid, Donne compares the soldier and the lover and decides to serve his country by remaining with his mistress and creating men rather than by going to war and killing them. But even in this elegy, Donne adds satirical elements concerning both war and contemporary society, elements which were non-existent in the classical elegies of this type. The Romans in their boudoir poems are tenderly exultant and triumphant, but Donne's Elegy XVIII is not a subjective, emotional utterance. It is an objective argument in favor of copulation: woman should be appreciated for one thing and one thing only--her "centrique part."³ One should not try to

²Propertius, p. 80.
³Donne, I, 117.
make love any more than what it is—the gratification of physical desire. Donne's Elegy XIX resembles the classical boudoir elegy more than does his brutally frank Elegy XVIII. But even though Elegy XIX has the tender tone and dramatic situation of the Roman elegies, it goes far beyond them in complexity of thought. By emphasizing the spiritual as he talks of the physical, Donne creates an artistic and complex elegy from the simple situation of a lover eagerly anticipating his mistress's coming to bed.

Despite the fact that the Roman elegists swear eternal devotion to their mistresses, they cannot resist variety in love. They find themselves attracted not to one but to many women. Propertius, for instance, tells a friend that he is enchanted by all women:

There isn't a street in Rome I haven't wandered;  
the theater trapped me, too, and long ago.  
O those white arms flung out, that white throat pouring  
its music forth to win my willing heart!  
and that same trouble-seeking heart still conscious  
of this one's bare breasts, or of that one's art . . . 4

Ovid, in Amores 2.10 assures his friend Graecinus that a man can love more than one woman at a time, for, in fact, he now loves two at a time. In Amores 2.4, Ovid admits to a grievous fault—he cannot resist women:

Out of control, I lack will power to keep me aright.  
There is no definite One whose beauty drives me to frenzy;  
No: there are hundreds, almost, keeping me always in love.5

Ovid loves the modest ones, the brash ones, the ones who sing beautiful songs and the ones who dance, those who are tall and

4Propertius, p. 90.  
5Ovid, p. 44.
those who are short, redheads, blondes, brunettes, both young and old. In fact, says Ovid, "All-embracing, I think, is the proper term for my passion;/ There's not a sweetheart in town I'd be reluctant to love."\(^6\)

Donne, like the Roman elegists, writes of change and variety in love. But whereas the Romans consider man's desire for all women as irrational a force as that which makes men slash their arms to the tune of the Phrygian flute, Donne sees free love as both natural and desirable. Whereas Ovid reluctantly admits that he cannot defend himself against his desire for all women, Donne actively advocates change and variety in love, lamenting that the "golden laws of nature" have been repealed and that "honour" and "opinion"\(^7\) now prescribe singularity rather than plurality in love.\(^8\)

In Elegy III, the reader is present while a lover carefully considers his philosophy of change and then pronounces it valid. "Change," he says, "is the nursery/ Of musicke, joy, life, and eternity." Although to live in one land is "captivitie," to freely roam all countries is "wild roguery."\(^9\)

\(^6\)Ibid., p. 45. \(^7\)Donne, I, 114. \(^8\)In his erotic elegies, Donne assumes a libertine attitude toward conventional morality. Such an attitude, however, was a part of Renaissance thought and not unique with Donne. Louis I. Bredvold in his article, "The Naturalism of Donne in Relation to Some Renaissance Traditions," finds Donne's Pyrrhonism, like Montaigne's, a combination of both Naturalism and Scepticism. For further discussion of this point, see Bredvold's article in volume twenty-two of Journal of English and Germanic Philology. \(^9\)Donne, I, 83.
Change is the happy medium. The purest waters are those free-running streams that kiss one bank and then, leaving it, kiss another without looking back.

When this elegy opens, one discovers a lover expressing his concern about his mistress's ability to be faithful. Using religious imagery, the lover compares his mistress to one who, through words, faith, and good works, has demonstrated his love. Nothing should undo it. But, says the lover, even if the mistress should "fall backe" from her sworn belief, "that apostasie/ Confirm\(\bar{\text{s}}\) thy love." Just as one lapse and subsequent reaffirmation strengthens a Christian's faith, so may the mistress's unfaithfulness strengthen her love for the speaker. The lover may also wittily be saying that the mistress's "apostasie" (renunciation of the present lover) confirms the fact that she loves (although not the present speaker). "Yet much, much I feare thee,"\(^{10}\) says the lover, for either she will again backslide, or she loves all men indiscriminately.

In the next ten lines, the lover, by elaborating on the nature of women, indirectly explains why he fears his mistress. Women are "like the Arts, forc'd unto none,/ Open to'all searchers, unpriz'd, if unknowne."\(^{11}\) Although the Arts and women cannot be forced onto someone, their pleasures are

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 82.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
open to all those who wish them. And, like the Arts, women must be known to be appreciated. Turning from the thought of knowing women, the lover proceeds to the thought of catching women. "If," he says, "I have caught a bird, and let him flie,/ Another fouler using these meanes, as I,/ May catch the same bird."¹² Just as the pleasures of women are open to all, so the techniques of catching women are available to all men. Women, like birds, are free creatures which must not be kept in captivity. But, being free creatures, they may easily be caught again by another "fouler."

In showing the nature of women, Donne carefully chooses to compare women to unrestrained Nature. They are as wild and free as untamed animals. "Women are made for men, not him, nor mee," says the lover. That is, they are made for all men, not for an individual man. Using animal imagery, the lover first compares women to the notoriously lecherous and sly "foxes and goats." Since, says the lover, "all beasts change when they please,/ Shall women, more hot, wily, wild than these,/ Be bound to one man?" In other words, if all animals are allowed to roam, why should the wildest and most passionate of all animals be tied to one partner? Further, he questions, "Did Nature then idly make them apter to 'endure than men?"¹³ Was Woman given this wiliness, this wildness, for no reason?

¹²Ibid., p. 83. ¹³Ibid.
Having considered the nature of women, the lover then turns to examine the effect their behavior has on men and to determine what his attitude toward them and their behavior should be. First, the lover sees that women are men's "clogges, not their owne." In his next metaphor, the lover makes his point clearer: "If a man bee/ Chain'd to a galley, yet the galley's free." A man may be tied to a woman as a slave is chained to a galley, and yet both the woman and the ship remain free to trade where they please. In the next couplet, the lover shifts from showing that women cannot be bound, to showing that they are capable of receiving more than one man can give. "Who hath a plow-land, casts all his seed corne there,/ And yet allowes his ground more corne should beare."\(^{14}\) A man puts all his seed into his land, but he realizes that the land is capable of producing more than he is able to plant.\(^{15}\) Selecting another image from nature, the lover reinforces his idea of women's large capacity for receiving: "Though Danuby into the sea must flow,/ The sea receives the Rhene, Volga, and Po."\(^{16}\)

But from his general thoughts about the nature and capacity of women, the lover returns to his specific situation with his mistress. "By nature, which gave it, this liberty/ Thou lov'st," says the lover rationally. Making the word

\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., II, 66.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., I, 83.
nature serve two functions, the lover implies that it is natural that the woman should love the liberty Nature gave to her. "But Oh!" he cries out, "Canst thou love it and mee?" Can a woman love her liberty and one man at the same time? Since "likeness glues love," ponders the man, and since you love your liberty, "to make us like and love, must I change too?" That is, if being alike is what cements a love, and if you change, must I change too? "More than thy hate," he answers, "I hate 'it, rather let mee/ Allow her change, then change as oft as shee,/ And soo not teach, but force my'opinion/ To love not any one, nor every one." The lover dislikes indiscriminate change more than he minds having his mistress hate him. By allowing her to change and then changing himself, he will force her not to love indiscriminately.

In the last lines, the lover resolves his indecision and concludes that change is what creates life. But he differentiates between promiscuity and change. He feels that living in one land is "captivity," but that freely roaming all countries is a "wild roguery." Drawing another comparison from nature, the lover shows that waters which remain in only one place "stinke soone," and those which are in the sea "are more putrified" ("'made salt' and so less fit for drinking"). The purest waters are those that "when they kisse one banke, and leaving this/ Never looke backe, but

\[17\] Ibid.
\[18\] Ibid.
\[19\] Ibid., II, 67.
the next banke doe kisse." "Change," says the lover confidently, "is the nursery/ Of musicke, joy, life, and eternity."\(^{20}\)

Whereas in Elegy III the lover reflectively examines his philosophy of change, the speaker in Elegy XVII, "Variety," actively argues in favor of inconstancy. All Nature is inconstant, he says. Why should not man be so? The sun, the rivers, even the spheres "rejoyce in motion,"\(^{21}\) but man is made servant to the monster "opinion." He is bound by custom. To the speaker, who glories in variety in love, "the law is hard, and shall not have my voice." To him, love is an appetite, and the restrictions put on free love are arbitrary. Motion and variety are natural, but "the golden laws of nature"\(^{22}\) have been repealed. Custom has unfortunately stripped Love of "those awfull wings"\(^{23}\) with which he formerly flew.

In the opening question of the elegy, the lover begins his use of nature imagery to justify his belief that variety and change are not only natural but preferable. If the heavens rejoice in motion, he says, why should I renounce my "much lov'd variety" and fail to share my youth and love with many women? "Pleasure is none, if not diversified,"\(^{24}\)

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p. 83.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 113.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 114.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., p. 115.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 113.
he continues. Returning to his nature imagery, the lover proceeds to demonstrate that his belief in inconstancy is justified by natural law.\textsuperscript{25} The sun, whose flame warms all, is not contented "at one Signe to Inne,/ But ends his year and with a new beginnes."\textsuperscript{26} The sun does not remain in one place in the heaven ("Inne"); he travels from the sign of Aries the Ram to the sign of Pisces the Fishes. And when he has completed one journey (around the heavens constituting a year), he begins another one.

"All things doe willingly in change delight," says the lover expansively. Not only the heavens, but also all things on earth delight in change, for change is "the fruitfull mother of our appetite." Love, for this speaker, is an "appetite," which is whetted by change. Using river imagery similar to that in Elegy III, the speaker declares that the clearest and purest rivers are those whose "fair spreading streams" roam far and wide. A "dead Lake," on the other hand, "corrupts it self and what doth live in it." Change means life and purity. Having somewhat justified and strengthened his argument for variety, the lover turns from metaphoric to specific argumentation: "Let no man tell me such a one is faire,./ And worthy all alone my love to share."\textsuperscript{27}


\textsuperscript{26}Donne, I, 113.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid.
A woman may be particularly lovable, the speaker grants. Such a woman he would love, serve, and even "dye" for (sexual connotation). But is it logical, he asks, that he serve only her, when he has a choice of other equally beautiful women and may rejoice in change?

"The law is hard," declares the lover, "and shall not have my voice." By making this statement before he begins cataloguing women that appeal to him, the lover prepares for his later discussion of the wrong that the arbitrary laws of custom and "opinion" have done. The rules that have been set up by society are contrary to what is natural, the lover feels. All women appeal to him. He is attracted by the fair beauty of one woman and by the soft discourse of another. Others he loves neither for their beauty nor for their conversation, but for their noble birth. The lover glories in variety, and even though he may fail to achieve his "required ends,/ The attempt is glorious and it selfe commends."28 Even though the lover may not catch all women he pursues, he joys in the chase itself.

From his thought of the sheer joy of the chase itself, the lover returns to his complaint about the restraining forces of custom: "How happy were our Syres in ancient time,/ Who held plurality of loves no crime!" Then, it was not a "crime" to "stirre up race of all indifferently," rather, it was "charity." Moreover, one had only to ask to obtain a

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28 Ibid., p. 114.
woman's consent, "and what they did was honest and well done."
But, says the lover mournfully, with the inception of the title
"honour," man's credulity has been abused. By instating
"honour," man indirectly let the "golden laws of nature" be repealed.

"Our liberty's reversed, our Charter's gone,/ And we're
servants to opinion,/ A monster in no certain shape attir'd,"
exclaims the lover dramatically. Donne here continues his
imagery pattern of law and government. Man's liberty has
been "reversed" in the same manner that a judge sets aside
a previous decision, and his charter guaranteeing him certain
rights has been taken away. In short, man is no longer free;
he is the servant of the monster "opinion." Originally,
opinion was not codified. It was "formelesse at first," but as it grew it took a certain shape. Then it set forth
certain customs and laws of behavior to nations.

At this point, says the lover, when opinion began prescribing,
Love received incurable harms. Love was stripped of his
"daring armes" (i.e. his bow and arrows which dared to roam).
Worse than the loss of his "daring eyes," Love lost "those
awfull wings" that enabled him to fly (to roam). Love was
divested of his magnitude. Now, only a few, like the speaker,
"retain the seeds of ancient liberty." They follow that part

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., p. 115.
of Love which has been depressed (variety), and within their hearts they enthroned him again. In spite of "modern censures," they avow him their "soveraigne." I, says the speaker, am among those who now serve Love. "I glory in subjection of his hand" and never refuse any command Love gives me. In whatever form (whatever woman) the message of Love comes, the lover opens his heart to it.

But, says the lover, in an unexpected reversal, time will someday reveal a point when he, the lover, must deny "this loved service." The speaker's allegiance to variety in Love is only temporary. When he becomes older in both years and judgment, he will be less inclined to change and to obey the art of different eyes. By admitting that his enlistment in Love's army (for natural love) is temporary, the speaker gives a more believable quality to the whole argument. He is not so blinded that he does not see that variety is primarily for youth and that age brings the wisdom to love one woman. And so the lover concludes:

But beauty with true worth securely weighing,
Which being found assembled in some one,
Wee'll love her ever, and love her alone.33

In Elegy XX, Donne takes a favorite theme of the Roman elegists and wittily and lustily advocates love in preference to war. He not only finds the profession of love much more

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., p. 116.
desirable than that of war, but also discovers a similarity between the lover and the soldier. A lover performs the same acts as a soldier, but with much less personal danger and with much more personal satisfaction.

To the classical elegists, war is cruel; peace is kind, primarily because it promotes the joys of love. Propertius, in 3.5, discusses the rival claims of love and war, and finds war sadly lacking in appeal: "It is Love as a god of peace we lovers worship;/ wars with a mistress are all that we would make." To him, the spoils of war have no appeal. "What booty can we take past Lethe?" he asks. "When at last I'm impotent and aging,/ when my black hair is thinned and streaked with gray," then I'll be content to turn to other matters such as war, he says. In 2.6, Propertius tells a friend that Cynthia's arms have robbed him of his valor: "I am not fit for warfare and its glories;/ love's is the only war that I can wage."

Whereas Propertius's elegies stress the fact that love is preferable to war, Ovid's elegies on this theme compare love and war and show how a soldier resembles a lover. In Amores 2.12, Ovid sings an exultant victory song at having Corinna in his arms. He is the triumphant warrior: "I was my army, a victorious one,/ Commander, captain, standard-bearer, knight,/ And first-class private on the field of fight."

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34 Propertius, p. 121. 35 Ibid. 36 Ibid., p. 33. 37 Ovid, p. 57.
In *Amores* 2.10, he expresses his wish that if he must die in a duel, that he die in bed with Venus as his second. Let the soldier to war, let the trader seek wealth, but as for me, he says, "Let me go in the act of coming to Venus;/ In more senses than one, let my last dying be done."\(^{38}\) In *Amores* 1.9, Ovid specifically points out similarities between the lover and the soldier. The aggressiveness and arduous spirit that a captain wants in a soldier are also what a pretty girl wants in a lover. Both the soldier and the lover must keep watch, one at the tent of his captain, the other in front of his girl's door. Both must spy, both must lay seige, and both work best at night. Love is as much a test of a man as is war; neither is an easy calling. As Ovid says, "If you want to forswear idleness, then fall in love."\(^{39}\)

"Till I have peace with thee, warr other men,/ And when I have peace, can I leave thee then?"\(^{40}\) says the lover in Donne's *Elegy XX*. Despite its dramatic opening, this elegy shows a delight in Ovidian wit rather than in Ovidian drama. Donne develops this elegy through witty couplets rather than paragraphic structure. In the first half of the poem, he shows the absurdity of war through satiric references to contemporary events and displays a classical fear of a sea journey. In the second half of the elegy, he facetiously

\(^{38}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 55.}\)
\(^{39}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 31.}\)
\(^{40}\text{Donne, I, 122.}\)
argues that warring with a mistress is preferable to actually going to war. After a short comparison of the attributes of a soldier with those of a lover, Donne proceeds to further compare love and war to the disparagement of war.

The opening couplet sets the witty, slightly argumentative tone of the elegy. The lover will not leave his mistress until he has peace with her; other men must war. But then, says the lover, if I obtain peace with you, will I be able to force myself to leave and go to war? All other wars involve principles, the lover tells his mistress, implying that only love's war is one unimpeded by rules. Only you, "O fayr free Citty, maist thyselfe allow to any one." By thus saying that the mistress, like a city, may open her gates to anyone, the lover implicitly begins his comparison of love and war. She is a free, unconquered city that may do as she chooses.

At this point, the lover turns to a reflective consideration of war and contemporary events. Wars, he finds, are petty, useless, and futile. In Flanders, for instance, who knows whether "the Master presse; or men rebell?" Was the ruler oppressive in his treatment of his subjects, or were the subjects particularly inclined to be rebellious? The only thing one knows for certain is that "they beare most blows which come to part the fray." Shifting his thoughts to France (who has always hated English soldiers), the lover

\[41 \text{Ibid.}\]
comments that lately she even hates England's God. Nevertheless, she still relies on English angels (an English coin). England's angels return to England no more than do the fallen angels to heaven. Continuing his contemporary allusions which show the baseness of society and the ridiculousness of war, the lover turns his attention to England's neighbor, Ireland. This country is sick with a strange war that, like an ague, leaves her first raging and then quiet. Although time might cure such an illness, the lover feels that one big purge and blood-letting would do Ireland a great deal of good and perhaps cure her permanently of her chronic sickness, war. Spain possesses only "Midas joyes." There one may touch gold, but he can find no food to eat. Further, says the lover, the Spanish climate is intolerably hot: "I should be in the hott parching clime,/ To dust and ashes turn'd before my time."^42

From the dangers of foreign lands, the lover turns his thoughts to the dangers of sea travel. He sees the grimmer aspects of the sea as clearly as did the Roman elegists. To be confined in a ship is, to him, to be held in a prison that is likely to crumble. Being in a ship is like being in a cloister (without women and love), except that a cloister is "a calme heaven" and a ship "a swaggering hell."^43 Long voyages are long consumptions," in that they consume one like a disease, and "ships are carts for execution" because they

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^42 Ibid.
^43 Ibid.
take one off to his death (either from war or from separation from the mistress). "Yea they are Deaths," the lover decides, for sea journeys take one off to another world just as death does.

Having both disparaged society and depicted the dangers of foreign war, the lover says to his mistress: "Here let mee warr; in these armes lett mee lye." One can do approximately the same things as a lover that he would as a soldier. The speaker will lie in his mistress's arms, instead of wearing the armor of war. "Here," says the lover to his mistress, "let mee parlee, batter, bleede, and dye." He prefers to entreat with his mistress and die in her service than to perish in a real war.

In the remaining couplets, the lover turns his wit to proving the superiority of love to war. Whereas other men fight in order to gain rest, the lover and his mistress rest so that they might fight again (make love). In war, says the lover, "Wee are alwayes under, here above." That is, in war we are always privates or low in rank; here we are above, i.e. (1) more important and (2) on top of the woman. In war, the sound of the war engines makes one afraid when the engines are not even near, and yet with the mistress "thrusts, pikes, stabs, yea bullets hurt not here." In war lies are wrong, but in love one may lie most "uprightly" (phallic

\[\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 123.\]
\[\text{Ibid.} \]
 Whereas men kill in war, men make men in love. "Thou nothing; I not halfe so much shall do/ In these warrs, as they may which from us two/ Shall spring," says the lover. In love's war, the woman has to do nothing and the man very little compared to what the lovers' children may later have to do in a real war. The lover says:

Thousands wee see which travaile not
To warrs; But stay swords, armes, and shott
To make at home . . . 46

One may "travaile" (have sexual intercourse) and not necessarily travel to war. By staying home, says the lover, shall I not do more glorious service by making men?

Despite the fact that the Roman elegists vividly wrote of their love for their mistresses, nowhere among their elegies does one find a poem comparable to Donne's frankly sensual Elegy XVIII, "Loves Progress." Because their mistresses were promiscuous and venal courtesans who preferred wealthy rivals to poor poets, the elegists only occasionally celebrate the joy of consummated love. These elegies show a lover tenderly or exultantly joysing in his mistress's affection as well as in the purely physical act of love itself. The Roman poet rejoices in the fact that, despite the obstacles of husband or rivals, he is now the possessor of his mistress. For one night she is his alone. Propertius, for instance, writes:

Cynthia's mine! At this let all men marvel,
and through the city let my fame be spread!
Though emperors seek her and though Croesus beckon,
she will not turn a poet from her bed. 47

46 Ibid.
47 Propertius, p. 99.
In this elegy, the poet stresses his joy at being with Cynthia rather than his joy in sensual love. In another of his elegies, Propertius displays a tender and quiet joy in making love with his mistress:

No more blest! O night, not dark for me, beloved bed, scene of such dear delight!
To lie and talk there in the lamp's soft flicking, and then to learn ourselves by touch, not sight—

Ovid, one would think, might be more likely to express a joy in purely physical, sensual love. But even he has no elegy comparable to Donne's frank assertion that one thing is to be preferred in woman—her "centrique part." The difference between Ovid's Amores 1.5 and Donne's Elegy XVIII is the difference between an enjoyment of making love and a delight in copulation. In Ovid's elegy, the lover speaks almost reverently of his mistress, saying:

So soon she stood there naked, and I saw,
Not only saw, but felt, perfection there,
Hands moving over beauty without flaw,
The breasts, the thighs, the triangle of hair.

In Donne's elegy, the lover argues that

Although we see Celestial bodies move
Above the earth, the earth we Till and love:
So we her [the mistress's] ayres contemplate, words and heart,
And virtues; but we love the Centrique part.

There is, Donne says, only one "right true end of love."

Anyone who tries to make of love anything else but pure physical pleasure is "one that goes/ To sea for nothing but to make him sick." Donne's erotic Elegy XVIII is simply one step further

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48 Ibid., p. 80. 49 Ovid, p. 21.
50 Donne, I, 117. 51 Ibid., p. 116.
toward the physical and the realistic than are Ovid's amatory elegies. Donne's eroticism is not colored by romanticism.

The opening lines of Donne's Elegy XVIII argumentatively assert that if love is forced to become anything other than pure physical pleasure, "We err, and of a lump a monster make." The speaker feels that Platonic love is monstrous and unnatural: "Were not a Calf a monster that were grown/ Faced like a man, though better than his own?" Rather, one must prefer one woman and one thing in her. Just as one may appreciate the ductility or the ingenuity of gold, so may one appreciate the beauty and intelligence of women. But what makes both gold and women loved is use, "the soul of trade." "Can man," asks the lover emphatically, "more injure women than to say/ They love them for that, by which they're not they?" Man, by not loving woman's essence, her "centrique part," does her a grave injustice. Must I, asks the speaker in another rhetorical question, "cool my bloud/ Till I both be, and find one wise and good?" The lover sees no point in denying himself the pleasure of physical love. He will wait to love neither until he is both good and wise nor until he discovers a woman who is also wise and good. Let barren angels so love, says the speaker. I will not.

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., p. 117.}\]
"Search every sphear/ And Firmament, our Cupid is not there:/ He's an infernal god and under ground,/ With Pluto dwells, where gold and fire abound." To this speaker, the bow-boy Cupid does not fly through the upper realms. Rather he is underground where fire and passion lie. Since there he dwells, one should place his offerings to him in "pits and holes." To further emphasize the difference between admiring beauty and enjoying it physically, the speaker chooses an image from nature. One may admire the celestial bodies, but he tills the earth. So should man contemplate woman's virtues, but love her "centrique part."\(^5^4\)

From this frank argument in favor of purely physical love unhampered by virtue, honor, or Platonic ideals, Donne turns in the second section of the poem to an extended metaphysical conceit. Making love to a woman is described in terms of voyaging. Just as on a sea journey one should take the easiest and most direct route, so should the lover take the most direct route to where he wishes to embay. Beginning at the face, as this speaker shows, is dangerous. The attributes of a woman's beauty that are appreciated by the Petrarchists are here viewed as impediments to the lover's expedition. As Robin Skelton says, the elegy exposes "the absurdity and decadence of a too elaborate and sophisticated sexual procedure."\(^5^5\)

\(^{5^4}\) Ibid.

\(^{5^5}\) Skelton, p. 208.
For thirty-four lines Donne sustains his metaphysical conceit. The mistress's hair is a "forest of ambushes," the brow a becalmed sea, or, if it is wrinkled, a wild sea of waves which shipwrecks the voyager. The nose directs the lover's ship down through the rosy hemispheres of the cheeks to the "Islands fortunate," the woman's lips:

We anchor there, and think our selves at home,  
For they seem all: there Syrens songs, and there  
Wise Delphick Oracles do fill the ear . . . .

The lover is charmed by the woman's lips into thinking he has arrived at his desired destination. In a paradisiacal creek pearls grow (the woman's teeth) and the Remora (her clinging tongue) dwells. Donne here plays with the word Remora, making it into a ship, but also including the idea of a fish with a suctorial disk on its head.

Passing the promontory of the chin, the lover glides along the "streight Hellespont between/ The Sestos and Abydos of her breasts." Donne equates the space between a woman's breasts with the narrow strait in northwest Turkey between the twin cities of Sestos and Abydos at the narrowest part of the river. Having successfully maneuvered this dangerous passageway, the lover comes upon a boundless sea, the woman's torso. If he is observant, his eye "some Island moles may scattered there descry." Sailing toward the woman's "India," he may, if he is not watchful, be inclined to stay at the "Atlantick Navell" station. Proceeding onward, the current

\[56\text{Donne, I, 117.} \quad 57\text{Ibid., p. 118.}\]
becomes stronger (by dint of the lover's passion). But, says the speaker, before one can reach where he wishes to embay, "Thou shalt upon another Forest set,/ Where many Shipwrack, and no further get."\(^{58}\) Thus shipwrecked, consider, says the speaker, how much you erred by taking such a hazardous route.

Moving into his last section of his advocacy of physical pleasure, Donne deliberately makes his language vulgar and his imagery original to contrast with the extravagant Petrarchan imagery of the previous section. By this contrast he emphasizes the complete falseness of the Petrarchan convention and the complete wrongness of men who would refine love into something that it is not. In this section, Donne advises sailing directly towards one's appointed harbor, that is, directly from the foot to the "centrique part." Since the shape of the foot somewhat resembles the man's destination, it serves as a map, pointing the way. The foot, unlike the face, is "least subject to disguise and change." ("Men say the Devil never can change his."\(^{59}\)

Throughout this last section, Donne proceeds from one witty and argumentative point to another. If, says the speaker, the kiss has been transplanted from the face, to the knee, to the "Papal foot," and if "kings think that the nearest way, and do/ Rise from the foot, Lovers may do so too." The delight in going this way is the lack of resistance one encounters. Just as spheres move faster in their airless

\(^{58}\) *Ibid.*  
spaces than can birds who must fight the air resistance, "so may that man/ Which goes this empty and Aetherial way,/ Than if at beauties elements he stay." With his most direct argument, Donne closes the poem. Rich nature, says the speaker, has given woman two purses, "their mouths aversely laid." Those who owe tribute to the lower treasury and who do not approach by the way it faces make as great an error as those "who by Clyster gave the Stomack meat." By concluding with this direct, vulgar image, Donne shows a man "who is impatient of the delights of mere anticipation, and who recognizes coarsely and directly the simple physical necessity which lurks within all this romantic verbiage."

In contrast to the frank sensuality of Elegy XVIII is the tender eroticism of Elegy XIX. Whereas in all of his other erotic elegies Donne chooses to stress the purely physical aspects of love and to objectively view women as mere objects of sexual gratification, here in "To His Mistress Going to Bed" Donne returns to a semblance of a dramatic situation and views his mistress more tenderly and subjectively. Although in Elegy XVIII the reader sees a lover "exploring" a woman, the elegy is not a dramatic one. It is an argument in favor of copulation addressed not to the mistress but to the reader. In Elegy XIX, Donne's imagery is not the nature imagery which he uses when he wishes to justify indiscriminate gratification of physical desire, but

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60 Ibid.
61 Skelton, p. 208.
rather it is religious imagery. Donne's delight here in the physical is less gross and more refined than in his other erotic elegies. His elegy itself is much more complex, reflecting to a certain extent the dichotomy of body and soul and emphasizing the spiritual in the physical.

"Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defie,/ Until I labour, I in labour lie," entreats the lover in the opening lines of Elegy XIX. The lover, lying on the bed, is watching his mistress as she slowly undresses. Yet the description that the reader receives of the lady's unrobing is not actual reality, but the lover's eager anticipation of the soon-to-be-accomplished fact. Impatiently, he begs the mistress to remove her individual garments. "Off with that girdle, like heavens Zone glistening,/ But a far fairer world encompassing," he says. She must unpin the "spangled breastplate" that is to stop the eyes of busy fools, but which must be removed for the knowledgeable lover. By un-lacing herself and dropping her garments to the floor, the lover will know by the sound of "that harmonious chyme" (the sound of the garments striking the floor) that it is bedtime.

Gently parodying a Petrarchan convention (which is ultimately classical), the lover begins his anticipation. Just as Ovid's lover in Amores 2.15 envies the ring on his mistress's finger which may touch her breasts, so Donne's lover

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62 Donne, I, 119.  
63Louthan, p. 72.
envies his mistress's "happy busk" which can be so still,
and yet be so near. The corset, unlike the man's flesh, can
remain close to the mistress and yet remain motionless. Con-
tinuing, the man says, "Your gown going off, such beautious
state reveals,/ As when from flowry meads th'hills shadow
steales." With the removal of her "wyerie Coronet," the
mistress will show her haiery Diademe." The "underpinnings"
are to the pubic hairs as a coronet is to a lady's coiffure, says the lover. With the envisioned removal of his mistress's
shoes, Donne moves into the religious imagery which pervades
his poem. By removing her shoes (which would be hazardous
to intercourse), the mistress may then tread safely ("barn-
yard term for copulating") in Love's "hallow'd temple, this
soft bed." Moving more directly into religious imagery, Donne
equates the mistress in her white robes with Heaven's angels
which, in their white robes, used also to receive men. She
brings with her "a heaven like Mohomets Paradice." Although,
says the lover, ill spirits also dress in white, it is easy
to distinguish them from the angelic mistress: "We easly
know, By this these Angels from an evil sprite,/ Those set
our hairs, but these our flesh upright."  

In the second section of this elegy, Donne's basic
metaphor, as in Elegy XVIII, is that of voyaging and explora-
tion. The mistress is the lover's America, his "new-found-
land." The lover is the explorer who requests a royal

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64 Donne, I, 120.  65 Louthan, p. 72.
66 Ibid.  67 Donne, I, 120.
patent ("license") which will allow him to explore his new land, "conquer it, and, having established himself as its autocratic monarch, bring it under the firm mastery of his civil authority." In the final line of this section, the lover assumes "full command over his mistress in terms of the authoritative conclusion to a legal document or proclamation." As the lover says, "Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be." The lover pledges his obligation to the place where his hand is set, and, in turn, he is entitled to the seal of exclusive ownership.

"Full nakedness!" apostrophizes the lover in the opening line of the third section. To you, all joys are due. In the second sequence of religious imagery, the lover says: "As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth'd must be,/ To taste whole joyes." Just as spiritual joy occurs only when the soul is released from the clothes of the body, so must the body be released from its clothes to experience its most intense joy. Sensual pleasure is thus equated with spiritual joy. The gems which women wear test men (as God might test) to see whether they are able to distinguish between real substance (the woman herself) and earthly possessions (the woman's clothes). So women are thus gaily arrayed for the laymen, the ignorant who cannot read the real substance of womankind.

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69 Ibid.  
70 Donne, I, 121.  
71 Louthan, p. 72.
Only select lovers, like competent clergymen, are allowed to read these "mystick books" (women).

Addressing his mistress directly, the lover says: "Then since that I may know;/ As liberally as to a Midwife, shew/ Thy self." The mistress, says Clay Hunt, is asked not merely to show her naked body, but, more specifically, her genitals. They are the means by which the lover shall see God revealed. "Yea," again entreats the lover, cast all "this white lynnen hence,/ Here there is no penance, much less innocence." Using a carry-over from the previous sequence of religious imagery, the mistress's white linen becomes "garb of virgins and religious penitents" which is not required here. "To teach thee," the lover says, "I am naked first; why then/ What needst thou have more covering than a man?" Since men need more armor than do sheltered ladies, if the lover is now naked, what possible excuse can the mistress have for holding back?

The erotic elegy was utilized by no other Elizabethan poet besides Donne. Donne's erotic elegies, although not necessarily classically inspired, are within the scope of the Roman erotic elegy. Donne, more cynical and erotic than the romantically inclined Roman poets, advocates rather than

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72 Donne, I, 121.
73 Ibid.
74 Hunt, p. 28.
75 Donne, I, 121.
76 Hunt, p. 28.
77 Donne, I, 121.
78 Louthan, p. 72.
admits susceptibility to all women and views women less as unique individuals and more as objects of sexual pleasure. But his defenses of inconstancy, his expression of joy in pure physical gratification, his witty and satiric condemnation of war in favor of love, and his artistically complex boudoir elegy are not only within the classical concept of the elegy, but by being cynical where the Romans are romantic and argumentative where they are matter-of-fact, Donne adds depth to the whole concept of the erotic elegy.
Despite their seeming diversity, the remaining five of Donne's twenty formal elegies fall into two general categories, vituperative and satiric, both of which are within the classical elegiac tradition. Two are vituperative trifles in the style and spirit of Catullus—crude, satiric, and vulgar. One is a witty argument in favor of preferring an ugly woman, another is an ingenious display of wit colored with satire, and still another is a satiric, humorous tale of the kind Catullus appreciated. The two elegies which are abusive in tone include Elegy XIII, a condemnation of a vicious and envious woman, and Elegy VIII, a denunciation of another man's mistress much in the style of Catullus's denunciations of beauties who attempt to rival Lesbia. Elegy II, "The Anagram," and Elegy XI, "The Bracelet," are witty in a manner foreign to the classical elegists. Although Catullus is occasionally witty, his is not the ingenious wit of Donne. For instance, in Elegy II Donne brings to bear all possible reasons for loving an ugly woman rather than a beautiful one, and in Elegy XI, he displays his delight in metaphysical conceits. In the latter elegy, the speaker complains briefly of having to spend twelve angels...
(coins) to replace his mistress's lost bracelet. But this complaint is only an excuse to allow Donne to ingeniously play with the idea of sacrificing twelve righteous angels to pay for the bracelet. Elegy XIV, in contrast to both Elegy II and Elegy XI, is humorous rather than witty. In this elegy, Donne satirizes an ignorant citizen and shows the speaker and the citizen's wife come to an unspoken agreement to meet again later.

Although all the Roman elegists occasionally use an abusive tonal quality to denounce the lena who has helped the mistress sell herself to a wealthy lover, it is Catullus who shows the most enjoyment in abusive and satirical elegies. His colloquial and vulgar language is particularly suited to such vituperative trifles. Among Catullus's poems, one finds several in which he denounces, satirizes, or scoffs at women who attempt to rival the beauty of his Lesbia. In Carm. cxxxvi, he finds Quintia, whom people call beautiful, a failure. She may have a fine figure, but she does not have the charm and sparkle of Lesbia. Catullus, in Carm. xliiv, satirizes a girl who, "out in the sticks," is called pretty. Your nose is large, Catullus tells her,

your feet--well, hardly snappy
your fingers--not too long
your lips--you wiped your mouth yet?
your tongue--well, shall we say not the most elegant . . .

You, pretty? scoffs Catullus. "You mean to say they've been

\[\text{Catullus, p. 40.}\]
comparing you to Lesbia--my Lesbia? O what a tasteless witless age!"\(^2\)

In another satirical poem, Catullus taunts his friend Flavius about his new girl. She must be a "honey," says Catullus, because Flavius isn't talking about her:

who is she, huh? c'mon, tell Catullus
y' aren't gonna tell?
pretty bad, must be, 'cause if she wasn't
(talk about telling)
ya couldn't keep yer mouth shut
ya got yersef a flooz
hot like a fever . . . \(^3\)

I know you aren't sleeping by yourself, Catullus continues. "Yer bed can't talk, but (boy!) it don't need to/ smells like rosebuds and (whew!) what perfume."\(^4\)

In Elegy VIII, Donne uses the abusive tonal quality of Catullus to try to convince a man he should leave his odious mistress. In a series of comparisons, Donne extravagantly praises his beloved and is grossly obscene in his condemnation of the other man's mistress. As the elegy opens, one is given the delicately sensuous lines: "As the sweet sweat of Roses in a Still,/ As that which from chaf'd muskats pores doth trill,/ As the Almighty Balme of th'early East . . . ."

But this delicacy is only to enhance the surprise and shock when, in the second part of his comparison, the lover reveals that it is his mistress's "sweat drops"\(^5\) that are being compared to the sweet sweat of roses. Further, says the

\(^2\)Ibid. \(^3\)Ibid., p. 7. \(^4\)Ibid. \(^5\)Donne, I, 90.
lover, these are no drops of sweat, but "pearle coronets." In contrast, the "ranke sweaty froth" of the other man's mistress is comparable to "spermatique issue of ripe menstrual boiles." Her drops of sweat are no pearl coronets, but "vile lying stones" set in yellow tin. Like "warts, or wheales, they hang upon her skinne."^6

Throughout this elegy, Donne compares his mistress to the other woman; he compares their heads, chests, arms and hands, skin, fingers, and "best lov'd parts." All these comparisons are ingenious, and some of them are metaphysical conceits. For instance, the chest of the other mistress is like "worme eaten trunkes, cloth'd in seals skin,/ Or grave, that's dust without, and stinke within." Or the "best lov'd part" of the other mistress is like "the dread mouth of a fired gunne,/ Or like hot liquid metalls newly runne/ Into clay moulds, or like to that Aetna/ Where round about the grasse is burnt away."^7

Having denounced the other mistress as thoroughly loathsome, the speaker next attempts to make the other man admit that his relationship with his mistress is necessarily foul. Does not "thy fearefull hand in feeling quake,/ As one which gath'ring flowers, still feares a snake?" demands the speaker of the other man. Is not your "last act" as harsh and violent "as when a Plough a stony ground doth rent?" he further questions. In contrast, the speaker and his mistress when

^6Ibid., p. 91. ^7Ibid., p. 92.
they love are like two turtledoves kissing, like priests reverently handling sacrifice, and like surgeons delicately searching wounds. From the previous questions, the speaker shifts to command, and in a short, emphatic statement entirely damns the other mistress: "Leave her, and I will leave comparing thus;/ She, and comparisons are odious."8

In Elegy XIII a lover finds not another man's mistress vile, but his own. This elegy Grierson finds imitative of the scurrilous style that Horace used in his invectives against Canidia.9 But whether inspired by Horace or Catullus, this elegy possesses the same vigor and coarseness of language that Donne used in Elegy VIII. Donne's condemnation of Julia is as vituperative as is any of Catullus's condemnations of an enemy. Donne's Julia "vomit[s] gall in slander." She swells her veins "with calumny, that hell if selfe disdaines."10 She does her best to ruin her friends' reputations and to plant doubt in the minds of happily married couples. She is even envious of her own child! "Would to God," says the speaker, "she were/ But halfe so loath to act vice, as to heare/ My milde reprofe."11

In the second section of this elegy, Donne describes the "beauties" of his mistress in harsh, abusive words. Although the speaker is going to describe Julia, he wishes that Mantuan, the famed woman-hater, were alive to clearly

8Ibid.
9Ibid., II, cxxxvii.
10Ibid., p. 104.
11Ibid., pp. 104-105.
sketch this "she Chymera, that hath eyes of fire." As horrible as the legendary Chimaera which was a lion in front, a serpent behind, a goat in between, and whose breath was unquenchable flame, Julia's cries, like the night-crow's, bode ill for others. Her breath is comparable to the "juice" in Tenarus, a sulphurous cavern thought to be a passage to Hades. Her mind includes, among other things, multitudes of curses, "abuses yet unfashion'd, thoughts corrupt,/ Mishapen Cavils, palpable untroths,/ Inevitable erroirs, self-accusing oaths." All these things swarm in her breast waiting for creation. "I blush to give her halfe her due," says the lover, "yet say, no poyson's halfe so bad as Julia."¹²

Although abusive in tone, Elegy II, "The Anagram," depends for its effect on a peculiar type of seventeenth century wit. In Donne's generation, cleverness was appreciated, and hence it permeated certain genres (such as the elegy) to which it was originally foreign.¹³ Donne, an admirer of ingenuity, thought Elegy II the best of his elegies. His contemporaries also preferred this elegy;¹⁴ they enjoyed the series of witty and clever arguments Donne used to show the advantages to be derived from marrying an ugly woman.

Donne's Elegy II, says Henry K. Miller, is very close to the paradoxical encomium, a "species of rhetorical jest or

¹²Ibid., p. 105. ¹³Ellrodt, II, 314.
display piece which involves the praise of unworthy, unexpected, or trifling objects, such as the praise of lying and envy or of the gout. To Peter Ure, this elegy is a part of the seventeenth century's "somewhat recondite taste for the beauty of deformity." Leishman, basing his remarks on those of Drummond of Hawthornden, compares Donne's Elegy II with Tasso's "Stanzas against Beauty." Donald L. Guss, however, argues very convincingly for viewing this elegy not as the sort of rhetorical game which pleased Tasso. To him, Donne's elegy is not a general praise of ugliness. "The Anagram" is addressed to the lover of a "disgusting lady." Donne tells this man to go ahead and marry his Flavia, even though Dildoes, Bedstaves, and her Velvet Glasse would be as loath to touch as Joseph was. Thus, Elegy II is a companion piece to Elegy VIII. It is "vituperation, not comic praise; and its supposed defense of the lady is obvious, even exaggerated, sarcasm."

"Marry, and love thy Flavia," says the speaker to his friend, "for shee/ Hath all things, whereby others beautious

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16 Peter Ure, "The 'Deformed Mistress' Theme and the Platonic Convention," Notes and Queries, CXCIII (June 26, 1948), 269.

17 Leishman, p. 74.

bee." Even though her eyes are small, her mouth is large, and even though her eyes are ivory, her teeth are jet. "What though her cheeks be yellow, her hair's red,/ Give her thine, and she hath a maidenhead."¹⁹ She has all the ingredients of a lovely face, and since "in buying things perfum'd, we ask; if there/ Be muske and amber in it, but not where," what should it matter where beauty's elements are placed? The woman has, the speaker says, "yet an Anagram of a good face."²⁰

Throughout the elegy, Donne proves and re-proves that the lady's ugliness is desirable. He proves her desirable by definition: "All love is wonder; if we justly doe/ Account her wonderfull, why not lovely too?" He does so by analogy: "For one nights revels, silke and gold we chuse,/ But, in long journeys, cloth, and leather use." And he does so by reference to authorities: "Beauty is barren oft; best husbands say,/ There is best land, where there is foulest way."²¹ Donne argues in favor of Flavia because her ugliness protects her from the attentions of other men. Yet he goes on to say that even if she were promiscuous or had a child no one would believe it. Even though "seaven yeares, she in the Stews had laid,"

¹⁹Donne, I, 80.
²⁰Ibid., p. 81.
²¹Guss, pp. 81-82.
A Nunnery durst receive, and think a maid,
And though in childbeds labour she did lie,
Midwifes would sweare, 'twere but a tympanie,
Whom, if she accuse her selfe, I credit lesse
Than witches, which impossibles confesse . . .

But he concludes by saying that "one like none, and lik'd of
none, fittest were,/ For, things in fashion every man will
weare." 22

At approximately the same time that he was writing his
elegies, Donne was also writing formal verse satire. Thus it
is natural that he introduced satirical elements into certain
of elegies. 23 Edward Le Comte feels that Donne's Elegy XI
and Elegy XIV might as well be called satires, 24 and C. S. Lewis
finds Elegy XI a satire which has great comic strength. 25

In making both humor and satire a part of his elegies, Donne
is not adding a new element to the classical concept of the
elegy. He is merely following a precedent set by Catullus.

Catullus, according to J. B. Emperor, is the "master of
pleasant humor and subtle wit." 26 He is also a master of
sharp and cutting satire. In Carm. lxxviii, Catullus humor-
ously writes of the panderer Gallus. This man had two brothers,
one with a handsome wife and the other with a handsome son.

22 Donne, I, 82. 23 Ellrodt, II, 273.
24 Edward Semple LeComte, Grace to a Witty Sinner: A
25 Clive Staples Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth
Century, Vol. III of Oxford History of English Literature,
edited by P. P. Wilson and Bonamy Dobree, 12 vols. (Oxford,
26 Emperor, p. 9.
Seeing his chance to make a match, "pretty boy and pretty girl," he "tucked them in one pretty bed." But, says Catullus,

    Gallus, Gallus, he's a fool
    did he forget he's got a wife?
    isn't uncle showing uncle
    how to play little bedroom games?27

Carm. lxxi illustrates the more bawdy and vulgar brand of Catullus's humor. In this elegy, Catullus finds one big consolation about having his "gal" taken from him:

    sometimes things is so right
    you take a guy gotta stinkin' goat
    under his arm
    or one got his comuppance (all cripple up)
    with the gout:
    the guy that beat you outa yer gal
    and is doing yer Exercises fer ya
    boy it's wonderful--he stepped
    into yer shoes caught
    both them troubles.
    everytime they do it he makes
    both her and him
    pay for what he done to ya:
    he kills her with the Stink
    and himself with gout.28

In Carm. lxvix, Catullus again plays with the idea of the stinking goat, this time using it as part of a satirical elegy on Rufus:

Rufus!
you got no business bein' surprised
if there's no dame that wants to lay
her nice white smooth leg under yours

    you know what 'tis that's hurtin' you?
    well, there's a story goin' 'round
    --just tellin' you what people say--
you got a goat, a stinkin goat
lives in your armpits--yeah, that's what

27 Catullus, p. 100.
28 Ibid., p. 95.
the dames is scared of—and why not?
a goat's a dirty beast, no girl
is gonna wanta sleep with that
so either kill the thing that kills their noses
or quit your wonderin' why they run away

As can be seen in these satirical and humorous elegies, Catullus is a master of colloquial and vulgar language. Here, again, Donne has a precedent for using colloquial language to enliven his coarse and acute observation of contemporary manners.

In Donne's Elegy XIV, the speaker of the poem is an actual person with quirks and oddities that are clearly defined both by the manner of his speech and the nature of his conversation. He is as important to the humor and satire of the elegy as is the citizen whom he satirizes. The speaker of this elegy begins his tale by telling of himself. He sings, he says, "no harme good sooth to any wight,/ To lord or fool, Cuckold, beggar, or knight." He is no libeler, nor will he become one, for there are too many already. As to his tale, no "count nor Counsellour will redd or pale" because of it. But although the speaker is no libeler nor teller of bawdy tales, he relates a satirical tale of a citizen and his wife in which the speaker and the wife leave each other with an unspoken agreement to cuckold the citizen.

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29 Ibid., pp. 93-94.
30 Donne, I, 105.
31 Ibid., p. 106.
The colloquial language of the elegy is used both to characterize the speaker and the citizen. The speaker, for instance, calls the wife a "wench," a "pretty peate," and the citizen, "lecherous," merely because he turns around on his horse to steal a kiss from his wife. To start an acquaintance with the citizen whose wife has attracted his attention, the speaker says that he "began/ To sort discourse fit for so fine a man." He asks about the number on the plague bill, about the Virginia scheme, and about the pirate Ward. He inquires of the new exchange, of the newly built city gate and of the newly constructed public walks. But, says the speaker of the citizen, "he (as mute/ As an old Courtier worn to his last suite)/ Replies with only yeas and nayes." Here, the image that the speaker chooses, plus his condescending tone, shows that he, unlike the citizen, is of the upper levels of society.

Finally, the speaker asks the citizen of "Tradesmens gains," and "that set his tongue agoing." "Alas, good sir," said the citizen,

\[
\begin{align*}
\ldots \text{There is no doing} \\
\text{In Court nor City now; she smil'd and I} \\
\text{And (in my conscience) both gave him the lie} \\
\text{In one met thought} \ldots
\end{align*}
\]

\[32\text{Ibid.}\]
\[33\text{Ibid.}\]
\[34\text{Ibid., pp. 106-107.}\]
Both the speaker and wife, despite what the citizen may think, know that there is "doing" in both city and court, and as they smile at each other, there begins the possibility of still more "doing." The citizen, however, unaware of his wife's and the speaker's knowing look, has launched into a tirade against the times. The "lord of Essex dayes" he calls the "age of action." Today people are hot to buy, but cold to lay down the cash, and when pressured, "away they runne." The only profitable trades these days, says the citizen sarcastically, are those of "Bawd, Tavern-keeper,' Whore and Scrivener." The noblemen who hold monopolies from the king, and others who are thus protected, make everybody else poor.

"So void of reason/ Seem'd his harsh talke, I sweat for feare of treason," says the speaker. Why, he says indignantly, when the citizen spoke of those who prayed for protection of the "wise Lord Mayor,/ And his wise brethrens worships," he "swore that none could say Amen with faith." This remark makes the speaker angry, but his interest in the wife causes him to prefer to hear the citizen rave than to leave both the raving and the wife. Finally, says the speaker, "an Angel did appeare,/ The bright Signe of a lov'd and wel-try'd Inne,/ Where many Citizens with their wives have bin/ Well us'd and often." The speaker may fear the traitorous remarks of the citizen, but he himself satirically couches his remarks

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36 Ibid.
about spotting the inn along the lines of the biblical story of Mary and Joseph. There is the angel, the "bright sign," and the inn where they may stay.

When the speaker asks the citizen to have some refreshment with him at the inn, the citizen looks like the man "that hid the gold (his hope)/ And at's returne found nothing but a Rope." That is, the speaker, using a proverbial expression, says that the citizen thought he had found a true friend, but finds instead that he has found no other than a meddling man who is interested in his wife. The citizen abruptly refuses the invitation, and the wife, "though willing," pleads a weary day. "I found my misse," says the speaker wittily, meaning both that he sees his mistake and that he has also found his miss, the citizen's wife. He shakes hands with the citizen, and in order to keep the acquaintance, asks him where he lives. The citizen "barely nam'd the street, promis'd the Wine,/ But his kind wife gave me the very Signe." She gave him the signe of the house and an unspoken agreement to a later meeting.

Elegy XI, like Elegy II, is a seventeenth century creation. Its prolonged delight in the pun on the English angel (coin) is a delight in a type of wit foreign to the classical elegy, although wit in general, satire, and the theme of the mistress's

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., p. 108.
venality are not. According to Grierson, "Donne has in this
Elegy carried to its farthest extreme, as only a metaphysical
or scholastic poet like himself could, the favourite Eliza-
bethan pun on the coin called the Angel."

In this elegy Donne's lover complains of losing his
mistress's bracelet not because it was his mistress's which
often embraced and kissed her hand or for 'that silly old
moralitie,/ That as these linkes were knit, our love should
bee,' nor does he mourn the loss of her bracelet as bad luck.
He regrets losing the bracelet because of the 'bitter cost.'
Twelve "righteous Angels" will have to be melted down to make
her another gold bracelet. Twelve "innocent Angels" by the
mistress's sentence shall be thrown into the furnace as
punishment for the lover's offense. These pure angels which
have been the lover's "faithfull guide," who have comforted
his soul, have thus been harshly condemned.

In the second section of the elegy, the lover says that
he would not mind giving up "Crownes of France," "Spanish
Stamps," or gold manufactured by the chemist, but he does
mind being forced to condemn his twelve pure English Angels.
In this section, one finds elements of contemporary satire
similar to those in Elegy VI or Elegy XIV. The Crowns of
France have their country's native "rot." They are chipped

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39 Ibid., II, 76.
40 Ibid., I, 96.
and debased in value. As the lover says, "And howsoe'r
French Kings most Christian be,/ Their Crownes are circumcis'd
most Jewishly." Neither would the speaker mind spending
Spanish Stamps, "still travelling,/ That are become as Catholique
as their King." Grierson finds "Spanish Stamps still travell-
ing" a reference to the bribery of many English noblemen by
the King of Spain. These same coins also "ruin'd" and
'decay'd" France.

If you love me, says the speaker, "let them alone,/ For
thou wilt love me lesse when they are gone." Here, the lover
makes a cynical remark about the venality of his mistress, a
complaint which was frequent among all the Roman elegists
concerning their mistresses. Rather, says the lover, let
me spend a groat and have "some lowd squeaking Cryer . . .
like a devill roare through every street;/ And gall the finders
conscience, if they meet." Or, he says, let me try some
"dread Conjurer." But the mistress is adamant. She will
have her bracelet, and so the lover must be guilty of his
twelve angels' decay. But he may curse the finder of these
angels. He hopes that the finder will be chained to hellish
pains, that he will find a poison that will "rot his brain,"
that he will suffer from venereal diseases, impotency, gout,
and poverty. He further curses the man, hoping that all the

41 Ibid., p. 97.
42 Ibid., II, 77.
43 Ibid., I, 98.
plagues of marriage and love will afflict him. But, he says, I will forgive you if you will repent and restore the gold. "But if from it thou beest loath to depart,/ Because 'tis cordiall, would'twere at thy heart."44

Despite the somewhat miscellaneous quality of this last grouping of poems, all these types of elegies are more or less justified by classical tradition. Even though Elegy II and Elegy XI display a kind of wit peculiar to the seventeenth century, wit and humor are not extraneous to the classical tradition. The more bawdy and humorous Elegy XIV is, however, more directly in the style of Catullus. Too, the satire of these elegies is not foreign to the classical elegy, even though it is of a less personal and more general type of satire than Catullus wrote. The poems abusive in tone are fully in the classical conception of the elegy. Donne's denunciations of Julia and the other mistress are no more vituperative in tone than are any of the Roman elegies which both curse and denounce the luna.

44Ibid., p. 100.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

John Donne's elegies have been called strange, repellent, and bizarre, but such a comment is valid only when one views them in a vacuum. Compared to the elegies of his contemporaries or to those of later writers, Donne's twenty formal elegies are frank, cynical, and erotic. One must, however, consider Donne's elegies not in isolation, but as part of the classical elegiac tradition. Then it becomes clear that Donne—and not his contemporaries or later elegiac writers—most nearly parallels the Roman poets in their use of the elegiac form.

Among the Elizabethan elegists, Donne is the only writer of amatory elegies that are classical in spirit, tone, and theme. Although some of his contemporaries wrote threnodic and didactic elegies that perhaps can be traced to classical sources,¹ no writer of amatory elegies besides Donne shows such a strong classical element. Donne's elegies have the same tonal qualities and frequently use the same themes found in the classical elegies. Unlike the amatory elegies of his contemporaries, Donne's elegies are much more than extravagant Petrarchan laments concerning a mistress's unfaithfulness.

Donne's elegiac tones range from complaintive, lamentive, erotic, abusive, to satiric and witty. His subject matter ranges from a dramatic tableau in which a lover is betrayed by his perfume, through a lover's somber invocation of night to foreshadow for him the darkness of his mistress's departure, to an extremely imaginative and high-spirited description of a lover's exploration of his "new-found-land," his mistress. Like the Roman elegiac poets, Donne did not limit either his subject matter or his tonal quality.

Although Donne's elegies have been said to be united only by their generic title and by their metre, this judgment does not stand up under close examination. Donne's formal elegies fall into five general categories, all of which are part of the classical elegiac concept. Three of these forms--the elegy of complaint, the elegy of lament, and the erotic elegy--are the most widely used forms of the Roman amatory elegy. The vituperative elegy, although not as common a form as these three, is, nevertheless, used by all the Roman elegists. Although the satiric elegy was not a form that appealed to all the Romans, Catullus, and occasionally Ovid, particularly delighted in it.

Donne, like the Romans, uses the lover's complaint to deplore his mistress's behavior or any other aspect of her situation that distresses him. The attitude Donne's lover takes most closely parallels the attitude of Ovid's lover. Both Ovid and Donne tend in their complaints to be more cynical
and dramatic than other of the classical poets. The lover that Donne pictures is a dynamic man who complains of his mistress's behavior by berating his mistress rather than by feeling sorry for himself, or who rejects the mistress that has rejected him. Although Donne's complaintive elegies are classical in spirit, tone, and theme, certain of these elegies contain innovations, some of which are more artistically successful than others. Donne, for instance, in Elegy XV attempts a rather Propertian experiment: he tries to simulate the irrationality of a lover who has just discovered his mistress's unfaithfulness. In another, more successful, innovation, Donne adds depth to several of his lover's complaints by extending the range of the treachery found in the lover's world to the outer world of parents, relations, city, church, and state.

Donne plies the delightful art of Ovid in his complaints, but his laments reveal the depth of feeling and the passion of Propertius and Tibullus. Ovid almost always views love as a merry game; in contrast, Donne's elegies display more depth and variety than those of Ovid. Donne truly laments separation and actually fears the possibility of impending death. Three of these poems are lover's laments, occasioned by parting. Unlike the lovers in most of the classical elegies of this type, those that Donne pictures enjoy a mutual passion and are thus deeply affected by their forced separation. In only one instance does the lover even consider that his
mistress may be unfaithful. Usually, he is secure in the knowledge of his mistress's affection but concerned with outside factors, such as the dangers a journey may present to his mistress. In his two other lamentive poems, Donne, as do many of the Elizabethans, sees the fleetingness of life and the baseness of mankind. But with Donne these poems become a unique experience; they are not a conventional theme treated in a conventional way. Donne's dream poem (a classical form) is overlaid with melancholy reflections about the fleeting nature of both love and life, and Elegy IX is a piece of mature artistry in which the praise of an older woman is undercut by images of death and the grave.

In his erotic elegies, Donne is unique. He is seemingly the only Elizabethan writer who explored this type of amatory elegy. These erotic elegies are perhaps Donne's biggest enlargement of the classical concept of the elegy. They are written within the classical erotic form, and yet they go beyond it and at the same time deepen it. In one of these elegies, Donne adheres rather strictly to a classical theme, comparing the lover to the soldier. In two other elegies, he takes the classical idea of man's susceptibility to the charms of all women, and creates from it a forceful advocation of change and variety in love as both purifying and life-giving. In his two boudoir elegies, Donne is more erotic than the Romans were in this type of elegy. The latter are inclined to be romantic in their boudoir elegies; Donne is cynical
and witty. Roman elegists view their mistresses as unique individuals; Donne (particularly in Elegy XVIII) sees women as mere objects of sexual gratification. But in Elegy XIX one finds Donne's most artistically complex erotic elegy. Here, Donne makes of a typical boudoir elegy a witty and yet serious statement of the spiritual element that lies within the physical—a statement of the dichotomy of body and soul.

Donne's abusive elegies are quite in the style of Catullus, but perhaps even more colorful than Catullus's because of their ingenious comparisons. Although Donne, in his vituperative elegies on Julia and the other mistress, is closest to Catullus's colloquial and vulgar language, Catullus is not the only one of the Romans who wrote vituperative elegies. All the elegists at one time or another denounced the lena, their mistress, or an odious rival. Donne's witty elegies are seventeenth century in their wit, but, even so, wit is a part of the classical elegy, and it is particularly a part of Catullus's elegies. The satirical elements of Elegy XI and the satirical, humorous Elegy XIV are also sanctioned by the classical elegiac tradition. Again, Catullus delights in both satire and humor. Although the form that Donne's satire takes is not as personal as Catullus's, still, satire is a part of the Roman elegy.

Donne's use of the broad range of tones and themes of the classical elegy in his amatory elegies gives him a unique place among his contemporaries. He occupies a similarly
unique place among all English elegists. After Donne, the
diversity found in the Elizabethan elegy slowly diminished,
and the English elegy gradually became the funeral lament
it is today. No major poet besides Donne wrote an extensive
body of amatory elegies. James Hammond (1716-1742) wrote
love elegies in an endeavor to introduce the erotic elegy as
it was written by Ovid and Tibullus. His follower, William
Shenstone, imitated him. But despite minor attempts such
as these, the English amatory elegy died with Donne.

After Donne, there came into being a tendency to narrow
the elegiac range of subjects to sorrow and death at the
expense of the hortatory, erotic, and didactic moods. By
the 1730's "every churchyard" resounded with elegies, says
John Draper of the funeral elegy. "Indeed, the first half
of the eighteenth century witnessed the culmination of an
elegiac wave that had long been accumulating scope and power." As Gayley and Kurtz note, the restriction of the term elegy
to a poem concerning death was imposed in the seventeenth
and eighteenth centuries, and oddly enough, these critics
find Donne one of the first to begin this restriction. Donne's
elaborate funeral elegies praising the dead are among the
first elegies which began the narrowing and restriction of the
English elegy to the funereal rather than the amatory.

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2 Draper, p. 5. 3 Ibid., p. 3.
4 Ibid.
5 Gayley and Kurtz, p. 404.
Donne's funeral elegies on Elizabeth Drury and Prince Henry are strictly within the line of English elegiac poetry. But it is his classically oriented amatory elegies which stand out as the most singular attempt in the amatory elegy outside of Rome.

Donne's formal elegies are powerful and complex. They show a great poetic virtuosity which found even further expression in his *Songs and Sonets*. Donne's touch may be light or heavy, but throughout all his elegies one has the sense of a ruthlessly realistic human spirit--powerful, complex, touched by irony, alleviated by courage and wit and understanding, capable of ultimate sophistication in the face of both love and death.
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