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*Loss , Love and Geographical Imagination in Donne's Poetry*

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*May 2018*

## ***Dedication***

This work is dedicated to our dear parents for their patience, help, understanding and support during all the years of our studies

Also, I dedicate this work to our best friends

It is dedicated to all whom we love without exception.

### *Acknowledgements*

In the name of **Allah**, Allah who teaches us with pen and teaches human beings what they do not know. May peace be upon our prophet Muhammad, the noblest human being and the teacher of all people in the world. He is a chosen prophet who has most fluent tongue. All praise and gratitude be to Allah having power upon all people on earth, giving the inspirations, health, and power to me, so I can finally finish this Dissertation.

We very grateful to my supervisor, Lect. Ahmed Abdul Hussein for showing us the way to the generative level, for all his encouraging support and for being an inexhaustible source of helpful comments.

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***Abstract***

John Donne is acknowledged as the master of metaphysical poetry and is admired for his talent and magnificent wit exercised in his writing. Donne's strategies to win the authority of the 'domain' of love in his poetry are attempts to claim a personal domain for himself.

The study is divided into two chapters . Chapter one deals with John Donne's life and career while chapter two sheds light on loss , love and geographical imagination in Donne's poetry

Finally the conclusion sums up the findings of the study.

## Chapter One

### **Jonne Donne's Life and Career**

Jonne was born in London in 1572, into a recusant Roman Catholic family when practice of that religion was illegal in England. Donne was the third of six children. His father, also named John Donne, was of Welsh descent and a warden of the Ironmongers Company in the City of London. Donne's father was a respected Roman Catholic who avoided unwelcome government attention out of fear of persecution.<sup>1</sup>

His father died in 1576, when Donne was four years old, leaving his son fatherless and his widow, Elizabeth Heywood, with the responsibility of raising their children alone. Donne was educated privately; however, there is no evidence to support the popular claim that he was taught by Jesuits. Donne's mother married Dr. John Syminges, a wealthy widower with three children, a few months after Donne's father died. Donne thus acquired a stepfather. Two more of his sisters, Mary and Katherine, died in 1581.<sup>2</sup>

Donne's mother lived her last years in the Deanery after Donne became Dean of St Paul's, and died just two months before Donne, in January 1631. In 1583, the 11-year-old Donne began studies at Hart Hall, now Hertford College, Oxford. After three years of studies there, Donne was admitted to the University of Cambridge, where he studied for another three years. However, Donne could not

obtain a degree from either institution because of his Catholicism, since he refused to take the Oath of Supremacy required to graduate.<sup>3</sup>

In 1591 Donne was accepted as a student at the Thavies Inn legal school, one of the Inns of Chancery in London. On 6 May 1592 he was admitted to Lincoln's Inn, one of the Inns of Court. In 1593, five years after the defeat of the Spanish Armada and during the intermittent Anglo-Spanish War (1585–1604), Queen Elizabeth issued the first English statute against sectarian dissent from the Church of England, titled "An Act for restraining Popish recusants". It defined "Popish recusants" as those "convicted for not repairing to some Church, Chapel, or usual place of Common Prayer to hear Divine Service there, but forbearing the same contrary to the tenor of the laws and statutes heretofore made and provided in that behalf".<sup>4</sup>

Donne's brother Henry was also a university student prior to his arrest in 1593 for harbouring a Catholic priest, William Harrington, whom he betrayed under torture. Harrington was tortured on the rack, hanged until not quite dead, and then subjected to disembowelment. Henry Donne died in Newgate Prison of bubonic plague, leading Donne to begin questioning his Catholic faith.<sup>5</sup>

By the age of 25 he was well prepared for the diplomatic career he appeared to be seeking. He was appointed chief secretary to the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, Sir Thomas Egerton, and was established at Egerton's London home, York House, Strand close to the Palace of Whitehall, then the most influential social centre in England. During the next four years Donne fell in love with Egerton's niece Anne More, and they were secretly married just before Christmas.<sup>6</sup>

In 1610 and 1611 Donne wrote two anti-Catholic polemics: *Pseudo-Martyr* and *Ignatius His Conclave* for Morton. He then wrote two Anniversaries, *An Anatomy of the World* (1611) and *Of the Progress of the Soul* (1612) for Drury. Although James was pleased with Donne's work, he refused to reinstate him at court and instead urged him to take holy orders. At length, Donne acceded to the king's wishes, and in 1615 was ordained into the Church of England. In 1615 Donne was awarded an honorary doctorate in divinity from Cambridge University, and became a Royal Chaplain in the same year, and a Reader of Divinity at Lincoln's Inn in 1616, where he served in the chapel as minister until 1622.<sup>7</sup>

In 1618 he became chaplain to Viscount Doncaster, who was on an embassy to the princes of Germany. Donne did not return to England until 1620. In 1621 Donne was made Dean of St Paul's, a leading and well-paid position in the Church of England, which he held until his death in 1631. During his period as dean his daughter Lucy died, aged eighteen. In late November and early December 1623 he suffered a nearly fatal illness, thought to be either typhus or a combination of a cold followed by a period of fever. During his convalescence he wrote a series of meditations and prayers on health, pain, and sickness that were published as a book in 1624 under the title of *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*.<sup>8</sup>

In 1624 he became vicar of St Dunstan-in-the-West, and 1625 a prolocutor to Charles I. He earned a reputation as an eloquent preacher and 160 of his sermons have survived, including the famous *Death's Duel* sermon delivered at the Palace of Whitehall before King Charles I in February 1631. Donne is considered a master of the metaphysical conceit, an extended metaphor that combines two vastly different ideas into a single idea, often using imagery. An example of this is his equation of lovers with saints in "*The Canonization*".<sup>9</sup>



Unlike the conceits found in other Elizabethan poetry, most notably Petrarchan conceits, which formed clichéd comparisons between more closely related objects such as a rose and love, metaphysical conceits go to a greater depth in comparing two completely unlike objects. One of the most famous of Donne's conceits is found in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" where he compares two lovers who are separated like the two legs of a compass.<sup>10</sup>

Donne's works are also witty, employing paradoxes, puns, and subtle yet remarkable analogies. His pieces are often ironic and cynical, especially regarding love and human motives. Common subjects of Donne's poems are love (especially in his early life), death (especially after his wife's death), and religion. John Donne's poetry represented a shift from classical forms to more personal poetry. Donne is noted for his poetic metre, which was structured with changing and jagged rhythms that closely resemble casual speech (it was for this that the more classical-minded Ben Jonson commented that "Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging").<sup>11</sup>

Some scholars believe that Donne's literary works reflect the changing trends of his life, with love poetry and satires from his youth and religious sermons during his later years. Other scholars, such as Helen Gardner, question the validity of this dating most of his poems were published posthumously (1633). The exception to these is his *Anniversaries*, which were published in 1612 and *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* published in 1624. His sermons are also dated, sometimes specifically by date and year.<sup>12</sup>

The knowledge of Donne's immense learning, the subtlety and capacity of

his intellect, the intense depth and wide scope of his thought, the charm of his conversation, the sadness of his life, gave a vivid meaning and interest to his poems, circulated among his acquaintances, which at this distance of time one cannot reach without a certain effort of imagination. Donne is one of the most interesting personalities among our men of letters. The superficial facts of his life are so incongruous as to be an irresistible provocation to inquiry<sup>13</sup>.

Donne died on 31 March 1631 and was buried in old St Paul's Cathedral, where a memorial statue of him by Nicholas Stone was erected with a Latin epigraph probably composed by himself. The memorial was one of the few to survive the Great Fire of London in 1666 and is now in St Paul's Cathedral. The statue was claimed by Izaak Walton in his biography to have been modelled from the life by Donne in order to suggest his appearance at the resurrection; it was to start a vogue in such monuments during the course of the 17th century. In 2012 a bust of the poet by Nigel Boonham was unveiled outside in the cathedral churchyard.<sup>14</sup>

After Donne's death, a number of poetical tributes were paid to him, of which one of the principal (and most difficult to follow) was his friend Lord Herbert of Cherbury's "Elegy for Doctor Donne". Posthumous editions of Donne's poems were accompanied by several "Elegies upon the Author" over the course of the next two centuries. Six of these were written by fellow churchmen, others by such courtly writers as Thomas Carew, Sidney Godolphin and Endymion Porter. In 1963 came Joseph Brodsky's "The Great Elegy for John Donne".<sup>15</sup>

Beginning in the 20th century, several historical novels appeared taking as their subject various episodes in Donne's life. His courtship of Anne More is the

subject of Elizabeth Gray Vining's *Take Heed of Loving Me: A novel about John Donne* (1963) and Maeve Haran's *The Lady and the Poet* (2010). Both characters also make interspersed appearances in Mary Novik's *Conceit* (2007), where the main focus is on their rebellious daughter Pegge. English treatments include Garry O'Connor's *Death's Duel: a novel of John Donne* (2015), which deals with the poet as a young man.<sup>16</sup>

He also plays a significant role in Christie Dickason's *The Noble Assassin* (2012), a novel based on the life of Donne's patron and (the author claims) his lover, Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford. Finally there is Bryan Crockett's *Love's Alchemy: a John Donne Mystery* (2015), in which the poet, blackmailed into service in Robert Cecil's network of spies, attempts to avert political disaster and at the same time outwit Cecil.<sup>17</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Robert Cecil Bald, *John Donne, a Life* (Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> David Colclough, *Donne, John (1572–1631)* (Oxford:Oxford University Press,2004),p.351

<sup>6</sup> Ibid,p.355.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Anniina Jokinen, *The Life of John Donne (1572-1631)*(Oxford:Oxford University Press,2006),p.42

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid,p.43.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Richard W. Langstaff, *Johnston, Bernard, ed. Donne, John. Collier's Encyclopedia.* Vol 8. New York: P.F. Colliers,1988 ,p. 346.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid,p.348.

<sup>15</sup> Harold Bloom ‘*Bloom’s Classic Critical Views: John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*) New York New: York University Press,2008),p.33

<sup>16</sup> Ibid,p.34

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Two

## Loss , Love and Geographical Imagination in Donne's Poetry

*The Sunne Rising* In this dramatic love song, Donne emphasizes the self sufficient and all-absorbing nature of love. The union of lovers embraces the entire cosmos and time past, present and future. It is for this reason that Coleridge regards the poem as an epitome of true vigorous evaluation of both soul and body in full form. The poet and his sweetheart are lying in their bedroom and when the sun rises on the eastern horizon early in the morning, the lovers feel disturbed by the intrusion of the sun's rays through the windows and curtains of the room. The lover addresses the Sun as "busie old fool, unruly Sun" and asks him .<sup>1</sup>

Why dost thou thus,  
Through windows, and through curtains call on us?  
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?<sup>2</sup>

The Sun must know that lovers are not the slaves of time and changing seasons. Love exists independent of all laws, rules, conventions and movement of time. In fact, it transcends all earthly laws and the boundaries of time and space, for there is something divine about true Love .<sup>3</sup>

Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,  
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

The poet tells the Sun to chide children for being late to school. Instead of interfering with the poet and his beloved, he should remind apprentices, courtiers, and farmers of their duties within specific periods of time. Thus, in the very opening stanza, the poet strikes a note of unconventionality. "The Sun" which Spenser and the other Elizabethan poets had so often described as "the golden eyes of heaven", "Hyperion", and "the glorious planet sol", is reduced by Donne to

"busie old fool" and "Saucy pedantic wretch." This is so because in his eyes, love is more important than anything else in the world .<sup>4</sup>

The poet catches the sun, and addressing him as man to man, is playfully angry at his intrusion. He pictures the day's first activities of the boys who pass his windows on their way to school or work, and of the court which was the focal point and symbol of sixteenth century English life; he strips down the rigours of a time table; and he centres his attention on the thought of love." The poet points out that the Sun has no reason to feel proud of its powerful and bright beams. If he so chooses, he can eclipse and cloud his brightness by closing his eyes. He would, however, not do so, for he cannot bear the thought of removing his eyes from the face of his beloved even for a moment. Her eyes are so dazzling that they are capable of blinding even the sun.<sup>5</sup>

The poet then juxtaposes his private world of love with the external world of geography, and says that the world of lovers is a microcosm of the outside world, because the dreams, imaginations and collective spiritual landscape of the lovers include within their bounds the kingdoms of kings and the glory, vastness and riches of the whole universe.<sup>6</sup>

Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,  
Whether both th'Indias of spice and mine  
Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.  
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,  
And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.  
She is all states and all Princes, I,  
Nothing else is.  
here in my love."

In the concluding stanza of the poem, Donne uses his favourite "all nothing

antithesis", when he points out that the self and glory of the external world are insignificant as compared with the wealth and splendour of the world of love. The princes and kings merely imitate the poet and his sweetheart and try to be as happy as they are. But the fact is that they cannot even dream of the wealth of romance; nor can they ever taste the bliss of love the poet and his sweetheart experience in their "lover-bower".<sup>7</sup>

Compared to the glory and profundity of love the worldly glory is mere mockery and all other kinds of wealth are trash. The poet argues that he is far richer and happier than the Sun because the latter is alone without a beloved. Again, the poet says that since the world of the lovers is all-inclusive, the Sun should, in future, shine on them alone, because in so doing, it will have done its duty which is to distribute his light and heat to the entire world .<sup>8</sup>

*The Sunne Rising* is characterized by structural unity and the various elements the impudent address, the ingenious conceit that the Sun's journey farther away from the lovers bed-chamber is futile, and the idea that lovers concentrate within themselves the whole world-are fused into a perfect poetic pattern. The variety of tone is completely dissolved in symphony of love. Therefore, Joan Bennet rightly believes that the poem is a "successful fusion of wit and passion." Donne's lovers seem to transcend the limits of the physical world by disregarding external influences, coercing all things to rotate around them instead.<sup>9</sup>

*A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* the poem was in all likelihood composed in the year 1611 as a parting song for his wife, when Donne was going to France for a period of two months. It is believed that this composition was

triggered by Anne's premonitions during the last phase of her pregnancy, which prove true as she gives birth to a still born child. The crux of the argument is based on the premise that the body is separated from its soul. Yet, the lovers' souls are united and therefore the geographical separation cannot separate or impact their love for each other .<sup>10</sup>

Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion...

In the opening lines, Donne establishes a distinction between virtuous and non-virtuous men. This distinction is based on the ability of the virtuous men to communicate ("whisper") with their souls and the non-virtuous men's unawareness of their souls. The imagery of the death employed is not to mention the literal death of the poet-lover-husband, but to be able to celebrate the death of the virtuous men, which is their gateway for seeking heavenly favours. The lovers temporary separation from his beloved/wife is similarly, supposed to be celebrated as it does not indicate any kind of suffering, sorrow or tragedy, but expansion, "endure not yet/ A breach, but an expansion,/ Like gold to aery thinness beat."<sup>11</sup>

The separation allows them to be aware of the expansive qualities of their souls. Even when the two lovers possess two different bodies, their souls are intermixed like two liquids that are poured into each other. The metaphysical conceit of the "twin compasses" employed illustrates how the two lovers are joined together by one common handle. The wife, because she is staying back at home, becomes the "fixed foot" of the compass, whereas the husband, because he is travelling, becomes the other leg of the compass that "far doth roam". Yet, even when the two legs of the compass seem to be engaged in their different tasks, they



supply a certain degree of inter-dependence and mutuality to each other.<sup>12</sup>

And though it in the centre sit,  
Yet when the other far doth roam,  
It leans and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect as that comes home.

As the husband's soul moves away in distance, the wife's soul continually inclines towards him, for they are joined together, and not separate. It's precisely because of her love and firmness, that allows the other leg of the compass to complete full circle, and return to the centre, "thy firmness makes my circle just, / And makes me end, where I begun."<sup>13</sup>

The pun on the word "growing erect" supplies the earthly, carnal and sexual element to the discussion on the body and soul. Even when he talks about souls, the body and the bodily pleasures cannot be discarded or set aside. In fact, „body“ becomes the indispensable site where the spiritual could be realized. In the post-sex, pre-spiritual gap lies the real meaning of love and other concepts such as the divide between the sensual and the spiritual. Donne's lover repeatedly establishes the impossibility of concrete and absolute articulation of love in language: "a love so much refined, that ourselves know not what it is."<sup>14</sup>

*The Anniversary* As the title of the poem shows, the poet celebrates the anniversary of his love. The Kings and their countries "all glory of honours, beauties, wits", and the sun itself which makes time are older by one year since the poet and his sweetheart first saw each other and fell in love. The poet addresses his

beloved and says that everything in the world is transitory and mortal, but their love is immortal because it transcends time and death. There is something divine about their love, therefore, it is unchanged and unchangeable in the changing world where everything is subject to decay and death.<sup>15</sup>

All other things, to their destruction draw,  
Only our love hath no decay;  
This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday,  
Running it never runs from us away,  
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

After their death, the poet and his beloved will be buried in two graves. But if they are buried together in one grave, even death would not be able to separate them. They are the princes of the kingdom of love which is richer and vaster than any kind of empire. No doubt, they will die physically, but their love will still be immortal. Their souls will remain united in heaven. Their eyes, ears, and other senses will disappear with their physical death but reduced to pure souls, they will experience the intensity of love fully. The poet means to suggest that their love increases all the more then, after death, their bodies fall into dust and their souls rise to heaven.<sup>16</sup>

This, or a love increased there above,  
When bodies to their graves, souls from their graves remove.  
Clearly, like a Hindu sage, Donne believes in the immortality of human soul and  
the constancy and permanence of true love.

In the concluding stanza, the poet expresses his hope and confidence that in heaven they will be "thoroughly blest". They will enjoy spiritual bliss, like other souls who go to heaven after spending their life-span in the world. On earth, the poet and his beloved are Kings crowned with the glory and beauty of love. Their status is higher than that of other Kings and emperors whose position is threatened

by treasons and conspiracies. In the case of the poet and his sweetheart none can be treacherous to them, unless one of them turns false and faithless. But there is no ground for doubt; and it would be unwise on their part, if they allow imaginary fears to interfere with their present happiness. They should remain firmly committed to each other and continue loving each other nobly, and adds again.<sup>17</sup>

Years and years unto years, till we attain  
To write threescore this is the second of our reign.

Thus, the poet has harmonized not only the realistic and the idealistic aspects of love, but also juxtaposed and reconciled the polarities of the nothingness of death on the one hand and the eternity of love, on the other. Again, as in many other poems, Donne's treatment of love in this poem differs from that of Elizabethan poets whose concept of love lacked realism and passion.<sup>18</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Meg Lota Brown, *Donne and the Politics of Conscience in Early Modern England* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995) ,p.32.

<sup>2</sup> John Donne, "The Sun Rising." *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*. Ed. David Damrosch, et al. (New York: Longman, 1999) ,p. 1552-1553.

<sup>3</sup> Lisa Gorton, "John Donne's Use of Space." *Early Modern Literary Studies* 4.2

(1998): 27 pars. 10 November 1999 .

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Docherty, *John Donne, Undone* ( London: Methuen, 1986),p.33.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid,p.34.

<sup>9</sup> Achsah Guibbory, "*John Donne.*" *The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry: Donne to Marvell.* Ed. Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993),p. 123.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid,p.126.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Toshihiko Kawasaki, "*Donne's Microcosm.*"*Seventeenth-Century Imagery: Essays on Uses of Figurative Language from Donne to Farquhar.* Ed. Earl Miner. (Berkeley: California University Press , 1971),p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Monroe Coffin, *John Donne and the New Philosophy*( New York: Humanities Press, 1958),p.89.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid,p.93.

## Conclusion

The poetry of John Donne, a great late-Renaissance poet, is the product of

the epoch's emergent imperialism and colonization . In many of his love poems, Donne defines himself as having power over his beloved, addressing her as his 'empery' or 'America'. John Donne is preoccupied with the question of 'domain' as an imperial pattern of his age. The lover in his poetry claims a personal domain for himself. These metaphors of domain can further reveal how this imperial pattern constructs the identity of the poet. To analyze Donne's concept of self in light of cognition, first one should note that the self, just like the domain of love in his poetry, is conceptualized as a closed space. Donne's seeking a secure place is highly associated with his view of human society.

Donne talks of the degeneration of the late-sixteenth century society in his Satires, dealing with frivolous, materialistic values of his society; the legal system; religious institutions; the court and courtiers; and the judicial system and structure of rewards in late Elizabethan England. In these poems Donne demonstrates his tendency to be isolated from the society, showing himself as its lone critic; He also expresses his opposition to the political establishment of his society both in his Elegies and Songs and Sonnets; His Satires, however, show "contrary impulses", both "outrage" at and "attraction" to the society

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