

T.C.
İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATLARI ANABİLİM DALI
İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI BİLİM DALI

YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

THE TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE
IN JOHN DONNE’S POETRY

CANSU ÇİPRUT

2501130408

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DÜZELTİLMİŞ TEZ

İSTANBUL – 2020



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İSTANBUL ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ



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ÖĞRENCİNİN;

Adı ve Soyadı : CANSU ÇİPRUT

Numarası : 2501130408

Anabilim Dalı /
Anasanat Dalı / Programı : İNGİLİZ DİLİ VE EDEBİYATI
BİLİM DALI

Danışmanı : DR.ÖĞR.ÜYESİ FERAH İNCESU

Tez Savunma Tarihi : 10.01.2020

Saati : 10.00

Tez Başlığı : "THE TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE IN JOHN DONNE'S POETRY"

TEZ SAVUNMA SINAVI, İÜ Lisansüstü Eğitim-Öğretim Yönetmeliği'nin 36. Maddesi uyarınca yapılmış, sorulan sorulara alınan cevaplar sonunda adayın tezinin KABULÜNE OYBİRLİĞİ / OYÇOKLUĞUYLA karar verilmiştir.

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CORRECTIONS

The examination of John Donne's poems have been revised and framed within the conceptual metaphor theory. The lack of cohesion through the text has been detected and corrected. More information about the social background about 17th century England has been provided. The unnecessary passages about biographical criticism or biography are eliminated. A more specific definition of modernity has been given in order to clarify the perception of the thesis concerning Donne's opted poems. The number of the texts examined are equalised between the two chapters of textual analysis. The order of chapters has been changed in order to indicate the theoretical frame and necessary notions before the textual analysis. The use of language and choice of words have been checked and corrected in order to maintain the academic manner and perception.

TEZ ONAY SAYFASI



ABSTRACT

THE TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE IN JOHN DONNE'S POETRY CANSU ÇİPRUT

This study examines the transcendental experience in John Donne's metaphysical poetry delving into the analogical alchemical transformation between tangible and intangible elements in the poems. Throughout the examination of the opted poems, the effects of themes such as philosophy, knowledge and science and the poet persona's sentiments relevant to them are also put forward alongside the analyses of employed conceits. In his poems, John Donne uses alchemical discourse and metaphors which present a transformation between tangible and intangible elements in analogical terms. The poet goes beyond the traditional concept and content of poetry, so his poetry elicits a transcendental experience for not only the 17th century reader but also the contemporary reader. Based on the transgressing literary style of John Donne, in this study, the poems are examined in the context of transcendental experience also through a questioning of how they comply with a contemporary approach, how they reflect modernity as metaphysical poetry requires such a contact. The alchemical transformation of tangible and intangible elements, erotica and transcendental experience will also be discussed in the opted poems via close reading. While the personal and social background of John Donne is examined, the contribution of Donne's status as a priest and a preacher in 17th century England to his poetry will be subsidiarily observed. To enhance analysis, Donne's poetry is discussed within the conceptual metaphor theory as it welcomes the idea of perception and meaning construction acknowledging modern relativity and spontaneous multiplicity.

Keywords: Metaphysical Poetry, Transcendental Experience, 17th Century England, Modernity, John Donne, Conceptual Metaphor Theory.

ÖZ

JOHN DONNE ŞİİRİNDE AŞKINLIK DENEYİMİ CANSU ÇİPRUT

Bu çalışma John Donne tarafından yazılan metafizik şiirlerdeki aşkınlık deneyimini, soyut ve somut imgeler arasındaki dönüşümü analogik açıdan simyaya dayanarak incelemektedir. Seçilen şiirler incelenirken, duygu ve düşünce ile birlikte felsefe, bilgi ve bilim temalarının etkileri de çok katmanlı imgeler aracılığıyla ortaya konulmaktadır. John Donne, 16. yüzyıl sonu ve 17. yüzyıl başında kaleme almış olduğu şiirlerinde soyutu somuta, duyuyu düşünceye, bedeni ruha ulaştırabilen analogik olarak simya söylem ve benzetmeleri kullanmıştır. Şair, geleneksel şiir konularını ve yapılarını aşarak sadece zamanının okurunun değil çağdaş okurun da bu aşkınlığı deneyimleyebileceği şiirler üretmiştir. John Donne'ın zamanının ötesindeki üslubundan ötürü, aşkınlık deneyimi bağlamında, aynı zamanda metafizik şiirin böylesi bir temas gerektirmesi dolayısıyla, bu çalışmadaki şiirlerin çağdaş bir yaklaşımı yansıtarak, çağdaşlık niteliğini nasıl sergiledikleri incelenecektir. Tezde esas olarak, seçilen şiirlerde soyut ve somut olgular arasındaki simyasal dönüşüm, erotika ve sunulan aşkınlık deneyimi yakın okuma yöntemi aracılığıyla tartışılacaktır. John Donne ile ilgili kişisel ve toplumsal art alan verilirken, 17. yüzyıl İngilteresindeki bir rahip ve vaiz olarak konumlanışının Donne'ın şiirine olası katkıları yan bir konu olarak gözlemlenecektir. Daha ileri bir kavrayış için Donne'un şiirleri, metafor (eğretileme) kuramının anlayışlarından birisi olan kavramsal metafor kuramı çerçevesinde tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Metafizik Şiir, Aşkınlık Deneyimi, 17. Yüzyıl İngilteresi, Çağdaşlık, John Donne, Kavramsal Metafor Kuramı.

PREFACE

This thesis is the result of my peculiar interest in John Donne's poetry and it includes an examination of Donne's poetry in the context of transcendental experience. The characteristics of his poems also led me to question how they reflect modernity and are still able to address the modern readers. I was fascinated by the inclination of John Donne to go beyond his time and I decided to examine his literary work through a contemporary perspective. Donne's style and use of language and his transforming the verbal devices and images almost like an alchemist also seem to contribute to this still effective allurements of the poems.

It has always been an honour to study with my dear supervisor Ferah İncesu. Her encouragement, positive energy and guidance have always been very special and beyond words since the day we set off the journey. Thus, I would like to present my greatest thanks to her.

Thanks to the inspirational poetry classes I have had with dear Ayşegül Deniz Toroser, I have never thought about another genre to study for my thesis. Also, I would like to thank dear Murat Seçkin whose existence has always been enlightening and enchanting in my life. I have been a student of the English Language and Literature Department, Istanbul University since 2008. I would like to deliver my profound thanks to all members of the department for their contribution to my present personality and academic standing. I am very lucky, because they have always been there to answer and discuss my endless questions.

I would like to thank my best friend Güven Kimeçe for sharing not only the best but also the worst days of our lives and for being brain twins all the time. My kindest thanks go to Göksenin Abdal for his tireless support and encouragement.

I would like to thank my parents and my sister for their life long support and their strong belief in my choices since my childhood. I owe a great gratitude towards my mother who is a real book worm, for leading me to the fantastic world of literature at a very young age. Without them, I would not have studied my favourite subject at university and been doing my dream job today.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my husband Robert for taking up all the challenge with me. My precious daughter Luna deserves a great appreciation for being the best kid during my studies as if she knows she needs to tolerate her mother and behave in a mature way.

Finally, I would like to quote some lines from Donne for everyone I have thanked and presented my gratitude above:

No man is an island entire of himself; every man is a part of the continent, a part of the main [...] I am involved in the mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.¹

I dedicate this thesis to my daughter Luna as an epitome of achievement through our mother and daughter solidarity.

Cansu ÇİPRUT
Istanbul, 2020

¹ John Donne, **Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions**, the USA, Kessinger Publishing, 2004, p. 31.

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INTRODUCTION

The Introduction comprises of the definition of metaphysical poetry, the transition from the 16th century to the 17th century in English poetry, the notions of alchemy and transcendence, and a survey of the quality of modernity so as to understand the background of Donne's poetry.

John Donne is one of the most significant and influential poets of the late 16th and 17th centuries. He was neither as mythological as earlier poets of the 16th century nor as logic based as the 18th century poets. His poetry was like a medal which had two different but joint sides and was comprised of Shakespearean characters who were blended with black and white, good and bad, ideal and physical in their beings. It can be said that the Renaissance plays a significant part in the emerging of a new approach to poetry like Donne's as Meyer Howard Abrams defines the Renaissance as: "the birth of the modern world out of the ashes of the Dark Ages; as the discovery of the world and the discovery of man; and as the era of untrammelled individualism in life, thought, religion, and art."¹ The reason why ideas receive importance as much as feelings and images in John Donne's poetry might be its being a production of the transitional period. Additionally, his multiplicity in vision, narrative voice and structure puts his poetry beyond his time. Regarding the use of ideas and reflection of thoughts in his works, Anthony Burgess states as follows:

His poems show a brain that works as hard as an engine. In him, as in Shakespeare, thought goes on all the time, getting mixed up with emotion and sensation, and producing strange and wonderful results.[...] He is impatient of convention and invents many new verse forms of his own.²

As it is implied in the statement by Burgess above, his unconventional style which could be regarded even as strange made the greatest difference when compared to Elizabethan poetry which includes a high amount of sonnets and lyrics

¹ Meyer Howard Abrams, **A Glossary of Literary Terms**, USA, Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc, 1988, p. 155.

² Anthony Burgess, **English Literature: A Survey for Students**, Hong Kong, Longman Group Limited, 1974, pp. 100-101.

written in the frame of conventions. Suitably, David Daiches remarks: “Elizabethan poetry handles and pays regard to the conventions.”³ Alongside Donne’s songs or secular poems, his “Holy Sonnets”, poems with more religious concerns, are fundamental to display both his standing as a 16th century poet and the points that make his poetry distinctive through the 17th century. For instance, Mina Urgan refers to Donne’s sonnets as follows:

They are nineteen poems that are really in the form of a sonnet and they have all characteristics of John Donne’s love poems.[...] These sonnets may reflect the multifaceted and idiosyncratic personality of John Donne better than his love poems.[...] He unburdens himself to God and argues with him frankly as he does with his beloved in the love poems.^{4*}

Based on Mina Urgan’s remarks, it is seen that even when Donne wrote poems in a conventional form, he made a difference in the way he put his way of thinking into words. “Dr Johnson called him ‘a metaphysical poet’, referring to him as a poet who liked ideas as much as feelings, and the name has stuck.”⁵ After John Donne, a number of poets also used similar eccentric analogies while juxtaposing ideas with feelings in their poetry. Regarding the formation of metaphysical poetry and the poets who wrote these poems, Helen Gardner states in her book **The Metaphysical Poets** as follows:

The term ‘metaphysical poets’ came into being long after the poets to whom we apply it were dead. Samuel Johnson, who coined it, did so with the consciousness that it was a piece of literary slang, that he was giving a kind of nickname.[...] he did not consider that these poets had the right to be called ‘metaphysical’ in the true sense.⁶

As it is stated by Helen Gardner, metaphysical poetry as a term came forward after a considerable range of poems were written in this literary style. By definition,

³ David Daiches, **A Critical History of English Literature**, Vol. I, Great Britain, The Ronald Press Company, 1960, pp. 203-204.

⁴ Mina Urgan, **İngiliz Edebiyatı Tarihi**, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2017, p. 179.

*Throughout this study, all the translations from Turkish into English are made by Cansu Çiprut.

⁵ Burgess, **op. cit.**, p. 100.

⁶ Helen Gardner, **The Metaphysical Poets**, Great Britain, Penguin Books, 1966, p. 15.

it referred to a specific genre of poetry including a great amount of active intelligence within sentiments. One of the early advocates of the subgenre in modern times, T.S. Eliot, in his essay “The Metaphysical Poets”, counts “ingenuity” in figures of speech, “analytic” discourse and “the intellectual poet” among the attributes of metaphysical poetry and Donne.⁷ To him such poets and Donne were such that mere intellectualism was not enough to define them. The soul, the heart, the mind and subject, style and truth are all there together:

there is a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling, which is exactly what we find in Donne [...] A thought to Donne was an experience; it modified his sensibility.[...] The poets of the seventeenth century, the successors of the dramatists of the sixteenth, possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience.[...] We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.[...] Hence we get something which looks very much like the conceit - we get, in fact, a method curiously similar to that of the 'metaphysical poets', similar also in its use of obscure words and of simple phrasing.[...] transmuting ideas into sensations, of transforming an observation into a state of mind.⁸

According to Eliot's definition of poetry and the poet, the metaphysicals, the “school of Donne” rightly achieve the association of sensibility and their diction and form are very suitable for modern man of civilisation.

According to Piu Sarkar, metaphysical poetry emerged against the conventional romanticism of Elizabethan love poetry, and as a result, it needs to be considered differently. Sarkar defines metaphysical poetry concisely as follows:

⁷ T.S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets", (accessed) <https://www.usask.ca/english/prufrock/meta/>, 09.12. 2019.

⁸ **Ibid.**

Metaphysical poetry has sparkling capability to explore and express ideas and feelings about the terrestrial world and its diverse phenomena in a rational way to mesmerize the readers. Making innovative and shocking use of puns, paradoxes and employing subtle logical propositions, metaphysical poetry has achieved a style that is energetic and vigorous unlike the rich mellifluousness and lilting overtones of the then conventional poetry.⁹

Regarding Sarkar's definition of metaphysical poetry, it is implied that metaphysical poetry is set apart from Elizabethan poetry due to being more realistic and extensive in terms of touching upon all aspects of life and love. Elizabethan poetry is full of allegory, in which the relationship between man and woman is usually an unattainable affair and it is left without sexual intercourse. Hence, in its aspiration to purity, abstraction and idealisation, and its superficiality at times, it does not delve into much reality, mundane experience, and multi-facetedness. Burgess puts in a nutshell **The Faerie Queen**, which is one of the major works of the Elizabethan age as follows:

Spenser's major work is *The Faerie Queene*, which, though unfinished at Spenser's death, is still a monumental poem far too long for many modern readers. It tells of the human virtues -love, faith, friendship, and so on- in the form of allegory, giving to each virtue a special knight or protector, and presenting in Gloriana (the Faerie Queene herself) the glory which comes from possession of virtue.¹⁰

Regarding the remarks of Burgess, it can be said that John Donne's poetry is comprised of more down to earth components of love and human experience in a more economic diction of pithy remarks while it is still idealistic and full of humane compassion. The distinctive points in Donne's poetry are indicated by Daiches as follows:

⁹ Piu Sarkar, "Metaphysical Poetry and John Donne: An Overview", **Zenith International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research**, Vol. II, Feb. 2012, p. 447.

¹⁰ Burgess, **op. cit.**, p. 98.

Against the highly stylized artfulness of Spenser, [...] Donne set a poetry which combined violence of personal passion with intellectual ingenuity and an imagery both starkly realistic and startlingly cunning.[...] objected to the mere sweetness of the latter phases of the **Petrarchan tradition** [...].¹¹

As also stated by Martin Molar, the Petrarchan tradition was mostly shaped by its subject matter of ideal love through the presentation of details such as the smoothness of a lady's skin and fullness of her hair and her smile which would "make a paradise on earth" (as in Petrarch's poem 292) whereas Donne is much original and has a more realistic woman image.¹² The conceits and style are original in Donne's poetry. His expressions reveal wit and interesting associations. In contrast, regarding the language of the Petrarchan sonnet, the same images and words were used so much so that poetic diction eroded freshness and dynamism.

Donne intensifies the sense of realism and passion by his knowledge in different fields such as geography, philosophy and geometry. While he deals with ordinary, elemental or universal topics, experiences or aspects of love, he combines a knowledge of sciences with them and uses images of different branches of study, or refers to objects, devices and terms of these fields. However, as Mina Urgan states: "Elizabethan poetry is full of references to Greek mythology.[...] The sentiments are more important than thoughts.[...] The verses are written in an order which is almost musical."¹³ In his lines, Donne does not refer to his beloved like a goddess, but he compares the naked body of his lover to America, which is known to be the new found land of that time. He can be ranked among the 16th century poets, but his works and his attitude towards the art of poetry make him different from his contemporaries. In order to point to his different style and content in poetry, Michael Bryson and Arpi Movsesian draw attention to the content and love affairs in Elizabethan sonnets:

¹¹ Daiches, **op. cit.**, p. 359

¹² Martin Molar, "Love, Women and Conceits in Donne's Songs and Sonnets and Petrarch's Canzoniere", **Newfoundland Studies**, Dec. 1990, Canada p. 2.

¹³ Urgan, **op. cit.**, pp. 170-171.

The implication is that because the lover loves, the beloved is supposed to have mercy on, extend favor to, and in some cases reciprocate the love of the lover. When she does not, she is described as haughty, even imperious, while the man who loves her is a helpless fool.¹⁴

Bryson and Movsesian underline the conventional and artificial patterns of Elizabethan poetry. It can be said that John Donne can compare and transform the elements that might be regarded as irrelevant. The unusual style he uses gives the impression that he can do a kind of alchemy and opens the gates of transcendental experiences to his readers while reading his poems. However, it is necessary to give the meaning of the word “alchemy” to prevent a possible ambiguity about its function in this thesis. According to **Merriam-Webster Dictionary**, alchemy is defined in several senses:

- 1: a medieval chemical science and speculative philosophy aiming to achieve transmutation of the base metals into gold, the discovery of a universal cure for disease, and the discovery of a means of indefinitely prolonging life
- 2: a power or process that changes or transforms something in a mysterious or impressive way
- 3: an inexplicable or mysterious transmuting¹⁵

Along with taking into consideration the lexical definitions of alchemy, it is necessary to remark that Donne’s alchemical images present an analogical transformation between tangible and intangible elements rather than an alchemical process in terms of a scientific endeavour. He can create analogies with such elements that can be regarded as irrelevant. His discourse is almost mysterious first, with obliqueness awaiting resolution and analysis.

John Donne does not use alchemy in scientific terms, but he uses the discourse of alchemy to constitute the metaphysical conceits and transcendental experience within his poetry. He is fascinated by the transformative power of alchemy. Apart from his love theme, he also combines this fascination with his

¹⁴ Michael Bryson, Arpi Movsesian, **Love and Its Critics: From the Song of Songs to Shakespeare and Milton’s Eden**, Cambridge, Open Book Publishing, 2017, p. 312.

¹⁵ “Alchemy”, **Merriam-Webster Dictionary**, (accessed) <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alchemy>, 29.05.2019.

another peculiar concern with 'death', both of which turn into frequently used subjects in his poems. There is a close relationship between the theme of death and alchemy, where in alchemy, the base elements are blackened and the lover dies and the soul is released by the dying body element. At this point, in alchemy, the element is heated when the whitened materials produce the red coloured rock or elixir.¹⁶ As alchemy aspires to reach or create absent material, transforming a substance into an invaluable one, the characters in Donne's poems transform from death into an all encompassing existence. In other words, whereas alchemy destroys the substance and turns it into something invaluable step by step where the process starts with the heating of the element, the lover dies and gradually turns into an invaluable existence within the transcendental realm. Alchemical thinking and transformation in Donne's poetry can thus also unfold a connection with the death theme.

Donne uses symbols and terms which are associated with alchemy such as elements, materials, circle, gold, making a mixture. Rather than the amount of Donne's knowledge about the field of alchemy, his way of using alchemy comes into prominence as it is also demonstrated by Edgar Hill Duncan in the following lines:

The amount of Donne's alchemical knowledge is, after all, of little importance. An important matter is the originality which Donne displayed in his adaptation of the material of alchemy to his poetical purposes. And analysis of these figures in the light of alchemic literature has, I hope, helped to show the most important matter of all: the precision and skill with which Donne applied the material to his purposes in molding conceits.¹⁷

In Donne's poetry, the lover transforms as the material transforms in alchemy. Thus, the transformation here and his knowledge and use of the transformative power of alchemy is not only a physical means but also an intellectual tool. That is why it may be argued that his poetry goes beyond the centuries along with his style, artistry and language use. Because of the transformative themes, alchemical images and analogies, his poems contain many elements that allow a

¹⁶ Ann Hayward, "Till We Meet Again: The Soul's Alchemy in John Donne's Songs and Sonnets", Master Thesis, Grand Valley State University, USA, 2009, p. 12.

¹⁷ Edgar Hill Duncan, "Donne's Alchemical Figures", **English Literary History**, Vol. 9, USA, John Hopkins University Press, p. 285.

multifaceted and detailed analysis of transcendence and transcendental experience. This thesis is to examine the materialization of the transcendental experience which is presented in John Donne's poetry by analysing how he can combine and transform tangible and intangible elements like an alchemist does. In the way this study regards the poet's use of alchemy as analogy concerning transformative metaphors, concerning transcendence the thesis does not refer to a religious or philosophical movement but rather to transformation and reaching from a level or aspect of an experience to another, again also specifically through conceits. In order to clarify what the term "transcendental" represents in this thesis, the definition of "transcendent" by **Merriam-Webster Dictionary** is to be given as follows:

- 1 a: exceeding usual limits : surpassing
 - b: extending or lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience
 - c: in Kantian philosophy : being beyond the limits of all possible experience and knowledge
- 2: being beyond comprehension
- 3: transcending the universe or material existence
- 4: universally applicable or significant¹⁸

In regard to the lexical definition of the word "transcendent", the transcendental quality in this study denotes Donne's special literary style which goes beyond the conventional and artificial patterns of Elizabethan poetry and the capability of his poetry to address the modern reader in terms of his concerns and attitude.

In the current study transcendence or the transcendental issue and impression will lead the literary material and effect to modernity. The content, attitude and style, language use of Donne point to modernity, and thus transcend the past, conventions and shallowness, while, as stated by Li Zhengshuan and Li Dan, he breaks the Renaissance literary conventions through making comparisons, providing metaphysical usage of elements and topics of science, defamiliarising poetic form, and expressing the theme of *carpe diem* in a fresh and challenging way, different

¹⁸ "Transcendent", **Merriam-Webster Dictionary**, (accessed)
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/alchemy>, 29.05.2019.

from the previous times.¹⁹ Hu Ling Li's claim about modernist factors in Donne's poetry may also talk about his relevance to modern times and mindset. According to Li, Donne's poetry embodies the dialectical relationship between tradition and innovation.²⁰ His poetry goes beyond tradition transforming it and reaches innovation, a quality modernity is sensitive about.

The concept of modernity has been subjected to various discussions and interpretations from different paradigms. The intention of this thesis is not to attempt to give a review of the concept and related movement, but try to give a background survey of the concept, in its possible linkage to Donne's poetry. Its context and relevance to the current study is of social change and accompanying mentality or basic concerns.

First of all, the concept of modernity for the scope of this thesis is derived from Max Weber's, Georg Simmel's, and Robert Michels' classical thought as Donne's poetry seems to inherently carry modern attitudes fed by social movements. Modernity has its roots in the social changes in Europe in the nineteenth century according to classical sociological theory.²¹ Socioeconomic factors of the Renaissance proceeded through the Enlightenment paving the path for modern times and the concept of modernity. Pertinently, Crane Brinton sums up: "Between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries the modern culture of Western society was formed."²² Those changes include the influences of industrialization, urbanization, and political democracy on mostly rural societies.

"Modernity" was related to those changes and the "modern" was contrasted with the "traditional" in such an understanding. The theme emerged from sociology, and Karl Marx, Weber, and Emile Durkheim were the first to write about the concept.²³ For them, being more than a heuristic concept, modernity held

¹⁹ Li Zhengshuan, Li Dan, "Individuality and Modernity in John Donne's Poetry", **Foreign Literature Studies**, 38(2), Beijing, April 2016, pp. 41-45.

²⁰ Hu Ling Li, "Modernist Factors in John Donne's Songs and Sonnets", Master's Thesis, Fordham University, New York, 2007, p. 23.

²¹ Ron Eyerman, **Modernity and Social Movements**, University of California Press, USA, 1992, p. 37.

²² Crane Brinton, **The Shaping of Modern Thought**, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. Prentice Hall, 1963, p. 104.

²³ Eyerman, **op. cit.**, pp. 45-46.

connotations regarding a new experience of the world. The concept was in relation to a world which was reconstructed by the active and conscious intervention of individuals, and led to a new sense of self, and the world was experienced as a human construction in a modern society.²⁴ Such an experience would provide the individual with a sense of freedom, and generate relativity.²⁵ In other words, social change and understanding led to the development of a new sense of self, subjectivity, and individuality, or vice versa as it occurs in Donne's poetry. As it will be deduced in further parts, Donne starts with the familiar topics but then through a new sense of self and subjectivity, he transforms the traditional understanding of the relationships and leads to a change in expression. This is how he reaches a transcendental experience through his poems. The process in modernity seems to be similar to what Donne does in his poetry. Regarding such a paradigm of social reality, modernity and Donne's poetry might be linked to each other and accordingly his poetry might appeal to the modern reader. The relevant historical context of Donne's life and aesthetic enterprise is, thus, to be given in the chapter of the thesis anterior to textual analyses.

A new sense of the self causes a distinction of the modern individual and the traditional one since a new understanding is born, which is liberating. That is, there occurs a mental break with the rural, family based or feudal community, and the traditional community networks which constitute the basics of social identity lose its power and control on the individual.²⁶ Likewise, Donne breaks down the traditional conventions, and through his subjectivity and the different uses of his conceits, he reaches transcendental experience where a new identity is born. Those associations restate a foundation of new social identities for the individual of various groups. The separation from the traditional society leads to a separation from the established identity giving authority. The newly identity gained individuals free themselves from the traditional conventions by reorienting themselves and reconstructing their world.

²⁴ Alain Touraine, **The Voice and The Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, p, 43.

²⁵ Alberto Melucci, "The New Social Movements: A Theoretical Approach", **Information: International Social Science Council**, Vol. 19, No. 2, Social Science Information, London and Beverly Hills, 1980, p. 221.

²⁶ Eyerman, Andrew Jamison, **Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach**, Polity Press, Oxford, 1991, p. 38.

The social movement which started "behind the backs" of individuals can be turned into a positive social force, into a social-political movement for Marx.²⁷ For Durkheim, it is turned into new forms of social solidarity, which again might be associated with transcendental experience in Donne's poems.²⁸ His artistic legacy, his "canonisation" in Western culture may constitute that kind of solidarity. For Weber and Simmel, modernity calls for new possibilities for the expression of human subjectivity, and Donne tries a new form and understanding of love relationships in his poetry.²⁹

Despite some different interpretations, those thinkers at least consider modernity as a separation from the traditional bonds of society which brings the possibility of freedom of action and expression for the individual. In that sense, there occurs a new relationship between the individual and society. David Daiches, in his book **The Novel and the Modern World**, sums up the ailments of the modern age in human history: "Concern with individual consciousness, its multiplicity [...] leads to emphasis on the individual's loneliness.[...] Society is thus in a sense unreal [...] Yet the desire to communicate is also a deeply imbedded human instinct, and the desire to escape from loneliness one of the chief human preoccupations."³⁰ Daiches diagnoses the modern rupture between "the public sphere" and "the inner life of men." "What E.M. Forster called 'the great society' is meaningless; at best only "the little society" can have any validity."³¹ Interestingly, the idea recalls the classic image of a world of "just the two us", which is treated by Donne in compact, imaginative imagery as will be discussed in the further chapters.

This new sense of freedom which is brought by the social change, alongside the concept of modernity leads to an awareness and a new experience of time. According to Weber and Simmel, time comprises not only duration and process for

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³⁰ David Daiches, **The Novel and the Modern World**, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

the modern individual but also constitutes a sense of dynamic change.³² Such a change directs the focus to the future, not to the past. In other words, modernity as a concept is progressive, as can be found in Brinton's survey. Brinton, accordingly, also counts progressive interest in sciences as a base of modernity in the West.³³ Hence, the modern individual becomes aware of himself as a creator of self and society, pertinently, having a future as well as present and past customised according to personal perception of the flow of time, and Donne's poetry provides the reader with such a process and sense. Donne, in his poems, works on a new sense of individuality and future orientation as he breaks traditional conventions, and looks for creative possibilities and seeks such attributes in the individual. In this sense, Donne might be regarded as a modern writer who tries to hold the dynamism of a new, modern experience in content and form.

The word modernity refers to current events and includes ideas like free societies which can question and change the traditions.³⁴ The question of how modernity can be seen in Donne's poetry lies in the notions of freedom and peculiarity as the individual or the artist escapes from the traditional conventions of content, form and expression, thus of style and attitude, and transforms into a new being where s/he experiences transcendence. His content challenges the previous understanding of the themes of love and relations while both go through a transformation as modernity goes away from courtly love and feudal bonds. That is, as modernity evolves traditions into innovation and unfamiliar expression, earthly love and relation may transform into transcendental experience, and sex is indispensable while feelings and virtues are to be fed as well in Donne's poetry. Unlike the Petrarchan tradition, as mentioned before, his images do not reflect the "ideal" but the reality and various aspects of experience, and refuse to remain any single ideal love.³⁵ According to Yoshinobu Hakutani, by making connections

³² Jeffrey C. Alexander, **Modernity and General Structural and Cultural Change**, USA, California University Press, 2004, p. 182.

³³ Brinton, **op. cit.**, pp. 233-234.

³⁴ "Modernity", **My Accounting Course**, (accessed), <https://www.myaccountingcourse.com/accounting-dictionary/modernity>, 28.12.2019.

³⁵ Virendra Kumar Roy, Ramesh Chander Kapoor, **John Donne and Metaphysical Poetry**, London, Doaba House, 1969, p. 26.

between the surface of daily experience and the deep level of truth, Donne comes to be a modernist writer, and thus appeals to the modern reader.³⁶

Relativity and realism relevant to modernity also engender naturalness or sincerity alongside a search and interest in mundane life and philosophising about the ways of the world and mortality. Thus, multiplicity or flexibility in vision and mentality, ambivalence, paradox, quest and questioning, incongruity and at times absurdity are qualities and states integral to the modern mindset and production. In Donne's poetry, the poet challenges the widely accepted perception of the world, his language is multidimensional, experimental and connotative, and his tone is witty, intellectual, searching and insightful. Donne connects love and emotions with historical and geographical notions. Discursive elements and absurdity of his poetry generate an argumentative and analytical tone. His lines are venturesome so much so that he sexualises metaphors in the Elizabethan era.

Roy Booth, in **The Collected Poems of John Donne**, suitably makes an illustrative comment:

Donne was until quite recently promoted as a modern poet, someone in whose sentiments -unlike those of the Elizabethan sonneteers- we would recognise ourselves. That he seems to have been the first person to use the word 'sex' in its present day sense (for the act of sex, rather than just in differentiation of gender).³⁷

Marie L. Burke also points to Donne's popularity in the mid of the 20th century. Because of Donne's transgressive style, his poetry "has been the subject of a body of recent criticism impressive both in extent and in quality, the combined effect of which has resulted in Donne's entrenchment as the basis of a new aesthetic of poetry".³⁸

Papari Kakati evaluates Donne's art similarly:

³⁶ Yoshinobu Hakutani, ed., "Introduction", **Modernity in East-West Literary Criticism: New Readings**, Madison Teaneck, Fairleigh University Press, 2001, p. 9.

³⁷ Roy Booth, **The Collected Poems of John Donne**, Great Britain, Wordsworth Editions, 2002, p.VII.

³⁸ Marie L. Burke, **The Reputation of John Donne in the Twentieth Century**, Master's Theses, Chicago, Loyola University, 1947, p. i.

The emotional range of his lyrics is wide, wider than that of any other poets. John Bennett rightly points out that Donne saved the English love lyric from the monotony which had overtaken it in the early 17th century.[...] Donne has intellectualised the English lyric and thus extended its range and scope.”³⁹

Kakati also emphasises that Donne is distinguished by his treatment of love which is sensuous and realistic at the same time, in comparison to the other poets. That is why Kakati concludes his article reminding that Donne becomes a popular and influential poet over the others in English literature, and that discussions on his poetry prove “his strong appeal to the Modern Age”.⁴⁰

The above discussions, deductions, and comments on Donne’s poetry have attempted to shape the direction of this current study. It aims to frame, analyse and come to a suggestion regarding the transcendental experience in Donne’s poetry through the lens of his background and assisted by the framework of the conceptual metaphor theory. Accordingly, Chapter I presents a survey of conceptual metaphor theory to discuss the major issues regarding Donne’s poetry in the chapters of textual analysis. In Chapter II, the personal background of John Donne is presented within the literary and social background of 17th century England in order to trace his journey to become a metaphysical and transcendental poet. In Chapter III, the transcendental experience and alchemical analogies are examined in the poems “The Good Morrow”, “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” and “The Canonization”. The transcendental experience in Donne’s poetry and his transgressing literary style find reverberation in the modern perception. In Chapter IV, the poems “The Flea”, “Holy Sonnet X” and “The Broken Heart” are analysed in terms of the transcendental experience John Donne’s poetry refers to in line with the discussion on how Donne’s poetry might appeal to modernity. The Conclusion recalls the goal, scope and method of the study and the primary discussions, and finalises the synthesis of multiple threads of Donne’s complexity and richness.

³⁹ Papari Kakati, “The Appeal of John Donne to the Modern Age: Donne’s Popularity and His Influence”, **Global Research Methodology Journal**, 6th Issue, Aug.-Sept.-Oct. 2012, p.4.

⁴⁰ **Ibid.**

CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY

As studies in the field of cognitive linguistics have been continuing to be conducted recently in relation to Donne criticism¹, this thesis may be allowed the aid of conceptual metaphor theory, not delving into the accumulated or fresh literature of its data, but alongside its already considered, dependable initiation by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.

Cognitive poetics, a developing interdisciplinary field and school of criticism, has attached much importance to metaphor and attempted to work on a comprehensive analysis of metaphors. Cognitive linguistics has become an important research area where cognitive theories are applied to some literary works such as Shakespeare's **Hamlet**, which is analysed by researchers Svitlana Shurma and Wei Iun Lu through the lens of conceptual metaphor theory.² Otherwise, Donne's poetry might not be considered as a reflection of transcendental experience and carry a metaphysical aspect which is needed to be grounded in our schemata.

The conceptual metaphor theory is brought by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, **Metaphors We Live By**. The theory is built upon a long time of scholarship which considers metaphor not only merely an ornamental tool in language but also a conceptual device for structuring, restructuring and creating reality. Mostly, it is defined as an understanding of one domain of experience which is abstract in terms of another which is concrete.³ Likewise, L. David Ritchie initialises his **Context and Connection in Metaphor** employing the recent developments in cognitive literary criticism, by citing Lakoff and Johnson's definition of metaphor as "understanding

¹ Zohreh Sohrabi, Hossein Pinajmuddin, "John Donne's Metaphors of Self and Empire: A Cognitive Analysis", **The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies**, Penerbit University, Kebangsaan, 2017, pp. 50-59.

² Svitlana Shurma, Wei Iun Lu, "A Cognitive Poetic Analysis of Life and Death in English and Ukrainian: A Multiple Parallel Text Approach to Hamlet's Soliloquy", **Theatralia**, Vol. 19, No. 2, Masaryk University Press, 2016, p. 11.

³ Zoltan Kövecses, **Where Metaphors Come From: Reconsidering Context in Metaphor**, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 33.

and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another’.” , and the base of their argument or observation as “our primary metaphorical systems are grounded first and foremost in our direct physical and social experience.”⁴ The conceptual metaphor theory aims to uncover “mappings” in our conceptual systems. Its methodology and the nature of the data are based on the individualistic level where the concrete and abstract, namely the process and the product mappings are sought.⁵ In Donne’s poetry, such mappings are transparent, and, accordingly, this thesis attempts to observe and understand them. Donne mostly uses conceits, which are a kind of metaphor that compares two very unlike things in an unusual way, states one thing as another thing bringing an explanation to an idea or showing similarities that are hidden.

As recent linguists of the contemporary age have attempted to bring a comprehensive understanding of metaphors, rhetoricians of previous periods also tried to come up with an understanding of the issue.⁶ The discussion goes back to Greek philosophy where Plato did not favour the use of metaphors as it had an artistic effect on the people and thus would deceive the citizens.⁷ However, he used some metaphors himself like the famous cave metaphor to convey philosophical thoughts. Art, for him, was an imitation of the world and the physical realm was that of the ultimate truth itself. As the core elements were lost in imitation, any imagery would not say the ultimate truth. In that sense, he regarded metaphor as deviation. Nevertheless, Aristotle, as opposed to Plato, highlighted the importance of the function of metaphor in **Poetics**; he says metaphor is the application of a strange term applied through analogy.⁸ In **Rhetoric**, for example, he emphasizes that metaphors are instructive and the power of the human mind. When one understands new metaphors, he learns new things according to him. It made people understand

⁴ L. David Ritchie, **Context and Connection in Metaphor**, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2006, p. 32.

⁵ Atilla Cserep, “Conceptual Metaphor Theory: in defence or on the fence?”, **Argumentum**, Vol. 10, 2014, p. 268.

⁶ Peer F. Bundgaard, Goran Sonesson, “The Rhetoric of Contemporary Metaphor Theory”, **Cognitive Semiotics**, Special Edition, Germany, 2019, p. 4.

⁷ Plato, **Plato in Twelve Volumes**, Vol. 9, William Heinemann Ltd, 1925, London, p.161.

⁸ Aristotle, **Poetics**, Trans. by S.H. Butcher, Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2015, p. 19.

new states of affairs through the new analogies; thus he found another function of metaphor, which was metaphor as a manifestation of cognitive power and human creativity.⁹

Literary critics outlined another function of metaphor in the following periods. Thus, with the beginning of arguments of Greek and Roman rhetoricians and some critics in the Elizabethan period, metaphor became a central topic in literary theory. They came to a consensus that metaphor was used to express one's emotions in imagery to please and/or persuade the reader.¹⁰ Such an approach brought another function of metaphor called metaphor as ornament. So, during the Elizabethan era and the Renaissance, literary critics and poets argued that the use of it would succeed in revealing different aesthetic values in a work of art.

The representative thinkers of the Enlightenment did not accept the mentioned aspects of metaphor as they were in a culture that believed in the verity of empirical science. The foundations of ideas are sustained through direct sense impressions as Locke explains in **An Essay Concerning Human Understanding**.¹¹ In that approach, words need to refer to things and metaphors are wrong ideas that move passions and misdirect judgement.¹² However, in the Romantic period, the poets appreciated the use of metaphor and believed that the intellectual power distinguished them from common man. Coleridge defined "imagination" as the poet's ability to come up with a metaphor and it is to create the "ultimate end of human thought and human feeling, unity".¹³ For him, through the use of this literary device the poet and the reader perceive special connections of things in this world, so much so that he suggested the critics should study metaphor with regard to the intellect.¹⁴ In the 19th and 20th centuries, also the language of science used metaphors to be understood in a clear manner by leaving the 'ideal' aspect of the

⁹ Aristotle, **Rhetoric**, Ed. by Lee Honeycutt, Trans. by W. Rhys Roberts, 2004, p. 32.

¹⁰ Johanna Rehn, "Metaphors of Time", **Södertörn University Cultural Studies**, Vol. 2, 2009, p.

14. ¹¹ John Locke, **An Essay Concerning Human Understanding**, Book I, Ed. by William Tegg, Penguin Random House, London, 2017, p. 2.

¹² Klaus P. Fisher, "John Locke in the German Enlightenment: An Interpretation", **Journal of the History of Ideas**, Vol. 36, No 3, Jul-Sept., 1975, p. 436.

¹³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, **Biographia Literaria. Edited with His Aesthetical Essays**, Ed. by J. Shawcross, Vol.1, Nabu Press, Charleston, 2010, p. 9.

¹⁴ **Ibid.**, p. 11.

concept aside and working on relations among objects where only metaphors are able to recreate such relations appropriately.¹⁵

The contemporary rhetoricians try to solve how metaphor is constructed. Metaphors create semantic tension as they deviate from the literal meaning, which bring new meanings at different levels from the word level to the sentence level and to the written work. However, such views are regarded as traditional ways.¹⁶ That is, viewing a language as a device for conducting meaning to the reader and neglecting the knowledge and experience of a reader is a traditionalist vision.¹⁷ For example, Andrew Goatly opposes the attempt to reveal the objective meaning of language.¹⁸ As Robert Weimann mentions, the essence of metaphor is to connect and interrelate the physical and the spiritual, the concrete and the abstract, the individual and the social by the powers of imagination. Metaphor links the sense of reality and the power of imagination.¹⁹ Such an approach regarded metaphor as more of a linguistic term. Thus, rhetoricians attempted to find a mechanism of this literary device and dealt with the ways metaphor has a role in our act of reading rather than just what it can do to literary writing and society, and accordingly, a new function is born called metaphor as a way of understanding. The approach is of a cognitive view and grounded in Aristotle's views which stated that metaphors could bring an intellectual insight into phenomena under inspection.

Such a view has also shaped George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory which considers metaphor found in literary texts to play a central role in the reader's cognition in their work **Metaphors We Live By**, which was first published in 1980. To this modern perspective, the background knowledge of a reader also has an important role. According to them, metaphor is not just a linguistic

¹⁵ Rüdiger Görner, "The Poetics of Science: Understanding Scientific Metaphor in 19th and 20th Century European Literature", **Kultur Poetik**, Vol. 3, 2003, p. 173.

¹⁶ Robert R. Hoffman, "Cognitive Metaphors in Experimental Psychology in David Leary's *Metaphors in the History of Psychology*", **Psychology Faculty Publications**, Richmond UP, UK, 1990, p. 359.

¹⁷ **Ibid.**

¹⁸ Andrew Goatly, **Conceptual Metaphor, Its Paradoxes, Modifications, And Distortions In The Poetry Of John Donne, Explorations in Stylistics**, Equinox Publishing Ltd., UK, 2008, p. 44.

¹⁹ Robert Weimann, "Shakespeare and the Study of Metaphor", **New Literary History**, Vol. 6, The John Hopkins UP, USA, 1978, p. 150.

expression or is created only when a word's literal meaning is replaced by figurative language as they discuss in their book. Rather, it is a linguistic expression that is created when the reader attempts to understand the world unconsciously as a result of his cognitive mechanism, and he tends to understand a concept in relation to other concepts. In this regard, a human's cognitive system is metaphorical.²⁰ In their view, our language is underlined by a systematic metaphoric structure called conceptual metaphor. The reader's ideas and our language are metaphorical in nature.

Lakoff and Johnson's focus on the human mind and individual cognition not only raises awareness in lingual terms but also puts emphasis on multi-facetedness and liberation of thoughts. Thought is related to language as the thoughts of the reader are expressed via language, and if language is metaphorical, then the thoughts are metaphorical. More specifically, the reader engages in the processes of understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another, involving "mappings" between two conceptual domains. According to Lakoff, there is a systematic relationship between source and target domains, which is called mapping.²¹ In that sense, metaphors are therefore vital in understanding. Conceptual metaphors are found in the abstract system of language and are thus related to people's way of perceiving life and the world. Conceptual metaphors are comprised of two conceptual domains which are source domain and target domain. As Zoltan Kövecses remarks, the conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain.²² Based on Kövecses's remarks, it might be deduced that the source domain is tangible whereas the target domain is an area for abstract or physical entity.

According to the cognitive approach, metaphors are windows across the way the poet understands different concepts. As Lakoff and Johnson argue, the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.

²⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, **Metaphors We Live By**, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1980, pp. 12-13.

²¹ **Ibid.**, p. 29.

²² Zoltan Kövecses, **Metaphor: A Practical Introduction**, Oxford UP, UK, 2002, p.36.

Thus, what Donne understands and makes it understandable for his readers has great significance.²³ By producing a variety of metaphors in his poems, Donne feeds the cognitive system in his reader's mind. Moreover, the meaning is liberated through the imagination and cognition of not only the poet but also the reader. His literary style puts the reader in a place where s/he can be active while employing or implying meaning. Donne puts away the traditional pattern of the passive reader. Besides, he keeps directing his reader like a map, he gives the reader the opportunity to be autonomus rather than being authorized. In the modern conception, as Jean Paul Sartre pins down, reading is to be a creation by guidance²⁴ In parallel to Donne's complex construction of metaphors, this attitude can be regarded as a donation to modern sensitivity in Donne's poetry.

Donne's spontaneous preoccupation with the question of domain in the conceptual metaphor theory ahead of his time may have associations with the notions of microcosm and macrocosm in the Renaissance. He sometimes reverses the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm.²⁵ He extends his poetic sphere through the conceptual metaphors in order to attain transcendence. However, to attain transcendence, the background knowledge of the reader becomes significant to understand metaphors and conceits in Donne's poetry in order for "mapping". A systematic relationship between source and target domains occurs which will be discussed throughout the analysis of Donne's poems in the following chapters as first a frame of historical background is to be disclosed so as to enable the reader to find convenient mappings.

²³ Lakoff and Johnson, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

²⁴ Jean Paul Sartre, *Edebiyat Nedir?*, Trans. by Bertan Onaran, İstanbul, Can Yayınları, 2008, p. 44.

²⁵ Adam Smyth, "The Whole Globe of the Earth: Almanacs and Their Readers", *A Companion to the Global Renaissance*, Ed. by Jyotsna G. Singh, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, pp. 294–304.

CHAPTER II

DEFINING JOHN DONNE

AS A METAPHYSICAL AND TRANSCENDENTAL POET

Concerning the 17th century, it might be claimed that it was a chaotic period for England. There were significant problems about the monarchy and religious sects. In order to define John Donne as a metaphysical and transcendental poet in the 17th century, it is necessary to take the tumultuous conditions of the period into consideration as Jonathan Scott states in his **England's Troubles: Seventeenth Century English Political Instability in European Context** as follows:

Seventeenth century men killed, tortured and executed each other for political beliefs, that was because belief lay at the heart of the troubles.[...] whether as cause (of the troubles), substance (of the revolution) or subject (of restoration recontainment). In the troubles, it has been suggested, we see the destructive effect upon fragile institutions of powerful beliefs¹

Based on the statement above, it can be deduced that after so much conflict, loss and chaos, the focus of the society shifted to a more individualistic point. As Ifor Evans states: "The seventeenth century is in many ways the century of transition into our modern world. The Civil Wars separated men from the older ways of living, and the religious controversies killed much that had remained lively in the national imagination since the Middle Ages."² John Donne lived between 1572 and 1631 before the Civil War started.³ However, he may have experienced the antecedent turbulent times in the society.

In his time, the provisions of the Renaissance such as early traces of individualism, humanism, scientific reasoning, exploration and experimentation subsisted within art and the society alongside a combust of oscillation, scepticism

¹ Jonathan Scott, **England's Troubles: Seventeenth Century English Political Instability in European Context**, the UK, Cambridge UP, 2004, p. 51.

² Ifor Evans, **A Short History of English Literature**, Great Britain, Penguin Books, 1977, p. 51.

³ Roy Booth, **The Collected Poems of John Donne**, Wordsworth Poetry Library, Great Britain, 2002, p. 21.

and corrosion. John Morrill also writes about the dynamics of economy: “In the century from 1540 to 1640 there was a redistribution of wealth away from rich and poor towards those in the middle of society. The richest men in the kingdom derived the bulk of their income from rents and services, and these were notoriously difficult to keep in line with inflation [...] Those in the middle of society, whether yeomen farmers or tradesmen, prospered.”⁴ Like the shift in the economy he points to the change in the religious aspect:

For the Church of England, [...] the seventeenth century was an age of disillusionment. By the time of the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9 it had lost the intellectual, moral, spiritual authority it had acquired by 1603.[...] The Civil War and Interregnum years saw the disintegration not only of Anglicanism, but of English Puritanism. The structure of the Church of England was abolished (bishops, church courts) or proscribed (the Prayer Book, the celebration of Christmas or Easter). Cathedrals were turned into preaching centres or secularised (used as barracks, prisons, shopping arcades).⁵

Morrill acknowledges “the early and mid-seventeenth century” idealism among “most intellectuals and most governors” including “Donne’s poems” reflecting “the immanence of God in his Creation, by a deep sense of God’s activity in human history [...]” in contrast to the later period when “Ministers were encouraged to preach that religious duties meant being kind to old people and animals rather than preaching about the transformation of the world.”⁶ Morrill, suitably, refers to “secularization” describing the trend in literature, the visual arts, and science, the practicality and the citizen’s contentment in political thought, and the ascendancy of scientific aspirations like “enquiry and improvement”, “exact observation”, “inductive reasoning”, “extensive experimentation and measurement”.⁷

These conditions paved the way for metaphysical poetry to come into existence as an unprecedented genre of poetry of which John Donne was a prominent implementer before the title “metaphysical” was given:

⁴ John Morrill, “The Stuarts (1603-1688)”, **The Oxford History of Britain**, Ed. by Kenneth O. Morgan, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 338.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 390-391.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 393-395.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 395-398.

It was the time of what came to be called metaphysical poetry, but of much more than that; there was more than one way, even in the heyday of the metaphysicals, for a poet to use his intelligence. For more generally it was a time of great active intelligence, intelligence working its way down into the very capillaries of a poem; and it ended when, by the time of the Restoration, the nature of the intellectual process itself had been revalued.⁸

Donne's poetic style goes beyond not only reflecting the society directly or camouflaging the bad sides and just focusing on pleasure but also the conventionalism of Elizabethan poetry. While doing that, he has a distinctive attitude as Sir Herbert Grierson draws attention to Donne's attitude as follows:

The movement which these poems reflect in its excesses was one of thought as well as feeling, and the thought remained a central one in all his later development.[...] The dualism of body and soul he refused to accept as the absolute one [...] Man is body and soul, and neither can be complete without the other.⁹

In other words, in his poems, Donne builds a relationship between bodily actions and the soul. For instance, he conveys sex as a religious experience in "To His Mistress Going to Bed". In his poems, he incorporates sexual images into spiritual contexts. In that sense, he brings a different and new attitude towards poetry through such "contradictions of Donne from one poem to another".¹⁰

In addition to that attitude towards poetry, John Donne's creativity also proves that his personality and intellect have transcendental characteristics as well, because producing such poems appealing to the following centuries experiencing their origins indirectly is a genuine proof of his transcendental identity as a poet.

As a sense of "beyond" carried in transcendence, "Metaphysical" means "beyond the physical". When Dr Johnson titled John Donne and his successors metaphysical, he aimed to point at their excessive style. The arguments and the

⁸ Hugh Kenner, *Seventeenth Century Poetry: The Schools of Donne and Jonson*, USA, Rinehart Editions, 1964, p. IX.

⁹ Sir Herbert Grierson, *Donne: Poetical Works*, Preface, Ed. by Sir Herbert Grierson, UK, Oxford UP, 1971, p. XXIII.

¹⁰ Basil Thommen, *The Sexual and the Spiritual in John Donne's Poetry: Exploring "The Extasie" and its Analogies*, Vol. 6, No. 11, 2014, p. 1.

paradoxes, analogies, metaphors and questions about the existence of God, love and religion in their poetry triggered the reader to question “the unsayable”. This “unsayable” as the sun metaphor is also found in Book IX of Plato’s famous allegory. It was presented by this Greek philosopher in his work **The Republic**. In the allegory, there is a person who is able to get rid of his chains and goes out of the cave where the other people are in chains. Outside, his eyes become dazzled by the shine of the sun which symbolises the real truth, and goes back to the cave to warn his citizens that they merely see the shadows of the objects as there is a fire behind those chained prisoners. Their heads are tied, because of that they have not looked at anything, but have seen the reflections of the objects. Donne might have also been affected by this philosopher as his poetry also includes such possibility in some uses of language. Like Plato’s man in the allegory of cave, Donne’s poems go “beyond the physical” into the world of metaphysics, an intellectual process which leads readers to transcend from this world as it is the “reflection” of the objects. As M.H. Abrams describes “allegory” in his glossary, “the agents and action, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived both to make coherent sense on the ‘literal,’ or primary level of signification, and also to signify a second, correlated order of agents, concepts, and events.”¹¹ This, in a way, relates to Lakoff and Johnson’s source-target domain axis, acknowledging the use of variant senses and dimensions of verbal devices. The frequent use of literary devices turns metaphysical poetry to a genuine challenge at the first attempt to read. A high amount of attentiveness and concentration are needed, because metaphysical poets are brief and concise with all their ideas, and messages are even conveyed through one single line in a poem. That multi-layered style for Donne is a means of communication as it was for Plato. He makes contacts with his beloved, or with the unsayable within the limits of his poems. Regarding this implicitness, there is multi-dimensionality in the language of Donne’s metaphysical poems which have different peculiarities compared to the other types of poems.

¹¹ Meyer Howard Abrams, “Allegory”, **A Glossary of Literary Terms**, 4th ed., New York, Chicago and San Francisco, Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1981, pp. 4-7.

According to Hugh Kenner, metaphysical poems are different in the sense as follows:

We can never guess, three lines ahead, where such a poem is going to turn; so, though each of its figures is thoroughly conventional, Donne exacts of us an unremitting attention to which his taut wording answers. Each move is articulated; there are no gaps; yet he was thought difficult in his own time, and is often difficult now.¹²

From Kenner's opinions it is possible to deduce that while reading a metaphysical poem, the reader needs to go through the lines, get inspiration from them and react to the sensational constraints behind each and every word. This condition brings about a certain amount of difficulty to the readership making it a major characteristic of metaphysical poetry. As Helen Gardner emphasizes, in **The Metaphysical Poets**, the metaphysical poets preferred to be simple in the form but complicated when it came to meaning since the poems bring demands to the reader while challenging them to make sense, and thus such poems require the readers to have "a self-conscious eye" same as the poet:

It does not attempt to attract the lazy and its lovers have always a certain sense of being a privileged class, able to enjoy what is beyond the reach of vulgar wits.[...] This is a source of both weakness and strength. At times the writing has the smell of a coterie, the writer performing with a self-conscious eye on his clever readers.¹³

Gardner's generalisation is in a way exemplified by Donne's case in Roy Booth's remarks concerning Donne's poems which were not published during his lifetime but were circulated in manuscript as follows:

Donne the poet opted for a poetry that was never published, but circulated privately among his friends, a poetry of private and daring meaning.[...] In poetic terms, he was the priest hidden in the priest hole, a poet whose works were privately transcribed by admiring friends.¹⁴

¹² Kenner, **op.cit.**, p. XIX.

¹³ Helen Gardner, **The Metaphysical Poets**, Great Britain, Penguin Books, 1966, p. 17.

¹⁴ Roy Booth, **The Collected Poems of John Donne**, Wordsworth Poetry Library, Great Britain, 2002, p. VI.

Within Donne's multi-dimensionality as stated previously, the scope is generally associated with the themes of love and sexuality which can be considered as ordinary themes. However, the content of his poems brings cognitive demands on the part of the reader through the use of his conceits and metaphors. The content of his poems is more than heart-warming love poetry thanks to Donne's conceits and metaphors that are highly attributed to the realm of scientific knowledge and positivism in his era. By using unexpected conceits and multi-dimensional metaphors, he went beyond the conventional love poems written with an ornamental language. The multi-dimensionality shows itself in Donne's poetry through his personal passion with intellectuality, bringing out the prominent feature of his poetry. In most of his poems, there are often questions leading the reader to consider the ideas derived from philosophy, scientific notions and geographical explorations beside the question of love or religion, which create a union in itself as long as thinking in multi-dimensionality is sustained. This induces the wide range of metaphorical possibilities as in the conceptual metaphor theory by Lakoff and Johnson pointing to the source-target domain axis in human understanding and artistic production. Donne obviously does it on purpose to arouse and excite his reader and might want to get them to delve into the unsayable, to the world of metaphysics. As Gardner emphasizes a relatable quality to modernity, "The metaphysical style heightens and liberates personality. It is essentially a style in which individuality is expressed. The best pupils in the school of Donne learned from their master how to speak their own voices."¹⁵

The conceits and the sense of liberation are distinctive characteristics in his poetry. He gives a flexible and unprejudiced impression about his poetry. In order to define the term "conceit," Helen Gardner continues: "A conceit is a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness, or, at least is more immediately striking.[...] a comparison becomes a conceit when we are made to concede likeness while being strongly conscious of unlikeness."¹⁶ The use of conceits in Donne's poetry as verbal inventions and devices in verse functions like an analogical

¹⁵ Gardner, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

instrument via which the reader can experience the thoughts and feelings conveyed by the poet. In this manner, Donne's dramatic imagination makes a harmonious remark out of unlikeness, captures the concentration of the reader and gets the reader to think deeply. The reader of this poet is to work through numerous references to contrastive, complementary or binary terms appealing to the conscious, unconscious or subconscious, which give Donne's works a metaphysical outlook on individual and life. It would be a mistake to think that his language was too complicated and sumptuous to read. In Donne's poetry, the richness of meaning was derived from the paradoxes and fertile incongruities. For example, through obscene imagery for the standards of the age the sexual and psychological aspects behind a love affair are duly reflected.

John Donne caught the attention of the readers for his being a bright minded literary figure. His versatile personality and mindset did not let him repeat himself in the sense that although the themes such as love and religion, attitude and thoughts were similar to each other in his poems, he rendered peculiarities, putting such familiarities into words in a new way. That new way includes putting themes that seem to be distinct from each other as Roy Booth puts it forward as follows:

Donne's major subjects, approximately speaking, consist of the deplorable state of things, women (also usually deplorable), and God (who is, rather awkwardly, both irreproachable and deplorable): satire, sexual relations, and religion. He is at his utmost discursive when he can deal with all three together, as in his "Anniversaries", and at his most intense when flickering back and forwards, sexualising religion and consecrating sex (both subjects involve a rejection of the everyday world). But because Donne wrote using 'conceits', witty analogies, he devotes a very large proportion of his poetic attention to an array of minor subjects.¹⁷

Based on the comments above which might be also associated with the double dimension of the conceptual metaphor theory, it can be said that John Donne's literary style is interwoven with metaphors and conceits which also present an integral affinity between serious and light topics, grandiose and ordinary areas of knowledge and experience, and an analogical transformation between tangible and intangible elements. Lakoff and Johnson, suitably, explain the relation between the

¹⁷ Booth, *op cit.*, p. XIV.

source and target domains, concerning the potentiality or use of the tangible to tell about or conceive the intangible. Donne conveys meaning by using unexpected conceits and multi-dimensional metaphors, and he went beyond the conventional love poems written with a different language due to his putting together contradictory themes and attitudes and the way he used literary devices different from the poets of his era.

Extending the already set patterns of thought and expression of his time in the counter current inclination of search and argumentation, his attitude, tone, mood, topic and discourse may further the “standards” of his era. For example, he alludes to same-sex love in the poem titled “Sappho to Philaenis”.¹⁸ This was a taboo at that time. As Anne Lyle remarks, in the Elizabethan era men were legally superior to women. Under the influence of Greek literature, homosexuality came to light. However, until recent times, homosexuality has been accepted as a pattern of temporary moral degeneracy.¹⁹ The theme of sexuality in his poems becomes much more striking when his identity as a preacher is taken into consideration. He goes beyond the virtues such as conservation from material life, dedication to God and reclusion from worldliness, which are expected from a preacher in the sect of Anglicanism. Nonetheless, when compared to the sect of Catholicism, there is no obligation for clerical celibacy in the Church of England, as David Michael Hope, the Bishop of London, states in his article “The Anglican Communion and Priestly Celibacy”:

The requirement for celibacy in the clergy was formally abolished in the Church of England in 1549. Since that time, and continuing in the present time, there is no requirement for celibacy even among single clergy within the Anglican Communion. Indeed, the point has been made again only very recently in the report from the House of Bishops, on Human Sexuality, that celibacy cannot be prescribed for anyone. What is needed is that the single should live in the form of chastity appropriate to their situation.²⁰

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

¹⁹ Anne Lyle, “Homosexuality in Elizabethan England”, (accessed), <https://www.annelyle.com/homosexuality-in-elizabethan-england/>, 30.12.2019.

²⁰ David Michael Hope, “The Anglican Communion and Priestly Celibacy”, (accessed) http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/, 24.05.2019.

As mentioned above, even though clerical celibacy was abolished, the requirement for an appropriate and modest life as a clergyman was supposed to be fulfilled. The notion of being proper requires being appropriate not only in action but also in the mind. Thus, the ideas and images John Donne presented in his poetry were still going too far for the Anglican Church.

It might be important to consider Donne's life before analysing his poems as George Alexander Kennedy overtly states that: "the works of authors were read as sources of information about their lives, personalities and interests. Some of this material was then used by later commentators and critics to explain passages in their works."²¹ Jackson Benson, too, talks about the significance of the author's biography in literature in his article called "Steinbeck: A Defense of Biographical Criticism": "Biographical criticism can do best, discovering an author as a unique individual, a discovery that puts a burden on us to reach out to recognize that uniqueness before we can fully comprehend an author's writings."²² However, Donne's poetry may also contribute and appeal to the contemporary reader due to the responses the poems may evoke in that reader. When Kennedy's and Benson's statements are taken into consideration through a contemporary perspective, it can be said that a biographical approach does not function as a fulcrum. Still, it can contribute to elucidate in which ways a poet like John Donne emerged with metaphysical poetry.

When his life is considered as a lover, man of letters and preacher, all may effectuate subsidiary, enhancing components to define him as a metaphysical and transcendental poet. When we look at John Donne's life, we see the reflection of his century. John Donne was born in 1572 in London into a Catholic family at a time when being a Catholic was troublesome. He studied at both Cambridge and Oxford, but could not get a degree because of his sect. He returned to London to study law. During these years, he discovered his will and desire to write about love and women.

²³ About Donne's ambition to write about relations between man and woman, Mina

²¹ George Alexander Kennedy, **The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Classical Criticism**, Great Britain, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 205.

²² Jackson Benson, "Steinbeck: A Defense of Biographical Criticism", **College Literature**, Vol.16, Spring 1989, p. 108.

²³ Booth, **op cit.**, p. XVI.

Urgan states, in her book on English literature, “According to Ben Jonson, John Donne wrote his most interesting love poems before the age of twenty five and he tried to burn them when he became a priest.”²⁴ His marriage was also an unconfirmed one as the bride was under age and they eloped; he became a kind of outcast for a long time.²⁵

Donne started to question the religion he was born into after his brother died in prison due to the religious problems. This questioning process inspired him to produce works related to religion in this era, which can be seen as a sign for his tendency to Anglicanism during that period.²⁶ Especially when his wife Ann Donne died, after a short time she gave birth to their twelfth child, John Donne mostly focused on religious issues rather than humane concepts such as love, hatred, jealousy and commitment.²⁷ “He wrote **Pseudo-Martyr** in 1610. In the same year, he also received his honorary MA degree from Oxford University. In 1615, Donne was appointed as Royal Chaplain.”²⁸ He converted officially to Anglicanism. In 1625, “he was appointed the dean of St Paul’s Cathedral”.²⁹ Nevertheless, his literary identity continued to exist at one and the same time of his position as an ecclesiastic. Sexual symbols blend with religious ones. He continued to work on religious symbolism in his poetry which is full of Biblical and theological allusions.³⁰ His conversion became the milestone through the rise of his career as a prospering preacher whose sermons were refined blends of religious knowledge and his literary identity. It might be said that regarding his personal background, the use of his multi-layered and unconventional metaphors, religious symbolism and peculiar conceits made a great preacher out of him.

²⁴ Mina Urgan, **İngiliz Edebiyatı Tarihi**, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2017, p, 174.

²⁵ Booth, **op cit.**, p. XXII.

²⁶ **Ibid.**, p.XXIII.

²⁷ “John Donne: English Poet”, **Encyclopedia Britannica**, (accessed), <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Donne>, 28.12.2019.

²⁸ Booth, **op. cit.**, p. VI.

²⁹ Booth, **op. cit.**, p. XXIV

³⁰ “Battered by Donne: A Personal Appreciation of the Religious Poetry of John Donne”, **The Gospel Coalition**, (accessed), <https://au.thegospelcoalition.org/article/battered-donne-personal-appreciation-religious-poetry-john-donne/>, 29.12.2019.

He became more and more integrated into the realm of divinity in the later years of his life. His motive in the rise of his career towards loading metaphysical imagery with religious concepts is suggested by Helen Gardner as follows:

The strength of the religious poetry of the metaphysical poets is that they bring to their praise and prayer and meditation so much experience that is not in itself religious.[...] Much stress has been laid upon the strongly traditional element in the conceits of metaphysical religious poetry.[...] It is also true that the metaphysical manner of setting a subject, 'hammering it out', and then 'shutting it up' is closely allied to the method of religious meditation and that many metaphysical poems are poetical meditations.³¹

Through metaphysical poetry, in the categories of whether secular poems or holy sonnets, Donne transforms the conventional poetry into a liberated form of expression interwoven with intense emotion and high intellect. As will be discussed in the following chapters, he often uses questions and imperative sentences at the beginning of his poems. Thus, he makes his addressees attainable for him, and directly addresses his beloved or God. In contrast to the general conceptualisation of death and the afterlife in Christianity, which functions as an impassable separation between materiality and divinity, Donne makes use of death as a transparent gate into eternity rather than an absolute end of a human being. This can be seen as a proof of his pioneering position among the metaphysical poets of his era. Hence, he presents a fusion of sentiments and sensations through creating an unconventional attitude and vision with his discourse and literary devices.

In his later years, the search for eternity turns into a divine journey. In all his poems, including religious ones, John Donne always gives the sense of exploration and an endless passion to go beyond what is existent at present. His standing and writing let him transcend many social norms and restrictions of his time. As well as his poetry, secular and religious, his prose works like **Meditations** reflect similar style and tone. If we should talk of the wholeness of God and humans within the universe, it is not possible to totally separate these notions. John Donne, able to relate

³¹ Gardner, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

two disparate elements in a synthesising way, displays the notion of transcendence in the following lines taken from “Meditation XVII”:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent,
a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as
well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine
own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind,
and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.³²

Referring to the definition of transcendence and what Donne says in “Meditation XVII”, it can be implied that the notion of love and reaching the wholeness in Donne’s mind went through a transformation and found a realm of existence in divinity, which marks a transition from love poetry to religious poetry as an anticipated move in his aged life. As a reflection of this concern, Donne describes the relationship between man and God like a relationship of two human beings, and does not hesitate to include imagery which was used for sexuality in the secular poems even when he is addressing God. In “Holy Sonnet XIV”, for example, he may sound like a restless lover that is arguing with his beloved:

Divorce mee, ‘untie or breake that knot againe,
Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I,
Except you enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.³³

He demands to be enthralled and ravished by God to be free and chaste. At the beginning, the oppositions seem strange, but Donne uses them as literary devices and they make the meaning much more striking. This is a sign of Donne’s poetry in general. He finds unusual comparisons, conceits and images to convey emotions and opinions. As the conceptual metaphor theory explains, human understanding and aesthetic perception exploit analogies, similarities, associations, and possible links among the familiar and concrete and the unfamiliar and abstract domains or components, elements. Donne’s artistry and writing exploited these as well.

³² John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, USA, Kessinger Publishing, 2004, p. 31.

³³ Booth, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

There is not a huge difference between two personas of John Donne as a love poet and as a religious poet. He manages to keep up with the same intense passion in all the poems. He is on the side of unfolding thoughts and emotions rather than covering and burying them. His continuous intention to demand liberation in both spiritual and physical terms puts him into a different place as a poet of love and religion. Due to his attitude and his stubborn words, he goes beyond the bordered roles of men and women in a way. That is why he is never an incurable cheerful lover or a surrendered devout. There is always a question to ask or a fight to put up. His way of expression in his poems is restless, but always passionate. Beside such peculiarities of his poems, the way he handles and processes the knowledge might be accepted as idiosyncratic. This is because when he combines his knowledge with his fantasies, he goes beyond his present time and wafts his reader by providing them with the transcendental experience.

Writing courageous poems, addressing God and death just like they are his counterparts, comparing love to a fatal plague might be considered as quite eccentric for a 17th century preacher. However, it is not possible just to call him a fool and put him off. He became the pioneer of a new genre by an unprecedented choice of comparisons, conceits and imageries. His liberation from the rules, norms and restrictions constitutes the fulfilment of the transcendental experience which paves the way to a wholistic perspective. Thus, his attitude through poetry is about associating rather than dissociating.

Donne's propensity to wholeness as a transcendental poet led him to the concepts of death and eternity. John Donne inclined to focus on his bonds with God and divinity. When the transcendental elements in his poems are considered, death comes forth as a notion that is intriguing and perplexing enough for his poems. In the course of time, his interest turned into a peculiar fascination by death. The Christian belief made death an undeniable reality in his life. Thus, death could be perceived in two ways for him either as an enemy to take down or a means of attaining his wife eternally. Since he had an inherent potential to transcend by all measures, death meant a new transcendental experience for him. Actually his ideas about death are sometimes challenging and sometimes showing a certain anxiety about death.

In “Holy Sonnet I”, a certain fear of death is observed:

I runne to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday;
I dare not move my dimme eyes any way,
Despaire behind, and death before doth cast
Such terrour, and my feeble flesh doth waste
By sinne in it, which it t'wards hell doth weigh;³⁴

The persona is very much aware that death is approaching. He thinks he deserves to be in hell. That is why he is anxious. He feels desperate and sinful. There is not even a little glimpse of the charm imputed to death by the poet. Yet, “Holy Sonnet X”, which will be analysed in Chapter 4, brings a challenge and derision to death as it is a mere and necessary vehicle to embrace eternity and divinity.

When death is regarded as a transition between earthly material life and eternal spiritual life, it seems quite suitable for the sense of transcendence in Donne’s poetry, because in that case death functions like a key to let the poet and the reader go beyond the boundaries. In other words, to understand the death theme in his poetry might be considered as one of the keys to transcendental experience.

John Donne the preacher attaches importance to similar notions and transcendental experience. In addition to his vast knowledge of religion, his poetic sophistication makes each sermon almost an artistic performance. The multifacetedness of him cherishes his capability to blend the source and the target domains mentioned by Lakoff and Johnson in a framework of the idea of microcosm and macrocosm in the Renaissance, the material and the spiritual aspects of human being. Such experience can be found in his famous sermon called “Death’s Duel”. John Donne preaches in a manner as if he is dead and the sermon is preached for him:

When my mouth shall be filled with dust, and the worm shall feed and feed sweetly upon me, when the ambitious man shall have no satisfaction if the poorest alive tread upon him, nor the poorest receive any contentment in being made equal to princes, for they shall be equal but in dust.³⁵

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.247.

³⁵ John Donne, **Death’s Duel**, Australia, The University of Adelaide, 2014, p. 4.

In this sermon like his other sermons, he describes the transition from material life to spiritual life. He also emphasizes the notion of equality and merging into nature and being wholly united with the universe via death.

According to the recordings in the sources of the British Library, it can be deduced that the way he preached, his word choice was a foresight of his own death:

Death's Duel is the last sermon preached by Donne in his role as Dean of St Paul's Cathedral. The sermon was delivered in Whitehall in front of King Charles I on 25 February 1631. This was only a month before Donne died on 31 March.³⁶

This sermon can be regarded as his final word before his death. The three sections of the sermon are quite likely a reference to the Holy Trinity in Christianity which is nearly a blessing of his words. He embroiders the funeral sermon so efficiently that the audience is carried through the transcendental experience as Donne also calls the reader for such an experience in his poems:

In all periods and transitions in this life, are so many passages from death to death; our very birth and entrance into this life is exitus a morte.[...] That which we call life is but hebdomada mortium, a week of death, seven days, seven periods of our life spent in dying, a dying seven times over; and there is an end.³⁷

As it can be deduced from these lines, being has a much deeper meaning for John Donne when compared to physical existence. He never perceives death as a kind of annihilation. It is the liberation from all the materiality and an experience of transcendence.

His peculiar attraction to that experience comes in the state of sickness as his close friend Izaak Walton states that:

³⁶ "Death's Duel by John Donne", **British Library**, (accessed) <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/deaths-duel-by-john-donne>, 25.05.2019.

³⁷ Donne, **op. cit.**, p. 2.

Donne posed for a morbid sketch of himself as he would look after death. Wrapping his naked body in a winding sheet, knotted at the head and feet. Donne stood on a wooden urn with his eyes shut. He set the completed picture by his bedside where it remained until his death.³⁸

John Donne looked at that sketch until the day he died. It is the portrait of a man who is sick not only physically but also spiritually. Hence, looking at himself in a shroud is not something that a person with the fear of death can do. He was looking forward to seeing what is promised for the afterlife. He was probably expecting to reach God whom he addressed in many of his poems. As it is implied from his last sermon, life is like a journey from death to death. Envisaging his death by all means, John Donne proves his transcendental identity as a poet and a unique human being.

After his death, John Donne was buried in St Paul's Cathedral. Later, according to an official declaration by St Paul's Cathedral: "The effigy of poet and Dean of St Paul's John Donne was the only monument to survive the Great Fire without significant damage."³⁹

Figure 1: "John Donne in Shroud"⁴⁰ **Figure 2: "John Donne Monument"**⁴¹



³⁸ Izaak Walton, *The Life of John Donne*, California, Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2018, p. 112.

³⁹ "St Paul's Cathedral", (accessed) <https://twitter.com/StPaulsLondon/status/1081187396035792896>, 01.06.2019.

⁴⁰ "John Donne in Shroud", Martin Droeshout, (accessed) <http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/shroud.htm>, 24.05.2019.

⁴¹ "John Donne Monument", Nicholas Stone, (accessed) <https://twitter.com/StPaulsLondon/status/1081187396035792896>, 01.04.2019.

These two pieces of art turn death into a very concrete issue which is a quite abstract one. They can be regarded as the embodiment of the transcendental experience that is presented through John Donne's poetry. He managed to make his lifelong fascination with death visible to everyone. After all, the marble monument despite lacking a soul stands for his transcendence to eternity leaving behind the materiality.

This chapter has shown that John Donne is defined as a metaphysical poet due to the new genre he pioneered as a transcendental poet. Due to his literary style and tone, metaphysical conceits and extraordinary imageries, his poetry goes beyond the conventional poetic forms and contents written until the 17th century. The transcendence may bring him from the 17th century to the modern age. Aware of the facts and circumstances of his time, John Donne puts forward important poems with analogically alchemical imageries and provides the reader with a transcendental experience through his art. In the following chapter, the analogies of alchemical images and the notion of transcendental experience will be examined throughout the opted poems of John Donne.

CHAPTER III

TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE THROUGH ALCHEMICAL IMAGES IN JOHN DONNE'S POETRY

"The true alchemists do not change lead into gold; they change the world into words."¹

John Donne is the pioneering poet of metaphysical poetry. In his poetry, there is a variety of alchemical images which let his poems present the transcendental experience. In this chapter, the opted poems by John Donne are examined in the context of alchemical images which are analogical and transformative or transferring from a conceptual space to another as the conceptual metaphor theory diagnoses concerning metaphors. They lead the process to reach the transcendental experience, a reading experience going beyond the age's conventions and in quest of incongruities.

Jocelyn Emerson draws attention to the analogical use of alchemical discourse as follows:

Donne's employment of alchemical discourses [...] would have been understood by his contemporary coterie readership; further because alchemical treatises were widely available to the members, Donne's readers would have been able to apprehend the multiple rhetorical, political, literary and theological ends to which he used alchemical language in his love lyrics, sermons and letters.²

He can create analogies with such elements that can be regarded as irrelevant. John Donne is not an alchemist. However, he is fascinated by the idea of transformation itself. His concern is not changing metals into gold or staying alive forever. When his poems are considered, he seems to be interested in a spiritual change from body to soul, which can be considered as an analogical process of alchemy in terms of the

¹ William H. Gass, **A Temple of Texts**, USA, Knopf, 2006, p. 37.

² Jocelyn Emerson, "Donne and the Noble Art", **Textual Healing: Essays on Medieval and Early Modern Medicine**, Ed. by Elizabeth Lane Furdell, Leiden, Brill, 2005, p. 212.

kind of materialization applied therein. On the other hand, it is known that John Donne was not the only person who had an interest in and wrote about alchemy in the 17th century as Robert M. Schuler adds that there was an increase in the publication of English alchemical material during the Civil War and Interregnum:

With regard to verse, one work stands out: Elias Ashmole's *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652), which has already been mentioned in relation to Norton and Ripley.[...] Zetzner's *Theatrum Chemicum* (first ed. Ursel, 1602; 4 vols), contains 436 pages of alchemical poetry, plus fifty pages of commentary. Of the fifty-three Middle English alchemical poems, now known to survive.³

Apart from the common interest in alchemy in 17th century England, it can be said that John Donne uses the philosophy of alchemy in his poems, because he does not look for any material profit or scientific endeavour out of it. The alchemical images which he applies function like phases of the transcendental experience in his poems. In contrast to Donne's prospering application of alchemical images, Edgar Hill Duncan puts forth a statement about the source of John Donne's knowledge about alchemy as follows:

Donne gives no hint as to where his knowledge of alchemy was derived, makes ascription of particular sources for his alchemical ideas extremely hazardous. It can hardly discount, however, the attempt to illustrate those ideas by references to treatises which may be fairly said to represent the alchemical milieu of John Donne's own lifetime.⁴

Interpreting Duncan's lines above, it can be said that there is not a certain proof of John Donne's background about alchemy. On the other hand, it is certain that he is a well-educated poet. As it is implied from his poems, he is not a person who takes everything for granted. Thus, it can be said that he made use of alchemy in his own direction which is not the first time that Donne preferred to draw his own direction in literature and his personal life. He was marginalised for long years due to Catholicism and an unconventional marriage. Relevant to this matter, Roy Booth

³ Robert M Schuler, "Chymical Medicine and Spiritual Alchemy", **Alchemical Poetry 1575- 1700**,. Ed. by Robert M Schuler, USA, Routledge Library Editions, 2013, p. 35.

⁴ Edgar Hill Duncan, "Donne's Alchemical Figures", **English Literary History**, Vol. 9, USA, John Hopkins University Press, p. 258.

states that John Donne and his wife had hard times together at the beginning of their marriage⁵. He gives the impression that he was accustomed to doing everything his own way. He was excluded from a certain society, but he never excluded himself from the universe.

Regarding that uniqueness in his perception, it is crucial to say that he uses the ideal principles of alchemy in his poetry to reach the wholeness of the spirituality and materiality in this universe. Thus, it is observed in his poetry that even the most irrelevant elements can be brought together or compared to one another. The poet goes beyond the boundaries by liberating the tangible and intangible elements through a bivious transformation which transcends, reaches to perfection in a way and becomes alchemy itself. Lakoff and Johnson's search on metaphor construction and consumption are, thus, relevant. Before moving through the analysis of alchemical images in the opted poems of John Donne, we can take into consideration Edgar Hill Duncan's remarks about the specific understanding of alchemy for John Donne as follows:

The perfection which medieval and renaissance alchemists ascribed to gold they explained[...] on the basis of the perfect balance and equality of the elements of which they considered to be made up.[...] The majority of Donne's alchemical images, however, are based on the theoretical rather than the experimental or practical side of science.⁶

3.1. "The Good Morrow"

The first poem to be examined in the context of transcendental experience through alchemical images is "The Good Morrow" for two reasons. Firstly, the title itself alludes to the idea of a new beginning, so it functions as a process of awakening and being enlightened for the reader as it does for the persona and his beloved. Moreover, the straightforward language of the poem paves a clear way to see the compounding of sensations and sentiments in a metaphysical poem while demonstrating the capability of Donne's alchemical analogies to transform and transcend the material and spiritual elements.

⁵ Roy Booth, **The Collected Poems of John Donne**, Great Britain, Wordsworth Editions, 2002, p.VI.

⁶ Duncan, **op. cit.**, p. 264.

In “The Good Morrow”, there are three stanzas; the first one refers to the past, the second one refers to the present and the third one refers to the future. The poem starts with a rhetorical question since he is not interested in the response of the beloved and he seems to have his mind set already:

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd on countrey pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the seven sleepers den? ⁷

The poet asks what his and his beloved's lives were like before they found each other. He makes a reference to their childhood which means the time they have not been mature individuals yet. As a child, their understanding of the world is limited and they just know the unrefined pleasures of the country. However, maturity has brought them an awareness. There is a close relationship between morning, epiphany and consciousness in these lines. He is referring to childish pleasures which are nourishment and sleep. They are the main needs of a newborn. These were only means of pleasure for them, because they did not awake and conscious then. The poet also mentions Seven Sleepers who slept in a dark cave for 200 years: “**Seven Sleepers of Ephesus**, the heroes of a famous legend that, because it affirmed the resurrection of the dead, had a lasting popularity in all Christendom and in Islam during the Middle Ages.”⁸ The poet and the beloved have slept like them in unawareness for so long. Regarding these, it can be implied that the two lovers are like two base materials that need to be brought together and love does bring them together. When they wake up in the morning, they are not dead any more. Here sleep and death might refer to the same state of unconsciousness. The morning brings resurrection of the dead, those two people. The narration will disclose that as in the process of alchemy, the dynamics of love take them together and proceed to a unified state of soul and mind. Their rustic and childish pleasures are transformed into a consciousness. The poet takes the imagery from the source domain of the

⁷ Roy Booth, *op. cit.*, p. 1, Stanza I, Lines 1-4.

⁸ “Seven Sleepers of Ephesus”, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, (accessed) <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Seven-Sleepers-of-Ephesus>, 06.06.2019.

unconscious people such as the child and the sleeper so as to construct the target domain of unconscious states such as immaturity, ignorance and rawness.

In the second stanza, it is a celebration of their present love. It starts with a positive phrase “Good Morrow” which the poem is called after:

And now good morrow to our waking soules,
Which watch not one another out of feare;
For love, all love of other sights controules,
And makes one little roome, an everywhere.
[...]
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have showne,
Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.⁹

This is a waking up of their souls or consciousness. With the rise of the sun, their erotic love transforms into a religious, even holy devotion, because their waking up gives the sense of going through the afterlife which is eternal. It is the start of a new phase in their life and soul; it is the celebration of love, and the awakening of the soul. There is no fear and no other dominance in their room. The union of their souls and their love reign. They see each other and everything through love. It is the love that brings them together. A moment of epiphany is signified here. A celebration of maturity is happening while keeping security, order and peace as the consequences of true love is indicated. Donne makes up images from the source domain of space, minor and major, personal and external, so as to refer to the target domain of intimacy, sincerity and truth. The lovers go beyond their selfish, private boundaries and their experience becomes a transcendental experience through love. There is a trust between the lovers in this room. With this trust and love, the man does not want to be with any other woman. True love causes restraint over country pleasures, carnal desires and the attraction of mere sights. As there is a juxtaposition between the space they create together and the materialistic world of the explorers, scientists or merchants, they are experiencing true love, satisfactory beyond physicalities and materialism. This human love spreads into the whole being. They each have their personal realms, their minds and souls; together with this kind of real love they

⁹ Booth, *op. cit.*, p. 1, Stanza II, Lines 8-14.

extend self love and create a realm for the two of them in addition to each of their personal worlds. The individual love transforms into a universal love and transcendental experience. This love is so great and true that wherever they come together like this chamber turns into the whole world, everywhere. In that sense, in this poem, there is an individualistic approach through true love and the idea of retaining the self in a wholeness. Now, the lovers have gone beyond the limitations of the walls of the room into the universe, and escaping the life of their era, reached all ages, the timeless era which may only be sustained by love. Such a transcendental experience brings them to this contemporary age even. This transformative experience seems to be similar to the transmutation of matter where base metals are converted into gold and a universal elixir is found through attempts in alchemy. The experiences in erotic love change and transform into an all-encompassing transcendental experience where the souls are unified and the love they have spreads into the whole being with the rise of the sun. Like alchemy's universal elixir, the lovers become immortal. Where in alchemy, the matter is not the base matter anymore but a universal elixir within the transmutation experience, the lovers are not mortal but immortal within the transcendental experience.

The image of immortality and wholeness are repeated in the third stanza as well:

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares,
And true plain hearts doe in the faces rest,
Where can we finde two better hemispheares
[...]
What ever dyes, was not mixt equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die.¹⁰

The lovers are unified in one and complete in their eyes which function not only as organs to perceive the physical world but also as the mediator for their souls to be fed by the mind and the heart. As they are together, each of them sees one another literally and metaphorically, physically and spiritually. Intimacy and truth in their heart and soul are reflected in their face and thus when they look at one another's

¹⁰ **Ibid.** Stanza III, Lines 15-17, 19-21.

face they perceive each other's heart and truth. The poet speaker regards their eyes, in which each other's face is reflected, as the hemispheres of the earth. They make the globe together, which refers to the notion of perfection as from the antiquity to Donne's time circle had been regarded as the most perfect geometrical shape. The circle is a universal symbol with extensive meaning. It represents the notions of totality, wholeness, perfection, eternity, timelessness. God is a circle whose center is everywhere. It also symbolizes the cycle of time and the journey of planets. It is the antithesis of square and the ultimate state of oneness.¹¹ As Elizabeth Scott Bauman emphasizes in her article, Donne "often used images in circles and circularity for both erotic and devotional poems."¹² It is necessary to say that the round shape is also a reference to the notion of immortality because a circle has no beginnings and ends. Likewise, in transcendental experience, the feeling is infinite. This transcendence from the eyes of one another to a universal vision can also be regarded as a reference to the terms of microcosm and macrocosm:

Macrocosm" and "microcosm" are philosophical terms referring, respectively, to the world as a whole and to some part, usually man, as a model or epitome of it. According to one version of this ancient analogy, man and the universe are constructed according to the same harmonic proportions, each sympathetically attuned to the other, each a cosmos ordered according to reason. By an imaginative leap, the universe itself was thought to be, like man, living and conscious, a divine creature whose nature is reflected in human existence¹³

In accordance with the conceptual metaphor theory, Donne employs the source domain the heavenly body, the planet to relate to the target domain of unity and completeness. He furthers the semantic consumption through the space of alchemy while he refers to a comparison of corruption and perfection. The world will be perfect with their perfect mixture as emphasized in the last three lines directly. It was believed that death and corruption is a consequence of a lack of right mixture of the materials, vital elements. The vital elements are earth, air, fire and water. They are

¹¹ Eric Jaffe, **Dictionary of Symbolism**, Michigan UP, the USA, 2001, p, 32.

¹² Elizabeth Scott Bauman, "Donne's Circles", (accessed) <https://www.pulterprocet.northwestern.edu>, 8.12.2019

¹³ Donald Levy, "Macrocosm and Microcosm", (accessed) <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities>, 05.05.2019.

believed to be essential to life. Human being and the universe are formed by these four elements, which refers to the notions of balance and perfection.¹⁴As the lovers mix equally, that is, they love each in the same degree, there appears a true and perfect mixture which will lead to immortality and a true transcendental experience. The analogy is again from alchemy; when there is a true transmutation in alchemy, a universal wholeness will be sustained. If four core elements, as an example, are mixed right, in due proportion, one complete universe will be created.

In conclusion, the early physical, superficial, sensual, worldly and erotic love transform into a mature love through experiencing the rise of the sun which symbolises enlightenment, where tension escapes and mutual trust is born, and a transcendental perfection emerges.

3.2. “The Canonization”

In “The Canonization”, John Donne brings a new dimension to the concept of canonization. Within the frame of Lakoff and Johnson’s theory of the conceptual metaphor we can say that he uses the source domain of religion, specifically the concept of canonisation referring to the target domain of the special love, the concept of exemplum. He presents love as a canonizing element and glorifies the union of love in a multi-dimensional way including the physical and spiritual aspects. Love functions like an alchemical substance and transforms the idea of death to eternity. The lovers are canonized and literature acquires a monumental qualification. Thus, what is described in the poem is a transcendental experience.

The poet creates an alternative to the conventional concept of canonization. It accords to the conceptual metaphor theory as mostly one understands something unfamiliar via something familiar. In general, the word canonization is a reference to death, because only a dead person can be canonized and becomes a saint. Saints are mediators between people and God. People pray to saints for their wishes. However, the alchemical analogies used by the poet transforms the idea of death to a concept of immortalization. It is implied that the poet persona will talk about death in this poem. However, when the form of the poem is considered, it is crucial to say that the first

¹⁴ Jaffe, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

and last lines of each stanza end with the word love. In alchemical terms, by this repetition he both underlines this theme of love and order, and creates a circle, which refers in Donne's poetry at some occasions to spiritual terms at the deep level of the words meaning eternity rather than merely to spatial terms at the surface level of meaning.¹⁵ As in the previous poem, Donne again refers to "circle" here, and reminds the reader also of life circle, which is always a metaphor for eternity, and other related notions such as wholeness.

He compares Phoenix, which is a mythological entity, to sexual intercourse. "[F]or centuies, the symbol of Phoeix has appeared in various cultures, signifying life and rebirth forms [...] life and death, ending and beginning. It has been used to express someting as simple as the sun rising and setting each day. It can be a symbol for royalty, or nobility".¹⁶ It also refers to Jesus Christ's death and resurrection according to M. A. Abraham. Similar to the interpretation of "The Good Morrow", the physical terms transform into spiritual terms where the lovers become immortal reaching the encompassing divine love through enlightenment and resurrection of the lover. The transmutation of an erotic love leads to a transcendental state where immortality, wholeness, perfection, nobility, and divinity are experienced.

As usual, the tone of the poem is argumentative. In the first stanza the persona expresses his wish not to discuss issues any more since he wants true noble love. He assumes that he has an opponent who disapproves of his love, and disagreeing with him he asks him to stop arguing about eternal feelings. Instead, he may only refer to his ailments and such language of rejection needs to be left aside:

For Godsake hold your tongue and let me love,
Or chide my palsie, or my gout,¹⁷

¹⁵ Lisa Corton, "John Donne's Use of Space", *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 4.2, Special Issue 3, Sept. 1998, p. 1.

¹⁶ M. A. Abrams, *Rising from the Ashes: The Importance of the Phoeix*, (accessed) <http://www.mugglenet.com>, 7.11.2019

¹⁷ Booth, *op. cit.*, p. 6, Stanza I, Lines 1-2.

The persona is pointing to an external pressure to their relationship. According to the stanza, somebody is talking too much about their love and the persona tells them not to do.

In the second stanza, he turns to himself. But his emotions still stay strong. He is not angry but he reproaches the implied opponent. He is rather removed from the raging world, which contrasts with his peaceful love:

Alas, alas, who's injur'd by my love?
What merchants ships have my sighs drown'd?
Who saies my teares have overflow'd his ground?¹⁸

His responses to and pain of love have never harmed anybody physically or financially. He says his tears have not overflowed any ground owned by someone. He has shed his tears but not too much so he still has hope for true love. In the poem sigh is associated with the wind: his sigh does not make a trade ship drown and thus his love does not damage economy. He tries to prove that his love does not harm the course of life and business. In this regard, the poet compares materialism, material dimension of life and mercenariness to an intangible platform and the world of senses and emotions. Donne exploits the materialistic context as the source domain to refer metaphorically to the target domain of true and pure love, away from harm, competition and strife. Such a love may lead to transcendental experience which leaves the material dimension of life. Such a love will be the world of immortality, divinity and solidarity.

In the third stanza, the poet speaker is talking about the essence of him and his beloved. As it is mentioned before, John Donne is a poet who presents love in a three dimensional way. He does not take sexuality out of love. He adds more to it; he associates it with a philosophical and spiritual realm. Thus his analogical alchemy is fulfilled through a multi-dimensional notion of love. He transcends through love and passion. As it can be implied in his poems, sexuality is not only a lustful moment; it is a motive to unite and harmonize with nature and the universe as in alchemy, it is the base material which will be transformed into a universal form. That is why the symbolization is significant here:

¹⁸ **Ibid.** Stanza II, Lines 10-12.

Call us what you will, wee are made such by love;
[...]
And wee in us finde the Eagle and the Dove.
The Phoenix ridle hath more wit
By us, we two being one, are it.
So, to one neutrall thing both sexes fit,
Wee dye and rise the same,¹⁹

The Eagle is very masculine, powerful and a protector and the dove is a bird that stands for peace, fragility and femininity. The so-called opposites function to unite and constitute completion. The couple reaches perfection, thus, eternity via their pure love. In soul and body they unite. Their feeling connects them. They also unite in intercourse. When they become one, they die and rise like a phoenix, which is a metaphor for their transformative love. Phoenix is reborn out of its ashes. Like phoenix they rise up after erotic love. Orgasm is thought as a short death: "The saying derives from the term 'la petite mort' which means little death and used to express that orgasm is a subsequent to death."²⁰ Thus, it is exactly the peak moment that functions as a gate to run away from the materialistic world. They are burnt with their love and turned into ashes to be reborn. The transcendental experience is grounded in this material world starting from the tangible actions and mortality and ending in intangibility, that is, immortality, divinity, and nobility. Within the frame of conceptual metaphor theory the source domain of mythology with a cultural symbol relates to the target domain of abstract states of perfection and immortality. As in alchemy and the alchemical idea of perfect mixture, two complete materials, base constituents in transformation constitute wholeness, a neutral entity transmuting so-called opposites.

The theme of metaphorical death and resurrection of the lovers foreshadows the topic of their physical death:

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7, Stanza III, Lines 19, 22-26.

²⁰ "la Petite Mort: Riding Lifes Multiple Orgasms", (accessed), <https://www.tantricalchemy.net/tantraalchemyblog/2015/12/29/la-petite-mort-riding-lifes-multiple-orgasms-little-deaths>, 09.06.2019.

Wee can dye by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombes and hearse
Our legend bee, it will be fit for verse;
[...]
We'll build in sonnets pretty roomes;
[...]
The greatest ashes, as half acre tombes,
And by these hymnes, all shall approve
Us Canoniz'd for Love.²¹

In the last stanza the poet speaker is still conscious of oppositions against their love, which might be an unconventional one. It might be considered unsuitable by others, by the public and this public opinion might be voiced by representative of society, by the implied addressee in the argumentative poem. The couple might be regarded as an unmatched one, as in the opening of the poem the persona has referred to his ailments which might be originated from old age. Thus, the strained speaker sounds to fed up with the opposition and discussion.

The persona says if they are not suitable for tombs and hearses, they are suitable for poetry. They and their love are outside the dominant system and its concerns. They are away from the materialistic world. They and their love fit the realm of art. The transcendental experience, true love or physical love can not make them immortal literally. Their love can be immortal as long as it reaches beyond their physical existence. The value of their love is beyond the political, military and financial achievements. The poet suggests that their love can get its reward in the realm of art and literature.

The poet speaker suggests that “by these hymnes”, which is a type of verse, a song of praise or joy²², they will be sanctified, regarded as exemplary with this love and transcendence. In accordance with the conceptual metaphor theory, the poet discusses something abstract via visible images. A work of art can be handed to next generations and thus owned by the future; immortality and timelessness are brought by that work of art. Their love will be immortalized through sonnets and verses, so they will make their mark throughout history. The transformation of the love affair, a worldly experience, to the abstract realm of art constitutes an alchemical context in

²¹ Booth, *op. cit.*, p.7, Stanzas I-IV, Lines 28-29, 30, 32, 34-36.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 220.

that sense. Their love is out of this world, so death will be the beginning of their transcendental experience to eternity.

John Donne reveals his belief in the afterlife in the lines here. Thus, death is not viewed as a fearful end. On the contrary, it is a transition to eternity where they can get away from the materialistic world and live their love liberally. That is why he chooses literature as the realm of existence for the ones who want to get away from the materialistically oriented world. Sonnets are a metaphor for their room, it is the space they will find in literature. Known and remembered by generations of readers, their love will be saved from death, annihilation. Their love has no material gain and will be spiritual as they are such exemplary lovers like saints, who are guides of society and emblems of possible perfection.

3.3. “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”

In “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”, the poet describes a strong bond of love which has already reached the perfect mixture of physical and spiritual aspects. In alchemical terms, the perfection constitutes the unity and eternity of their love. In comparison to the love of sublunary lovers, that is, the couples in this fallen, imperfect world of eventual decay, the love of the poet and his beloved is a transcendental experience. It reaches to a wholistic point. That is why their love overcomes the sense of absence and even death. This is the reason why there is nothing to mourn and the poet forbids in the title. In the frame of conceptual metaphor theory, the poet enables a conceptual domain of farewelling to be stripped off its ordinary attributes, possible grieving and sense of loss. The significance is constructed by the incongruity between the source and target domains in the usual association, leading to a reconsideration of the relation and its potentialities.

At the very beginning of the poem, the persona initiates us to the idea of death:

As virtuous men passe mildly away,
And whisper to their soules, to goe,
Whilst some of their sad friends doe say
The breath goes now, and some say, no: ²³

²³ **Ibid.**, p. 33, Stanza I, Line 1-4.

Employing the preposition “as” the poet speaker establishes a comparison between his separation from the beloved and virtuous men’s separation from soul. This is a deathbed scene. The attendants are not sure about the forthcoming death of their friend and watching for the last breath. Whereas their vigilance reflects the anxiety about death and the love of life, the virtuous man is ready to pass away and willing to desert life and this world. For such a man there is no reason for restlessness and resistance; having lived virtuously they have confidence and inner peace, and thus they die in peace and comfort.

He turns to himself at the beginning of the second stanza:

So let us melt, and make no noise,
No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move²⁴

The phrases “sigh-tempest” and “teare-flood” refer to the exaggerating style of 16th century sonneteers, whom he criticises here. According to him, as opposed to those sonneteers, spiritual love needs to be balanced, serious, intellectual, and beautiful in its polished simplicity. It includes no exaggeration, thus, artificiality, superficiality and untruth. In contrast to these excessive, sentimental shows revealing a lack of restraint, moderation and wisdom, the persona asks for just melting. It is a metaphor for their separation. It would be so smooth and easy. Because of the simplicity and balance of their love, as if melting, they can get away in a silent act, like the good man’s deserting soul, not much to say about sorrow. Due to the strength of their bonds with one another, this valediction will not bring a mourning. The separation, metaphorical nonexistence will not cause any commotion. Through death, the lovers will be transformed into a transcendental state of unity where people “would not die at all but would still experience the advent of Christ in their lifetimes and would go directly into the Kingdom of God.”²⁵

In the fourth stanza, the speaker makes use of another comparison. He puts forth the image of a pair of wordly lovers, a couple of fall and imperfection. He talks

²⁴ **Ibid.**, Stanza II, Line 1-2.

²⁵ “Christianity and Concepts of Life After Death”, (accessed)
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity>, 8.11.2019.

about the sublunary lovers whose love is constituted differently from their virtuous and strong love:

Dull sublunary lovers love
(Whose soule is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.²⁶

The persona again refers to alchemical imagery. The material, the elements of their bond are fragile, liable to change and corruption. For sublunary lovers who focus on sensation, the absence is not convenient. Hence, it ruins the components of their love which is sensuous. Based on that idea, the love of sublunary lovers can vanish as soon as they fall apart. Since they are connected just by physicality, when they are physically separate the relationship perishes. Their love is devoid of virtues, spiritual provisions to keep it intact and last forever. A move in space or a change in the relationship causes termination.

Unlike the love of those dull lovers, their love has already transcended the physical dimension and extends to the realm of souls as is shown in the following lines:

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must goe, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion
Like gold to airy thinness beat.²⁷

Their separation does not constitute a damage to their love, bring a break in their relationship or make a difference. It is not destructive, but even an expansion. The poet speaker brings up alchemical imagery again. He likens the distancing of the lovers in space to the expansion of gold when beaten. Such a literal and metaphorical distance can only cause enhancement to these perfect lovers. The persona compares the expansion of their love to the expansion of gold which is a very soft and precious metal that can be beaten as thin as air. He means that the value of their love will not lose anything just like gold does not. Hence, their love reaches perfection and

²⁶ **Loc. cit.**, Stanza IV, Line 13-16.

²⁷ Booth, **op. cit.**, p. 34, Stanza VI, Line 21-24.

becomes eternal. Now, their love is so much related to the idea of eternity and divineness. Their love goes beyond the worldliness, getting more perfect and eternal than ever before. In this regard, it needs to be mentioned here that this is the difference in John Donne's perception; he does not describe gold as a sign of wealth, he refers to it as a means of reaching eternity, adding a spiritual and philosophising dimension to it. Through the metaphysical conceit, he shows that gold can be compared to love in spiritual terms rather than a materialistic attitude. In the context of alchemy gold stands for perfection in a process of changing base materials. Whereas the lovers are mortal beings, base materials, in the process of distancing, owing to their moral aspect, gold, that is, a relationship of integrity, perfect and eternal love, comes out. Pertinently to the conceptual metaphor theory, the latter abstract concepts are expressed by the former tangible images.

In the next stanzas, the persona continues to describe their love through a metaphysical conceit which is known as John Donne's compass conceit:

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do.

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.²⁸

In these lines, the idea of stability and endurance are seen again. One foot is fixed and the other turns around it. According to the metaphysical conceit, their souls resemble a compass. The poet uses the conceit to depict the vigour of their love based on balance. The fixed foot is the lady's soul leaning after the moving foot, the man. Even if the persona goes away, home will be sustained by the woman; in faith, patience and meekness the beloved will remain attentive and harmonious to the movement, the deeds of the persona. They move in a circle which is drawn by the

²⁸ **Ibid.**, Stanzas VII-VIII, Line 25-32.

compass. Jan Wassenaar describes the symbolic definition of circle as follows: “the circle is considered as the perfect shape. It is the symbol for the total symmetry of the divine [...] Greek scholar Proclus wrote: ‘the circle is the first, the simplest and most perfect form’. As a Christian symbol, it represents eternity.”²⁹ Since the origin of the completed shape might be any point in time and space, a sense of eternity which leads to transcendental experience is evoked by the conceit concerning their loving souls and their relationship.

In the closing part of the poem, the persona completes the poem and the drawing of a circle by arriving at the same point he started the poem with:

Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begunne.³⁰

In these lines, the firm standing of the lady ensures the continuity of their love, because a perfect circle can be drawn as long as the other foot is fixed and stable. The lady stands fixed in the center and the persona turns around her. Thus, the perfection and eternity of love are not harmed. The compass conceit substantiates the same attribution as the alchemic gold metaphor. At this point, it can be implied that the poet speaker draws a circle throughout the poem. Wherever he goes and whatever he does, the lady is the centre of his life. Donne is diligent to keep drawing the perfect circle within the compass conceit to refer to the transcendental experience. The message, the quality of the lady and their relationship are conveyed by a practice complying with the conceptual metaphor theory; the source domain provides a visible image of geometry and of the realm of objects and the target domain presents the ideals of love such as fortitude and faithfulness.

3.4. Conclusion

Throughout Chapter III, it is indicated that John Donne uses various alchemical terms and images such as material, elements, mixture, gold, elixir,

²⁹ Jan Wassenaar, “Conic Section: Circle”, (accessed), <http://www.2dcurves.com/conicsection/conicsectionnc.html>, 25.07.2019.

³⁰ Booth, *loc. cit.*, Stanza IX, Line 35-36.

expansion and union with which he creates analogies in his poems to present the transcendental experience.

Cindy Blakeley comments upon the alchemical effect on Donne's poetry as follows:

Donne recalls the alchemical premise of regeneration, rebirth, resurrection, spiritual reunion. Because he sincerely trusts that something more remarkable will be created in heaven than existed when he and Ann were lovers on earth, he is able to find the courage to endure a miserable existence that allows him no sensual contact with her.³¹

According to Blakeley, Donne considers their separation as a regeneration of love in the image of God rather than a destruction of love, and alchemy is more of a religious vision that leads him to an understanding of life and "the promise of a sacred Reunion with his beloved Ann in the glory and splendor of heaven."³² Donne's peculiar interest in alchemy might derive from his personal life as a husband who lost his wife and also as a preacher who was waiting for the fulfilment of the promises made by the religion.

We have seen in the analyses of the poems in this chapter that in accordance with the conceptual metaphor theory, Donne's imagery and conceits make use of a source domain which is relatively more tangible, familiar or visible to relate to a target domain which enables concerns with philosophising, argumentation, abstract entities, notions and ideas. The transcendental experience is significant in John Donne's poetry, because as it is observed through the opted poems, there are multiple ways of transcending such as love, sex, elixir and alchemy. In addition to these, John Donne is transforming literature into a power, source like alchemy and a way to go alternate between materiality and spirituality. Therefore, he can make "one little roome, an everywhere."³³ This might as well encompass any time and modernity.

³¹ Cindy Blakely, "John Donne's Alchemical Vision", (accessed), <https://esirc.emporia.edu/handle/123456789/1729> 11.06.2019.

³² **Ibid.**

³³ Booth, **op. cit.**, p. 1, Stanza II, Line 11.

CHAPTER IV

MODERNITY AND THE TRANSCENDENTAL EXPERIENCE IN JOHN DONNE'S POETRY

“ I am neither within time nor entirely beyond.”¹

John Donne as a 17th century poet is different from his contemporaries, because his poems are distinguished from conventional English poetry. The characteristics of his poetry brought innovation to the perception of poetry in 17th century England. He blends sensations with serious notions of philosophy, science and religion. Based on the metaphysical conceits and analogies through alchemical images in his poetry, he not only manages to elicit a transcendental experience for the readership but also presents relatable concerns and elements of modernity which may appeal to the modern reader.

This chapter aims to observe how John Donne elicits the transcendental experience in the sense that his poetry also addresses modernity, modern concerns. Donne's poetry reflects modern qualities for several reasons. First of all, his courageous attitude which caused a new genre of poetry makes his poetry more remarkable for not only the 17th century but also the modern readership. The goal of his poetry, suitably, appeals to the core metaphysical problem of humanity of all ages; conveyance of the experience simultaneously in a specific and wholistic way, analysing via syntheses. His multiplicity in vision, diction and structure comes into picture when he creates personas and mise-en-scenes in his poems. His poetry is well appreciated by some of the succeeding major practitioners as Roy Booth points out the reappearance of Donne's poems as follows:

¹ Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, (accessed) <https://rob389.com/pp/en/200849>, 12.06.2019.

By the eighteenth century Pope was 'versifying' Donne's satires, Robert Browning was a rare nineteenth century admirer, until the twentieth century re-discovered his fascination, largely prompted by the Grierson edition of the poems in 1912.²

As it can be implied from Booth's statement, there were times that John Donne's poetry had drawn attention since the 17th century. As a poet who examined love in his poems without ignoring the sexual and psychological aspects, alongside a moralising and dignifying sublimation, the depiction of love as a three dimensional notion seems to be a modern attitude, especially in a period not having Freud and his suggestions. His realistic approach to the psychological and physical aspects of a relationship between man and woman adds his poetry a deep understanding of human nature. He analyzes the realities of human life and tries to generate an alternative reality which makes the transcendental experience possible in a sense of expansive thinking and liberal perception.

His literary style does not have many counterparts in the corpus of poetry, so it can be said that his originality is a factor that contributed to the surprise experienced by the 17th century reader. While the 17th century reader is astonished by his brand new style, in the 19th and 20th centuries, the reader and the men of letters are impressed by possible mutuality with John Donne in their concerns and approach to poetry. Dayton Haskin debates Donne's poetic genius within Coleridge's commentary in the following lines:

Coleridge intuited that Dr Johnson, having spoken disapprovingly of the discordia concors, had recognized Donne's remarkable talent without fully appreciating it. Coleridge understood the 'combination of dissimilar images', indeed the 'discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike', to be a mark of imaginative power.[...] there were basic similarities between metaphysical wit and the secondary imagination, which 'dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate; or where the process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify'³

² Roy Booth, **The Collected Poems of John Donne**, Great Britain, Wordsworth Editions, 2002, p. V.

³ Dayton Haskin, **John Donne in the Nineteenth Century**, Great Britain, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 40.

As Coleridge says, the conceits and images used in Donne's poems can only be the production of great wit. In each poem he provides the reader with the process of uttering ingenious expression about relatable concerns. Here, it is necessary to state that he could talk about the most ordinary things in his poetry through a defamiliarising use of language, and transform the ordinary things into greater subjects of his poems. In addition to handling love with its sexual or metaphysical aspect, his confounding temperament, imagery and synthesis out of contrasting elements put forward poems which are able to be regarded as modern texts. Mina Urgan draws attention to his dilemmas and complexity as the modern characteristics of Donne's poetry. According to her:

His writing in colloquial language and discussing ordinary subjects instead of only glorious and poetic subjects [...] applying entirely new analogies instead of conventional imageries, complexity, perplexity, emphasizing the sexuality of man and woman relationships are characteristics of modern day poets.⁴

For Urgan, poetry includes sentiments and sensations. It is not merely compounding them. Rather, it is transforming a sensation to a sentiment and a sentiment into sensation. John Donne's attitude towards poetry leads to the transformation between sensations and sentiments alluding to the alchemical analogies which pave the way to the transcendental experience in his poems rendering his poetry appealing to the modern reader. Accordingly, the conceptual metaphor theory may explain and support this view on Donne's artistry and effect as it focuses on verbal outcomes, semantic potentialities and perceptual praxis. Donne's artistry transforms and transmutes semantic domains in an intellectual stamina similar to modern art practices.

4.1. "The Flea"

In "The Flea", the poet uses a flea which is an irritating insect to constitute a sexual metaphor. The choice of an insect is significant in two aspects. First of all, it can be implied as a sign of Donne's modern and flexible tenderness about the variety

⁴ Mina Urgan, *İngiliz Edebiyatı Tarihi*, İstanbul, Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2017, pp. 169-170.

of a poem's subject. As a man of the modern age, his mind is liberal, without biases; here in respect to the subject of poetry. He shows that not only wars, invasions, piety and magnificent love stories but also a little insect can be the subject of a poem. He also criticizes the unnatural, pretentious values and virtues of the society. The flea functions as a metaphor which puts emphasis on how they are exaggerated.

As it is mentioned previously, John Donne uses ordinary elements in his poetry. However, the meaning and significance he implements on these elements go beyond ordinariness and appear to be much more meaningful than predicted. That is, a flea is nobody's favourite animal and nobody talks about a flea in a love poem. However, Donne transforms this regular perception as in the following lines. Mingling the blood of two lovers refers to reach the perfect mixture as an alchemical analogy. So it becomes an example of the unpredictability and transcendental experience in John Donne's poetry:

It suck'd me first, and now nocks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee;
Thou know'st that this cannot be said A sinne,
nor shame, nor losse of maidenhead,⁵

In these lines, the persona's anxiety is about the social and moral restrictions of the time, because he sees them as a barrier preventing him from having sexual intercourse with his lover. He criticizes the notions of honour and chastity with which the society is obsessed. Although he tries to persuade his lover to have a sexual intercourse with him, he does not need to do this since the flea's sucking both the poet and his lover and compounding their blood in its body turns into a transcendental experience for the poet persona, his beloved and the flea.

Through the flea, he humourously looks down on the values that are artificially promoted. This kind of conservative moral values take away sexual freedom and the independence and individuality of people. It can be implied that John Donne chooses a flea to belittle the repressive and unnatural moralistic values

⁵ Booth, *op. cit.*, p. 26, Stanza, I, Line 3-6.

through the little body of a flea. Thus, he can express that these conservative values are not more obstructive than this flea in the following lines:

This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is⁶

The poet likens the flea to a marriage bed, because the flea denotes the consummation of their love. Concurrently, by describing it as a temple, he blesses the physical and spiritual unity of their love which is more natural and virtuous than the conventional constraint of chastity. According to the poet speaker, his lover does not commit a sin or lose her chastity when they unite as their blood is brought together by the flea. The flea can be regarded as a tool of transformation through the poet's alchemical discourse. The socially and morally conservative rules do not matter for the poet persona.

He tries to persuade his beloved until the final lines of the poem:

‘Tis true, then learne how false, feares bee;
Just so much honor, when thou yeeld’st to mee,
Will wast, as this flea’s death tooke life from thee.⁷

The man claims that since the flea functions as the temple of their marriage and the symbol of their wholeness, the death of the flea is a slighting act of all these social propositions and precepts. Society's limitations on their individualities might go away like that small life of the flea. Likewise, the man suggests that as much slight as the loss of blood by the flea bite has been would be the loss of the lady's honour in case they make love.

The poem is clearly criticizing the conservative values of the 17th century through the emancipatory perspective of John Donne. His attitude leads the content of the poem to the transcendental experience in two ways. The first one is through the flea which is compounding the blood of the two lovers and regarding it like a sexual intercourse without losing any virtues. It constitutes overcoming and going beyond the familiar patterns and understanding of intercourse or affair subvertingly,

⁶ Roy Booth, *op. cit.*, p. 27, Stanza, II, Line 12-13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Stanza, III, Line 25-27.

via a trivial and absurd setting or factor. The second level is, thus, the manner and critical approach of the poem. In a satirical way, in a way through burlesque, the poet speaker, in his argumentative tone, aims to transcend the limits of conventions. In his attempt to convince the lady of the convenience and innocence of fornication, he also transcends ordinary logic, mathematical vision and moderate discourse. Donne's style of surprise, absurdity, oblique resentment, refined criticism, subvertive discourse and subjective vision relates to modernity.

He reflects subjectivity, individuality, liberation and fun. He seems to acknowledge a neglected aspect of human experience and potentiality in a modern aspiration. Regarding Donne's outlook as a poet, Virginia Woolf states as follows:

Not only did he see each spot and wrinkle which defaced the fair outline; but he noted with the utmost curiosity his own reaction to such contrasts and was eager to lay side by side the two conflicting views and to let them make their own dissonance. It is this desire for nakedness in an age that was florid, this determination to record not the likenesses which go to compose a rounded and seemly whole, but the inconsistencies that break up semblances, the power to make us feel the different emotions of love and hate and laughter at the same time, that separate Donne from his contemporaries.⁸

While expressing his feelings and thoughts, his intensity, his challenging attitude towards his beloved and the limitations are presented in a modern mise-en-scene in "The Flea". The conceptual metaphor theory may also explain the endeavour in the text. The basic metaphor around which all the argument and fun evolve relates to modernity. Whereas a scale carries an insect, the other pair is too heavy with great concepts. The source domain is visible and trivial, a microcosm whereas the target domain constitutes tradition, a moral and value system and critique. The unbalance between the two domains pours out a modern vision where absolute truths and metanarratives get transparent, vulnerable and liable to questioning.

4.2. "Holy Sonnet X"

"Holy Sonnet X" is one of the nineteen sonnets in "Holy Sonnets" sequence written by John Donne. The specific sonnet is chosen in order to exemplify Donne's

⁸ Virginia Woolf, *The Second Common Reader*, USA, Mariner Books, 2003, p, 105.

peculiar interest in the notion of death which is mentioned in Chapter I in addition to pointing out his literary style in a poem which is not about love and sexuality. The poem is proper to indicate the confounding temperament and multiplicity of the poet's vision which transforms the confrontation with death into a transcendental experience. The poet's attitude and diction address modernity again. A big concept like death is subverted in an analytical, daring, peculiar tone of naturally faint humour. Donne is almost cynical in his approach to death. Within the frame of conceptual metaphor theory, the source domain is the human world, a familiar concept of man whereas the target domain is another big concept, an abstract and inscrutable notion.

In this poem, Donne challenges death which is presented as a personified respondent:

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not soe,
[...]
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.⁹

He personifies death and challenges it as if death is a rival to get rid of. In this poem, Donne uses more than one metaphor on death. In one line, death is compared to an arrogant man, in another, to a poor man, and in another, to a weak man. So much so that the speaker even condescends and puts up with death's existence telling it not to die since death would not achieve killing him. Treating the subject that way, John Donne contrasts with his contemporaries, because death is generally depicted as a scary, dark and the doomed end for people in the eyes of the other literary figures.

John Donne's distinguished approach to death can be implied as a revelation of his identity as an ecclesiastic who believes in the afterlife according to Christianity or as a man of letters who goes beyond the ordinariness by putting unusual conceits into his poetry. John Donne's fascination by death and application of alchemical images to this topic make him perceive death as a transition from the worldliness to the realm of eternity.

⁹ Booth, *op. cit.*, p. 251, Line 1-2.

Thus, there is no way that death can make his wife afraid as is shown in the following lines:

Thou art slave to fate, Chance, kings and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,
[...]
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death thou shalt die.¹⁰

Here, the persona personifies death and addresses it in a defiant way, does not regard it as an end to himself or his beloved, even death is supposed to die like a mortal human being. Death is not so able an entity either; it relies on agency such as chance, cruel men and disasters, it cannot work alone. Like a modern adventurer or entrepreneur, the poet is undermining or challenging a so-called absolute truth or a well-established habit. The poet brings an end to the poem and death in a victorious manner, because he believes that death is not more than a short sleep after which people will wake into their eternal life. The passage to the phase of death is reduced to a short sleep carrying one to eternity. All these almost wipes death off. By killing death, he goes beyond mental and physical norms; when death is personified, it also turns into a mortal being. His subject and genre get almost closer to science fiction, which subverts physical laws. Therefore, the poet manages to make an alchemical transformation creating a scene where man is immortal while death is mortal, which in itself elicits an obvious transcendental experience for the reader.

The poem is also a direct attack to the fear of death which is caused by worldliness. He is not afraid, because its prowess is denied to death as his religion has promised him for the afterlife. He believes that the delightfulness of the eternal life will overcome death which causes such a worldly fear.

The persona has a passion to overcome death to experience eternity, because his perception of death is befitting for a modern approach to death which is stated by Lee Raymond as follows:

¹⁰ **Ibid.**, Line 9-10, 13-14.

The modern meaning of the world is generated through the drive to create and preserve as actions that empower the unfolding of world mastery. Loss of life [...] exemplifies loss of creativity [...] For that reason, death in modernity is treated as the end of life, the termination of production. A gulf exists between death and modern concepts centered on life as production. Only by denying death can modern individuals pursue their quest for world mastery.¹¹

In consideration of Lee Raymond's statement, Donne's taking away the mystical power of death illustrates futuristic imagination. Samuel Taylor Coleridge appreciated Donne for his special creativity as Dayton Haskin states below:

What Coleridge most valued in Donne was a vital capacity for creation, a teeming energy that could not be accounted for by the detached scrutiny that Johnson had applied to 'metaphysical' poetry. Coleridge believed that Donne was a poet of Imagination¹²

Donne's imagination, thus, becomes a vitalising engine to carry his production to the space outside his age.

4.3. "The Broken Heart"

"The Broken Heart" deals with lovesickness from a different angle in each stanza. In this poem, the metaphysical conceits and the confounding perception of time develop a modern point of view in the context of the transcendental experience as one more time feeling, senses and thought coexist and there is a reference to multiple vision. In an alchemical analogy responses and images transform, and experience is processed into deduction. From the aspect of the conceptual metaphor theory, concerning many images, the source domain is again tangible elements whereas the target domain supplies intangible states and a range of feelings.

In this poem, the poet talks about his own broken heart:

He is starke mad, who ever sayes,
That he hath beene in love an houre,
Yet not that love so soone decayes,
[...]

¹¹ Lee Raymond, "The Deconstruction of Death: Postmodernism and Near Death", **Journal of Near Death Studies**, Vol. 22, Spring 2004, p. 185.

¹² Haskin, **loc.cit.**

Who will beleeve mee, if I sweare
That I have had the plague yeare?¹³

He says that one can fall in love in one hour but it may decay soon. According to this metaphysical conceit, the poet aims to say that love can encompass a person, but it can also leave very quickly after perishing the heart. He compares two dissimilar things in an unexpected way to express the greatness of his woe. The process of love in Donne's description resembles the process of plague which is a disease spreading and affecting the human body badly in a short period of time. Also, due to his confounding perception of time, he compares an hour of love to a year of plague. The conception of time is modern as it acknowledges the differentiation between clock time and subjective time. Like other modern entities of relativity, time can be relative due to the mental and sensational state of a human being.

The third stanza is addressing the one who is the cause of the persona's broken heart. He describes the heart as if it is not a part of his body. Interestingly, the poet employs fragmentation, in a modern fashion. It begins from this stanza. However, the more remarkable point is that he says he leaves the room without his heart which is broken into pieces. His love is not reciprocated, so his heart is quite fragile and shattered like glass as is seen in the following lines:

I brought a heart into the roome,
But from the roome, I carried none with mee:
[...]
More pittie unto mee: but Love, alas,
At one first blow did shiver it as glasse.¹⁴

In the last stanza, the poet talks about being nothing which evokes **Being and Nothingness** by Jean Paul Sartre. As Sartre says: "Nothingness beyond the world accounts for absolute negation."¹⁵ When Donne's lines are examined in the light of Sartre's definition regarding the modern human being it is implied that the persona

¹³ Booth, *op. cit.*, p. 32, Stanza I, Lines, 1-3, 5-6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33, Stanza, III, Lines, 19-20, 23-24.

¹⁵ Jean Paul Sartre, **Being and Nothingness**, USA, Routledge, 2003, p. 21.

and the addressee of his unrequited love do not exist anymore. After all he does not have a heart to survive and be able to love again. The only thing he has is the broken pieces of his shattered heart stuck in his breast as shown in the following lines:

Yet nothing can to nothing fall,
Nor any place be empty quite,
Therefore I thinke my breast hath all
Those peeces still, though they be not unite;
And now as broken glasses Show
A hundred lesser faces, so
My ragges of heart can like, wish and adore,
But after one such love, can love no more.¹⁶

Being and Nothingness was published for the first time in 1943 and interestingly John Donne's 17th century poem can refer to the context of Sartre's definition, especially in the first lines in the last stanza. A reader of today can trace down almost an existentialist attitude in Donne.¹⁷ As in the respect of consciousness it concerns subjectivity and relativity, the person's perception of the inner and outer worlds is shaped by his conscious and maybe unconscious motives, and his responses are also shaped by his conscious and maybe unconscious knowledge about himself and the world or people.

The poet speaker's heart stops existing in order not to fall and be broken again. In another farfetched and almost comical manner, the plot may relate to science fiction again, this time awaiting an age of organ transplantation including the stopping of the heart, suspended animation and reanimation. The first line of the stanza is a negation for the heart of the speaker. As long as his love is not answered by his beloved, there is no point in existing. In a paradox he expresses the greatness of his love; owing to the previous disappointment he has lost his heart metaphorically, also losing his ability to love again, and simultaneously he cannot love again because after such a love and with a heart so broken other possibilities cannot have a chance.

¹⁶ Booth, *loc.cit.* Stanza III, Lines, 25-32.

¹⁷ "Jean Paul Sartre", **Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, (accessed), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sartre/>, 04.01.2020.

The fact that his consciousness is filled with her and his memory is sealed by her image is visualised by a strong image and conceit. In the fourth stanza, the broken heart like broken glass is fragmented into many pieces, and worse, they are still in his breast. In a fertile metaphor, because his heart has been sealed by her image, now each piece is reflecting her. It/she exists in a lesser fashion as the wholeness is destructed, yet because of the sharpness and multitude of the pieces of glass, the heartache is severe. Every broken piece in his breast is symbolically the remains of his unrequited love. The notion of wholeness and perfection is ruined in an irreparable way. His feelings are turned into rags which will not be able to love anymore. When his heart is broken into pieces, his love transforms into woe. Owing to the fragmentation and lesser fashion, what he feels can only be lesser emotions such as liking, wishing and adoring. Due to his loss and pain, he argues that he cannot be drawn to love, the higher sentiment, again. Reversely, he is confessing his doom; he is doomed to love her and no more.

While the subject is a classic one, Donne's style and conceits looks forward to the modern age. While he employs transformative, analogically alchemical imagery, his art transcends the habitual expressions and he is able to predict some components of the future like life sciences and some modern visions like fragmentation. In accordance with the conceptual metaphor theory this poem transmutes tangible elements and images into intangible elements and entities.

4.4. Conclusion

Donne reflects a modern consciousness; subject, style, technique and tone in his poetry can be regarded as modern. Each humane thing is worth writing a poem about. Every love does not have to be like a fairy tale. Human psychology, a critical attitude, transcending religious and social taboos, subjective time and fragmented self take him beyond his time. Juliet Dusinberre also explains a feminist potentiality in Donne's poetry as follows:

His love poetry and his religious poetry relocate him in a cultural context which belongs to a new liberated feminine awareness.[...] If Donne appears extravagant, excessive and spontaneous, it is in part at least, because he wished to define himself as poet in opposition to humanist ideals of sobriety, measure and deliberation. Spontaneity, extravagance, excess, are all terms used against women in this period.¹⁸

Tracing the ideas of Dusiinberre, it might be argued that Donne's liberated approach to certain notions attributed to men and women takes him to a different place from his contemporaries. In his opinion, love has a philosophy in itself. That is why, in all his poems, love is sacred and powerful. He does not neglect physicality and lovesickness, either. Based on John Donne's point of view, love can reach up to perfection, eternity and make a whole with the universe. That is the reason why he uses a discourse in order to go beyond the materiality of the body and the world. The love and union of the lovers can be transformed into a union with God in the afterlife. The three dimensional, courageous, psychological depictions by John Donne in his love and religious poems let him transcend into the realm of modern literature.

He does not yield to anything that can limit a person's free will and passion in both spiritual and physical terms. Thus, in his poetry, he is in a constant search of transcending and going beyond the restrictions and boundaries which are against humanity in his opinion. This flexible and liberating approach make his poems fit into the understanding of modernity. Beside the multiplicity in narrative voice and vision, he also synthesizes oppositions and questions taboos such as death and chastity. Analogically transmuting conceits serve his message and artistic goal. As in the theory of conceptual metaphor, he transfers visible and invisible entities between domains of meaning. From his perspective, it can be said that he manages to be eternal as he aspires in his poems. Virginia Woolf also sum up:

¹⁸ Juliet Dusiinberre, **Virginia Woolf's Renaissance: Woman Reader or Common Reader**, London, Macmillan Press, 1977, p. 79.

We cannot see how so many different qualities meet together in one man. But we have only to read him, to submit to the sound of that passionate and penetrating voice, and his figure rises again across the waste of the years more erect, more imperious, more inscrutable than any of his time. Even the elements seem to have respected that identity. When the fire of London destroyed almost every other monument in St Paul's, it left Donne's figure untouched, as if the flames themselves found that knot too hard to undo, that riddle too difficult to read, and that figure too entirely itself to turn to common clay.¹⁹



¹⁹ Virginia Woolf, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

CONCLUSION

This study searches how transcendental experience is presented in John Donne's poetry. As it is an extension of the subgenre Donne initiated and composed in, the Introduction of the thesis begins with the definitions of metaphysical poetry. The characteristics of Elizabethan poetry are surveyed in order to prove how John Donne is distinguished from his contemporaries. Moreover, the lexical definition of alchemy is given in order to explain in which terms alchemy is used in the examination of the opted poems. Alchemical imagery is considered to be analogically employed by the poet to evoke transformation and transcendence. Via such images ideas, opinions and themes connect, combine and transform to one another, and the discourse, conception and tone may go beyond patterns and familiarisation. Towards the end of the Introduction, the lexical definition of "transcendent" is given in order to indicate what the term refers to throughout the thesis. Donne is regarded as a transgressor, entrepreneur, practical philosopher and rhetorician going beyond its time and being able to address modern sensibilities. Modernity, thus, is considered a relevant aspect of Donne's poetry. The senses of the concept are provided at the end of the section. Before beginning the examination of the poems, Chapter I surveys the conceptual metaphor theory to consider the key mechanism behind Donne's modernity and within the transcendent discourse. Chapter II focuses on defining John Donne as a metaphysical and transcendental poet as he uses alchemic terms. Beside defining how John Donne is not only a metaphysical but also a transcendental poet, the chapter also observes John Donne's poetic identity alongside his identity as a preacher. The social background of 17th century England initialises this chapter. Necessary biographical info is related to the two attributes in this chapter. Hence, it seems essential to comprehend how he manages to transcend not only the society of his time but also his own self. Moreover, it is necessary to understand why and how a poet like John Donne emerged in the 17th century. His peculiar interest in the notion of death and final sermon "Death's Duel" are also taken into consideration to constitute a background for the poems that are analysed via close reading in Chapter III and Chapter IV.

Chapter III examines the alchemical images in detail to observe their contribution to the transcendent experience. Donne uses the alchemical discourse and make analogies that put forward metaphorical transformation between tangible and intangible elements. It is necessary to mention that John Donne is not a scientist or alchemist. However, in his poems, it is seen that he uses certain symbols and terms of alchemy which was a popular issue of the Renaissance and the 17th century.

The alchemical images are examined in detail in “The Good Morrow”, “The Canonization”, and “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”. In “The Good Morrow” he uses the image of circle and metaphors that can be associated with a circle and round shape frequently. Two lovers are two hemispheres which constitute a whole globe when they unite and the union alludes to the idea of eternity and perfection in alchemical terms. Donne employs the transformative capability of alchemy concerning the power of multi-dimensional love. A circle makes the act of transformation in a continuous flawless way due to the absence of corners; therefore, the circle imagery matches the discourse of alchemy well. The phases of unconsciousness like childhood, immaturity and ignorance also serve the idea of enlightenment by true love. The productive imagery of unconsciousness versus that of awakening functions to convey the theme of true and mature love of body and soul in a transforming and compact manner like the alchemical process. In “The Canonization”, he repeats the word “love” at the end of the first and last lines of each stanza, so he creates another circle which alludes to the idea of perfection and eternity again. The persona claims that owing to this perfect and timeless quality of their love, they will be metaphorically canonised as posterity will regard them as their exemplum, their guide in love. The poem also elevates the power of art and verses pronouncing their canonisation are like alchemical processors transforming them from mundane reality to the realm of divinity. In “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning”, the physical absence is said to ruin the main elements of sublunary lovers, who are imperfect, sensuous and materialistic in a sense of carnality. Hence, the idea refers to the perfect mixture of four elements in alchemical terms and lacking one of the elements means the perfection is ruined. Because such lovers’ bond is cherished mainly by physicality and sight, when they would not see one

another their relationship would come to its end. In contrast, owing to the perfect mixture of vital elements in a relationship such as affection, delight, virtue and wisdom, and the right mixture of due, equal love in their relationship, the persona argues that they have no reason to suspect that their bond comes to the end. The compass conceit embodies their true love of faith, confidence, order and peace, and thus, like a device of alchemy serves to transform the qualification into a visible image. Whereas the man is going away, the pair do not separate but the female leans towards him, directs her attention to him only to welcome him firmly at the end of the circular journey.

In each poem, there are questioning, causality, sophistication and intellectual pursuit as also proposed by the conceptual metaphor theory. The alchemical imagery serves the ideas of pure love, speciality, pleasure and dignity. Besides, images of death are frequently seen in Donne's poetry. John Donne's perception of death is very idiosyncratic in which death is depicted as a transition between worldliness and spirituality. It functions as a gate for the speaker to go beyond the materiality of the world and physicality of love. The transformation between tangible and intangible, materialistic and spiritual elements pave the way to the transcendental experience which is the main focus of this study. The alchemical analogies made by the poet function like the elements that comprise the perfect mixture to go beyond and reach the wholeness in the universe.

In addition to them, it can be observed that there is a certain focus on eternity in the poems. Just like alchemists experiment with substances to reach immortality and mix them evenly to reach perfection, John Donne does his experiments on poetry. Through the alchemical images like constituting a circle, composing a perfect mixture, transforming death into a mortal persona, he provides the reader with a transcendental experience which is much more beyond the conventional content and structure of poetry. According to John Donne's poems and his personal point of view about alchemy, it can be remarked that the power of love is the equivalent of the power of alchemy. Hence, love functions as the key to perfection, immortality and the way to eternal life. In this sense, it also matches John Donne's identity as an ecclesiastic.

Finally, in Chapter IV, the transcendental experience in John Donne's poetry is examined from a modern perception. Modernity refers to not only current events but also the change in patterns and traditions. The notion of freedom and the idea of individuality add a modern tinge to Donne's poetry. Dealing with erotic aspects of love, the use of multilayered expressions, the subjective perception of time and the confounding temperament in his poems make a modern approach towards human experience and artistic production. Beside his multiplicity in vision, diction and structure, his realistic approach to the psychological and physical aspects of a love relationship put forth a deep understanding of human nature in terms of modernity. His natural humour, searching motive, experimentative approach, critical attitude, oblique mode of expression, intellectual tone and sexualising the context are all propensities of a modern mindset. The transmutation between physical and spiritual elements in his poems produce mappings between the source domain and the target domain according to the conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff and Johnson. As Donne uses conceits that refer to a transcendental experience, the target domain is activated through the source domain in the modern reader's cognition. "The Flea", "Holy Sonnet X" and "The Broken Heart" may generate constructions of modern concerns. In "The Flea", Donne criticizes the unnatural, pretentious values and virtues of the society. Moreover, he presents the ideas of subjectivity, individuality and liberation as neglected aspects of human experience and potentiality. The flea is the conceit of extra marital union. The loss of blood and honour would be as little as a flea bite. In burlesque Donne transgresses both the taboo of sex and the ordinary scope of poetry. "Holy Sonnet X" indicates the confounding temperament and multiplicity of the poet's vision which transforms the confrontation with death into a transcendental experience. Subverting physical laws, Donne's style almost approaches science fiction. From a modern point of view, he survives and continues his experience by denying death. It is exactly the transcendental experience by all means including philosophy, literature and even religion, because he is going beyond all the boundaries and focus on the wholeness without ruining individuality. "The Broken Heart" also reflects modern matter and style. The transcendent issue here is the sharpness and intensity of love. Though one year long his lovepain resists. Though he claims that lesser felings like admiring, wishing, liking continue too, the

conceit of broken heart of glass remaining in the breast evokes torture and neverending love. An unrequited love transforms into a modern fragmentation of self. The images of a deconstructed or displaced organ, carried into a room, or absent or pierced and fragments, each piece with another seal and reflection seem to await an age of organ transplantation including the stopping of the heart, suspended animation and reanimation.

The transcendental experience that is examined in John Donne's poetry is not associated with experiences like astral journey or hypnosis. As similar to the alchemical images in his poetry, he uses a transcendent discourse to celebrate the power of love, art, existence, mind or to challenge or reconcile with death and lovesickness. Even if the subject is a classic one like love aches or death, Donne's style and conceits look forward to the modern age. While he employs transformative, analogically alchemical imagery, his art transcends the habitual expressions and he is able to predict some components of the future like life sciences and some modern visions like fragmentation. In accordance with the conceptual metaphor theory the modern reader may have mental and lingual maps of the relevant cultural contexts and components to associate with one another. Donne's legacy is beyond ages and continues within western culture.

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APPENDIX

App. 1.1. A VALEDICTION: FORBIDDING MOURNING ¹

As virtuous men passe mildly away,
And whisper to their soules to goe,
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-tempests move;
T'were prophanation of our joyes
To tell the layetie our love.

Moving of th' earth brings harmes and feares,
Men reckon what it did, and meant;
But trepidation of the spheares,
Though greater farre, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love
(Whose soule is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.

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, and hands to misse.

Our two soules therefore, which are one,
Though I must goe, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beate.

If they be two, they are two so
As stiffe twin compasses are two;
Thy soule, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other doe.

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth come,
It leanes and hearkens after it,
And growes erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to mee, who must,
Like th' other foot, obliquely runne;
Thy firmnes makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begunne.

¹ Roy Booth, **The Collected Poems of John Donne**, Great Britain, Wordsworth Editions, 2002, p. 33.

App. 1.2. HOLY SONNET X ²

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not soe;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poore Death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures bee,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
Rest of their bones, and souls deliverie.
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, war, and sicknesse dwell,
And poppie or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
And better than thy stroake; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleepe past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

App. 1.3. THE BROKEN HEART³

He is starke mad, whoever sayes,
That he hath been in love an houre,
Yet not that love so soon decayes,
But that it can tenne in less space devour ;
Who will beleeve me, if I sweare
That I have had the plague a yeare?
Who would not laugh at mee, if I should say
I saw a flaske of powder burne a day?

Ah, what a trifle is a heart,
If once into love's hands it come !
All other griefes allow a part
To other griefes, and ask themselves but some ;
They come to us, but us Love draws ;
He swallows us and never chawes ;
By him, as by chain'd shot, whole ranks doe dye ;
He is the tyrant Pike, our hearts the Frye.

If 'twere not so, what did become
Of my heart when I first saw thee?
I brought a heart into the roome,
But from the room I carried none with mee.
If it had gone to thee, I know
Mine would have taught thine heart to show
More pity unto mee ; but Love, alas !
At one first blow did shiver it as glasse.

² **Ibid.**, p. 251.

Yet nothing can to nothing fall,
Nor any place be empty quite ;
Therefore I thinke my breast hath all
Those pieces still, though they be not unite ;
And now, as broken glasses show
A hundred lesser faces, so
My ragges of heart can like, wish, and adore,
But after one such love, can love no more.

App. 1.4. THE CANONIZATION⁴

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsie, or my gout,
My five gray haire, or ruined fortune flout,
With wealth your state, your mind with Arts improve,
Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his honour, or his grace,
Or the Kings realL, or his stamped face
Contemplate; what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.

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

Call us what you will, wee are made such by love;
Call her one, mee another flye,
We're Tapers too, and at our owne cost die,
And we in us find the' Eagle and the Dove.
The Phœnix riddle hath more wit
By us; we two being one, are it.
So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.
We die and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombes and hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And if no piece of Chronicle wee prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty roomes;
As well a well wrought urne becomes
The greatest ashes, as halfe-acre tombes,

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 32- 33.

And by these hymnes, all shall approve
Us Canoniz'd for Love:

And thus invoke us: You, whom reverend love
Made one another's hermitage;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
Who did the whole worlds soul contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes
So made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize
Countries, Townes, Courts: Beg from above
A patterne of your love!

App. 1.5. THE FLEA⁵

Mark but this flea, and marke in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled bee;
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoys before it wooe,
And pampers'd swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than wee would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where wee almost, nay more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our mariage bed, and mariage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are met,
And cloystered in these living walls of Jet.
Though use make you apt to kill mee,
Let not to that, self-murder added bee,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruell and sodaine, hast thou since
Purpled thy naile, in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty bee,
Except in that drop which it suckt from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and saist that thou
Find'st not thy selfe, nor me the weaker now;
'Tis true; then learn how false, feares bee:
Just so much honor, when thou yeeld'st to mee,
Will wast, as this flea's death tooke life from thee.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

App. 1.6. THE GOOD MORROW⁶

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the seaeven sleepers den?
'Twas so; But this, all pleasures fancies bee.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desir'd, and got, t'was but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking soules,
Which watch not one another out of feare;
For love, all love of other sights controules,
And makes one little roome an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let Maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possesse one world, each hath one, and is one.
My face in thine eye, thine in mine appeares,
And true plain hearts doe in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheares,
Without sharpe North, without declining West?
What ever dyes, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.⁶

⁶ Ibid. p. 1.

