

**“A ‘Right Poet’ in his Means, (a ‘Modern Poet’ in his Ends)”:
John Donne and the Concept of the “Right Poet” in
Sir Philip Sidney’s *An Apology for Poetry*¹**

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Abstract

This paper will try to answer the question of whether John Donne can be considered as the ‘right poet’ in Sir Philip Sidney’s sense. Upon close study of *An Apology of Poetry* and a selection of Donne’s works, this essay will conclude that, technically speaking, Donne can be considered as a ‘right poet’ since his works delight the readers with original invention of metaphysical conceits and creative flow of thought in passionate and persuasive argument. However, morally speaking, Donne does not fit into Sidney’s category of the ‘right poet’ whose aim is to teach or move by delighting the readers’ ‘erect wit’ so that it will propel their ‘infected will’, to try to reach the Edenic uncorrupted state of moral righteousness. True, Donne’s major concern is not of morality and didacticism but he can be considered as a ‘modern poet’ who is ahead of his time in his total acceptance of human flaws or inclination to sin as well as his encouragement for readers to be thinking individuals who get to decide for themselves what is morally right and wrong.

Introduction

In *An Apology for Poetry* (presumably written between 1580-1582), the most important and elegantly-written manifesto of creative writing in the sixteenth century, Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586) ventures to defend the art of writing or, as he hyperbolically puts it, “to make a pitiful defence of poor Poetry, which from almost the highest estimation of learning is fallen to be the laughing-stock of children” (Sidney 20). To be precise, studies have been made on Sidney’s main motivation in writing this apology² and it is contended that Sidney intends to pose an indirect attack on Stephen Gosson’s *School of Abuse* (1579), a work which condemns poetry and which the author dedicated to Sidney without his permission to do so (Thaler 14).

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² According to *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theories* (50), apology, which means ‘defence’ in Greek, is a work written to defend a writer’s opinions or to elaborate and clarify a problem. A well-known example is Plato’s *Apology* in which Socrates defends himself against the governing body of Athens. Another notable instance is Sir Philip Sidney’s *Apologie for Poetrie, or Defence of Poesie* (1595), an essay which examines the art of poetry and discusses the state of English poetry at the time.

An Apology for Poetry, upon close reading, can be divided into three main parts: the first part which gives the definitions of poetry and describes the nature and working of the 'right poet' who is "lifted up with the vigour of his own invention [my emphasis]" (Sidney 25) or, in other words, the poet who deserves admiration for his original and innovative means as well as his didactic and moralistic ends in writing, the second part which, by means of logical counter-argument, deals with the accusations made by poetry-haters and art-haters and, lastly, the third part which touches upon English contemporary poets and poetry. Throughout his essay, we can see that Sidney employs the very art of persuasive argument which the horseman John Pietro Pugliano, as stated in Sidney's introduction and personal account, once used so effectively that "he [Pugliano] would have persuaded [Sidney] to have wished [himself] as a horse" (Sidney 19). Here, it is interesting to note that Sidney's employment of logically convincing and persuasive argument can also be seen recurring in the works of the posthumously-labeled 'metaphysical' poet John Donne (1572-1631) who was about 23 years of age in the publication year of *An Apology for Poetry*. Donne, growing up and grooming himself, presumably with Sidney's poetics in mind, to write love songs and sonnets before turning to holy poems and sermons when he was ordained in 1614, resembles Sidney in his views on the nature of poetry, especially love poetry, that it must not be about "artised" (Kermode 15) or, in other words, artificially and traditionally contrived notions of courtly love but rather the real pleasure and pain of love itself:

Who ever 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:³
(Donne, *The Complete English Poems* 179)

Considering the passage above, it is, therefore, interesting to see other links between Sidney's poetics and Donne's spontaneous, passionate and ground-breaking poetry, particularly, when it comes to Sidney's notion of the 'right poet'.

This paper will try to answer the question of whether John Donne can be considered as the 'right poet' in Sir Philip Sidney's sense. Upon close study of *An Apology of Poetry* and a selection of Donne's works, this essay will conclude that, technically speaking, Donne can be considered as a 'right poet' since his works delight the readers with original invention of metaphysical conceits and creative flow of thought in passionate and persuasive argument. However, morally speaking, Donne does not fit into Sidney's category of the 'right poet'

³ From "Elegie [XVIII] Loves Progress"

whose aim is to teach or move by delighting the readers' 'erect wit' so that it will propel their 'infected will', to try to reach the Edenic uncorrupted state of moral righteousness. True, Donne's major concern is not of morality and didacticism but he, in truth, can be considered as a 'modern poet' who is ahead of his time in his total acceptance of human flaws or inclination to sin as well as his encouragement for readers to be thinking individuals who get to decide for themselves what is morally right and wrong.

Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*

The Division of Poets

In *An Apology for Poetry*, Sir Philip Sidney categorizes poets into three different types: firstly, the poet who only praises God, secondly, the poet who second-handedly draws his material from philosophical or historical matters and, lastly, the poet who brilliantly uses his creative power to teach and inspire by delighting. Here, the third kind is, according to Sidney, regarded as the 'right poet' and is the most ideal of all. Here are the detailed explanations:

1. The Divine Poets who "Imitate the Inconceivable Excellencies of God"⁴

This type of poet ventures to praise not only the Christian God like, for example, David does in his *Psalms*, Solomon in his *Songs of Songs* but also the pagan gods like, for example, the pre-Homeric poet Orpheus does or Amphion, the harp player, in the making of the wall of Thebes as well. However, these divinely inspired poets, though dealing with divine subject matter, are, for Sidney, not really poets since, firstly, they function as only the cheerers of human joy and the soothers of human affliction:

And this poesy must be used by whosoever will follow St. James's counsel in singing psalms when they are merry, and I know is used with the fruit of comfort by some, when, in sorrowful pangs of their death-bringing sins, they find the consolation of the never-leaving goodness. (Sidney 27)

Secondly, they are not really poets since they are not "lifted up with the vigour of [their] own invention[s]". To illustrate, these divinely inspired poets, in Platonic terms, merely imitate from the "shadow" of perfection and, hence, are considered as removed from reality. Interestingly, A.C. Hamilton points out that, according to Plato, if this kind of poet honestly praises the gods as what they really are, truly receiving "a very inspiring of a divine force, far above

⁴ Sidney 27

man's wit" (112), he will be admitted into the ideal state of the Republic but if this kind of poet becomes "twice removed from reality", he will be banished:

'...Like one who gives a city over into the hands of villains, and destroys the better citizens, so we shall say that the imitative poet likewise implants an evil constitution in the soul of each individual; ...he manufactures images very far removed from the truth.'...
'Let it, then,' I said, 'be our defence now... that is was only to be expected that we should expel poetry from the city, such being her nature...' (Plato 294-296)

Considering the fact that this kind of poet, by copying what they see, often adds false and exaggerated things about God or gods in order to praise and flatter more, Plato will surely reject them. However, for Sidney, whose ways of thinking reject such Platonic concept of divine inspiration, not only will he banish them the way Plato will probably do, but he will also question their label as "a poet" since poetry must not be "above man's wit" but within "his own invention" and, most of all, true and morally inclined.

2. The Inauthentic Poets who "Deal with Matters Philosophical... or Historical"⁵

Included in this category are poets like the Greek elegiac poet Tyrtaeus, the Roman philosopher Lucretius, the astronomer Manilius and the historian Lucan. Here, whether they second-handedly take material from moral, natural, astronomical or historical issues, respectively, and turn them into verse, they are, for Sidney, not really poets:

because this second sort is wrapped within the fold of the proposed subject, and takes not the course of his own invention, whether they properly be poets or no let grammarians dispute" (Sidney 27).

Here, since these poets are also "twice removed from reality" in that they not only meditate on a particular subject of knowledge which, in Plato's terms, is considered the shadows of perfection, but also affirm fixed concepts and conclusions when, in fact, all fields of knowledge are supposed to be disputable and logically refuted by newer knowledge later on, there is only one measure left to test whether or not they can be labeled rightfully as "poet" and that is their employment of elegant language, rhyming and versification. However,

⁵ Sidney 27

Sidney states later that a 'right poet' is, in truth, beyond any grammarians' dispute. Here, Sidney, being ahead of Plato and being ahead of his time, has other measures in mind:

it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet, no more than a long gown maketh an advocate, who though he pleaded in armour should be an advocate and no soldier. But it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by;
(Sidney 28-29)

We can see that, for Sidney, what marks a poet lies in his act of imitating virtues and vices in the world in order to delight and teach other human-beings to be good. "Rhyming and versing", therefore, only serve as a facade, not the true color of a poet.

3. The "Indeed Right Poets" who "Imitate to Teach and Delight"^{6,7}

This type of poet is, for Sidney, considered the most ideal and preferable of all the three because, firstly, the 'right poet' is creative and innovative. He is not Plato's meaner sort of painters who copies from what he sees. Instead, he "borrow[s] nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be, and should be" (Sidney 28). To illustrate, the 'right poets' manifest not only a certain degree of originality in their portrayal of reality but also creativity by using their own wit and imagination to write about the state of moral perfection. Therefore, we can see that, unlike the divinely inspired poets who seek inspiration from the Christian God or pagan gods, the 'right poets' look into themselves for inspiration just like Sidney's *Astrophel* in his famous sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*:

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe:
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain.
But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay;
Invention, Nature's child, fled stepdame Study's blows;
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.
Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite:

⁶ From Ovid's statement that the poet's mission is "to teach and delight (*docere delictendo*)"

⁷ Sidney 27-28

“Fool,” said my Muse to me, “look in thy heart, and write”⁸

We can see that Astrophel decides to look into his heart and pour his own feelings out in writing his love poetry. Therefore, it can be said of Sidney that he is a man who practices what he preaches in that he relies on his own ‘wit’ and ‘invention’ when it comes to creative writing. Here, it can be argued that Sidney is being traditionally Petrarchan in his overtly declaring that his poetry is original. However, David Kalstone, author of *Sidney’s Poetry: Context and Interpretations*, interestingly objects to such a claim:

The substance of the line [“look in thy heart and write”] is entirely conventional. But the manner of its presentation is not: the violence and release of tension with which the poet is advised to look at Stella’s image marks Sidney’s version as quite special. He presents this conclusion as a personal discovery, marking it with a burst of direct speech and colloquial reproof (“Foole”) that hardly befits the dignity of the supposed Muse who warns him. (126-127)

In short, what makes Sidney unconventional and ahead of his time is that, considering the self-reprimanding word “fool”, Astrophel appears to be in the ‘thinking’ process before reaching his conclusion of finally taking his own self as the material of his sonnet sequence.

Secondly, not only does he turn to his own personal experiences for inspiration, the ‘right poet’ uses his own wit to imitate in order to teach and delight, to move human-beings into a higher state of moral righteousness. Here, Sidney states clearly the obligations of the ‘right poet’:

to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger, and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved; which being the noblest scope to which ever any learning was directed, yet want there not idle tongues to bark at them. (Sidney 28)

Therefore, we can see that, unlike the second type of poet who is constrained within the philosophical or historical world of knowledge, the ‘right poet’ strives hard to attain the highest aim of every learning and knowledge, that is, the virtue or goodness itself. Here, it is interesting to note that the belief that knowledge is the very tool used for improving people’s moral goodness stems from the Classical period or the Greco-Roman civilization.

The Function of Poetry

Now that the definition of the 'right poet' is clarified, it is important to explore Sidney's opinion on the nature and function of poetry. Here, considering the nature and definition of the divine poets who "imitate the inconceivable excellencies of God" and the inauthentic poets who "deal with matters philosophical... or historical", we can see that both types are subjected by the constraints of either the heavenly portrait of the divine or the secular knowledge. Here, A.C. Hamilton (114) offers another interesting view which highlights the inferiority of the function of poetry written by the meaner sort of poets to that written by the ideal 'right poet':

Sidney is supporting his claim that all arts and sciences follow Nature, and are therefore subject to her – all except the right poet, who remains free to create another nature. Since nature is fallen, her world is brazen; but the poet's world, being unfallen, is golden.

According to this citation, it is the duty of the 'right poet', whose world, being a transcendently imaginative one, is "unfallen" or "golden", to write poetry which will appeal to human's 'erect wit' so that the reasoning part or the human intelligence which is capable of understanding moral perfection, will move human's 'infected will' or human's imperfection which tends to hinder virtue or goodness to strive hard to be as good as or as perfect as the Edenic state of the world before the fall of Adam and Eve, despite the knowledge that such attempt is impossible since the fall is irrevocable:

This purifying of wit, this enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit, which commonly we call learning..., the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worst by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of. (Sidney 29)

Therefore, it can be summed up that, firstly, the 'right poetry' written by the 'right poet' must be creative and passionate in its means or, in other words, must be a "speaking picture" which emotionally affects and moves human beings to moral righteousness. Secondly, poetry, for the moralist Sidney, must be didactic in its ends.

Now that an overview on Sir Philip Sidney's poetic theory is given, it is, thus, appropriate to move on to explore and explain, by comparing and contrasting Sidney's poetics and Donne's works, how John Donne can be considered a 'right poet' in his means and a 'modern poet' in his ends

John Donne as a 'Right Poet' in his Means

John Donne fits into the category of Sidney's 'right poet' because, first of all, though traces of Petrarchan convention can still be seen in his works, Donne clearly adds some elements which stem from his wit and originality in the treatment of the traditional conceits, making his poetry even more 'delightful' in Sidney's sense since it makes the readers think along with the course of the argument presented as well as feel delighted during their thinking process. Secondly, Donne does not treat love as just a 'pose' or empty tradition. On the contrary, he, like Sidney's Astrophel, really does "look in [his] heart, and write" from his own true 'self' and experience, producing, therefore, unique and beautiful poems which are filled with such passion and vigor that no other poets in his time can rival against.

1. Innovative Treatment of Petrarchan Convention

Most critics have long been able to sense and notice Donne's greatness and uniqueness as a poet. Ben Jonson, Donne's contemporary cavalier opposite, for instance, regards Donne as "the first poet in the world in some things" (Donne, *John Donne: A Selection* 11) because of his technical innovation which was truly incomparable. Later on, in the nineteenth century, the romantic poet Coleridge clearly confirms Jonson's remarks in his work "On Donne's Poetry":

With Donne, whose muse on dromedary trots,
Wreathes iron pokers into true-love knots;
Rhyme's sturdy cripple, fancy's maze and clue,
Wit's forge and fire-blast, meaning's press and screw.

T.S. Eliot, in 1920, expresses his admiration for Donne in "Whispers of Immortality":

Donne, I suppose, was such another
Who found no substitute for sense,
To seize and clutch and penetrate;
Expert beyond experience,

He knew the anguish of the marrow
The ache of the skeleton;
(Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 14)

To conclude from the three quotations, we can say that critics tend to revere Donne as a poet who is ahead of his time in challenging the overpowering

Petrarchan sonnet tradition. To illustrate, firstly, it is interesting to note that, apart from his praise, it was Ben Jonson who also criticizes Donne's unconventional use of form and rhyme scheme which, in Coleridge words, is "sturdy cripple" in comparison with the Elizabethan well-balanced and elegantly-rhymed verses by saying "Donne for not keeping of accent deserve hanging" (Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 14). Also, instead of treating love as merely a mask to wear as a fashion and as a tradition like the speaker in Petrarchan sonnets does, Donne's speaker treats love as genuine feelings of intermingling pain and pleasure, desire and passion. Therefore, we can see that he wears love not only as an ornament but, instead, embrace both the true pleasure and the "the anguish of the marrow" and "the ague of the skeleton" which love itself brings. However, John Donne, in truth, does not fully reject the Petrarchan convention since, before one is able to effectively refute something, one must know it by heart. Therefore, it will be more accurate to regard him as the interface between Petrarchism⁹ and originality since we can see Petrarchan elements in his work and, at the same time, elements reflecting his defiance against the tradition.

In "XIII: What if this present were the worlds last night?", one of his Holy Sonnets [Divine Meditation], Donne adopts the Petrarchan conceit that the heart is the dwelling place of Cupid or Love. Hence, the image of the beloved one resides in the speaker's heart as in this following passage:

Marke in my heart, O Soule, where thou dost dwell,
The picture of Christ crucified, and tell
Whether his countenance can thee affright,
Teares in his eyes quench the amasing light,
Blood fills his frownes, which from his pierc'd head fell;
(Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 442)

Here, we can see that the passage showing how Jesus Christ's image, the emblem of suffering, resides in the heart of the speaker echoes the same conceit which Sidney employs in Petrarch's "Rime 140":

Amor, chenal penser mio vive e regna
E l'suo seggio maggior nel mio cor tne
[Love who within my thoughts does live and reign
Who keeps his favoured seat inside my heart],¹⁰

⁹ According to *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theories* (662),

Petrarchism is, in broad sense, the imitation of Petrarch's style.

¹⁰ From "Poetic and Narrative Forms"; Translation by Anna Maria Armi (1946)

Also, such conceits can be traced in the very first sonnet of the *Astrophel and Stella* sonnet sequence:

‘Foole,” answers he, ‘no *Indes* such treasures hold,
But from thy heart, while my sire charmeth thee,
Sweet *Stella*’s image I do steal to mee” (Kalstone 126)

However, we can see that both of the conceits, Donne’s and Petrarchal one, though they stemmed from the same root, are remarkably different. To illustrate, while Sidney follows Petrarchan tradition, Donne uses such a tradition and molds it into something new. Here, by replacing the sonnet lady’s beautiful image with Jesus Christ’s terrifying image, Donne innovatively blends profanity with religion. This is the originality which cannot be found in the Petrarchan sonnets.

Apart from the conceit that the heart is the seat of love, Donne’s adds an innovative element on the Petrarchan conceit of sleep being the image of death as reflected in Hamlet’s famous soliloquy:

...—To die,—to sleep,—
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, ‘tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wishd. To die, —To sleep;—
To sleep! Perchance to dream: ay there’s the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause:
 (“Hamlet” Act III Scene I 688 in Shakespeare, 1996)

Here, in Donne’s “Womans Constancy”, sleep is also portrayed traditionally as the image of death. However, there is a tinge of originality in it since never before has this Petrarchan conceit been used to reprimand the sonnet lady’s inclination towards infidelity and unreliability:

Or, as true deaths, true maryages untie,
So lovers contracts, images of those,
Binde but till sleep, deaths image, them unloose?
(Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 51)

We can see that the Petrarchan conceit is turned into Donne’s Metaphysical conceit which thrills and delights the reader with its unlikely yet undeniable

plausibility. To illustrate, the argument points out that, according to the matrimonial vow "till death do us part", marriage can be annulled by death. Here, the metaphysical conceit goes as far as contending that, since sleep is the image of death, the woman may think that her marriage can be cancelled while the speaker is sleeping.

In addition, according to the Petrarchan sonnet convention, the speaker in the poem must desperately pine for his lady's love. Petrarch himself, in "Rime 310", portrays the desolation which the unrequited love brings to the speaker:

Ma per me, lasso!, tornano i più gravi
 sospiri, che del cor profondo tragge
 quella ch'al ciel se ne portò le chiavi;
 e cantar augeletti, e fiorir piagge,
 e 'n belle donne oneste atti soavi
 sono un deserto, e fere aspre e selvagge.
 [But to me only come the heaviest sighs
 That from my heart she will draw out and pull,
 Who flew away with its keys to the skies;
 And small birds singing, and blossoms so full,
 And lovely women, their acts fair and mild,
 Are a desert to me, beasts rough and wild.]¹¹

While the speaker in "Rime 310", pining for her love, considers his lady's cruelty in not returning her love to him as "a desert to [him]", the speaker in "Womans Constancy", on the other hand, does not traditionally sigh and pine for his lady's love. On the contrary, he goes as far as accusing his lady as a "vaine lunatique" only to shock the readers by revealing, at the end of the poem, that he "may think so too", confessing, thus, that he is not any better than the accused lady. Here, Donne's poetic self¹² is ahead of his time by saying that, whether they are men and women, lovers can equally be inconstant¹³. Therefore, it is no wonder why Coleridge regards the title "Womans Constancy" as "a misnomer" and that, in his own words, "the title ought to be – Mutual Inconstancy"¹⁴. Donne's revolutionary message and the realistic portrayal of human nature brilliantly imposed on the Petrarchan sonnet tradition is considered truly as a delighting innovation.

¹¹ From "Poetic and Narrative Forms"; Translation by Anna Maria Armi (1946)

¹² Donne's poetic self differs from Donne's self since the poetic self is the speaker in the poem whereas the self is the Donne in reality.

¹³ This remark by Donne reverses Renaissance views towards gender hierarchy which indicates that men are superior to women in the great chain of being.

¹⁴ qtd. in Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 51

2. The 'Self' as Material for Poetry

As mentioned in this essay's explanatory section on *An Apology for Poetry*, Sidney's 'right poet' is one who creates passionate 'speaking Picture of Poesy'¹⁵ (Sidney 33) or, in other words, poetry which appeals to the reader's sentiment, not the poetry which serves only as a stiff and empty traditional ornament. Therefore, this ideal kind of poet will certainly take his own 'self' and experience as source and material in the writing of his poetry. In other words, the 'right poet', of course, "only bringeth his own stuff, and doth not learn a conceit out of a matter, but maketh matter for a conceit" (Sidney 36). Here, upon close study of Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning", the clearest illustration of the metaphysical conceit, and "Hymn to God the Father", this section will point out that Donne really "bringeth his own stuff" and "maketh matter" out of his life, feelings, identity and experience, molding his 'self' into passionate and revolutionary metaphysical conceits.

To begin, it is interesting to note that sonneteers in the courtly love tradition normally write poetry for aristocratic mistresses who are not their real-life spouses. To illustrate, Petrarch writes for Laura and Sidney writing for Penelope Devereux. Donne, on the contrary, writes "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" for his wife Anne More as Redpath explains in *The Songs and Sonets of John Donne*:

Walton [author of *Life of Donne*] says that the lines were given by Donne to his wife when he left her to go with Sir Robert Drury [Donne's patron] to France in 1611. Walton adds: 'And I beg leave to tell, that I have heard some Criticks, learned, both in Languages and Poetry, say, that none of the Greek or Latin Poets did ever equal them. equal them.' (83)

If such statement is true, we can regard "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" as a poem on which stems from Donne's very own 'self' or from his own feelings and experience. This personal and moving poem begins with a metaphysical analogy comprised of juxtaposition of images. Here, the speaker tells his lady that their parting must not involve an extravagant exhibit of grief and mourning no more than a silent death of a man whose deathbed is surrounded by friends who are unable to tell whether the man is dead or not:

¹⁵ From *Ut pictora poesis* or, literally, "as is painting so is poetry", Horace's repetitive statement in *Ars Poetica*

Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,
 The breath goes now, and some say, no.
 So let us melt, and make no noise,
 No teare-floods nor sigh-tempest move,
 (Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 97)

Here, the speaker prefers his and his lover's silent act of 'melting' away from each other at the time of his departure. The reason, remarkably, is that he considers their love as superior to that of the "dull sublunary lovers" who are changeable that their love sways according to physical and external elements such as parting:

But we by a love, so much refin'd,
 That our selves know not what it is,
 Inter-assured of the mind,
 Care lesse, eyes, lips, hands to misse.
 (Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 98)

In the speaker's case, there is no need for the blazon¹⁶, no need to place importance on his lady's physical appearance when it comes to missing her because their mutual and spiritual love, unlike most people's physical love, transcends all the physical things on earth. However, the speaker's exaltation of their love does not end here. A brilliant paradox and metaphysical conceit is yet to be introduced to the readers:

Our two soules therefore, which are one,
 Though I must goe, endure not yet
 A breach, but an expansion,
 Like gold to ayery thinness beate.
 (Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 98)

Here, the paradoxical statement points out that, though they possess separate souls, the speaker considers himself and his beloved as united or as one in spirit. Therefore, when the speaker has to depart, their joint soul will be expanded even though the gap between their bodies widens just like the gold in its process of being beaten to leaf. Such paradoxical statement, hence, confirms the notion that "absence makes a heart grow fonder".

¹⁶ According to *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theories* (90), the blazon, as a literary term, was used by the followers of Petrarchism to describe verses which dwelt upon and detailed the various parts of a woman's body; a sort of catalogue of her physical attributes.

From the paradox, the readers are brought to a climactic conclusion, one of the most passionately-expressed metaphysical conceits: the lovers as the two legs of compasses, with the lady's soul as the fixed leg and the speaker's soul as the roaming leg used in drawing circles.

And though it in the center sit,
 Yet when the other far the rome,
 It leanes, and hearkens after it,
 And grows erect, as that comes home.
 Such wilt thou be to mee, who must
 Like th'other foot, obliquely runne.
 Thy firmness makes my circle just,
 And makes me end, where I begunne.
 (Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 98)

From the text, his lady's steadfastness and constancy in love are, precisely, what bring the speaker back to her. Here, from all the citations, we can see that "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning", Donne's remarkable "speaking picture", apart from being so witty and metaphysical, is filled with a man's intense and passionate love for his beloved. Also, such emotions are conveyed to the readers by images of mining and machines, the beating of gold and the mathematical compasses, respectively, which are the emblems of the new science in Donne's time. This concretely-portrayed love poem, therefore, is considered a more profoundly touching and powerfully moving one than the aloof and decorative courtly love sonnets.

While "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" portrays a man who is brimful with passion, a sense of triumph and full confidence in their mutual love, In "A Hymne to God the Father", we can see the image of a man approaching death who tries to impose a sense of firmness to soothe his spiritual uncertainty. Here, presumably written after Donne's serious illness in 1623, we can see how Donne's speaker, on one side, tries to calm down his disquieting mind and be at peace in the assurance of the divine grace and, on the other side, employing very personal puns to signify his love for his beloved lady:

Wilt thou forgive that sinne I have begunne,
 Which was my sin, though it were done before?
 Wilt thou forgive that sinne, through which I runne,
 And do run still: though still I do deplore?
 When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
 For, I have more [my emphasis].
 (Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 490)

Here, the speaker addresses God, asking Him to forgive the original sin which, "though it were done before" by his ancestors Adam and Eve, is also his sin. However, considering the word 'done' as a deliberate pun on his name "Donne", we can see that he subtly expresses his feelings of guilt and repentance and that he also wants God to forgive the "done [Donne] before" or his identity as a once young and profane courtier Jack Donne writing seductive poems before becoming ordained and Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. Considering the pun and putting it in close examination, it is interesting to note the double meaning in the last two lines of the quotation as well. Here, the apparent meaning is that, though God forgives him, that is not all since he still has more sins in his life awaiting atonement. The most gravely of all sins is his sin of despair:

But swear by thy selfe, that at my death thy sonne,
 Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
 And, having done that, Thou haste done,
 I feare¹⁷ no more [my emphasis].
 (Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 491)

Here, the speaker, filled with doubt and despair, urges God to promise that his "sonne" which means both the sun and God's son Jesus Christ will 'rise' and 'shine' for him, redeeming all his sins so that he will "feare no more" sins.

The second meaning, on the other hand, obviously deals with secular and personal matter. To illustrate, considering the sentence "When thou hast done, thou hast not done,/for, I have more", the speaker tells us that even if he dies and God has him in that the speaker is united with God, it will not be, in his eyes, a trivial matter since he already has Anne More. They are united in a way that even death or sins are not able to separate them. Therefore, we can see that love is portrayed as more powerful than religion itself.

To conclude, from the selected poems, we can see that Donne is the poet who, in Sidney's term, is "lifted up with the vigor of his own invention" and his invention, indeed, stems from his personal 'self' as both the young, cocky and profane Jack Donne and the grim and religious death-obsessed Dean and preacher, making his poetry, unlike the "artised" and artificial poetry, "alive" with flesh and blood, with pain and pleasure of love, and with faith and doubt in religion.

¹⁷ The word "feare" here means "have"

John Donne as a 'Modern Poet' in his Ends

As seen in the previous sections, John Donne can truly be regarded as Sidney's 'right poet' since he is innovative and breathes life into his poetry, making it so witty and passionate that the readers cannot help but feel delighted as they follow the course of the conceit and moved as they are exposed to the speaker's deepest sentiments. However, what is discussed concerns only the techniques of poetry, marking Donne as a 'right poet' in his means. This section, therefore, will explore whether or not Donne's works are morally inclined in subject matter and didactic in its ends since it is the duty of Sidney's 'right poet' to teach by delighting in order to move the reader's 'erect wit' nearer to goodness.

To begin, going back to "Womans Constancy", we can see that Donne overtly admits the fact that human beings are not always virtuous and perfect. The speaker and the lady can equally commit the immoral sin of adultery. Donne as a poet, therefore, realistically embraces human's 'infected will' instead of trying to teach human's 'erect wit' to be puritanical or moral in thoughts and actions. However, instead of being 'immoral', Donne's poetry will be more truly justified if it is labeled as 'amoral' since he does not appeal to the 'erect wit' in order to propel human beings to the Edenic state of moral righteousness nor does he appeal to the 'infected will' to sink deeper and deeper in the fallen man's infection. What he does, even in the most obscene seductive poems, is using his wit in order to present a perfectly logical argument, a clever 'brain-teaser' which elevates the readers to the realm of critical thinking. This is considered very 'modern' or, in other words, ahead of his time:

Marke but this flea, and marke in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
..., our two bloods mingled bee;
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sinne, nor shame, nor loss of maiden head,
(Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 47)

In "The Flea", Donne uses outrageous metaphysical conceit of the flea which, having sucked the lovers' blood, becomes a holy temple¹⁸ which, if the lady kills it, she will commit three sins: that of murder the speaker, that of suicide and that of sacrilege by destroying God's holy place. However, the poem is so dramatically written that the readers can see how the lady, without thinking and hesitation, crushes the flea. Here, Donne turns his crisis into a great opportunity to make the readers realize the fact that, true, killing the flea is trivial but going

¹⁸ Sexual intercourse, in Donne's day, meant the exchange of blood and fusion of body liquid.

to bed with the speaker, too, is equally trivial since the lady will only waste just a droplet of honour which is as tiny as the blood she wasted from this trivial fleabite.

Here, as readers, we are fooled into following Donne's argument and, hence, trapped, as the lady is, into accepting absurd logical conclusions such as the conceit of the flea becoming a "marriage bed, and marriage temple" from biting two people only to be refuted and ridiculed at the twisting end of the poem. Clearly, apart from pointing out that following your own human instincts must not be considered "a sinne, nor shame, nor loss of maiden head", what Donne ventures to do is also to delight us with plausible argument and trap us into thinking along the flow of the poem. His ends, indeed, is amoral.

Another example of how Donne can be considered as a 'modern poet' in his ends can be reflected in "The Sunne Rising". Here, the speaker scolds the sun for rising and interrupting his time with his lover:

Busie old foole, unruly Sunne,
Why does thou thus,
Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us?
Must to thy motions lovers seasons run?
(Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 53)

Donne's unconventional aubade or 'dawn song' is interesting in its joyous tone of the lover and the tongue-in-cheek treatment of the sun. The apostrophe "busie old foole" strikes the reader as an extraordinary way to address the sun, the great source of life and heat. Here, it is clear that the sun signifies the passing of time as well since, when the sun "calls on" the lovers, they must rise and part. However, we can see that, later on, the speaker defiantly says that love is not subject to time and the seasons: "Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,/ Nor houres, dayes, moneths, which are the rags of time." Regarding time as a nuisance, the speaker dismisses the sun, telling the sun to bother and remind other people such as late schoolboys, bitter apprentices, court huntsmen and country ants of their jobs towards the society. The speaker has his lover as his perfect world and, hence, does not care for anything else:

Looke, and tomorrow late, tell mee,
Whether both the 'India's of spice and Myne
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here with mee.
Aske for those Kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
And thou shalt heare, all here in one bed lay.

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

(Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 54)

Unlike Sir Philip Sidney, a public figure whose aim in writing was to mold men that would be of service to Queen and country, Donne, in this poem, indicates that matters of the state is not as important as matters of two individual hearts. Here, Donne is 'modern' in the sense that he, being anti-utilitarian, focuses on an individual private realm, even pointing out that personal life and the love between a man and a woman are more important than the universe. It is interesting to mark the metaphysical conceit in this counter-aubade: the beloved lady, for him, is the newly explored East Indies, "the land of spice", as well as the West Indies, "the land of Myne". Moreover, all the royalties in the world can be found in their bed since the lady is all the countries and the speaker is all royalties in the world. Therefore, to conclude such brilliant conceit which playfully toys with the matters of the state, the speaker now, surprisingly, invites the sun to shine on them since, if the sun dwells on them, it would be as if the sun is everywhere in the universe. Their bed, not the world outside their bedroom, is triumphantly regarded as the centre of the universe:

Shine here to us, and thou art every where;
This bed thy center is, these walls, thy spheare

(Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 54)

To conclude from the examples, considering his amoral and non-didactic ends, John Donne can only be labeled as a 'right poet' in his means and techniques. However, in fully acknowledging human's 'infected will' or flaws of human nature as well as turning his poetry into a thinking process, Donne is considered as being ahead in his time in moving the readers to see the concrete reality of the world and venture to think along with his words. In this way, John Donne can surely be seen a 'modern poet' in his ends.

Conclusion

Throughout the course of our journey, we have explored Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*, the most prominent and best-written Renaissance poetics or manifestation on Renaissance creative writing, and we have delved into the selected works of John Donne, the most innovative metaphysical poet in the seventeenth century. Here, looking at Donne's poetry in terms of Sidney's poetics, there is a subtle link between the two in the issue of the ideal 'right poet' in that Donne, being innovative and vigorously passionate in writing his works, fits perfectly in the category of Sidney's 'right poet' in his means of

delighting the readers with his wit, intense feelings, and originality. Here, this essay shows how Donne is both revolutionary in his treatment of the Petrarchan convention and ardently-inspired by his experience, taking his 'self' as his own Muse in writing his touching poetry. However, Donne, being amorally inclined and non-didactic in his ends, can be considered not as a 'right poet' in Sidney's terms but, rather, as a 'modern' poet in his ends, a poet who is ahead of his time in that he embraces human's 'infected will' rather than trying to teach human's 'erect wit' to be virtuous. What is incredibly 'modern' and most remarkable about Donne and his profound understanding of secular life and human nature is that we must not forget that such a man who wrote seductive and libertine poems of *Songs and Sonets* were the same man of God who would later write the powerful *Divine Poems* and various religious sermons. Here, Thomas Carew in "An Elegie upon the death of the Deane of Pauls, Dr. John Donne", states clearly the amazing duality of Donne's identity:

Though every pen should share a distinct part,
 Yet art thou Theme enough to tyre all Art;
 Let others carve the rest, it shall suffice
 I on thy Tombe this Epitaphe incise.
 Here lies a King, that rul'd as he thought fit
 The universall Monarchy of wit;
 Here lies two Flamens, and both those, the best
 Apollo's first, at last, the true God Priest.
 (Donne, *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* 498)

I perceive such duality of Donne's identity, the double meaning of his puns, hyperboles and metaphysical conceits as well as his double labels as a 'right poet' in his means and, in my own invented title, a 'modern poet' in his ends as a portrayal how human nature, being so fluid and dynamic in substance, can change through time and experience. Here, had Sir Philip Sidney been alive to witness the greatness and extreme duality of John Donne, he may alter the definition of the ends of the 'right poet' on Donne's behalf. Therefore, the 'right poet' will not only be "lifted up with the vigour of his own invention", but also aim "to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach, and delight to move men" into, as we see in Donne's works, knowing their own true nature, accepting their 'infected will' and see the beauty in it. Thus, if this is true, Donne will certainly be regarded as a complete 'right poet' both in his means and in his ends.

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