

閱讀輔導：

~~~~~鄧約翰的詩~~~~~

# A Study Guide

to

John Donne's Poetry

1572-1631

## Chief Editors:

John Deeney

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## 序 言

自從我們的「閱讀輔導」出刊以來，深受各院校外文系同學的喜愛，同時也得到許多教授的鼓勵，和臺北美國新聞處的支持。現在有關美國文學方面的「閱讀輔導」，已請新亞出版社發行出版，關於英國文學方面的「閱讀輔導」我們也委託弘道文化出版公司出版。在內容方面，我們每冊均力求完美，俾能切合同學們的需要。

正如我們在第一本閱讀輔導「密爾頓之 Lycidas」序中說的，我們編「閱讀輔導」的目的乃在使愛好文學的同學能深一層的瞭解和欣賞。目前我們的「閱讀輔導」僅限於英美詩歌的評註是因為從我們講授英美文學的經驗裏體會到，同學們在閱讀英美詩時，遭遇的困難最多。常常因查字典找生字就花費許多時間，求解原詩本義已屬不易，遑論真正的欣賞了。因此，我們的「閱讀輔導」，第一就是要省去同學們翻字典的時間。凡是詩中可能難解的單字，片語，或句型構造，我們都盡可能的詳加註解。其次我們再將詩中主題、結構、意象及形式等加以詳細分析，以幫助同學們對於原作的了解和欣賞。

現在爲了配合我們的「閱讀輔導」，還特別灌製了一套唱片。這套唱片，大部份配合英國文學文面的「閱讀輔導」，使對英國文學有興趣的人都有機會聆賞一些由專家朗誦或演唱的英詩精華。

文學的欣賞，尤其是詩歌，除了視覺的閱讀還應配合聽覺的吟詠，否則常會因探求詩中的字意而忽略了詩的節奏，音韻等音樂性。對以英文爲第二語言的學生來說，多聽幾遍唱片，從專家朗誦的抑揚頓挫中，當可進一層的領悟原詩的精華。

我們已收到許多同學們的意見表。他們不但希望我們詳註英美的詩歌，更希望我們能詳註戲劇及短篇小說方面的傑作。其實這也是我們想要達到的目標。假以時日，我們希望能對英美文學做一系列的介紹。

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# INTRODUCTION

## Life of John Donne (1572-1631)

John Donne's adult life can be divided into three clearcut periods. As a young man he was very much the Elizabethan type—a man hungry for love, for knowledge, and for action. He was a man about town who also read eagerly in all fields of knowledge, and took part enthusiastically in military expeditions in Spain and the Azores. He was charming, full of intelligence and wit, and had all the reasons in the world to expect success at court and promotion in civil service under Elizabeth. During that period he wrote a great number of verse letters to friends, satires, and sensual love lyrics. *The Flea* belongs to that time.

In 1601 when he was twenty-nine and a hopeful secretary to one of the ministers of Elizabeth he eloped with Ann More, the 16-year-old daughter of a prominent man of great fortune. Her father had Donne imprisoned for a time, ruined all his hopes of advancement at court, and did nothing to help the young couple financially. For the next fifteen years Donne experienced only privation and hardship, depending on the charity of friends for his livelihood while his family was growing. He wrote a pamphlet on the moral justification of suicide (*Biathanatos*) and two others on religious questions much

debated at the time. He also wrote some of his most beautiful lines of love poetry which are usually thought to have been addressed to his wife. *A Valediction* belongs to that period. The young rake had become a husband in love with his wife. Some of the *Holy Sonnets* also belong to that time of his life.

In 1615 King James I, his admirer, pressured him to take orders in the Anglican Church. From then on Donne devoted his efforts to devotional writings—*Holy Sonnets*, *La Corona* series, *Meditations*, and *Sermons*. He lost his wife in 1617 and, weary of all worldly ambitions, devoted himself entirely to his sacred duties. In 1621 he was nominated Dean of St. Paul's cathedral church in London and, as Dr. Donne, he was the most famous preacher of his time.

Donne's secular and religious poetry had characteristics that distinguished it sharply from the poetry of his time. He had a great number of followers of his technique, the most famous of whom were Herbert (1593-1633), Crashaw (1612-1649), and Vaughan (1622-1695). Marvell was also very much influenced by him. Donne's type of poetry flourished until the Restoration (1660). It is called Metaphysical Poetry.

### **Metaphysical Poetry**

The word "metaphysical" applied to Donne and his followers refers to their conception of a unified universe where all things physical and spiritual are related. All things have a similarity between them, the most concrete

object being in some way an image of the most spiritual. For instance, in the poems presented in this *Study Guide*, the flea that has sucked both lovers' blood is the temple of their union; the compass of *Valediction* is an image of the high degree of love between a man and his wife; God in *Holy Sonnet XIV* is compared to a blacksmith. The prose also uses metaphysical imagery—the unity of mankind is like a continent (*Meditation XVII*).

This use of imagery requires wit; that is, the mental ability to join ideas and objects apparently dissimilar and unrelated. The findings of wit, the disclosure of similarity in the dissimilar, is called metaphysical conceit, which is really the distinctive feature of metaphysical poetry.

Metaphysical poetry is then characterized by the predominance of the intellect. Yet what the intellect seeks to express is passion, feelings and emotions. For instance, in the famous compass image of *Valediction* the mind is very much at work, but it is at work on an analogy to a deep feeling. The mind of the metaphysical poets is not trying to build an intellectual view of a unified universe; it uses the unity of all things to express their passions and their emotions. The metaphysical poets are lyrical poets in whom thought and feeling are associated.

### **Subject Matter**

The main preoccupations of the metaphysical poets.



are love, death, and religion. Most of the famous metaphysical poets were religious poets having in mind the universe unified in God. But even the secular poems offered here contain some religious allusions. In *The Flea*, the black insect is a temple and a cloister; *The Canonization* is a mock elevation of the lovers to the state of the blessed in the heaven of the god of love; *A Valediction* forbids the listener to tell laymen the couple's love. Death also pervades the secular poems—the killing of the insect in *The Flea*; the act of love as being a dying in *The Canonization*; the separation of the couple compared to a peaceful death in *A Valediction*. The religious poems and prose are immediately concerned with death. Love, of God as well as of man, pervades all the works.

Yet if we look a little deeper into the meaning of the poems, we realize that the main preoccupation of the metaphysical poets is themselves; their own complex self-consciousness is the real subject-matter. In his love poetry, Donne is not so much occupied with the description of the charms of the loved one. We hardly find a feature of the girl mentioned. What comes out with great reality is Donne's analysis of himself in love. In the sonnets we find a complex expression of Donne's feelings towards God and eternal life.

### Language

Donne used images taken from everyday life and from the sciences, technology and crafts of his time.

The language was also the language of everyday life, and in this his poetry strikingly contrasts with the elevated style of the poets of his time, especially Spenser and Shakespeare. *The Canonization* begins with: "For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love," which is hardly poetic. The language is the language of ordinary conversation; the structure of Donne's poetry is that of a dialogue of which only one half is heard, a device called "dramatic monologue" made famous by Browning in the XIX century.

## Rhythm

Donne's deliberate use of conversational style creates a peculiar rhythmic effect. The verse line contains a double series of stresses, one made of the normal stresses of conversation, the other, of the staple iambic foot of the verse. For instance, in the second stanza of *The Flea*, the iambic feet require the following scanning:

Oh stáy, thrée lîves in óne fléa spáre,

Whêre wé álmóست, yéa móre thán márrîed, are.

Yet the conversation stresses required by the meaning are placed on quite different syllables. The placing of the stresses depends a great deal on the reader; the following is only one suggestion:

Oh stáy, thrée lîves in oné fléa spáre,

Where we álmóست, yéa móre thán márrîed, are.

The iambic stresses do not disappear under the impact of the stresses of normal speech; they are only subdued and they combine with the conversation stresses to

form a counterpoint.

The colloquial language also affects the verse line which often breaks open at the end and runs on to the next line:

Soldiers find wars, and Lawyers find out still  
Litigious men, which quarrels move, ...  
The King's real, or his stamped face  
Contemplate ...

Such run-on lines abound in *Holy Sonnet VII* and *Holy Sonnet XIV*:

At the round earth's imagined corners, blow  
Your trumpets ...  
Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you  
As yet but knock ...

The counterpoint effect of the conversational style overriding the iambic rhythm is echoed in the use of rime. Often the riming sound expected by the listener is slurred over by the speaker in the poem:

Soldiers find wars, and Lawyers find out still  
Litigious men ...

Where the rime scheme requires a stronger word than "still." The strong stress falls on the run-on word "litigious" at the beginning of the next line.

Rime, language, and imagery all combine to give Donne and his followers a poetic style that puts them apart from the main current of English poetry from the Renaissance to the beginning of the XX century.

## Religion

Another side of Donne's writing which requires special attention is his use of religion. Many of the titles of his works show his love for religious topics, even though he may be also writing sensual verses. This strikes many readers as most strange. But the paradoxes which characterize his poetry are matched by the seeming contradiction of his life; that is, Jack Donne, the notorious young playboy, and Dr. John Donne, the religious church minister.

The poets of this century have learned from Donne's poetic method, by which emotions are expressed by ideas and ideas defined in their emotional context. What interested Donne was not the ultimate truth of an idea but the fascination of ideas themselves. He was not committed to a particular philosophic system, but he was interested in conflicting, fascinating, and often disturbing philosophies of his period. His images are drawn from whatever beliefs or ideas best expressed the emotion he had to communicate; that is, to describe an emotional state by its intellectual equivalent.

When T. S. Eliot praises Donne for keeping the proper union of intellectual and imaginative sensibilities, it is perhaps related to the largely "incarnational" part of Donne's life and work. Originally, "incarnational" meant the striking and paradoxical union of the divine with the human after the model of the god-man Jesus Christ. When applying the term to Donne's poetry, it

means his attempt to combine, balance, and reconcile opposites; for instance, the union of man with the divinity, of heart with head, of female with male. It is curious that so many of Donne's works try to describe the mystery of divine love by shocking (though not necessarily irreverent) references to human love and vice-versa. For example,

Except You enthrall me, never shall be free,  
Nor every chaste, except You ravish me. (*Holy Sonnet XIV*)

In another poem, he tries to raise ordinary secular love to the level of sacred love.

And by these hymns, all shall approve  
Us canonized for love: (*The Canonization*)

Donne is a typical writer of the "womb to tomb" kind of poetry. These poems are very frequently found in the larger context of love and religion; they are well illustrated by his double meaning of die, for instance, signifying both death and sexual intercourse:

We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,...  
We die and rise the same, and prove  
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live by love, (*The Canonization*)

This death-in-life-and-love type of poetry is touchingly described in, *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*, a farewell poem addressed to his wife on the occasion of his trip to the Continent; his wife had given birth to a stillborn child during his absence.

Themes connected with religion are frequently found in Donne's writings: for instance, his concern with death (*Meditation XVII*["No man is an island...Therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."]); his fear of divine punishment because of sin (*Sermon LXXVI*["On Falling Out of God's Hand"]); and his painful resignation to God's will (*Holy Sonnet VII*).

A saving quality of Donne's otherwise serious writing is his peculiar sense of humor, which requires of the reader a certain tolerance for the strange and the macabre.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,  
Where we almost, yea more than married, are.  
(*The Flea*)

A bracelet of bright hair about the bone (*The Relic*)

Neither Donne's life nor works could be described as conventional. His witty conceits are brilliant sparks of inspiration, a kind of inspiration which the Greeks, at one time, attributed to the divinity. They are divine in the sense that his poetic vision goes far beyond our ordinary human condition and surprises us with its fresh originality as if it had come from another land. But at the same time, his works are rooted in that same human condition which makes him a kindred spirit with us. . . a spirit incarnated.

## The Canonization

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, 5  
Observe His Honor, or His Grace,  
Or the King's real, or his stamped face  
Contemplate; what you will, approve,  
So you will let me love.

Alas, alas, who's injured by my love? 10  
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 man to the plaguy bill? 15  
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still  
Litigious men, which quarrels move,  
Though she and I do love.

Call us what you will, we are made such by love;  
Call her one, me another fly, 20  
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,  
And we in us find the eagle and the dove.  
The phoenix riddle hath move wit.  
By us: we two being one, are it.

So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit. 25  
We die and rise the same, and prove  
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live,  
And if unfit for tombs and hearse  
Our legened be, it will be fit for verse; 30  
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,  
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;  
As well a well-wrought urn becomes  
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,  
And by these hymms, all shall approve 35  
Us canonized for love:

And thus invoke us: You whom revered 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 40  
Into the glasses of your eyes  
(So made such mirrors, and such spies,  
That they did all to you epitomize)  
Countries, towns, courts: Beg from above  
A pattern of your love! 45



**Line****Annotation**

**題標 Canonization** 此處詩中人自認以世俗的觀點看，他們的愛情或有「不務正業」之嫌，但只要他們相互誠摯不渝，捨棄世間榮華，並結合為一體，他們終有成聖的一日。  
**Canonization**，封聖，天主教會冊封卓越之教徒為聖徒，其過程類似法院的審訊，教會自動替準聖徒辯護，但另有類似檢察官的人在庭上主張不予冊封，通稱之為魔鬼的辯護人，準聖徒的行為經過一番審查之後，若合乎若干條件方得正式成為聖徒。本詩中男女兩人的愛情終能提昇至宗教的水準，所經歷的過程亦如冊封的程序。

- 1 **For God's sake** 看上帝份上。  
**hold your tongue** 閉嘴。詩中人慷慨激昂，要求外人不要多管閒事，而妨礙他們的愛情。
- 2 **Or** 再不（…也好）。  
**chide** 苛責，批評。  
**palsy** 中風。  
**gout** 痛風。詩中人認為外人可以批評他的健康，但無權過問他的愛情。弦外之音似為：他的健康別人無權置喙，而他們的愛情更不用說了。
- 3 **My...flout** flout 為此行之動詞，其受詞為 five gray hairs 與 ruined fortune.flout：嘲弄。  
**five gray hairs** 五根灰白的髮，象徵年老。  
**ruined fortune** 葬送了的前程。依 J.B. Leishman 的看法，此詩可能作於 Donne 婚後，影射他與 Ann More 的結合毀了他一生致仕的美夢。
- 4 **With...improve** 按散文的句法，應作 Improve your state with wealth, your mind with arts. Donne