

My interest in metaphysical poetry has always been tainted with a sense of amazement and awe: the poetry of the School of Donne, indeed, poses fundamental questions about the nature of modern poetry and the mission of a poet within a disenchanted world. The slow abandonment of the old Pythagorean system of harmonious spheres rotating around a stable earth and the acceptance of the heliocentric Copernican-Keplerian universe marked a true "breaking of the circle of perfection" - to use the term of Marjorie Nicholson - and entailed a complex breach in the nature of representational arts. The old cosmology depicted the universe as truly universal, i.e. turning around a single axis, a single principle, or a clearly defined centre. The order of creation was granted by the gradual chain of being, uniting the lowest with the highest in a scale of perfection. The nature of representational arts was, primarily, to re-present the order of creation: i.e. finding a means of transfer between the static order of universe and human understanding. Classical Renaissance literary theory - in fact, inherited from Antiquity - emphasised that poetry as the art of making was to "teach and delight": its delightfulness had to be firmly bound with instruction and initiation into the order of harmonious cosmos. Indeed, Sidney emphasised that poetry must not be dull and has to delight; however, there was no room for any kind of 'art pour l'art' movement in Renaissance poetics. What mattered was balance, a sense of decorum, which secured a truly proportionate and, after all, classically "objective" art. What Renaissance thinkers associated with nature was obviously *heavenly nature*, i.e. embellished nature, not a wild and unbound nature of the Romantics. Nevertheless, in the framework of this concept, art could always aspire to a sense of classical proportion: i.e. harmony granted by the concept it was meant to re-present.