

disingenuous are those seemingly innocuous numeral adjectives *first*, *second*, *third*. The assumption creeps in that 'first' indicates not merely 'in Dr. Gardner's group 1', but also 'earliest'. It needs a conscious effort, in fact, not to make this translation—but the translation is crucial to the argument; although, beyond a passing reference to the Elegies, no evidence is offered that 'first' does mean 'earliest'. Secondly, we have the apparent assumption that the group a poem falls into necessarily has something to do with its date; that the poems in any given group were probably written at the same time. Dr. Gardner has forgotten her own warning (quoted above) that we cannot assume idealistic poems to have been written at a different time from cynical ones (see p. xxi).

Thus by the time we get to the classification by metrical form (pp. liv-lvi), we are—if we have not been reading with the utmost attention—under the impression that something definite (or at least probable) has been established: for the 'groups', suggested as a hypothesis, now assume the status of settled entities, which serve as a jumping-off ground for further classifying. The discussion of metrical forms is detailed but proves absolutely nothing: for what reason is there to suppose that Donne would have used similar metrical forms at the same time, any more than that he would have written about the same subjects, or taken the same point of view, at the same time? Nevertheless, on p. lvi Dr. Gardner emerges with a conclusion: 'We have not arrived at a distinction between cynical and serious poems; but at a distinction between a simpler, and presumably earlier, and a more complex, and presumably later, conception of lyric form and style'. It is amazing that Dr. Gardner should offer us that 'presumably' as a substitute for the evidence she has not found.

Her 'presumptions' are, however, interesting—the more so in that they are inexplicit. I think she has fallen into a kind of evolutionary fallacy. The notion is that artists develop in straight lines, that their work always gets more and more complex, that, in short, their *oeuvre* invariably shows an evolution in value and quality. But a brief glance at some known facts about a writer other than Donne will

suggest that poets do not always develop continuously from the simple to the complex. Consider what would happen if we tried to date Keats's *The Cap and Bells* without using external evidence. It would clearly be absurd to assign it to the later months of 1819, because at that time Keats was writing *The Fall of Hyperion*, and so we would have the extraordinary spectacle of a man producing a jeu d'esprit and his most tragic work simultaneously. No: *The Cap and Bells* must obviously have been written earlier, perhaps in the second half of 1818, before Tom's death and the meeting with Fanny Brawne clouded the poet's temperament. Yet in point of fact we know that Keats did write the two poems at the same time—devoting, according to Charles Armitage Brown, his mornings to the one and his evenings to the other.

No doubt considerations such as these were in Dr. Gardner's mind when she issued the caveat I have already referred to (p. xxi). As we have seen, she also rejected 'biographical inferences' (p. xxiii). How completely she forgot her own warnings is shown by the veritable cloud of biographical speculation she throws out on pp. lvii-lxii. On p. lviii, for instance, she says: 'The empty period in Donne's literary career is from 1599 to 1607'; the only poem that can certainly be assigned to these years is *The Progress of the Soul*, which Donne himself dated August 1601 and which betrays wider and more curious reading than the Elegies or the Satires do. 'I find it hard to believe', she says, 'that a man whose mind was filled with these concerns and who had set himself so ambitious a task as this poem launches out on was, at the same time, writing love-lyrics. I would therefore place the composition of the earlier *Songs and Sonnets* . . . before 1600'. But what Dr. Gardner finds it 'hard to believe' is not, I submit, evidence: it is opinion, and should be clearly recognised as opinion.

She goes on to remind us that Donne's marriage in 1601 ruined his career for a long while. He retired to Pyrford, dependent on the charity of his wife's cousin. 'How did he employ himself in these years? He had only too much leisure for reading and writing: but there was no purpose, other than a personal one, that reading or writing could