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Nizar Qabbani and John Donne as Heretics of Love: A Comparative Study Anees Mohammed AlNajjar

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Abstract

The basic aim of this paper is to compare and contrast certain aspects of the love poetry of John Donne (1572—1631) and Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998). It is important for two reasons: it is considered to deal with these two great poets together, Donne and Qabbani; the two poets belong to different cultures, yet their heretical views and unconventional approach to love has brought them together as love poets. Despite the age and cultural difference between the English poet of the Renaissance and the 20th century Arab poet, many striking similarities are found between the two poets especially in their experience and treatment of love as shown in their selected poems. The study also illustrates the two poets' unusual celebration of love as well as their juxtaposition of far-fetched and forced analogies between apparently dissimilar objects. A comparative approach is used to analyze some selected poems, mainly specific lines and some excerpts to show relevant similarities and differences between the two poets. It is concluded that Qabbani and Donne share similar themes and views on love emphasizing the positive relationship between man and woman.

ملخص

تناول هذا البحث مظاهر شعر الحب في شعر كل من الشاعر جون دون 1572-1631 و نزار قباني 1923-1998 دراسة مقارنة وكانت الأسباب التي تكمن وراء اختيار هذا الموضوع التالي: (1) ان هذه الظاهرة لم تدرس من قبل دراسة مقارنة بين شاعرين أحدهما عربي والآخر غربي (2) التعرف على أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بين هذين الشاعرين بالرغم من اختلاف ثقافتهما (3) وجود الكثير من أوجه الشبه بين الشاعرين وخصوصا في تجربتهما وتعاملهما مع موضوع الحب. كما تكمن أهمية البحث في كونه أول بحث تناول هذين الشاعرين الكبيرين معا وأنه سيبين اوجه التشابه والاختلاف بين شاعرين ينتميان الى ثقافتين مختلفتين كما أنه سيسعرض الاحتفاء الغرائبي بالحب من قبل الشاعرين من خلال الألفاظ والصور الميتافيزيقية بعيدة المنال. وقد اعتمد الباحث على المنهج المقارن مع الاستفادة من باقي المناهج الأخرى في تحليل النصوص الشعرية لإظهار اوجه الشبه والاختلاف بين الشاعرين. ويختم البحث بالكشف عن أوجه التشابه والاختلاف في تعبير الشاعرين عن الحب مؤكدا على أهمية العلاقة الايجابية بين الرجل والمرأة.

Keywords: comparative literature, Donne, love, juxtaposition, metaphysical, Qabbani

الكلمات المفتاحية: أدب مقارن، Donne، الحب، التراكيب، الميتافيزيقي، قباني

Introduction

position of women in society. In the Arab world, Qabbani appeared as a committed poet who concerned himself with social issues of his contemporary time. Unlike Wordsworth whose poetry was “a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Jones, 1968, p. 237), Qabbani’s poetry proves to be “criticism of life” in Matthew Arnold’s words (Super, 1973, p. 180). Arieah Loya (1975) who wrote about the social

This study compares and contrasts two great poets who have been extensively studied separately but probably never together. It is hoped that it will bring new insights to the academic world. Comparatively speaking, this study brings an English poet and Arabic poet together. Despite their different cultures, Donne and Qabbani echo similar thoughts concerning love and man-woman relationships especially the

poetry should be assessed and measured. For them, the most appealing verse must be free and spontaneous and the outpouring of the heart. Therefore, they tried to create poetry of the people, in diction and a language which can be enjoyed and understood by the common man. In his article, *Nizar Qabbani, the Poet and his Poetry*, Gabay (1973) describes Qabbani's poetry as:

Qabbani's poetry is written from the heart, in a very simple style, economical, close to the vernacular, avoiding the decorative and pedantic. His form was the simplest and most flexible of all possible poetic schemes. This was, as its name indicates, almost as free as prose (1973, p. 212)

The revolutionary aspect in Donne and Qabbani's poetry is stylistic more than thematic. Their stylistic innovation has entitled each one of them to have a style of their own. Atalah Mohamed Ali (2005) conducted his English thesis *Nizar Qabbani's Style: An Evaluation of his Work in English Translation* and considered Qabbani's poetic style as elegant and an epitome of renewal and beauty. Atalah's work offers a linguistic critical study of Qabbani's poetry and explores in detail Qabbani's 'style' from lexical, syntactical and phonological perspectives. He compares Qabbani to Shelley, "in terms of the lyrical quality of his poetry he can be compared to the Romantic Age's best known English poet P. B. Shelly (2005, pp. 100-101).

In addition, Ben Jonson and John Dryden admired Donne for his extraordinary ability to present and communicate complex ideas with ease and simplicity of expression. It appears that what Ben Jonson and Dryden say of Donne can be also applied on Qabbani's poetic diction. Like Qabbani, Donne challenged the traditional mode of composing poetry and wrote in a way that reflected his dissatisfaction with the worn-out conventions of his contemporary time. Donne's contribution to the reformation of English language and also English verse was so significant. His poetic achievement has always been compared to Shakespeare's dramatic achievement. In *John Donne and the Metaphysical Poets*, the well-known English critic, Harold Bloom (2008) reflects on the revolutionary style of John Donne,

Donne intentionally introduced a revolution into English versification. It was doubtless a rebellion against the smooth and somewhat nervous iambic

position of Arab women as reflected in Qabbani's poetry rightly observes:

Qabbani's poetry reflects not only woman's problem, but also the mood, experience and agony which Arab youth has under-gone in the last three or four decades in respect of their relations with the opposite sex (1975, p.1)

Through their poetry it seems Donne and Qabbani exhort poets to be more self reflective and must look inward for inspiration and guidance and must never censor their thoughts even if they run counter to social expectations. Because the great poet should always possess freedom of thought, it follows that he should also be more receptive to new ideas and perspectives about life, human relations, and his surroundings. Donne complains against poets whose only concern was not to bring about change but to seek rewards at any cost, "who write, because all write", and who "write to lords, rewards to get" (McGrath, 1980, p. 1).

Both poets valued simplicity, the present moment, and the search for personal truth outside of social rigid doctrines. Both poets were accused of heresy and Qabbani's poetry in particular, was described as poisonous and a threat to the peace of the country (Qabbani, 1973, p. 82). According to Bacem Essam (2016), Qabbani had been accused by Islamists as a heretic "because of his libertinism, obscenity and atheism" (p. 966). Despite that, Qabbani never succumbed to those attempts that tried to silence his poetic voice and thwart the progress of his literary career. Qabbani kept writing knowing that the silent majority enjoyed and appreciated his sensual romantic verse.

Our two poets, Donne and Qabbani believed that society perishes when there is no higher vision—when the eye prefers blindness to truth. Through his poetic journey, Qabbani attempted to subvert the conventional images of femininity by creating daring heroines who could voice their ardent desires just like men. In Qabbani's poetry woman is no longer portrayed as a goddess, but as a creature of flesh and blood. In this context, Mohja Kahf (2000) intelligently remarked that despite Qabbani's "Promethean efforts to create brave new women, it is he who was created by women in their laboratory" (p.49).

Both Donne and Qabbani sought to differ from all their contemporary poets. For them, literature should be the voice for all the oppressed in the society. They challenged any criteria against which great

periences and that his poems reflect deep understanding of love. His poetic power lies in turning minute details into beautiful verses in an astonishing manner. In other words, Donne intelligently takes advantage of every private and intimate experience to make up a poem and this, of course, was due to his sharp wit and ingenuity. Joan Bennett (1964) remarks:

To enjoy it is only necessary to be prepared for a strange assortment of moods, to enter into each without reserve, and one thing further Donne's reader must share, in some degree, his own capacity for associating widely diverse themes and feelings. He travelled from one type of experience to another, but carried with him into the new a vivid memory (p. 14)

In the Arabic poetic tradition, for example, love takes various forms as well, and we have numerous love affairs in Arabic literature. For example, the famous love story between Qais Majnon and Laila; Jamil and Buthaina; Kahlil Gibran and May Zayada, but Qabbani's love is daring and sensual. Woman is depicted in Qabbani's poetry starting from his first volume *QalatLi Al-Smra'a* [The Brown Said to Me] till *AlRasmu Bil Kalimat* [Drawing with Words] as a beating heart, a burning desire; a woman of the poet's own making. Yet, Haidoush (2001) studied Qabbani's poems to classify his poetic maturity and eventually observed that the female characters that have the most conspicuous presence in Qabbani's poetry are the mother woman, the city woman, the poetry woman (2001, p. 117).

Qabbani ascribes the superficial treatment of love by the traditional Arabic poets to the barriers imposed by religion and tribesmen who forbade the poet from meeting with his beloved. He believes that Qais and Jamil (famous Arab love poets) had to comply and conform to the mores and conventions prevalent at the time. In other words, had Leila and Bouthaina (the two poets' beloveds respectively) been living in a more tolerant and free society, Qais and Jamil's stance and perception of love would have changed drastically and consequently their poetry would differ from that we received. In general, it is 'obedience' to social and ethical codes not 'passion' that is the 'prime virtue and duty of humankind' (Bryson, 2017).

Furthermore, inspired by comparative literature as a discipline and motivated by an epistemic curiosity, this study undertakes to address a gap by throwing light on the importance of trans-cultural connections and affiliations. Despite the poets' cultural difference,

flow of Spenser and the earliest contemporaries of Shakespeare, that Donne invented his violent mode of breaking up the line into quick and slow beats (2008, p.57)

Donne adopted the Petrarchan tradition of poetic conceit, but he adapted it by virtue of his witty inventions. The metaphysical conceit, unlike the conventional conceit, is not meant for decoration, but considered an integral part of the poem. Conceits function in Donne's poems as instruments to extend analogies, present arguments and make thematic connections between heterogeneous ideas to startle the readers. Anita Khare (2019) observes, "A conceit of Donne is his instrument of argument and persuasion. The fantastic conceit is in accord with the content of the poem. The intensity of feeling approaches the precision of thought" (p. 197). Qabbani, like Donne, was able to manipulate his intensity of feelings by his creative humor and intellectual imagery; i.e. to fuse feelings with thoughts in a beautiful and startling manner.

Commenting on the dramatic nature of Donne's poems, John Hayward (1986) writes, "Almost all of Donne's poems are dramatic monologues uttered in a mood of passionate apprehension" (p.12). In fact, Donne and Qabbani distinguished themselves from the conventional poets in terms of their skilful use of dramatic monologues where their textual mistresses have no speaking part in the poems. In most of their poems, the female voice is almost unheard except for some poems. In his book, *The Blue Rose at Twilight: On Modern Arabic Verse*, Samir Al-sheikh is of the opinion that Qabbani particularly "resorted to dramatic monologue to portray woman's suffering" (2012, p. 51).

Love, as it appears, is Donne and Qabbani's favorite leitmotif; other subjects do not seem to receive the same fervent treatment and concern from the two poets. They rightly deserve to be called true love poets. In fact, Love finds its way smoothly in poetry and takes various forms depending on the inclination of the poets and the vogue and orientation of the age as a whole. Of Donne's love poetry, Anita Khare (2019) observes, "He shows cynicism, grotesqueness, purity and simplicity, medievalism, and sensualism. But he adds to these the spiritual and the metaphysical strains (p. 53).

Donne was not an amateur in love; rather he was an extraordinary poet with diverse range of love ex-

tion and reflection. Besides, he would never slacken to embark on new voyages of discovery in order to explore and fathom love and probe into its core.

Qabbani wrote about love in all its forms and subjects adopting new styles and subverting conventional forms and themes; ushering in a new era of Arabic sensual love poetry. Thus, his revolutionary ideas about love divided people and brought about a huge controversy in a part of the world that is known for its conservatism. Qabbani's lines of poetry are often quoted in ordinary love letters for their simplicity and spontaneity and even recited by illiterate and ordinary lovers. Qabbani (1973) describes Arabic language before his arrival to the literary arena:

It was pompous, bureaucratic and never shakes hands with people except when wearing white gloves...and what I did was that I convinced poetry to abandon its aristocratic nature and wear summer shirts and get down to the streets to play with children... laugh and cry with them (1973, p. 132)

Qabbani expressed his views related to sex in the Arab world at the time he was composing his poetry:

Sex was forbidden; it was only sold in black markets. It was intimidating to love, intimidating to go on a date, intimidating to make love and intimidating to write (1973, p. 99)

Adonis (1993) a great Arab modernist poet describes Qabbani's daring and innovative contribution to Arabic poetry as:

Nizar Qabbani's reputation was at its height all over Damascus. He was the one who stirred its stagnant waters with a fresh cascade springing up from its historical heritage and from the details of everyday life. Nizar was teaching life how to turn into a poem (1993, p. 24)

Likewise, John Donne, the English poet of the Renaissance and the father of English Metaphysical poetry is known for love poetry that broke free from the Petrarchan conventional theme and style. Petrarchan poets used to exaggerate the beauty of the beloved and portray her as a divine and angelic creature. Donne subverts Petrarchan conventional themes and adopts a new style that was startling and shocking to

there is a universal attitude towards love; common sentiments being expressed and a universal language of love spoken by the two poets alike. Most of the earlier critical writings discuss Donne and Qabbani as separate entities, yet, this study seeks to attain a wider perspective on the aspects of love poetry via inter-literary negotiations.

In fact, this study involves studying poetry across time periods, across cultural boundaries and across disciplinary and linguistic frontiers which could not be effectively done without employing a comparative method. It presents detailed comparative reflections on two important poets, Qabbani and Donne with regard to their heretical views on love. The striking similarities found between their poetic works make the two poets a useful duo for this study.

The study relies on close readings of selected poems by the two poets, mainly specific lines and relevant excerpts to illustrate such parallelisms. The selected poems by Donne are: "The Indifferent", "The Good Morrow", "The Primrose", "The Canonization", "The Perfume" and "To His Coy Mistress". The selected Diwans by Qabbani are as follows: "AlRasmu bil Kalimat" [Drawing with Words], "Takhuthin Fi Hakaebuk Alwaqt Watusafreen" [You Take Time in your Luggage and Travel], "Osafiru Fi Ainaik" [I Travel in your Eyes], "AlBortukala" [The Orange], "Shamatun wa Halalmtun" [Candle and Nipple], "Akrau Jasaduk wa osbhu mothaqaf" [I Read your Body and become cultured], "Ohubuk wal Baki Yatba" [I love You and the Rest Follows], "Eshroon Emratan Ahbabi" [Twenty Thousand Women I loved] and "Jasaduk Kharitati" [Your Body is my Map].

Love: The Two Poets' Favorite Theme

To start with Nizar Qabbani, the Arab poet of the twentieth century, he is widely admired in the Arab world for his sensual and love poetry. Qabbani dared to differ from the traditional Arab poets and wrote magnificent poems that portray woman in totality not as had been partially portrayed by the traditional poets. His poetry delineates the spiritual side as well as the physical side as parallels; physical beauty is the illumination of the inner self. So, together the beauty of the soul and the attraction of the body evoke the aesthetic pleasure in him and beckon to his mind. Like Donne, it is not solely the female body that attracts male gaze, but the female 'pilgrim soul' merits male gaze either. Like Donne, Qabbani always sought to renew and enrich himself by constant contempla-

Like Donne, Qabbani holds love in high esteem and reverence and Love in his view is a source of power and inspiration. He gives equal importance to soul and body as he believes that body should elevate man and lead to the love of soul and both body and soul should lead to the love of God. For Qabbani, woman's body should not be disparaged and regarded merely as an object of male sexual pleasure but should be adored as a receptacle of love. He says in *I Love you & the Rest Follows*:

*Let me erect a country of love
Where you become the Queen
And I become the greatest lover (1978, p. 20)*

The Miracle of Mutual Love

For Qabbani, love is so essential to every poet, because love has a huge impact on the poet's growth of aesthetic sensitivity, and it is a means for a poet to achieve fame and greatness. Love and creativity work side by side and are highly interdependent: love kindles and galvanizes the flow of creativity and imparts to it a humanistic touch and without creativity, love loses its exhilaration, vitality and cosmopolitan appeal. In his poem *I Love You*, he says:

*When I said I love you
I knew I was inventing a new alphabet
For a city that does not read.
I knew I was singing songs in an empty hall
And offering wine
To wine snobs (1998, p. 60)*

Donne and Qabbani's poems reveal and reflect this dynamic fusion and interaction between deep love and creative expression. Thus Qabbani's adoption of love as his favorite topic and theme in his poetry makes his poetic career so rich and prolific. Not only that, but Qabbani's love poetry also has had a tremendous influence on Arab young lovers and lines from his love poems have been highly appreciated, circulated and exchanged between lovers of both sexes. Indeed his love poetry has effected an enormous change in young men and women's perception about love and love relationships. Qabbani says:

*In the name of love
I begin.
A word never dies
It is the bread of the good;
The cross of the believers, and
The grave of the wrong doer (1998, p. 60)*

his contemporary peers and readers. Love for him is a natural human passion and one should not be ashamed or feel guilty for making love. Donne's abrupt beginning in his famous poem *The Indifferent* celebrates this new kind of 'indifferent' and free love:

*I can love both fair and brown,
Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want
betrays,
Her who loves loneliness best, and her who masks
and plays,
Her whom the country formed, and whom the
town,
Her who believes, and her who tries,
Her who still weeps with spongy eyes,
And her who is dry cork, and never cries;
I can love her, and her, and you, and you,
I can love any, so she be not true (Grierson, 1912,
p. 12)*

Qabbani in *Twenty Thousand Women I loved* echoes Donne in the following lines:

*Twenty thousand women I loved
Twenty thousand women I tried
And when I met you, beloved,
I felt I have just begun (1998, p. 746)*

Both poets are so proud of their private worlds. Donne shows carelessness about world's discoveries because he has another important discovery of his own that is "vaster and more slow" in the words of Andrew Marvel. Donne in *The Good Morrow* says:

*For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have
shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is
one (Grierson, 1912, p. 18)*

Qabbani is expressing the same idea in *Your Body is my Map*:

*Your body is my new map
I no longer care about the map of the World
(1972, p. 26)*

mistress that his love for her is invincible and immutable and neither 'time nor death' can affect their love. He says in *Love's Fruits*,

*Do not care for the rhythm of Time or the names
of years
You are a woman that remains a woman in all
times
I will love you
When the twenty-first century comes in
And when the twenty-first century comes in
I will love you
When the sea waters run out
And the woods burn down (1982, p. 12)*

Donne also assures his beloved in the same poem not to fear life's vicissitudes and that true and mutual love ought always to triumph over earthly challenges and difficulties:

*If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can
die (Grierson, 1912, p. 7)*

Qabbani also asks his beloved not to fear the ups and downs of this world because their love does not belong to 'sublunary love' but rather 'superlunary'. He assures his beloved that as long as they celebrate this kind of 'high' and mutual love, their love never ends or 'slackens' or turns to ashes. In *Love's Fruits*, again, Qabbani celebrates grand love as follows:

*When love is grand
And the beloved is the moon
This love will not change
Into a pack of hay eaten by fires (1982, p. 12)*

Surprisingly, it is extremely delightful to find that Qabbani's poem *I Read Your Body* ...echoes the same idea of Donne's *The Good Morrow*: the abrupt beginning, figuration, the dramatic monologue and even some of the wording and phrasing are similar. Qabbani emphasizes the importance of being together with his beloved and that his life before she came was empty and meaningless. He admits that he was 'backward' and 'thirsty' before her and that he wanted to get rid of his backwardness as well as quench his thirst. In other words, he hopes to renounce his darkness (backwardness) and embrace light and wisdom by joining the world of his beloved and exploring it to the fullest extent. He also longs to leave off the life of spiritual aridity (Thirst) and embrace self-

Qabbani's love poetry has no equal in the modern Arabic literary history. Despite his eroticism, some Arab young girls never feel ashamed to mention his name or recite some of his lines to their friends and relatives; they can never do the same with any other love poet of modern times. It is his commitment and devotion to love as love and for love's own sake that earned him this great fame and unique stature in the modern Arabic literature. He writes in *When I Said I Love You*,

*I write
To save women from misogynists,
From cities of death,
From polygamy,
From likeness of days,
From frost and monotony*

*I write to save she whom I love
From cities of unpoetry, unlove, depression & melancholy
I write to make her a Messenger;
I write to make her an Icon
I write to make her a Cloud (1970, p. 20)*

In fact, Donne and Qabbani have exerted a tremendous influence on love's literary tradition. They wrote from the depths of their hearts and souls and no other poet could aspire to grab the same attention they deservedly received. The following quotation cited in Al-Khamisi (2011) reflects Helen Gardner's admiration and commendation of Donne for his astonishing and exceptional treatment of love:

No poet has made greater poetry than Donne has on the theme of mutual love. He has no predecessors here and virtually successors of any stature. The poems which Donne wrote on the subject of love as the union of equals, such poems as *The Good Morrow*, *The Anniversary*, or *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*, are his most beautiful and original contribution to the poetry of human love; for poets have written very little of love as fullness of joy (2011, p. 21)

In their love poetry, Donne and Qabbani seek to transcend life's challenges, self-preoccupations and temporal limitations of the physical world through harmony and mutual love. Real commitment and true mutual love deepens the relationship bond and effect a long lasting life partnership. Qabbani assures his

wants to embrace the world of 'Beauty'-- the world of 'Magnolia' which is a symbol of meditation and feminine beauty. Qabbani also rejects the Bedouin love for it dehumanizes women and regards them as mere objects of sex and pleasure. He requests his beloved in *I Read your Body and Become Cultured* to teach him the philosophy of this new world:

*I want to divest my Nomadism
And sit beneath trees
And bath in water springs
And learn the names of flowers
Will you teach me to read and write
For writing on your body is the beginning of
knowledge
And penetrating your body is a safe passage to
civilization.
Your body is not the enemy of culture
It is culture itself
And he who does not read the notebooks of your
body
Shall remain illiterate his whole life (1978, p.
15)*

Moreover, John Donne glorifies the new world that emancipates him from the shackles of lust and superficialities. He wants to delve deep into his beloved's spiritual world in order to enjoy true love that is not confined by time or place. In the *Primrose*, Donne describes those who do not have respect for women as monsters and Qabbani describes them as *Bedouins*. Donne claims that admission to the civilized world can only be achieved by glorifying and elevating his thoughts about women. Both Donne and Qabbani express their resentment against those who think about women only in sexual terms. Donne's *The Primrose* is so close to Qabbani's *I Read your Body* in terms of respectful and civil treatment of women:

*All thought of sex, and think to move
My heart to study her, and not to love
Both these were monsters; since there must re-
side
Falsehood in woman, I could more abide;
She were by art, than nature falsified (Grierson,
1912, p. 61)*

awakening and enlightenment (Water and Magnolia). For him, it seems, the emotional and spiritual world is far more enriching, invigorating and illuminating:

*The time before you was but an illusion
And after you, fragments
So do not ask why we are together
I want to get rid of my backwardness
And embrace the World of Water
I want to flee from the Republic of Thirst
And embrace the Republic of Magnolia (1978, p.
15)*

Likewise, Donne opens his poem *The Good Morrow* abruptly, wondering as to how the lovers used to spend their lives before knowing each other. Both poets contrast their worlds before their union with their beloveds and after. Donne seems to regret the time he spent in the past in pursuit of illusory pleasures and insignificant matters. He assumes that his beloved and he were living in a state of ignorance and oblivion before loving each other:

*I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of
thee (Grierson, 1912, p. 7)*

In the second stanza of the same poem, the poet seems to have achieved a spiritual awakening, realizing that physical pleasures were mere 'fancies' and the real pleasure consists in the harmony of the two souls and that the real beauty is skin deep. Therefore, the awakening of this long forgotten side of the self which is the spiritual side is worthy of praise and celebration:

*And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear
(Grierson, 1912, p. 7)*

Qabbani has a strong desire to relinquish the 'childish world', the world of ignorance and pleasures for another transcendental world. He wants to awaken himself from that 'long sleep' and oblivion. The old world for him did not quench his soul's thirst. He

remarked in his book, *My Story with Poetry*:

"The publisher changed the title of my verse book in order to save the reputation of his magazine but by so doing he slaughtered the title of my beautiful book" (1973, p.112).

Qabbani's depiction of women's sexuality and the propagation and encouragement of free love provoked a number of Muslim preachers who publicly accused him of heresy and debauchery especially at Friday sermons. To elucidate, I quote an excerpt from a poem entitled *Candle and Nipple* of the same Diwan. The candle whispers to the nipple that in the same room lives a poet who is famous for his heretical ideas:

*You and I and love
In this same spot
Lighting is my job; pleasuring is yours
In such a cosy room
Lives a poet with heretical ideas (1998, p. 125)*

In *The Orange*, Qabbani assumes that he was chosen by Love like a prophet who was chosen by God. He makes some allusions to Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) when the angel Gabriel visited him in the cave for the first time and asked him to recite the first words of the Qur'an:

*Love surprises me like a prophecy when I sleep;
Painting on my forehead
A twinkling crescent and a pair of doves:
It bids me speak,
Then my tears run down my cheeks and could not speak
And then bids me fake pain,
I answer: there is nothing left in my chest except bones?
He says, Learn.
I answer: O my Lord
For fifty years
I have been trying to conjugate the verb of love
(1978, p. 7)*

Similarly, John Donne encounters a huge amount of criticism from his contemporary rivals and readers for breaking free from the conventional treatment of

Donne and Qabbani's Boldness and Lack of Sentimentality

Throughout his long poetic journey, Qabbani composed 35 Diwans of love and erotic poetry. He is well-known in the Arab world as the 'Women Poet' and 'Breasts Poet' because most of his poems deal and celebrate women's beauty, nipples and sexuality. His first Diwan brought about a huge controversy amidst Syrians and Arabs in general. He was, therefore, called a poet of pornography. Qabbani himself comments, "When my first Diwan was published, it caused a deep pain in the body of the city that refuses to admit her body or her dreams. They attacked me fiercely and my flesh then was still fresh" (Qabbani, 1973, p. 132). In *The First Appointment*, Qabbani says:

*I extolled your breasts until out of Pride
They refused to kneel down to God.*

*Your breasts were not made for Bras but for mouths--
Crazy she who hides her breasts out of protection;
Crazy she who let her youth pass by without being kissed or sucked (1998, p. 24)*

Like Donne, in this excerpt, Qabbani encourages a married lady to take advantage of her husband's absence and have sex with her lover. He says in *Profane Milk*,

*Take advantage of his absence;
Some house is demolished by she who lives in it
While the toddler creeping unconcerned
His mother was lying in a lover's arms
If baby were to cry, his mother would never hearken (1998, p. 78)*

In a reputable Egyptian magazine review of Qabbani's second Diwan *Childhood of a Breast*, the word *Breast* which is *Nahd* in Arabic was transmuted into *River* which means *Nahr* in Arabic. In fact, this Diwan contains some of the most erotic poems that Qabbani had ever written. The title was thus changed into *Childhood of a River* in order to suit public taste and avoid any conflict with readers. Qabbani (1973) sadly

*And a notice board written in all languages
 "Please Do not Disturb."
 I understood you were away with another man
 He offered you a legal abode
 And legal sex
 And legal death (1978, p. 31)*

In the same poem, Qabbani admonishes his beloved 'the queen' for replacing the happy and free life that she used to have with him with another barren and suffocating life which has nothing beautiful to cherish. Qabbani elaborates:

*O Queen
 Whose breasts used to manipulate weather?
 And control the movement of the ebb and flow
 What has become of you?
 O lady whose voice had fallen into the ground
 And became a tree
 And her shadow fell on my body
 And became a fountain of water
 Why did you abandon my chest?
 And became homeless
 Why did you leave the time of poetry?
 And chose the narrow time?
 Why did you break the Green ink pot?
 I used to paint you with
 And became a woman
 With only white and black (1978, p. 31)*

Donne also in a number of poems encourages women to be sexually free as well as practice adultery without fear of their fathers or husbands. As if he wanted them to rebel against patriarchal suffocating dominance and subjugations. In *The Perfume*, Donne excels in the presentation of his argument with his silent mistress who he encourages to have sex with him without regard to her father. Like Marvel in *To His Coy Mistress*, Donne in this long erotic poem, eloquently attempts to convince her that there is no good of her beauty if she does not enjoy it and share it with him, "If you were good, your good doth soon decay" (Grierson, 1912, p. 161).

In addition to that, Donne in 'Elegy 19: On His Mistress Going to Bed', a full seduction scenario is presented where he cleverly tries to persuade his mistress to take off her clothes item by item till she gets completely naked. Then he cleverly offers to explore her naked body parts. Astonishingly, he does this in a

love. Donne shows a kind of daring love that was not conventionally celebrated. The following lines taken from *The Canonization* show how Donne seems to be annoyed by those who objected to his new love:

*Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?
 What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?
 Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?
 When did my colds a forward spring remove?
 When did the heats which my veins fill
 Add one more to the plaguy bill? (Grierson, 1912, p. 14)*

Qabbani strongly condemns his society for equating female honour with chastity and virtue. A woman for him should not be mistrusted or mistreated or subordinated either by fathers or husbands; rather she should be given 'a room of her own' in both family and society to explore her individuality and practise her rights as a fully independent human being. He also condemns the views that undervalue women and consider them as evil creatures. Indeed, the battle he fought to dismantle patriarchy and misogyny was not an easy one. He says in *When I Said I Love You*,

*When I said to you
 I love you
 I knew
 I was trying to stage a coup against Tribe laws
 And ring the bells of Scandal
 I wanted to seize power
 So that I could make the World woods greener
 And World's seas bluer
 And World kids more innocent
 I wanted
 To put an end to the barbaric age (1970, pp. 7-8)*

Moreover, according to Arabic culture, sex is only legitimate within marriage. Sex outside marriage was subject to public disgrace and punishment. However, Qabbani considers that marriage suffocates women's freedom and women only resort to marriage just to conform to familial and social expectations. Organized marriages are just forms of death. He says in

You Take Time in your Luggage and Travel:

*I went to the stations where I used to receive you
 And to the stations where I used to see you off
 I saw tens of flower pots*

not feel the thought immediately. Let's consider the following excerpt from *I Travel in Your Eyes* by Qabbani which I hold has some likeness to Donne's compass conceit:

*When I travel in your eyes, beloved
I feel I am riding a magic carpet
Swayed by violet and pink clouds
I roam and rotate in your eyes, beloved
I rotate like the earth (1998, p. 766)*

Both Qabbani and Donne consider their mistresses as centers around which they revolve and rotate. Of course, Qabbani's image is not as startling as that of Donne; yet the beauty lies in their common belief in the pivotal role of a woman in a man's life. For both, it is woman who defines and expands the lover and makes him feel like a king. The steadier and more loving the woman, the safer the journey the lover undertakes. The caring and supportive she is, the happier and more prosperous the lover becomes. That is having a mistress of such qualities can make a Heaven of Hell. Let's consider the following stanza from Donne's *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*,

*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 th' other do (Grierson,
1912, p. 49)*

The image of the compass with its abstractness asserts Donne's idea of his "refined love" which is based on faith and independence of lovers. The 'sub-lunary' lovers "whose soul is sense", according to Donne, fail to conceptualize this idea of spiritual love. Love for them relies on common sense and must involve the presence of lovers. To illustrate, the compass image reflects the story of Odysseus who roamed the world and underwent challenges and temptations but his devotion to his beloved wife Penelope made him find his way back home despite all the obstacles. Penelope was the fixed foot who was committed to her husband's love and who had faith in love as well as in her husband's return. She cherished hope of his return till the very end:

*Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun (Grierson,
1912, p. 49)*

beautiful language, with ease and without shame or guilt:

*Licence my roving hands, and let them go,
Before, behind, between, above, below.
O my America! my new-found-land,
My kingdom, safest when with one man
mann'd,
My Mine of precious stones, My Empirie,
How blest am I in this discovering thee!
(Grierson, 1912, p. 119)*

Donne and Qabbani's Imagery and the Conceit

As a matter of fact, writing in a metaphysical style is modernist in the sense the role of the reader is as crucial as the role of the writer in meaning making. This was really visionary in the part of Donne and his followers in the metaphysical school. A reader of Donne is expected to have at least a reasonable amount of intelligence and humor in order to be able to appreciate and reflect on his conceits. Linda Linzey (2009) observes, "in the *Elegies*, Donne calls on his reader to move beyond "overhearing" and to enter into relationship with the speaker...to make a judgment of the action... to fill in the rhetorical/linguistic gaps" (Linzey, 2009, p. 28).

Donne uses paradoxes and juxtaposition in order to create tension so that readers emotionally and intellectually are involved in the production of the meaning. Tension is also crucial for the readers to grab the thorough and overall meaning of an image or an object and see beyond the text. By skillfully yoking disparate images together, Donne was able to create what it is called the metaphysical conceit. In Donne's hand, conceit is no longer an ornament but rather integral to the overall meaning of the poem. The function of conceit in Donne's poems is to define, explicate, persuade, or enhance a point. Another significant aspect of Donne's metaphysical conceit is that it cannot be isolated from its context, the whole poem. As cited in Al-Khamisi (2011), Helen Gardner rightly puts it:

In a metaphysical poem, the conceits are instruments of definition in an argument or instruments to persuade. The poem has something to say which the conceit explicates or something to urge which the conceit helps to forward (2011, p.59)

In fact, Qabbani fuses feeling and thought in a different way from Donne. His essential experience is inclined towards emotionality. Unlike Donne, he does

doxes and juxtapositions such as 'presence absence'; 'here and there'; 'sight and blindness', 'I love you when I love someone else' etc. This careful weaving of paradoxical imagery compels the readers to pause and reflect on the complex nature of love and love relationships:

*What do you call this feeling for you?
And how I explain this presence of absence
And this absence --presence?
And how can I be here and can be there at the
same time?
And how they want me to see them
While I am blind to all women on earth but you!*

*I love you when I am another one's lover
And I call out your name when I call her
What do you call this?
Duality? Fall? Escape? Madness?
And how am I with you?
And claim to be with her!
Contradiction runs in my blood
And I love my contradictions (1978, p. 22)*

Conclusion

This comparative study between Donne and Qabbani reveals that passion of love had shaped the two poets' lives and poetic careers. The poets believed that traditional verse was no longer capable of embracing the new aspirations of contemporary young people. They grappled as to how to make it new and succeeded in their attempts to inaugurate a new kind of love poetry which generations of readers have found fresh and captivating. Love is considered to be the main preoccupation of their minds, the obsession of their daydreams, the energy of their bodies, the food of their souls, the incentive behind their quest for truth and beauty and the favorite subject matter of their poetry.

Despite Qabbani and Donne's deep immersion in their literary traditions, they showed a strong inclination towards innovation. The intensity of emotions and the breadth of experience combined with wit and humor enabled the two poets to employ forced analogies between apparently dissimilar objects to materialize a new style. Like Donne, Qabbani worked for a simple style so that poetry could be read and appreciated by common readers. His explicit celebration of love and his emphasis on feeling, spontaneity, simplicity and the pleasure of beauty over formality and

Qabbani's imagery as well is characterized by ingenuity, wit and innovation but he cannot indeed rise to the level of Donne. Donne's ingenuity, wit and poetic talent are well illustrated in the compass stanza as it reflects what Eliot calls 'unification of sensibility': an emotional state, love, being philosophized and intellectualized. Qabbani like Donne was able to manipulate his intensity of emotions by his creative humor and intellectual imagery; i.e. to fuse feelings with thoughts in a beautiful and startling manner. Both Qabbani and Donne defined their private and subjective emotions and experiences by finding suitable objective correlatives and logical parallels. They could never do so without real poetic talents and linguistic competence.

Indeed, readers of Qabbani's poems experience almost similar linguistic creativity and dexterity as well as deep intellectual and emotional reflections on various subjects, mainly love. His poetry is replete with far-fetched and forced analogies between objects apparently dissimilar. Let's consider this excerpt from Donne's *A Letter to a Reader*, for example:

*My fevered imagination made perfumes be seen
And the waves of reverberation be smelt (1998,
p. 16)*

Furthermore, Qabbani, like Donne, amazingly portrays his private experiences and reflections in paradoxical terms especially his juxtaposition of the mundane with the Divine in order to startle readers and captivates their attentions. This makes his style appealing, fresh and alive. I consider the following erotic extract by Qabbani a conceit for its far-fetched and humorous analogies:

*I spared no breast white or brown
Without planting my flag in it
I wove a garment from women's skin
And erected Pyramids from nipples
And composed poetry of unequal charm
Except God's words in the Old Testament
(1998, p. 464)*

In addition, Qabbani in *Heart's Contradictions* presents a number of successive opposites and contraries which is reflective of Donne's style. He states that contradictions run in his blood and that he is fond of his contradictions. The following excerpt is an excellent example of Qabbani's creative use of para-

Finally, the study has adequately and substantively shown the undeniable relationship between Donne and Qabbani in terms of their treatment and approach toward love. This study will also inspire others to research the topic further as Donne and Qabbani have a lot in common as has been shown in this research.

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ornament changed the course of Arabic love poetry. Both poets aimed at producing poems that appear to be written for their own sake; fresh, vital and responsive to the spirit of the age. In addition, Donne and Qabbani's great achievement consists mainly in the revitalization of love language that was growing weary and enervated. Their creative capacity always found them ways to reinvent and re-mould linguistic expressions that cater to the public taste of their contemporary times.

Both poets condemned social discrimination against women and showed a universal attitude towards liberation and empowerment of ordinary women. Each believed that subjugating women and viewing them merely as objects of consumption and conquest will only perpetuate carnal images of lust in the minds of young men. Pent-up sexual passions will only impede any deeper conception of women as human beings.

The two poets introduced a kind of daring love that was not conventionally celebrated. Qabbani was accused of his explicit depiction of women's sexuality and the propagation and encouragement of free love. In the discussion of the sexual and erotic poems of Donne and Qabbani, it must be mentioned that there is a remarkable progression in their approach and treatment of love. Their early poems reflect their preoccupation with eroticism where one finds sexually explicit imagery and detailed description of woman's body to satisfy their carnal desires. In their later poems one discerns the change in their attitudes and philosophy towards love and man woman relationships.

Qabbani and Donne belong to different cultures; however, for them the beautiful woman is undoubtedly the most poetic topic in the world. Again, if asked to define poetry, they would certainly concur that 'poetry, thy name is woman' to borrow from Shakespeare. They tackled and discussed secular, feminist, erotic as well as romantic topics in their poetry. Yet eroticism seems to dominate. To them, true love is a sacred emotion; it purifies the lovers from baser pursuits. They believe that physical love should lead to a spiritual awakening. As in Qabbani's *I Read your Body* and Donne's *Good Morrow*, the poets show common interest in delving deep into the beloved's spiritual world in order to enjoy true love that is not confined by time or place, yet this cannot be attained without the physical union.

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