

THE COMPLETE POETRY
and SELECTED PROSE OF
JOHN DONNE

EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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INTRODUCTION

BY CHARLES M. COFFIN

IN 1880 Matthew Arnold was thinking about the future of poetry. It was “immense”—enough, probably, to shore up the modern spiritual life sagging from the decay of Christian orthodoxy. He did not, I am sure, expect that the seventeenth-century poetry of John Donne would figure in this future. Donne was not represented in the anthology that Arnold was introducing; moreover, he was not classical in the sense that the “touchstones” and the “high-seriousness” required. Yet, within fifty years Donne had made an extraordinary place in the “immensity.” In fact, in the twentieth century he has been the poet to whom English and American readers most often have turned—though not exclusively—not for compensation for the lost religion, but for just such an enlargement of our view of man and a sharpening of our insight into his complication as the poet can give—in short, in Arnold’s phrase, for a “criticism of life.”

Our concern with Donne’s poetry has been pretty high for almost half a century. If a point were to be set to mark its beginning, I should say that 1912 would serve, the year when Professor Grierson published his great edition of the poems—though that date is arbitrary, for already the Muses Library text was in wide circulation, and in 1905 Charles Eliot Norton had made his selection of the “love poems.” Edmund Gosse’s two volumes of *The Life and Letters* had come out in 1899. It was obvious that something was going on, and that it might go further than a “revival” had been anticipated by George Saintsbury, who in 1896 had warned readers of Donne’s genius for attracting the *coterie* or for winning admirers “this side idolatry,” and admitted that only a stiff critical resistance had moderated his own enthusiasms. By the twenties the interest had reached a pitch. The “cult” of Donne was here. At the same time, a company of considerable poets put in their appearance—one could name most of the important ones who came into prominence here and in England after the First War—whose work clearly showed that they had been reading Donne. Even those who had not yet made his acquaintance—if their verses had the ruffled movement of “spoken” music, a metaphor mingling objects of sense and in-

tellect, and an excitement of language generally—their critics marked them with Donne's influence.

In 1921, Grierson's *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems* added further to Donne's prestige, and to that of the school of "metaphysical" poets with whom he had been associated since Dr. Johnson's *Life of Cowley*. The appearance of this book occasioned the review by T. S. Eliot, which now has become a classic among the papers on the seventeenth-century poets. Eliot remarked their capacity for "direct sensuous apprehension of thought," their possession of a "mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience," indicative of the unified sensibility which he regarded as a condition essential to their peculiar accomplishment.¹ Thus, with a stroke, Eliot lightened the burden of Johnson's long-standing judgment of the Metaphysicals, that "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together," by attributing to an accepted source of weakness the cause of their special strength.

The prestige of Donne in these years could be measured not only by the number of editions and reprints of his poetry which were coming out, but also by the fact that its popularity had authorized the recovery of his prose. In 1931, however, when the three-hundredth anniversary of his death was being celebrated, Eliot thought that the peak had been reached and that Donne's poetry was a matter of current concern, not likely to enlist the attentions of the future.² No doubt Donne had surrendered the office of "poets' poet" which earlier he had filled. Yet, now, almost twenty years later, the scholars and critics are still busy with him, as their numerous papers on his language, his rhetoric and meter, and his biography show; and his poetry is still a discovery for the young reader or for those who have heard his verse read for the first time by a sensitive and experienced voice like that of Austin Warren in his recent recordings. This discovery has been summed up by F. R. Leavis, who, confident in his earlier judgment, has but recently reissued the declaration that for us Donne "obviously is a living poet in the most important sense."³

The impression possibly given that everyone has approved and liked the kind of "living poet" that Donne is needs correction. His reputation has been made too fast, some would say, and often

¹ "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), in *Selected Essays 1917-1932* (New York, 1932), pp. 246, 247.

² "Donne in Our Time," in *A Garland for John Donne 1631-1931*, ed. Theodore Spencer (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), p. 5.

³ "The Line of Wit," chap. 1, *Revaluation* (New York, 1947), p. 11.

at the expense of his betters. They have sensed something probably spurious about the whole affair, that we have "kidnapped" Donne rather than taken possession of him by the lawful means of sound literary judgment and a proper consideration of history. C. S. Lewis, for example, though sensible enough not to "deplore" history, has tried to ameliorate its ill effects by "explanation." Something has gone wrong with the modern world to make it especially hospitable to Donne: "an element of dandyism in Donne" has called to the "dandyism (largely of Franco-American importation) in the modern world"; or, it has lost its ear—"most modern readers do not know how to scan"—so that although "Donne may be metrically good or bad, in fact," it is "obvious that he might be bad without offending the great body of his modern admirers."⁴

The resistance to Donne centers upon his failure to square with "the tradition." Some years ago Eliot asked quite frankly if it was not time for us to regard Donne and his kind—the Herberts, King, Crashaw, Marvell, Vaughan, Cowley "at his best"—as being in the direct current of English poetry.⁵ Answers have been given, affirmatively, like that of Cleanth Brooks in *Modern Poetry and the Tradition*, but there has been no consensus. Very likely the difficulty goes back pretty far, possibly to Ben Jonson, in whose ambiguous esteem his "true friend" was "the first poet in the world for some things," but "for not keeping of accent deserved hanging." Jonson reckoned that "for not being understood" Donne would perish, ironically aware that his own delight in his friend's learning and subtlety (he was "Longer a knowing, than most wits doe live") was not likely to be shared by everyone. "Obscure" and "difficult" are certainly words often used against Donne, and that he could be "harsh"—"My minde, neither with prides itch, nor yet hath been / Poyson'd with love to see, or to bee seene"—as well as harmonious, is well known, for he took pleasure in disturbing the composure of sound and sense which Spenser and Daniel had been teaching the poets. There are other "heresies": his distaste for the conventional Elizabethan love poetry—

Rebell and Atheist too, why murmure I,
As though I felt the worst that love could doe?

⁴ "Donne and Love Poetry in the Seventeenth Century," in *Seventeenth Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert Grierson* (Oxford, 1938), esp., pp. 71-72.

⁵ "The Metaphysical Poets," in *op. cit.*, p. 250.

Love might make me leave loving, or might trie
A deeper plague, to make her love mee too,

—and the irresponsibilities of taste and license of the youthful Elegies; and, above all, the bold analogues, or the “heterogeneity” of material which he coerced into his metaphors.

Yet, lines like these from *The Good-Morrow*, offered by Leavis in support of his judgment, can be submitted in reply to his critics:

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

And the counter-statement could easily be extended.

Expectedly, the situation which I have summarized excites an interest in explanations—and many of them have been written. One important line which they have followed, though not the only one, remarks the fundamental compatibility—less cautious writers have said “similarity”—of Donne’s time and our own. A matter of such scope and complication, obviously, cannot be arbitrated here; but the historical significance which Donne is felt to have is noteworthy, especially as he lived in a great period and, admittedly, expressed so complete an interest in it. He was born in London in 1571 or 1572, and he died near there in 1631. His life, then, was roughly coincident with Shakespeare’s, Francis Bacon’s, and Ben Jonson’s; a little later than Spenser’s, though overlapping nearly three decades. This was the age of the high Renaissance in England, and of its decline: Elizabethan England at its zenith and its setting and the shadowy years of the first two Stuart kings.

Comparing this period with the Greece of Pindar and Sophocles, Arnold remarks that then “the poet lived in a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power; society was, in the fullest measure, permeated with fresh thought, intelligent and alive.” The word “animating” or “animation”—the life in motion—which has the full connotation of his idea, might be taken as a suitable designation of possibly the most powerful quality of the Renaissance. There is the life

and motion expressed outward, in the exploration of new lands and in the discovery of new facts in nature, in the earth and in the heavens; and, in the enlargement of the range of thought and sensation through the new association with the old classical literature and learning. There is also the reciprocal motion inward, increasing the sense of personal involvement in the world, and giving somehow a sense of responsibility for it, which placed man more nearly in the center of his own attentions and at the focus of all the animating forces.

There is at the same time the paradoxical "motion in corruption," as Donne puts it, the "breaking up" of history. Significantly, for example, there is the crumbling out "to his Atomies" of the old world-order, the massive body of moral and spiritual experience and natural learning which the logic of the Schoolmen and the Doctors of the Church had forged into a system of objective truth comprehending the totality of man's physical and metaphysical relations. The breakup of the feudal hierarchy and of the medieval Christian community are institutional aspects of the dissolution. Further, the movement toward the heightened individualism carried with it an inclination for self-analysis and introspection, ironically productive of anxiety and the feeling of personal isolation. Some time later Sir Thomas Browne, viewing the separation of the natural and the spiritual worlds which had come about, termed man that "great and true Amphibium," who was "disposed to live in divided and distinguished worlds." The extraordinary thing about the Renaissance is that then man could somehow inhabit the divided universe. For a brief period, at least, the power of old beliefs and values, surviving beyond the philosophical-theological structures in which earlier they were maintained, and a fine confidence in human worth—in the mind and in all of the "faculties of the soul"—collaborated to produce the sensibility which could apprehend significance in the total "heterogeneity" of the universe. And the fluid, unfixed state of the language of the period was the exact medium for the poets to present the complexity of the situation.

All this is reflected in Donne, in his writings and in his life, and a great deal is known about his life as well as about his texts. His own large correspondence in both verse and prose; the occasional pieces associated with identifiable persons and events; the explicitly autobiographical statements and allusions introduced into books and sermons; the memorial verses and other writings of friends, or such lively notes as William Drummond made of his conversations about Donne with Ben Jonson,

the official references in public documents; and, finally, the contemporary *Life* by Izaak Walton, constitute sources supplying a greater quantity of biographical information about Donne than exists for any other important English writer before John Milton.

The customary treatment of this material gives Donne three periods. The first shows us "Jack Donne" of the Town, prodigal of his fortune as well as of his affections, yet brilliantly ensconced in a courtly office until his secret marriage "above his class" to the niece of his employer lost him his post and all prospects of getting another. In the second period Donne is the distressed husband and father and the melancholy scholar, depending upon the generosity of friends and patrons, his fate oscillating between hope and disappointment until finally he accepted the invitation to take orders in the English Church. The last is the period of the divine, the Dean of Saint Paul's. His literary career is usually drawn into correspondence with his life, so that there is first the satirist and the cynical, rebellious love poet; then the poet of "sincere" love, sober verses, and scholarly books; and, at the end, the eloquent preacher and the author of holy sonnets and devotions. Both arrangements, however, are far too rigid and full of inaccuracies. The poetry especially has been forced into the formula by a zeal for biographical interpretation, which, in turn, has been made to argue the partitioning of his life.

Some particularization is in order. Donne came of a prosperous Roman Catholic family. His first teachers were Jesuits. He attended both Oxford and Cambridge, but received a degree from neither university because he could not take the oath required at graduation. He was admitted to the study of law, first at Thavies Inn and then at Lincoln's Inn. Early in the London years, having come into a considerable fortune, he became free to follow his native bent. He spent his money, at the theatre, on books and pleasures, and on travel on the Continent. In 1596 and 1597 he saw service under the popular Earl of Essex in the Cadiz expedition and the "Islands Voyage." Meanwhile, he had become the friend of the poet Christopher Brooke, his chamber-fellow at Lincoln's Inn, and of Ben Jonson, who was a member of Brooke's circle of literary associates.

Amidst all this activity Donne managed to remain a student and to cultivate an ambition for public life at Court. Looking back upon the earlier years, in *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610), Donne remarked his "naturall inclination not to digge painfully in deep,

and stony, and sullen learnings,” and an intellectual independence forbidding his attachment “to any one science, which should possess or denominate” him. Accordingly, in the same record, he admits having “surveyed and digested the whole body of Divinity, controverted between ours and the Romane Church,” and Walton says that he mastered “the grounds and use of Physicke.” The remark on his divinity studies would imply that by 1610 he had broken with the family faith, though it would be incorrect to suppose that his “conversion” to Anglicanism came early, for the studious independence which was releasing him from the old ties did not easily let him establish new ones, and, as he goes on to say, “I used no inordinate hast, nor precipitation, in binding my conscience to any locall Religion.” The poet of the Third Satyre expresses the same attitude. The state of his religious faith evidently was no obstacle to his public advancement, however, for after his return from service with Essex, he was appointed private secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal. Independently, or as a consequence of his new connection, he moved in a brilliant company, many of whom were to become his close friends, gentlemen like Sir Francis Wooley, Sir Henry Wotton, Rowland Woodward and George Gerrard and Sir Henry Goodyer, his special intimates in the coming years. The most important person he met, however, was Ann More, daughter of Sir George More and niece to Lady Egerton. They fell in love, carried on a secret courtship, and just before Christmas, 1601, were married, and, as Walton put it, “the remarkable error of his life” had been committed.

In these years Donne also had become a poet, and as well the author of many of the sportive prose exercises which go by the title *Paradoxes and Problemes (Juvenilia)*. Ben Jonson told Drummond as late as 1619 that Donne, in fact, had written his best poetry in these years, before he was twenty-five, a remark which, if taken literally, would exclude Ann More as the inspiration of what many suppose to be his finest pieces. If, however, we extend the period through the marriage year, 1601, we shall no doubt have the bulk of Donne’s verse which later was classified as Songs and Sonets, Elegies (“Love elegies” in pentameter couplets), Satyres, Epigrams, and that strange, unfinished satirical “epistle” called *Metempsychosis: The Progresse of the Soule*, which carries the date “16 Augusti 1601.” In addition, many of the Verse Letters will fall within this early period. A precise chronology of these poems cannot be offered. A very few of

Donne's poems were published in his lifetime (*The Baite*, *Breake of Day*, *Elegy on Prince Henry*, a couple of Latin pieces, and the notable *Funerall Elegie* on Elizabeth Drury and *The First and Second Anniversaries*). They got into wide circulation usually in manuscript, and, except where the person addressed or the occasion gives a clue, they are practically undatable. This fact, however, has not deterred interpreters from attempting the application of the biographical formula noted above, even after Grierson's warnings and his own practice of refraining from conjectures which could not be generously supported. How awkwardly the formula fits is evidenced, for example, by Grierson's discovery that *La Corona*, a group of religious sonnets, was probably written in 1609 instead of sometime after Donne had taken Holy Orders, or that *Elegie XIV*, with its joking conclusion about the wife's fidelity, if by Donne at all, came well along in the more sober years when he was supposed to have done with such matters. Again, although Walton sounds right in associating the famous *Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* with Donne's leaving from his wife when he went to the Continent in 1612, there is no such assurance for linking *The Canonization* with his uneasy courtship, nor for supposing that the "bracelet of bright haire about the bone" in *The Relique* was woven from Ann Donne's tresses. The inclination of many to attach the name of Lady Herbert to *The Autumnall* (*Elegie IX*) and *The Primrose*, or that of Lucy, Countess of Bedford, to *Twickenam Garden* and *A Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies Day* also raises considerable problems.

These early pieces assuredly bear Donne's stamp, and any estimate of his stature must take them fully into account. Their prominent subject is love, some aspect of the complex relation of man and woman, or some attitude of the lover toward this relation; but there are also the acrid portraits of flatterers and hypocrites or other creatures of the Court and London life of the Satyres. And there are some of the Verse Letters in this group which get the status of authentic poems because Donne understands how to mask the intimacies in the stiff permissive rhetoric of the form and at the same time to keep it in motion with the most direct kind of dramatic statement.

The thing in the love poems that is often talked about is their tonal range, from stark cynicism and disillusionment and reproach to the highest and gentlest celebration, but that way of speaking hardly brings one into contact with their most important qualities. One remembers the arresting opening lines:

- For Godsake hold your tongue, and let me love
—I am two-fooles, I know,
—If yet I have not all thy love,
Deare, I shall never have it all,
—He is starke mad, who ever sayes,
That he hath been in love an houre,
—I long to talke with some old lovers ghost,
—Goe, and catche a falling starre.

Lines like these command but do not halt the attention. They open up a situation, and the attention enters fully. They are in the rhetoric of address; yet it is not the poet addressing the reader, nor addressing himself as poet, in the way, for instance, that Shelley talks and declaims to himself. It is the poet as the person in the poem speaking, and the voice is so precisely suited to the meter that the phrasing and rhythm of real speech are not only caught and retained, but emphasized. Donne is not, of course, only a poet of brilliant introductions. The texts hold up. There is the wonderful modulation in movement to fit the stress and precision of the situations as they develop, effected by a modification of diction, or by the calculated dislocation of the phrase or word to give it the unexpected prominence and rightness which it requires—and yet the basic sense of an oral presentation is maintained. The stanza from *The Good-Morrow* quoted above illustrates this process.

Donne's lyric, further, is argumentative, dialectical, and thus catches something of the tone of intellectualism of the late medieval Italian love poems, which likewise is in Wyatt who anticipates Donne's speaking rhythms. This quality may be seen if the conceptual language and the abstractions are taken into account at the same time that the rhetorical structures of the sentences are studied, wherein they present the question and answer, the enumerative partitioning of the subjects, postulate and inference, antithesis, and premise and conclusion. No doubt the process reflects Donne's early acquaintance with the old dialectic, his native intellectual bent, and his familiarity with the early poetry, but in Donne this is not "medievalism" once it is naturalized within his animated rhythms and applied with dramatic directness to the personal situation. It is in some such consideration of this, of Donne's sense for the animation of

language and of his delight in the play of mind upon the subjects, which Petrarch himself shows, that one comes to an understanding of his "revolt" from the popular love poetry of his day. Actually Donne keeps to many of its words, like "sigh," "melt," "fair," "burn," "fuel," and "eyes"; but the Petrarchan psychology ("Fair is my love, and cruel as she is fair") had been frozen into a reduction which his argumentative mind could not accept; and the sensuous language of the sonneteers ("Whenas her hair, more worth, more pale, than gold, / Like silver thread lies wafting in the air," or "See where my love sits in the beds of spices, / Beset all round with camphor, myrrh and roses") and their smooth, distracting melody did not apprehend such an image of reality as he demanded. When one of his contemporaries wrote, "My verse is the true image of my mind," he expressed the kind of Platonic sentiment which kept much of this poetry from connecting with experience in the way Donne's connects. The reason is simply that such poetry reflects the formula, or the doctrine in the mind, rather than the object in life and motion. Again, in comparing Donne's love poetry with the popular kind, it is revealing to note the utterly different sense of the personal pronouns, for example, in a line like "Burn on sweet fire, for I live by that fuel," and in the first lines quoted above, where the "living poet" articulates himself.

Another aspect of Donne's poetic, which has both historical antecedents and use among his contemporaries, is the conceit, or the metaphor compounded of disparate elements. In Donne's poetry its use in conjunction with such features as those noted above and its use in a way which makes it so completely expressive of his sensibility and of his relation to so many facets of his period make it almost the hallmark of his style. Examples are abundant: phrases like "a naked thinking heart," "Bath'd in a cold quicksilver sweat," "the spider love, which transubstantiates all," or verses like

- As our blood labours to beget
Spirits, as like soules as it can,
Because such fingers need to knit
That subtil knot, which makes us man:
- Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
But yet the body is his booke,
- Who did the whole worlds soule contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes,

- 'Tis much that glasse should bee
As all confessing, and through-shine as I,
- I, by loves limbecke, am the grave
Of all, that's nothing,

—and one dare not omit reference to the classical example, though written later, of the figure of the compasses in *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*, or, to the "cleare body" of the lady of *A Funerall Elegie*, which was "so pure and thinne," "Twas but a through-light scarfe, her minde t'inroule."

So far in the description of Donne's poetry I have not used the word "metaphysical," thinking it better to find the important qualities in the texts than to appear to be deducing them from a technical term. The word, it will be remembered, was first linked to Donne's name by Dryden (He "affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love") and, as noted, given wide application to seventeenth-century poetry by Dr. Johnson. Some have wished to abandon the term, but the word has managed to stick, and it remains a useful designation for the combination of "passion and intellect" which one notes in Donne's animated rendering of the dialectical and metaphorical features of his verse, and for the broad intellectual and aesthetic implications of this process.

The passion which Donne shared with the Renaissance for giving relation and organization to the multitudinous aspects of this world is exhibited in the "heterogeneity" of the terms comprising his metaphors; but there is also the passion for relating the "divided and distinguished worlds" of matter and spirit, and this gets expression through the significant juxtaposition of the secular terms with those whose referents are always in some objective order of belief or big construct of reality. In this way the certitudes of belief and value which received logical endorsement in the medieval system are rendered symbolically in Donne, to be grasped experientially as truths. Further, Donne had a passion for the interior organization of the self, and this also is realized in the metaphysical figure. The disparate elements of human composition, for Donne, the Body and the Soul, are never long allowed to go on their separate ways. To show this, the treatment of the love experience is critical. There, the im-

pulse of both lover and beloved for the consummate joining of both flesh and spirit is strongest; and both as cause and as result of the perfection of their experience, the instinct of each is to achieve a completeness within himself. Nowhere in our poetry is this situation more suitably managed than in Donne's *Extasie*; and its significance is assumed in many other pieces, whether the local effect is honorific or cynical, for, paradoxically, the body and the soul are often at war as well as in rapport. Hence, the love experience in Donne's practice in these early poems is a kind of image of the persisting tension between Body and Soul, and between the secular and the divine. Yet, in dealing with the situation, Donne is not the mystic, for within the frame of the secular, human experience, which inevitably is his perspective, he acknowledges the dynamic of each of the principles in tension and does not admit the absorption of the energy of the one completely by the other.

The aesthetic implication of the metaphysical style is expressed by John Crowe Ransom when he says: "The impulse to metaphysical poetry . . . consists in committing the feelings in the case . . . to their determination within the elected figure."⁶ The same impulse for relation and organization, for completeness, which operates in the situations already noted, operates within the poem itself and, in terms which the metaphor, the "elected figure," requires: as the body-soul image in *The Extasie*, the figures of annihilation in *A Nocturnall Upon S. Lucies Day*, the "hieroglyphical" importance of the letter in *A Valediction: of the Booke*, or, in the imagery clustered round "wonder" in *The Good-Morrow*. The texture of such pieces exploits the figure to display the argument so that all of the relevant possibilities are taken into account, and in an important order. Hence, the figure should not be taken to mean a single locution which is repeated many times, nor re-expressed as variously as ingenuity allows, as may be seen in shallow imitations. It is rather the vehicle of the basic thought-emotion situation, "elected" for its comprehension, or for its capacity to envelop the total meaning within its varied and appropriate manifestations.

Donne's successes, as expected, are not uniform. And to some, the levity so evident in pieces like *The Anagram* and *The Flea*, or the joking ambiguities and ugly language of *The Comparison*, or the calculated harshness of the *Satyres* suggest in several ways

⁶ "Shakespeare at Sonnets," in *The World's Body* (New York, 1938), p. 286

a cleverness or perversity which a poetry of seriousness and taste ought to avoid. It is extraordinary, however, to find him a good poet so much of the time, and often in the pieces where he is frowned upon. This simply means that we recognize that Donne, in fact, is an artist, quite responsible for what he is saying, and saying it in language, meter and stanza in a way which shows its importance. What he says, of course, in these early poems is nothing philosophical like the metaphysic which is structured in Dante's poem, nor is he throwing a poetical mask over a set of favorite concepts. Rather, he is realizing in language situations which may be referred to authentic human experiences, wherein ideas are in motion, that is, where both the mind and feelings are vigorously engaged.

In the first years of the seventeenth century, following the lively period of the early poems, when Donne was "out of favor" though still hoping for some preferment, he became, even if reluctantly, more and more the scholar, the "serious" poet and the contemplative. His correspondence multiplied; he attempted to put his learning to some public as well as private benefit; and he prepared himself, though unconsciously no doubt, not only for the composition of his most ambitious and most important poems, *The Anniversaries*, but as well for the profession which eventually he was going to follow. In the early phase of this period, until 1609, say, when Sir George More was induced to pay his daughter's dowry, or 1611, when he was generously assisted by the patronage of Sir Robert Drury, he was greatly helped along by friends like Sir Francis Wooley, or Lady Magdalene Herbert, George Herbert's mother, and Lucy, Countess of Bedford, the women who played such a prominent part in his life, as the literary and personal record shows.

In 1608 or thereabouts he wrote *Biathanatos*, a treatise on suicide. A book on such a subject at this time may expectedly show the "sickly inclination" to take his own life, which in the preface he confesses often to have felt. But there is little that is morbid in the text, and the personal note is kept far below the surface of the elaborate dialectic and show of learning which distinguish the composition. He did not, in fact, intend the "scandal" implicit in a defense of suicide, and if the nub of the argument can be isolated, it is that he wished to show the need for charitable interpretations of such an act whose motives are usually hidden and obscure, or, like Samson's, the evident desire to advance God's glory. The subtitle of the book, "a declaration of that paradoxe, or thesis, that selfe-homicide is not so