

# John Donne's Love Poetry: A Poetry of Human Love

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**Abstract**—John Donne set a poetry which combines violence of personal passions with intellectual ingenuity. His love poems are written at different times, in different moods and addressed to different persons. Most of his love poems are his analytical exercises in love which he did in his youth when he was notoriously known as Jack Donne. Donne was rediscovered in the twentieth century by modernists such as W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot who wrote that Donne's poems, with their fusion of passion and intellect, demonstrate a "dissociation of sensibility." Today Donne is viewed as an extraordinary poet, an equally accomplished writer of prose, and an influence on many poets, notably the modernists of the first half of the twentieth century. Eighteenth-century critic Samuel Johnson noted that in Donne's work, His love poems are unconventional and original both in form and content.

**Keywords:** Passions, Sensibility, Moods.

Love poems of his young age and the holy sonnets of his old age make an interesting and contrasting reading. In poetic idiom, they describe the romantic morning and remorseful evening of personality of Donne. The traditional dichotomy between Jack Donne and Dr. Donne is essentially false. On one hand, Donne's love poetry is philosophical in its nature and characterized by a texture of religious imagery; and on the other hand, his devotional poetry makes unexpected, bold use of erotic imagery. What Donne presents is two sides of a consistent vision of the world and of the mortality of man. John Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* do not describe a single unchanging view of love; they express a wide variety of emotions and attitudes. Love can be an experience of the body, the soul, or both; it can be a religious experience, or merely a sensual one, and it can give rise to emotions ranging from ecstasy to despair. Conventional wisdom may expect devotional poetry from a divine and feel certain uneasiness when faced with love poetry, but such a view misses the point in two different ways.

His love poems are unconventional and original both in form and content. These poems are neither his sentimental salutes to his love nor its mere prosaic data. Instead they combine reason with passion and sensibility with wit. In other words, unlike Browning and Tennyson, he "thought his feelings". They

were composed not as flattering verses to his lady love. His treatment of love is a blend of realism and romantic idealism. In his love poems it is love which never changes with the passage of time because it is a marriage of two souls and at the same time, he admits calls and claims of flesh, pleasures of sex, joys of secret meetings and the ecstasy which the lands of love experience while 'unlacing of body of his beloved'. In fact to turn from the love lyrics of Elizabethan poets to those of Donne is to receive a shock-pleasant or unpleasant. While Elizabethan poetry is impersonal and ideal, that of Donne is lively and bubbly. Fantastic as Donne is, he writes of his own experience.

In *'To his Mistress Going to Bed'* we see how highly Donne can praise sensual pleasure. Aroused, he uses his hands to full advantage to explore her body. He compares his amazement to that of someone discovering a new land. He next directs her to bare her body to him as fully as she would to the midwife. This graphic request is followed by the poem's closing couplet, in which the persona points out that he is naked already to show his mistress the way and thus poignantly reveals that he is only hoping for such lasciviousness from her. He addresses the woman as:

*Oh my America, my new found lande,  
My Kingdome, safeliest when with one man man'd,  
My myne of precious stones, my Empiree*

Women in Donne's poetry are not regarded as goddesses rather they are presented as fickle and faithless:

*"Nowhere lives a woman  
Virtuous and fair"  
"Hope not for mind in a woman"*

Most of his well-known poems celebrate the never dying nature of platonic love- love which is a meeting of two souls. In some of his poems, he uses religious imagery to describe the beauty and poetry of his love. In "A Valediction – Forbidden Mourning" He claims that the physical separation between two lovers does not end but expand love. He laughs

at the love of earthly people who cannot bear separation because their love is based on senses:

*“Dull sublunary lovers love*

*Whose soul is sense?*

*Cannot admit absence because it doth remove*

*Those things which element it “*

The poem uses religious imagery when it advocates a woman's bearing of her body to her lover by analogy with the baring of the soul before God.

The idea of two coming together to form one is very important in Donne's view of love. When a couple find perfect love together they become all-sufficient to one another, forming a world of their own, which has no need of the outside world. This idea is expressed in these lines from *The Sunne Rising*:

*She' is all States, and all Princes, I,  
Nothing else is.*

*Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;  
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.*

Love in these poems has been described as something complete in itself and has nothing to do values, calls and claims of worldly people. In “The Canonization,” the persona justifies his love affair in explicitly sacred terms by explaining that his relationship with his beloved makes the two of them saints of love. The ‘You’ in the poem “*Canonization*” is there to prove it.

If we make a structural analysis on love poems of Donne, we find the same pattern in most of the poems. The poet builds two theses—on the one hand there is anti-love and pedestrian society and on the other hand lovers whose only job is to love.

His poems have memorable, jarring and gripping openings. These openings shock the readers into attention—sometimes by a question. First he shocks then develops the thought. This is the thought which seems to be addressed not to casual mistresses but to someone truly passionately loved and this is the chief quality of poetry of Donne. Following lines may be noticed:

*“For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love”*

*“Twice or thrice had I loved thee*

*Before I knew thy face or name”*

*“Busy, old fool, unruly sun”*

Donne's poems are extraordinarily witty and ingenious, but this does not exclude the possibility that they also contain strong emotion. Donne's poems are quite capable of stirring the emotions, and no matter how clever his conceits, or revolutionary his thought, his poems would not work without a seed of genuine feeling at their Centre. In a word, it is not a

degree but kind of unique love poetry of Donne which has made it memorable in the annals of English poetry.

### Works Cited

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