

Authorial Aficionados: The Striking Connection Between Metaphysical Poet John Donne and  
Modern-Day Music Sensation Taylor Swift

Echoes of resplendent lines from a popular song play on an antique radio, the song's mellifluous lyrics enabling listeners to instinctively perform an effervescent dance. A masquerader hurriedly recites the lines of a poem written nearly 400 years ago, attempting to bind the words to their bones before an opening-night performance. One melody was penned by a modern-day music sensation, the other composed by a sixteenth-century metaphysical poet. Two artists, at first glance appearing as mismatched as pieces from two remarkably different puzzles, exude stark similarities in their writing styles, despite the cataclysmic menagerie of centuries separating their lives. Taylor Swift skyrocketed into the limelight at age 17 when she released her debut album entitled *Taylor Swift* (Biography.com Editors). John Donne began composing his poetry in the 1590s (although the exact dates are uncertain, as long-lasting recordkeeping was not a priority in the 1500s) at around the age of 18 (Parfitt 13). Both authors have received acclaim for their distinct writing styles, through which they exhibit extraordinary abilities that only emerge once in a century. Even though their works were written over four centuries apart, famed metaphysical poet John Donne and globally renowned singer-songwriter Taylor Swift demonstrate similar writing styles and techniques. The twain brilliantly incorporates shocking endings, elaborate imagery, clever metaphors, and impressive metaphysical conceits to elevate their writing and cement their places in literary history.

Taylor Swift and John Donne possess the unique ability to inject their pieces with bewildering revelations, as they occasionally place the theses at the end of their works, an uncommon practice among wordsmiths. In Donne's sonnet "Death, be not proud," the narrator is addressing Death, informing the ubiquitous character that it has no reason for pride. It is

obvious the narrator is building to a final argument; however, Donne does not reveal the thesis until the final lines, leaving audiences pondering the purpose of the poem until the very last moment. “One short sleep past, we wake eternally / And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die” (Donne, “Holy Sonnets” lines 13-14). Donne does not foreshadow Death’s demise; so, this declaration is shocking to audiences. Similarly, Swift incorporates a surprising ending in a song from her critically acclaimed *evermore* album. In “no body, no crime,” Swift relates a story in which a woman exacts revenge on her friend’s husband after he allegedly cheats on and murders her. Swift begins to foreshadow the twist when she sings, “Good thing my daddy made me get a boating license when I was 15 / And I’ve cleaned enough houses to know how to cover up a scene / Good thing Este’s sister’s gonna swear she was with me / Good thing his mistress took out a big life insurance policy” (“no body, no crime” 2:26-2:50). After these lines are recited, the audience understands that the narrator is hinting at an unexpected development in the plot, but the lack of explanation leaves readers questioning. In the final lines, Swift sings, “No, no body, no crime / I wasn’t letting up until the day he / Died” (“no body, no crime” 3:21-3:30). Like Donne, Swift slowly builds to the introduction of the thesis, and she does not explain the purpose of the song until the final lines. This deliberate syntax choice is uncommon, as most writers are taught that a thesis statement should be placed at the beginning of a work to allow audiences to predict the plot of the piece. Donne and Swift’s placement of the theses at the end is a calculated choice. By placing it at the end, audiences are interested throughout the piece. Additionally, this technique preserves an aura of mystery, a perfect atmosphere for such grim works. This brilliant stylistic choice is prevalent in both poets’ writings and makes clear that both authors are deserving of literary praise.

Taylor Swift and John Donne both brilliantly incorporate figurative language in their

pieces. Their works are rich with detailed imagery, creative metaphors, beautiful diction, and impressive similes. Because both authors are attentive to their language, frequent incorporation of figurative language is another prominent similarity in the writing styles of Taylor Swift and John Donne. In John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," Donne relates the story of a man consoling his romantic partner, as she is upset about an impending separation (either the man's death or a physical relocation will divide the pair). The speaker iterates that a physical separation will not sever their connection, as the couple's souls are united. This poem is filled with gorgeous metaphors and imagery. The speaker states, "As virtuous men pass mildly away, / And whisper to their souls to go, / Whilst some of their sad friends do say / The breath goes now, and some say, No" (Donne, "A Valediction" lines 1-4). These lines are abounding in imagery, painting a detailed picture of friends mourning the passing of someone. This formidable incorporation of imagery forces the audience to imagine a funeral, evoking vigorous feelings of sadness within readers. The beauty and meticulousness of the lines in Taylor Swift's ten-minute version of "All Too Well" mirror Donne's talent with imagery. The ten-minute version of "All Too Well" chronicles a tale in which someone reminisces about a past relationship that met an unfortunate end. Like "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," the ten-minute version of "All Too Well" is filled with elaborate imagery and meaningful metaphors. In the opening lines of the ten-minute version of "All Too Well," Swift sings, "I walked through the door with you, the air was cold / But somethin' 'bout it felt like home somehow / And I left my scarf there at your sister's house / And you've still got it in your drawer, even now" (0:22-0:44). These melancholic lines utilize imagery to portray someone remembering a previous relationship. The imagery allows the audience to feel as though they are with the narrator of the song, deepening their connection to the story and its characters. A review of "All Too Well" perfectly articulates

this phenomenon, as it claims, “You must be ready to hear it and you have to be ready to feel it, because trust us, you will absolutely feel it” (McCafferty). Swift’s articulation of extraordinarily passionate emotions washes over the audience, making them feel the emotions as well. Donne’s work is similar, as he utilizes kindred imagery in his poems. Both authors deliberately placed these moments at the beginning of their pieces, expertly using imagery as a tool to immediately enthrall their audiences. The presence of this clever tool is salient in both wordsmiths’ works, rendering the authors deserving of literary acclaim.

Additionally, Swift and Donne pen moving metaphors in their literature. “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” (Donne, “A Valediction” lines 25-28). Donne has received a considerable amount of literary praise for this metaphor, all of which is deserved. When analyzed, this metaphor is perfect for the two lovers featured in this poem. Stiff twin compasses, modernly known as drafting compasses, have two separate ends that always move in tandem, held together by a thin attachment. Even though the two ends of the compass are physically separated, one end is always connected to the other, much like the narrator’s idea in Donne’s poem. Swift includes a similar brilliantly crafted metaphor in “All Too Well.” The ten-minute version of “All Too Well” reads, “From when your Brooklyn broke my skin and bones / I’m a soldier who’s returning half her weight” (Swift 7:33-7:43). This metaphor is an incandescent demonstration of Swift’s lyrical brilliance. The metaphor can carry the literal meaning of a soldier returning from war with an altered appearance—the relationship is the war, and the speaker lost weight due to the sadness and trauma from the experience. The metaphor can also carry another meaning, one less overt but more tragic to the speaker. A “soldier returning half her weight” after a relationship likely represents the speaker losing the weight of another

person—her partner—after the demise of the relationship. Like Donne’s, this metaphor is expertly curated, and it serves as the perfect lyrical inclusion.

Metaphysical conceits were a highly regarded literary technique during the metaphysical poetry era; however, they are not commonly utilized today. Despite their rarity, metaphysical conceits can be discovered in Taylor Swift’s writing, enabling the beguiling device to be another commonality in Donne and Swift’s writing styles. Metaphysical conceit “refers to a poet’s use of somewhat unorthodox language and language construct to describe the quality of an everyday concept” (Du 963). It creates a metaphor for something ordinary using something unexpected. John Donne was regarded as the “most outstanding of the English metaphysical poets, and was also considered a master of the metaphysical conceit” (Du 692). One of Donne’s more famous metaphysical conceits appears in his poem “The Flea,” during which Donne employs a flea to represent a couple’s love and desire. This comparison is odd and unexpected, increasing its metaphysical fame. During “The Flea,” the narrator states, “This flea is you and I, and this / Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is... Though use make you apt to kill me, / Let not to that, self-murder added be, / And sacrilege, three sins in killing three” (Donne lines 12-18). This comparison is a metaphysical conceit because the speaker is using a peculiar metaphor (the flea as the pair’s love and desire) to convince a woman to sleep with him. This bizarre metaphor acts to interest and engage readers, forcing them to view an ordinary topic like love and desire in a new and unusual way. Taylor Swift brings the concept of metaphysical conceits back into the twenty-first century in her song “False God.” “False God” uses religious comparisons to describe a relationship, one that carries deep love as well as troubling challenges. Metaphysical conceits are incorporated in her religious references, as Swift uses religion as a metaphor for desire and sexual intercourse. Swift sings, “They say the road gets hard and you get lost / When

you're led by blind faith, blind faith / But we might just get away with it / Religion's in your lips... The altar is my hips / Even if it's a false god / We'd still worship this love" ("False God" 0:44-1:18). Using religious idols (like faith, god, and altars) to symbolize sexual intercourse is certainly classified as a metaphysical conceit, as unorthodox language is describing a familiar concept. Audiences would not expect religion to be likened to sex; so, it is shocking, and it gifts the audience with a new way to think about religion, love, desire, and sexual intercourse. This creative incorporation elevates Swift's writing, proving that she creates literature as well as art. Both authors' clever uses of metaphysical conceits have cemented their places in literary and art history.

Society is an ever-changing entity—people grow, technology develops, artwork dons new appearances, and literature, an idea consistently molded to match a civilization's current trends, evolves. Despite the constant adaptation, similarities can be discovered, even appearing in works written with over four centuries of separation. Many view music as an art form, but the persistent appearance of literary devices and techniques suggests it is a form of literature. "Song is a part of literature. It is a way of life... If an important occasion is a meal, songs are its spices—leaving the meal incomplete without them. In a song, we can find lyrics which complete and beautify the song and makes the hearer more interested in hearing it" (Siallagan 55).

Literature is not complete without music, as songs feature lyrics that touch, educate, and offer new ways of thinking to listeners. When analyzing music as literature, Taylor Swift can be regarded as a literary master and trailblazer, enabling the comparison of Swift to other literary aficionados throughout history. John Donne is considered one of the best metaphysical poets, and, even though they existed centuries apart, Taylor Swift exhibits remarkable similarities to Donne. The pair lived similar lives (both had early career beginnings and had different "eras" of

work, building large and diverse repertoires for the artists), but, more impressively, the two authors exhibit comparable writing styles. Both Donne and Swift cleverly incorporate surprising endings, detailed imagery, unique metaphors, and brilliant metaphysical conceits, elevating their writing and cementing their places in literary history. Certainly, both artists are deserving of artistic and literary acclaim for their impressive feats, as they have molded society and revealed that they possess talents that only emerge once in a century.

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