THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO

ENGLISH POETRY

DONNE *to* MARVELL

英国诗歌

从多恩到马韦尔

THOMAS N. CORNS 编

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PART ONE

THE CONTEXT

I

DAVID LOEWENSTEIN

Politics and religion

The poets of early modern England, from Donne to Marvell, were deeply engaged and stimulated by the period's political antagonisms and rich diversity of religious experience. Indeed, in their age politics and religion were thoroughly interconnected: as Sir Francis Bacon observed, 'Matters of religion and the church ... in these times are become so intermixed with considerations of estate.'[1] Since the time of Henry VIII's Protestant Reformation, which rejected papal authority, the king of England had assumed the supreme headship of the English Church and thus governed both state and church: this was true for the Stuart kings of our literary period – James I (1603–25) and Charles I (1625–49) – whose absolutist power was reinforced by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. As James I succinctly put it, 'No bishops, no king, no nobility'; and his son, Charles I, fully agreed, observing that in the kingdom 'religion is the only firm foundation of all power'.[2] The purpose of this essay, however, is not only to explore the intimate connections between politics and religion as essential background for appreciating earlier seventeenth-century poetry: the aim is to highlight, using select examples from poems of the age, some of the ways its leading poets responded imaginatively to the political conflicts, ideologies, and religious currents of early-modern England up to the tumultuous years of the Civil War and Interregnum, when both the Stuart monarchy and Church of England were disrupted by revolution and Puritan opposition. We shall see, for example, how the language of political absolutism, characteristic of the theory of Stuart kingship, finds anxious expression in Donne's love poetry; the ways the languages of both Protestant theology and kingly power find expression in the restlessness of Herbert's devotional performances; how Vaughan poignantly responds in verse to the destruction of the traditional Anglican Church during the Civil War; and how Marvell's verses imaginatively recreate the responses of Puritan exiles to religious persecution and explore the dynamics of power and politics in the Interregnum.

Our period was an age when politics, religion, and literary culture

intersected. The poets of early modern England were themselves often directly engaged in serving or writing on behalf of the state and church: Donne, who had considerable political ambitions, became Dean of St Paul's in 1621; Jonson, the author of lavish court masques praising Stuart kingship, believed the poet had an essential role to play in the state; Herbert and Herrick both served as priests in the Anglican Church; Crashaw wrote extravagant poetry displaying his high-church sympathies; Lovelace was imprisoned twice by Parliament during the Civil War for his pro-royalist activities; and both Milton and Marvell served in the position of Latin Secretary under Oliver Cromwell, while Marvell also served as a Member of Parliament for Hull. The author of some of the age's most vehement pamphlets attacking the Anglican clergy and Stuart monarchy, the Puritan Milton considered himself 'church-outed by the prelates': his own visionary poetry, he hoped, would serve 'to deplore the general relapses of kingdoms and states from justice and God's true worship'.[3] Given that such intimate links existed between poets and the civic and ecclesiastical worlds, we should expect their poetry to interact with and represent the conflicting political ideologies and religious controversies of their age.

STUART MONARCHS, POWER AND POETRY

'The kings of the earth are fair and glorious resemblances of the king of the heaven; they are beams of that sun, tapers of that torch, they are like gods, they are gods': so observed John Donne in a sermon preached near the end of James I's reign.[4] Donne's notion here that kings are essentially gods on earth was thoroughly compatible with the theory and myth of Jacobean kingship. King James himself famously articulated the absolutist assumptions behind Stuart power in his printed *Works of the Most High and Mighty Prince, James* (1616): 'God', he announced in a sonnet encapsulating the argument to *Basilikon Doron*, 'gives not Kings the stile of *Gods* in vaine, / For on his Throne his Scepter doe they swey'[5]; and in a speech delivered at Whitehall in 1609, he asserted that 'Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of Divine power upon earth ... if you will consider the Attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a King' (p. 529). According to James, then, regal power comes directly and solely from God: the king was thus an anointed, semi-divine figure who ruled by divine right, a belief shared as well by his son Charles I.[6] Indeed, such a view, James claimed, was supported by scripture, where, as he noted, 'Kings are called Gods by the propheticall King *David*' (James I, p. 194); numerous biblical texts like 1 Samuel 8:9–20 or Psalm 72:1 ('Give thy Judgements to the King, O God, and thy Righteousnesse to the Kings

Sonne') only helped to buttress the claim for divine sanction (pp. 196–7, 549). Absolutist monarchs like James and Charles thus magnified royal power so that the king was above the restraint of human law and Parliament, limited only by the laws of God: he alone in the kingdom possessed political power.[7] As a writer who eagerly wished to win the favour and support of his king, Donne himself concurred in 1610, observing that the people 'cannot contract nor limit [the king's] power'.[8]

When the poet Donne let himself imagine, in the following year, 'all coherence gone ... and all relation', his extravagant vision of social disintegration meant that 'Prince, subject, father, son, are things forgot' (*The First Anniversary*, lines 213–15). The cult of Stuart monarchy was supported by a hierarchical order which configured the king's absolute authority in patriarchal terms: the king was '*Parens patriae*, the politique father of his people',[9] just as Adam himself had been both the first father and first king to whom God had granted an unlimited monarchy. Great power was concentrated in this patriarchal head of the state, an authority to be obeyed and never to be resisted actively by his subjects. As God's lieutenant on earth, the Stuart monarch thus had power over Parliament – which he could summon as he wished – and over the ecclesiastical order. Given the patriarchal emphasis on obedience to political authority in the earlier seventeenth century, it seemed highly unlikely that before 1640 a Cromwell might emerge who would altogether disregard the 'antient Rights' of kings and dare, in Marvell's famous words, to 'cast the Kingdome old / Into another Mold' ('An Horatian Ode', lines 38, 35–6).[10]

Major poets of the period both promoted and were stimulated by the Jacobean myth of royal power and divinity. As the leading professional court poet of the age, Ben Jonson saw himself contributing to it through his imaginative writing, including his non-dramatic verse. Publishing his *Works* (1616) in the same year that James I published his, Jonson, in his polished epigram 'To King James', suggested that poetry (which James himself had written) plays a central role in the service of a great royal state:

> How, best of Kings, do'st thou a scepter beare!
> How, best of *Poets*, dost thou laurel wear!
> But two things, rare, the *Fates* had in their store,
> And gave thee both, to shew they could do no more.
> For such a *Poet*, while thy dayes were greene,
> Thou wert, as chiefe of them are said t'have beene.
> And such a Prince thou art, wee daily see,
> As chiefe of those still promise they will be.
> Whom should my *Muse* then flie to, but the best
> Of Kings for grace; of *Poets* for my test?[11]

Jonson is essentially conservative in his political ideology: recognized by James as the poet laureate of his age, this author of royal entertainments and court masques projecting the power and magic of his monarch certainly knew how to 'sing / The glories of [his] *King*'.[12] In praising ideal kingship in James – whom he treats as both the 'best of Kings' and the 'best of *Poets*' in his epigram – Jonson develops one of his numerous analogies between poets and princes: 'I could never thinke the study of *Wisdome* confin'd only to the Philosopher: or of *Piety* to the *Divine*: or of *State* to the *Politicke*', he writes in his *Discoveries*. 'But that he which can faine a *Common-wealth* (which is the *Poet*) can governe it with *Counsels*, strengthen it with *Lawes*, correct it with *Judgements*, informe it with *Religion*, and *Morals*; is all these.'[13] The Jonsonian poet, in his diverse roles, is essential to a strong monarchy because he can help to sustain the king's authority by offering counsel, advice, praise, and blame; by shaping political values and perceptions; and by creating powerful fictions (including masques in which kings appear like gods) in the service of the state. So Jonson often places the poet in the midst of the world of power and aristocracy, as he does in 'To Penshurst', where the Sidney family receives him as warmly as they receive royalty (lines 65–88): 'all is there; / As if thou, then, wert mine, or I raign'd here'. But even as he praises the nobility, which James considered essential to his absolutist hierarchy, a discriminating Jonson does not hesitate to offer criticism and tactful warning, such as when he contrasts the more modest Sidney country estate (itself an ideal microcosm of the commonwealth) with 'Those proud, ambitious heaps' (line 101) displayed by other Jacobean lords.

Although he never regarded himself as a professional Jacobean court poet, Donne reveals in his poetry a fascination with the world of Stuart politics and kingship,[14] as well as a sense of unease about that world of seemingly unlimited power which he himself was never able fully to participate in. Indeed, more flamboyantly than any other poet of the age, Donne appropriates the extravagant language of kingship, power, and absolutism (which, we have noted, he himself used in his public discourse) and brings it right into the private world of his love poetry. There is plenty of evidence to indicate that the restless Donne himself was at times highly ambitious and eager to advance at James I's court[15] – a public ambition thwarted by the disaster following his clandestine marriage to Ann More, the daughter of a social superior, in 1601. But if Donne could never obtain a central and secure place at court in the real world of power, he could nevertheless imagine, in the exuberant love poetry of his *Songs and Sonets*, a world of power that rivals that of the Stuart court and state:

> Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
> And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.

> She'is all states, and all princes, I,
> Nothing else is.
> Princes do but play us; compared to this,
> All honour's mimic. ('The Sun Rising', lines 19–24)

In one sweeping gesture, Donne in 'The Sun Rising' obliterates the external world of politics: the lovers' intensely private new world *is* that real world of politics, with its states and princes – 'Nothing else is.' In Donne's extravagant vision, where the lovers can assume the role of powerful monarchs, 'All' (one of Donne's favourite words) in the world of power is merely an imitation of this new private realm. In an age where politics and theatricalism are often inseparable, Donne can imagine for a moment that 'Princes do but play' them. Donne has taken the hyperbolic language of absolutism, given new emphasis in the age of James I, and wittily focussed it on the bedroom: if 'The State of MONARCHIE is the supremest thing upon earth', as James insisted in his *Works* (p. 529), then the all-powerful institution of kingship in Donne's extravagant imagination can be contracted into the bedroom which itself assumes that supreme 'State of MONARCHIE'. In Donne's own poetry, then, we find this urgent insistence on the lovers themselves becoming all-powerful – Donne's way of giving a particular intensity to their private, mutual relationship.

Yet in a poem like 'The Anniversary', where Donne sets the mutual world of the two lovers against the dazzling world of kings and courtiers, he becomes less exuberant and more anxious as he contemplates death: 'Alas, as well as other princes, we, / (Who prince enough in one another be,) / Must leave at last in death' (lines 13–15). Being 'prince enough' is not quite the same thing as boldly asserting that 'She'is all states, and all princes, I.' The lovers' desire to possess absolute and unconstrained power here and now on earth ('we are kings, and none but we / Can be such kings', lines 23–4) is strengthened by their recognition that in heaven there will indeed be a levelling of such political hierarchy ('then we shall be throughly blessed, / But we no more, than all the rest', lines 21–2): no longer will they resemble monarchs with their unlimited power and supremacy. Yet the suggestion that 'True and false fears' could lead to 'Treason' in the lovers' earthly kingdom (lines 25–7), adds, in the final stanza, a darker note to the poem's political language of mutuality: even as Donne appropriates the analogy of kingly power to characterize the intensity of a mutual relationship, he can also register unease with the analogy's more treacherous implications.[16]

If the reign of James I encourged a perception of kingly power as absolutist, so did the rule of his son Charles, who also firmly believed that monarchy was the true pattern and image of divinity. Like his father he believed that church and state should be modelled on the divinely ordered

hierarchy.[17] Yet an increasingly absolutist King Charles was also a less able politician than his father: a ruler who was aloof and intolerant of political disagreement, Charles refused to play the role of a limited monarch during his years of Personal Rule when he governed without Parliament from 1629 to 1640. His austere and reserved temperament, his devotion to a Catholic queen, Henrietta Maria, and his controversial alliance with William Laud, the powerful Archbishop of Canterbury who promoted religious ceremonialism under Charles (discussed below), gradually helped to isolate the king and his court. With the summoning of the Long Parliament in November 1640 and especially with the Civil War erupting in the summer of 1642, the Stuart king's exceptional powers and mystique were increasingly undermined. Indeed, with the powers and mystique of Stuart kingship sharply challenged during the Civil War years, one radical observer was prompted to remark: ''Tis true the kings have been instruments to cast off the Pope's supremacy, but we may see if they have not put themselves into the same state.'[18]

The republican revolution of 1648–9 not only abolished monarchy and the House of Lords, but culminated in the daring public trial at which Charles was sentenced to death in January 1649. With the execution of the Stuart king, the world of royal power, absolutism, and hierarchy was now turned upside down. Indeed, pleading the 'antient Rights' could no longer protect the king's authority nor his person; the revolution had challenged the king's claim that he was answerable only to God. No poet of the period captures better than Marvell the king's theatricalism on that extraordinary political occasion of his execution:

> *He* nothing common did or mean
> Upon that memorable Scene:
> But with his keener Eye
> The Axes edge did try:
> Nor call'd the *Gods* with vulgar spight
> To vindicate his helpless Right,
> But bow'd his comely Head,
> Down as upon a Bed.
>
> ('An Horatian Ode', lines 38, 57–64)

Charles's bearing at his trial (where he challenged the authority of the special Parliamentary court to try him) and at his execution – 'that memorable Scene' – was dignified.[19] In a political poem where the energy and forces of history all seem to be on the side of the active revolutionary who casts 'the Kingdome old / Into another mold', Marvell's lines acknowledge the grace, as well as the theatrical power, of Charles's final act – a historical moment when the claim to royal power by divine right was rendered 'help-

less'. Here the king has become the tragic actor in the final royal masque performed at Whitehall. The Stuart monarchs of our period believed that their power and mystique were inseparable from role-playing and theatricalism, 'That a King is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly doe behold' (James I, p. 180). For King Charles, Marvell suggests, such was the case in life as well as in death.

The Civil War, then, released forces destructive to the very foundation the monarchical order with its authoritarian hierarchy and patriarchal values. Indeed, royalist poets found themselves disoriented and deeply unsettled 'In this our wasting Warre' (Herrick, 'Upon the Troublesome Times', line 12).[20] Nevertheless, during the tumultuous years of the 1640s, the Cavalier poets rallied around the king, exploring in their verse issues of loyalty, gallantry, honour, and defiance in the midst of political crisis and royalist defeat. Even in prison, the royalist poet – unvanquished in his spirit and liberated in his soul – refused to relinquish his ideal of a once all-powerful and paternal monarch:

> When (like committed Linnets) I
> With shriller throat shall sing
> The sweetness, Mercy, Majesty,
> And glories of my KING;
> When I shall voyce aloud, how Good
> He is, how Great should be,
> Inlarged Winds that curle the Flood
> Know no such Liberty.
> (Lovelace, 'To Althea, From Prison', lines 17–24)[21]

Like Ben Jonson, this Cavalier poet sings the glories of his king, though with a 'shriller throat', conveying the urgency of maintaining the traditional royalist vision of kingship in a radically unstable political world. Yet by singing not only 'how Good / He is' but also 'how Great' his king 'should be', Lovelace painfully acknowledges that in this age of revolution and political upheaval, Stuart kings, with their contracted power, no longer seem like gods 'adorned and furnished', as the absolutist James I had so assuredly put it, 'with some sparkles of the Divinitie' (James I, p. 500).

RELIGION AND POETRY

Seventeenth-century poets responded to the complexity of religious beliefs in an age that produced exceptionally diverse and rich religious verse: the Laudian and anti-Calvinist poetry of Crashaw was strikingly different from the Calvinist verses of the Protestant Donne or from the anti-Laudian and

prophetic poetry of Milton. The religious beliefs which shaped and were articulated by this poetry were themselves often closely interconnected with the world of politics and state power. Thus Laudianism, with its new and controversial emphasis on ceremonial religion, was promoted by the court of Charles I in the 1620s and 1630s. In this section, I want to highlight, using select examples from the period's poetry, some of its principal religious currents, including two conflicting religious movements within the English Church that heightened tensions in earlier seventeenth-century Protestant England: Calvinism and Laudianism.

In the early seventeenth century, Calvinist theology was by and large the orthodox creed of English Protestantism: it dominated the Church of England and, indeed, James I himself was Calvinist, though his son, we shall see, would be influenced in the 1620s and 1630s by conflicting and hostile religious developments. The popularity of the Geneva Bible (1560), which went through at least thirty-nine quarto editions printed in England between 1579 and 1615,[22] and the enormous influence of Calvin's own sermons, biblical commentaries, and especially his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536; 1559; translated 1561), contributed to the dominance of Calvinism in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Calvinism emphasized God's eternal decrees, along with his initiative and irresistible grace enabling man's salvation; consequently it downplayed, as Luther did, the efficacy of the works of sinful man and denied that his free will played any role in matters of salvation or damnation. Most significantly, it stressed absolute divine sovereignty and power and the notion of divine predestination (see, for example, *Institutes* 3.21.5) whereby elevation to Heaven (as one of the elect) or reprobation to Hell depends solely on the will of God: as number 17 of the Thirty-Nine Articles (1563), the English confession of faith, read, 'predestination to life is the ever-lasting purpose of God, whereby ... he hath constantly decreed by his counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind'.[23] Calvinist divines suggested, however, that the number of the elect was very few and that most men, women and children would perish: 'Some think one of an hundred, some but one of a thousand shalbe saved.'[24]

The starkness of Calvinist theology, with its persistent emphasis on human depravity and sinfulness, could generate acute anxiety, doubt, and restlessness. For one thing, Calvinism expelled intermediaries between an omnipotent, often inscrutable God and man's soul: the Protestant Reformation emphasized justification by faith alone, and neither the church nor the sacraments nor religious ceremonies could provide divine grace needed to assure one's salvation. With this emphasis on the individual's personal relation to God, Protestantism could thus make God seem more awesomely

distant and yet also bring him more awesomely close.[25] Donne's agonistic and intensely introspective *Holy Sonnets* offer powerful examples of his Calvinistic terror of damnation and sense of sinfulness as he confronts his personal and awesome God; thus at one moment an anxious Donne can become contentious with God as he envies the rest of creation:

> If poisonous minerals, and if that tree,
> Whose fruit threw death on else immortal us,
> If lecherous goats, if serpents envious
> Cannot be damned; alas, why should I be?

But then, recognizing the all-powerful nature of this Protestant God who can forget Donne's human sins, the poet retreats from his quarrelsome posture: 'But who am I, that dare dispute with thee / O God?' Indeed, Donne's awesome heavenly monarch possesses a power not unlike that which James I attributed to kings: 'they make and unmake their subjects: they have power of raising, and casting downe: of life, and of death' (James I, p. 529). So in the sonnet 'Batter my heart', Donne's Calvinistic God – capable of making and unmaking his sinful, helpless subject – becomes, in the poem's three successive quatrains, a metal worker, a warrior-king, and a male lover as the resistant Donne himself, paradoxically, demands God to apply his violent force:

> Batter my heart, three-personed God; for, you
> As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
> That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
> Your force, to break, blowe, burn and make me new.

The alliteration and forceful verbs of line 4 (God's spirit blows rather than breathes, his face burns rather than shines) convey the divine power and violence needed to break Donne's resistance and make him anew, especially when he is 'betrothed' – as he is in the third quatrain – to God's enemy, Satan. After all, with its deep conviction of human sin, Protestantism simultaneously increased the sense of the enormous and potentially irresistible powers of Satan – that 'prince and God of this world' as John Knox called him.[26] Since Donne is betrothed to Satan (though he dearly loves God), Donne urges God's sexual assault and penetration: 'Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again.' For Donne, however, God's enthralment paradoxically enables Donne's freedom, just as God's ravishment paradoxically enables Donne's chastity: 'for I / Except you enthral me, never shall be free / Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me'. The dazzling paradoxes, the vivid tropes suggesting God's great force and Donne's complete inadequacy, the imperative mode of Donne's dramatic address – all convey, in a highly

individualistic and flamboyant way, intense emotional pressure and the urgent need for God to apply his full power and grace to remake the sinful Donne.

Although less flamboyant than Donne, the Protestant Herbert, with his emphasis on the religion of the heart, also often focusses on the agony within. Using the Bible as his chief source of imaginative expression, Herbert in 'Sion', for example, contrasts the glorious artifice and architecture of Solomon's Temple (2 Chronicles 3–4) – which hardly seems to affect God – with the architecture of the New Testament temple found within the individual's heart (see 1 Corinthians 3:9, 16; 1 Peter 2:5):

> There thou art struggling with a peevish heart,
> Which sometimes crosseth thee, thou sometimes it:
> The fight is hard on either part.
> Great God doth fight, he doth submit.
> All Solomons sea of brasse and world of stone
> Is not so deare to thee as one good grone.[27] (lines 13–18)

In Herbert's interior world of arduous spiritual battle between God and the Protestant sinner, 'one good grone' – that simple pained utterance and emission from the heart – is far more effective and spontaneous as an expression of devotion than any ornate or lavish external form of worship. To be sure, Herbert's poetry often refers to the external features and rituals of the Anglican Church (to which he was devoted), but he tends to transform them inwardly so that the altar becomes his heart, its monuments become his flesh, its lock becomes his sin, its marbled floor becomes the basic virtues, and so on. That is precisely the kind of inwardness that the Protestant Herbert emphasizes at the end of 'The Church-floor': 'Blest be the *Architect*, whose art / Could build so strong in a weak heart' (lines 19–20). But then if God is the powerful artist who creates strong spiritual virtues within the feeble heart of the Protestant individual and poet, what about Herbert's own artistic contribution and mortal agency? This issue is a source of considerable tension in Herbert's work: for as he uses his fallen human art to praise God's transcendent power and art, the Protestant poet, fully aware of his own sinfulness, is indeed often uneasy that he may go too far in his display of artifice and 'weave [him] self into the sense' (Jordan (II)', line 14).

Herbert, moreover, will sometimes characterize the restless relationship between the individual speaker and his omnipotent Protestant God in language reminding us of the close interconnections between politics and religion in earlier seventeenth-century England. For example, Herbert will dramatize that relationship in terms of an unworthy subject serving a powerful king, so that the inner self now becomes the principal site of political power and struggle. In 'Affliction (I)', he begins by writing about God's