

Representation of love in Donne's poetry: A Selected Study

Author: Namarta Devi
namartasangwan@gmail.com

Abstract:

The paper, "Representation of love in Donne's poetry: A Selected Study," discusses how platonic and romantic love are portrayed in Donne's poetry with particular emphasis on "The Canonization" and "The Sunne Rising" as well as sexual difficulty in his poem "The Flea." These poems reveal the feelings of the lover and his opposition to social norms. John Donne, a poet who was born in 1572, is regarded as one of history's smartest and funniest writers. Donne is one of the metaphysical poets who rejects the antiquated biases related with love and sex that are still pervasive in the modern world, a term that was appropriately used by Samuel Johnson in his Essay, "Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets."

About Donne's poetry:

The collection "Songs and Sonnets" from 1633 contains fifty-five of Donne's compositions, one of the finest love poets in English literature. This collection also includes "The Canonization." In this poem, the author treats love as a sacred passion akin to the devotion of a follower to his creator. In this poetry, platonic love is depicted. Donne thought that the most supreme force that might elevate a regular person to sainthood was love, which is defined as "to respect or revere as sacrosanct or holy."

Donne approaches the subject of love as though it were divine love. He defends his self-centered love as heavenly and holy. As in a sacred mystery, the act of making love unites the body and soul. In Donne's poetry, physical love is considered as a spiritual union. In "The Sunne Rising," one of his poems, lovers reject the world of things, and in "The Canonization," they are praised for performing the divine act of love. The portrayal of Divine love in Donne's poems was one of his poems' recurrent topics.

In order to defend his act of making love, Donne writes his poems in the style of a passionate dramatic monologue. Donne addresses everyone who tries to stop him from loving in the first lines of the poem. Along with that, he makes fun of patriarchal methods of making love. Nobody should interfere with him and his partner's passionate embrace. Dedicated to his wife Anne Moore, John Donne's love poems capture the joy of a successful marriage.

“For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,
My five gray hairs, or ruined fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honor, or his grace,
Or the king's real, or his stampèd face
Contemplate; what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.”

Hyperbole, another trait of the metaphysical poet, is abundant in "The Canonization." The best illustration of that is the second stanza.

“Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?
 What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?
 Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?
 When did my colds a forward spring remove?
 When did the heats which my veins fill
 Add one more to the plaguy bill?
 Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
 Litigious men, which quarrels move,
 Though she and I do love.”

Donne asks the audience in this passage who is harmed by his act of making love. He asks if his sighs have disrupted the company and compares them to the frivolous breezes. The poet wonders if any natural calamities have been caused by the comparison of the tears to floods. The poet compares the icy sensation of being apart from a beloved to the changing of the seasons and wonders if his emotions have affected the arrival of spring. The question of whether more individuals are dying as a result of the fire of love burning through his veins is raised. He continues by questioning why anyone would stop him from adoring his sweetheart if all of the tasks of this planet were still in progress.

The poet shifts to the metaphysical and spiritual side of love in the following stanza. He likens the two lovers to tapers and flies, both of which die of love.

“Call her one, mee another flye,
 We're Tapers too, and at our owne cost die,”

The poet also contrasts himself and his partner with the diametrically opposed characters of "eagle and dove." As the dictatorial and destructive eagle and the innocent and gentle dove, respectively. He makes a suggestion that despite their innocence in love, they are nonetheless capable of being just as destructive and hostile to others out of love. Both self-destructive and self-consuming, their love.

“And we in us find the eagle and the dove.”

The poet alludes to the tale of the "phoenix" and asserts that his love enhances the "riddle of the phoenix." One phoenix at a time is said to be the maximum number in existence.

Although they are physically different from one another, the poet claims that when they fell in love, their souls became one. This implies that their love is egotistical.

“The phœnix riddle hath more wit
 By us; we two being one, are it.

So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.”

These analogies, in which lovers are likened to flies, an eagle and a dove, and then a phoenix, are the ideal illustrations of the wit and pretension Donne employs in his poetry.

Donne believes in the love he and his partner have so strongly that even if it is rejected while they are still living, it will be remembered after their passing.

“And if unfit for tombs and hearse

Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;”

Donne cites these examples to argue that even if their love is not as great, tombs will still be built for them, but that poets all across the world will honour it and write poetry about it. To honour their love, songs will be sung and verses will be written.

“We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;
As well a well-wrought urn becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,
And by these hymns, all shall approve
Us canonized for Love.”

The poet here claims that sonnets are equally suitable for burying lovers as large monuments spanning a "half-acre" and compares them to "well-wrought urns." According to the poet, even though their love is rejected while they are still living, after they pass away, people will remember their love as pious, and they will be "canonized for love."

“And thus invoke us: ‘You, whom reverend love
Made one another's hermitage;

You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;

Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove

Into the glasses of your eyes

(So made such mirrors, and such spies,

That they did all to you epitomize)

The poet concludes the poem by stating that future generations would refer to them as glorified souls who redefined what it is to love everyone. They will be the embodiment of love since they contracted the globe and saw reflections of each other's worlds in their eyes. Everyone would then want for a love that was identical to their own.

“Countries, towns, courts: beg from above

A pattern of your love!”

Another love poem by Donne, "The Sunne Rising," was printed in 1633. In this poem, the poet addresses the sun directly and in a very direct manner. Despite the Sun being regarded as the ultimate power in mythology and being addressed as a god, Donne never once fails to minimise the might of the ultimate being. As a love poet, Donne is renowned for being outspoken about his affections for his beloved.

He views love as having the greatest power, and anything that stands in the way of the lovers' love is insignificant. This is clear from the poem's first stanza, where he rebukes the sun for shining over him and his sweetheart. He refers to the sun as a "old fool" and as "unruly." This provides the appearance that the lovers are disobedient.

“Busy old fool, unruly sun,

Why dost thou thus,

Through windows, and through curtains call on us?”

He also commands the sun to scold people like "late schooleboyes and sowre prentices" and to leave. He also requests that the sun speak to the "court-huntsmen" and "counteryanuts" to direct them to carry out their respective duties. Love, according to Donne, is oblivious to temperature, dates, or seasons. Time is trivial and pointless to him.

“Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,

Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.”

The sun's abilities have also been questioned by poet. He makes fun of the sun's rays for being more powerful than the emotions of love and community. He disparages the beams and claims that he can extinguish the brightness of the sun "with a wink." After saying this, Donne claims that he won't because he fears losing his loved one's sight.

He adds a lovely statement by noting that for him, the world is reduced to the small bedroom where he and his loved one are laying. Therefore, he is exalting love. According to Donne, "the little world of the lovers is believed to be the microcosm of the outside world," and "the exterior and the world of love exist in a little universe" (Tilak, 124). "All the glory and riches (east indian spices and west indian gold) of the outside world" are contained within the lovers.

“Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine

Be where thou leftst 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.”

In the last stanza, which is fitting for metaphysical poetry, the poet compares his beloved to "all states and all princes" and presents himself as a cypher.

“She's all states, and all princes, I,

Nothing else is.”

He trivialises royal power, royal majesty, and global wealth once more. He believes that despite their best efforts, they are failing terribly to achieve their level of bliss because nothing is more wonderful than the glory that their love possesses. Donne contends that when contrasted to the power of love, all wealth and power are rather illusory.

The sun is addressed once more, this time claiming that if it is his responsibility "to warm the globe," he has done so by warming the bedroom of lovers since "This bed is thy centre, these walls, thy sphere."

“Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy sphere.”

At the time, it was revolutionary to think of romantic love as a transcendent, spiritual feeling. According to Christian belief, homosexuality is a sin. Ilona Bell points out that Donne's "rugged unpredictability of emotional, colloquial speech" did not conform to the social mores of his era, which forbade discussion of sexual darings. However, Donne openly discussed sexuality in poems like "The Flea." Donne discusses both physical and spiritual love in his writings, and for him, love is a synthesis of the two.

"However, Donne expresses a viewpoint where the lovers inhabit the body and transcend it at the same time, which is contradictory in his love poems. Although physicality is valued, transcending biological constraints seems to be the key to finding the ideal partner. Additionally, according to Donne, a man is the union of his body and soul rather than either one alone. It is possible to read his handling of sexuality in "the flea" as a critique of the modern age.

He portrayed the sexual conflict that couples have when the guy tries to persuade the ladies to have an intimate relationship. Donne employed ovidian conceits to explain how humans feel about sexuality. The idea of the flea has been used to portray sexual activity as "shameless" and "unimportant." The phrase "two bloods mingles be" is an example of how pointless making love is. According to the poem, showing physical affection is neither "a sin, nor a humiliation, nor a loss of maidenhead."

The poet lived in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, a time when it was frequently difficult to write about sexual urges and bodily pleasures. However, Donne examined the idea of love and wrote about it from a variety of angles by analysing the idea of love from both a bodily and spiritual standpoint. As a result, he created some of the most impassioned poetry of his time, among which is "the flea."

The poet has addressed the difficulty of a sexual fusion between two lovers in an open-minded manner. It's intriguing how the poet has reduced the forbidden act of having sex to only the action of the flea sucking blood and the act of consummation by mixing blood in the flea, proving that having sex is not "A sin, not disgrace, nor loss of maidenhead."

“It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;
Thou know’st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,”

Then he says that even though they are not married yet, they have united as one. He adds that a flea has three lives—those of the lover, the object of his affection, and the flea itself. This blood could also be interpreted as a representation of the hymen because it is thought that when a woman's hymen breaks, blood leaks out. In the subsequent lines, the poet highlights how physical contact between unmarried couples is viewed as taboo.

“though parents grudge, and you, we’re met,”

In the modern world, there is still a taboo between men and women engaging in physical contact. People don't have the freedom to publicly express and admit their sexual demands. The poet's beloved is attempting to kill the flea for this reason, and he is preventing her from doing so since he believes that this would be an immoral act.

“Though use make you apt to kill me,

Let not to that, self-murder added be,

And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.”

This could be interpreted as pure love losing out to social conventions when cherished kills the flea. Donne approaches this with the arrogance that if the lover hasn't lost her respect, she shouldn't worry about doing so once they give way to their love.

“Yet thou triumph’st, and say’st that thou

Find’st not thy self, nor me the weaker now;

’Tis true; then learn how false, fears be:

Just so much honor, when thou yield’st to me,

Will waste, as this flea’s death took life from thee.”

"Donne's originality comes from the fact that he is more interested in studying love relationships than he is in the flea itself. He emphasises the importance of a physical union, yet physical and spiritual love can coexist.

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