

**THE RHETORIC OF
JOHN DONNE'S VERSE:
A DISSERTATION**

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The Rhetoric of John Donne's Verse: A Dissertation by Wightman Fletcher Melton

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BY

WIGHTMAN FLETCHER MELTON.

A Dissertation

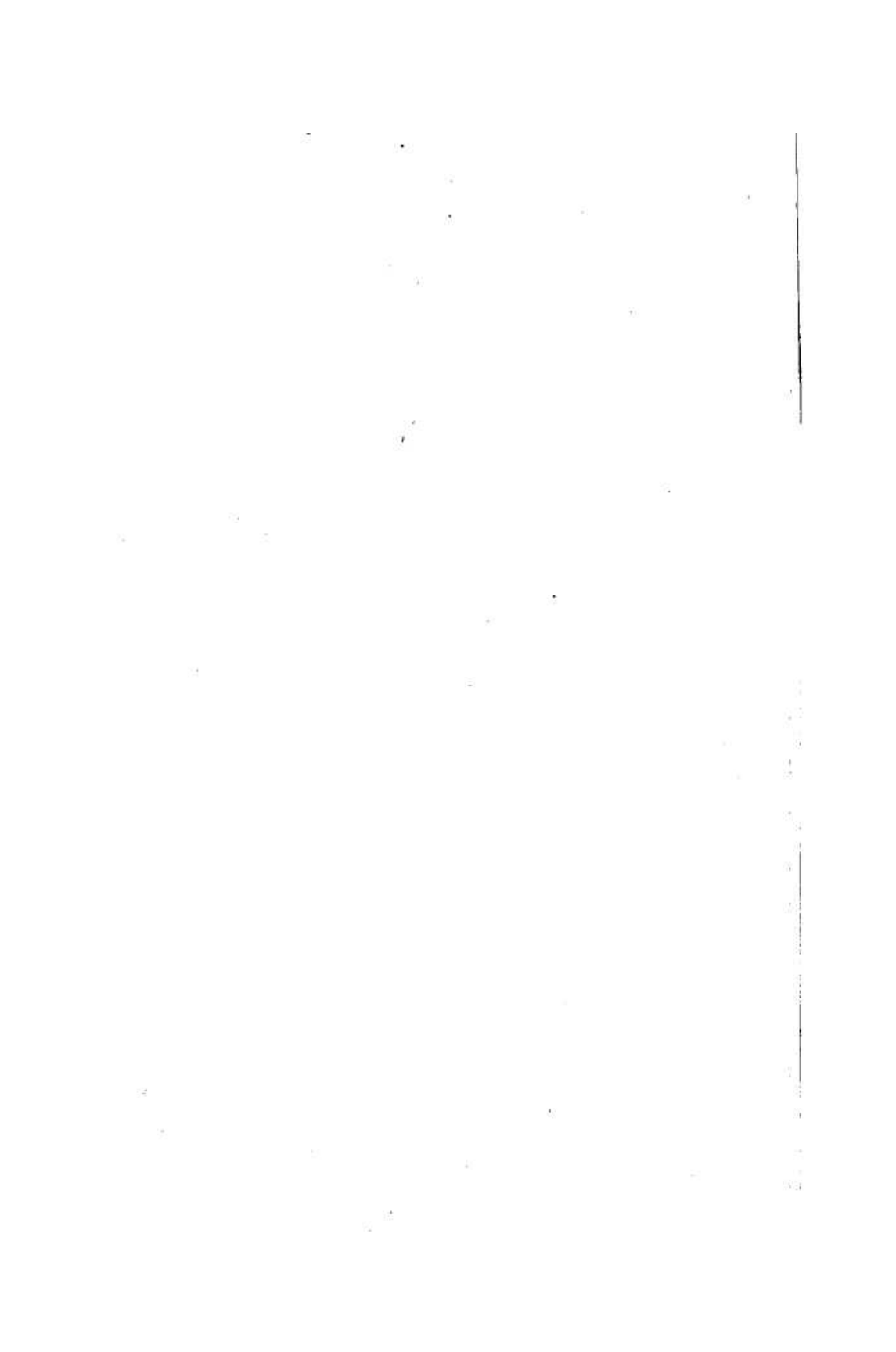
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THIS DISSERTATION
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED TO MY WIFE AND CHILDREN,
WHOSE SACRIFICES HAVE ENABLED ME,—
AFTER TEACHING FIFTEEN YEARS,—TO SPEND THREE YEARS IN THE
UNIVERSITY.
WITHOUT THEIR SYMPATHY
THIS WORK COULD NOT HAVE BEEN ACCOMPLISHED.



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THE RHETORIC OF JOHN DONNE'S VERSE.

INTRODUCTION.

According to Goldsmith, all those 'misguided innovators' who succeeded, but did not understand Dryden, Addison, and Pope, 'are silent, and those who make out their meaning are willing to praise, to show their understanding.'¹

There are so many literary historians, and writers on versification, who make no mention of John Donne, that we may take it for granted that he was either not understood, or not appreciated by them. Of those who do mention him, to praise or to condemn, it cannot be said that all, or any, fully understand him,—that praise and condemnation are sometimes offered to 'show understanding' there can be no doubt.

Our first chapter makes no pretense to being an exhaustive study of Donne's critics, for the reason that our concern is only with the metrical side of his poetry.² Even with this end in view, some important authorities may have been overlooked; but the showing is sufficient to enable one to trace the current of opinion from Ben Jonson to the present time. Occasionally when one critic quotes or refers to another, no further special mention will be made of the one so quoted or referred to.

The second chapter is merely an application, to the poetry of Donne, of the theory of 'secondary word-accent in English verse,' as advanced by Professor Bright and applied in the dissertations of his pupils, Huguenin, Brown, and Miller. The last of these has cited numerous examples from Donne; but it seems necessary, as a preliminary to our third chapter, that a more particular, or more

¹ *The Poetical Works of Thomas Parnell*, (Aldine ed.), pp. 52-3.

² A study of the critics who are concerned specially with the style and thought-matter of Donne may be found in the forthcoming work of Professor Martin G. Brumbaugh (University of Pennsylvania): *A Study of the Poetry of John Donne*.