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From the earliest of times, many have pursued the goals of alchemy, a form of chemistry and speculative philosophy in which advocates attempted to discover an elixir of life and a method for converting base metals into gold. To the true alchemist, the "Great Work" was more than a science or a philosophy--it was a religion. The seventeenth-century poet, John Donne, though not a practicing alchemist, was himself interested in alchemy's religious connotations. In his poetry, he indicates his concern with man's spiritual transcendence which parallels the extraction of pure spiritual essences from any form of base matter. In addition, the presumed sequence in which he writes his poems (precise dates of composition are, as yet, not established)

reveals his growing fascination with the spiritual message suggested by alchemy. In "Loves Alchymie," likely written before Donne's marriage to Ann More, Donne is pessimistically questioning man's ability to transcend his base physical nature and, therefore, doubts the validity of spiritual alchemy. Then, during his love affair with and marriage to Ann More, he feels his new experiences with love and recently acquired understanding of love prove man is capable of obtaining spiritual purity. At this time, he writes "The Extasie," "The Good-Morrow," and "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning," employing basic alchemical imagery to support his notion that a union of body, soul, and spirit between man and woman is possible. Finally, as seen in "A Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies Day," his belief in his alchemical vision becomes most crucial when the alchemical bond between him and his wife is severed, and he is left to deteriorate in the physical world alone. Rather than remaining in utter and unqualified despair, Donne recalls the alchemical premise of regeneration, rebirth, resurrection, spiritual reunion. Because he sincerely trusts that something more remarkable will be created in heaven than existed when he and Ann were lovers on earth, he is able to find the courage to endure a miserable existence that allows him no sensual contact with her. Thus, he miraculously views their separation not as a destruction of love, but rather as a regeneration of love in God's image. Alchemy is, for Donne, a religious vision that provides him with an understanding of life and the promise of a sacred reunion with his beloved Ann in the glory and splendor of heaven.

JOHN DONNE'S ALCHEMICAL VISION

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CHAPTER I

A STUDY OF JOHN DONNE'S ALCHEMICAL LANGUAGE: PROCESS AND RELATED TERMINOLOGY

Although John Donne uses a variety of metaphorical imagery, his alchemical imagery is the most significant. Throughout his works, Donne refers to the science of alchemy including such terms as *balm*, *base*, *gold*, *concoction*, *dissolution*, *element*, *cement*, *chain*, *chaos*, *compass*, *mercury*, *sulphur*, *salt*, *philosopher's stone*, *alembic* or *limbeck*, *marriage*, *elixir*, *quintessence*, and *tincture*. Donne's reliance on such alchemical imagery and terminology suggests that he found in alchemy not only a suitable metaphor to represent love and purity but also a spiritual message and a means of making sense of the physical world.

When Donne speaks of alchemy, it is clear that he is referring to legitimate science and not its exploitation. Alchemy is complex because of its spiritual as well as material aspect (Mazzeo 104). In his definition of alchemy, Robert Ray summarizes the alchemical process and its most significant related terminology:

The "science" or "chemistry" of the Middle Ages and Renaissance that attempted to turn base metals into gold by the use of the "philosopher's stone." Also, these practitioners of alchemy, the "alchemists" (or "chemics"), wanted to concoct or extract an "elixir" (or "elixir vitae"),

a miraculous medicine that supposedly would cure all disease and prolong life. This elixir was also referred to as the "quintessence" (or "fifth essence"), an absolutely pure substance that could purge impurities. It was believed by some to be latent in all matter but that it is what makes up the heavenly bodies. One must note that Donne and other writers commonly do not distinguish between the "philosopher's stone" and the "elixir" and the "quintessence," but use these terms interchangeably. An important part of the combining and distilling apparatus used by the alchemists is the "alembic" or "limbeck," a womb-shaped retort with a rounded, bulbous bottom (referred to by Donne in "LOVE'S ALCHEMY" as the alchemist's "pregnant pot"); in this would be placed the chemicals to be combined, heated, and distilled into a smaller receiving vessel. In Donne's time, alchemy and alchemists were recognized as being fraudulent and as making claims that could not be supported by results--i.e., as the "imposture" designated in "LOVE'S ALCHEMY." (29)

Ray's definition identifies important alchemical terms, such as philosopher's stone, elixir, and quintessence, and stresses that Donne ordinarily uses such terms synonymously. Along these same lines, Hunt specifies in an endnote that, when speaking of alchemy in Donne's language, one must recognize that "Donne uses 'quintessence,' 'elixir,' and 'soul of gold' as interchangeable terms, though these terms were sometimes used in the writings of

the alchemists to designate different substances" (215).

In the Oxford English Dictionary, alchemy is defined as "The chemistry of the Middle Ages and 16th c.; now applied distinctively to the pursuit of the transmutation of baser metals into gold, which (with the search for the alkahet or universal solvent, and the panacea or universal remedy) constituted the chief practical object of early chemistry." This definition, however, may be a misrepresentation of the true science of alchemy, to which Donne refers, leading one to think that alchemy resulted merely from the vain attempts of men, who were impelled either by plain greed or by the hope of becoming God's equal, to produce gold artificially. Scholars have proven alchemy to be something much different and have explained why gold once was and still is believed to be the ultimate objective of the Hermetic Art known as alchemy. Some suspect that "the stress laid upon the transmutation of metals was . . . a kind of dust thrown into the eyes of non-initiates, to prevent their understanding the secret truths of alchemy" (Sadoul 18). Others claim that the science is misunderstood because people confuse the persons who have attempted the transmutation of metals (the Puffers and the Archimists) with true Hermetic Philosophers.

Because Puffers, unlike true Hermetists, were not actual scientists and did not know elements according to their symbolic name, they would ignorantly put all manner of things into their crucibles and retorts in the hopes of producing gold. Unfortunately, a number of their combinations, some coming

dangerously near to resembling gunpowder, proved deadly. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, Mary Manley wrote in Memoirs of the New Atlantis of one such Puffer whose career "ended in a big bang" (Sadoul 19). This "Hermetist" told "a lady of quality" that he would convert lead into gold for her; she needed merely to provide him with the necessary materials and the time to carry out his undertaking. The physicist spent two years in a laboratory on the lady's estate, had his meals delivered, refused to see anybody, and eventually became grossly pale and emaciated. One day, however, he commanded the attention of everyone on the estate when he set a great part of the building on fire. Soon after, the lady and her servants found the experimentalist, by then reduced to nothing more than a charred corpse (19-20).

Like the Puffers, the Archimists "enjoyed" similar "successes." Official science never admitted the validity of the so-called "successes" the Archimists claimed, for the Archimists asserted that "the transmutation of metals was perfectly feasible by ordinary chemical means, that is to say by using methods other than the liberation of the tremendous nuclear energies made possible by modern physics" (Sadoul 21). Although their experiments did not end in massive explosions, the results were not promising, for the quantity of gold they obtained was so minute that it might have come from impurities in the substances they used. When one such experimentalist, German Professor Hans Miethe, set out in 1931 to prove he had transmuted mercury into gold, scientists discovered that the traces of gold found in the

mercury at the end of the experiment actually came from the frame of the Professor's spectacles, which had been affected by the mercury fumes (21).

These amusing exploits of the Puffers and Archimists are not representative of the work of the actual Hermetic Philosophers, those chemics to whom Donne refers. Characterizing the work of a true Hermetist is difficult because these Philosophers have always taken so much trouble to conceal their meaning. In his Sum of the Perfections of the Mystery, the Arabic Jabir explains the reasoning behind the vagaries the Artists use: "'I declare here that in this book I have never taught our science explicitly. Had I described the order of its development, ill-intentioned persons might have understood it and have used it for pernicious ends'" (Sadoul 23). Jabir's reply indicates that what alchemists or adepts had to conceal was something more important than secret formulae for making precious metals.¹ A medieval writer, who identified himself as Brother Basil Valentine of the Order of Saint Benedict, may have revealed the Art's actual focus when he, in The Twelve Keys to Philosophy, wrote, "'In this treatise I have done my utmost to impress upon you that the Stone of the Ancients was most assuredly bestowed on us by Heaven for the health and comfort of men in this vale of woe, and that it is the greatest of earthly treasures'" (Sadoul 29). It is, thus, evident that the majority of medieval Hermetic Philosophers were much more concerned with the medicinal virtues of the philosopher's stone (elixir, quintessence, soul of gold) than its

powers of transmutation. Yet, for the Art's true practitioners in later times, alchemy also had an even more important, religious aspect to it, as John Reed notes in Through Alchemy to Chemistry: "Many of the adepts . . . looked to the Stone primarily as a philosophical and religious goal, although doubtless they had a secondary interest in it as a source of wealth, health, and long life" (83). Donne, a seventeenth-century poet, would have been well aware of the "close connection between alchemical tenets and certain religious doctrines, including Redemption and Resurrection" (Reed 59)--a connection made just before Donne's time as Robert Halleux notes in the Dictionary of the Middle Ages: "A view that . . . became extremely powerful in the sixteenth century, regarded alchemy as a spiritual and mystical experience that transformed the experimenter himself" (134). Donne, although no practicing laboratory alchemist, suggested, as the true alchemists did, that the physical process of purifying metals was paralleled by a spiritual one, "the adept undergoing purgation simultaneously with the metals" (Crawshaw 325). Thus, Donne employs alchemical terms in his poetry with religious connotations in mind. This is Donne's alchemy--one that links the transmutation of metals and the medicinal properties of the stone (elixir, quintessence, soul of gold) with the regeneration of the human mind and soul.

If one keeps in mind that Donne is using alchemy in his poems as a type of religious belief system, one can determine his intended meaning for alchemical terms. *Balm*, the second term on

the list, is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "a healing, soothing, or softly restorative agency or influence." However, in order to explicate Donne's notion of *balm*, one must recognize the significance of alchemical *balm* or *balsam*. According to Crawshaw, *balm* was "the indestructible and regenerative spirit which preserved and strengthened matter and which the alchemists worked to find and 'multiply'" (342). Consequently, Donne, in accordance with the principles of alchemy, suggests that *balm* belongs both to the physical and the spiritual worlds. One sees that the *balm* present in Donne's poems is a spiritual force, itself incorruptible, which strengthens those who possess or come into contact with it.

The next two terms, *base* and *gold*, are best defined by the OED as "Alloyed with less valuable metal, debased, counterfeit" and as "The most precious metal characterized by a beautiful yellow colour, non-liability to rust, high specific gravity, and great malleability [adaptability] and ductility [ability to undergo change of form without breaking]," respectively. In Alchemy: The Philosopher's Stone, Allison Coudert further explains the nature and significance of base metals as well as *gold*. She notes that there are six base metals: silver, copper, mercury, tin, iron, and lead. Because alchemists accepted Aristotle's notion that everything in nature strives for perfection, they believed that these six base metals struggled to reach the same perfection as *gold*. *Gold* was the most perfect of all metals because it was the most stable. In order to

understand why alchemists considered *gold* to be the most stable metal, one must recall the Aristotelian theory that all matter was a combination of earth, air, fire, and water. Because *gold* contained a mixture of the four elements in such perfect proportion that they could not be separated, alchemists believed it the most stable (20). Furthermore, alchemists thought that "every created thing emanated from a single, divine soul-substance which assumed innumerable material forms, each of which was in a constant state of flux" (29). Therefore, transmutation was an inevitable fact of life, and the reactions which occurred in alchemical vessels were "microcosmic reflections" of the transmutations of the world at large. Thus, the alchemists thought that the gross elements in base metals separated themselves from the subtle essence of *gold* during transmutation (29). Donne, undoubtedly aware of all of this information, uses *base* and *gold* frequently in his poetry.

The terms *concoction*, *dissolution*, and *element* are all related to the two previous terms, *base* and *gold*. *Concoction* is "the ripening, bringing to a state of perfection," which suggests the transmutation of corruptible *base* materials to pure *gold* (Ray 76). At the same time, *dissolution* is the "reduction of any body or mass to its constituent elements," indicating alchemy's necessary return of *base* material to the state of *chaos*--the state of nothing that allowed the alchemist to recreate the *base* matter from a state of decay to one of purity (*gold*) (99). Ray also provides other similar definitions for *dissolution*: ". . .

(2) destruction of an existing condition; (3) disintegration or decomposition; (4) undoing or a tie, bond, union, or connection; (5) death" (99). Ray, then, draws parallels between the terms *element* and *base*, since both indicate imperfection and corrosion. He explains that "in Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance thought, [elements were] the four simple substances [from lightest to heaviest: fire, air, water, and earth] out of which all material bodies are made: anything composed of any one or more of the four elements is mortal and, therefore, subject to decay and death" (118). Ray's other definitions of *element* suggest the production of gold, or other pure substances, from that which is *base*: ". . . (2) more generally, any constituent substance out of which a more complex substance is made. . . . Verb: (1) to compose or make up something out of a combination of some or all of the four elements (fire, air, water, and earth); (2) to constitute or compose" (118). Clearly, many of the alchemical terms, such as these five, are either closely related in meaning or they significantly involve one another.

Although the OED defines *cement*, as "any uniting medium or substance" and as "a principle of union," during the Renaissance, *cemented* had a more specific, alchemical meaning. *Cementation* was described as "'the process by which one solid is made to penetrate and combine with another at high temperature . . . without liquefaction taking place'" (Walker 3). Coudert makes reference to *cementation* in a footnote:

In the process of cementation common salt and barley

husks (or some other source of carbon) are packed around the precious metals, along with brick dust or clay and copper and iron sulphates. With strong heating, chlorides or metals are formed, including silver, but not gold to any appreciable extent. These volatilize [pass off as vapor] or are absorbed by the ash of the cupel [a small, cuplike, porous container, usu. made of bone ash], leaving a cake of pure gold. (197)

Here, Coudert identifies cementation as an alchemical process necessary to the production of gold. Thus, Donne may clearly be using cement as a reference to alchemical theory.

One also encounters Donne's use of chain. Most assuredly, the term has multiple meanings, but Donne often uses it to refer to the alchemical process. Ray presents what he believes to be Donne's notion of chain in defining the heavenly hierarchy:

The supposed nine ranks or levels or orders of angels, especially as proposed by Dionysius the Areopagite, a Christian Platonist. . . . His work *On the Heavenly Hierarchy* designated the highest division to be composed of Seraphs, Cherubs, and Thrones. The second division contains Dominations, Virtues, and Powers. The third has Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. The highest are the most contemplative, and the lowest are the most active. Those in the third division mediate between man and the realm of God and the angels by delivering messages to man and carrying out God's bidding. The nine orders are also analogous to the nine SPHERES, and, in fact, these orders

were believed to be the INTELLIGENCES that were assigned to the spheres, enabling the creation of the music of the spheres. Most of the angels that fell with Lucifer were of the Seraphs (Seraphim). (161)

The OED also offers a "chain of being" interpretation, presenting chain as ". . . a continuous series or gradation of types of being in order of perfection, stretching from God as the infinite down through a hierarchy of finite beings to nothingness." The alchemical chain resembles the "chain of being" in that it is a hierarchy of matter linking all substances from the lowest base metals to gold, the highest and most perfect form. Because alchemists believed in transmutation, they maintained that people's souls could spiritually ascend the hierarchy of being just as base metals could physically ascend the hierarchy of matter. Donne frequently refers to both hierarchies simultaneously when he employs chain.

Like chain and cement, chaos has its common popular definitions as well as a specific alchemical meaning. Jacques Sadoul defines chaos in the glossary of Alchemists and Gold as "Prime matter when first extracted from the mine" (272). Reinhard Federmann proceeds, in The Royal Art of Alchemy, to equate chaos with terms such as "prime matter" or "*materia prima*," "virgin soil" or "virgin milk," and "the inchoate" (30). He further points out that chaos is composed of the four Aristotelian elements, which the adepts (alchemists) call "essences"--fire, water, air, and earth. Aristotle taught that

all of the four elements are mutually transmutable. Federmann explains the Aristotelian theory:

Each element has two of the basic characteristics--moist (or liquid), dry, hot, and cold. Fire is hot and dry; earth is dry and cold; water is cold and liquid; air is moist and hot. In each element, one of the basic characteristics is dominant. For earth, dryness is characteristic; for water, coldness; for air, moisture; for fire, heat. Yet, each element does have a second basic characteristic, and if one of the secondary characteristics is exchanged, the element changes into another. Thus, when fire (dominant characteristic heat) loses its dryness in exchange for moisture, it becomes air (steam). When air (dominant characteristic moisture) loses its heat and takes on cold, water (condensation) is the result. When water (dominant characteristic coldness) loses its liquidity, it turns into earth, that is, a solid body, namely ice. When earth (dominant characteristic dryness) loses its secondary characteristic of coldness, it turns into fire, which may call to mind drought as well as the forest fires resulting from drought, or the fact that solid bodies turn to smoke (air) in the presence of fire. The same process also works the other way around. When fire loses its heat, earth (ash) results. When earth loses its dryness, it turns to water (by which is meant the liquification of solid bodies). When water loses its coldness, air results (it evaporates). When

air loses its moisture, fire results. (30-31)

Therefore, Aristotle concluded that only form changes while matter remains "immutable" (31). Thus, chaos, and its relationship to Aristotelian theory, is actually the basis for the science of alchemy since alchemists believed in the transmutation of all matter. Donne's employment of the word chaos reveals his interest in Aristotle's concept of transmutability.

Compass is yet another of Donne's terms with specific, alchemical definition. Of course, the compass is, as Ray notes, associated with a "circle or anything circular" (74), and the circle is "frequently used by Donne and many other writers as the symbol of perfection, infinity, immortality, and God" (71). Although this general information is useful, Donne's employment of the compass is, at times, somewhat more complex. In order to comprehend fully Donne's use of the term, one must understand the roles of *mercury*, *sulphur*, *salt*, and the *philosopher's stone* in the alchemical process, since the image of the compass represents "the circular reunion of opposites, sulphur and mercury, male and female, [which] produces the Stone" (Cunnar 84).

Sadoul provides three definitions for *mercury*: he defines it as "Commercial quicksilver . . . mercury contained in the prime matter"; *Philosophers' mercury* as "The female principle in prime matter"; and *philosophic mercury* as "The salt extracted from the prime matter by the action of the secret fire" (275). Next, he defines *sulphur* as "The male principle in prime matter" (278) and

salt as "The means whereby sulphur is united with Philosophers' mercury" (277). Finally, the OED provides a thorough explanation of the philosopher's stone: "A reputed solid substance or preparation supposed by the alchemists to possess the property of changing other metals into gold or silver, the discovery of which was the supreme object of alchemy. Being identified with the Elixir, it had also, according to some, the power of prolonging life indefinitely, and of curing all wounds and diseases." Joseph Mazzeo makes some equally useful observations when he states that "in general, the philosopher's stone was said to possess four major properties: it brought metals to perfection, it healed diseases and prolonged life, it could change all base stones into precious ones, and it could soften any kind of glass" (115).

According to Sadoul's interpretation of the science of alchemy, three secret elements are necessary to the production of the *Philosophers' Stone*: the *prime substance*, an irreducible element on which the alchemist works and which he exposes to the action of the *secret fire* (also called *prime agent*), and *philosophic mercury* (19). Coudert further contends that *mercury*, *sulphur*, and *salt* are the materials the alchemists combined to produce the stone. She utilizes Aristotelian theory, focusing on one of Aristotle's theories used to explain the differences between minerals and metals. She notes that Aristotle suggests that, although metals and minerals were basically composed of the four elements (earth, air, fire, and water), their immediate

constituents are two "exhalations" formed below the surface of the earth, an "earthy smoke" and a "watery vapour." The earthy smoke consists of small particles of earth on their way to becoming fire, while the watery vapour is made up of particles of water in the process of turning into air. Because stones and minerals are formed from this earthy smoke, they can not melt or liquefy. Metals are formed from the watery vapour, explaining why they are capable of being altered (21).

Alchemists took Aristotle's theory further and suggested the two exhalations were an "ideal" sort of sulphur and mercury, which combined in different proportions and degrees of purity to form the different minerals and metals. The "mercurial" principle seemed to provide a plausible enough explanation for the fact that all the known metals melted and became like mercury, the normally liquid one. Every alchemist who accepted this theory knew perfectly well that ordinary sulphur and mercury could not be the constituents of metals because, when combined, they form cinnabar (mercuric sulphide). Although this observation might have led alchemists to abandon the original theory, "they simply described their sulphur and mercury as 'sophic,' 'philosophic,' 'ideal,' or just 'not vulgar'" (Coudert 21).

In the sixteenth century, Paracelsus (1493-1534) modified the sulphur/mercury theory by adding salt as the third constituent of material bodies, alongside sulphur and mercury. Paracelsus and his followers then associated certain properties with mercury,

sulphur, and salt: metallicity, fusibility, volatility, spirit, and water with mercury; inflammability, soul, and air with sulphur; and uninflammability, fixidity, body, and earth with salt (23). (It is also important to note that Sadoul earlier revealed that mercury represents the "female principle" and sulphur is associated with the "male principle"). This combination of chemical substances and their chemical properties with spirit, soul, and body emphasizes the alchemists' belief that everything was alive--there was no such thing as inorganic matter. Coudert notes that, in The Hermetic Museum, one alchemist advises, "'If you can only rectify the mercury, sulphur, and salt . . . until the metallic spirit and body are inseparably joined together by means of the metallic soul, you thereby firmly rivet the chain of love, and prepare the palace for the coronation'" (24). Alchemists would have understood these references to "love," "the palace," and "the coronation" as allusions to "the last stage in the alchemical work, when the philosopher's stone, produced by the loving union of salt, sulphur and mercury, or body, soul and spirit, is finally crowned as the king of all substances" (24-25).

Now, it is necessary to consider some of the crucial steps through which the alchemist had to progress in order to achieve the stone, in order to determine how the alchemical process came to be associated with the circular motion of the compass. First, congelation and fixation was the essential step that brought the alchemist closer to gold. This process consisted of "making

substances solid and non-volatile" (Coudert 45). Alchemists had to give their stone the stability and fixidity of gold so that these qualities could be passed on to base matter. This was no simple procedure since philosopher's mercury, which most alchemists judged an essential ingredient of the stone, was extremely volatile (45).

Following congelation and fixation (as well as another step called solution and digestion), distillation was the step "sometimes symbolized in alchemical illustrations by the tail-eating serpent known as the ouroboros to show the circular nature of the processes" (Coudert 47). Alchemy's circular processes occur, of course, in the piece of laboratory equipment which most captivated Donne's imagination--the limbeck (alembic), the alchemist's "distilling apparatus" (Sadoul 271). During distillation, the alchemists thought, as they watched vapours rise up in their limbecks, they were witnessing a miraculous transformation in which the "soul" of matter separated from its "body" and reunited with it in a more refined and pure state. Mazzeo notes that "in 'spiritual alchemy,' the tortuous curvings of the retort tube was analogous to the hard path traveled by the soul in the process of its purification" (110). He further explains that "the limbeck was also the symbol for a regenerating purgation" and that "death was also likened to a limbeck which refined our bodies in preparation for the resurrection (111). Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary founder of alchemy in the West, considered "the alembic a miniature cosmos in which

distilled substances ascended from earth to heaven" (Coudert 45).² The eighth precept from his famous *Emerald Tablet* is a cryptic description of reflux distillation; here, he describes substance ascending from earth to heaven and then descending to earth, bringing "together the powers of things superior and things inferior" (45-47). This alchemical process clearly helps one to visualize the significance of the symbolic compass, as well as the limbeck, to the production of the stone.

Furthermore, many scholars note that this union of substances, which takes place in the limbeck, is also known as marriage. Sadoul defines chemical marriage as "Union of sulphur and Philosophers' mercury in the philosophic egg" (272). And, the philosophic egg is a "Glass vessel containing the philosophic substance for the final coction [cooking]" (273). Coudert points out that alembic vessels are often drawn as eggs, "universal symbol[s] of birth and creation" (111). Clearly, the process of making the philosopher's stone was frequently described in the human terms of marriage, as well as birth, growth, copulation, and death. The transformation of metals, particularly the smelting of the metals, has always entailed the sexual union, or marriage, of the ingredients in the furnace and the birth of a new substance (114). In his love poems, Donne often presents marriage in the alchemical sense.

This preview of the main alchemical concepts leads one to a consideration of the philosopher's stone and the elixir, which result from the sum total of the principles and are the pre-

minent vindications of the Work. In Alchemists and Gold, Sadoul, who firmly believed that alchemists could convert base metals into gold and prolong man's life, notes how the contemporary Adept Fulcanelli describes the philosopher's stone: "The Philosopher's Stone is presented to us in the form of a clear, crystalline substance, red in the mass, yellow when pulverised. It is dense and highly fusible, although solid at all temperatures, and its substance makes it penetrating, fiery, invariable, and incombustible" (35). In Prelude to Chemistry, Read provides other useful information concerning the true nature of the stone. He mentions that Philalethes (renowned medieval alchemical philosopher) states in A Brief Guide to the Celestial Ruby that

. . . the Philosopher's Stone "is called a stone, not because it is like a stone, but only because, by virtue of its fixed nature, it resists the action of fire as successfully as any stone. In species it is gold, more pure than the purest.

. . . If we say that its nature is spiritual, it would be no more than the truth; if we describe it as corporeal [bodily], the expression would be equally correct." (129)

Thus, the stone is not, in actuality, a stone, but a substance which has some of a stone's durable qualities, as well as both a spiritual and physical aspect.

The OED defines *elixir* as "a preparation by the use of which it was sought to change metals into gold. Sometimes identified with 'the philosopher's stone'; but perhaps of wider meaning,

including powders, liquids, or vapours used for the same purpose." Sadoul further suggests that the elixir of life is "The Philosopher's Stone in a homoeopathic dose" (273). Since Sadoul provides what he believes to be a "factual" account of one man's encounter with the elixir, his use of the word "homoeopathic," here, is clear. *Homeopathy* is, according to Webster's Dictionary, "a method of treating disease by minute doses of drugs that in a healthy person would produce symptoms similar to those of the disease" (641). Sadoul writes of a sixteenth-century Councillor of State who placed a few drops of the elixir, given him by his physician, on his tongue. The Councillor soon became ill and lost his hair, his nails, and even his teeth. It was, then, much later noted that his hair, nails, and teeth had all grown back and that the Councillor, despite being one hundred and twenty-three years old, was in excellent health (37-38). The conclusion was, thus, that the elixir induces the aging process before diminishing altogether the signs of aging.

After defining the terms, Sadoul points out other extraordinary qualities about the stone and the elixir, claiming that the stone itself has no "transmutatory power," and that it only makes possible the preparation of the "precipitate powder," the "actual transmutatory agent" (35). He maintains the solid stone was directly fused with purified gold or silver, and that red powder was used to transmute a metal into gold, while white powder was used to transmute it into silver. When the

metal reached the melting point, the adept (alchemist) added the powder, wrapped in paper or a lump of wax. After about a quarter of an hour, the base metal would have been turned into gold, with no loss of weight (35).

Sadoul, then, explains the relationship between the stone and the elixir, revealing his differences with other scholars:

Almost all extant alchemical studies state that the Philosopher's Stone was equally efficacious for the preparation of "drinkable gold" or the universal medicine, and the elixir of life. But this statement has the facts quite wrong. It is nonsense to say that the Stone can be used for the transmutation of metals and the elixir of life. The Philosopher's Stone is intended *only* for making the universal medicine, which is the elixir of life. (35)

Sadoul further contends that the transmutatory powder was "simply an experiment carried out at the end of the Master Work, to make certain that the substance manufactured was indeed the Philosopher's Stone" (35). Thus, he is suggesting that alchemists wished to maintain their health but had no desire to produce gold in order to capture wealth. Revealing his serious convictions about alchemy, he maintains that this motivation is evident when one considers that few adepts made fortunes.

Moreover, as already noted, Sadoul believes that there have been those whose health profited after they had digested the elixir.

Obviously, scholars interpret some terms differently. Of course, those who truly believe in alchemy and those who do not

will certainly disagree on the science's purpose and focus. Perhaps, it is important to point out these variations because the remaining terms, quintessence and tincture, hold so many different meanings. Although the definition of quintessence varies from text to text, the OED provides an accurate interpretation of the term as "the 'fifth essence' of ancient and medieval philosophy supposed to be the substance of which the heavenly bodies were composed, and to be actually latent in all things, the extraction of it by distillation or other methods being one of the great objects of alchemy." Many sources provide rather vague discussions of quintessence and make few references to it. For example, Federmann briefly identifies the quintessence as the fifth essence, which the four essences--earth, air, water, and fire--must contain, and equates it with the "stone" (30). At the same time, Read explains quintessence as something "shadowy" and "ill-defined," which hovers behind the four elements. He suggests that "Aristotle called it ether, the element of the stars; the neo-Platonists called it Logos, otherwise the Word, God, or Reason; and among the medieval philosophers it was known as the quinta essencia, fifth being, . . . sometime confused in alchemy with Philosopher's Stone" (3). Clearly, these definitions are contradictory. Yet, although the discussions of quintessence are brief and contradictory, there is, nevertheless, a clear relationship of quintessence to alchemical process--e.g., it generally was a much desired "certain matter [beyond the four known substances] extracted from

all things which nature has produced, and from everything which has life corporally in itself, a matter most subtly purged of all impurities and mortality, and separated from all elements . . .'" (Mazzeo 115). Undeniably, Mazzeo is accurate when he notes that the quintessence was believed "to reside, somewhat like a seed, at the 'core' of things" (115).

Perhaps, what is most important to recall here is that, even though many alchemists made distinctions between the quintessence and the elixir and the philosopher's stone, Donne ordinarily does not. According to Donne, as Mazzeo reveals, "the Elixir, Stone, or Quintessence, [is] the 'purest' of substances and [is] not of the four elements but [is], as its name implies, a fifth element, perfect and incorruptible and the substance from which the heavens [are] made" (115). Previously mentioned comments by Ray and Hunt also indicate Donne's tendency to use the three terms interchangeably while employing them in the general manner suggested by Mazzeo's definition. When a distinction is made, both the elixir and the quintessence represent the "golden drink" or the "panacea"--"the universal medicine that would solve all of the problems of physical life," and the philosopher's stone is the name for the elixir when "gold-making rather than health [is] the end [goal of the alchemist]" (Rugoff 58-59).

Finally, tincture is a term to which few sources refer, and often completely disagree on its meaning. Even the OED provides multiple definitions for tincture:

A supposed spiritual principle or immaterial substance

whose character or quality may be infused into material things which are then said to be tinctured; the quintessence, spirit or soul of a thing. Universal tincture, the Elixir. An active principle, of a physical nature, emanating, or derivable from any body or substance; a liquid or volatile principle.

According to the above interpretations of the term, tincture may be synonymous with the quintessence, the elixir, and possibly even the stone. However, Crawshaw makes a valuable distinction which helps in comprehending the significance of tincture in the alchemical process, identifying tincture as the "gold" produced at the climax of the alchemists' work; he further suggests that tincture has been equated with Christ because this "gold," when projected onto base metals, has the power of transmutation (347). In a similar manner, Mazzeo explains the significance of tincture in alchemical resurrection:

The reduction of a metal is followed by a synthesis of the original constituents but in such a manner that the final product is "perfect." Gold, the most perfect metal in nature, is, by alchemical means, transmuted to tincture, which is more than perfect in possessing the power to transmute base metals into gold. Similarly, Christ, the perfect man, is crucified and becomes "tincture" which can transmute "Leaden and iron wills to good" through the grace which all mankind receives from His sacrifice. (119-120)

Both Crawshaw's and Mazzeo's explanations are valuable when

Considering Donne's use of this term.

¹It may be important to make a distinction between the alchemist and the adept. While the alchemist was anyone in search of (but who may not yet have discovered) the stone, the adept was an alchemist believed to have actually achieved the stone.

²Hermes Trismegistus was one of the Greek gods or a pre-Pharaonic king or a Gnostic saviour to whom legend attributes the foundation of alchemy. Several alchemical treatises are ascribed to him, among them the famous *Emerald Table*, which contains the shortest extant epitome of the Great Work, if not the clearest. One legend has it that the text was found by Alexander the Great's soldiers in the Great Pyramid at Gizeh, this being none other than the tomb of Hermes himself. He personally, it is said, graved the words upon an emerald plaque with a diamond stylus, whence its name. The Precepts of Hermes engraved upon the *Emerald Table* are as follows:

1. Speak not fictitious things, but that which is certain and true.
2. What is below is like that which is above, and what is above is like that which is below, to accomplish the miracles of one thing.
3. And as all things were produced by the one word of one Being, so all things were produced from this one thing by adaptation.
4. Its father is the sun, its mother the moon; the wind carried it in its belly, its nurse is the earth.

5. It is the father of perfection throughout the world.

6. The power is vigorous if it be changed into earth.

7. Separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross, acting prudently and with judgement.

8. Ascend with the greatest sagacity from the earth to heaven, and then again, descend to the earth, and unite together the powers of things superior and things inferior. Thus you will obtain the glory of the whole world, and obscurity will fly far away from you. (Coudert 28)

9. This has more fortitude than fortitude itself; because it conquers every subtle thing and can penetrate every solid.

10. Thus the world was formed.

11. Hence proceed wonders, which are here established.

12. Therefore, I am called Hermes Trismegistus, having three parts of the philosophy of the whole world.

13. That which I had to say concerning the operation of the sun is completed.

CHAPTER II

JOHN DONNE'S POETRY:

THE UNITY OF BODY, SOUL, AND SPIRIT IN LOVE AND ALCHEMY

John Donne utilizes images associated with alchemy to reveal how pairs of lovers can achieve physical and spiritual purity. Like the alchemists, Donne suggests that the physical process of purifying metals parallels a spiritual one, "the adept undergoing purgation simultaneously with the metals" (Crawshaw 325). In addition, Donne is acutely conscious, as were the alchemists, of transience and corruption and of the need for regeneration. He is particularly concerned with alchemy's religious implications--the spiritual resurrection of immortal and perfect beings or substances from a previous state of chaos or decay. Just as in the alchemical process in which salt (body), sulphur (soul), and mercury (spirit) are combined to achieve the elixir, the philosopher's stone, the quintessence, or the soul of gold, Donne's lovers undergo a transmutation. Figuratively, they ascend the hierarchy of matter, a chain which links all substances from the lowest base metals to gold, the highest form. A close study of Donne's metaphorical use of such alchemical imagery reveals his awareness of the significance of the alchemical stage in which base metals cease to be volatile and appear to take on the perfect durability of gold, the alchemists' most highly valued material. By achieving a unity of body, soul, and spirit, Donne's lovers reach an elevated state and resist the natural processes of decay.

Donne's ever-changing vision of love is directly related to his use of alchemical imagery in the love poems he wrote before and during his marriage to Ann More and those he composed immediately after her untimely death. In these love poems, Donne reveals his developing interest in alchemy as a means of explaining the nature of love and, as Zimmerman notes, also begins to establish four themes of love:

. . . sensual love, physical in nature and devoid of spirituality; spiritual love, non-independent upon sex or other physical aspects; integrated love, simultaneously spiritual and physical; and Petrarchan love, conventional and of no major importance. (10)

Each category of love indicates much about Donne's alchemical view of life. One may suggest that Donne, before his marriage to Ann More, is questioning the legitimacy of love and marriage, a supposed combining of the man and woman not only physically but also spiritually. By comparing the insufficiencies of love with those of alchemy, he expresses his doubts concerning a successful union in marriage. Then, during his love affair with and marriage to Ann More, he feels that his new experiences with love and his freshly acquired knowledge of love give him insight into the differences between sensual and spiritual love as well as the nature of integrated love. At this point, he turns to alchemy as a means of supporting his notion that a union of body, soul, and spirit between man and woman is possible. Finally, after Ann's inability to survive childbirth, he relies on the belief systems

of alchemy to make sense of and to find hope in the separation of lovers by death. Thus, as Donne ages and matures, the subject of alchemy comes to have an increasingly greater influence over his visions concerning the nature of love and life.

In such poems as "The Extasie" "The Good-Morrow," and "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," each of which is believed to have been written to Ann More, Donne's lovers do achieve the physical and spiritual unity suggested by alchemy, allowing them to reach an elevated state in which they are able to overcome the depredations of time. In "A Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies Day," written after Ann's death, Donne's desolate lover is saved from utter destruction and unqualified despair when he recalls the alchemical theory of putrefaction-regeneration. The poet as lover is figuratively decaying, but his alchemical vision allows him to anticipate his own resurrection and spiritual reunion with his deceased lover. Yet, Donne's ability to find such strength in the possibilities suggested by alchemy developed slowly over many years of joy, pain, celebration, and doubt. Much earlier in his life, in "Loves Alchymie," he was recording his discontent and bitter disillusionment with love as well as expressing his cynical view of alchemy.

In "Loves Alchymie," Donne attacks a lofty and widely accepted view of love. Here, Donne is criticizing Platonic doctrine, specifically the Platonists' belief in the existence of a love free from sensual desire, and, in that respect, one concludes that the poem contains a spiritual love theme. Here,

he likens love to alchemy because both are processes of spiritualization, both have medicinal powers attributed to them, and, as Hunt notes, both are "swindle games for the naive and soft-minded" (Hunt 36). One senses Donne's cynicism for both spiritual love and alchemy in nearly every line of the poem. For example, in the opening lines, Donne makes crude sexual references to the Platonists' spiritual quest, creating a picture of these lofty moral idealists seeking spiritual essence by busily digging deep in the "centric" mine of a woman's body:

Some that have deeper digged love's Mine than I,
Say, where his centric happiness doth lie. . . . (1-2)

The alchemical references, specifically to the production of gold, are also clear in his use of "digged," "Mine," and "centric." One recalls the greedy Puffer who, in actuality, is no alchemist because he is interested solely in the acquisition of gold, the physical implications of alchemy, even though he may claim to be inspired by the possibility of a spiritual transmutation. Donne's use of "centric" appears relevant when one considers that the alchemical symbol for gold is a circle with a dot placed perfectly in its center. Duncan makes an alchemical connection when he asserts that "the poet's repeated efforts to discover the 'centrique happiness' of love are here compared to the repeated rounds of experiments through which an alchemist goes in his efforts to discover the philosopher's stone" (259).

Donne, next, implies the physical aspects of love while revealing his disbelief in the discovery of spiritual love, the elixir of life, the "hidden mystery":

I have loved, and got, and told,
 But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,
 I should not find that hidden mystery. (3-5)

Then, Donne blatantly scorns both the pursuit of spiritual love and the practice of alchemy:

Oh, 'tis imposture all. . . . (6)

Before interpreting the concluding lines of the first stanza, one should understand the connection Donne makes between the alchemist's elixir and Platonism. As Hunt notes, the poets who wrote in the Platonic tradition used "the stock metaphor of a fever to suggest the restless inquietude of lust, and presented rational or spiritual love as a balm or sovereign remedy for the fleshly disease of sensuality" (35-36). Thus, one makes an association between the medicinal properties of spiritual love and the alchemical elixir, a panacea for all ills of the flesh. In lines 7-10, Donne "drives an ugly analogy between the alchemist's pot and the woman's womb, impregnated by the lover who 'glorifies' (brags about) the satisfactions and the 'medicinall' power of spiritualized love, and who believes that he is near to discovering the pure 'Elixir' of a love based

solely on the mind" (Hunt 37):

And as no chemic yet th'Elixir got,
 But glorifies his pregnant pot,
 If by the way to him befall
 Some odoriferous thing, or medicinall, . . . (7-10)

Then, in the final two lines of the stanza, Donne contrasts the Platonists' sentimental "dream" of an emotionally satisfying and enduring spiritual love with the cold reality ("winter-seeming") of a single short night of lust ("summer's night"):

So, lovers dream a rich and long delight,
 But get a winter-seeming summer's night. (11-12)

In the second stanza, Donne continues to mock the Platonists for their concept of *spiritual love*. He begins by referring to the images of the bubble and the shadow, stock metaphors in Platonic literature:

Our ease, our thrift, our honor, and our day,
 Shall we, for this vain bubble's shadow pay? (13-14)

He proceeds to disclose that "he himself can discover nothing in love beyond the momentary animal pleasure available to any common servant who is willing to degrade further his already humble condition in order to 'endure the short scorn of a bridegroom's play'" (Hunt 38):

Ends love in this, that my man,
 Can be as happy'as I can; if he can
 Endure the short scorn of a bridegroom's play? (15-17)

He ridicules, next, the Platonic doctrine that, "through the love of women whose minds are literally 'angelic' . . . , one can rise above fleshly pleasure to a direct rational apprehension of other forms of spiritual beauty" (Hunt 37). Donne asserts that it is idiotic for one to believe that his physical desire for a woman's bodily beauty could lead to an understanding of God's idea of beauty, the beauty of the "spheres":

That loving wretch that swears,
 'Tis not the bodies marry, but the minds,
 Which he in her angelic finds,
 Would swear as justly, that he hears,
 In that day's rude hoarse minstrelsy, the spheres. (18-22)

He may also be suggesting that it is just as ludicrous to expect that the physical process of purifying metals could produce an elixir capable of disclosing the secrets of the universe. As Ruffo-Fiore states, "a lover who mistakes sex for love is as deluded as the alchemist who mistakes a lesser substance for the elixir" (55). Clearly, the alchemical imagery does not vanish in these lines. Hunt and other scholars would contend that Donne is no longer relying on alchemy here, but if one recalls that the female element in the alchemical process is mercury and that

mercury is also the "human spiritual principle," one understands that Donne is again associating the Platonist who attributes angelic qualities to a woman's mind with the alchemist who affiliates the spiritual with the female principle (Freccero 301). While the Platonists believed man could be united with woman to yield purely spiritual love, the alchemists believed that sulphur, the male element that also corresponded to the human soul, could be combined with salt, the body, and with female mercury, the "'spirit' of Love," to form the philosopher's stone (elixir, soul of gold, or quintessence), the "immortal and incorruptible gold of the glorified body and soul" (301). In his closing lines, Donne discredits both theories:

Hope not for mind in women; at their best,
Sweetness, and wit they'are; but, Mummy, possessed. (23-24)

Here, Donne incorporates the alchemy analogy to conclude his argument against the Platonists' notion of spiritual love. In "Hope not for mind in women," he suggests much about his perceptions of both love and alchemy. He is indicating that true love can never be anything but lust and that the only available cure for the fever of lust lies in the degrading act of animal sexuality. The sexual act is, thus, a remedy, but it is not like that of the pure spiritual essence of the elixir, which Donne believes does not exist and which is as much an "imposture" as the concept of spiritual love. It is, therefore, appropriate that he refers to the medicine offered by a woman's love as

"Mummy," for the powder made by grinding up mummies provides a remedy which is physical rather than spiritual in nature (Hunt 39). Donne, thus, gives the impression that women are mere flesh without soul, revealing his present belief in the impossibility of a spiritual union between husband and wife in marriage as well as the infeasibility of a loving union between "sulphur and mercury, male and female" in *chemical marriage* (Cunnar 84).

In "The Extasie," Donne records both his happiness and intellectual puzzlement as he attempts to resolve the unpleasant quandary of "Loves Alchymie." He favorably employs alchemical imagery in this detailed logical analysis of both sensual and spiritual love. Here, he tries to account for his revelatory experience with a new kind of love and first examines the nature and characteristics of physical love. Consequently, he opens the poem with highly physical and sensual images of sex and pregnancy:

Where, like a pillow on a bed,
 A Pregnant banke swel'd up, to rest
 The violets reclining head,
 Sat we two, one anothers best. (1-4)

The word *pillow* suggests the marriage bed, a setting for physical love. In a similar vein, *pregnant*, *banke*, and *swel'd* are related to rest and reclining. As Zimmerman notes, "the entire image is one of love, birth, fertility" (19). The images, thus, call to mind the *limbeck* (or the *philosophic egg*), the alchemical

marriage bed, and the process of making the philosopher's stone, frequently described in the human terms of "marriage, birth, growth, copulation, and death" (Coudert 114). As Walker contends, these opening lines may actually suggest the first step of the complete alchemical process (8). She asserts that these lines show the alchemist placing the two main principles, the man and the woman, in the philosophic egg, the figurative nuptial bed. She explains that Donne identifies each lover as "one anothers best" because philosophic sulphur and mercury are the extracts of the two "best" metals (2).

Zimmerman, however, in helping one comprehend the association Donne is making between the nature of love and alchemy, further emphasizes the significance of the word pregnant for its suggestion of "birth, propagation, and generation" (20). He, then, asserts that pregnancy must be observed for its "spiritual understanding to which the physical leads" as well as for its "purely physical concept" (20). In the poem, "the sensuality of the material world and the sexual relationship begins to alter, to assume a new character and a different value," just as the male and female of alchemy (*sulphur* and *mercury*) physically unite ("melt" in the furnace) and transform base metals to a new state of purity (20). The alterations undergone in both love and alchemy clearly result from an apprehension of the spiritual world:

Our hands were firmly cimented

With a fast balme, which thence did spring,
 Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred
 Our eyes, upon one double string;
 So to'entergraft our hands, as yet
 Was all the means to make us one,
 And pictures in our eyes to get
 Was all our propagation. (5-12)

In these lines, the words *cimented* and *balme* are two direct alchemical references that reveal Donne's changing perceptions of spiritual love. *Cimented*, which describes the way in which the lovers' hands are joined, suggests the alchemical "process by which one solid is made to penetrate and combine with another at high temperature . . . without liquefaction taking place" (Walker 3); and *balme*, the element that firmly bonds the lovers' hands, is alchemy's incorruptible spiritual force capable of strengthening those who possess or come into contact with it (Crawshaw 343). One understands that the lovers are joined both physically and spiritually, for both terms correspond to the dual nature of love and alchemy--the physical union of bodies or elements and the spiritual union of souls or essences. The other image in these lines, the twisting of the eye-beams, also indicates that the couple's discovery of spiritual love has caused their souls to become one. The image relies on the belief that the eyes emitted beams which picked up the image and transferred the image to the eye itself. As Zimmerman states,

"the image of a loved one was carried to the heart which, as a result, became heated and released souls into the blood" (20). The lovers' souls were now "activated" (20). Their eye-beams were "twisted," meaning doubled, because each lover's eyes emitted a beam. Lines eleven and twelve reveal that "the pictures or reflections in the eyes were their [the couple's] only propagation; i.e., love was their only propagation" (20). Certainly, the lovers' revelatory experience, which is engendered in each lover's eyes, further indicates the couple's oneness, revealing Donne's new outlook on the possibilities suggested by love and alchemy.

At this point, the lovers' souls are uncertain, since they have just recently been "freed from the senses" (20). Their release from the body was necessary in order "to advance their state," but now they appear hesitant or unable to progress any further; thus, the souls remain momentarily fixed or suspended. They are "two equal Armies" locked in a battle; "neither side is advancing or retreating, so [the] souls [hang] motionless, face to face, in the air" (Gardner 252):

As 'twixt two equal Armies, Fate
 Suspends uncertaine victorie,
 Our soules, (which to advance their state,
 Were gone out,) hung 'twixt her and mee. (13-16)

While the lovers are in their static state, their bodies ("like sepulchrall statues") are still and silent all day and their

souls are negotiating:

And whil'st our soules negotiate there,
 We like sepulchrall statues lay;
 All day, the same our postures were,
 And we said nothing, all the day. (17-20)

Still, since the souls "were gone out," nothing has happened. Even though the souls are negotiating, there is no evidence of progress. *Sepulchrall* suggests burial and indicates the lovers' bodies are dead. Yet, applying an alchemical interpretation here identifies the couple's physical death as a positive sign of their upcoming spiritual rebirth. One need only recall that death (as well as decay or separation) is the necessary predecessor to the alchemical resurrection--the rise of pure and immortal substances from formerly flawed and corruptible materials. One may also recollect that the elixir, the physical end product of alchemy, induces the aging process (decay) before working spiritually to diminish the signs of aging altogether.

Clearly, the lovers require the addition of a third element before pure spiritual love can be fully achieved, just as sulphur and mercury demand the presence of salt before the alchemical process can be completed. Donne, thus, introduces a new element, a "he," and progress resumes:

If any, so by love refin'd,
 That he soules language understood,

And by good love were growen all minde,
 Within convenient distance stood,
 He (though he knew not which soule spake,
 Because both meant, both spake the same)
 Might thence a new concoction take,
 And part farre purer than he came. (21-28)

Here, Walker asserts that the third element, the "he," is clearly "acting as a catalyst, just as the Philosophical Salt [does] in the alchemical process" (5). Undisputably, the fact that the souls possess a new ability to speak the same language, and, thus, no longer need to negotiate, indicates they are now one. By means of the observing agent "he," the spiritual union of the two principles has taken place. There is a direct mention of a "new concoction" and, as Walker so succinctly states, "now that the essences of the two best metals are united in a concoction which the fifth element, Ether or Quintessence, has taken part in or partaken of, this same element--Salt, the third principle of the alchemical process, the essence drawn from Art, the poetic observer--can depart more rarified than before" (6).

Just as the first twenty-eight lines of the poem corresponded with physical actions in the alchemical process, so do the next twenty lines mirror another portion of the analogous alchemical process. After the union of the principles had been accomplished by the alchemist and the philosopher's stone ("This Extasie," the "new concoction") had been produced, the stone had to be

allowed to cool, and in the process of this cooling, all of its virtues became apparent. In lines 29-48, there is no action, but there is much extolling of the virtues of the Extasie which has taken place (7):

This Extasie doth unperplex

(Wee said) and tell us what we love,

Wee see by this, it was not sexe,

Wee see, we saw not what did move:

But as all several soules contain

Mixture of things, they know not what,

Love, those mixt soules doth mixe againe,

And makes both one, each this and that.

A single violet transplant,

The strength, the color, and the size,

(All which before was poore, and scant,)

Redoubles still, and multiplies,

When love, with one another so

Interanimates the two soules,

That ableer soule, which thence doth flow,

Defects of loneliness controles.

Wee then, who are this new soule, know

Of what we are composed, and made,

For, th'Atomies of which we grow,

Are soules, whom no change can invade. (29-48)

In these lines, the lovers are no longer perplexed. While in

this state of ecstasy, their souls have "rare insight into the infinite truths" (Zimmerman 22). Here, Donne resolves the struggle between body and soul, for the lovers have achieved "integrated love which includes sex, but which is essentially neither of matter or spirit, but of a mixture of the two" (22). Their discovery of a new kind of love transforms their two souls into one "ableer soule." The new soul, interanimated by love, redoubles and multiplies, curing the defects of the single, independent souls. Donne's use of the duplicating flower in these lines illustrates the benevolent influence of the union which has taken place and the transforming power of its product, the philosopher's stone (elixir, soul of gold, or quintessence). The stone, the new soul, has elevated base materials, the lovers' individual flawed souls, to a level of immortality, purity, perfection. The formerly five-petaled "single violet" now has ten petals. Walker explains that in alchemical language, ten, the perfect number, was assigned to the philosopher's stone (7). Thus, Walker makes her well-supported assertion that the poem stresses contact with the stone and the influence it presumably had to work upon substances "to refine them to their highest natural state" (7).

Donne, who has now found a love possessing the qualities of pure gold--an incorruptible consistent mix of the physical and the spiritual, once again abandons Platonism, for the lovers' souls realize that they need not abstain from their bodies:

But O alas, so long, so farre,

Our bodies why do we forbear? (49-50)

Ray suggests that line 49 marks the next significant turn in the poem's development, leading to the climactic definition of this mutual love and its constituent elements. He further states that "the physical and spiritual are merged, and the merging is justified by various images and analogies showing how body and spirit are related throughout the universe and how soul communicates with soul through physical means" (111).

The remaining lines of the poem do, as Ray contends, stress physical and spiritual unions, but they do so by presenting the final phase of the alchemical process, "the application of the Philosopher's Stone, the alchemical result of the lovers' union, to other people and their projected improvement by such contact" (Walker 7):

They'are ours, though they'are not wee, wee are

The intelligences, they the spheare.

We owe them thankes, because they thus,

Did us, to us, at first convey,

Yeelded their forces, sense, to us,

Nor are drosse to us, but allay. (50-56)

The lovers' souls resemble *intelligences* because both are spiritual in essence. The bodies and *spheares*, then, are both "physical entities moved by spiritual ones" (Ray 111). Although

the inclinations of the lovers' souls first moved the lovers' bodies towards each other, the bodies, for which the couple should be grateful, provided the means by which their souls communicated and came to know each other. Therefore, the bodies are not contemptible, useless dross, "the worthless waste from processing metals" (111); rather, they are useful alloy, "an inferior metal mixed with another more valuable one to improve the latter's strength, durability, and appearance" (111). Walker accurately contends that the lovers' bodies have become alloy through contact with "the Stone, the ecstatically united souls of the lovers" (7).

On man heavens influence workes not so,
 But that it first imprints the ayre,
 So soule into the soule may flow,
 Though it to the body first repaire. (57-60)

Donne, thus, reveals that the soul must have the body. He "finally achieves a reconciliation of the opposites" (Zimmerman 24) that resembles alchemy's "circular reunion of opposites, sulphur and mercury, male and female" (Cunnar 84):

As our blood labours to beget
 Spirits, as like soules as it can,
 Because such fingers need to knit
 That subtile knot, which makes us man;
 So must pure lovers soules descend

T'affections, and to faculties,
 Which sense may reach and apprehend,
 Else a great Prince in prison lies. (61-68)

In these lines, it is evident that the lovers must use their bodies in order to free their souls, which will otherwise "lie imprisoned like a great prince" (Zimmerman 24). The Spirits link the body and soul together, or tie them in a knot, just as *philisophic mercury* unites salt and sulphur. The refinement and physical union of the lovers' bodies will serve as an example obvious enough to catch the attention of, and thereby possibly instruct, the "Weake men" who, like the *Puffers* and the *Archimists*, would otherwise be drawn only to the superficial goals of alchemy:

To'our bodies turne wee then, that so
 Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
 Loves mysteries in soules do grow,
 But yet the body is his booke. (69-72)

The lovers are now in a state in which they can act as a *tincture*, meaning their mere presence can spark the transformation of others. Walker concludes her explication, stating that "for the most attuned, the 'some lover, such as we,' the 'dialogue of one,' which the unified souls now speak will offer a possibility of spiritual refinement such as the original lovers experienced" (Walker 7):

And if some lover, such as wee,
 Have heard this dialogue of one,
 Let him still marke us, he shall see
 Small change, when we'are to bodies gone. (73-76)

Throughout "The Extasie," Donne incorporates alchemical imagery to assist him in his efforts to resolve his personal dilemma over the nature of love. Personal experience makes him aware that sensual contact can result in a spiritual union that makes a perfectly-mixed love (body and soul) possible, just as the physical processes of alchemy can result in a spiritual union that makes the production of pure gold, as well as the stone or the elixir, possible. "The Extasie" is a poem of discovery in which Donne addresses all of the concerns he had about love in "Loves Alchymie," but with none of the previous cynicism.

In "The Good-Morrow," presumably written after "The Extasie" and Donne's marriage to Ann More, he reveals none of the sarcasm and bitterness present in "Loves Alchymie"; rather, he literally awakens to the possibilities of spiritual love and favorably uses alchemical imagery to express his dramatic realizations. The painstaking examination of love and experience he undertook in "The Ecstasy" seems to be behind him (Hunt 69). Consequently, he opens the poem with an oath and a burst of emotion:

I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
 Did, till we loved? (1-2)

Here, the lover is dramatizing the excitement of his first discovery of love. The lover, then, appears to be astonished to learn what he and his mistress have been missing. He claims that they have been simple-minded babies who have wasted their time on useless diversions or "country pleasures":

. . . were we not weaned till then?

But sucked on country pleasures, childishly? (2-3)

The lover goes so far as to say that they have been dead asleep and out of the world in all of their life up to now:

Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den? (4)

The lover, then, explains that, in comparison with the vivid actuality of the pleasure of love, all the other pleasures which he has known seem now to be mere "fancies," insubstantial and imaginary:

T'was so; but this, all pleasures fancies be. (5)

When the lover, next, refers to his earlier sexual conquests, he tells his mistress that she is the only woman who has made him realize true love. He now sees that the "beauties" (women whose charms are purely sensual) whom he has "got" physically are not real; they seem merely a "dream" of her and the actual love which she makes a reality:

If ever any beauty I did see,

Which I desired, and got, t'was but a dream of thee. (6-7)

At this point, Donne suggests that spiritual love is possible for the lover and this particular mistress, even though the other women the lover has previously known had only physical beauty to offer. As Donne makes his position perfectly clear in the second stanza, he incorporates alchemical imagery.

Here, he makes a distinction between love and lust, spiritual and physical, pure and base. The opening line reveals that "the love affair, unlike the lovers' earlier fleshly liaisons, has brought about an awakening of their souls and that their souls are now active agents of their experience of love" (Hunt 57):

And now good morrow to our waking souls, . . . (8)

As the lovers lie gazing at one another, they are not watching each other "out of fear." Their love is so strong that it overpowers or "controls" any desire which either lover might have to look at anyone else:

Which watch not one another out of fear;

For love, all love of other sights controls, . . . (9-10)

The lovers can now renounce all of the normal activities of life in the world, for they now have their own "little world." Theirs is a complete world, and "each [lover] has gained an entire world merely in possessing the other" (Hunt 59):

And makes one little room, an every where.

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
 Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown,
 Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one. (11-14)

This passage recalls alchemy, since the lovers have clearly achieved a love of perfect durability. Unquestionably, they have been regenerated or transformed to a higher level. The speaker and his mistress are the sulphur and mercury that the alchemist transmutes into gold or a state of perfection. The state of death, the lovers' sleep, represents the necessary return to the state of chaos from which the alchemist began his work. As Cunnar notes, "the reduction of base materials to the state of chaos or nothing allows the alchemist to recreate them from a state of putrefaction to one of purity" (79). In other words, the physical union of the lovers in the marriage bed has produced a purely spiritual love, just as the physical union of base materials yields the perfect soul of gold in the alchemical marriage bed, the "limbick" (Freccero 298). In addition, just as the base metals are altered physically by their transmutation, the lovers' faces manifest the new level of love experienced by their souls:

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
 And true plain hearts do in the faces rest, . . . (15-16)

The two discrete worlds of man and woman, body and spirit, sulphur and mercury are fused into a single globe. The couple's

new world of love has the perfect consistency of gold, and like gold, "it cannot be weakened by the dominance of any one element" (Crawshaw 345). Consequently, the lovers' pure and harmonious union will make their love permanent, since, as alchemical theory indicates, it is "a disproportion between constituents" that results in the decay of matter (345):

Where can we find two better hemispheres
 Without sharp North, without declining West?
 Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
 If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
 Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die. (17-21)

Donne's use of alchemical imagery is most clear, here. Since the couple's love is based on a union of souls, it can be characterized by the purity and constancy of the soul of gold, the stone, the elixir, the quintessence. Certainly, "The Good-Morrow" reveals Donne's joyous discovery of a wholly satisfying love which includes physical sex but which is essentially spiritual. In these lines, he resolves the bitter dilemma of "Loves Alchymie" as he learns that body and soul can be fully compatible in love. Donne indisputably employs alchemical concepts as the central means of integrating and understanding his personal revelations concerning love.

"A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" closely parallels "The Good-Morrow" in that it analogizes sensual love ("the gross union of the unstable fleshly matter of lovers' bodies") to matter

("the heterogeneous substance of the earth") and spiritual love ("the pure union of the eternal substance of lovers' souls") to the fifth essence or quintessence ("the homogeneous substance of the spheres") (Hunt 65). The "Valediction," which Izaak Walton contends Donne wrote for his wife, Ann, when he left for a journey to the continent with Sir Robert Drury in 1611 (Ray 337), is perhaps Donne's "most consistently spiritual" love poem (Andreasen 225). This spirituality and accompanying alchemical imagery is evident from the initial image of the poem--an image indicating a religious death and an alchemical separation:

As virtuous men passe mildly away,

And whisper to their soules, to goe, . . . (1-2)

The lover who delivers this farewell message is saying that the separation which he and his beloved must undergo is a kind of death. It is important to remember that, in spiritual alchemy, "the state of death or putrefaction represents the necessary return to the state of chaos or nothing from which God and the adept [the alchemist] begin their work" (Cunnar 79). One must also be aware that the reduction of "base materials to the state of chaos or nothing allows the adept to recreate them from a state of putrefaction to one of purity, which in turn is analogous to God's redemptive acts, especially at the resurrection and the second coming" (79). Thus, the separation of the lovers in the poem is like the death of a virtuous man, which is like the alchemical dissolution of the elements back

into chaos. Just as "virtuous men" (implying those who strongly believe in and are rightfully assured of life hereafter) die very calmly and unemotionally ("pass mildly away"), so should the speaker and his lady ("us") part calmly and unemotionally; both should have faith in their spiritual resurrections.

In this first stanza, Donne also pictures the people around the bedsides of these dying men trying to determine the exact moment of death:

Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,

The breath goes now, and some say, no. . . . (3-4)

Some of them believe that their dying friend has taken his last breath ("The breath goes now), but "other witnesses disagree and say, 'No he is still breathing'" (Ray 338). So, neither the dying men nor their friends are carrying on emotionally, which suggests, as the title implies, that there is no "mourning." As Ray points out, Donne is thus transferring "this lack of emotion and lack of noisy weeping at this death to the situation of the two lovers' parting" (338). Ray also states that the lovers should not shed tears at their physical parting, since "a virtuous man does not weep at his physical death" (338). The implication is that the lovers "should have confidence in a spiritual togetherness and life beyond mere physical separation" (338).

In the second stanza, Donne's speaker echoes alchemy's technical description of the dissolution (physical separation)

that is spiritual union: "So let us melt, . . ." (5). As Freccero notes, *melt* can mean "both dissolution or blending, at once a separation and a union" (298). Freccero further explains that *melt* is, thus, in the allegory of the alchemists, "variously represented as death and sexual union, while the still or 'limbeck' is alternately designated as a sepulchre or a marriage-bed" (298). Freccero makes alchemy's connection to sexual union and death even more clear, identifying the lovers as the alchemist's "Hermaphrodite" metal, composed of both a masculine and feminine principle. Plates from alchemy texts reveal that step five of the alchemical process presents the lovers as a married couple together in bed, while the next step shows them in a grave, their "'bodies putrefying in the tomb of glass'" (524). At the same time, Freccero states that "from the 'putrefaction' of the 'Hermaphrodite' is generated the seed of a new creature. Like the death of a Christian, this decomposition is also a birth" (298). Freccero emphasizes that this poem's parting of the lovers suggests the alchemical process in which materials (the married lovers) are broken down into distinct elements or parts (putrefied) before they are heated by flames and volatilized, passed off as vapor, in the limbeck. It is only then, when the quintessence (elixir or soul of gold), "the constituent matter of the heavenly bodies" (Webster's College Dictionary), rises in the limbeck, that spiritual union of male and female is achieved.

One senses, now, the relevance of Cunnar's comments

concerning Donne's use of the word *melt*. It is his claim that *melt* may also suggest that the lovers' separation, which is "no 'breach' but an 'expansion,' is inspired by the flames of divine love and that through the imaginative recreation of that separation in alchemical terms, [the separate lovers] will be transformed into a new whole" (85). He also points out that the term *melt* refers to the alchemical process in which the "body" is spiritualized and the "spirit" is materialized "through the agency of fire after the initial dissolution into chaos" (85). This information shows alchemy to be a "microcosmic recreation of the process of creation rather than simply an imitation of the results of creation," thus, revealing the lovers' separation to be "a regeneration of love in God's image" rather than a destruction of love (85). It is evident, then, that just as the Christian's spirit rises only after his or her death, the quintessence (*elixir* or *soul of gold*) rises only after the alchemist has reduced materials to a decayed or chaotic state. Clearly, then, the parting of the lovers is alchemical in nature, since it suggests the chemical severing of base matter's male and female principles, both of which will later spiritually unite when the purest substance of their essences rises in the heated *limbeck* to produce the "king of all substances" (the quintessence, the *elixir*, the *stone*, the *soul of gold*) and the love of all loves (Coudert 25). Thus, as one progresses through the poem, he or she understands that both the death of a virtuous man and the separation of the lovers stand for "a physical

separation and a spiritual union" (Freccero 298).

Since the lovers' parting is the sign of a more glorious reunion, the speaker does not want the two of them to sob noisily, reveal floods of tears, and exhibit storms of sighs:

. . . and make no noise,

No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move, . . . (5-6)

If the lovers were to display their love so emotionally, they would be lowering their love to the level of the layetie, the laymen in love:

T'were prophanation of our joyes

To tell the layetie our love. (7-8)

The implications are that the speaker and his lady have a true spiritual love and that the ordinary people (layetie) know only the ridiculous elements of Petrarchan love and/or the superficial elements of sensual love. The speaker continues to contrast the spiritual love he and his mistress have with the sensual love of ordinary worldly couples as he juxtaposes the "trepidation of the spheares" with the movement of the earth ("Moving of th'earth"):

Moving of th'earth brings harmes and feares,

Men reckon what it did and meant,

But trepidation of the spheares,

Though greater farre, is innocent. (9-12)

Ray explains the significance of these two conflicting images in

the following manner:

The speaker says that, when an earthquake occurs, it causes damages ("harms"), and men "reckon" (estimate or size up) the damage done ("what did it"). The earthquake also brings "fears": men are frightened by it and wonder what it "meant," whether or not it is divine punishment or warning, for example. But the movement or vibration or oscillation ("trepidation") attributed to the spheres, even though it is a far greater movement through the expanse of space as opposed to a mere earthquake on a limited portion of the earth, is "innocent" (i.e., harmless). Men do not look for damage, and they are not frightened by the "trepidation of the spheres." (338)

The two lovers are, thus, of the spheres, the spiritual, and not of the earth, the sensual. They are not afraid to part because mere physical separation cannot destroy their superior kind of love. Freccero provides, yet, further significance to these lines by noting that, "in some experiments, the 'spirit' of mercury [the female principle] was sometimes 'refined' by being whirled in a spherical container" (301). He, then, explains that "in Donne's macrocosm, the container is, of course, the vault of heaven, while 'Trepidation of the spheares' is the gently whirling of refinement" (301). Obviously, Donne is choosing alchemical method as the means by which his lovers achieve heavenly spiritual love and rise above earthly sensual love.

In stanza four, Donne further applies this contrast between

the spiritual and the physical:

Dull sublunary lovers love

(Whose soule is sense) cannot admit

Absence, because it doth remove

Those things which elemented it. (13-16)

Here, the "Dull sublunary lovers" are those lovers who are ordinary, earthly, and worldly; they communicate only on a physical level through their five senses. They cannot admit absence from each other, since their relationship depends entirely on their being together physically. Absence takes away the very things (their physical parts and selves) that elemented (made up) their love from each other. Thus, as Ray points out, "the analogy is made that the 'sublunary' lovers' parting is like the earthquake: it is a parting of their earth (their bodies, their flesh), and it damages (even destroys) their relationship" (339). He further explains that the ordinary lovers "would be frightened at the prospect of parting (just as men are of an earthquake)" (339). He, then, adds that these lovers "would be the ones to carry on emotionally and to be 'mourning'--the very things that the speaker tells his lady that he and she should not do, since their love is on a level much higher than that of the 'sublunary,' earthly, physical, changeable type of love" (339). Clearly, the speaker and his mistress have figuratively transcended the alchemical *chain* to a level consistent with the incorruptible spiritual and material purity of gold.

In the fifth stanza, Donne continues his contrast between earthly love and the "'love of the spheres'" and makes the alchemical imagery even more prevalent (Andreasen 227). When the speaker, in line 17, identifies the love he and his lady share as refin'd, one understands the alchemical relevance of the speaker's identification, in line 16, of the lustful love of common men as a love elemented of the flesh:

But we by a love, so much refin'd, . . . (17)

One realizes that *elemented* refers to "the four elements which composed all earthly matter and from which the alchemist 'refined' by extraction the spiritual essence of the quintessence, or the 'soul' of gold" (Hunt 215). As opposed to the dull earthly love of ordinary couples, the speaker and his lady's love is refin'd in its spiritual and intellectual nature and is, therefore, pure like the quintessence, elixir, stone, or soul of gold. This suggests, then, that their love is "comparable to the celestial spheres, and their physical parting is a movement like the 'trepidation of the spheres': it is 'innocent,' does no damage to their love, and should cause no fears to the partners" (Ray 339). Line 18 further reveals that "the refined love of the speaker and the lady is so perfect in its spiritual nature that they cannot even define it precisely" (339):

That our selves know not what it is, . . . (18)

Yet, despite the fact that their love is a spiritual mystery, it is "secure enough to make them 'Inter-assured of the mind'"

(Andreasen 227):

Inter-assured of the mind, . . . (19)

They "Care lesse" about missing one another's "eyes, lips, and hands," since they, unlike *sensual* lovers, do not need them to experience their love:

Care lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse. (20)

Here, one must understand that Donne is not denouncing physical love as he presents a spiritualizing love (Cunnar 90). This fifth stanza simply emphasizes that, even though the lovers cannot know what they love because they love the image of God (a figure whom earthlings cannot directly know) in their partner, they can reassure one another that separation will not matter because their love is refined and, just as the science of alchemy is, directed toward an eternal and spiritual object.

In the next stanza, Donne gives evidence that a significant alchemical process is now complete when the speaker directly asserts that the love he and his mistress share is a spiritual oneness:

Our two soules therefore, which are one, . . . (21)

Donne's lovers have experienced alchemical dissolution and, then, purification--the process that has reunited them through

expansion into a state in which the two souls are one (Cunnar 93):

Though I must goe, endure not yet

A breach, but an expansion, . . . (22-23)

Even though the speaker says he must go on his journey, their two souls (now one) nevertheless (yet) do not experience (endure) a breaking apart (breach). Clearly, the refin'd soul "will not suffer a 'breach' but an 'expansion' like that at Creation and like that which takes place in the retort or limbeck" (Cunnar 92). The spiritual bond between the lovers' two souls, which expands over the physical distance between them, will keep the lovers together. It is, then, alchemically significant that the speaker compares this expanding spiritual bond to the hammering out and expansion of a piece of gold, which is soft and can be beaten out in thin gold leaf:

Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate. (24)

Ray accurately says the gold leaf conceit is "ingeniously appropriate" as a reference to the speaker's love relationship because gold has an "expansible, malleable quality" and it connotes "ultimate beauty, purity, and value" (340).

Certainly, Ray's comments point out the line's alchemical importance, but Cunnar and Freccero stress much more about the gold leaf's connection to alchemy. Cunnar asserts that Donne is appropriately using the "gold leaf as a symbol for the

spiritualization of the body and the embodiment of the spirit, that is a fixation" (95). He further explains that the image of beaten leaf gold suggests the lovers' successful completion of the first alchemical stage (also known as the first stage of resurrection)--"the merging of the alchemically fixed [that which is pure and stable like gold--i.e. the couple's spiritual bond] and volatile [that which is changeable and inconsistent like all other base materials--i.e. the couple's physical attraction for one another]" (95).

In his effort to explain the beaten leaf gold image, Freccero quotes Basil Valentine, the famous medieval alchemist who believed (as all alchemists did) that in order to obtain the "'philosopher's gold,'" one had to begin with "earthly gold and extract its spirit"; in Basil's words, one had to begin with "'gold . . . beaten into the greatest possible thinness'" (299). Freccero shows that Donne is drawing parallels between love and alchemy, for the lovers represent the homogeneous mixture of mercury (female) and sulphur (male) which is gold. The connection becomes even more obvious when one considers that this gold is prepared by being beaten into gold leaf, since beaten gold will "react more readily with the Stone" (525). The lovers are, in their separation, this pure and constant thin beaten gold, suggesting that their absence from one another does not involve a severing, but rather an expansion. Freccero, then, specifies that the alchemists thought the extract or "'seed of gold'" was "the essential ingredient of any transmutation," since

gold was the only existing perfectly uniform mixture (299).

Freccero's commentary is relevant, for Donne, here, is clearly associating the transmutation of love with the beating of gold into gold leaf.

In the seventh stanza, Donne progresses from the alchemical image of gold leaf to that of the compass. Here, the speaker proposes that if they (the two souls of himself and the lady) are indeed two, then they are two in a special way in which they are also one:

If they be two, they are two so . . . (25)

To illustrate the truth of this paradox, he compares their two souls to "stiffe twin compasses":

As stiffe twin compasses are two, . . . (26)

The two legs are, of course, connected at the top, and this connection represents the spiritual bond between their souls, and the two legs represent their two souls. So, they are both separate and united in souls, just as the two legs of the drawing compass are both separate and united. At the bottom of the legs there is no connection, and the legs can be separated from each other to determine the distance desired before a circle is drawn. This separation of the legs when pulled apart on these ends, then, represents the physical distance between the speaker and his lady as he makes his journey--the important fact that he wants her to see, of course, is that they are still spiritually

together by the bond between the legs of the compass at the top.

Cunnar explains the alchemical significance of Donne's incorporation of the compass, here. The path of the compass suggests "the alchemical transmutation of base material or sinful nature to gold or spiritual perfection [which] represents the end of a cosmic and spiritual process [as well as] the recreation and restoration of the original divine state of being" (96). In other words, the lovers, who now operate as a compass does, reveal their pure spiritual love when they physically separate, remain spiritually bound, complete an entire revolutionary process, and return to one another in their original and perfect state. The image of the compass also calls to mind the alchemical *ouroboros*, or the serpent devouring its own tail, another emblematic symbol of the circular nature of the alchemical process (96). But, most importantly, the compass indicates the alchemical symbol of gold (a circle with a dot placed perfectly in its center) and, thus, represents alchemy's "circular reunion of opposites, sulphur and mercury, male and female, [which] produces the Stone" (Cunnar 84). More specifically, the compass traces the circular path of the rising of *female mercurial spirit* and *male sulphuric soul* from base matter (the body) in the heated *limbeck* and subsequent return of these two heavenly and pure substances to the earthly material that remains at the base of *limbeck*. The matter or body will, then, be resurrected by its reunion with the *spirit* and *soul*. The return of the heavenly essences to physical matter, of

course, marks the production of the stone and the discovery of the elixir, quintessence, and soul of gold--the completion of the alchemical process.

The compass image becomes even more explicit when the speaker designates the "fixed foot" of the compass (the one that stays firmly in place while the other foot is drawn outward from it) as analogous to the lady's soul:

Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show

To move, but doth, if the'other doe.

And though it in the center sit, . . . (27-29)

This analogy is, of course, logical, since she is indeed the one who will be remaining in place while the speaker makes the journey away from her; yet, the correspondence is also alchemically significant. In spiritual alchemy, as Mazzeo notes, "any substance possessing an active generative principle was called masculine, and the passive substances, acted upon by the active ones, were called feminine" (112). It is certainly, then, appropriate for Donne, as he continues to present love in alchemical terms, to give the lady the passive role while representing the speaker's soul as the active other foot that "far doth roam":

Yet when the other far doth roome, . . . (30)

Next, the speaker says that, while her *fixt* foot remains firmly in the center, it *leanes* and *hearkens* at the top outward toward

the moving foot:

It leanes, and hearkens after it, . . . (31)

Symbolically, her soul also pulls toward and communicates attentively with his soul spiritually over the physical distance. Alchemically, her soul is the mercurial "spirit" and his soul is the sulphuric "soul," both of which are gently extracted from the body (the two share a purely spiritual bond while apart), but remain in contact with it from afar, refreshing it from time to time. Upon the speaker's return home, the soul (man) and spirit (woman) reunite with and, thus, rejuvenate the body:

And growes erect, as that comes home. (32)

The tension is released as the lovers, still functioning like the two legs of the compass, come together.

The final stanza emphasizes that her soul is like the *fixt* foot of the compass and that it is her *firmnes* that allows him to draw a perfect circle, just as the fixed foot of the compass must stay absolutely firm in its place for a perfect circle to be drawn by the other foot:

Such wilt thou be to mee, who must

Like th'other foot, obliquely runne;

Thy firmnes makes my circle just,

And makes me end, where I begunne. (33-36)

The *firmnes* applied to her soul here is her constancy and her

fidelity--the speaker compliments her character highly. In fact, she is at the center of their love relationship, just as the fixed foot is at the center of the circle. And, the circle is the symbol of their perfect love relationship, since it represents infinity and something unending. Their spiritual love relationship is, therefore, perfect and undying--it corresponds to the celestial circles of the infinite spheres that the speaker earlier compared their love to. Their spiritual love is also analogous to the pure and incorruptible alchemical elixir, stone, quintessence, or soul of gold. The speaker, then, can end where he began through her firmness and their spiritual unity--he can close the perfect circle of their love and return home to one that he was only physically separated from, rather than spiritually separated from, to begin with. According to Freccero, the final step in the alchemical process has now been achieved, for "when the 'spirit' [female mercury] reaches its point of celestial purity, both it and the soul [male sulphur] return to the body which is thereby coagulated, 'fixed' in the form of celestial, glorified gold, now capable of turning into gold all that it touches" (301). The couple can, thus, function as the tincture transforming other base matter into gold--the absolute climax of the alchemist's work.

Throughout the "Valediction," then, Donne has consistently incorporated alchemical process as an analogy of love. His lovers have been able to prove the purity of their spiritual love--a love that the separation created by time and distance

cannot destroy. They need not mourn at their farewells, since the two of them are never, in the most important sense, really parting at all. The compass reveals not only the full revolution and completion of the alchemical process, but also the perfection and completeness the speaker and his lady discover in their love. The couple has achieved a love that not only has the purity of alchemy's stone, elixir, quintessence, or soul of gold, but it also has the transmutatory ability of the most highly prized tincture. Clearly, Donne's reliance on alchemical imagery becomes increasingly more prevalent as his faith in an invincible integrated love that is essentially spiritual becomes undeniably more powerful.

In "A Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies Day," Donne finally utilizes alchemical imagery as a means of discovering the hope and faith necessary for his own survival in a world of chaos, death, and decay. Many agree with John T. Shawcross that Donne's employment of the name "Lucy" is not an indication that he wrote the poem for Lucy, the Countess of Bedford, or Lucy Donne, his daughter. Shawcross and others contend that "the name 'Lucy' is not as important as the feelings associated with the festival day and that the actual circumstance is the death of Donne's wife, Ann More, in August, 1617, thus leading to Donne's writing of the poem focusing on St. Lucy's Day a few months later" (Ray 242). Because the poem is emotionally violent, it is "tempting to think that only the death of Donne's wife, two and a half years after he had committed himself to the greater love of God, could have

caused emotion of this kind" (Novarr 126). "A Nocturnall" is overwhelming evidence that "Donne had a lifelong interest in alchemy and frequently used alchemical symbolism to vivify his thoughts," particularly his thoughts concerning the love he shared with his wife, Ann (Hayes 56). Clearly, it is the spiritual resurrection and reunion suggested by alchemy that saves Donne from complete despair after Ann's death and allows him to abandon his dark and lonely world (earth) for the love and promise of heaven.

The poem's first stanza, as Hayes contends, "describes the hyperbolic 'death' of the world" (56). Donne (if one considers the poem autobiographical) notes that it is midnight, in the "dead of night" preceding St. Lucy's Day and that this night also is the midnight for the year itself--the longest period of darkness and the "dead of the year":

'Tis the yeares midnight, and it is the dayes, . . . (1)

It is a day that reveals (unmaskes) itself for hardly more than seven hours (i.e., of daylight):

Lucies, who scarce seaven houres herself unmaskes, . . . (2)

The stars are portrayed as *flasks* of gunpowder that are almost exhausted, sending forth only bare squibs (like flashes from firecrackers) of light:

The Sunne is spent, and now his flasks

Send forth light squibs, no constant rayes; . . . (3-4)

So, as Ray specifies, "the darkness of the day and of the year is almost total, reflecting the darkness of death and despair that he [Donne] feels with the absence of the light, vitality, and life itself of the woman whose death he is lamenting" (242). The sap or balme of the world has itself sunk and disappeared:

The worlds whole sap is sunke:

The generall balme th'hydroptique earth hath drunk, . . .

(5-6)

Hayes asserts that, here, Donne is "parodying the medieval alchemical and hermetical concept of the eternal God-created macrocosm by personifying it as a dying man" (56). The balme here is "the life-preserving fluid that was believed to exist in every living being, the disappearance of which would bring death—an idea of Paracelsus" (Ray 242). Therefore, to Donne, the world itself seems dead, and, indeed, he compares the world to a body on its deathbed:

Whither, as to the beds-feet, life is shrunke,

Dead and enterr'd; yet all these seeme to laugh,

Compar'd with mee, who am their Epitaph. (6-8)

Clearly, he is suggesting that the death of this woman (wife Ann) means the death of the world and of life itself to him. Yet, he proceeds to stress that he is far more dead, stating that everything "he has designated as being dead or near-dead [seems]

vibrant and laughing when compared to his own dead status as an epitaph for all else" (Ray 242). The picture Donne creates intimates that his lover's "burial in the earth is equivalent to the life of the earth sinking and shrinking, leaving all humanity and life on the surface withered and dead," and indicates that he, himself, is "the epitome of all this deadness, indeed the receptacle in which all the deadness is concentrated" (242-243). Donne is certainly deeply affected by the extinction of what was for him the universe's life-giving force, his Sunne, his inspiration, his love--his dear wife, Ann. Here, Hayes notes that "the corpse-like earth [with the sun at its lowest ebb] epitomizes the poet's despair" (56).

Since he is the epitaph for all deadness, Donne, in the second stanza, exhorts all other lovers (who still will be living in the spring, which he calls a "next world," a new world for them after the deadness of winter) to study him:

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee

At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:

For I am every dead thing,

In whom love wrought new Alchimie. (9-12)

They will see that "love reversed all normal processes of ['Alchimie'] in him. Rather than taking ingredients to arrive at the life-giving ['quintessence'], love as an alchemist 'expressed' (squeezed out) from 'nothingnesse' a quintessence"

(Ray 243):

For his art did expresse

A quintessence even from nothingnesse, . . . (13-14)

Donne's quintessential nothingnesse came from other nothings, such as privations (possibly entailing "deprivations of emotions," "deprivations of the company of the loved one," and "deprivation of the loved one's life itself") lean emptiness ("dispiritedness and despair after her death that wasted him away physically, emotionally, and spiritually"), absence, darknesse, and death (Ray 243):

From dull privations, and leane emptinesse:

He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot

Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not. (15-18)

All of the preceding are "things which are not" or *nothingnesse*, and he is the greatest state of *nothingnesse* that can be formed from all of these conditions that love subjected him to. He was "collapsed into ruins by nothings and paradoxically rebuilt into an utter state of nothingness" (Ray 243). Instead of the "'Elixir of All,'" the alchemist, love, has produced the "quintessence of nothingness" (Duncan 280).

In this second stanza, Hayes is able to uncover the hope and spiritual message Donne finds in alchemy, stressing that "with this sudden realization of the reborn world, the poet, through a 'new Alchimie,' even though 'ruin'd' from 'dull privations, and

leane emptinesse,' is to be 're-begot' out of the 'quintessence' of 'nothingnesse.' The 'old' alchemy, presumably, worked with things, but love has created a 'new' alchemy which uses nothings -- 'absences,' even death, to create new essences" (56). Hayes further suggests that, "to Donne, the awaiting spectacle of the rising sun on St. Lucy's day symbolizes the world's reawakening to a new life" (57). He, next, appropriately recalls the role of the alchemist (who is, in this poem, personified love) as one who "creates and destroys only to re-create out 'Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not'" (57). Hayes, then, concludes that "out of the celebration of loss comes the surprise that something more remarkable has been created than existed under the 'old' alchemy, that is, when the two lovers were alive" (57). Thus, Donne reveals his faith in a purely spiritual love (a love which transcends any love man can find on earth) and indicates his willingness to await steadfastly his alchemical-like regeneration from his current state of putrefaction, and subsequent glorious reunion with his one true love.

The third stanza proceeds with further differences in love's alchemy. Duncan notes that "the first two lines of the stanza describe those quintessences of everything which are the usual preparations of alchemists" (281):

All others [alchemists], from all things, draw all that's good,
Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have; . . .

Duncan also mentions that the description in these lines "conforms closely to Paracelsus' description of the quintessence":

The quintessence, then, is a certain matter extracted from all things which Nature has produced, and from everything which has coporeally in itself, . . . and separated from all elements. . . . [T]he quintessence is, so to say, a nature, a force, a virtue, and a medicine. . . . The same is also the colour, the life, the properties of things. (281)

He, then, contends that these same two lines, "by the implication of contrasts, help to make clear the state of the poet, who is the 'grave' of everything that is nothing, the quintessence of nothingness, expressed or drawn by the alchemist, love, from the opposite of everything--from nothingness, privation, emptiness, absence, darkness, and death" (282). Some of the steps whereby love as alchemist has accomplished this result (the quintessence of nothingness) are detailed in the remainder of the stanza.

First, love appears as the *limbecke* in which Donne's transfiguration was performed:

I, by loves *limbecke*, am the grave
Of all, that's nothing. . . . (21-22)

His love or "love affair was the *limbeck*, or alchemical vessel, which transformed him into the quintessence of misery and nothingness" (Andreasen 156-157). Donne presents the *limbecke* as "the burial place, the earthly repository, of all that is

nothing, as opposed both to normal alchemy that tries to make concrete somethings of value out of inferior ingredients and to the normal process of life itself which allows humans to draw out of everything that exists the good qualities that generate and sustain life" (Ray 243). Love's alchemical-like process caused Donne and his lady to be "the whole world, but in weeping they drowned the world (like the Old Testament flood) . . ." (243). Thus, their "destroyed world is [another] 'nothing' coming from something" (243):

. . . Oft a flood

Have wee two wept, and so

Drownd the whole world, us two; oft did we grow . . . (22-24)

Also, if they had to divert themselves from their own world of each other, they became like Chaosses (primordial states of disorder)--these Chaosses are, once again, nothings coming from previous somethings:

To be two Chaosses, when we did show

Care to ought else; . . . (25-26)

Here, it is likely that Donne extracted both terms, chaos and flood, from a Hermetic context. Although interpretations of chaos vary, Duncan believes that Donne is probably thinking of it as a "'general expression for all aerial matter,' a meaning which Paracelsus often gives the word" (283). Moreover, Duncan holds that the word, flood, is of Hermetic origin. A flood seems to

have been a phenomenon or "situation to be avoided in the progress of the work," and Duncan supports this view with a quotation from Ashmole's Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum (283):

Let him drinke noe more than will suffice,
Beware of Floods I you advise. (283)

Hayes adds that, in these lines, there exists an additional "hermetical macrocosm-microcosm motif [emphasizing] the seriousness of love's absence" (57). Hayes claims that Donne is reintroducing the liquid imagery present in the first stanza and contends that alchemy's dissolution process is evident. He explains that this dissolution process "microcosmically, refers to the alchemical belief that no operation should be performed until all materials are reduced to a liquid" (57). Donne is, thus, imaginatively duplicating primal *chaos* in order to effectively contrast "ethereal and intellectual love with earthly and sexual love" (57). Donne continues to juxtapose the spiritual with the physical in the stanza's final lines:

. . . and often absences

Withdrew our soules, and made us carcasses. (26-27)

These lines suggest that while Donne and his lady were absent from one another during physical separation in this perfect love, he had her soul with him and she had his soul with her; therefore, his body was a dead one (a carcass) without his soul in it, and hers was a carcass without her soul in it--"each body became a 'nothing' that previously was a something" (Ray 243).

The assertions in the third stanza present love's strange alchemy during Donne and his lady's life together. But, in the fourth stanza, Donne says that this state of "first nothingness" cannot compare to the end of love's alchemy, the appearance of the *Elixer* itself after the lady's death. The episodes of deprivation, emptiness, and absence in the two lovers' lives are, thus, as Donne "looks back on them, antecedent . . . operations by the which the alchemist love was preparing to make him [Donne] the elixir of nothingness. They are accidents involving those 'materials' out of which, as the poet has said, love expressed him, the elixir" (Duncan 283). The adjoined statement in parentheses, "which word wrongs her," is an expression of alchemy's religious conviction that "physical death is not really death at all" (283). Indeed, the word *death* wrongs the lady, since Donne is assured of her eternal life. However, he cannot yet enjoy this state himself--he is himself the quintessence or *Elixer of nothingness*:

But I am by her death, (which word wrongs her)

Of the first nothing, the *Elixer* grown; . . . (28-29)

The death of the lady, then, was the final step needed in the process of love's alchemy to create this *Elixer*. Donne now feels "he is no longer even a man" (Ray 244). In fact, "he is not a man, not even an animal, not even a plant, not even a stone" (244):

Were I a man, that I were one,
 I needs must know; I should preferre,
 If I were any beast,
 Some ends, some means; Yea plants, yea stones detest,
 And love; All, all some properties invest; . . . (30-34)

The poet reveals that "he has no attributes of any of these levels of creatures--no choice, desire, instinct, response, movement, attraction, repulsion. He is not a something at all" (Ray 244). But, even worse, "he is not even an 'ordinary nothing,' such as an insubstantial 'shadow,' which at least has a body that produces it" (244):

If I an ordinary nothing were,
 As shadow, a light, and body must be here. (35-36)

So, Donne is more nothing than a nothing. Indeed, he feels as if he is the Elixer or quintessence of nothingnesse--he is in utterly hopeless despair. Yet, Donne's alchemical vision, as stanza five reveals, does not allow him to remain in this depressed state.

The last stanza is "a consolation where resurrection and rebirth are prepared for" (Hayes 57). Since his love is lost, Donne begins the stanza by saying that his Sunne (the lady) will not renew, will not return:

But I am None; nor will my Sunne renew. (37)

As Ray notes, "This cleverly follows from the shadow having a body and a sun to cast the shadow: Donne has neither a body nor a sun (the lady). Again, he is 'none,' nothing" (244). Then, he addresses again the lovers spoken of in the second stanza, "those who will be able to experience love again in the spring (in contrast to Donne)" (244). He tells them that "the 'lesser Sunne' (i.e., the literal sun in the sky: It is 'lesser' than the most important 'Sunne' for Donne, his lady) has now (at the winter solstice) entered the constellation of Capricorn" (244):

You lovers, for whose sake, the lesser Sunne
 At this time to the Goat is runne
 To fetch new lust, and give it you,
 Enjoy your summer all; . . . (38-41)

Here, the stanza includes "a pointed reference to alchemy's accompanying pseudo-science, astrology" (Hayes 58). The name Capricorn signifies Goat, and "the goat is its zodiacal sign" (Ray 244). Hayes explains that "at the winter solstice the sun has 'runne' to the lascivious Capricorn 'Goat' to 'fetch new lust' for the new lovers introduced in stanza two" (58). The Sunne literally plucks "passion and love" out of Capricorn and beams down "this fertility and energy into lovers in the spring" (Ray 244). Here, Donne is "begrudgingly [recognizing] the coming of spring and the new lovers for whom the sun has brought new lust" (Hayes 58). Although "that sun" will return, Donne's sun, wife Ann, will not. He must now believe in and rely on a

completely spiritual love, since all physical contact has been extinguished, making a perfectly mixed integrated love impossible. Yet, he tells the other lovers to enjoy their coming summer of love, clearly emphasizing the fact that he himself is excluded from such:

Since shee enjoyes her long nights festivall,
 Let mee prepare towards her, and let mee call
 This houre her Vigill, and her Eve, since this
 Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is. (42-45)

Donne knows he must accept this change and have faith in the alchemical bond which still attaches him to his lost love. He resigns to prepare towards his lady, his love, his wife who has died. *Prepare*, here, suggests the spiritual preparation he is making on this St. Lucy's festival that he also equates with his dead lady's "long nights festivall." So, "the long night preceding St. Lucy's Day symbolizes also the long night of death anticipating release through resurrection" (Ray 244). Donne himself will have to "bear lingering a long 'night' on earth before he eventually can join [his] lady in death and the festival of resurrection" (245). The "deep midnight" of the winter solstice expresses the dark, cold, lonely, unending grief and isolation he must endure in his remaining earthly days until such release. Donne concludes by making "the last line of the poem [return] full circle to its first line, suggesting perhaps the seemingly endless cycle of no progression in his earthly

life. His life remains now at midnight of the longest night of the year" (245). Yet, the circular nature of the poem also indicates the completion of the alchemical process, the cycle of death and rebirth, the combining of man and woman, the unity of body, soul, and spirit. In addition, the circle may represent the perfect and immortal spiritual love Donne and his lady still share despite their physical separation. Donne knows he must dismiss his earthly existence and ready himself for a heavenly one; he awaits the joyous spiritual reunion that will make absolute, incorruptible, and inseparable the alchemical bond shared by him and his love, his life, his Ann.

In conclusion, Donne demonstrates, from "Loves Alchymie" to "The Extasie" and then from "The Extasie" to "The Good-Morrow," a progression of thought. After tensely expressing his disillusionment with love and its physical nature in "Loves Alchymie," he, in "The Extasie," examines his experience with a new kind of love--one that is both sensual and spiritual. His intellectual struggle with love and careful analysis of love present in "The Extasie" is then completely resolved in "The Good-Morrow," where he dramatically celebrates his understanding of and revelatory experience with a love that is mostly spiritual. Donne's developing attitude concerning the nature of love, so evident in these three poems, can be detected in his employment of alchemical concepts. His reliance on such alchemical imagery reaches its height in later poems. After writing "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (1611), which may be

"a conscious reworking, at a later date, of some of the materials of 'The Good-Morrow'" (Hunt 230), he discloses in "A Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies Day" that his only hope for a meaningful existence depends on the alchemical premise of spiritual transcendence. Thus, alchemy provides Donne with a means by which he can not only comprehend an ideal integrated love--achieve a unity of body, soul, and spirit--but also find the strength to overcome the tragic loss of his wife, Ann, by anticipating a most glorious resurrection and subsequent loving reunion with her spirit in heaven. Donne's life vision truly becomes one that is based on the great possibilities of alchemy, the science of love.

CHAPTER III

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF JOHN DONNE'S ALCHEMY: A SUMMARY OF THE DONNE/ALCHEMY RELATIONSHIP

Alchemy provides John Donne with a complete life vision--a comprehensive explanation of love and existence in both the physical and spiritual worlds. His love poems, interpreted autobiographically, reveal his lifelong interest in alchemy as a means of defining the nature of all processes, all things, and all beings. In a simple, logical manner, he employs the basic components of alchemy--the primary transforming vessel (the *limbeck*) and the desired end product (the stone, *elixir*, *quintessence*, *tincture*). The *limbeck*, his most relied upon image, is the heated retort in which the pure spiritual heavenly essence (the alchemical end product) of flawed physical earthly matter separates itself and rises to the highest level suggested by the *chain of alchemy* as well as the *chain of beings* and *angels*. In the absence of the spirit, the base material or body liquefies, decays, or dies. Upon completion of its circular path, the pure spiritual essence (alchemy's desired end product which transforms all it comes into contact with) reunites with the physical element and subsequently transforms it. The physical matter or body becomes cleansed by the renewed presence of the pure spiritual essence or spirit and is, thus, resurrected--elevated to a more perfect state. Clearly, Donne believes that life can be explained in terms of the death and rebirth cycle, known in alchemy as the putrefaction-regeneration

theory.

Since all life can be interpreted in such a way, Donne conceives of a spiritual love and existence that will transcend physical love and existence. Yet, Donne's faith in alchemy's religious or spiritual implications took time to develop. He, first, had to overcome his reservations about the possibility of spiritual love bonding in a world that seemed mostly physical. Certainly, Donne is able to dismiss these doubts concerning the likelihood of a higher form of love suggested by alchemy when he realizes he and Ann More have discovered spiritual love and their physical natures have been transformed by the union of their souls. He recognizes that he and Ann have established a perfectly mixed integrated love--a love with the incorruptibility and consistency of gold. Their bodies, souls, and spirits have achieved a oneness that is both pure and everlasting.

His belief in his alchemical vision, then, becomes most crucial when the alchemical bond between him and his wife is severed, and he is left to deteriorate in the physical world alone. Rather than remaining in utter and unqualified despair, Donne recalls the alchemical premise of regeneration, rebirth, resurrection, spiritual reunion. Because he sincerely trusts that something more remarkable will be created in heaven than existed when he and Ann were lovers on earth, he is able to find the courage to endure a miserable existence that allows him no sensual contact with her. Thus, he miraculously views their separation not as a destruction of love, but rather as a

regeneration of love in God's image. Alchemy is, for Donne, a religious vision that provides him with an understanding of life and the promise of a sacred reunion with his beloved Ann in the glory and splendor of heaven.

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