

# Men, Women, and Sexuality in the Works of George Herbert and John Donne

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Preddiplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i filozofije

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Donne**

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Borislav Berić

Osijek, 2016.

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## Abstract

Given that George Herbert and John Donne are probably the most famous English metaphysical poets, their works have been studied in the light of various reading strategies. This paper first shows the characteristics of Metaphysical Poetry, as well as the peculiarities of Herbert's and Donne's literary oeuvre. Considering religion as being one of the most important parts of their lives in the seventeenth century, both of them, of course, include religious elements in their works. The focus is on Herbert's and Donne's poems dealing with God and religion. However, both poets also concentrate on the human beings, their spirituality and physicality. Moreover, in the works of both poets it is possible to notice elements of sexuality, which is sometimes expressed directly, and sometimes quite subtly. Also, they often discuss the relationship of men and women, showing strong negative attitude towards female gender. Finally, the analysis of the poems points to the autobiographical elements, but also to the similarities and differences in the way of writing.

Keywords: George Herbert, John Donne, men, women, sexuality, God

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## Introduction

Since it appeared in the seventeenth century, Metaphysical Poetry has been very interesting and in some ways different from other poetic genres. The name was coined by Samuel Johnson, and he was actually the first one who noticed and described metaphysical poets and their unique style of writing in his work *Life of Cowley*. Metaphysical poets are called so because they introduce elements of philosophy in poetry, while the most important motives in their works are God and God's grace. George Herbert and John Donne are considered as the originators of Metaphysical Poetry, and their poems are, according to many critics, timeless. Namely, they both write religious poetry, and it is unusual, but also very interesting, that they insert in it many elements of sexuality and corporeality. It would not be surprising at all if sexuality was not a taboo topic in their time.

The focus of this paper will be primarily on the poems dealing with sexuality, men, and women. Namely, both poets have a unique way of writing and imposing their views, and sometimes even passions and fears. The first part of the paper defines Metaphysical Poetry in general, while the second part deals with the characteristics of Herbert's and Donne's poetry. Lastly, individual poems are analyzed and critics are explored in part three.

## 1. The Features of Metaphysical Poetry

Metaphysical Poetry first appeared in the seventeenth century in England. Its representatives are called "metaphysical poets", and that term was coined by Samuel Johnson. In his *Life of Cowley* Johnson mentions a race of writers who use a peculiar way of writing with strong lines and elements of philosophy (Gardner xix). Strong lines indicate general desire for concise expressions whilst the usage of philosophical elements shows a willingness and skill of poets to confront even with the hardest thoughts of human cognition. According to Gardner, Metaphysical Poetry "demands upon the reader and challenges him to make it out. It does not attempt to attract the lazy, and its lover have always a certain sense of being a privileged class, able to enjoy what is beyond the reach of vulgar wits" (xxi). Every work of literature requires attention from the reader, but works of Metaphysical Poetry demand concentration and patience because only one reading of the poem is almost never sufficient enough for its understanding. Although metaphysical poems tend to be brief, it is important to emphasize their complex structure which is always closely woven (Gardner xxii). Reading Metaphysical Poetry was, and still is, a great exercise for the mind because those poets use metaphysical conceits and make ingenious comparisons of dissimilar things. Williamson suggests that "it was not only an exercise for sharp wits but also a means to the interpretation of life" (11). Every Metaphysical poet is preoccupied with thoughts and things around him but there is something that distinguishes metaphysical style of writing from any other, and that is the need of a poet to argue, persuade, or define every moment of his experience described in the poem. Many of those experiences are very personal, where a man speaks with his mistress or thinks about her, addresses his God or just thinks about his life in a way that exceeds the limits of human experience (Gardner xxvii). All the above indicates the complexity of Metaphysical Poetry that has significantly influenced the literature of the seventeenth century, both in England and abroad.

## 2. George Herbert and John Donne: Metaphysical Poets

George Herbert and John Donne are considered as the originators of Metaphysical Poetry. However, Richard Crashaw, Abraham Cowley, Henry Vaughn also became known as metaphysical poets. Herbert and Donne have shown originality and a dose of artistic courage, writing in a different and more demanding way. Their works are similar in many aspects and they reflect the spirit of their time. Love, soul, body and God are just some of the main motifs of their works. However, while Herbert fully dedicates himself to writing religious poetry, Donne is also well known for his love poems. That is one, but certainly not the only, difference in the oeuvre of these great writers. Their prose works, as well as essays and poems, are even today the subject of numerous studies. According to Milgate, “In this century, Donne’s poetry has been found particularly congenial to modern poets and their reader, and criticism has often been based in favour of its qualities understood - or misunderstood as exhibiting Donne as a precursor or pattern of modern styles and of modern conflicts and attitudes of mind” (43). Donne’s poetry, described by many as lively and penetrating, has been studied in many works, of which perhaps the best known and the most respected one is A. Stein’s *John Donne’s Lyrics*, which “deals thoroughly with the nature of eloquence, integrity, and simplicity of the poems not to everyone’s complete satisfaction” (Milgate 46).

Just like Donne, Herbert has gained his fame with verses which, thanks to their quality, survived even the times of the Protectorate and the Restoration. Although they were very close, Herbert’s style of writing differs from Donne’s. Margaret Bottrall says that “his psychological subtlety, his remarkably sure handling of colloquial language and his exquisite craftsmanship were acknowledged strengths; and it was apparent that, in spite of his personal links with Donne, he was not his poetic disciple to any marked extent” (66). Both, Herbert and Donne, write about God, man and love, trying to combine spirituality and God’s perfection with man’s imperfection. Being the masters of English lyric poetry, they have provoked inner conflicts within all attentive readers and they have afforded the pleasure of honest and sensitive verse for all those who care for English poetry (Bottrall 68). In addition to these topics, both authors in their works include corporeality and elements of sexuality that each one expresses in a different way.

Their writing techniques are largely determined by the main motifs in their works. Basil Thommen emphasizes that “The main features of Donne’s technique arise from his



notion of ecstasy. Donne's ecstasy describes how the souls of two lovers leave their bodies during their physical union and mix together before returning to their original bodies. This experience purifies each of the lovers and grants them spiritual fulfillment" (1). The ecstasy and glorification of a human touch, pleasures and sexuality are the most important grounds on which Donne builds poems like "Self- Love", "The Good Morrow" and "Ecstasy".

On the other hand, the only relationship George Herbert writes about is the one between God and man. He was not just a poet but also a person that represented religion and its stability in those times. But, it cannot be said that not even one aspect of corporeality appears in his works. Despite the fact that "George Herbert started young in distancing himself from contemporary secular love poetry about women" (Wood 39) he writes a poem about biblical female character, Mary Magdalene. He does not write about her in the context of the time he lived in, but writes exclusively about her sins and connection with God. So, unlike Donne, Herbert's preoccupations were never contemporary men or women as he was constantly trying to emphasize their weakness without God's presence and their strength when they are in God's grace. His poems "Man", "Mary Magdalene", and "Collar" are some of the most important in his poetic oeuvre and they can be found in his poem collection called *The Temple*. The aim is to analyze them and compare them with the already mentioned poems of John Donne and observe on concrete examples all the similarities, differences, and important facts that marked the poetic work of two great artists.

### 3. George Herbert

#### 3.1. "Man"

Herbert's poem "Man" is a fine example of literature that glorifies God and man in communion. As in most of his works, Herbert points out that God is in the human heart. Furthermore, it is evident that the author carefully describes human body like a holy place which God created and where he himself dwells.

MY God, I heard this day,  
That none doth build a stately habitation  
But he that means to dwell therein.  
What house more stately have hath there been  
Or can be, than is Man? To whose creation  
All things are in decay. (1-6)

Man's body represents perfection and symmetry, and it is in direct contact with God. In fact, Herbert thinks that the human body is a temple and that its only task is to establish connection with God. No other corporeality, and certainly not one that is sexual, is important or worthy of man. According to Bromley,

Herbert constructs a personal relationship with God that requires God's presence. This intimacy, however, is difficult to sustain because of the historical and theological absence of Christ's body. In response to this problem, Herbert articulates a model of intimacy based on desire for the absent body of Christ. Without a body of Christ with which to be intimate, the speaker of Herbert's poems subjects his own body to disciplinary surveillance. (Bromley)

Moreover, Herbert thinks that man is the center of the world and that everything that exists serves to him. He glorifies perfect human body and proportions. Herbert says, "Man is all symmetry, / full of proportions, one limb to another" (13-14). When trying to express man's power, Herbert emphasizes that everything created in this world has a purpose of serving him and being kind to him.

The stars have us to bed;

Night draws the curtains, which the sun withdraws;

Music and light attend our head;

All things unto our flesh are kind

In their descent and being; to our mind

In their ascent and cause. (31- 36)

With that attitude Herbert leads human being to the level of infallibility and superiority over all living beings. However, each man is small compared with God, the spiritual leader who can ensure eternal life.

### 3.2. "Mary Magdalene"

Mary Magdalene, a scarlet woman, best known from the Christian books, is the main character in one of the most controversial Herbert's poems. Wood says that "Only two poems in *The Temple* are directly about women and the women selected, Mary and Mary Magdalene, form the distant poles of virgin and whore that have become a cliché in our own age. In both poems the speaker keeps himself at a measured distance from his female subject" (38).

The main reason why this poem is even today interesting to many literary critics is the fact that Herbert's mother was called Magdalene and it is considered that she had a big impact on his life. Izaak Walton, a famous English biographer, wrote also Herbert's biography. Walton thinks that it is very important to notice the connection between the speaker of Herbert's poem ("we") and the main character of the poem.

She being stain'd her self, why did she strive

To make him clean, who could not be defil'd?

Why kept she not her tears for her own faults,

And not his feet? Though we could dive

In tears like seas, our sinnes are pil'd

Deeper then they, in words, and works, and thoughts. (7-12)

That correlation between Herbert's speaker and Magdalene became basis on which Walton founded his assumption of a special relationship between George Herbert and his mother, Magdalene Herbert. It is believed that "Herbert's mother must have shown him the 'street' of pensive humbleness that he eventually would tread, just as Mary Magdalene shows the way to all sinners" ( Lull 17).

Many people think that Herbert chooses to write a poem about Biblical prostitute because he had erotic attachment to his mother, but in the same time he felt like he is doing something very perverse. Furthermore, some agree that he just wanted all his sins to be forgiven so he gives an example of a sinner who showed her remorse. Either way, it can be concluded that this poem stands out from his poetic oeuvre as one of the few songs written only about the woman.

She is "blessed Marie," a "deare soul," who resolves to live in "pensive humbleness," after washing Christ's feet, but her previous lifestyle is somewhat harshly treated. She is "stain'd," she has "faults" and "sinnes," which comprise "filth." She brings to Christ both her past, "wherewith to stain," and her tears, "wherewith to wash," and by washing Christ's feet she cleanses her own sins through him (Wood 38).

### 3.3. "The Collar"

The title of this Herbert's poem suggests from the start that the main character is a priest. Of course, that is not surprising given that Herbert himself was a priest, but what is surprising is a dose of anger in the first few lines of the poem. "I struck the board, and cried, "No more; / I will abroad!" (1-2). Namely, the man who serves God feels trapped and constrained. One can say that with this poem Herbert wants to admit that he, too, once upon a time, was in doubt, wondering whether to serve God or to live a completely different life.

What? shall I ever sigh and pine?

My lines and life are free, free as the road,

Loose as the wind, as large as store.

Shall I be still in suit? (3-6)

The speaker is suffering for everything he does not have and he is thinking about the taste of double pleasure to make up for everything that he missed while serving the God.

All wasted?

Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,

And thou hast hands.

Recover all thy sigh-blown age

On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute

Of what is fit and not. Forsake thy cage,

Thy rope of sands,

Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee

Good cable, to enforce and draw,

And be thy law,

While thou didst wink and wouldst not see. (16- 26)

When finally ready to take his life into his own hands, the speaker is interrupted by the voice of God who speaks directly to him. Such an unusual turn of events is characteristic of Herbert's poems that always have some sort of powerful energy that easily reaches the readers.

Stylistic games that are visible in this poem through a strong expression of desires, feelings, and even aggressiveness have served Herbert and many other poets to make religious poetry interesting and accessible. McDowell says that "Herbert and other religious lyricists were committed to the belief that poetry evokes emotional states in its readers by dramatizing those states" (69). "The Collar" is a poem that shows the real truth because a white collar that priest wears is his burden and an honor at the same time. Many would agree that the most important Herbert's intention was to show the human side of every person who yearns for earthly pleasures and freedom, even if that person is committed to serve only God. With the last two verses "Methought I heard one calling, Child! / And I replied My Lord" (35-36),

Herbert shows that the love for God cannot be compared with any other feeling because the speaker forgets about his thoughts as soon as God speaks to him.

#### 4. John Donne

##### 4.1. "Self- Love"

In John Donne's poem "Self-Love", motifs of love and body are dealt with the emphasis on the outer beauty of body and the vanity that is in everyone. The poem is very interesting because it was written from a female point of view and points to the fact that people are not even close to perfection. In fact, Donne is not sure whether perfection exists at all. The body in this poem is female and it is easily conquerable with money. The body is viewed as an object and its purpose is to satisfy others, not God.

Nor he that still his mistress prays,

For she is thrall'd therefore;

Nor he that pays, not, for he says

Within, she's worth no more. (17-20)

One can say that Donne has his own theory about the soul and the body. "In sermons, for instance, Donne speaks of the soul as having blood and bones, of the 'bowells' [sic] of the spirit, and of sin as a whole organic bodily system. He also explicitly contends that soul and body are one, and that all that the soul does, it does in, and with, and by the body" (Selleck).

Therefore this body is not disciplined and it can get sick. In this case, a disease can be seen as weakness and inability to resist the instincts. In "Self-Love" it looks like the female body serves another body in a sexual way, like it can be expendable. In fact, it seems that the sexual act is the only way for rapprochement with another person because the man and all human qualities are no longer valuable as before.

Is there no kind of men

Whom I may freely prove?

I will vent that humour then

In my own self- love. (21-24) (Donne)

Donne ends his poem on with quite a humorous note, although there is obviously no reason for contentment in a world without true love, the world dominated by vanity. Thus, nothing in this poem can be characterized as noble and worthy of praise. In conclusion, Donne

mostly concentrates on the bad things in the world in which the person is left to love only herself because no one else deserves to be loved.

#### 4.2. "The Good- Morrow"

This poem starts with the poet's awakening and follows the course of his thoughts on love. In the first few verses the poet is thinking about the past and it is easy to notice from the tone and the style of writing that he was feeling empty and sad before he met the love of his life. "I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I / Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?"(1-2). It looks like all that he had before he met her was just a passing phase and now he is complete. "If ever any beauty I did see, / Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee" (6-7). Their love is the real one because it reunites their bodies, minds, souls, and desires while all those previous loves were only physical.

But again, the emphasis is on the body as the poetic narrator understands that relationships based on physical led him to true love. It is possible to compare awakening of two lovers with their spiritual awakening, but many would agree that this poem is more about sexuality than spirituality. Donne does not describe any sexual act but subtly points out the importance of sexuality in a relationship.

Furthermore, it is important to note the role of a woman because at first it may seem that man and woman are in the same position, but Bach points that even in this poem there is a gap between them and that woman is subordinated to man. The narrator says, "If our two loves be one, or, thou and I / Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die" (20-21). According to that, Bach concludes that "the conditional conjunctions in these lines mark this vision of equal love as fantasy. That fantasy governs the poem, but even though it is beautiful (perhaps especially to modern critics), for Donne's speaker it is always a fantasy" (272). However, in this case the woman is loved by a man who is not ashamed to show it so it differs a lot from Self- Love.

"The Good- Morrow" is a perfect example of Donne's ecstasy. Namely, the love of the characters in the poem is so strong because they are a union and no one can separate them, not even death.

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. (8-14)

Moreover, they are self-sufficient and fearless because their souls will always find a place in the world if they just stay together. However, the physical part of that relationship must not be neglected because, in order to become one soul, they must become one body first.

#### 4.3. "The Ecstasy"

"The Ecstasy" is considered to be one of the most popular Donne's poems because it summarizes his thoughts of love, body, and sexuality better than any other work. The poem begins with pictures of the lovers on a riverbank.

Where, like a pillow on a bed  
A pregnant bank swell'd up to rest  
The violet's reclining head,  
Sat we two, one another's best.  
Our hands were firmly cemented. (1-5)

The fact that he mentions bed, pillow, pregnancy and hands means that he emphasizes elements of eroticism, which extend through the entire poem. Although the narrator says that "We see by this it was not sex" (31), it is obvious that there is physical contact between two lovers because it is, after all, the foundation of Donne's concept of love. They talk about souls and spiritual love because "in much of Donne's poetry, sex is unimaginable in other than religious terms" (Bach 272). Thus, physical connection exists, but it is not ordinary; it is the one that leads to the state of greatness. By holding hands and looking into each other's eyes, lovers surrender their souls, and in that moment nothing else but them is important. They do

not move because “both lovers clearly associate sexe with the gross matter of original sin that must be purged from their motionless, disembodied encounter” (Gimelli Martin 134).

It could be said that the title of the poem, which is also the name of Donne’s love philosophy, indicates the movement of souls, the overrun of something that is sinful and physical. However, that spiritual process happens in a romantic way as the poet places his characters in the environment which implies love, primarily because of the riverbank and the smelling violet, whose color can also be interpreted as one sign of love.

The whole poem is imbued with philosophical and religious thoughts, which is logical because Donne uses elements of Neoplatonism and the theory of human nature to support his views on love.

Since God’s children unite “both heaven and earth,” just “as our bodies glorified shall be capable of spiritual joy, so our souls demerged into those bodies are allowed to take earthly pleasure. Our soul is not sent hither, only to go back again: we have some errand to do here; nor is it sent into prison because it comes innocent, and he which sent it is just. (Gmelli Martin 130)

Therefore, the body is necessary for souls to be mixed and become one, it is necessary to get closer to God and to have the ecstasy like the lovers in this poem. They just wanted to become one and they are aware of the fact that it can only be done with the help of their bodies as mediators. First their bodies have to become like a knot because it is a part of their nature, it is the essence of every human being.

So soul into the soul may flow,  
Though it to body first repair.  
As our blood labors to beget  
Spirits, as like souls as it can,  
Because such fingers need to knit  
That subtle knot which makes us man. (59-64)

Donne’s “Ecstasy” is all in one, a poem that unites all the philosophical, religious, and poetic thoughts of one man who greatly differed from his contemporaries. Just as Bach emphasizes,

“Donne understands the body and its relationship to sex not as the nineteenth century would—as a container of the personality formed in sexuality, a container that might inadvertently manifest the pressures of that sexual nature—but rather as a material thing linked to the immaterial soul by the blood’s vapors” (271). Such an opinion he has throughout his life and the term "ecstasy", as well as this poem, indicates the versatility of his poetic work, in which he always stresses spirituality, but also recognizes the importance of earthly bodily pleasures.

## 5. On the Issue of Men, Women, and Sexuality in George Herbert's and John Donne's poetry

Based on previously analyzed poems of both authors it can be seen that Herbert was an author whose works, especially poems, were written in honor of God but man also has a role in them. In this case it is necessary to emphasize the difference between the sexes because the female characters are in minority in Herbert's literary oeuvre. In works in which he mentions female characters, he does so in a rather negative way, so Wood concludes that "Given the pervasive negative language about women in poetry of the time, however, we should probably concede that this is just one more slippery handle" (39).

Many are trying to conclude his attitude to women on the basis of his relationship with his mother and sister, which is why his personal life is sometimes more interesting than his works. Certainly, it is easy to say that he did not write about women and that he shared attitude like most of his contemporaries. Women were connected to sin and Herbert was a priest who fought against that sin, like that they have no place in literature or in social life in general. Of course, except in the case of Mary Magdalene, who served as an example to sinners. In fact, Mary Magdalene is not the most important in that poem because the emphasis is actually on God and His grace with which He forgives all her sins. Therefore, Herbert has definitely had some problems he could not face alone, and one of those problems was women. "There is, I think, reason to believe he had some difficulties in his relationships with women. There is, I believe, some reason to suspect that he had some mixed feelings about his relationship with his mother. However, suspicion and belief are far from conclusive" (Wood 45).

As for Herbert's attitude towards sexuality it can be said that he is very careful because sexuality and physicality are symbols of sin. The only case when human body is not considered sinful is when God dwells in it, as evident in Herbert's poem "Man". In fact, the body that Herbert imagines and describes in his poems should have its purpose in connection with God and it must not be used to satisfy passions and desires. Except for the sinfulness of the body, Herbert thought that there is also sin in the language, yet he uses it as the main instrument of expression and dissemination of his thoughts.

Nevertheless, "wit" remains the central dynamic of Herbert's holy art – a paradox that his poems brilliantly enact through a sacramental poetics of human sexuality. Consistent with Reformation spirituality, Herbert's poems pursue the thesis that both

sexuality and textuality, however inherently corrupt, remain worthy of spiritual regard. Both the carnal body and carnal language are redeemable by grace when consecrated to devotional ends (Liew 35).

In “Man” Herbert somehow neglects human sexuality while in “The Collar” he shows how weak and confused one man can be without that part of his personality. Namely, he is like the priest in the poem who refrains from enjoying life and yearns for it at one point in his life. It is possible to say that Herbert very cleverly and subtly expresses all his views about sexuality through his works, but again, he gives a reader a dose of subjectivity because there are a lot of autobiographical elements in many of his works. Many critics studied his collection of poems *The Temple* because they noticed sexual reference. The poems analyzed in this paper also belong to the collection, so they are all connected with motifs of death, soul, God’s love and lust that lead to destruction of a human being and also his body, which is seen as the temple of God.

Death, the mortality of the body, renders the sensual element of desire frustrating and distracting. How much "easier," then, to dismiss the body's distractions and focus desire on an immaterial divine object or the beloved's soul? Ironically, in *The Temple* this very desire is impossibly, paradoxically, irresolvably driven by the body/ temple metaphor of the title. The natural and erotically charged desire for physical, tangible presence beyond metaphor is then a defining and divinely conferred characteristic of humanity. (Beuchamp 7)

In the case of John Donne it is possible to say that he shows his life philosophy through his works. He does not write most of his works for God, but certainly God has a major role in his life and Donne does not omit Him from poems that are analyzed in this paper. It looks like Donne develops his own system of values where he puts men, women, and God as examples of perfection. Donne’s opinions, that at first glance may seem very complicated, Bach explains in a few sentences:

A system wedded to the principles that women are naturally inferior to men and, therefore, naturally more sexually desirous (and unfaithful); that a man’s relationship with God is primary, that his relationships with men are secondary, and that any sexual engagement with women runs a distant third; and that sexual desire is sinful, a worldly result of the original sin of our first parents. (Bach 263)

Therefore, not even in Donne's poems women are privileged. In poems like "Self- Love" the female body is degraded to that point where it is used just for sex. Donne's whole philosophy of love called ecstasy is actually based on a sexual relationship and he believes that physical pleasures are harmful and that they should be used only to reach stronger spirituality and love.

Of course, as with Herbert, there are people who believe that in many works Donne actually writes about himself, so they try to find autobiographical elements. While investigating the connection between Donne and female gender, Bach says many interesting things about "virulent sexual misogyny that pervades Donne's oeuvre" (262). Therefore, not only does he not think that the female gender is important, but also in his works he writes about sexual acts with the woman he loves, without realizing the real importance of woman. With sexual act that involves a woman, a man can reach his complete spirituality so the woman's role in that should not be neglected. Bach can think of several reasons for Donne's attitude towards sex and women and concludes that the fact that sex is in the centre of Donne's poetry means that it is also in the centre of his life. "As we will see, the conviction that sexual desire is at the center of the self is a feature of modernity. Donne's disgust with sex can only be a denial of his true self if his true self is formed in sexual desire" (Bach 262).

In his poems Donne describes the beauty of the landscape; he shows the reader that everything around him and his woman is very romantic and ready for love, but he does not describe the woman he makes love with. It is obvious in "The Ecstasy" where he mentions riverbank, flowers, and romantic atmosphere, but not his loving woman. It is evident that they love each other because if that was not so; their souls could not merge into one. So, although he loves her, the fact that a woman is inferior allows him not to write a single verse about her beauty. Gimelli Martin compares Donne's reflections of female beauty with Ficino and concludes that Donne really distances himself from highlighting feminine beauty.

But "The Extasie" then clearly goes beyond Ficino, who, as we have seen, regards beauty as a mediator between goodness and justice but restricts love's realization in pleasure by requiring it to return to its transcendent source—the infinite beauty, goodness, and justice of God. This emphasis upon beauty as an abstract mirror of goodness is neither fully incarnational nor fully compatible with Donne's erotology, which rejects this restrictive lineage by pointedly excluding any description of the woman's beauty or physical appearance from his love lyrics. (Gimelli Martin 135)

Therefore, George Herbert and John Donne, both well known metaphysical poets, at first glance appear to be very similar, mostly due to the fact that they both dedicated their lives to God. It is most likely that they did include some autobiographical elements in their prose and poetry. Unfortunately, the life they describe in their works is far from perfect, but the characters seek solace in God. Herbert and Donne were contemporaries, and that is actually seen in their literary oeuvre. In their works, as well as in their lives, the most important thing is faith, and they try to show that human life has no meaning without a connection to God.

Except religious elements, Herbert and Donne are known for incorporating normal human needs, desires and acts in their works, but they always do it very subtly, so that the reader must make a conclusion about what they really think. They both have quite a negative attitude toward women, but it is possible that it is just a reflection of the time they lived in. While Herbert writes very little about women, Donne does not hesitate to express his views fully. Their attitude towards sexuality is also visible through the analyzed poems, but also throughout the rest of their poetic oeuvre. Both poets share the opinion that sexuality is a sin. However the difference is that Herbert does not write directly about sexuality and corporeality, while Donne very clearly states in his works that sexuality is the foundation of his theory of ecstasy.

## Conclusion

Poetic works of George Herbert and John Donne have provoked many different interpretations and discussions. Considering that they are both dedicated to God, it is expected that they write about the love that God offers humanity. What is surprising is the fact that they do not hesitate to take out their opinions on matters not related to God. For that reason both of them use only their works as a means of spreading their views on society, sexuality, and religion. George Herbert is the master of religious poetry and he clearly shows that he believes that human body is sinful and that every passion or love based on physicality distances us from God. As for the narrator and characters in his works, they are mostly men who are pious because God dwells in their bodies. The fact that the body is considered to be the habitation of God is a foundation for his collection of poems *The Temple*. There are no direct components of sexuality in his poems, but critics agree that he often mentions passions and desires, and also one woman, Mary Magdalene, whose name is actually synonymous with sin. Herbert writes even one poem about her, where he indirectly states that women are just sinners for him. When talking about Donne, he has female characters in his poems, but the main character and narrator is always male. Except for his works, Donne is known for his theory of ecstasy which is based on sexuality. So, Donne is very open about it even though his theory is somehow paradoxical because the ecstasy belongs to the spiritual sphere and it is based on something corruptible and temporarily as human body and sexuality. Many describe him as a misogynist and he himself points out in his poems that women should know their place in the society. They both obviously have problems with women in their works, so many believe that it was the same in their real life. But, no matter what, part of Herbert and Donne will definitely be forever preserved in their works and both of them will certainly be remembered as the greatest metaphysical poets and originators of that unique kind of poetry.



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