



TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

**«Women in John Donne's Poetry:
An Analysis of a Selection of Poems»**

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GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

Curso Académico 2017-2018

Fecha de presentación 05/09/2018



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1. Abstract

The purpose of this work is to analyse a selection of poems by the metaphysical poet John Donne by focusing on his ideas of women. Donne's ambiguous ideas on this subject hinder us from making a clear statement of his vision. However his works are worthy of study due to their valuable artistic features as well as the introduction of the concept of women as human beings and even as equals. These ideas contrast with the Petrarchan tradition in which women were treated as flawless objects to be worshipped rather than as human beings. The first section, which analyses "Love's Progress" and "The Comparison", is aimed at highlighting women's physical characteristics, followed by "To His Mistress Going to Bed" and "The Good Morrow", in which the poet treats his beloved as an equal who wants and deserves to be respected. The final section analyses "Sappho to Philaenis", exploring a world in which two women love each other without the presence of a man and free from the patriarchal system, sharing a mutual feeling of love between equals.

Key Words: Women. Mutuality. Metaphysical Poetry. John Donne.

Este trabajo consiste en un análisis de distintas obras poéticas del autor metafísico y renacentista John Donne, centrándonos en sus ideas acerca de la figura de la mujer. La ambigüedad de su punto de vista en este tema nos impide realizar un juicio claro de sus ideas, aunque sus obras son dignas de estudio gracias a su riqueza artística. Así pues, destacan sus conceptos acerca de la mujer como ser humano o como igual, claramente alejados de las ideas petrarquistas que posicionan a la mujer como un objeto a adorar. La primera sección de poemas analiza "Love's Progress" y "The Comparison", enfocados en destacar el cuerpo de la mujer con un fin sexual o de desprecio pero acercándola al mismo tiempo, viéndola como un ser humano. La siguiente sección estudia "To His Mistress Going to Bed" y "The Good Morrow" y cómo la mujer es vista como una igual ante el poeta, quien debe aprender a respetarla y tratarla como tal. La última parte del trabajo está dedicada al análisis de "Sappho to Philaenis", explorando el amor homosexual entre dos mujeres sin la necesidad de un hombre, libres del sistema patriarcal y con un sentimiento mutuo de igualdad.

Palabras clave: Mujer. Mutualidad. Poesía metafísica. John Donne.

2. Introduction

Of all the relevant aspects of the Renaissance, John Donne's poetry was one of the most important contributions to the literary world, as well as a new approach to the traditions and teachings of the Middle Ages. Being one of the harshest metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, Donne has been highly criticised and labeled as inept and gross, ignoring what lies beneath his verses. What is hidden behind his harsh words and complicated conceits is what we will focus on in this work, more specifically on one of the topics most treated by Donne: women. Obsessed with an unknown subject as woman as a person and not as an angelic being (as in the Petrarchan tradition), Donne explores the opposite gender from a new perspective, rejecting and criticising the Petrarchan tropes and giving his opinion through a variety of poems that differ greatly one from another. And this is the cornerstone of our work: Donne's opinion about women is not as easy to address as it might seem at first glance. His attitude and mind vary from one poem to the next, even from one verse to another, thus hindering us from making a clear statement of his true point of view. Perhaps he just wanted to experiment with such a fascinating as well as distant subject as the woman of the Renaissance, or maybe what we have is a man confused by his own thoughts that clashed against the influence of Renaissance society. Be that as it may, in this work we will make an analysis of several poems that represent the different postures of the poet about women. After making clear the influence of Renaissance society on the poet and his role as a metaphysical poet, we will analyse two of the most criticised and at first glance misogynistic poems, aimed at objectifying and criticising the female body. The following two poems, related to equality between both sexes and mutual respect, will give us a clearer description of the concept of mutual feeling that Donne frequently uses, ending with a poem of love between women without the control of the male figure.

The purpose of this work is not to show that John Donne did not have a misogynistic behaviour, but to better understand his vision on a subject that fascinated him, giving rise to egalitarian concepts that were revolutionary in a sexist society, concepts that contributed to a society of mutual respect as equal human beings.

3. The uncertainty of the Renaissance

John Donne's career could not be understood without comprehending the influence of the era in which he lived, one of the most relevant ages in the history of humanity: the Renaissance. This well-known period of European history brought the rebirth of many aspects to a society in which religion had been a controlling force, affecting everything from art, politics, music and even the perception of reality, among many other features. Thus, the previous centuries before the Renaissance were characterised by constant patterns which were kept almost intact for many years until the Renaissance emerged. From a structured view, completely based on religious teachings, we move on to a new kind of reality in which plenty of things people considered to be universal truths were challenged (*Crossref-it.info*).

In terms of religion, the cosmos was depicted by the geocentric model of the universe with Earth at the centre, a theory supported by the idea of man as the core of God's greatest creation. However, Nicolaus Copernicus' researches, which placed the Sun rather than the Earth as the centre of the universe, were motivated by classic ideas brought by the Pythagoreans, meaning the rebirth of the astronomical model of heliocentrism as well as the starting point of a scepticism about some teachings of the Church (*Cs.mcgill.ca*).

Regarding politics, system turned into powerful hereditary monarchies, expanding their power and unifying and dividing lands by conquering through force or by means of more subtle tactics. Princedoms and republics played a key role in the development of this political scene as well, the first being a state ruled by an individual with the support of his family and the second a system of balanced power in which no family or individual could control the cities. These multiple expansions of power led to the need of studying political theory. This uncertainty about how to govern and the search of the proper way to rule brought the publishing of famous books like Machiavelli's *The Prince*, motivating the rulers to be devious in order to achieve a state of stability in their territories (*Encyclopedia.com*).

Humanism also played an important role during the Renaissance, bringing a new spirit and a new sense of reality to the Renaissance world. Humanism changed the focus of different artists and philosophers from God to the human being, imitating the works of Ancient Greece and Rome, and thus supporting a classical revival and showing a critical attitude toward institutions, received morals, or any teaching coming from the Middle Ages which did not fit in the humanist principles. Once more, we move on from the structured reality of religion in which God's guidance is spread out by the Church and the Old and New Testaments, to the almost unknown field of study which is the human being, exploring it from the hand of the

classical figures, giving rise to questions about man's physical and intellectual position in the Renaissance world: a new world in which the old beliefs might not be as true as they thought. As a result, individualism became one of the most iconic features during this period, meaning the search for one's own pleasure as a Renaissance man through self-exploration. Divinity was still relevant and fundamental as it had been during the last centuries but the figure of man as an interesting and complex being was almost the main matter of study in the Renaissance (*Britannica.com*).

One of the most relevant events that occurred during this period of time, that was fundamental to the spread of knowledge throughout the West from the 15th century onwards, was the invention of the printing press in Europe. Caxton's invention brought the dissemination of information in a cheaper and easier fashion than in the Middle Ages, allowing every humanist to spread their ideas, criticism or thoughts in every important place of the Renaissance world (*Crossref-it.info*).

Under these circumstances, the Renaissance meant not only a step forward into the modern world but the blend between the old classical knowledge, now adapted and studied from a modern point of view, and the numerous teachings of the Middle Ages. Such a development in a static system led to a state of uncertainty and wonder: how were the people of Renaissance supposed to understand the new reality presented in front of them? Were they prepared to defy what they had been believing for hundreds of years? As a matter of fact, they were, especially one of the most relevant figures of the metaphysical poetry, an English poet called John Donne.

4. John Donne's Ambiguous View of Women

As one of the greatest writers of English verse and the most well-known metaphysical poet, John Donne's poetry is one of the best considered works in literature nowadays. An exceptionally skilled writer of his time, we perceive the influence of the period in which he lived on many of his works, finding many of the before mentioned Renaissance issues and topics treated under his metaphysical way of poetry. Even though metaphysical poetry was not similar to other poetic genres as the main authors did not even get to know each other, this style of poetry was characterised by specific elements which separated them from the rest of Renaissance poetry. For example, metaphysical poets tended to prioritise wit over perfection of form, looking for surprise by their ingenuity and the use of inventive conceits. These conceits aimed to shock the readers as well as to explore all areas of knowledge by using unusual, bizarre and extravagant analogies, mostly based on contemporary sciences and exploration. Poems became an intellectual exercise by which metaphysical poets explored topics like love, morality, religion, death, etc. in a rebellious and direct tone, always trying to disconcert and appeal to readers' intellect (*Study.com*).

Among the amount of thoughts, issues, and questions which metaphysical poets approached we find one topic which was particularly ambiguous as well as highly fascinating in its treatment: women. Women as a subject of poetry have a long story in their treatment, but in the Renaissance (more specifically in the Stuart period) we notice that this topic shares the common uncertainty feature of its period, questioning the figure of woman as a "donna angelicata" and leading to evolve to a new reality where they are treated in a different way. From the conventional and romantic Elizabethan love poetry (i.e. Petrarchan style) which puts the beloved on a pedestal, showing awe and respect for her, we move on to the metaphysical poets, who chose to represent woman as an equal and not as a superior and divinely unapproachable being, thus destroying the Petrarchan pedestal and moving from adoration to intimacy. This approach varies depending on the author but in regard to Donne's point of view on this topic, it is commonly known that his ideas were ambiguous but guided by the concept of woman as an equal human being (Boyd 3-4).

Donne's view of women remains inconclusive nowadays. Most of the writers who have studied his works and his life concluded that he was a misogynist influenced by society and the importance of "being masculine" (Bell 201). They might be true but, probably, there was a deeper meaning hidden behind a façade whose only purpose could have been being accepted in a patriarchal world by following its rules. Obviously, his sexist attitude towards women

cannot be denied nor his numerous poems which highlight their flaws in a harsh and cruel way, but it is true that his position changed depending on the audience and the situation: Donne was a man of his time, which means he was strongly influenced by the patriarchal view of the Renaissance and the external opinions about him. As a result, Donne's poetry on women seems to be unintentionally divided in several groups, organised by his different views of the opposite gender and his attitude towards them. Hence, apart from bitter poems against women's bodies, we also find witty works where women are portrayed as equal beings, even with more power than men. It is important to make it clear that John Donne was not a kind of feminist icon because of the aforementioned, but he may have helped to change women's position in society with his poetry (Boyd 7-8).

We will analyse poems such as *The Comparison*, which brings a description of two women's bodies, focusing on their features as they are human beings (instead of divinities as in the Petrarchan model); *To His Mistress*, where the speaker understands that he is not in control as his lover is an equal, as powerful as he is, and we will conclude with the study of *Sappho to Philaenis*, in which two women love each other without needing a man, presenting the first female homosexual love poem in English (Bell 212). In the following sections, we will try to understand Donne's view of women through the analysis of a variety of remarkable poems that meant a step forward for women equality in an early modern world which was experiencing multiple changes.

5. Donne's Poetry: A Selection

5.1. Description of Women's Bodies, Highlighting Multiple Flaws

Donne's Elegies tended to show his most misogynist facet as a poet. Most authors have made hard statements on his personality and how harsh his attitude was towards women based on these elegies, especially those which are aimed to criticise women's flaws. In this section, we will be looking at 'Love's Progress' and 'The Comparison', two poems which aim to highlight women's physical features without idolising them, putting them down the Petrarchan pedestal.

5.1.1. "Love's progress"

Our first poem, Donne's Elegy XVIII 'Love's progress', is not as harsh and cruel as other poems, but it stands out because of the mixture of Donne's thoughts and influences which converge in a love poem. The plot is about a trip through the sea and the progress of this, comparing it with the progress of love between two lovers and their main purpose: to have intercourse. We will discuss later if this poem can actually be considered a love poem, but firstly we are going to analyse the relevant parts of the text according to Donne's view of women:

Whoever loves, if he do not propose
The right true end of love, he's one that goes
To sea for nothing but to make him sick. (ll. 1-3)

These are the first three lines of the poem, which hint at the possible fact that there is not only one way of loving but multiple, only one being proper in order to reach "the true end of love". Donne tells us that other men are wrong in their attempts to seduce women only based on their looks, affirming that women are more than pretty faces and recognising the opposite gender as complex beings instead of pure objects of sexual desire or admiration. However, the author goes far beyond what was done by other poets of his period with this statement, but, at the same time, he still treats them as precious and valuable items or even lands which await to be conquered.

Furthermore, the “true end of love” which Donne mentions is nothing but sleeping together, having sexual intercourse as a result of valuing women for something more than their beauty. Donne does not abandon his sexist views as a man of the Renaissance, but he challenges the Petrarchan tradition by giving women more relevance and treating them as human beings, rather than unreachable muses. Petrarch's philosophy of love is based on adoring that which is related to God and virtue (García 60), so the Petrarchan ideal of women would put them in a heavenly position: instead of being a real person or an equal, the beloved is an unattainable dream which the poet can only long for and suffer for loving. This idea of love towards women denies their human features and places them as items of worship on top of a pedestal. To those who idolise women by their look, the poem itself brings a message making use of the metaphor of love as a sea journey which is displayed in the poem, warning them that women can cause a man's downfall:

The brow becalms us when 'tis smooth and plain,
And when 'tis wrinkled shipwrecks us again— (ll. 43-44)

Donne directly criticises these foolish flatterers who are not able to see women as they really are apart from their ‘supernatural’ beauty. In contrast, he is not afraid of putting on display the physical features of women and exploring their bodies instead of adoring and idolising them from afar, also commenting their mood as an important feature to notice as they are more than beautiful objects. Donne devotes much of the text to depict woman's physical characteristics, taking his time to know more about her in order to reach the final goal which is having sexual relations. Now, women are physical and real entities susceptible to criticism as well as being treated as human beings or even equals as we will see in coming poems (Boyd 17-18).

However, ‘Love's Progress’ cannot be understood without considering the public to whom the poem was addressed. Although Donne's works were spread in the 1620s, almost all of his poems were composed for a close audience: known readers of his social circles in which most members were men who used to share the same sense of frustration towards the opposite gender. Donne, concerned about the dissemination of his work, even tried to keep them in privacy telling their friends not to make copies of what he sent them (Marotti 35). Thus, his poems' tone and general message tended to vary depending on the audience in order to please them. As we mentioned before, our poet was a man of his time, concerned about impression and longing for social and political involvement that could bring him wealth and

credit as a well-known poet (Boyd 23). Regarding this poem, Donne warns his male fellows about the threats of loving a woman just for her physicality. We mentioned at the beginning of this section that ‘Love’s Progress’ is a love poem and so it is, but in a more erotic way. However, we could not state that it is an erotic poem even though it talks about having sexual relations: Donne is not interested in appealing to our senses as he does not even show us images of female bodies in a sensual or exciting fashion. The real purpose of the poem is amusing his friends, more specifically one of his closest circles for whom the poem was addressed. By making use of witty conceits and intellectual knowledge, ‘Love’s Progress’ is more about stimulating their intellects than an emotional work (Nutt 21):

Smooth, 'tis a paradise where we would have
Immortal stay, and wrinkled 'tis our grave. (ll. 45-46)

For instance, these verses are quite arduous to understand without applying an intellectual approach to their real meaning. Donne, as a metaphysical artist, was an expert on displaying bizarre images which tended to obscure the essence of each verse. In this case, he may be alluding to the sexual act (Caracciolo 205), in which “wrinkled ‘tis our grave” could be interpreted as a metaphor of the wrinkled sheets of a bed after having intercourse. As we mentioned, the poem brings up sexual images which are not portrayed in an erotic way but most likely as a mental exercise of brilliance and wit.

5.1.2. “The Comparison”

Donne’s Elegy VIII, “The Comparison”, stands out as one of the most controversial poems of Donne’s career as a poet. Apart from the main topic, which will be discussed later, the poem proudly shows off a variety of historical and classical references as well as witty conceits according to its metaphysical nature, difficult to understand on a first reading or without some cultural background. Through a complex and harsh selection of words, the author explores two women’s bodies, comparing his beloved to his friend’s dearest in an unkind way. The poem starts following its title, by making a comparison in which his beloved is portrayed as a dazzling and beautiful woman while her opposite is seen as a disgusting prostitute whose physical appearance is cruelly depicted by the author.

As the sweet sweat of roses in a still,
As that which from chafed musk-cats' pores doth trill,
As the almighty balm of th' early East,
Such are the sweat drops of my mistress' breast,
And on her brow her skin such lustre sets,
They seem no sweat drops, but pearl coronets. (ll. 1-6)

Donne aims the first six lines of the poem at his dearest, describing such a mundane matter as her sweat as if it was something splendid and beautiful. This means more than a mere attempt to scorn his friend’s beloved by making a comparison: what Donne does by describing how his mistress sweats is to show us that she is human, a real person like Donne. Now, the symbol of beauty and heavenly perfection which women embody, inherited by the Petrarchan ideals, vanishes as the beloved is a real being who stands in front of the poet, letting him appreciate her human characteristics as well as her flaws.

Rank sweaty froth thy Mistress's brow defiles,
Like spermatic issue of ripe menstruous boils,
Or like the scum, which, by need's lawless law
Enforced, Sanserra's starved men did draw
From parboiled shoes and boots, and all the rest
Which were with any sovereign fatness blest,
And like vile lying stones in saffroned tin,
Or warts, or weals, they hang upon her skin. (ll. 7-14)

In regard to these flaws, the next seven lines talk about his friend's beloved, describing her in the harshest and repulsive way we could expect, thus being viciously degraded in contrast to the fascinating vision we perceived before. The first three words strongly hit our senses, trying to shock us with such harsh insults, expressing how disgusting this woman is. However, while this string of sentences aims to criticise her body it also makes her real. Both mistresses have been depicted in different ways but they share the same human feature which is sweating, thus breaking the conception of the beloved as a perfect muse and showing that she might be not as attractive as one expects but can be loved anyway. Their dearests are not angelic and unreachable creatures as they had been considered, but now they are humans with whom they have become close enough to even notice how they perspire, allowing a man to love his mistress better as she is closer once she goes down the pedestal.

Although this may be true, the two women in this poem continue to be seen as different entities, now real, but ultimately different. For instance, their physical appearances are attacked as these were considered the most valuable features of a mistress, unlike their psychological qualities which are not mentioned since they do not seem to be relevant enough for men, focusing on their beauties. Under those circumstances, we could agree that Petrarch and Donne approached women in their works only through their visual beauty (but only in some poems like this one in the case of Donne). Through the evaluating sight of men and the vulgar argument presented in "The Comparison", they are treated as valuable items susceptible to malleability according to men's considerations and their statements about their bodies. If this was not enough proof to call him a misogynist for criticising a woman in such a cruel fashion, knowing how pleased he is controlling the opposite gender does not clean his image.

We will see different feelings regarding this theme in the next section, which hinder a clear statement of Donne's opinion about women, but according to what we find in "The Comparison" we shall focus on the humanity of the mistresses. The author expands on his descriptions, making use of all kinds of references, metaphors and similes to appeal to our wit and our senses, and hence starkly highlight women's virtues and imperfections.

At such demonstration of high culture and mastery one question arises: What is this poem for? Does it have a purpose beyond a vulgar argument? At first sight, the poem describes how a proud man shows off his beloved in comparison to his friend's, with whom he seems to be arguing, but a variety of theories display a more complex meaning. Boyd argues that Donne could be talking about not two women but only one, whose physicality is condemned to change but not as a negative aspect. The speaker's dearest is fascinating in her

beauty and that is the reason why he loves her, but his friend also loves his beloved despite the numerous flaws the former points out. As both women could be the same one, Donne shows us how to love as he did already in “Love’s Progress”, teaching the readers (his male fellows) that a woman is susceptible to the passage of time as well as she changes as she reacts to different events in her life, showing multiple moods and not a single one (19).

In opposition to this approach, other theories interpret the poem as a study of the subjectivity of desire, as Bell argues. That is how each man is attracted by a different kind of woman, as we observe in “The Comparison” when the speaker’s friend seems to find his beloved alluring despite the criticism. Making the reader question what constitutes sexual attraction leads to distinctions between women, thus breaking the duality in which women are divided: angels and prostitutes. Thus Donne argues against these conceptions based on social norms, and specially criticises Early Modern marriage manuals (among sermons, homilies, etc...) which insisted that men and women were bound to chastity, although men ended up enjoying more sexual freedom than the opposite gender (206-207).

Bell also states that both Elegies treated here are about women enjoying intercourse without losing their honor, which was attached to the mentioned chastity and marriage, leading us to wonder about Donne’s position on this topic (207). Maybe “The Comparison” was written as a mere critique against a woman in contrast to his beloved, based on their physicality, or maybe he went a step forward by humanising them and even challenging the social constructs. Either way, both “Love’s Progress” and “The Comparison” work as excellent starting points for our next section, in which women will reach an equal position by the hand of Donne himself.

5.2. Woman as an Equal: The Question of Mutual Feeling

John Donne did not only challenge Elizabethan poetry by humanising the opposite gender. In fact, through his new approaches he went much further to explore such an unknown subject as women were in the Renaissance. In the poems of this section, women are equal beings by Donne, on occasions even possessing more power than him, thus developing the concept of equality between both genders and what that entails.

5.2.1. “To His Mistress Going To Bed”

If our last poem was controversial, Elegy XVIII is known for being omitted from the first printed edition of Donne’s poetry after his death because of its obscene and shocking topic (Nutt 7). Here we find again one of the most indecent facets of Donne which, like most of his poetry, it was not addressed to a large audience but just to a few peers of his. The plot of this poem is simple at first glance: the attempts of the speaker for his beloved to agree to sleep with him. As in other Elegies, the author aims the theme of the poem to the matter of having intercourse, the “journey” that a man must go through in order to be intimate with his beloved. However, when we start reading it we notice that the tone is fairly different from our last poems, more erotic and persuasive in the speaker’s attempts to have his beloved undressed. Through the whole poem we will see how these efforts vary due to the complaints that come from his mistress, even though they do not appear in any line but are easily deducible on a close reading. But before analysing these aspects, we shall take a look at the first four lines and their peculiar *double entendre*.

Come, madam, come, all rest my powers defy,
Until I labor, I in labor lie.
The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
Is tired with standing though he never fight. (ll. 1-4)

As Nutt states, the poem is crowded with witty word play and cultural allusions. Just at the beginning of the poem we find how some puns are displayed in order to confuse the reader as well as to advise them of what is coming. “Labor” is the first pun we find, referring to a kind of labour he must accomplish before he and his mistress have intercourse. This labour can be understood in multiple ways, perhaps as making reference to “labouring in

vain” or “hard labour”, letting us decide which one is the most suitable according to what we find in the poem. The second pun, “standing”, compares Donne’s standing as he is watching his mistress like a soldier waiting for a battle to begin, but on a close reading we could also link “standing” with the poet’s own erection. The latter pun brings an erotic tone which reveals some hints of what we are going to read, but the former is quite interesting as it is related to the time that a soldier has to wait before a battle, just as Donne waits to have a witty competition with his beloved in the following lines (9-10).

Off with that girdle, like heaven's zone glistening,
But a far fairer world encompassing.
Unpin that spangled breastplate which you wear,
That th' eyes of busy fools may be stopped there. (ll. 5-8)

The speaker commands his dearest to undress in front of him as a kind of female strip-tease. As we know, Donne tends to use his male privilege to influence and dominate the opposite gender. In the last section we saw how he criticised and described women bodies as if they were mere objects, closer and less idealised than in the Petrarchan tradition but still under his control. For this reason, we cannot be surprised when our speaker firmly demands his mistress to take off the variety of clothes and jewelry she wears. In these endeavours to undress his beloved we can notice how persistent the speaker is in giving orders to her: “Off with that girdle” (5), “Off with that happy busk” (11), “Off with that wiry coronet” (15), “Now off with those shoes” (17), “Unpin that spangled breastplate” (7), “Unlace yourself” (8). The first part of the poem, which could be considered the first twenty four lines, displays the lover’s description of his mistress as he commands her to get naked. However, in contrast to the other poems in which women were portrayed as silent and submissive beings, we notice that Donne is changing the tone for some reason: his beloved’s negative to fulfill his desires and thus her independence to choose what she desires. Her intelligence as well as her wit match his own, so Donne takes this as a competition against an equal and not an inferior being. The rough way of having intercourse is to impose his male power over her by the use of the mentioned imperatives, as if he did not expect a denial or as if that denial did not matter. By using numerous orders, he tempts her to satisfy him, undressing as he appears to be and lying in bed together. However, when these approaches seem to fail, Donne must adapt as he realises he is not in control of the situation anymore, something which will be discussed later (Boyd 24-25).

This competition of wit in which both are submerged has a critical meaning regarding our analysis: the woman who appears in this text does not only have a voice to complain against the speaker's orders (even though we cannot read her replies) but she has enough control to affect what is happening. The mistress makes it clear that she is not going to proceed under his terms but, at the same time, she does not want to be idolised either as if she were a Petrarchan muse. All that she wants in this case is to be respected as an equal and not treated as a malleable and valuable treasure. As Donne cannot succeed by behaving as the prototypical male of the Renaissance, he has to understand that she leads the situation and therefore he has to change his approaches. As a result, Donne stops ordering his dearest to undress and this time he simply asks: "License my roving hands, and let them go/ Before, behind, between, above, below" (26-27). However, the speaker is not up to lose this competition and even though he agrees to respect her as an equal, still tries to impose his male power in the next lines:

O my America! my new-found-land,
My kingdom, safest when with one man manned,
My mine of precious stones, my empery,
How blest am I in this discovering of thee!
To enter in these bonds is to be free;
Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be. (ll. 28-33)

This is not the first time we read Donne's depictions of women bodies as a land which awaits to be conquered. This metaphor comes just after surrendering to her power by asking for permission. In a subtle and intelligent way he is accepting her terms but refusing to lose his male privileges. And that is true: ultimately, he is still in control as the speaker asks to conquer her, to take advantage of his position as a man in the patriarchal society of the Renaissance. His eagerness to be the monarch of the kingdom that she embodies is almost unstoppable, desiring to have dominance over her body and hence over her whole person (Boyd 26). To emphasise this, we also find another case of objectivisation when his mistress is compared to a "mystique book" in the following lines:

Like pictures, or like books' gay coverings made
For lay-men, are all women thus arrayed;
Themselves are mystic books, which only we
(Whom their imputed grace will dignify)
Must see revealed. [...] (ll. 41-45)

Donne explains that the “fools” are not allowed to read (or maybe they are illiterate) the “mystique book” which this woman is, so the only ones who could do it would be the high priests, among whom Donne is one of them, thus having the authority to “read this mystique book” (Nutt 12).

This desire for dominance, inherited from the importance of being “masculine” which dominated the Renaissance, leads Donne to a delicate position: he wants to possess her but his dearest will not let him do so. Furthermore, all of this charming flattery could hide a sociopolitical significance as Guibbory states, arguing that these elegies, which explore the fantasy of male dominance over the opposite gender, are a way of expressing discomfort with serving a woman monarch in a patriarchal society, as Elizabeth I was the queen of England when he wrote the Elegies (136).

We also find another warning, as we did in “Love’s Progress”, which warns us that approaching a woman in the wrong way would lead a man to his demise:

Full nakedness! All joys are due to thee,
As souls unbodied, bodies unclodeth must be
To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use
Are like Atlanta's balls, cast in men's views,
That when a fools' eye lighteth on a gem,
His earthly soul may covet theirs, not them. (ll. 35-40)

In “To His Mistress Going To Bed” this advice comes from the metaphor of Atalanta’s apples and the story of how she could not handle their irresistible magic, thus losing the race against Melanion and eventually leading her to her end. In the same way, Donne advises us that focusing on the jewels that a woman can wear (and therefore paying attention to her possessions instead of herself, unable to distinguish between both) will not let us see our beloved as she really is, leading to failure. However, Donne decides to accept both the risk and her conditions in order to be together as they love each other, both being equal in their relationship and thus balancing each other out. (Boyd 27-28).

Given this point, we cannot help but ask ourselves about the purpose of such a poem. As Nutt argues, Donne always tries to provoke us into thinking about the subtext of the poem, and in this case what the poet tries to show us is not a description of his mistress, whose physical appearance we hardly know anything about, but what he can do with words, how far he can reach by means of poetry (14). As we have seen, “To His Mistress Going To Bed” is

full of puns and dense word play which the author uses to explore the unknown topic of woman, not as a superior being as in Elizabethan poetry but as an equal being worth to be respected instead of adored.

5.2.2. “The Good Morrow”

The previous poems were part of Donne’s Elegies, which were normally aimed to explore women and more specifically the female body. In this section we will study “The Good Morrow”, a poem which belongs to his “Songs and Sonnets”, where Donne deeply explored women’s mind and the experience of love between both lovers. Among a wide variety of poems, each composition in “Songs and Sonnets” tends to vary one from the other, thus playing multiple roles and tones in order to explore the nature of love itself. “The Good Morrow” celebrates love as the greatest feeling a human being can experience by means of intimacy and equality between the speaker and his mistress, telling us what the poet feels after waking up beside his dearest. It is worth mentioning that Donne’s development of ideas towards women and love is not a result of maturing into sincerity and stability as time goes by. Many of these poems were composed at different times which does not show a development from a young and libertine Donne to a mature one who has learnt to love. Then, the lack of evidence for the dates and Donne’s ambiguous approaches make it hard to determine if the concept of mutual love he mentions is the result of years of developing as a man as well as a lover or just an idea to explore in his poems. Whichever is true, “The Good Morrow” is an excellent poem to explore the question of mutual feeling and the highest expression of equality between man and woman in an intimate relationship (Guibbory 137-138).

I wonder, by my truth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved; were we not weaned till then,
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den? (ll. 1-4)

Even though the poem is not as extensive as the others, this one is full of meaning in every little word, expressing a strong feeling of love for his mistress. The first four lines clearly state a contrast with the speaker’s life before he met her, describing his past life as a childish and banal experience or even a dream from which he waited to be awakened

(portrayed by the Christian story of the Seven Sleepers). Furthermore, these rhetorical questions that the author brings to the table help to create an atmosphere of perfection and harmony in contrast to his past life, presented as fragmented and chaotic due to the fact that something essential for him was missing: his beloved.

'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee. (ll. 5-7)

The most remarkable feature of these lines in regard to our analysis is how the speaker scorns what he has experienced and learnt before being with his mistress, as if the known and “real” world did not exist anymore. As everything he has known is now like a dream, he declares that the only reality is that in which he can be with his beloved and love her, thus reminding us of the Allegory of the Cave by Plato, which makes sense, as Plato’s ideas were revisited due to the return of the study of the classics in the Renaissance. What Donne does by refusing the external world is clearly to reject and scorn that patriarchal influence of the Renaissance society on him, letting himself love her dearest liberated of any social convention. The repetition of “I” in these verses is equally important to be mentioned. The poem is not a dialogue, we cannot conclude that his mistress is replying to him as we saw in “To His Mistress Going To Bed”, and Donne is talking about his inner feelings. So the final intention of “The Good Morrow” seems to be to communicate the speaker’s love. And while the former poem talked about physical pleasure and carnal themes, this one ignores them and focuses on the mind, the feelings of the lover beyond having intercourse, experiencing joy and a sense of fulfillment (Nutt 48-49).

And now good morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room, an everywhere. (ll. 8-11)

As Nutt explains, “The Good Morrow” seems to work as a conventional love poem: it is settled at dawn after what appears to be a night of love between two lovers, implying that the poem is not happening in the speaker's head but he is recreating a real stage, giving importance to these events (47). However, it is important to realise that we do not find any physical descriptions in this poem even though the speaker has established a physical place.

Boyd also indicates that the connection between both characters is not reached by physical means, an important step to love in the best fashion as we saw in the previous poems, but it is accomplished by connecting their souls through their eyes (29). “Everywhere” also contains an important meaning in our analysis, appealing to the satisfaction of being complete through love in every place in the world, even in a small room which can work as a universe for the couple, and thus destroying again the Petrarchan ideal of the unreachable mistress, far away from the lover (32).

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one. (ll. 12-14)

These three lines intensify the sense of independence from the rest of the world that we have talked about. The lovers do not need what is outside their own world, their own sphere in other words, as the other is what they need to be complete. The use of the image of the world to portray their sense of unity is not a random choice and much less means what it meant in the Renaissance. As Nutt argues, the selection of the world as a metaphor corresponds to “the conventional technique in Renaissance love poetry” of using a hyperbolic tone when referring to their dearests, parodied by Shakespeare in his “Sonnet CXXX, My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun” (11). In regard to how the concept of the world was perceived in this period, this was an age of risky trading voyages in which cargos used to take years to return (if they ever did), so the choice of the noun “world” has a higher meaning than it has nowadays (49).

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp North, without declining West? (ll. 15-18)

The sense of dependence between both lovers is strongly portrayed in these lines, in which they are close enough to be able to see themselves reflected in the eyes of the other, as if they have exchanged their souls, being part of each other. Then, they complement each other through a mutual feeling, attached by their love and the sense of unity and fulfillment they experience together. The previous metaphor of the world returns again, now portraying both lovers as equal hemispheres which together become a world. They are equal as Donne

respects and considers his mistress as he considers himself, so now these beings, who were fragmented, are able to form a whole together. This equality and dependence of each other lead them to experience a mutual feeling as a result of a loving relationship in which both respect the other as they consider the other identical to them. Moreover, the image of two hemispheres forming a perfect circle is not arbitrary: a circle represents the idea of continuity as it does not have an end, and in the contexts of philosophy it is also the image of perfection (Boyd 32-33). This idea of eternal durability which brings a sphere to represent the endless and reciprocal love between the couple leads us to the final lines of the poem.

Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one; or thou and I
Love so alike that none do slacken, none can die. (ll. 19-21)

As Guibbory explains, the mutuality and unity which link the lovers seem to be “the antidote to the impermanence and mortality that characterize the rest of the world” (138). Then, creating a new world by means of the equal union of the speaker and his beloved leads them to reach immortality, thus avoiding the pain of death through the joy of harmony and union of two equal beings who love each other deeply and in a mutual way.

5.3. Being Able to Love Without a Man

The last section of our study covers a remarkable and controversial topic in Donne's period: female homosexual love. In order to comprehend "Sappho to Philaenis" and its implicatures we must pay attention to the concept of "being homosexual" during the Renaissance and how it affected mutual love between women. First of all, we have to understand that the contemporary descriptions of homosexuality do not agree with how it was understood in this period: most of those practices which are considered exclusively heterosexual nowadays between man and woman were shared between close male friends. This does not mean that all male friendships were homosexual, as Sugg explains, but homosexuality did not exist as we know in our present days (75). An intimate relationship between both men who were friends entailed similar aspects to a heterosexual one as if their friend were "another self", as Cicero exposed (23). The Roman philosopher was an inspiration for Donne as many of his ideas seemed to be influenced by Cicero, for example, his idea of friendship (Sugg 78). This does not mean that the English poet was unique in his beliefs. As we know, the Renaissance was strongly determined by classical ideas, so the male population with a certain level of culture acquired a few characteristics from the ancient cultures, like the kind of relation that men shared between them. As Hammond states, the man of the Renaissance shared most of his time with other men, thus creating close bonds of affection which were often passionate. Typical heterosexual contemporary habits like sharing beds, kissing or using highly-charged language to portray their bonds (for instance, the speech Donne uses in the previous poems) were common for Renaissance men, among whom even erotic feelings could happen but not to endanger their friendship but to enhance it (27).

On the contrary, relationships among women were not at the same level due to them being considered inferior by nature in the eyes of the patriarchal Renaissance society. Being considered "more passive and more simple than men" as a common belief of the period, love between women could not be considered as important as any kind of relation a man could have. Even the "natural distinctions" between both genders were influenced by patriarchal ideas: the female gender was contemplated through medical theories as creatures who had failed to develop as perfect and whole as men (Segg 68-69).

How were women supposed to have loving connections with another person of the same sex if they were relegated to weak creatures whose purpose was simply being beautiful objects admired only for their physical characteristics? Nevertheless, against these patriarchal beliefs and the alleged lack of independence of women, Donne could write what would be one

of “the first female homosexual love poem in English” (Bell 212), setting up the starting point for many others in the history of English literature.

5.3.1 “Sappho to Philaenis”

At first sight “Sappho to Philaenis” conveys the impression of a poem made for male desire, more specifically for one of Donne’s close circles of fellows for whom he used to write. Love between women was also seen as erotic in that period as it is considered nowadays, so many critics have argued against Donne and his misogyny, affirming that this poem is nothing but a way of exploring male fantasy of female sexuality (Bell 208). Through the classical Greek poet, Sappho, Donne explores the question of mutual feeling and equality between women, a way of female self-expression which portrays his feelings and concerns by means of the love which attaches Sappho and Philaenis, who is absent.

The poem displays Sappho’s desires to be with her lover again, remembering her perfect body and missing being together. She also mentions how men could try to flirt with Philaenis, showing a bit of jealousy but being sure that she could not find in those men what she finds in her.

Plays some soft boy with thee, oh there wants yet
A mutual feeling which should sweeten it.
His chin, a thorny, hairy unevenness
Doth threaten, and some daily change possess. (ll. 31-34)

Sappho is confident that Philaenis will not be able to fall in love with a man or have intercourse with him as there is something needed to proceed: a mutual feeling, which in this case both lovers share. This lack of reciprocal love, the union which attaches both women, ensures Sappho that their bond is so strong that her partner will not betray her, let alone with a man whose physical qualities are described in a negative way, as if the masculine body were imperfect, full of flaws (Bell 208). This contrasts with the theory which was mentioned before: the natural differences between man and woman. Men were supposed to be physically perfect by nature but, in this poem, the body of the archetypal young man is scorned in comparison with the perfect physique of a woman, Philaenis in this case.

In previous poems we noticed how Donne tended to use an excessive hyperbolic tone and the use of elaborated metaphors when describing something in particular. His peers also used to compose poems in the same fashion as it was typical of the Renaissance artistic style finding such an exaggerated style full of metaphors in different poetic works. However, Sappho rejects comparisons in this poem, arguing that they are mere distractions from the honest and intimate relation they share:

For, if we justly call each silly man
A little world, What shall we call thee than?
Thou art not soft, and cleare, and strait, and faire,
As Down, as Stars, Cedars, and Lillies are,
But thy right hand, and cheek, and eye, only
Are like thy other hand, and cheek, and eye. (ll. 19-24)

Avoiding the use of metaphors, she scorns the popular poetic tropes in Donne's period and rejects any kind of objectification, describing her beloved as she really is without flowery speech, in contrast to the poems which have been analysed in this work. In the same fashion, Sappho's independence of the typical tropes is a sign of her own autonomy in the world she lives, where she can make decisions and fulfill her own desires without any man above her that controls her. Moreover, we also read how Sappho describes Philaenis as a beautiful and independent woman as well and adds a sense of jealousy: "So may thy mighty, amazing beauty move / Envy'in all women, and in all men, love" (61–62). Men will desire Philaenis because of her attractiveness, but women will also envy her as she has many positive qualities women long for. However, as Bell states, only one of these features matters and it is what a woman should desire: being as independent and strong as Philaenis is (210).

Donne's elegies are characterised by encouraging women's sexual freedom as we have seen. Therefore in this poem the protagonist benefits from leaving aside any man with whom she could compete in this sexual freedom as she is free to decide on her own, choosing to love an equal: Philaenis.

Likenesse begets such strange selfe flatterie,
That touching my selfe, all seemes done to thee.
My selfe I embrace, and mine owne hands I kisse,
And amorously thanke my selfe for this.
Me, in my glasse, I call thee; But alas,
When I would kisse, teares dimme mine eyes, and glasse. (ll. 51-56)

These lines describe how Sappho brings herself to a sexual climax by pleasuring herself remembering her dearest. Even though she is free to do so as she can enjoy her sexuality, critics have argued against these lines appealing to the image of female masturbation as a male fantasy. Although this may be true, it is undeniable that the image Donne portrayed has been supported by feminist groups nowadays, arguing that the less oppressive form of female sexual pleasure is lesbian sexuality (Bell 210). “Sappho to Philaenis” could be understood as an erotic poem whose only purpose was to amuse Donne’s fellows, those being the close audience to which the poem is addressed. However, a close reading reveals that the poem can be enjoyed by both men and women, the protagonists being a model for lovers who want to share a mutual feeling with their partners, especially alluding to women, showing them that the way to reach a reciprocal love is to show themselves as the main characters: creative, self-confident, strong and sexually liberated (Bell 210).

Regardless of the supposed audience, we must notice two features related to it: the act of pleasuring yourself is one of the most intimate moments a person could have. One would not share such an intimate act with others, and if she did so, she would only share her feelings about it with a very close person, her beloved in this case. In this poem Sappho seems to represent the archetypal female poet/lover as Philaenis corresponds to the “archetypal private female lyric audience”. This suggests that perhaps the poem is trying to be intimate for some reason in particular, maybe because it is aimed at a specific person, as Bell argues (210). And this theory is strongly supported by the use of the words “more” in the final lines in an ingenious and passionate way.

My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two,
But so, as thine from one another doe;
And, oh, no more; the likeness being such,
Why should they not alike in all parts touch?
...
O cure this loving madnesse, and restore
Me to mee; thee, my halfe, my all, my more. (ll. 45-48, ll. 57-58)

And who could that person be to whom Donne would address this poem? With whom did the poet maintain an intimate and love relationship? We cannot help but be talking about Donne’s wife, Anne More. Since we do not know much about her, we cannot make a statement of what kind of relationship they had, and although due to the fact that Donne addressed numerous women in his works it is suggested that all these poems were not aimed

at her (Boyd 38). Nevertheless, "Sappho to Philaenis" hints that his words are directly addressed to his beloved by means of the puns which refer to his wife, More. Bell highlights the common use of puns in the Renaissance, stating that "punning allusions to a lover's real name were a common feature of Renaissance love poetry, famously illustrated by Sidney's puns on Penelope Rich's name in *Astrophil and Stella* or Shakespeare's puns on his own name, 'Will', in his sonnets" (210). In the same way, Donne seems to have used this resource to make allusions to the name of his beloved, which would go unnoticed in the eyes of any reader except in More's eyes. The feeling of loss that these lines express suggests that the poem may have been written after Anne's father knew about their marriage and opposed it, endangering their relationship and separating them (Bell 202). What Donne seems to be pleading for is that the mutual feeling that unites them does not disappear and stay alive (maybe through pleasuring herself), getting to the argument we saw in "The Good Morrow": Donne needs "his other half," which is equal to him, to be complete. Nevertheless, as we saw in the mentioned poem, to achieve that oneness it is necessary that both lovers are equal and agree to be together. Just as Sappho must await a response from her beloved, Donne must also wait for More to decide to return to him, thus respecting her decision and understanding that she is independent enough to decide on her own without the control of her lover (Bell 211).

6. Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction to this work, it is not easy to determine if John Donne could be considered a feminist icon in his time and nowadays. His innovative ideas, that departed from the Petrarchan tradition and explore the idea of equality and mutual respect, lead to interest in his works. Nevertheless, we cannot state that his point of view evolved as he matured over the years, since there is not enough information about the publication dates of many of his poems, and some of the harshest and most cruel poems were written after others that celebrate the mutual feeling between two lovers. It is not possible to make a clear statement of Donne's real opinion about women or the type of relationship he had with his wife, Anne More, but it is possible to study the concepts and ideas that he embodied in his works, which are of great interest as we have seen.

Even Donne's cruellest and most ruthless poem of a woman's body has a hidden meaning that defied all established concepts of women, just as the arrival of the Renaissance defied the ideas of the Middle Ages. All the poems seen in this work have helped to find out a little more about Donne's vision and the concepts he developed, bringing us closer to gender equality, which the Renaissance lacked, and even to the love between women as a symbol of independence. We cannot deny that Renaissance society had much influence on him as well as on his work, so Donne could not avoid having grown up and lived in a sexist society. However, he was bold enough to challenge the rules of society and explore the female gender by treating them as human beings and not as beautiful and divine but empty beings or even undeveloped creatures as we have seen. Through his poems we can see how Donne deals with various topics and how double meanings and conceits play in his favor to create images in the mind of the reader and force them to reflect on what they have read. Considering that a large number of his poems are about love between two people, we can state that Donne, even having been criticised for his misogynistic façade, contributed to the understanding of love as a relationship of mutual respect between two equal beings, between two independent beings that want to be with each other on their own decision, alien to the social standards of the Renaissance.

7. Appendix

Elegy XVIII: Love's Progress John Donne

Whoever loves, if he do not propose
The right true end of love, he's one that goes
To sea for nothing but to make him sick.
Love is a bear-whelp born: if we o'erlick
Our love, and force it new strange shapes to take,
We err, and of a lump a monster make.
Were not a calf a monster that were grown
Faced like a man, though better than his own?
Perfection is in unity: prefer
One woman first, and then one thing in her.
I, when I value gold, may think upon
The ductileness, the application,
The wholesomeness, the ingenuity,
From rust, from soil, from fire ever free;
But if I love it, 'tis because 'tis made
By our new nature (Use) the soul of trade.
All these in women we might think upon
(If women had them) and yet love but one.
Can men more injure women than to say
They love them for that by which they're not they?
Makes virtue woman? Must I cool my blood
Till I both be, and find one, wise and good?
May barren angels love so! But if we
Make love to woman, virtue is not she,
As beauty's not, nor wealth. He that strays thus
From her to hers is more adulterous
Than if he took her maid. Search every sphere
And firmament, our Cupid is not there;
He's an infernal god, and underground
With Pluto dwells, where gold and fire abound:
Men to such gods their sacrificing coals
Did not in altars lay, but pits and holes.
Although we see celestial bodies move
Above the earth, the earth we till and love:
So we her airs contemplate, words and heart
And virtues, but we love the centric part.
Nor is the soul more worthy, or more fit,
For love than this, as infinite is it.
But in attaining this desired place

How much they err that set out at the face.
The hair a forest is of ambushes,
Of springs, snares, fetters and manacles;
The brow becalms us when 'tis smooth and plain,
And when 'tis wrinkled shipwrecks us again—
Smooth, 'tis a paradise where we would have
Immortal stay, and wrinkled 'tis our grave.
The nose (like to the first meridian) runs
Not 'twixt an East and West, but 'twixt two suns;
It leaves a cheek, a rosy hemisphere,
On either side, and then directs us where
Upon the Islands Fortunate we fall,
(Not faint Canaries, but Ambrosial)
Her swelling lips; to which when we are come,
We anchor there, and think ourselves at home,
For they seem all: there Sirens' songs, and there
Wise Delphic oracles do fill the ear;
There in a creek where chosen pearls do swell,
The remora, her cleaving tongue doth dwell.
These, and the glorious promontory, her chin,
O'erpassed, and the straight Hellespont between
The Sestos and Abydos of her breasts,
(Not of two lovers, but two loves the nests)
Succeeds a boundless sea, but yet thine eye
Some island moles may scattered there descry;
And sailing towards her India, in that way
Shall at her fair Atlantic navel stay;
Though thence the current be thy pilot made,
Yet ere thou be where thou wouldst be embayed
Thou shalt upon another forest set,
Where many shipwreck and no further get.
When thou art there, consider what this chase
Misspent by thy beginning at the face.
Rather set out below; practise my art.
Some symmetry the foot hath with that part
Which thou dost seek, and is thy map for that,
Lovely enough to stop, but not stay at;
Least subject to disguise and change it is—
Men say the devil never can change his.
It is the emblem that hath figured
Firmness; 'tis the first part that comes to bed.
Civility we see refined; the kiss
Which at the face began, transplanted is,
Since to the hand, since to the imperial knee,
Now at the papal foot delights to be:

If kings think that the nearer way, and do
Rise from the foot, lovers may do so too;
For as free spheres move faster far than can
Birds, whom the air resists, so may that man
Which goes this empty and ethereal way,
Than if at beauty's elements he stay.
Rich nature hath in women wisely made
Two purses, and their mouths aversely laid:
They then which to the lower tribute owe
That way which that exchequer looks must go:
He which doth not, his error is as great
As who by clyster gave the stomach meat.

Elegy VIII: The Comparison **John Donne**

As the sweet sweat of roses in a still,
As that which from chafed musk cat's pores doth trill,
As the almighty balm of th' early east,
Such are the sweat drops of my mistress' breast ;
And on her neck her skin such lustre sets,
They seem no sweat drops, but pearl carcanets.
Rank sweaty froth thy mistress' brow defiles,
Like spermatic issue of ripe menstruous boils,
Or like the scum, which, by need's lawless law
Enforced, Sanserra's starvèd men did draw
From parboiled shoes and boots, and all the rest
Which were with any sovereign fatness blest ;
And like vile lying stones in saffroned tin,
Or warts, or wheals, it hangs upon her skin.
Round as the world's her head, on every side,
Like to the fatal ball which fell on Ide ;
Or that whereof God had such jealousy,
As for the ravishing thereof we die.
Thy head is like a rough-hewn statue of jet,
Where marks for eyes, nose, mouth, are yet scarce set ;
Like the first chaos, or flat seeming face
Of Cynthia, when th' earth's shadows her embrace.
Like Proserpine's white beauty-keeping chest,
Or Jove's best fortune's urn, is her fair breast.
Thine's like worm-eaten trunks, clothed in seal's skin,
Or grave, that's dust without, and stink within.
And like that slender stalk, at whose end stands
The woodbine quivering, are her arms and hands.

Like rough-barked elm-boughs, or the russet skin
Of men late scourged for madness, or for sin,
Like sun-parch'd quarters on the city gate,
Such is thy tanned skin's lamentable state ;
And like a bunch of ragged carrots stand
The short swollen fingers of thy gouty hand.
Then like the chemic's masculine equal fire,
Which in the limbec's warm womb doth inspire
Into th' earth's worthless dirt a soul of gold,
Such cherishing heat her best loved part doth hold.
Thine's like the dread mouth of a fired gun,
Or like hot liquid metals newly run
Into clay moulds, or like to that Ætna,
Where round about the grass is burnt away.
Are not your kisses then as filthy, and more,
As a worm sucking an envenomed sore?
Doth not thy fearful hand in feeling quake,
As one which gathering flowers still fears a snake?
Is not your last act harsh and violent,
As when a plough a stony ground doth rent?
So kiss good turtles, so devoutly nice
Are priests in handling reverent sacrifice,
And such in searching wounds the surgeon is,
As we, when we embrace, or touch, or kiss.
Leave her, and I will leave comparing thus,
She and comparisons are odious.

Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed

John Donne

Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defy,
Until I labour, I in labour lie.
The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
Is tir'd with standing though he never fight.
Off with that girdle, like heaven's Zone glistering,
But a far fairer world encompassing.
Unpin that spangled breastplate which you wear,
That th'eyes of busy fools may be stopped there.
Unlace yourself, for that harmonious chime,
Tells me from you, that now it is bed time.
Off with that happy busk, which I envy,
That still can be, and still can stand so nigh.
Your gown going off, such beauteous state reveals,
As when from flowery meads th'hill's shadow steals.
Off with that wiry Coronet and shew
The hairy Diadem which on you doth grow:
Now off with those shoes, and then safely tread
In this love's hallow'd temple, this soft bed.
In such white robes, heaven's Angels used to be
Received by men; Thou Angel bringst with thee
A heaven like Mahomet's Paradise; and though
Ill spirits walk in white, we easily know,
By this these Angels from an evil sprite,
Those set our hairs, but these our flesh upright.
Licence my roving hands, and let them go,
Before, behind, between, above, below.
O my America! my new-found-land,
My kingdom, safeliest when with one man manned,
My Mine of precious stones, My Empirie,
How blest am I in this discovering thee!
To enter in these bonds, is to be free;
Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be.
Full nakedness! All joys are due to thee,
As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be,
To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use
Are like Atlanta's balls, cast in men's views,
That when a fool's eye lighteth on a Gem,
His earthly soul may covet theirs, not them.
Like pictures, or like books' gay coverings made
For lay-men, are all women thus arrayed;
Themselves are mystic books, which only we
(Whom their imputed grace will dignify)

Must see reveal'd. Then since that I may know;
As liberally, as to a Midwife, shew
Thy self: cast all, yea, this white linen hence,
There is no penance due to innocence.
To teach thee, I am naked first; why then
What needst thou have more covering than a man.

The Good Morrow **John Donne**

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp north, without declining west?
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

Sappho to Philaenis John Donne

Where is that holy fire, which verse is said
To have? Is that enchanting force decayed?
Verse that draws nature's works from nature's law,
Thee, her best work, to her work cannot draw.
Have my tears quench'd my old poetic fire?
Why quench'd they not as well that of desire?
Thoughts, my mind's creatures, often are with thee,
But I, their maker, want their liberty.
Only thine image in my heart doth sit,
But that is wax, and fires environ it.
My fires have driven, thine have drawn it hence;
And I am robb'd of picture, heart, and sense.
Dwells with me still mine irksome memory,
Which, both to keep and lose, grieves equally.
That tells me how fair thou art; thou art so fair
As gods, when gods to thee I do compare,
Are graced thereby; and to make blind men see,
What things gods are, I say they're like to thee.
For if we justly call each silly man
A little world, what shall we call thee then?
Thou art not soft, and clear, and straight, and fair,
As down, as stars, cedars, and lilies are;
But thy right hand, and cheek, and eye, only
Are like thy other hand, and cheek, and eye.
Such was my Phao awhile, but shall be never,
As thou wast, art, and O, mayst thou be ever.
Here lovers swear in their idolatry,
That I am such; but grief discolours me.
And yet I grieve the less, lest grief remove
My beauty, and make me unworthy of thy love.
Plays some soft boy with thee, O, there wants yet
A mutual feeling which should sweeten it.
His chin, a thorny, hairy unevenness
Doth threaten, and some daily change possess.
Thy body is a natural paradise,
In whose self, unmanured, all pleasure lies,
Nor needs perfection; why shouldst thou then
Admit the tillage of a harsh rough man?
Men leave behind them that which their sin shows,
And are as thieves traced, which rob when it snows.
But of our dalliance no more signs there are,
Than fishes leave in streams, or birds in air;

And between us all sweetness may be had,
All, all that nature yields, or art can add.
My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two
But so, as thine from one another do,
And, O, no more; the likeness being such,
Why should they not alike in all parts touch?
Hand to strange hand, lip to lip none denies;
Why should they breast to breast, or thighs to thighs?
Likeness begets such strange self-flattery,
That touching myself all seems done to thee.
Myself I embrace, and mine own hands I kiss,
And amorously thank myself for this.
Me, in my glass, I call thee; but alas,
When I would kiss, tears dim mine eyes and glass.
O cure this loving madness, and restore
Me to thee, thee my half, my all, my more.
So may thy cheeks' red outwear scarlet dye,
And their white, whiteness of the Galaxy;
So may thy mighty, amazing beauty move
Envy in all women, and in all men love;
And so be change and sickness far from thee,
As thou by coming near keep'st them from me.

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