

it is said love poetry was to contain, “fictional expression”² i.e. in the style of a modern day soap opera, to write about more interesting things than real life. By him writing about his grief for his wife he is going against this constraint to express his love.

‘She whom I loved’ contains an element of pleading with God, although whether this is for his wife back or for the return of his religion we cannot be sure. This “dialectical expression of personal drama”³ is characteristic of Donne’s poetry. He often structures his poems as a one-sided address to either God, as in ‘She whom I loved’ or another being. It can be suggested that he is rehearsing his argument before presenting it, as although there is often an implied response we never hear it. This need to practise what he is going to say highlights the importance of his words, thus emphasising his love for the woman, with his need to get it right.

Although these two poems are both about romantic love, they are presented in very different ways, perhaps to correlate with the different women they are written about. It has been suggested that the purpose of Donne’s love poetry is to, “present as total a knowledge of the experience of love as one imagination could compass.”⁴ The two variations of love shown in these poems supports this aim, as they highlight love with a mistress when you never want to be disturbed, and love with a wife whom you never want to lose. However, the only main differences between these two appear to be the Christian convention of marriage, and the implied physical relationship with one but not with the other.

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Page 2 of 2

² Patrick Cruttwell, *The Love Poetry of John Donne*

³ J.B. Leishman, *The Monarch of Wit* (1959)

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