

Poetry is the most personal form of expression — it is as if the poet's soul is bared to the reader. The poetry of John Donne is certainly testament to the notion that the words of poetry are in fact the soul's voice. John Donne uses his poetry to express the depth of his emotion. The best way that he seems to know how to do this is through wit, intellect and drama — as in the poems 'The Sunne Rising' and 'Batter my Heart'. His style has received much controversy over the years — with extremely polarised responses about his metaphysical form. His recent revival in the early twentieth century, by such poets as Eliot and Pound, indicates the new found appreciation for his combination of thought and feeling in a modern context.

A common criticism of Donne is that his poetry is unrealistic — as Samuel Johnson wrote (in 'The Lives of Poets 1779') — "their amplification had no limits."

But ~~through~~ through to modern times, this interpretation has somewhat changed. For example, in 'The Sunne Rising'



Donne wittily reduces the most important influence in the natural world to a "Busie old foole" and a "sawcy gendatike wretch" that need only concern itself with "late schoole boyes and sawie prentices." This somewhat arrogant and childish disregard for authority serves to elevate the love of the two lovers to another level, above that of the common world. Donne continues this idea by comparing his mistress to "the 'Indias of spice and Myne'" - all the riches of the world. But Donne's love is seemingly so intense that even such a conceit is not sufficient in expressing it - thus he introduces the allusion to the microcosm of microcosm of the world. In saying "To warme the world, that's done in warming us," Donne is effectively saying that the two lovers are the world. This has commonly been interpreted as a very arrogant assertion, but it is absolutely true of ordinary human experience. When two people are in love, they may as well be the world - everyone and everything else are illusions.

So Donne, through his use of ~~ext~~ an extremely personal voice and conceit is merely describing the



real nature of love — and all its shades of emotion.

~~transformation~~ Also in 'The Lives of Poets', 1779, Samuel Johnson criticises Donne's conceits, saying they are "the most heterogeneous ideas, <sup>that are</sup> yoked by violence together."

~~This notion may possibly be~~ This notion may possibly be observed in the Holy Sonnet "Batter my heart, three person'd God" where Donne is demanding a spiritual transformation in very physical terms.

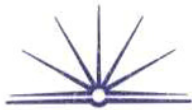
But the true personal nature of this poem, coupled with the intensity of Donne's emotions necessitates the nature of the arresting and forceful imagery.

Donne considers himself a piece of God's hardware and asks him to "break, blow, burn and make him new" as if he were a piece of misshapen steel. This very physical imagery, compounded by the repetition of "me" in "Divorce me", "Imprison me" and "vanish me", as well as the violence of the final paradoxical images — all show the true desperation and fear ~~that~~ that he is feeling. It must be

remembered, that for Donne; judgement, heaven and hell were physical realities, not just states of mind. So when he is asking for spiritual intervention in such personal and immediate terms - the strength of his divine devotion is unmistakably clear.

The way Donne represents such heartfelt issues, such as love and religion is that he portrays them in all their moods, such that they are as ~~to~~ true to human experience as possible. This fact has often drawn the criticism that ~~to~~ his work lacks unity - Johnson analogises the fragmented nature of the poetry by comparing it to someone dissecting a sunbeam with a prism in order to explain a summer's day.

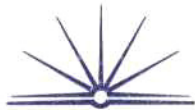
This fragmentation is particularly evident in "Hymne to Good My God, in my sickness" where Donne combines mapmaking, medical science, exploring, geography and the bible to present a meditation on his impending death. ~~in 'Donne and Love Poetry in the Seventeenth Century'~~ C.S Lewis [in 'Donne and Love Poetry in the Seventeenth Century' 1938]



tends to believe that this heterogeneity of ideas "tends to die on our hands" and that it is "too simple to satisfy".

Lewis' concerns echo the concerns of critics who fear that style has overdone substance in Donne's work, and his personal voice is not genuine, but rather contrived for the pleasure of his audience. A. Alvarez (in 'The School of Donne') expressed this as Donne being "a wit writing for wits." In other words, Donne used the very personal form of poetry as a medium for creating challenging conceits and puzzles for his audience of upper-class intellectuals to solve and enjoy.

But perhaps the effect of Donne's audience was that it served to liberate him from tradition. The fact that they were not professional poets may have served to free Donne from having to write in any wholly accepted form, ~~which~~ This, in turn, enabled him to develop the very personal and original voice that his poetry employs.



The nature of Donne's personal voice has invariably shaped the way readers have responded to it over time, both emotionally and intellectually. His wit and realism, as well as his drama and intensity of emotion create poetry which persistently affects response - whether it be avid support or vehement criticism. Either way, the presence of Donne's very intimate <sup>representation</sup> ~~portrayal~~ of love and religion is ~~unmistakable~~ undeniable.