4
Going to Extremes

4.1 The extremes of love and hate

In this shorter chapter I want to indicate the range of pathos to be found in early modern writing. Focusing, initially, on extreme expressions of emotion, and specifically on the crucial opposition of love and hate, should provide co-ordinates for the investigation of intermediate degrees. As a further system of reference, and an additional pointer to the possible combinations of feeling (for example, of personal and political emotion), I have chosen to look at expressions of love or hate on four different ‘levels’ – religion, politics, family, sexuality – within contexts which are either literary in their use of pathos, or addressed functionally to specific topics, audiences and occasions. A further purpose is to foster precision in the reading of such texts, without the additional complication of reference to the critical texts studied in the last chapter, or to the texts to which they refer, which we will look at in the next chapter. It will also be helpful, in a second section, to represent the widely different purposes and occasions to which emotive persuasion was applied, in this case instancing the relationship of preacher and congregation, subject and prince, feminine and masculine. Here extremes of feeling may be combined in a single text to serve its manifest persuasive design.

‘The extremes of love and hate’ are of course relative. Extreme malice, for example, might in the judgement of some readers be something the mind can intuit but never realise (see the article by Downes cited on p. 8, above), and in any case any such realisation might be deeply harrowing to read! Let’s say that I want to look at the visible ends of the range. But even within those undefined limits, we may find a fairly clear structural opposition in every enactment of love and hate from
the religious to the erotic. Taking our cue from Aristotle’s perception of the desire at the heart of hatred, that its object ‘should perish’ (*Rhetoric*, II.iv.32), we should find at one extreme the negation of another’s being (either the life, or the identity of that being), and at the other extreme, affirmation of it.

Any attempt to communicate such feelings depends on the capacity and susceptibility of those who are being invited to share them, or to empathise with them. Those who go the whole way will quite probably sense their difference from those who do not. Whenever *teaching* and *moving* are to be integrated, any writer representing the extreme emotions of a character, or any speaker trying to stir them in a companion or in an audience, will predict and seek to exploit this range of response, which I have termed the RPER. We have already seen how it may be deliberately stimulated through the use of Inclusion and Exclusion models (see pp. 20–5, above). Here we will consider several examples from outside the central group of authors figured in the two main chapters (besides some passages in their work, not referred to elsewhere). I will use varying degrees of *direct* quotation and analysis to suggest how the intensity of feeling expressed in each passage might reflect a sense of the original audience, whether reading or listening. Most of the passages will be briefly characterised, while two (the speech of Bunyan’s Mr. Stand-fast at his crossing of the Jordan, and Donne’s ‘Apparition’) will be examined in detail with some use of linguistic analysis.

4.1.1 Bunyan: the glowing coal

As I have just indicated, the first kind of emotion to be considered has God as its object, which in the context of sixteenth and seventeenth century England must mean the God of Christianity. But the humanity of the feeling expressed in the following passage will I hope render it accessible and acceptable to secular readers and to those of other faiths. Today the passage will elicit a range of reaction far outside anything predictable by Bunyan, all the more so as a consequence both of its subject, and the complex layering and interconnection of its emotive imagery. Towards the conclusion of the Second Part of his *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1684), Bunyan’s Mr. Stand-fast, like several of his companions, is summoned to cross the River; in other words he becomes aware that he is about to die. This whole extended passage of allegory—triumphantly completing Bunyan’s account of a Christian community’s journey towards Heaven, and analogous to the emotive conclusion of a speech or sermon—worked so memorably, for so long,