The House of Death

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Bentham judged a proposition true or false as it accorded or not with the result of his own inquiries; and did not search very curiously into what might be meant by the proposition, when it obviously did not mean what he thought true. With Coleridge, on the contrary, the very fact that any doctrine had been believed by thoughtful men, and received by whole nations or generations of mankind, was part of the problem to be solved, was one of the phenomena to be accounted for.

JOHN STUART MILL, “Coleridge”

So in divine learning we see how frequent Parables and Tropes are: for it is a rule, *That whatsoever science is not consonant to presuppositions, must pray in aid of similitudes.*

BACON, *The Advancement of Learning*

The preaching of the word hath been made a servant of ambitions, and a shop of many mens new-fangled wares. Almost every meanes between God and man, suffers some adulteratings and disguises: But prayer least.

DONNE, *Sermons*

In the study of sacred Scripture there were recognizable differences between the latitude of interpretation acceptable for purposes of individual devotion and the stricter methods expected from reputable theologians, old or new, presenting, to others, pious, learned, and reasoned arguments. To a hostile or impatient view the differences may seem negligible. To a sympathetic view, tempered by the knowledge that the differences were real to intelligent citizens of another age, but also tempered by the knowledge provided by historical perspective, further discriminations are available. One can observe singular opinions, however produced, becoming general and acquiring a history of their own. Moreover, in reading history and its interpretations one can observe major and minor shifts in the methods and some of the aims of scriptural interpretation. The Reformation broke with the old four-
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level method and its permissible elaborations of allegory. Instead, the
Reformation stressed the importance of the literal, historical level and
therefore needed to develop, not without some strain, a new interpreta-
tion of what “literal” really meant. Furthermore, the needs and dangers
of the times, whenever these were recognized, were likely to influence
casual interpretations of the moment but also the serious handling of
texts by authoritative champions. In addition, there was always the
transitory work done in sermons to a special audience for a special
occasion. Nevertheless, in spite of the qualifying remarks I have been
making, serious religious thinkers believed that the truth was there in
the text and, in spite of human fallibility, a system of reasoning was
available which had developed its own principles and applications and
ways of discriminating among the degrees of probability. The learned
might argue about the relative worth of resemblances and the stricter
methods of logic, or about the weight as evidence of any pattern of
resemblances or any disposition of analogies; still, in religious reason-
ing a linking of resemblances accepted as authoritative could not be
denied as having the force of reasoned analogy. What moves a private
insight or a public argument to the stage of a dominant historical career
is a humbling question in all branches of human endeavor.

Members of the militant church, the community of the living who
aspired to join saints, martyrs, and the blessed dead who would rise to
membership in the triumphant church in heaven, could not be indif-
ferent to the obvious fact that all competing arguments concerning
doctrine and interpretation could not be equally valid. The reformed
churches encouraged individual study of Scripture, not without guid-
ance and the kinds of control exerted by authoritative agreement on
crucial points, but not able or willing to furnish institutional validity to
established rules and sanctifications assuring salvation. As fact, the
death of every person is an individual event. The fact lends itself to
psychological bewilderment, traumas of incredulity, and transferences
but can also be muted or molded by patience, knowledge, and skill. The
general loosening of institutional supports, along with the increasingly
widespread sense that the moment of death was, in relation to the last
day of judgment, a preliminary hearing, or trial, or more, unquestion-
ably released old feelings latent in the knowledge that all die, but each
dies once, old feelings in new surges that had to be mastered. To empha-
size the connections between death and salvation by scrutinizing and
explicating them with prolonged attention could and did heighten and
extend the individuality of personal death. I am reviewing matters that
have been touched on before, but now for another purpose: to bring
together the acknowledged feelings related to all stages of striving for
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salvation and the value of reasoned acceptance traditional in the ideals of Christian death. For the individual feelings must do their part and carry their share of a good argument not to be read in the study by the learned but acted upon.

However great his desire for exact knowledge in formal discourse, a good poet cannot be indifferent to both the indispensability of, and the rightness of choice involved in, the uses of resemblances in poetic discourse. I draw another example from George Herbert. In “The H. Scriptures II” he begins by affirming his knowledge that all the separate “lights” of Scripture “combine”; they are “configurations” and “constellations of the storie.” But how the unity of the whole was made is a subject that exceeds human understanding while it inspires human longing to know:

This verse marks that, and both do make a motion
Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie:

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,
And comments on thee: for in ev’ry thing
Thy words do finde me out, and parallels bring,
And in another make me understood.

While believing in the inexhaustible profundities of scriptural meanings, and well aware of conditional uncertainties in interpretation (“both do make a motion / Unto”) and of the need to temper inspiration by sound discipline, he nevertheless makes a characteristic personal statement in the poem. He chooses not to exclude the personal evidence concerning the efficacy of the “word” from the intellectual analysis of meaning. To the speaker of the poem, who certainly did not regard himself as unlike the probable reader of his poem, the most important acts of commenting on Scripture are the demonstrations of understanding communicated by the life he lives. These will make him understood in another, the comments expressed by one life entering the very structure of another life. The human “secret” is to study both the word and “Gods Worke in his heart through the Word.”

There is an implicit correspondence between the absoluteness of divine initiative and the human initiative of marking resemblances, motions, and parallels. God’s words in Scripture “do finde me out, and parallels bring.” So divine communication is felt as immediate. The right human response is partly that of discursive reasoning and analysis, to understand, and partly that of assimilating the recognized parallels into the structure of personal life, to confirm and demonstrate the
conclusions. Though the unity of God’s “configurations” is not be understood at the level of “how,” it is nevertheless to be answered at the level of “why,” as an intuitive understanding of God’s purpose. (That understanding is not itself the subject of analysis.) The human answer that is presented imitates the divine unity in the smaller world of personal life, by an architectonic unity of living thought. And so the mystery of God’s “secrets” is repeated on a modest human scale. For the immediacy of communication made by direct contact, or the sense of contact, with one of blessed life speaks in ways not open to the eloquence of words or the convincing power of thought. With the assistance of some brief explication, Socrates would have understood the argument and might have thought another understood him.

What we see in Herbert’s sonnet is a bona fide argument in which personal feelings are presented as the contributing materials of inference. The argument is figurative and subtle, making and requiring interpretations, but also precisely reasoned within acceptable rules of both theology and poetry. The discourse does not depend on fiction or pretense or other privileges of poetic speech, though it surely owes much to the kinds of exacting discipline good poets impose on themselves. Once again Herbert’s example provides a special case. His figurative argument is a tour de force of convincing personal integrity, at once complete and brief, brilliant and humble in its combining intuition and plain good sense familiar to all. But when we step back from this height of dazzling realization, we should not be blinded to the existence of other possibilities of making poetic arguments out of similitudes, human feelings, and reason.

Certain images by long usage acquired something of the capacity of scriptural verses to “make a motion” toward another image, to “combine,” and to generate “parallels.” When Donne wishes to persuade his mistress to make their lovers’ parting peaceful and optimistic, he produces as the right model a scene of the good and happy death of the virtuous:

As virtuous men passe mildly away,
    And whisper to their soules, to goe,
Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,
    The breath goes now, and some say, no:

So let us melt, and make no noise.
    (“A Valediction: forbidding mourning”)

The large similitude between death and parting makes available a wealth of arguments concerning the desirability of a good death. A
small similitude, released by the choice of a single word, may go unnoticed. The melting is not, as John Carey proposes, one more example of Donne’s obsession with thoughts of dissolution, but is instead a translated echo signifying the peaceful death of the man of reason and self-control.²

The vocabulary of death is well furnished with standard indirections and is hospitable to new figures of speech. When Milton’s Eve eats the apple and delights in the taste and in the high expectation of knowledge, Milton combines death and eager ignorance and invents the idiom and syntax that tell a strange story under the auspices of indistinct “constellations,” as if one were speaking around the impediment of food: “Greedily she engorged without restraint / And knew not eating death” (PL 9.791–92). An old image often coming to mind was the brief narrative contained in the thought of life as a loan called in by death. That it was a pagan invention, like death as law, did not disturb the proper Christian definition of death as divine punishment. The image was useful and well worn and offered a kind of expressive neutrality which suited some circumstances of feeling. So Donne can write, opening a sonnet on his dead wife, “Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt / To Nature.” And Jonson can write, not without bitterness, on the death of his first son:

Seven years thou wert lent to me, and I thee pay,  
Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.

I conclude this stage of the discussion of similitude and reason by illustrating the use of three basic images for reflecting death: sleep, time, and love. They have the virtue of not seeming tired when repeated in the same ways, and they also possess a considerable range of unusual suggestiveness. First, sleep, the irrepressible similitude spreading easily through the obvious likenesses of appearance and illusion and the unlikenesses of common reality. If the life of the body is thought of as unreal, the further comparison of life as the dream of existence suggests itself. If only the life of the soul is thought of as real, the actual or metaphorical sleep of the body can be thought of as the waking time of the soul.³ Sleep is an entrance to thoughts of periodicity, such as night, winter, time, and eternity: “One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally.” It is a time of restoration, safety, and comfort, or of premonitions and terrors. Dreams may comment on past or future life or act as the authorized messengers of death, or one may imagine their bringing unknown contents to the sleep of death.

These patterns are familiar in literary and other usage, but particular examples often have both expected “motions” between sleep and
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depth and some unexpected turns. When Shakespeare’s Octavius Caesar looks at the dead Cleopatra, he becomes, against his bent of nature and destiny, a poet:

If they had swallow’d poison, ’twould appear
By external swelling; but she looks like sleep,
As she would catch another Antony
In her strong toil of grace.

(5.2.345-48)

After his coroner’s eye rejects the cause of death as poison, he takes another look and sees a figure in repose, inviting erotic thoughts, which are prudently transferred to “another Antony.” Implicit in the beauty of sleep there would seem to be a strange heightening of the kind experienced in some works of art and here also influenced by the knowledge that the imagined sleep is death. The last act of nature seems to be surpassing or here reversing the standard Renaissance aesthetic doctrine and to be completing art. But if I have gone a little too far now, let me add that Caesar is no spokesman for the later Romantic obsession with the beauty of death.

Among the slowly changing styles of tomb sculpture, in the kneeling or recumbent figures the sense of sacred, waiting repose expresses an image of religious sleep as tranquil hope. My next example is concerned with such and is also from drama, so I hasten to admit that the poetry of drama is often a special case. For the poetry is part of a larger argument in which movements and actions corroborate, contradict, or increase the density of meaning in spoken words. When a principal actor speaks, it is from an evolving function and individuality of character; where, when, and to whom he speaks are factors of what is then said. In a separate lyric poem the speaker does not have these advantages and their space, but can manage his limitations well enough and even provide some valuable lessons for the dramatic poet.

I come to the example, Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth on the subject of sleep. There are two preliminary remarks, one a natural observation:

When Duncan is asleep
(Whereto the rather shall his day’s hard journey
Soundly invite him).

(1.7.61-63)

The second is a contemptuous comparison of sleep and death. She will ply Duncan’s chamberlains with “wine and wassail” and so alter the nature of memory and reason that Duncan will be left “unguarded”:
When in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lies as in a death.
(1.7.67–68)

Then, alarmed that Macbeth has failed, even though she has done her part and has also carefully laid out the grooms’ daggers (“He could not miss ‘em”), she mentions a moment of her own encounter with the sleeping Duncan:

Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done’t.
(2.2.12–13)

Whether she is remembering her father laid out in death or simply asleep, her memory (“the warder of the brain”) responds to something essential in the physical likeness—for her, perhaps irrepressible feelings of filial reverence or a disturbing thought of the common exchangeability, now a planned exchange, between sleep and death, but also surely a sense of sleep lying “as in a death” of sacred repose. Then, after Macbeth has spoken his anguished poetry of sleep and has refused in fear to return to the place of murder, she declares:

Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures; ‘tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,
I’ll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
For it must seem their guilt.
(2.2.49–54)

Resemblances are renounced with contempt, along with what “the eye of childhood” may see or remember, and whatever fear she felt in her experience with the sleeping Duncan is now transformed and dismissed in the image of “a painted devil.” She confirms her resolution by the verbal play on “gild” and “guilt,” and by her own determination of what “must seem.”

My last two examples are less intricate and more playful. In them sleep “bears a taste of death,” as Denham wrote, but then clarified excessively, as others would not: “And both are the same thing at last.”

Unlilke time, sleep does not lend itself well to arguments based upon the condition of antagonism. Its threat of unattainability may approach alienation and otherness but chiefly as an estrangement, like a dear love that has turned away or a familiar part of one’s life that can be “murdered” in ignorance as by Macbeth. Or sleep may abscond from
its due resemblance of death, as Henry King discovered while in­ventorying the ills of life from the perspective of the sickbed, where “all forms of death” surround him, and “He copies death in any form but sleep.” Another poem ends, “I long to kiss the image of my death.” It sounds like a modern poem, but it is the conclusion of a sonnet by an insomniac William Drummond who seeks ease, even “feigned solace” for “a true-felt woe.” If the usual terms of praise, such as rest, peace, comfort, forgetfulness, will not move the “deaf god” to wonted grace,

Come as thou wilt, and what thou wilt bequeath;
I long to kiss the image of my death.

In the great lyrics discussed in Part 2 of this book, in which the poet drew upon thoughts of his own death, the imagining of time evolved as if by a spontaneous creation, an apparently collateral action that when it is finally in place is revealed as a master configuration. In “The Passionate Man’s Pilgrimage,” “Hymne to God my God in my sickness,” and “Death,” each evolving movement is unique, responding, one may think, to an intuitive necessity not acknowledged or explained in the body of the discourse. Time was not a theme, or a concept for purposes of reference or examination, but a force clear in its effect though indeter­minable as cause or motive. What we may recognize, at the very least, is that the effect is a certain sign of the poet’s depth of engagement and control of his subject.

Poems on the death of another, discussed in Part 3, did not need to master a personal struggle with past, present, and future. In the public elegies fixed obligations were prominent—the necessity of giving place to the traditional parts of praise, grief, and consolation. When solemn, enclosed time was completed, the shared time of the living could be acknowledged as beginning again. These are poems directed toward reconciliation. To those alive, much of human experience can be mea­sured by, referred to, commented on, by time or by the many images that serve as passages toward remembering and anticipating the properties of time. For the dead, the engagement with personal time has ended; mourners may prefer to talk of other things.

In the more private poems on the death of another, the weight of time was felt and responded to; still, the more urgent thoughts of present loss left no opening for the shaping imagination of time.

Time and its agents, mutability and death, haunted the Renaissance mind and aroused thoughts of human aspiration and constraint, of man’s proud, reaching spirit and the extremes of grandeur and reduc­tion. Images of time can reflect the intimacies of breath or pulse, or furnish the materials for arguing against a fixed antagonist, and time
can figure the absolute otherness of death. Speeches on the seven ages of man do not need to mention death, but in Herbert’s “Mortification” every stage of life offers a pregnant image of dying, like the stanza on middle age:

When man grows staid and wise,
    Getting a house and home, where he may move
Within the circle of his breath,
    Schooling his eyes;
That dumbe inclosure maketh love
    Unto the coffin, that attends his death.

The verses Raleigh left at the Gatehouse the day of his execution begin, “Even such is time,” which “takes in trust” and “pays us” and “Shuts up the story of our days.” To the man about to die time is the agent of death. To the author writing the last paragraphs of his History of the World, death has a force that, however derived from time, seems to act as if autonomously and, like an oracle immediately believed, sums up the wisdom of the world (and especially to the “great lords of the world” who have complained against infidelity, time, destiny, and fortune):

They neglect the advice of God, while they enjoy life, or hope it; but they follow the counsell of Death, upon his first approach. It is he that puts into man all the wisdome of the world, without speaking a word. . . . It is therfore Death alone that can suddenly make man to know himselfe. . . . O eloquent, just, and mightie Death! whom none could advise, thou hast perswaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised. Thou hast drawn together all the farre stretched greatnesse, all the pride, crueltie, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, Hic jacet.7

In discussing “Images of Reflection,” I touched on carpe diem poems and their ways of interpreting the lessons of time to love’s advantage. Images that could be made to reflect aspects of time and mortality were not in short supply, and the book of nature was always open for ready reference. Henry Vaughan demonstrates a standard method of moralizing “natural histories”:

This bird may very well signifie our life, and by the river we may understand time, upon whose brink we are always pearching. Time runs faster then any streame, and our life is
swifter than any bird, and oft-times all the pomp of it comes to an end in one day, yea sometimes in an hour. There is no object we can look upon, but will do us the kindnesse to put us in minde of our mortality, if we would be so wise as to make use of it. The day dyes into night, the spring into winter, flowers have their rootes ever in their graves, leaves loose their greenenesse, and drop under our feete where they flye about and whisper unto us. . . . And if from these frailer objects we turne our Eyes to things that are more permanent, we may by the doctrine of contrarieties make them as useful as any of the former.8

I think I may spare further examples. Others less naked have appeared in previous pages, and Spenser’s use of lily and rose and the contextual complexity of “So passeth, in the passing of a day” illustrated the finer possibilities of what may be done. I shall end with a couple of examples of another kind.

The factual measurements of time, when taken as a figurative reference to one’s own day of death, may exert some direct torsion on the unguarded feelings. In Measure for Measure, Isabella tries to shame her brother with numbers chosen as if at random:

O, I do fear thee, Claudio, and I quake,  
Lest thou a feverous life shouldst entertain,  
And six or seven winters more respect  
Than a perpetual honor.

(3.1.73–76)

Robert Parsons does not use such numbers with uncalculated spontaneity. He offers his religious patient a generous prediction of future life, doubles that, and then divides by ten and what remains by twelve—all preparatory to a deathbed scene in which time is measured by the expectation of moments:

Imagine then (my frende) thow I saye which art so freshe and froelike at this daie, that the ten, twentie, or two yeres, or perhaps two monethes, which thow hast yet to lyve, were now ended and that thow were even at this present, stretched out uppon a bed, wearied and wore with dolour and paine, thy carnall frindes aboute the weeping and howlinge, the phisitions departed with theire fees, as havinge geeven the over, and thow lyinge alone mute and dumme in most pitifull agonie, expectinge from moment to moment, the last stroake of death to be geeven the.9
George Herbert could deploy the numbers casually, in a detached manner, measuring not the time until death, and its latent anxieties, but the probable span within which, depending on the soil and contributing factors, a buried body might be expected to decompose sufficiently to make room for a new corpse, or for whatever reason become a visible object. This follows the opening stanza of “Death” and extends the erroneous former concept of death as something represented by the “hideous” remains of skull and bones. Though the subject is not inviting, and though there is a brief, erroneous opportunity for the reader to mistake the time as referring to his own approaching death, there is no personal threat intended, but only a dry comment in the process, not yet finished, of correcting an error of the past:

For we consider’d thee as at some six
Or ten yeares hence,
After the losse of life and sense,
Flesh being turn’d to dust, and bones to sticks.

Finally, I want to mention one image of an entirely different kind in Marvell’s “To his Coy Mistress.” It is not the extravagant unrolling of time in the first stanza, or the distinction, for purposes of assessing time, between dust and ashes, or the devouring of time at once rather than languishing, or the “Desarts of vast Eternity”; it is:

But at my back I alwaies hear
Times winged Charriot hurrying near.

Images of time prefer to speak to the mind and emotions through the eye. Here we have an exception, an allegorical vehicle that is named but exists chiefly because it is heard, behind one, always; its “hurrying” motion addresses the individual ear, which is the chosen access for measuring the degree of closing distance.

We reason by means of similarities and differences. Eros and thanatos have a long history of opposition; they are not unacquainted with each other’s secret thoughts. Human love and love of the divine use each other’s images and vocabularies but try not to forget the differences. Love of the divine, among other benefits, grants reasoning about death certain prerogatives. For those writing about love or death all differences had their convenient and necessary uses, and so did all discoverable affinities.

Though the speech has personal resonances in the mouth of Cleopatra, she is not saying what no one else might have thought when, about to die herself, she witnesses the sudden, quiet death of Iras:
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If thou and nature can so gently part,
The stroke of death is as a lover’s pinch,
Which hurts, and is desir’d.

(Antony and Cleopatra, 5.2.294–96)

The chaste heroine of a serious comedy finds herself saying more than she might intend about the hidden connections between death and sensuality. Thus the Isabella of Measure for Measure can proclaim to Angelo:

That is, were I under the terms of death,
Th’ impression of keen whips I’ld wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death, as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I’ld yield
My body up to shame.

(2.4.100–104)

A masculine voice as from her “father’s grave” speaks less colorfully, and the brother’s desire seems much indebted to resolution:

If I must die,
I will encounter darkness as a bride,
And hug it in my arms.

(3.1.82–84)

Other images are almost as familiar. Among the many “feigned deaths” of poetry, lovers’ partings begin with a known basis in “sweet sorrow” and are free to draw on analogies, of which the separation of soul and body is not to be forgotten. Nor are the metaphorical exchanges among spiritual ecstasy, sexual climax, and death. In meditative compliments, the lover can renounce all the world for the beloved and imagine “one little room” into “an everywhere”; or, alternately, summon the “soul” of the world as an appropriate essence that love possesses.10 Between the lover and his dead beloved the earth “such a strange eclipse doth make / As ne’er was read in Almanake,” but may be read in the witty schedules of love:

And the conjunction of our lips
Not kisses make but an Eclipsc.11

Or the lover, neglecting the whole world of appearances and others, and transcribing a conclusion of his own feelings, can say, as in Shakespeare’s sonnet 112,

You are so strongly in my purpose bred,
That all the world besides methinks are dead.12
Or the lover can slowly turn over an image of winter (with lingering retrospection of “yellow leaves, or none, or few,” and bare, cold, shattering boughs “where late the sweet birds sang”) and can draw out twilight after sunset fading in the west, all of which night will take away, “Death’s second self, that seals up all in rest”; and can dwell on the past and future history of the last glowing embers of a fire: so Shakespeare in sonnet 73 reviews what the person addressed will surely know but will be reminded of by another argument of love:

This thou perceiv’st, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Time being what it is, the warning images are free to adjust their evolvement in whatever sequence the mind chooses. So the lessons of memento mori do not quite exclude the younger lover.

In reasoning about the griefs of love, poets feel entitled to draw upon all the records of human misery and feel no more obliged to observe strict decorum, or the rules of logic, or a balanced view, than do those who meditate on death by arraigning all the illusory evidence of life. When love is denied, both the absence and the presence of the beloved “kill.” In The Phoenix Nest, 1593, a poem that may be Raleigh’s ends its mixed survey of grim cheer with the retrospective summation, “Death was the end of every such desire.” But the denial of death may also be part of the torment of living and loving and may exact ingenious pain. For the lover who sees and hears laughter and scorn from without may turn the view inward as he sees his life wearing away and finds himself despising himself:

And most of all wherewith I strive
Is that I see myself alive.

Or the poet in pain may recognize a surprisingly simple analogy: that his personal necessity is quite like the higher law that declares that willingness to accept the gift and good of life requires an equal assent to the ill. Since love “is a care that doth to life belong,” therefore, in spite of the “torments,”

Yet had I rather thus for to remain
Than laugh and live, not feeling lover’s pain.

In the seventeenth century the standards and taste for poetic reasoning responded to the currents of a new age. Marvell, who took full advantage of coming late, reworked old and new with a perfection that signaled the end of one age as the beginning, and the necessity, of another. To be brief: he can write triumphant exercises on the issues of
love and death. The violent history of "The Unfortunate Lover" ends with a posthumous chapter:

Yet dying leaves a Perfume here,
And Musick within every Ear:
And he in Story only rules,
In a Field Sable a Lover Gules.

In "On a Drop of Dew" and "A Dialogue between the Soul and Body" the love of the soul is entirely directed toward dying "here" in order to regain life at the source—old themes, and answers, elegantly revived and refined.

In other poems he can cultivate naivety, for instance in "A Dialogue between Thyrsis and Dorinda," where a small dramatic narrative discovers and pursues the simple conclusion to all the passionate praises of the life of immortality. Thyrsis instructs the innocent Dorinda as if he were a "shepherd" Adam acting in a small, rhymed version of *Paradise Lost* intended for a children's performance. She brings up the subject of death, very prettily, and he moves by adjusted steps to a description of the life of eternity "accommodated" to the experience and dreams of shepherds. She is troubled and demands proof that the story is true, requiring in her own story-language that he convince her "By bidding, with mee, all adieu." Thyrsis answers in the oldest language of love:

I cannot live without thee, I
Will for thee, much more with thee dye.

Upon which they speak in chorus, Dorinda's voice perhaps a little more emphatic as they propose to arrange for the "charge o' the sheep" and to make a potion of poppies. They will drink until they "weep" (unexplained): "So shall we smoothly pass away in sleep." The poem is an extraordinary feat, and we know little of its provenance except the state of confused transmission. The inner logic of its irony matches the more relentless single-mindedness of some Tudor love poetry, but the splendid simplicity is another matter. It reads like a serio-comic miniaturization, translated for another genre, of the human drama in *Paradise Lost*. And if the pastoral dialogue did (one wonders) precede all acquaintance with the epic and its plans, we may still think with conjectural delight of the connoisseur's pleasure Marvell's great friend might have had in listening to this entertainment.

Except for some of Marvell, however, and some of the darker poems of Donne, poets in writing of love and death are usually writing about love while drawing upon the expressive resources of death. The
one major exception is Crashaw, who is more than half in love with strenuous death. Magdalene, “The Weeper,” is a walking example of love as death-in-life. The world itself is “lovesick,” but that is almost incidental: “Love thou art absolute sole Lord / Of life and death.” Love is also the self-consuming “sacrifice,” the divine “annihilation(s).” St. Theresa, being denied simple martyrdom, must be Love’s victim until her “numerous” religious deaths “shall all at last dye into one.”¹⁶ And most to my point, the powerful prayer of invocation that ends “The Flaming Heart” of 1652:

O thou undanted daughter of desires!
By all thy dowr of Lights and Fires;
By all the eagle in thee, all the dove;
By all thy lives and deaths of love;
By thy larg draughts of intellectuall day,
And by thy thirsts of love more large then they;
By all thy brim-fill’d Bowles of seirece desire
By thy last Morning’s draught of liquid fire;
By the full kingdome of that finall kisse
That seiz’d thy parting Soul, and seal’d thee his;
By all the heav’ns thou hast in him
(Fair sister of the Seraphim!)
By all of Him we have in Thee;
Leave nothing of my Self in me.
Let me so read thy life, that I
Unto all life of mine may dy.

(p. 65)

This has been an intentionally brief survey of some of the images, their use, and their adaptability. Whenever love radically disturbs the orientation toward living in the world, the lover’s fancy turns to thoughts of death or to images at one remove or more. When it creates the acute sense of loss of self, love suggests obvious analogies with death; so may the disastrous losing or the ecstatic winning of the other. On union with the other in death, poetry says little worth saying that is not quoted from religion, though Donne and Milton show how much can be said by not quoting too much. But I do not want to leave the subject without a word in behalf of the independent inventiveness of love. Even the myth of Narcissus and its link with death, actual and metaphorlic, can be rescued from that association as well as from the familiar scandal of self-love. So Raleigh, prevented by the reasoning of love from gouging out his eye or stabbing his heart, thinks further:
Reasoning by Resemblances

I found my selfe was cause of all my smart,
And tolde my selfe, my selfe now slay I will:
But when I found my selfe to you was true,
I lov’d my selfe, because my selfe lov’d you.¹⁷