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REFLECTIONS OF A LOST HARMONY
IN
SEVENTEENTH CENTURY POETRY

Cathy Perkins
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English 391

Reflections of a Lost Harmony in Seventeenth Century Poetry

"I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony," says one of today's well-known commercials. Man's very nature requires him to seek harmony and order in his world. Medieval man's universal scheme seemed to be an answer to this search for order. His ordered system, in which everything was a part of one harmonious whole, was passed on to Renaissance man, who also valued the harmony and stability he found in an ordered system. The system set the universe in such harmony that it was often compared with music. But as the sixteenth century drew to a close, many things began to shake that "Elizabethan world picture."¹ One of the many influences which caused that harmony and order to disintegrate was the influence of the new scientific ideas and discoveries. The Renaissance had ushered in the age of humanism after the religiously oriented medieval period. Man became the center attraction. He gradually wanted more control over his world. Rejecting scholasticism and tradition, he began to explore, discover, question, and demand explanations. Religious and political controversies arose out of man's questioning. Fires, plagues, and the death of queen Elizabeth all acted upon the tightly-woven Elizabethan world scheme. The astronomical and scientific discoveries were only one influence; but as one critic stated, "in the seventeenth century the most disturbing light was astronomical."² The impact of these new discoveries was reflected in the poetry of the century. It is evident "that by the beginning of the century English poetry had definitely met the new science and was trying to evaluate it."³ By the end of the seventeenth century the world's image of musical harmony and rhythm was replaced by the order of a machine. During the span of the century man was forced to find a new way to understand himself and his universe.

During the seventeenth century man continued to hold onto the comfortable old images of the "Elizabethan world picture," but the impact of the new science grew steadily. Donne and Milton both used images from the old world view and the new discoveries; but in the final analysis they both rejected worldly systems and turned to faith. Many seventeenth century poets turned to faith, perhaps as an answer to their despair. For Donne and Milton the harmony was lost. In "The First Anniversary," Donne wrote that harmony had died and that the new ideas made everything questionable. Milton's Adam and Eve fell from paradise because of the empiricist Satan and the tempting fruits of the tree of science. Both poets connect a loss on earth with scientific ideas. For both poets it is the loss of a perfect harmonious world. As poets they realized that a beautifully ordered world scheme was disintegrating, and their poems reflect this loss and the influence of science in causing the loss.

In order to sense the loss Donne and Milton felt and expressed in their poetry it is necessary to understand the harmonious Elizabethan world scheme which they used in their poetry but which they saw falling apart. The "Elizabethan world picture" offered security because of its ordered structure for the universe. The Elizabethans shared "an interpretation of life where man's knowledge of his world, himself, and divinity could fit snugly together."⁴ In the medieval period, politics, music, art, literature, philosophy, science, and cosmology all revolved around religion. With the Renaissance and humanism there was a shift of emphasis. All aspects of life revolved around man and the cosmology, which placed man at the center of the universe. This Renaissance world view basically consisted of the Ptolemaic arrangement of the universe and three metaphors--a chain, a series of correspondences, and

musical harmony--which they used to explain the order they saw in the universe.⁵

The Ptolemaic system had been in existence for centuries. Ptolemy, a Greek-Egyptian mathematician, geographer, and astronomer, had brought the works of many earlier astronomers together in his work, the Almagest. His observations, done around 150 A.D., found the earth to be fixed at the center of the universe with the sun, planets, and moon revolving around it in their spheres. The Roman Catholic Church incorporated this view of the world into its teachings, and parts of Aristotle's metaphysical system was added.⁶ The astronomers after Ptolemy continued revising the system with their new data, rather than discarding it. By the sixteenth century this view had become extremely complicated, but it continued in use because it was compatible with the other parts of the ordered world picture of that time. The Ptolemaic idea of a moving sun can be seen in Donne's poem, "The Sunne Rising," in which he describes the sun as a moving body.

Busy old fool, unruly sun,
 . . .
 Must to thy motions lovers seasons run?⁷

The metaphor of the chain of being put everything in the universe into an ordered chain, which extended from God to the smallest object on earth. Each thing formed "a link in the chain, and every link except those at the two extremities was simultaneously bigger and smaller than another: there could be no gap."⁸ Milton used this concept of the chain of being in Paradise Lost.⁹ Raphael describes Adam's place in the chain:

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom
 All things proceed, and up to him return,

If not deprav'd from good, created all
 Such to perfection, one first matter all
 Indu'd with various forms, various degrees
 Of substance, and in things that live, of life;
 But more refin'd more spiritous, and pure,
 As neerer to him plac't or neerer tending
 Each in thir several active Sphears assignd,
 Till body up to spirit work, in bounds
 Proportiond to each kind. So from the root
 Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves
 More aerie, last the bright consummate floure
 Spirits odorous breathes: flours and thir fruit
 Mans nourishment, by gradual scale sublim'd
 To vital spirits aspire, to animal,
 To intellectual; give both life and sense,
 Fancy and understanding, whence the soul
 Reason receives, and reason is her being,
 Discursive, or intuitive; discourse
 Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,
 Differing but in degree, of kind the same.

The angels and God inhabited the spheres above the earthly sphere of fire. The celestial spheres were considered pure and incorruptible. They moved, but they *did* not change, and the spheres became purer as they reached the outermost sphere of God. Donne expressed this idea of the immutable spheres in "A Fever." The speaker addresses a woman who is presumably very ill. He pleads that she not die; and in his pleading, compares her beauty to the perfect outer spheres.

Thy beauty, 'and all parts, which are thee,
 Are unchangeable firmament. (p. 20, lines 23-24)

The Ptolemaic system placed man at the center of the universe and the chain supported this same idea. Man was at the center of the chain's hierarchy between the divine and the beastly. The earth at the center was the furthestest from the pure celestial spheres. It was composed of elemental matter and was the least perfect. Unlike the heavenly spheres, the earth was subject to change, corruptibility, and uncertainty.

With such an ordered and harmonious concept as a chain where everything formed a link, it was no wonder man became obsessed with keeping

order. If any part became changed, the whole chain was broken, and the universe was thrown into discord. In The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Hooker explains the need for man to keep his place in the chain.

Now if nature should intermit her course and leave altogether, though it were but for a while, the observation of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world, wherof all things in this lower world are made, should loose the qualities which now they have; if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself; if celestial spheres should forget their wonted motions, and by irregular volubility turn themselves any way as it might happen; if the prince of the lights of heaven, which now as a giant doth run his unwearied course, should as it were through a languishing faintness, begin to stand and to rest himself; if the moon should wander from her beaten way, the times and seasons of the year blend themselves by disordered and confused mixture, the winds breathe out their last gasp, the clouds yield no rain, the earth be defeated of heavenly influence, the fruits of the earth pine away as children at the withered breasts of their mother no longer able to yield them relief;--what would become of man himself, whom these things now do all serve? See we not plainly that obedience of creatures unto the law of nature is the stay of the whole world?ll

For the Renaissance man, reason was a divine gift which allowed him "to sink or rise on the chain."¹² man was capable of sinking because of the original sin which had corrupted man and the earth, but the Renaissance man was more confident and secure. His optimism outweighed any pessimistic undercurrents. Hooker offers an example of such optimism.

Although there seem unto us confusion and disorder in th' affairs of this present world, . . . 'Let no man doubt but that everything is well done, because the world is ruled by so good a guide! as transgresseth not his own law, then which nothing can be more absolute, perfect, and just. (p. 182)

The second metaphor of the Elizabethan world view can be seen in the use of the correspondences. Everything was in correspondence

with something else in the universe. "Thus a primate in one class of creation must be an important link in the chain as being closest to the class above it and must also correspond to a primate in another class."¹³ For instance a lion, the highest link of the animal world, would perhaps have called to mind the king, the highest link of men, or an eagle, the highest link in the bird world. In the same sense the humours of man's body corresponded to the four elements of the universe--earth, fire, water, and air. Man saw himself as a little universe. Donne used this idea of correspondences in "The Good-Morrow." He talks of "one little roome" which becomes "an every where" (p. 7, line 11). The macrocosm--the universe--is compared to the microcosm--the little room where he has his lover. This image follows the idea that the earth and man were both copies of the universe. In "Holy Sonnet V" he again uses the concept. "I am a little world made cunningly of Elements," he says, comparing himself to the macrocosm of the world (p. 295, line 1).

The third metaphor of the "Elizabethan world picture" involved an image of the universe in a state of musical harmony. The chain and the correspondences suggested harmony, but the Elizabethans saw much more than a suggestion. They believed in the music of the spheres; and through their doctrine of correspondences, were able to connect earthly music with that of the universe. Pythagoras and Aristotle served as the source for their image of the music of the spheres. Their theory suggested that the sound resulted when the "the hard glassy celestial spheres" rubbed together. The spheres were ordered harmoniously according to numerical ratios like those in man-made music.¹⁴ The sound produced was so great and constant that it was inaudible to human ears.¹⁵ The ancients defined harmony, not as a blending of sounds, but as "order resulting from the ratios of quantities to each other"--proportion.¹⁶

Polyphonic music developed in the later middle ages. So by Elizabethan times, the notion of harmony had taken on its modern connotation, and after the twelfth century, the music of the spheres was considered polyphonic-- a blending of sounds.¹⁷ Elizabethan man, who corresponded to the universe, sought to find harmony in himself and his world. Man, his world, and his environment were constantly identified with musical instruments which sought to produce music as perfect as the heavens.

Milton and Donne both used the image of the music of the spheres in their poems. In paradise Lost the celestial music is evident after God has finished his creation.

. . . . The Earth, the air
resounded . . .
The heavens and all the constellations rung. (p. 371, VIII,
lines 560-562)

Adam and Eve are also able to hear the music before the fall.

. . . . how often from the steep
Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard
Celestial voices to the midnight air
sole, or responsive each to other's note,
singing their great Creator; oft in bands
while they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk,
with heav'nely touch of instrumental sounds
in full harmonic number joined their songs
divide the night, and lift our thoughts to Heaven.
(p. 501, IV, lines 680-89)

In "Loves Alchymie" Donne uses the same image. He expresses the idea that true ethereal, intellectual love is a "hidden mysterie." He says that lovers dream that earthly, sexual love is "a rich and long delight"-- that pure love he seeks--but he says they have not found true love anymore than the alchemist has found his elixir. He mocks the lover in the last stanza who says, "'Tis not the bodies marry, but the mindes'" and finds his lover to be an angel. Donne says mockingly that such a lover would say he heard the music of the spheres in the wedding day's "rude hoarse minstralsey" (p. 35, line 22).

So during that time when "the past still held men's imaginations and forward-looking science had not yet silenced the heavens and made all life mechanical, there appeared again and again in philosophy and in poetry the conception of the universe as harmony, of man, his institutions, and his works as musical instruments."¹⁸ But, forward-looking science did come. Copernicus had set out to find, not a radical new theory, but a better and more concise explanation for the universe. His De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium--Concerning the Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies was published in 1543 with a preface by Luther Oslander. Oslander termed the work as only a theory to save Copernicus from attack. The theory, actually an old idea, placed the sun at the center of the universe with the earth and planets circling it. In addition, the earth not only circled the sun but also turned on its own axis. The fact that Oslander had proposed the ideas as only unproven theory, the Ptolemaic concept's close relationship with church doctrine, and the tendency for men to reject anything new when they have such a stable and ordered universe as the medieval man had envisioned, caused Copernicus' works to have little impact.

Still, humanism was pushing man away from the church-oriented existence he had known and he began to question his universe even more. Bacon rejected scholasticism and sought empirical truth and inductive reasoning. He wanted man to search for truths not just accept authority. The astronomers continued to observe, and Galileo was one of them. In 1610 he published Sidereus Nuncius in which he confirmed the Copernican theory with the use of the telescope. He discovered new stars, moonlike satellites around Jupiter, the rings of Saturn, and the mountainous surface of the moon. Both Donne and Milton showed awareness of Galileo's work in

their poems. In "The First Anniversary" Donne alludes to the "new starres, and old" which "vanish from our eyes" (p. 215, line 260). Galileo becomes the subject of several images in Paradise Lost. For example:

. . . . As when by night the glass
Of Galileo, less assured, observes
Imagined lands and regions in the moon (p. 317, V, lines 261-63)

Kepler and Gilbert were making new discoveries around the same time as Galileo. Kepler proved that the planets move in ellipses, not in perfect circles. Gilbert described the magnetic force of the earth and explained the daily rotation as a result of this magnetic force. Donne shows his awareness of Gilbert's idea of magnetism in "The first Anniversary" when he writes, "She that had all Magnetique force alone" is gone (p. 214, line 221).

These astronomical investigations worked in various ways to break-down the orderly "Elizabethan world picture." Clearly the new ideas destroyed the Ptolemaic concept of the universe. The sun became the center, making earth just another planet. Man was no longer the center of attention in this more vast and infinite universe. Man was no longer in such close contact with God. In fact, there could be many worlds in an infinite universe--an ancient idea--and man's was just one of them. Milton used images of this infinite vastness which the Copernican ideas implied in Paradise Lost.

. . . this earth a spot, a grain,
An atom, with the firmament compared
And all her numbered stars, that seem to roll
Spaces incomprehensible (for such
their distance argues and their swift return
diurnal) merely to officiate light
around this opacious Earth, this punctual spot.
(p. 574, VIII, lines 17-25)

Milton also alludes to the possibility of other worlds. Satan in his journey to earth winds his way

Amongst innumerable stars, that shone
Stars distant, but nigh hand seemed other worlds,

Or other worlds they seemed, or happy isles.

(p. 276, III, lines 565-67)

When Raphael is explaining the creation to Adam, he also refers to the possibility of other worlds.

Witness this new-made world, another Heaven
From Heaven gate not far, founded in view
On the clear hyaline, the glassy sea;
Of amplitude almost immense, with stars
Numerous, and every star perhaps a world
Of destined habitation. (p. 373, VIII, lines 617-622)

The Elizabethan chain of being, though still a valid concept in the seventeenth century, was ^{also} shaken because the closely-knit world view of which it was a part was disintegrating with the new ideas in science. With the idea of an infinite universe, the correspondences between the microcosm and macrocosm were destroyed. The new ideas of the infinite size of the universe broke down the idea of correspondences. Before, man could compare himself to the universe--a limited and definable universe. He was a little universe, but he was comparing himself to something definite. With the new ideas of a vast, infinite universe, man's comparisons were impossible. How could man be a little infinity? In "The First Anniversary" Donne shows his awareness that correspondences are lost.

The art is lost, and correspondence too.
For heaven gives little, and the earth takes less,
And man least knowes their trade and purposes.
If this commerce twixt heaven and earth were not
Embarr'd, and all this traffique quite forgot,
She, for whose loss we have lamented thus,
Would worke more fully, and pow'rfully on us: (p. 219, lines
396-402)

Galileo's discoveries showed that the outer spheres were also subject to corruption since he found new stars and the irregular surface of the moon. Before, the heavens were thought to be unchangeable and perfect and, therefore, not subject to new stars and irregular surfaces. Kepler's notion of elliptical orbits also destroyed any idea of perfection in the outer spheres. Before, the spheres had been seen as perfect circles.

Now they were irregular ellipses. Man had known before that he was corruptible as well as the earth, but now the whole universe was subject to decay. The harmonious musical image of the universe could no longer exist with such disorder. Kepler tried to prove a harmony still existed. He had dismissed the idea of the music of the spheres with his theory of elliptical orbits, but he held that there was an inaudible heavenly music just the same. He worked out new ratios to prove that the planets produce music--a polyphonic sound.¹⁹ Despite such efforts, science eventually proved music was nothing more than material in motion which was translated into music by the mind,²⁰ and the third metaphor of universal harmony was destroyed.

It is true that the poets of the early seventeenth century such as Donne still used many images taken from those three metaphors of the old Elizabethan world view; but gradually such images became only literary devices. As one critic stated, "In the years after 1650, the imagery familiar to the Elizabethans all but disappeared." It may be found occasionally in poetry, more "as trope than as truth, in the late poems of Marvell and Cowley or in the poetry of Thomas Traherne."²¹ In fact some of the ideas can still be found today--in such images as the sun rising and setting and man being unstrung and out-of-tune.

The masses were probably not directly affected by the new discoveries and ideas, but the poetry of Milton and Donne, does reflect the impact of such ideas. "Even if poets did not accept the new creeds, they could not help breathing a different air."²² No major poet however much he used the older traditions was "oblivious" of the new ideas.²³ Before new optimism was discovered at the close of the century, many of the writers of the time turned to religion and sought shelter in their faith by rejecting the matters on earth. Donne and Milton were no exceptions.

Donne did draw images from the "Elizabethan world picture" as well as from the new scientific ideas. Some critics have asserted that Donne did not uphold either the old or the new system of ideas but that he was "wandering between two worlds, that of cosmic unity and that of meaningless disorder and decay, and he cannot resolve the conflict."²⁴ Donne does seem to be searching for an answer to this confusion. The new science definitely had an impact upon his poetry. He could have avoided conflicts by resorting exclusively to the old world scheme, which was still reputable; but he chose to include the new science. Some critics claim that the new ideas and the old are nothing more than literary devices for Donne. This sounds like an easy answer for weary critics. Donne had a sensitive imagination and was educated in the universities where questioning was "the accepted mode of improving the mind,"²⁵ and he learned of the new scientific ideas by reading the actual texts.²⁶ With his interest in the scientific texts and his educational background, Donne cannot be accused of using images as merely literary devices. It is necessary not to assume that because he used materials from particular schools of thought, that he was a follower of that school. But this is not to say that he drew images from the air with which he had no personal identity. Donne's purpose is "not to expound a system of philosophy,"²⁷ but this does not mean the philosophies had no impact upon him. The personality of the artist is reflected in "his choice of tools, and the tools themselves affect his work." Without a doubt, the new ideas must have modified the way Donne looked at life at the same time that they served as a means for him to express himself.²⁸

In the "Anniversaries," Donne looked critically at both the old world view and the new ideas and pronounced any natural philosophy as insignificant to spiritual happiness. The poems concern the decay of the world

and the need for man to turn to spiritual matters to find new life and order. The poems were written as a eulogy for the death of a young girl, Elizabeth Drury. The poems are meditations which can be divided into three sections--"a meditation on the decay of the world and the effects of the original sin on man and the entire frame of the universe; a eulogy of Elizabeth as a lost pattern in the universe; and a refrain and moral, urging the reader to forget this dying world."²⁹ The lost "shee" of the poems has been described as a lost pattern of virtue, a lost meaning in the world, the Virgin Mary, Queen Elizabeth, Christ, and the Greek Logos.³⁰ She has been compared to all the beauty man and the universe lost in the original fall and to the frailty and decay of the whole world.³¹ The symbol seems too complex to find any sharp direction.

Perhaps the best solution to the symbol is to say that the "shee" represents lost wisdom and harmony--spiritual "immanence" harmonizing the universe.³² After man fell he lost direct communication with the spiritual, but Christ restored the spirit and wisdom again.³³ It is through Elizabeth's death that Donne realizes that this grace and wisdom exists in the world. The world has gradually gone downward to decay since that original loss, and Donne warns man that he is not looking in the right direction. He sees a glimmer of light still present and wants man to direct himself toward that spiritual light. In "The Second Anniversary" Donne has found his new direction and order for his life by realizing what his soul has lost. He regains the lost wisdom that directs him toward the spiritual. His soul had reached the right evaluation of this world and the next and rested secure in the love of God.³⁴

Donne uses scientific images and the old Elizabethan world view images to prove the decay of the world. Those ideas are only forms of false wisdom to him³⁵ and represent the disillusionment he feels. But it is the new philosophy that causes him to search. Why would he feel

compelled to find a new world view or new direction unless some new ideas had shaken his old world view? "We dare not forget Donne's debt to Galileo and Kepler, for it was they who set his wit on edge to furnish the poems."³⁶

The confusion brought to Donne's mind by the traditional ideas can be seen in this passage from "The First Anniversary":

We thinke the heavens enjoy their Sphericall,
 Their round proportion embracing all.
 But yet their various and perplexed course,
 Observ'd in divers ages, doth enforce
 Men to finde out so many Eccentrique parts,
 Such divers downe-right lines, such overthwarts,
 As disproportion that pure forme; It teares
 The Firmament in eight and forty sheires,
 And in these Constellations then arise
 New starres, and old doe vanish from our eyes:
 (p. 215, lines 251-260)

The old scheme was disintegrating even before the new ideas became prevalent. Man had complicated that system until its order and proportion were lost. In this famous passage from the "Anniversaries," Donne looks critically at the new philosophy.

And new Philosophy calls all in doubt,
 The Element of fire is quite put out;
 The Sun is lost, and th'earth, and no mans wit
 Can will direct him where to looke for it.
 And freely men confesse that this world's spent,
 When in the planets, and the Firmament
 They seeke so many new; they see that this
 Is crumbled out againe to his Atomies. (p. 213-14, lines 205-12)

The medieval element of fire was put out after scientists had shown that the sphere of fire could not possibly exist; and since the medieval positions of the sun and earth were being challenged, they were for all purposes lost. The new ideas have caused all "cohaerence" to be lost. Correspondence is lost, too. That "shee" of his poem is equated with the old idea of macrocosm and the earth as the microcosm.

She to whom this world must it selfe refer,
 As Suburbs, or the microcosme of her,
 Shee, shee is dead; shee's dead (p. 214, lines 235-37)

Heaven and earth can no longer communicate. She brought harmony and

order and now that she is gone, "a strong example, equall to law" (line 48), is gone. In this sense she is the order and harmony of the Elizabethan world view.

Donne decides these philosophies should be forgotten and effort directed toward the spiritual. His faith must be based on something more stable than natural philosophy. He tells of the need to "feed (not banquet) on the supernaturall food, Religion" (line 187). He is not merely echoing the medieval idea of contempt for the world. He has been forced to find a new source of order in a universe where order has been lost.

Some of Donne's other poems also show the impact of new ideas. In "Holy Sonnet V" the speaker pleads with God to deliver him from his sins. He uses an image of the astronomers to explain his desperate search for this deliverance.

You which beyond that heaven which was most high
have found new sphears, and of new lands can write,
Powre new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
Drowne my world with my weeping earnestly (p. 295, lines 5-8)

In one of his verse letters to the Countesse of Bedford he expresses his knowledgde of Copernican ideas when he writes that the "newphilosophy arrests the Sunne and bids the passive earth about it runne" (p. 173, lines 37-8).

Milton, like Donne, also seems to be aware of the new scientific ideas; but he, too, sees both the new ideas and the old traditional beliefs as the wrong direction for man's thoughts.

Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid:
Leave them to God above, him serve and fear
. . .
. . . heaven is for thee too high
to know what passes there; be lowly wise:
Think only what concerns thee and thy being (p. 378, VIII, lines 167-174)

The basic cosmological structure of Paradise Lost is Ptolemaic. In the following passage the sun moves along with the fixed stars in their spheres. Adam and Eve in their prayer ask the sun, "the fairest of stars," and

all the other fixed stars in their spheres to praise the maker.

Thou Sun, of this great world both eye and soul,
Acknowledge him they greater; sound his praise
in thy eternal course, both when thou climb'st
and when high noon hast gained, and when thou fall'st.
moon, that now meet'st the orient sun, now fliest
With the fixed stars, fixed in their orb that flies,
And ye five other wandering Fires that move
in mystic dance not without song, resound
his praise, who out of darkness called up light.

(p. 315, V, lines 171-79)

He realized, like Donne, however, how complicated that old system had become. Raphael tells Adam that he cannot blame him for asking about the universe but that God has concealed his secrets from man, who should only concern himself with admiration of the "wondrous works." Raphael says God finds amusement in man's conjectures about the universe.

. . . if they list to try
Conjecture, he his fabric of the heavens
hath left to their disputes, perhaps to move
His laughter at their quaint opinions wide
Hereafter, when they come to model heaven
And calculate the stars, how they will wield
The mighty frame, how build, unbuild, contrive,
To save appearances, how gird the sphere
With centric and eccentric scribbled o'er,
Cycle and epicycle, orb in orb. (p. 375-76, VIII, lines 75-84)

Milton refers directly to Copernican ideas in Book VIII when Raphael tries to answer Adam's questions. He says God placed heaven at a distance from earth so that man could gain nothing by studying it. He questions the importance of knowing whether the earth moves.

. . . . What if the sun
Be center to the world, and other stars
By his attractive virtue and their own
Incited, dance about him various rounds?
Their wandering course, now high, now low, then hid,
Progressive, retrograde, or standing still
In six thou seest, and what if seventh to these
The planet Earth, so steadfast though she seem,
Insensibly three different motions move. (p. 377, VIII, lines 122-130)

During the Renaissance an interest in empirical knowledge was renewed. As the seventeenth century advanced, man "wanted to feel

at home in the world of Columbus, Copernicus, and Galileo" so he turned to his own reason for control.³⁷ Descartes, rejecting scholasticism, separated faith and reason and developed Bacon's ideas of inductive reasoning and empirical truth. Descartes doubted everything and based his ideas on the very fact that he doubted. The world was an ordered whole before; but with such ideas as Descartes' dualism--separation of everything into either matter or thought--the world was broken into two worlds, one of science where reason discovered truth and one of religion where reason was powerless and faith was the true guide.³⁸ In this dualistic world, truth of the natural world was reached through empirical knowledge and reason. Satan in Paradise Lost is frequently equated with this empirical knowledge, and in this sense Milton seems to rebuke the new ideas. Satan sounds like an empiricist in the following passage when he is talking to Eve.

' That we were formed then say'st thou? and the work
Of secondary hands, by task transferred
From Father to his son? Strange point and new!
Doctrine which we would know whence learned. Who saw
When this creation was? Remember'st thou
Thy making, while the maker gave thee being?
We know no time when we were not as now;
Know none before us, self-begot, self-raised
By our own quickening power, when fatal course
Had circled his full orb, the birth mature
Of this our native Heaven, ethereal sons.
Our puissance is our own; our own right hand
Shall teach us highest deeds, by proof to try
Who is our equal.' (p. 332, VI, lines 853-866)

The tree of which Eve eats the apple is also associated with empirical science.

O sacred, wise, and wisdom giving Plant,
Mother of science now I feel thy power
Within me clear, not only to discern
Things in their causes, but to trace the ways
Of highest agents, deemed however wise. (p. 409, IX, lines 679-83)

It was the fruit of this tree of science that Eve tasted and that tempted Adam. The fall resulted not because Eve had destroyed something but because Eve's pride and presumption had taken control of her. Milton does not condemn the new science any more than the old ideas. His concern

is that man turn toward God and not scientific notions of the world which are nothing but pride and presumption.³⁹ Raphael warns that man's astronomical concerns are merely an example of his placing secondary things before God and religion. Eve's fall and Satan's revolt are examples of pride in action. Milton is in line with the ideas developing at his time, particularly in his appeal to inner certainty. The Elizabethans found order in an externally ordered world view. Milton's order is found within himself. The seventeenth century was "seeking to liberate itself from all authority of tradition."⁴⁰ Milton saw a divine order in man because he was created with "a spark of divine reason and divine will."⁴¹ man had, then, a personal responsibility to God. "The duty of every protestant was to search the scriptures for himself and construct his faith from its pages alone, without vain notions of other men or priestly tradition."⁴²

Although Milton uses the old Ptolemaic concept as a basis of his cosmology, it is apparent that the new scientific ideas of searching without relying on authority had a strong impact on him. man had been shown that the authorities and traditions were not reliable. The new scientific ideas had helped to prove this. man had only himself to depend upon and only his faith to sustain him. The impact of the scientific ideas made man develop stronger faith as an answer to his despair. Milton shows man that order can be found when all seems disorder.⁴³ He confronts the world's incoherence with his faith and comes to terms with it.⁴⁴

Many other poets of the seventeenth century besides Donne and Milton turned to faith as is suggested by the large amount of religious poetry at the time. It has been stated that underneath the Renaissance ideas, there was a current of pessimism concerning the decaying state of man and the earth. With the new scientific ideas this decay was extended to include the entire universe. Perhaps the abundance of religious poetry can be

attributed to the need to find a new stability and order. The ancient carpe diem theme became popular. Poets such as Herrick and Marvell seemed to think the world was in such chaos that they had better "live" while they could. Perhaps the turn toward God and heaven was a result and an answer to this need for order.

Herbert certainly seemed to turn to faith for shelter and order.

Whither, o whither art Thou fled,
 my lord, my Lover
 My searches are my daily bread,
 yet never prove.⁴⁵

His God is lost, and harmony for him is prayer. "I sent a sigh to seek thee out. . . . I tun'd another--having store--into a grave, because the search was dumbe before" (lines 21-24). In "Dooms-day," man has lost his order. He is "out of order hur'd, parcel'd out to all the world (p. 168, lines 27-28). In "Vanie" he dismissed the world just as Donne and Milton had done. He says,

The fleet astronomer can bore
 and thred the spheres with his quick-piercing minde;
 He views their stations, walks from doore to doore,
 Surveys as if he had design'd
 To make a purchase there; he sees their dances,
 and knoweth long before
 Both their full-ey'd aspects and secret glances. (p. 77, lines 1-7)

In this poem, he does not present the world as one of disintegration and decay, as Donne did, but as a world where man is seeking empirical truth. It is a world where man does not accept traditional views but searches for himself. Herbert rejects a world where new scientific ideas have had an impact. He questions whether man has not sought everything but his God, where he could find life.

what hath not man sought out and found,
 But his deare God? Who yet his glorious law
 Embosomes in us, mellowing the ground
 with showers and frosts, with love and aw,
 So that we need not say, where's this command?
 Poore man, thou searchest round
 To find out death, but missest life at hand! (p. 77, lines 22-28)

Herbert has a plan to restore order. It is not a large world view, but very much what Milton suggested in Paradise Lost. He, himself, will personally search until he finds his God and harmony. In "Christmas" he says he "will go searching till I finde a sunne." After finding the "sunne" they "will sing, and shine all our own day," and

. . . . one another pay:
 His beams shall cheer my breast, and both so twine,
 Till ev'n His beams sing, and my music shine. (p. 72, lines 27-30)

In his works Herbert shows man groping towards God. He is just as concerned with discovering a pattern where none existed as the scientists.⁴⁶

Vaughan also rejected this world. He rejects a world which he cannot understand and where he can find no truth. In "The World" he asks what the world is. He does not want to be "repriv'd" of the truth any longer.

I, who so long have in it liv'd
 That if I might,
 In truth I would not be repriv'd:
 Have neither sight
 Nor sense that knows
 These Ebbs and flows.
 But since of all, all may be said,
 and likelihood doth but upraid,
 and mock the Truth, which still is lost
 In fine conceits, like streams in a sharp frost:
 I will not strive, nor the Rule break
 which doth give Losers leave to speak.
 Then false and foul world, and unknown
 E'n to they own:
 here I renounce thee, and resign
 Whatever thou can'st say, is thine.⁴⁷

He wanted a unity and pattern in the world. Like Herbert, he was searching for his saviour and found in "The Search" that he must "search well another world, who studies this, travels in clouds, seeks manna, where none is" (p. 151, lines 95-96). For Vaughan and Herbert it is an inward search much as Milton advocated. For Vaughan like Herbert "prayer is the world in tune." The world was in tune for the Elizabethans if man stayed in his right position. Vaughan's harmony is found within himself. He identifies with no external theories. He expresses a pessimism in his view of mankind in general. In "Corruption" it is man who "drew the

Curse upon the world, and Crackt the whole frame with his fall" (p. 196, lines 15-16). Vaughan questions, "Almighty Love! where art thou now? . . . I see the Curtains are Close-drawn." Sin still "triumphs" and "man is sunk below the Center." All is "in deep sleep, and night; Thick darknes lyes and hatcheth o'r" the people (p. 196, lines 29-38).

On the other hand, the Elizabethan writers, in contrast to Vaughan, had a much more optimistic view of their existence as shown earlier in Hooker's works. Southwell serves as another example. He was not searching for God, and his general attitude was optimistic because he did not need to search. In "The Nativitie of Christ," he relates the joy of the nativity. For him the light is there, and man has only to respond.

Gift better then himselfe, God doth not know:
 Gift better then his God, no man can see:
 This gift doth here the gevever geven bestow:
 Gift to this gift let each receiver bee.
 God is my gift, himselfe he freely gave me:
 God's gift am I, and none but God shall have me.

Man altered was by sinne from man to beast:
 Beastes foode is haye, haye is all mortall flesh:
 Now God is flesh, and lies in Manager prest:
 As haye, the brutest sinner to refresh.
 O happie fieldes wherein his fodder grew,
 Whose tast, doth us from beasts to men renew.⁴⁸

In contrast Vaughan's "The Nativity" presents a pessimistic tone of searching. Vaughan does not see the joy that Southwell does. His light has not come.

Lord! grant some Light to us, that we
 May with them find the way to thee.
 Behold what mists eclipse the day:
 How dark it is! shed down one Ray
 To guide us out of this sad night,
 And say once more, Let there be light. (p. 422, lines 35-40)

Later seventeenth century poets such as Cowley expressed pleasure in the vast universe. He can climb to heaven in "The Extasie."

Through several Orbs which one fair Planet bear,
 Where I behold distinctly as I pass
 the Hints of Galileos Glass,
 I touch at last the spangled sphere.

Here all th'extended Skie
 Is but one Galaxie,
 'Tis all so bright and gay,
 and the joynt Eyes of Night make up a perfect day.

Where am I now? Angels and God is here;
 An unexhausted Ocean of delight
 swallows my senses quite,
 And crowns all What, or How, or Where.
 Not Paul, who first did thither pass,
 And this great worlds Columbus was,
 The tyrannous pleasure could express.
 Oh, 'tis too much for Man! But let it ne're be less.⁴⁹

No Elizabethan writer would have tried to climb to heaven. They were concerned with climbing into their place on the chain so all would be in order. By the end of the seventeenth century, the views of the universe had greatly changed since that "Elizabethan world picture" existed. Cowley's universe is Galileo's universe, but the pessimism of the early seventeenth century writers is replaced by an optimism and joy in such a universe. He is conscious, like Milton, of the vastness. He looks with "scientific acuteness upon illimitability and materiality and sees evidence of warmth and love."⁵⁰ So as the Copernican ideas became the accepted belief, the "Elizabethan world picture" faded away. The correspondences were lost with the vast new universe, and man could soar into that universe without concern for any chains. The music of the spheres became a convenient device for poets to praise their ladies. Carew compares his lady's singing to the music of the sky in "Song-Celia Singing."

Of her sweet voice it shall appear
 That Love can enter at the ear.
 Then unveil your eyes: behold
 The curious mold
 Where that voice dwells; and, as we know,
 When the cocks crow,
 We freely may
 Gaze on the day,
 So may you, when the music's done,
 Awake and see the rising sun.⁵¹

The idea of celestial music became a "cosmic cliché" and merely a device for comparison.⁵² For Dryden the earth's music "shall untune the sky."⁵³

In Gulliver's Travels the courtiers of Laputa play their musical instruments as "a gross parody of the harmony of the heavens."⁵⁴

Indeed, that harmony that the Elizabethans enjoyed was lost. Man has tried since then to find that unity again. He has turned to such things as religion, alcohol, and drugs to put what modern science and philosophy separated back together. Donne, Milton, and the other seventeenth century poets were the first to face the disintegration of that harmonious whole. The impact is evident in their images, their attitudes, and the tones of their poems. A new book of science was opened to replace a book of harmony. The rhythm of music was lost and eventually replaced by the order of a clock.⁵⁵ Newton, in 1687, published his laws of motion which restored a pattern to the universe--a law of gravity which held everything together.⁵⁶ The world became a "vast machine" and God was the "master mechanic."⁵⁷ Newton was the light which led to the eighteenth century enlightenment--an age of optimism where science had restored order.⁵⁸ Before that age of optimism, though, the seventeenth century faced confusion and the loss of that Elizabethan harmony. When that harmony had existed, it had given man a sense of understanding of himself and his universe that seventeenth century man clung to and that even modern man should envy.

Footnotes

- ¹E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture.
- ²Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, p. 274.
- ³Ralph B. Crum, Scientific Thought in Poetry, p. 42.
- ⁴Charles Monroe Coffin, John Donne and the New Philosophy, p. 41.
- ⁵E.M.W. Tillyard, the Elizabethan World picture, p. 25.
- ⁶Charles Monroe Coffin, John Donne and the new Philosophy, p. 42.
- ⁷John Donne in Herbert Grierson, ed., Donne--Poetical Works, p. 10, line 1,4. All other quotations from Donne's poems will be from this edition. Page and line numbers will be given at the end of each quotation.
- ⁸E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, pp.25-26.
- ⁹ibid, p. 33.
- ¹⁰John Milton in James Holly Hanford, ed., The Poems of John Milton, p. 323, V, lines 469-490. All other quotations from Milton's poems will be from this edition. Page and line numbers will be given at the end of each quotation.
- ¹¹Richard Hooker in Hyder Rollins and Herschel Baker, eds., The Renaissance in England, p. 183. All other quotations from Hooker's works will be from this edition. Page numbers will be given at the end of each quotation.
- ¹²Douglas Bush, Science and English poetry, p. 16.
- ¹³E.M.W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World picture, p. 85.
- ¹⁴Gretchen L. Finney, Musical Backgrounds for English Literature, p. ix.
- ¹⁵John Hollander, The Untuning of the sky, p. 29.
- ¹⁶Ibid, pp.27-28.
- ¹⁷Ibid, pp.31-38.
- ¹⁸Gretchen L. Finney, Musical Backgrounds for English Literature, pp.8-9.
- ¹⁹John Hollander, The Untuning of the Sky, pp. 39-40.
- ²⁰Gretchen L. Finney, Musical Backgrounds For English Literature, p..152.
- ²¹Ibid, p. 18.
- ²²Douglas Bush, Science and English Poetry, p. 43.
- ²³Robert B. Hinman, "The Apotheosis of Faust: Poetry and New Phil-

osophy in the Seventeenth Century," in Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, eds., Metaphysical Poetry, p. 150.

²⁴Douglas Bush in Frank Manley, ed., John Donne; The Anniversaries, p. 44.

²⁵Charles Monroe Coffin, John Donne and The New Philosophy, p. 40.

²⁶Ibid, p. 81.

²⁷Ibid, p. 20.

²⁸Ibid, p. 214.

²⁹Frank Manley, John Donne: The Anniversaries, p. 41.

³⁰ibid, p. 14.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid, p. 19.

³³ibid, pp. 31-32.

³⁴Ibid, p. 49.

³⁵Ibid, p. 45.

³⁶Charles Monroe Coffin, John Donne and the New Philosophy, p. 101.

³⁷Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, p. 15.

³⁸Charles Monroe Coffin, John Donne and the new Philosophy, p. 21.

³⁹Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, p. 398.

⁴⁰Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, p. 78.

⁴¹Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, p. 398.

⁴²John Hollander, The Untuning of the Sky, p. 226.

⁴³Robert Hinman, "The Apotheosis of Faust: Poetry and New Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century," in Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, eds., metaphysical poetry, p. 171.

⁴⁴ibid, p. 159.

⁴⁵George Herbert, "The Search," in Arthur Waugh, ed., The Poems of George Herbert, p. 145, lines 1-4. All other quotations from Herbert's poems will be from this edition. Page and line numbers will be given at the end of each quotation.

⁴⁶Robert B. Hinman, "The Apotheosis of Faust: Poetry and new Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century," in Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer,

eds., Metaphysical Poetry, p. 157.

⁴⁷Henry Vaughan, "The World," in French rogle, ed., The Complete Poetry of Henry Vaughan, p. 429, lines 5-20. All other quotations from Vaughan's poems will be from this edition. Page and line numbers will be given at the end of each quotation.

⁴⁸Robert Southwell, "The Nativitie of Christ," in Louis L. Martz, ed., The Meditative Poem, p. 41, lines 13-24.

⁴⁹Abraham Cowley, "The Extasie," in A.R. Waller, ed., Abraham Cowley--Poems, p. 204, lines 33-48.

⁵⁰Robert B. Hinman, Abraham Cowley's World of Order, p. 33.

⁵¹Thomas Carew, "Song, Celia Singing," in Alexander Corbin Judson, ed., Seventeenth-Century Lyrics, p. 103, lines 8-17.

⁵²John Hollander, The Untuning of the Sky, pp. 334, 348.

⁵³Ibid, p. 238.

⁵⁴Ibid, p. 381.

⁵⁵Gretchen L. Finney, Musical Backgrounds for English Literature, p. 46.

⁵⁶John Bowman, Universal History of the World, X p. 846.

⁵⁷Ralph B. Crum, Scientific Thought in Poetry, p. 64.

⁵⁸John Bowman, Universal History of the World, X, p. 854.

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