Chapter Five: Women and Love in Early Seventeenth-Century Lyric Poetry

The early seventeenth century, in its narrowest definition, extending from the accession of the first Stuart king (James I) in 1603 to the coronation of the third (Charles II) in 1660, is a period of great internal turmoil and conflict in religion, society and politics in England. Conflicts between Catholics and Puritans, between Cavaliers and Puritans, between the sovereign and the parliament, between monarchy and democracy, and all the upheaval and turbulence in society profoundly influence the cultural and intellectual atmosphere of this period. This is an age of clash and interaction between the old and the new in almost every field, including religion, science, politics, literature and so on. As Douglas Bush asserts in *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century 1600-1660*, “Surveying the age and its representative minds, in 1660 as well as in 1600, we may say that normality consists in incongruity” (2).

As incongruity and conflict appear in the society, there is also change in poetics in this period and it is well-known that there are roughly three different kinds of lyric poets in the early seventeenth century; they are “Metaphysical Poets,” with John Donne as the pioneer, “Cavalier Poets,” or “Sons of Ben,” with Ben Jonson as the father and leader, and George Herbert’s group, who write religious poems. All, in generally different ways, represent a revolt against the trend in the previous century. However, as many critics have claimed, the grouping of “Metaphysical Poets” and “Cavalier Poets” is not functional; actually, the name falls short of the reality. For instance, Bush, while introducing the two schools, says, “The dichotomy is sound enough to be useful, and false enough to be troublesome, since lines and planes which

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1 In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 7th edition, George Herbert is no longer categorized as a Metaphysical poet, instead his religious poems form another group with Traherne, Marvell, and the American colonial poet Edward Taylor as his followers.
at times seem quite divergent do in fact often meet” (107). Besides, David Daiches in *A Critical History of English Literature* also comments on the resemblance between the two schools. According to Daiches, in spite of the conspicuous differences between Jonson and Donne, their followers always combine the influence of the two poets and so sometimes it is hard to separate the two schools unequivocally.

Accordingly Daiches further explains:

This is not to say that Jonson and Donne wrote the same kind of poetry . . . but it does mean that the fact that there were common elements in the styles of the two poets . . . made it easier for their followers to combine elements from the style of each. Against the highly stylized artfulness of Spenser, Jonson set classical cogency and symmetry and Donne set a poetry which combined violence of personal passion with intellectual ingenuity and an imagery both starkly realistic and startlingly cunning. Both objected to the mere sweetness of the latter phases of the Petrarchan tradition . . . and for both the personality of the poet rather than the demands of a “poetic” subject and attitude determined . . . the choice of tone and image. (359)

This quotation from Daiches clearly explains the differences and common elements between the two groups and briefly shows their turning away from the Petrarchan traditions. Since there is overlapping between the two schools and their followers, in this chapter I would discuss the poems of the three schools together according to their subject matter with no distinction made between the three groups.

It is well-known that religious poetry plays a very important role in the seventeenth-century lyrics, and some poets, such as George Herbert, almost write only religious poems. In addition, however, love poems are also of great quantity. The most obvious example is John Donne, who writes about both God and women voluminously. Herbert J. C. Grierson in the “Introduction” of his famous
Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century says: “Donne . . . is metaphysical not only in virtue of his scholasticism, but by his deep reflective interest in the experience of which his poetry is the expression, the new psychological curiosity with which he writes of love and religion” (xiv). Bush also expresses a similar idea: “Donne’s major themes were woman and God, or perhaps one should say himself in relation to each, and the relation of his mind and soul to his body” (134).

Admitting that woman and God are the two major themes, Bush, however, focuses only on Donne’s religious poems in his book. Grierson has written an article “Donne’s Love-Poetry” yet he ignores the woman images and Donne’s attitude to woman represented in the love poetry. Although love to woman is one of the two major themes in Donne’s poetry, few critics concentrate on the woman illustrated in Donne’s poetry, not to mention those appear in the poems of other poets. C. S. Lewis in his “Donne and Love Poetry in the Seventeenth Century” only touches in passing the woman image and poets’ attitude toward woman illustrated in some of the seventeenth-century poetry. Since most women were silenced from the print world at that time, it is important for feminist criticism to find out how women were constructed then in men’s writings. Therefore in this chapter I will explore the woman image and the male poets’ attitudes toward woman that are represented in their lyrics. It is impossible to recuperate the reality of almost three hundred years ago and it will be hard to rehabilitate the cultural aura in the early modern period, as Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss in “Introduction: Minding the Story” declare:

The historical power of masculinity makes culturally sanctioned stories

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2 Later in this chapter I will take issue with Grierson’s reading of Donne’s love poetry in passing.
3 I have scrutinized all the poems in Songs and Sonnets and Elegies in The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne edited by Charles M. Coffin and the poems in Ben Jonson and The Cavalier Poets: Authoritative Texts, Criticism selected and edited by Hugh Maclean, and in The Metaphysical Poets selected and edited by Helen Gardner. Therefore, the citations in this chapter are taken from those three books.
suspect; the gaps between events and discourses, between what women are and what they are made to be, set up both contradictions in discourse and literary possibilities of recognizing and resisting them. Since these contradictions and resistances permeate culture, they operate in women as well as men, as their non-written forms underlie texts through which they are expressed and contended. (2)

Contradictions in discourse do exist in different ways but I do hope through careful scrutiny of those lyric poems in the early seventeenth century we can get the gist of the image of woman constructed in the literary discourse at that time.

As mentioned above, the incongruity in religion, society, and politics has great impact on the cultural and intellectual atmosphere of this period; it not only reflects in the multitudinous literary genres but also in the attitude toward love and women. Different from the Petrarchan sonnets in the British Renaissance, most of which consistently worship the beautiful but aloof lady as the unattainable goddess and depict the poets’ passionate but pure love toward that invaluable lady, the lyric poetry of this period consists of a host of conflict and incongruity, including clash between body and soul, between physical love and spiritual love, between recognition and denial of true love, and between praise of and discrimination against women. Through the understanding of this clash we may also get to know the mental state of those male poets and their motivation. The exploration of the lyrics of that time can show the struggle between body and soul in the male poets’ mind, the fundamental male intention to dominate the female and female’s oppressed situation. Consequently it may help probe into the male’s ambivalent feelings toward the opposite sex.

It is clearly demonstrated that women are repressed in a patriarchal society and theorists have been trying to find out the fundamental basis for this repression. In
Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson, Camille Paglia suggests that the male’s repression of women results from their fear of women’s chthonian nature. She starts her argument by asserting the intrinsic adverse quality between nature and art.\footnote{The ideas illustrated in this paragraph mainly come from the first chapter “Sex and Violence, or Nature and Art” in Paglia’s book.} In Paglia’s opinion, nature is chthonian and art represents human beings’ efforts to give form and order to this daemonic nature. Besides, according to Paglia, sex is part of nature and “[s]ex is the natural in man” (1). In order to get the dominant position, for a long time men try to put the chthonian elements, including sex and nature, under the control of logic reason. Society and culture are the main artificial forms for human beings to defend against the threatening power of nature. Paglia also holds the view that woman, because of her procreative power, is closer to nature and the identification of woman with nature results in man’s fear of woman and desire of conquering and dominating woman, since it in a way represents man’s power over both nature and woman. She makes use of Nietzsche’s idea of the conflict between Apollo and Dionysus in Greek culture and views Dionysus as the ruler of the chthonian and as the potential subversive power against the rigid social norms, which can be represented by Apollo. She argues that “western personality and western achievement are, for better or worse, largely Apollonian. Apollo’s great opponent Dionysus is ruler of the chthonian whose law is procreative femaleness. As we shall see, the Dionysian is liquid nature, a miasmic swamp whose prototype is the still pond of the womb” (12). Paglia explains the relation between women, nature and men as follows:

Nature’s cycles are woman’s cycles. Biologic femaleness is a sequence of circular returns, beginning and ending at the same point. Woman’s centrality gives her a stability of identity. She does not have to become but
only to be. Her centrality is a great obstacle to man, whose quest for identity she blocks. He must transform himself into an independent being, that is, a being free of her. If he does not, he will simply fall back. (9)

Of course, every human being has to fight against nature but Paglia believes that “nature’s burden falls more heavily on women” (9) since nature yokes women “into the brute inflexible rhythm of procreative law” (10). This identification of woman with nature grants woman, according to Paglia, the centrality that gives her stability of identity and also blocks man’s quest for identity; therefore, man must transform himself into a being free of her, or he will fall back into her (9-10). From the love poems of the early seventeenth century, we can find man’s intention and efforts to gain identity and autonomy in the tug of war between reasonable man and chthonian woman.

This kind of identification of nature with woman and the explanation of man’s fear of woman are quite common in Feminist thoughts; the difference is that Paglia extends the scope to include the whole culture and nature while most feminists put more stress on the opposition between man and woman. When talking about the ground on which culture, language, the imaginary and the mythology are built, Luce Irigaray in “Women-Mothers, the Silent Substratum of the Social Order” says: “The substratum is the woman who reproduces the social order, who is made this order’s infrastructure: the whole of our western culture is based upon the murder of the mother. The man-god-father killed the mother in order to take power” (47). Julia Kristeva in “Women’s Time” also suggests that woman is represented as the unconscious of the symbolic order in Judaeo-Christian culture, which is possible to overthrow the symbolic order through its marginality. This both interdependent and adverse relation between the two sexes causes male poets’ ambivalent attitude toward woman in the early modern period. Woman, most of the time as the silenced object,
could do little except for accepting the position that men assign them. With the understanding of the fundamental conflict between man and woman, we may readjust the disequilibrium between the two sexes.

The first effort to dominate woman is shown in the poets’ compliments of woman’s beauty, through which woman is made to be the desirable and beautiful sex object, instead of an autonomous subject. Somewhat following the Petrarchan conventions in the previous century, the lyric poets of this period also make use of the natural objects to praise woman and the emphasis most of the time is on the external beauty of woman, as in the Renaissance sonnets. So, eyes are the sun or the stars, cheeks are roses, and lips are cherries. Some poets deliberately subvert the Petrarchan conventions by making fun of them. In Thomas Carew’s “The Comparison,” he says to the lady:

Dearest, thy tresses are not threads of gold,
Thy eyes of diamonds, nor do I hold
Thy lips for rubies, thy fair cheeks to be
Fresh roses, or thy teeth of ivory;
Thy skin that doth thy dainty body sheathe
Not alabaster is, nor dost thou breathe
Arabian odors; those the earth brings forth,
Compared with which would but impair thy worth. (1-8)

John Donne’s Elegy VIII “The Comparison,” also mocks the Petrarchan conventions through the comparison between a beautiful lady and an ugly lady. Although there is this kind of revolt against the Petrarchan convention, in most of the poems their emphasis on the external beauty is still quite obvious and similar to the sonnets in the previous century. For example, in A Celebration of Charis in Ten Lyric Pieces Ben Jonson praises his lady in No. 4 “Her Triumph” by saying,
Do but look on her eyes, they do light
   All that love’s world compriseth!
Do but look on her hair, it is bright
   As Love’s star when it riseth!
Do but mark, her forehead’s smoother
   Than words that soothe her!
And from her arched brows, such a grace
   Sheds itself through the face,
As alone there triumphs to the life
   All the gain, all the good, of the elements’ strife.

Have you seen but a bright lily grow
   Before rude hands have touched it?
Ha’ you marked but the fall o’ the snow
   Before the soil hath smutched it?
Ha’ you felt the wool of beaver?
   Or swan’s down ever?
Or have smelt o’ the bud o’ the brier?
   Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
   O so white! O so soft! O so sweet is she!  (11-30)

Whereas in Donne’s “The Comparison,” the beautiful lady is “my Mistris” and the ugly woman is “thy Mistresse.” When describing the beautiful lady, Donne says, “As the sweet sweat of Roses in a Still, / As that which from chaf’d muskats pores doth trill, / As the almighty Balme of th’early East, / Such are the sweat drops of my Mistris breast” (1-4). As to the ugly lady, Donne says: “Ranke sweaty froth thy
Mistresse’s brow defiles, / Like spermatique issue of ripe menstruous boiles, / Or like
the skumme . . .” (7-9). Throughout the whole poem Donne tries his best to describe
the admirable beauty of his mistress and the disgusting ugliness of another man’s
mistress. In most of the poems that pay compliments on woman, the focus is on the
outward looks. Since vision, as Irigaray suggests, plays an important role in western
culture, it is natural for the male to notice the outward beauty first. And Irigaray
stresses that “her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her
consignment to passivity: she is to be the beautiful object of contemplation” (This Sex
Which Is Not One 26). The poets’ attention to women’s external beauty shows that
woman in their eyes is still beautiful sex object, which appeals to them through the
extraordinary physical attraction. According to Paglia, “the aesthetic sense . . . is a
swerve from the chthonian” (15). In order to suppress their sexual fear the male
need beauty to induce them. “The female is adorned not simply to increase her
property value, as Marxism would demystifyingly have it, but to assure her
desirability” (Paglia 16). Human beings defend the Apollonian fort with logic
reason to fight against the chthonian sexuality. Yet, beauty can help us relax.
“Beauty, an ecstasy of the eye, drugs us and allows us to act. Beauty is our
Apollonian revision of the chthonian” (16). Sidney Godolphin in “Song” depicts
men’s irresistibility to beautiful women: “For if beauty cause thy passion, / If a fair,
resistless eye / Melt thee with its soft impression, / Then thy hopes will never die, / Nor
be cured by cruelty” (11-15). They know that beauty is but skin deep as Sir
John Suckling claims in “Sonnet II”: “There is no such thing as that we beauty call,
It is mere cozenage all” (9-10). Beauty is only treachery and it is transient as
William Habington says in “To Castara, upon Beauty,” “Castara, see that dust the
sportive wind / So wantons with; ‘tis haply all you’ll find / Left of some beauty . . .”
(1-3). In the end the poet requests Castara to tell her suitor “that his lust / To
beauty’s madness; for it courts but dust” (13-14). Beauty is but dust and yet they still pursue the outward beauty since it can help the male forget the chthonian nature of woman temporarily; and beauty seems still the most significant feature of woman. In those poems that praise woman, we can only get the similar beautiful image of woman with no personality or identity. They become just lifeless symbols and means to attract the male. “By focusing on the shapely, by making woman a sex-object, man has struggled to fix and stabilize nature’s dreadful flux” (Paglia 30).

Besides, Diane Purkiss in “The Seventeenth-Century Woman Debate” discusses woman image in the pamphlets at that time and an important pamphlet, Swetnam’s Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Woman, describes woman as commodity—“a beautiful woman is for the most part costly” and women are “jewels”, “all precious, yet they are not all of one price” (qtd. in Purkiss 74). Therefore, we can conclude that it is common in the early modern period to take woman as beautiful object or commodity. To the male, “[w]oman’s beauty is a compromise with her dangerous archetypal allure. It gives the eye the comforting illusion of intellectual control over nature” (Paglia 17). Besides, making woman the object or the commodity helps man stay higher in the social hierarchy and so be able to have predominance over women.

However, there is a convention of praising an ugly woman in this period. One of Robert Herrick’s poems is a good example. In “No Loathsomeness in Love” the poet declares his true love by saying:

Be my mistress short or tall,

And distorted therewithal;

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5 In this chapter all the quotations from Swetnam’s The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and unconstant Woman are from Diane Purkiss’s “The Seventeenth-Century Woman Debate” in Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760 edited by Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss. In this article, Purkiss clearly exhibit the woman debate in the seventeenth century through the exploration of pamphlets written by both men and women.
Be she likewise one of those
That an acre hath of nose;
Be her forehead and her eyes
Full of incongruities;
Be her cheeks so shallow, too
As to show her tongue wag through;
Be her lips ill hung, or set,
And her grinders black as jet;
Has she thin hair, hath she none,
She’s to me a paragon. (3-14)

In Herrick’s opinion, so long as he loves the woman, her external looks are no longer important. John Donne does not often praise a woman’s outward beauty in his poems but in his “Elegy IX: The Autunnall” he chants out his praises of an “Autumnall face,” which follows the same trend as Herrick’s “No Loathsomeness in Love.” In this elegy, Donne claims: “No Spring, no Summer Beauty hath such grace, / As I have seen in one Autumnall face. / Young beauties force our love, and that’s a Rape, / This doth but counsaile, yet you cannot scape” (1-4). Throughout the whole poem the poet compares the love of a young lady and that of an older one and he insists that he prefers the love of the Autumnall face. Maybe Herrick and Donne are tongue-in-cheek when they say that they love the ugly or middle-aged lady; yet, at least, they give us some other possibility by showing us that in addition to external beauty there may be some other characteristics in women that can appeal to men.

Actually, in addition to the outward looks, some poets also write about the inner beauty of woman, that is, woman’s virtue. Those compliments on woman’s virtue, however, still demonstrate the male’s intention to dominate woman and make her succumb. Ben Jonson is the one that pay more attention to woman’s virtue. For
example, in describing the creature that he would most desire to honor, serve, and love, Ben Jonson, in “On Lucy, Countess of Bedford,” says, “I meant to make her fair, and free, and wise, / Of greatest blood, and yet more good than great” (4-5). So, fair is still the most important. Then he continues, “I meant she should be courteous, facile, sweet, / Hating that solemn vice of greatness, pride” (9-10). And “Only a learned and a manly soul / I purposed her; that should, with even powers, / The rock, the spindle, and the shears control / Of destiny, and spin her own free hours” (13-16).

In this poem Jonson’s intention is to praise the Countess of Bedford, who is Jonson’s patroness and those mentioned above actually is the description of the countess. So, in addition to beauty, this noble woman is free, wise, courteous, affable, and sweet. Most important of all, she has a learned and manly soul, which helps her control her destiny. Undoubtedly, for Jonson, man is still the parameter for judgment; therefore, a woman with a learned and “manly” soul is of course superior to those who have only physical beauty. From the French feminist viewpoint, this is but a left-handed compliment. This kind of judgment contains a kind of sex discrimination since it judges woman by the standard of man and this attitude acknowledges the superiority of masculine characteristics. In Jonson’s time, however, this expression is a sincere compliment. At least, Jonson here takes the noble lady as his equal, instead of an inferior one with no identity or subjectivity. The fact that this lady is his patroness may explain Jonson’s different attitude. In discussing Jonson’s addresses to noble ladies, Geoffrey Walton in “The Tone of Ben Jonson’s Poetry” comments on this poem: “This beautifully polished epigram is a suitable vehicle for the presentation of a vision of aristocratic elegance, charm, virtue and intelligence . . . and the poet’s admiration for them” (169). This male critic’s view may be true but later after reading more of Jonson’s addresses to noble ladies we will find that view is biased or even sexist. After careful scrutiny, we can find that Jonson usually pays his
compliment to a specific noble lady on her virtue, while only on her beauty when no identity is given. In his “Epistle to Katharine, Lady Aubigny,” Jonson says: “I will not say / ‘Your beauty,’ for you see that every day, / And so do many more” (29-31). Instead, he praises the lady’s virtue by saying: “My mirror is more subtle, clear, refined, / And takes and gives the beauties of the mind” (44-45). Through the whole poem the poet praises the lady because she shuns the vice that is popular among other women. He especially compliments on her procreative ability and says: “For which you worthy are the glad increase / Of your blessed womb, made fruitful from above, / To pay your lord the pledges of chaste love” (94-96). So, to bear children is a virtue because she can give posterity to her husband and she can prove her chastity at the same time. Later, Jonson specially praises the lady’s chastity:

. . .since you are truly that rare wife

Other great wives may blush at, when they see

What your tried manners are, what theirs should be

How you love one, and him you should; how still

You are depending on his word and will;

Not fashioned for the court, or strangers’ eyes,

But to please him, who is the dearer prize

Unto himself by being so dear to you. (110-17)

He praises her chastity as a special virtue because she will depend on the husband’s word and will. So, fertility and chastity are regarded as the lady’s virtue. Woman’s procreative power may be threatening to man but if man can have this power under his control then it is no longer threatening but profitable. The lady is but a means and object and the purpose of her existence is to give posterity to her husband and obey the husband’s word and will. To Jonson, it seems that woman has no independent value and her life is only the parasitic existence, depending on what they
can do for the men. In “Stabat Mater” Kristeva also says that in Western society the mother is “the only function of the ‘other sex’ to which we can attribute existence” (234). So, when Walton says: “Together Jonson’s lords and ladies form a brilliant, dignified, benevolent and gracious society, ‘dazling [sic.], yet inviting’” (171), the comments are actually, together with Jonson’s compliments on the lady’s virtue, male-centered. The society is brilliant, dignified, benevolent and gracious only from the male’s perspective while it is sexist, biased, repressive, and exploitative from the female’s perspective and this can be proved by Anne Bradstreet’s lines in “The Prologue” saying:

Let Greeks be Greeks, and women what they are,
Men have precedency, and still excel;
It is but vain, unjustly to wage war;
Men can do best, and women know it well;
Preeminence in each and all is yours,
Yet grant some small acknowledgement of ours. (37-42)

In these lines we can see women’s humble hope for some acknowledgement from the superior men. Instilled with sexist ideas constructed in the society, women in the seventeenth century recognized men’s superiority and believed in their own inferiority. They had no idea that the concept that woman is inferior to man was constructed by the male dominant society so they internalized the concept as if it were the given truth. In “A Sonnet to the Noble Lady, the Lady Mary Wroth,” Jonson compliments on Lady Mary Wroth’s sonnets and says, “Since I exscribe your sonnets, am become / A better lover, and much better poet” (3-4). This is an extraordinary breakthrough in the

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6 Although Ann Bradstreet emigrated from Britain to New England in 1630 yet as Cora Kaplan comments in Salt and Bitter and Good: Three Centuries of English and American Women Poets, her poems “owe more to the background of Elizabethan poetry in which she was educated than to the metaphysical tradition with which she was contemporary” (28). Therefore she still belongs to the British tradition. This poem is cited from Cora Kaplan’s Salt and Bitter and Good.
seventeenth century, compared with Bradstreet’s complaint in “The Prologue,” in which she says:

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue,
Who says my hand a needle better fits;
A poet’s pen all scorn I should thus wrong;
For such despite they cast on female wits:
If what I do prove well, it won’t advance,
They’ll say it’s stolen, or else it was by chance. (25-30)

Since woman is regarded more suitable for needlework, literary woman is despised. Jonson at least is more open-minded in praising a woman’s sonnet sequence. In the song “Queen and huntress, chaste and fair” in the play Cynthia’s Revels, Jonson chants the praises of Queen Elizabeth’s immaculate virtue. It seems that Jonson only pays attention to the virtue of those special noble ladies and as to the rest common women, only the physical beauty can appeal to him. One exception is the song “If I freely may discover” in The Poetaster, in which the first stanza talks about the special characteristics of the woman he loves, which are similar to those mentioned in “On Lucy, Countess of Bedford;” that is, she should be fair, witty, courteous, humorous and sweet. In the second stanza, however, Jonson shows more tolerance and compatibility by saying: “She should be allowed her passions, / So they were but used as fashions; / Sometimes froward, and then frowning, / Sometimes sickish, and then swooning, / Every fit with change still crowning” (11-15). Jonson may be male-centered but this kind of tolerant attitude is seldom seen in that period.

In addition to Jonson some other poets also mention woman’s virtue in their poems. For example, James Shirley praises Countess of Ormonde in “To the Excellent Pattern of Beauty and Virtue, Lady Elizabeth, Countess of Ormonde” and it is said that Shirley takes Jonson’s verse epistle to Lady Aubigny as his model.
Shirley does not definitely tell us what the lady’s virtue is but uses the phrase “flowing goodness” to represent her virtue. He says, “May you be / Still the same flowing goodness that we see; / In your most noble lord be happy still, / And heaven chain your hearts into one will” (25-28). The poet does not tell us exactly what one will it is but in the following line, Shirley talks about her two sons and the unborn babe. He says:

Be rich in your two darlings of the spring,
Which, as it waits, perfumes their blossoming,
The growing pledges of your love and blood;
And may that unborn blessing timely bud,
The chaste and noble treasure of your womb,
Your own, and th’ age’s expectation come. (29-34)

So, the “unborn blessing” is the chaste and noble treasure of her womb and she should be rich in the two darlings, which are “the growing pledges” of her love and blood. It seems that Shirley, following Jonson’s example, also considers chastity and fertility to be women’s important virtue. In addition, in “To a Lady upon a Looking-Glass Sent” Shirley emphasizes the importance of inward beauty and persuade those fair ladies, when they look at the mirror, to compare “The inward beauty with the outward grace, / And make them fair in soul as well as face” (9-10). According to what we have discussed so far, chastity and fertility, which represent men’s control over women’s body, must hold a very important place in a lady’s inward beauty. Henry Vaughan follows the same trend and compliments Lady Elizabeth in “An Epitaph Upon the Lady Elizabeth, Second Daughter to His Late Majesty” by saying: “Youth, beauty, virtue, innocence, / Heav’n’s royal and select expense, / With virgin-tears, and sighs divine, / Sit here, the Genii of this shrine, / Where now (thy fair soul winged away) / They guard the casket where she lay” (1-6). This lady died at the age of
fifteen, so the poet puts emphasis on her innocence, instead of on her chastity. She is innocent and naïve, and we can infer that she knows nothing of the men’s world. Hence, we can see in the early seventeenth century, woman should be innocent before marriage and stay chaste after marriage so that man can be sure that he has the sons of the father’s name. Aurelian Townshend in his poem “Upon Kinde and True Love” declares that he would rather have a lady who is kind and true than the one who is witty, free, and beautiful. He says: “‘Tis not how witty, nor how free, / Nor yet how beautifull she be, / But how much kinde and true to me. / Freedome and wit none can confine, / And beauty like the Sun doth shine, / But kinde and true are only mine” (1-4). He thinks that it is hard to confine freedom and wit and every one can see her beauty. The poet wants to own the woman totally so he wants her to be kind and true. In the last two stanzas Townshend further explains his idea:

Let others with attention sit,
To listen, and admire her wit,
That is a rock where I’ll not split.
Let others dote upon her eyes,
And burn their hearts for sacrifice,
Beauty’s a calm where danger lyes.

But kinde and True have been long tried
A harbour where we may confide,
And safely there at anchor ride.
From change of winds there we are free,
And need not feare Storme’s tyrannie,
Nor Pirat, though a Prince he be. (7-18)

Being true is the synonym of being chaste. If the woman is kind and true then she
will be his forever. It seems that Townshend, who intends to have complete control over his mistress, is more dominant and tyrannical. To Jonson, being witty and free is considered to be a lady’s virtue; yet, Townshend thinks it would be hard to control a woman who is witty and free. Thomas Carew in “Disdain Returned” expresses a similar view. Carew puts more stress on “a smooth and steadfast mind” than on external beauty.

He that loves a rosy cheek,

Or a coral lip admires,

Or from star-like eyes doth seek

Fuel to maintain his fires;

As old Time makes these decay,

So his flames must waste away.

But a smooth and steadfast mind,

Gentle thoughts, and calm desires,

Hearts with equal love combined,

Kindle never-dying fires.

Where these are not, I despise

Lovely cheeks, or lips, or eyes. (1-12)

The smooth and steadfast mind is a mind that will never change; therefore Carew asks for chastity too. The request for gentle thoughts, calm desires and hearts with equal love may be better than only asking for external beauty since the inner feature also counts to Carew. Yet, in this poem, the poet’s request only shows his desire to control woman instead of his sincere appreciation of woman. This poem, as the title implies, is actually a parting poem. The poet declares that, instead of smooth and steadfast mind, he can only find pride and scorn within the lady and so he will give up
this love. Carew says: “No tears, Celia, now shall win / My resolved heart to return; / I have searched thy soul within, / And find nought but pride and scorn; / I have learned thy arts, and now / Can disdain as much as thou” (13-18). So, woman should be beautiful and/or true so that man can have an easy control of her.

In the early seventeenth century, male poets, most of the time, pay more attention to woman’s outward looks and when they talk about the inward beauty, they mainly praise chastity and fertility as woman’s virtue. To them, woman is only a sex object so that she should be beautiful to attract the male’s attention and be chaste and fertile so that the male can be sure of the blood of his posterity. Except for those functions, woman is not autonomous and has no independent value of existence. When those male poets praise woman’s virtue, they actually express their expectation of and request for woman. This represents their intention to have order imposed on woman in whom the chthonian nature is dreadful to man because it may be out of his control. This shows man’s self-centeredness. Yet, different from Petrarchan sonnets, which confine the scope to the compliments on woman’s beauty and virtue, the seventeenth-century lyrics contain a lot of criticism and antagonism against woman. When they condemn woman, woman becomes quite contemptible in their description, and this kind of attitude not only shows man’s discrimination against woman but also demonstrates man’s fear of woman since woman’s abyssal chthonian nature is beyond man’s logic and reason.

Among those poets in the early seventeenth century, John Donne is the most notorious for his discrimination against women. Of all the woman’s vices mentioned in Donne’s poems, inconstancy or unchastity is the one that is mentioned most often. In “Song” or “Goe, and catche a falling starre,” Donne claims that it is impossible to find a true and fair woman. He says that after you make every effort to go on all the difficult expeditions you will swear, “No where / Lives a woman true, and faire”
And even if you really find a true and fair woman, Donne further says:

“Though shee were true, when you met her, / And last, till you write your letter, / Yet she / Will bee / False, ere I come, to two, or three” (23-27). In “Womans Constancy” Donne assures us that the woman who loves him today will change tomorrow. In “Twichnam Garden,” wondering in the garden, the poet suffers from unreturned love and his mind is full of gall; therefore, he complains, “O perverse sexe, where none is true but shee, / Who’s therefore true, because her truth kills mee” (26-27). So all the women are not true but this one, who tells him the truth (that she does not love him) and this truth almost kills him. Woman is cruel as well as untrue. In “Loves Diet” Donne expresses the idea that because of his indulgence in love, he suffers from the cumbersomeness of love and he would make love have a diet, that is, to apply more discretion when facing love. In this poem when talking about the mistress’ tears, Donne says that “eyes which rowle towards all, weepe not, but sweat” (18), and this implies that the mistress is false. And when the woman writes to him, Donne says, “. . . Ah, what doth it availe, / To be the fortieth name in an entaile?” (24), so his mistress is by no means constant. In “Elegie XV: The Expostulation,” Donne again depicts woman’s inconstancy when he expostulates with his mistress about her falseness:

To make the doubt cleare, that no woman’s true,

Was it my fate to prove it strong in you?

Thought I, but one had breathed purest aire,

And must she needs be false because she’s faire?

Is it your beauties marke, or of your youth,

Or your perfection, not to study truth?

Or thine ye heaven is deafe, or hath no eyes?

Or those it hath, smile at your perjuries?
Are vowes so cheape with women, or the matter

Whereof they are made, that they are writ in water,

And blowne away with winds? . . . (1-11)

This echoes his idea mentioned above; that is, you can never find a woman who is both true and fair. So, in “Elegie II: The Anagram” when Donne lists all the advantages of an ugly woman to persuade his friend to marry her, an important one is that he “needs no spies, nor eunuches” (39) to guard her because “her face guard her” (43). Besides, Donne says at the end: “One like none, and lik’d of none, fittest were, / For, things in fashion every man will weare” (55-56). Donne seems pre-engaged by the idea that fair woman can never be true. So, he says in the same elegy: “For one nights revels, silke and gold we chuse, / But, in long journeyes, cloth, and leather use” (33-34). Through the allegory in these two lines, Donne implies that get a fair lady if you want just one night stand, and find an ugly but true and steady wife in your long journey of life. It is acknowledged that Donne’s amatory verses are witty, ironical and comical but the voluminous description of women’s inconstancy should not be just jokes; it can be the evidence that this idea is deeply rooted in his mind.

This vice is also the one that appears often in other contemporary poems. In Robert Herrick’s “Upon Some Women” the charge is quite severe. In this poem, Herrick tries to tell us what woman is and woman seems not worth a pin in his opinion. Herrick says:

Thou who wilt not love, do this:
Learn of me what woman is.
Something made of thread and thrum,
A mere botch of all and some.
Pieces, patches, ropes of hair;
Inlaid garbage ev’rywhere.
Outside silk and outside lawn;
Scenes to cheat us, neatly drawn.
False in legs, and false in thighs,
False in breast, teeth, hair, and eyes,
False in head, and false enough;
Only true in shreds and stuff. (1-12)

To Herrick, every part of woman is false and so woman is not worth of man’s pure love. This kind of hatred to woman seems contradictory to the love of beautiful woman. However, this attitude corresponds with what Paglia says: “The historical repugnance to woman has a rational basis: disgust is reason’s proper response to the grossness of procreative nature” (12). And “[l]ove is the spell by which he puts his sexual fear to sleep” (13). Hence, repugnance to woman is natural and beauty is a way to induce love and makes man forget his hatred of woman. When woman is not true, that is, when she cannot be dominated by man, then she of course will be hated.

One of Thomas Carew’s poems directly addresses to an inconstant mistress. In “Song: To My Inconstant Mistress” Carew declares: “When thou, poor excommunicate / From all the joys of love, shalt see / The full reward, and glorious fate, / Which my strong faith shall purchase me, / Then curse thine own inconstancy” (1-5). In the second stanza, Carew tells the inconstant mistress that he is going to find a much better woman to comfort him and in the last stanza, the poet takes revenge by saying: “Then shalt thou weep, entreat, complain / To love, as I did once to thee; / When all thy tears shall be as vain / As mine were then, for thou shalt be / Damned for thy false apostasy” (11-15). Therefore, inconstancy was considered a serious vice of woman at that time; yet, the poet will ironically be inconstant as revenge to the inconstant mistress.

This kind of accusation of woman’s unchastity seems to show, in my opinion, the
poets’ fear of failure in controlling their mistresses. An ideal woman to them should be both beautiful enough to attract them and servile enough to be under their control thus the male can feel secure because the woman’s chthonian feature will be dominated. Since a beautiful woman can attract not only the poet but also other male, the poet is seized by the fear and suspicion that the mistress is not true.

Ben Jonson also talks about women’s inconstancy but from a very different aspect. In “In the Person of Womankind: A Song Apologetic” and the next one “Another, in Defence of Their Inconstancy: A Song,” Jonson uses the female persona to argue for women’s inconstancy. In the former one, the female speaker declares that women have the right to choose good men: “Nor do we doubt but that we can, / If we would search with care and pain, / Find some one good, in some one man” (7-9). Similar to Carew in “Song: To My Inconstant Mistress” the female speaker believes that she should search and find a better man. And then she takes flirtation as a kind of art and women as artists and says: “And as a cunning painter takes / In any curious piece you see / More pleasure while the thing he makes / Than when ‘tis made, why, so will we. / And having pleased our art, we’ll try / To make a new, and hang that by” (13-18). In the latter one, the female speaker regards woman’s change as something essential to woman’s life so she says: “Hang up those dull and envious fools / That talk abroad of woman’s change; / We were not bred to sit on stools, / Our proper virtue is to range; / Take that away, you take our lives: / We are no women then, but wives” (1-6). Then she explains that since men will improve their styles of combat in fighting, women should do so as well in love; therefore she says: “The frequent varying of the deed / Is that which doth perfection breed” (11-12). Then she goes on explaining that “to change for what is better” is not at all inconstancy and since it is not easy to find good men among those bad ones women of course have to try and examine searchingly. And then in the last stanza, she tells us another reason, which
concerns men’s inconstancy. She asserts: “And this profession of a store / In love
doeth not alone help forth / Our pleasure; but preserves us more / From being forsaken
than doth worth; / For were the worthiest woman cursed / To love one man, he’d leave
her first” (19-24). So, if a woman loves just one man, then she will be deserted first
by the man before she herself changes. In order to protect herself from being
forsaken, woman would like to have more men in reserve. This excuse may seem
ridiculous but it seems to argue for women since men’s inconstancy is involved.
Besides, Jonson seems to admit the fact that it is not easy to find good men. These
are the two points that concerns men’s vice. For the rest part of the two poems,
Jonson, while ostensibly arguing for women’s inconstancy, actually confirms
women’s inconstancy. And he takes inconstancy as the intrinsic nature of women.
It seems that the poet has no other choice but to accept the fact that women are
inconstant and then find some excuses for women in order to make the male poet
himself feel better. And because he uses the female persona, it seems that women
admit that they are not constant and this makes it hard for women to dispute that
charge.

Besides, Donne also writes poems to argue for women in “Confined Love,”
although he has accused of women’s inconstancy many times, as mentioned before.
Similar to Jonson’s two songs, as Theodore Redpath suggests in his note, “‘Confined
Love,’ put into the mouth of a woman, argues with remarkable freedom for female
promiscuity” (134). In “Confined Love” Donne first explains the origin of
monogamy. He suggests that because some man wreaks his anger on womankind,
 hence the law that “[o]ne might but one man know” grew. Then Donne uses both
natural and artificial objects to justify female promiscuity:

Are Sunne, Moone, or Starres by law forbidden,

To smile where they list, or lend away their light?
Are birds divorc’d, or are they chidden
If they leave their mate, or lie abroad a-night?
   Beasts doe no jointures lose
   Though they new lovers choose,
   But we are made worse than those.

Who e’er rigg’d faire ship to lie in harbors,
And not to seeke new lands, or not to deale withal?
Or built faire houses, set trees, and arbors,
Only to lock up, or else to let them fall?
   Good is not good, unlesse
   A thousand it possesse,
   But doth wast with greedinesse. (8-21)

Here, woman is compared to planets, animals and even things and woman seems to be regarded as at the same level as those creatures or inanimate objects. In “Elegy IV: Change” Donne justifies women’s inconstancy by first comparing women to arts. He says: “Women are like the Arts, forc’d unto none, / Open to’all searchers, unpriz’d, if unknowne” (5-6). Then the poet says: “Women are made for men, not him, nor mee” (10). So, women are objects of art that are for all the men, not for any definite person. Then Donne compares women to animals, clogs, galleys, the plow-land and the sea to show that it is natural for women to change:

   Foxes and goats; all beasts change when they please,
   Shall women, more hot, wily, wild than these,
   Be bound to one man, and did Nature then
   Idly make them aper to’endure than men?
   They’are our clogges, not their owne; if a man bee
Chain’d to a galley, yet the galley’s free;
Who hath a plow-land, casts all his seed corne there,
And yet allows his ground more corne should beare;
Though Danuby into the sea must flow,
The sea receives the Rhene, Volga, and Po. (11-20)

In the following part Donne even uses this as an excuse for himself to “change as often as she.” In these two poems women are compared to natural objects, animals, or just things. This kind of comparison contains two implications, which seem contradictory but actually originate from the same source. One is that through this comparison Donne ostensibly argues for female promiscuity but actually dehumanizes women and thus humiliates women. He seems to forget that women are human beings and not animals or things, which are deemed inferior to human beings at that time. And through this humiliation Donne actually shows his fear of women. When women are compared to animals or even things, it means that women are less than human beings and it gives men the chance to control them. Secondly, Donne’s poems, which display women’s promiscuity through the comparison of woman to animals or things, testify to the subversive possibility of woman’s chthonian nature since promiscuity is of course against social moral in a patriarchal society.

In addition, in “Beauty and Denial” Cartwright also uses natural objects to argue for woman’s unchastity. In this poem the poet uses roses, lilies, the sun, apples, and fountains, to persuade the beauty to yield and then he says: “Where nature knows no prohibition, / Shall art prove anti-nature, and make one?” (15-16). Here nature is regarded as opposition to moral and woman is connected with nature. Hence women to the poet are similar to animals, or natural objects or some artificial objects. Again women in their poems are always less than human beings but women’s subversive power, like that of nature, is also recognized. Except for few male poets who
mention their own unchastity for argument most of them seem to say that women are, or should be, inconstant just as those flowers or animals, which are inferior and antagonistic to men.

Another poet, Thomas Randolph also argues for women against the idea of chastity. Different from Ben Jonson and Donne, whose argumentations mentioned above show actually their belief in women’s unchastity, Thomas Randolph argues against the imposition of chastity on women for some other reason. At the beginning of Randolph’s “Upon Love Fondly Refused for Conscience’s Sake,” the poet says, “Nature, creation’s law, is judged by sense, / Not by the tyrant conscience” (1-2). Randolph believes that nature, which refers to creation’s law, is judged by sense and sense is regarded as the opposite of conscience. This sets up the common binary opposition between nature and moral. According to Randolph, since it is natural to love then it should not be guilty to fall in love. He also argues against monogamy by saying: “It was not love, but love transformed to vice, / Ravished by envious avarice, / Made women first impropriate; all were free; / Enclosures man’s inventions be” (11-14). Then, similar to Donne, the poet makes use of natural objects, such as animals, to show that it is natural to have more than one lover. The poet says, “Man is the lord of creatures, yet we see / That all his vassals’ loves are free” (29-30). After he assures us of several animals’ free love, Randolph persuades, “If our affections then more servile be / Than are our slaves’, where’s man’s sovereignty?” (37-38). Then he raises plants as examples to show that it is beneficial to have more lovers since the gardener can graft different kind of fruits on one tree “[t]ill he hath made by skilful husbandry / An entire orchard of one tree” (47-48). “The erotic, pornographic joke works like the description of the female body as eroticized landscape . . . . The grafting imagery complicates the meaning, however, since it suggests that generation by one kind of fruit tree or one partner is
not enough: if monogamy can be fruitful, then promiscuity yields even greater variety and enjoyment” (Malcolmson 254). So, the poet refutes the idea of conscience and says “‘Tis to be perfect to have none [conscience] at all” (60). For fear that this refutation should be too radical, the poet adds: “Suppose it be a virtue, rich and pure, / ’Tis not for spring or summer, sure, / Nor yet for autumn: love must have his prime, / His warmer hearts, and harvest time” (61-64). So, Randolph believes that conscience or virtue is for winter “when time’s colder hand leads us near home” (67) and women are connected with nature and instinct. In conclusion, the poet assures us that “… we may do / What youth and pleasure prompts us to” (69-70). This poem is of the common theme of carpe diem in literary works and the poet encourages people to make the best of their prime to enjoy love and he at the same time advocates subversion of the social order, the moral law. It seems that Randolph would rather surrender to the natural instinct than to be controlled by logical reason or conscience. In this poem he stands on the side of chthonian nature and woman to fight against conscience and social norms. However, in another poem entitled “An Elegy” or “A Platonic Elegy,” the poet expresses a totally different idea. This elegy reflects the fashionable concern with “Platonic love”:

Nor is this barren love; one noble thought
Begets another, and that still is brought
To bed of more; virtues and grace increase,
And such a numerous issue ne’er can cease,
Where children, though great blessings, only be
Pleasure reprieved to some posterity.
Beasts love like men, if men in lust delight,
And call that love which is but appetite.
When essence meets with essence, and souls join
In mutual knots, that’s the true nuptial twine:
Such, lady, is my love, and such is true;
All other love is to your sex, not you. (35-46)

Spiritual love, which begets noble thought and increases virtues and grace is superior to love of body and if men delight in lust then men are like beasts. These two poems with contradictory ideas seem to show in the poet’s mind the conflict between Apollo and Dionysus, that is, between reason/logic and chthonian nature. Pulled by these two powers, Randolph actually shows his way to deal with the situation in these two poems, which present seemingly contradictory ideas. In “Upon Love Refused for Conscience’s Sake” the poet, as the title implies, addresses to a woman and persuades her to enjoy sexual love and forget about conscience. While, in “An Elegy” the poet advocates spiritual love and insists that his love is this kind of love and only this love is true and “[a]ll other love is to your sex, not you.” So, to Randolph, true love is the love of the soul, not the sex, and man understands the love of the soul while woman tends to attract man on the basis of the love of the body. It seems that Randolph distinguishes between these two kinds of love and suggests that man is the one to decide which kind of love he will give to a woman. When the man wants to satisfy his carnal lust he will appeal to natural instinct; when he wants to show his superiority to nature and woman he will advocate spiritual love. So, he does not really emancipate women from the imposition of chastity; rather, he imposes the masculine will on women. His ideas in these two poems actually are not contradictory. To Randolph, spiritual love is superior to physical love and he will discreetly choose to whom to give the spiritual love. As for women, he would rather encourage them to enjoy physical love so that he can have sex with them freely. This can also help explain the contradiction in other poets. They, such as Donne and Carew, simultaneously condemn women’s unchastity and argue for female promiscuity. It
seems that the seventeenth-century poets struggle between Apollian spiritual love and Dionysian physical lust. And their preference for spiritual love tallies with Paglia's idea that man would like to dominate nature and woman by reason and logic and later in this paper, the tug of war between spiritual love and physical lust will be further discussed.

Instead of justifying women's unchastity, William Habington's “Against Them Who Lay Unchastity to the Sex of Women” tries to show that women are not unchaste and those who say that women are unchaste actually misjudge women because of some exceptions. In the first two stanzas, the poet uses natural allegories to say that we should not judge the whole with some exceptions. In the third stanza Habington says: “What madman, ‘cause the glowworm’s flame / Is cold, swears there’s no warmth in fire? / ‘Cause some make forfeit of their name, / And slave themselves to man’s desire, / Shall the sex, free / From guilt, damned to the bondage be?” (13-18). At last the poet comforts his mistress and says: “Nor grieve, Castara, though ’twere frail, / Thy virtue then would brighter shine, / When thy example should prevail, / And every woman’s faith be thine; / And were there none, / ’Tis majesty to rule alone” (19-24). So, the poet encourages his mistress to set the example for all women but in the end the poet assures Castara that even if no woman will follow her example it is “majesty to rule alone”. The last two lines show that subconsciously the poet still believes that women are unchaste and the purpose of this poem is to advise his mistress to be true when all the rest women are unchaste.

It seems that unchastity is women’s biggest vice and those constant men are hurt by this unchastity; yet, one of Thomas Stanley’s poems shows that men are not always true but they know how to defend themselves by sophistry. In “Changed, Yet Constant” Stanley explains to his mistress that he is not inconstant although he has changed. He says: “Wrong me no more / In thy complaint, / Blamed for inconstancy;
/ I vowed t’adore / The fairest saint, / Nor changed whilst thou wert she; / But if
another thee outshine, / Th’inconstancy is only thine” (1-8). So, the poet is subject
to the outward beauty and if he finds some other woman who is more beautiful he will
always change but he is still constant because he is attracted by beauty. He also
admit that he is controlled by sense and says: “None, though Platonic their pretense, / With reason love unless by sense” (23-24). This poem, which Stanley uses to justify
his change, shows the male’s selfishness, self-centeredness and superficiality. The
poet searches for the external beauty only but still asserts eloquently that he is constant. Women at that time had little chance to argue for themselves but through
this poem we can see men at that time were unjust and their accusation of women
seems prejudiced.

The seventeenth-century poets are obsessed with women’s chastity. They
praise it as women’s virtue and condemn the lack of it as their vice. This reflects
man’s insecurity and anxiety as to who is the father of their child and this in a way
also shows man’s fear of woman’s procreative ability. They are anxious of the
passing down of the father’s name. And this perhaps results in the popular theme of
against fruition, which reflects the tendency of controlling the power of physicality by
application of reason. Sir John Suckling has two poems named “Against Fruition,”
in which he promotes the forbearance of sexual desire. In “Against Fruition [1]”
Suckling dissuades the youth from sexual act since, according to Suckling, women
lose their attraction once they are enjoyed. He thus claims:

Women enjoyed, whate’er before they’ve been,
Are like romances read, or sights once seen;
Fruition’s dull, and spoils the play much more
Than if one read or know the plot before.
’Tis expectation makes a blessing dear;
Heaven were not heaven, if we knew what it were. (19-24)

In “Against Fruition [2]” Suckling despises love by saying: “Love’s a chameleon, that lives on mere air, / And surfeits when it comes to grosser fare” (5-6). Then he says: “That monster expectation feeds too high / For any woman e’er to satisfy” (15-16). That is, few women can satisfy his expectation of love. Hence he despises women as whores and states: “She’s but an honest whore that yields, although / She be as cold as ice, as pure as snow” (19-20). Finally the poet this time tries to persuade woman not to yield: “Then, fairest mistress, hold the power you have, / By still denying what we still do crave; / In keeping us in hopes strange things to see, / That never were, nor are nor e’er shall be” (23-16). Basically Suckling does not believe woman has any special thing for man to see so it is better for her to keep mystery by not yielding to man. Suckling actually is quite impudent in his love poems as Lewis comments, “Suckling’s chief fault . . .—a stolid fleshliness which sometimes leads him to speak of his mistress’s body more like butcher than a letcher . . .” (97). In his poem he puts more emphasis on physical love. He regards women as whores and he does not think the effort for courting is worthwhile so he says: “Some youth that has not made his story / Will think, perchance, the pain’s the glory, / And mannerly sit out love’s feast; / I shall be carving of the best, / Rudely call for the last course ‘fore the rest” (“Song” 11-15). Another poet, Abraham Cowley, is nicer than Suckling in treating woman. He also writes a poem entitled “Against Fruition,” in which he addresses to his mistress only and tries to persuade her not to yield. He thus starts: “No; thou’rt a fool, I’ll swear, if e’er thou grant” (1). Then he asks his mistress to keep “the forts and magazines” in her hand since he is not sure of his constancy. He says: “Thou’rt yet a whole world to me, and dost fill / My large ambition; but ’tis dang’rous still, / Lest I like the Pellaean prince should be, / And weep for other worlds, having conquered thee” (11-14). So, for Cowley the cause for him to be against fruition is
that he understands his own weakness and he knows it will be hard for him to stay chaste once he has the mistress. This shows man’s inconstancy, instead of woman’s. Yet, this poem still is a presentation of a similar attitude, that is, natural instinct should be under guard by reason.

In addition to inconstancy, another common vice of woman censured in the lyrics in the seventeenth century is her wantonness; that is, as those poets suggest, woman is licentious and she indulges herself in physical, sexual love. Accordingly woman in the poets’ opinion is mindless or soulless. This idea once again conforms to the chthonian nature of woman suggested by Paglia. In “Loves Alchymie” Donne declares that it is impossible to find true love in this world and he says: “Hope not for minde in women; at their best / Sweetnesse and wit, they’are but Mummy, possesst” (23-24). There may be different interpretations of the last line but the misogynic tone is conspicuous. In “The Blossome” Donne addresses to his heart and assures it that the true heart can never get reward from a woman since she, with no heart, knows nothing of a true heart. Donne thus tells the heart:

Well then, stay here; but know,

When thou [the heart] hast stayd and done thy most;

A naked thinking heart, that makes no show,

Is to a woman, but a kinde of Ghost;

How shall shee know my heart; or having none,

Know thee for one?

Practice may make her know some other part,

But take my word, shee doth not know a Heart. (25-32)

Jonson’s disdain of women is about the same. In one of his famous epigrams, “To a

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7 In *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* there is a note explaining the syntax of this sentence (273). In *The Songs and Sonnets of John Donne* 2nd edition edited by Theodore Redpath, the editor also explains this line in a note (145).
Friend,” Jonson shows his misogynic attitude directly in this two-line epigram. He says, “To put out the word, whore, thou dost me woo, / Throughout my book. ’Troth, put out women too” (1-2). So, women are just whores and in “To Sickness” Jonson says: “. . . with thy [sickness’s] crown, / They [women] maintain the turest trade, / And have more diseases made” (18-20). In this poem Jonson implies that since women are whores they will suffer from disease and even worse they can spread disease to men. Besides, he also lists women’s other faults:

That distill their husbands’ land
In decoctions, and are manned
With ten emp’ricks, in their chamber,
Lying for the spirit of amber;
That for th’oil of talk dare spend
More than citizens dare lend
Them, and all their officers;
That to make all pleasure theirs,
Will by coach and water go,
Every stew in town to know;
Dare entail their loves on any,
Bald, or blind, or ne’er so many,
And for thee, at common game,
Play away health, wealth, and fame. (29-42)

These lines imply that women are not only licentious but also extravagant and they will ruin their husbands financially by their luxurious habits. This corresponds to the description in Swetnam’s pamphlet, in which Swetnam cites from the Bible but reverses the traditional exegesis. According to Purkiss, in the Bible woman is a helpmeet to man since her husband was to obtain money or goods and she was to care
for them (73). In his citation of the biblical text, however, Swetnam reverses the traditional idea to a misogynic one: “Moses describeth a woman thus: ‘At the first beginning’ saith he, ‘a woman was made to be a helper unto man’. And so they are indeed, for she helpeth to spend and consume that which man painfully getteth” (qtd. in Purkiss 73). Later, Purkiss concludes the misogyny in Swetnam’s text by saying: “She is a signifier of wastage, not merely the absence of productivity but a prodigal consumption of resources. The point, however, is that woman spends money on her own desires, ‘toys’, ‘banqueting’ and female pride” (74). So, in Jonson’s poem women are stigmatized as whores and wastage. The woman depicted in Herrick’s “Upon Scobble. Epigram” is even more shameful. In this short epigram, Herrick says: “Scobble for whoredom whips his wife, and cries / He’ll slit her nose. But, blubb’ring, she replies, / ‘Good sir, make no more cuts i’th’outward skin; / One slit’s enough to let adul’try in’” (1-4). The erotic implication in this poem is quite comical and ironic but also contemptible. James Shirley in his “Cupid’s Call” also insults woman by describing woman as sex maniac. In this poem Shirley encourages lovers to make the best of spring, the love season. In the first stanza the poet urges those peasants to reap their “wanton harvest” and then in the second stanza, the poet compares ladies to flowers and the virgins’ reaction is described as follows: “Into Love’s spring-garden walk, / Virgins dangle on their stalk, / Full-blown, and playing at fifteen; / Come, bring your amorous sickles then! / See, they are pointing to their beds, / And call to reap their maidenheads” (7-12). So, the virgins desire for sexual love actively. Then in the third stanza, Shirley alludes to the story of the nightingale in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, in which Philomela, raped and maimed by her brother-in-law Tereus, was subsequently turned into a nightingale. This allusion appears often in poetry and most poets show pity for Philomela. Yet, Shirley reverses everything in the poem: “Hark, how in yonder shady grove / Sweet Philomel
is warbling love, / And with her voice is courting kings; / For since she was a bird, she
sings, / “There is no pleasure but in men; / Oh, come and ravish me again” (13-18).
Shirley implies that Philomel actually enjoys the rape so she asks to be ravished again.

The male chauvinistic attitude is quite obvious. This attitude reminds us of the
similar male chauvinism in some pornographic films; that is, the woman raped
actually enjoys the process and her unwillingness is but pretense. This description is
really a double humiliating insult to not only Philomel but also all women. In “A
Deposition from Love” Thomas Carew says: “I was foretold your rebel sex / Nor love
nor pity knew; / And with what scorn you use to vex / Poor hearts that humbly sue”
(1-4). Then in “Disdain Returned” the poet tells Celia that he is resolved to leave
and says: “I have searched thy soul within, / And find nought but pride and scorn; / I
have learned thy arts, and now / Can disdain as much as thou. / Some power, in my
revenge, convey / That love to her, I cast away” (15-20). So, woman knows no love
or pity and inside woman, nothing but pride and scorn can be found and woman has
no soul. Abraham Cowley goes further by saying that woman has beautiful outlooks
but actually she is totally malicious inside. In his poem “The Change” Cowley
describes a woman this way:

    Love in her sunny Eyes doth basking play;
    Love walks the pleasant Mazes of her Haire;
    Love does on both her Lipps for ever stray;
    And sowes and reapes a thousand kisses there.
    In all her outward parts Love’s always seene;
        But, oh, Hee never went within.
    Within Loves foes, his greatest foes abide,
        Malice, Inconstancy, and Pride.
    Soe the Earths face, Trees, Herbes, and Flowers do dresse;
With other beauties numberlesse:

But at the Center Darknesse is, and Hell;

There wicked Spirits, and there the Damned dwell. (1-12)

Hence, women are wicked inside and so is the earth; through the identification of woman with nature the poet reinforces the chthonian characteristic of both and suggests distain to each. To Cowley, woman may be as mysterious as nature, which is not comprehensible by the male’s logical mind and so they are stigmatized as malicious. Then the poet talks about himself and says:

With Me alas, quite contrary it fares;

Darkness and Death lyes in my weeping eyes,

Despaire and Palenesse in my face appears,

And Griefe, and Fear, Loves greatest enemies;

But, like the Persian Tyrant, Love within

Keeps his proud Court, and ne’er is seen. (13-18)

So, he is full of sorrowful feelings and so is not good looking but inside he is full of love and therefore he is quite the opposite of the woman. Then in the next stanza the poet suggests to have a change with the woman:

Oh take my Heart, and by that means you’ll prove

Within too stor’d enough of Love:

Give me but Yours, I’le by that change so thrive

That Love in all my parts shall live.

So powerfull is this change, it render can,

My outsides Woman, and your inside Man. (19-24)

To those poets, both Cavalier poets and Metaphysical poets, woman is beautiful but licentious, and soulless, or even worse, malicious. In “A Mask for Lydia” William Habington describes Lydia as basilisk because her looks “do kill.” The poet says:
“Veil, Lydia, veil, for unto me / There is no basilisk but thee: / Thy very looks do kill. / Yet in those looks so fixed is my delight, / Poor soul, alas, I languish still / In absence of thy sight” (7-12). Man’s fear of woman is thus shown in the early modern world and this fear consequently results in patriarchy and man’s dominancy. Paglia has illustrated this causality: “Male bonding and patriarchy were the recourse to which man was forced by his terrible sense of woman’s power, her imperviousness, her archetypal confederacy with chthonian nature. Woman’s body is a labyrinth in which man is lost” (12).

In addition to the poems on woman’s inconstancy, wantonness and soullessness, there are still other poems which show discrimination against women and consequently male’s intention to dominate women. In “Aire and Angel” Donne says that women’s love is less pure than men’s. In “Communitie,” Donne says that women are not good or bad but are just like fruits for men to taste. In the first stanza the poet says that we should have freedom to choose “things indifferent,” that is, things that are neither good nor bad. Then in the second stanza he further alleges that women are amoral, are “things indifferent” and so they are for men’s use. Then at last the poet claims:

But they [women] are ours as fruits are ours,

He that but tasts, he that devours,

And he that leaves all, doth as well:

Chang’d loves are but chang’d sorts of meat,

And when hee hath the kernel eate,

Who doth not fling away the shell? (19-24)

This dehumanization of woman is extremely humiliating, and through this dehumanization of woman the poet recognizes man’s superiority to woman and thus justifies man’s supremacy over woman. And A. C. Patridge thus comments this
Because women are alleged to be morally neutral, and therefore *things*, they deserve neither blame nor praise. The conclusion is that they are made for man’s use, like fruits of the earth, to be tasted, devoured or neglected, without public stigma. In every line of the final stanza the conceits (simile or metaphor) relate to the appetites. The paean to promiscuity ends with a triple crudity, supposed to be amusing to the male sex. (72)

Besides, Patridge also thinks this is an evidence for Donne’s subversion of the moral order and he says: “This is the simplest example of Donne’s cynical chop-logic, to undermine the moral order that he initially pretended to maintain” (72). In “The Sun Rising” while the poet describes the enjoyment of love, he says: “She’s all States, and all Princes, I, / Nothing else is” (21-22). The male’s dominating attitude is quite conspicuous here. No wonder, in “Elegie III: Change” Donne says: “Women are made for men . . .” (10). In “Song: That Women Are But Men’s Shadows” Ben Jonson despises women and arouses antagonism between man and woman. In this poem woman is compared to man’s shadow: “Follow a shadow, it still flies you; / Seem to fly it, it will pursue; / So court a mistress, she denies you; / Let her alone, she will court you” (1-4). Making use of the characteristic of shadows, Jonson convinces us of that antagonism between the two sexes. He thus states: “At morn, and even, shades are longest; / At noon, they are or short or none; / So men at weakest, they are strongest, / But grant us perfect, they’re not known. / Say, are not women truly, then, / Styled but the shadows of us men?” (7-12). So, men should be strong so that they can dominate women or men will be dominated otherwise. In addition, Richard Lovelace compares women to deer in “La Bella Bona Roba.” Lovelace starts the poem by saying that he loves plump women: “I cannot tell who loves the skeleton / Of a poor marmoset, nought but bone, bone. / Give me a nakedness with
her clothes on” (1-3). Then in the last stanza, the poet says: “Then Love, I beg, when next thou tak’st thy bow, / Thy angry shafts, and dost heart-chasing go, / Pass rascal deer, strike me the largest doe” (12-15). In this poem “bona roba” is a common term for a prostitute and so for Lovelace whoring is something ordinary and Lovelace even calls it love. He dehumanizes women as deer and this kind of love between him and the woman is nothing but animal instinct. Since he takes whoring as something common, no wonder Lovelace plans to buy love in “The Fair Beggar.” In “The Fair Beggar” Lovelace suggests to the fair female beggar that “I will suffice thy hungry need / So thou wilt but my fancy feed” (5-6). Then at the end the poet says: “But, cruel, if thou dost deny / This necessary alms to me, / What soft-souled man but with his eye / And hand will hence be shut to thee? / Since all must judge you more unkind, / I starve your body, you my mind” (31-36). Lovelace implies that the beggar is “more unkind” because she starves his mind; yet, does the poet-speaker use his mind, or just his body, for the beggar’s love? What the poet-speaker wants actually is the satisfaction of his sensual desire and he thinks it is possible to buy a woman’s body; therefore, he does not really love the fair beggar; he just treats her as a whore. This kind of exchange money for pleasure also appears in Swetnam’s pamphlet as Purkiss says, “Swetnam boastfully stresses the ease with which women can be obtained” (76). And Swetnam describes how to get women and says that “women are easily wooed and soon won, got with an apple and lost with the paring . . . golden gifts easily overcome wanton’s desires” (qtd. in Purkiss 76). So, in those men’s mind women are available because “they are pleasures which can be exchanged for money” (Purkiss 76). Lovelace intends to do the same thing but is rejected and hence his anger in the poem. In order to elevate himself, Lovelace shamelessly boasts of his love and kindness but actually he just wants to buy lustful pleasure. This kind of insolence to women and profanation of love also appears in William
Cartwright’s “Women.” In this six-line short poem Cartwright writes: “Give me a girl, if one I needs must meet, / Or in her nuptial or her winding sheet; / I know but two good hours that women have, / One in the bed, another in the grave. / Thus of the whole sex all I would desire / Is, to enjoy theirs ashes, or their fire” (1-6). So, men needs women only to satisfy their sexual desire and except for that women have no use in this world so they’d better die after they have served men.

It seems that in those poets’ minds what remains in women is only the function as sex objects to satisfy their physical desire. And this severe discrimination also reflects man’s fear of women and intention to control women. Since woman is licentious and inconstant in those male poets’ mind, stress on spiritual love is a way to control woman. Emphasis on the love of the soul or the unity of souls as true love shows man’s Apollonian desire to dominate the chthonian in woman. Similar to the Petrarchan sonnets in the previous century, most of the poems concerning physical love and spiritual love put more emphasis on the soul and claim that the soul should rule over the body. In “The Anniversarie” Donne stresses that the love of souls is true love, which can get eternity: “But soules where nothing dwells but love / (All other thoughts being inmates) then shall prove / This, or a love increased there above, / When bodies to their graves, soules from their graves remove” (17-20). In the famous “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” Donne again emphasizes the important role of the soul in true love and says: “Our two soules therefore, which are one, / Though I must goe, endure not yet / A breach, but an expansion, / Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate” (21-24). So, when the two souls are one, there is true love, which is firm and steadfast and will not be destroyed by absence. Ben Jonson in the tenth poem “Epode” in The Forest puts more stress on reason when discussing ideal love between the two sexes. In this poem Jonson says that we should have reason, “our affections’ king,” control and “make our sense our slave.” In Jonson’s opinion, the
kind of love that causes “tumults, horrors, and unrests” in our heart is not true love, but only “blind desire” and true love is “an essence far more gentle, fine, / Pure, perfect, nay devine” (45-46). He thus describes true love:

It is a golden chain let down from heaven,
  Whose links are bright and even;
That falls like sleep on lovers, and combines
  The soft and sweetest minds
In equal knots; this bears no brands, nor darts
  To murder different hearts,
But, in a calm and godlike unity,
  Preserves community. (47-54)

Therefore to Jonson reason is more important and we should have our senses and passion controlled by it and then it is possible to get ideal love. William Habington’s “To the World. The Perfection of Love” also expresses a similar idea; that is, the soul is more important than the body. Henry Vaughan in “To Amoret, of the Difference ’Twixt Him and Other Lovers, and What True Love Is” also shows the predominance of spiritual love over physical love and he says:

Just so, base sublunary lovers’ hearts,
  Fed on loose, profane desires,
  May for an eye
  Or face comply;
But those removed, they will as soon depart,
  And show their art,
  And painted fires.

Whilst I by pow’rful love, so much refined,
That my absent soul the same is,
Careless to miss
A glance or kiss,
Can with those elements of lust and sense
Freely dispense,
And court the mind. (15-28)

Andrew Marvell in “The Definition of Love” also says, “Therefore the Love which us
doeth bind, / But Fate so enviously debars, / Is the Conjunction of the Mind, / And
Opposition of the Stars” (29-32). So, true love means the combination of souls.
Actually Marvell, as a follower of George Herbert, is more religious and values the
soul more than the body and this idea is shown in some other poems. In “A
Dialogue between The Resolved Soul, and Created Pleasure” Marvell shows how the
soul wins the combat with all kinds of pleasure. At last the chorus sings: “Triumph, triumph, victorious Soul; / The World has not one Pleasure more: / The rest does lie beyond the Pole, / And is thine everlasting Store” (76-80). According to Frank
Kermode’s analysis in “The Argument of Marvell’s ‘Garden’” Marvell in “The
Garden” deliberately argues against “the libertine garden of innocent sexuality” (337).
Kermode uses Randolph’s “Upon Love Fondly Refused” , Carew’s “Rapture” and
Lovelace’s “Love Made in the first Age” as examples to show that “[t]he libertines
use the argument of the innocence of sense to exalt sensuality and to propose the
abolition of the tyrant Honour, meaning merely female chastity. In Marvell’s garden,
however, sense is controlled by reason and the intellect and this garden can
contemplate not beauty but heavenly beauty (338). Thus we can see in Marvell’s
mind, soul is much significant than body.

However, different from the sonnets in the sixteenth century in which only
spiritual love is valued and stressed, quite a number of poems in the early seventeenth
century put emphasis on the satisfaction of physical love and the language is boldly erotic. Donne’s “ElegieXIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed” is quite typical. In this poem the poet seduces the mistress to strip to nakedness step by step and then he says:

Licence my roving hands, and let them go,
Before, behind, between, above, below.
O my America! my new-found-land,
My kingdome, safeliest when with one man man’d,
My Myne of precious stones, My Emperie,
How blest am I in this discovering thee!
To enter in these bonds, is to be free;
Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be.

Full nakedness! All joyes are due to thee,

As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth’d must be. (25-34)

It seems that Donne is totally absorbed in the experience of erotic pleasure. He uses religious terms to describe this sexual experience, so the mistress is “heaven’s Angel,” who brings with her “[a] heaven like Mahomets Paradice” and the bed is “loves hallow’d temple.” However, there is nothing spiritual or sacred in the poem. Even love is not mentioned in the whole poem. So, the mistress is summoned to satisfy the poet’s physical desire. And woman is treated as sex object again. Lewis groups this poem as the lowest level (lowest, that is, in order of complexity) of sentiment in Donne’s poetry and he says: “If I call this a pornographic poem, I must be understood to use that ugly word as a descriptive, not a dyslogistic, term. I mean by it that this poem, in my opinion, is intended to arouse the appetite it describes, to affect not only the imagination but the nervous system of the reader” (92). Hence, this poem is quite licentious and appeals to carnal appetite. Since Donne compares the lady to his
America, his new found land, his kingdom, his mine of precious stone, and his empery, Christina Malcolmson thinks that Donne desires to possess not only the female body but also some other things on a larger scale and claims that “the female body seems to evoke a dream of possession, and an expression of unlimited desire which is both sexual and social or financial in nature” (253). Thomas Carew’s “A Rapture” is another example of this kind or erotic description. At the very beginning, the poet says: “I will enjoy thee now, my Celia, come / And fly with me to Love’s Elysium” (1-2). So, Celia is something for him to enjoy and Celia seems to be made a thing instead of a person. Then the poet persuades Celia to ignore the giant Honor and enjoy sexual love. The poet invites Celia to fly on the “wings of Love” and then “in the noblest seats / Of those blest shades quench and renew our heats” (23-24). And then the poet goes further

There my enfranchised hand on every side
Shall o’er thy naked polished ivory slide.
No curtain there, though of transparent lawn,
Shall be before thy virgin-treasure drawn;
But the rich mine, to the inquiring eye
Exposed, shall ready still for mintage lie,
And we will coin young Cupids. There a bed
Under the cooler shade of cypress groves;
Our pillows, of the down of Venus’ doves,
Whereon our panting limbs we’ll gently lay,
In the faint respites of our active play;
That so our slumbers may in dreams have leisure
To tell the nimble fancy our past pleasure,
And so our souls that cannot be embraced
Shall the embraces of our bodies taste. (29-44)

The erotic description reflects the poet’s stress on physical love, instead of spiritual love. In “The Poetry of Thomas Carew” G. A. E. Parfitt comments on realism in Carew’s lyrics and says that “. . . the human ‘realism’ which anchors so many of his lyrics, preventing both inert conventionality and any over-spiritual stress, involves an implicit awareness of the importance of sex and an unwillingness to pretend that love is either just a game or just a matter of the union of souls” (288). Later, the poet emphasizes that they do not have to be afraid of any disturbance from the world or the norms of the society:

No wedlock bonds unwreathe our twisted loves;

We seek no midnight arbor, no dark groves

To hide our kisses: there the hated name

Of husband, wife, lust, modest, chaste, or shame,

Are vain and empty words, whose very sound

Was never heard in the Elysian ground.

All things are lawful there that may delight

Nature or unrestrained appetite;

Like and enjoy, to will and act is one:

We only sin when Love’s rites are not done. (105-115)

Hence, the poets suggests that to enjoy love, especially sexual love, is the most important thing and we should follow our natural instinct, instead of being circumscribed by the social rules or laws. Then Carew even alludes to some chaste women in legend or mythology and tells the stories the other way round; that is, those chaste ladies, including Lucrece, Penelope, Daphne, and Laura, become sex maniacs in Carew’s description and Carew says: “These, and ten thousand beauties more, that died / Slave to the tyrant (honor), now enlarged, deride / His cancelled laws, and for
their time misspent / Pay into Love’s exchequer double rent” (143-46). Then the poet invites his Celia to join him and taste the joy:

Come then, my Celia, we’ll no more forbear
To taste our joys, struck with a panic fear,
But will depose from his imperious sway
This proud usurper [honor], and walk free as they,
With necks unyoked; nor is it just that he
Should fetter your soft sex with chastity,
Which Nature made unapt for abstinence. (147-53)

According to Carew, it is natural for human beings to desire for sexual pleasure and so, women should not be fettered by chastity. In the last part Carew assures Celia that he will fight for her in the name of “honor,” despite the forbiddance or damnation of religion. Finally, the poet questions: “Then tell me why / This goblin Honor, which the world adores, / Should make men atheists, and not women whores” (164-66). So, he wishes that honor can make women whores, that is, women will regard the enjoyment of sexual pleasure as a kind of honor, instead of shame. Commenting on Carew’s “A Rapture,” Parfitt pays attention to the conflict between the erotic and accepted Christian moral standards and compares this with the poems in the Elizabethan Age:

The normal Elizabethan tactic, when expressing overt eroticism, is to condemn what is being expressed or to use some kind of pre-Christian setting; the usual Cavalier device is to ignore the Christian code, to pretend that poet and mistress are somehow exempt from it, or to emit a smoke-screen of pseudo-argument. Carew, however, not only acknowledges a conflict between Christianity and the erotic but suggests that such a clash is inevitable, while his embodiment of the erotic has such
force and beauty that it makes the erotic-moral opposition a real factor in
the poem, makes the poem a disturbing phenomenon, puzzling and
extending our experience as poetry should do. (289)

The conflict between moral and sexuality is clearly exhibited in this poem.

In addition to the two typical poems mentioned above, which put emphasis on
physical love, there are still some other poems that value sexual pleasure more than
spiritual love. In Donne’s another elegy, “Elegie XVIII: Loves Progress,” it is
shown that the purpose of love is to have sex. At the very beginning the poet says:
“Who ever loves, if he do not propose / The right true end of love, he’s one that goes /
To sea for nothing but to make him sick” (1-3). What is the true end? According
to Donne, “ . . . if we / Make love to woman; virtue is not she: / As beauty’s not nor
wealth: He that strayes thus / From her to hers, is more adulterous, / Than if he took
her maid . . .” (23-27). Then the poet goes further to tell us what is essential in a
woman in his eyes:

So we her ayres contemplate, words and heart,
And virtues; but we love the Centrique part.

Nor is the soul more worthy, or more fit
For love, than this, as infinite as it.

But in attaining this desired place

How much they erre; that set out at the face? (35-40)

So, a woman’s looks, words, heart and virtues are not as essential as “the Centrique
part” and then it is wrong to set out at the face since it takes longer to get “the
Centrique part.” In the following part, the poet describes the path from the woman’s
hair, brow, nose, cheek, lips, teeth, chin, breast, and navel to “the Centrique part” to
testify to his words. So, the poet suggests, “Rather set out below” (73). At the end
the poet says:
Rich Nature hath in women wisely made
Two purses, and their mouths aversely laid:
They then, which to the lower tribute owe.
That way which that Exchequer looks, must go:
He which doth not, his error is as great,
As who by Clyster gave the Stomack meat. (91-96)

Here Donne’s description of two purses and two mouths coincidentally corresponds to
Irigaray’s “two pairs of lips.” Yet, different from Irigaray’s idea which emphasizes
woman’s multiplicity in sexuality as a contrast to man’s focus on the one, the penis,
Donne puts his stress on woman’s function as a sexual object, as Earl Miner puts, “. . .
it is a coarse, cynical, and arrogant joke dehumanizing women by representing them
by but one part of the body and that in relation to far from appealing bodily
incursions” (166). In this poem we can obviously see that to Donne woman is
nothing but their function in sex act. Carnal lust seems to be the most important
thing in Donne’s relation with woman. Therefore Earl Miner when commenting on
Donne’s elegies says:

Even accounting for the differences in status of the two sexes, the elegies
are remarkably antagonistic toward women, and in this antagonism,
expressed so many ways, lies their chief satiric force. That force is
directed to showing that conventional attitudes in poetry are wrong, and that
man need not be an abject suitor. Woman is often ugly, is as biological as
man, and is as much man’s possession to play with as he had been her
servant in Petrarchan poetry.

Different from Petrarchan sonnets, in Donne’s elegies, such as this one and “Elegie
XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed,” no love is mentioned and therefore, what
matters in the poet’s mind is only the satisfaction of carnal desire. In “Loves Usury”
Donne says:

For every houre that thou wilt spare mee now,
    I will allow,
Usurious God of Love, twenty to thee,
When with my browne, my gray haires equall bee;
Till then, Love, let my body raigne, and let
Mee travel, sojourne, snatch, plot, have, forget,
Resume my last yeares relict: thinke that yet
    We’had never met.

In this first stanza, Donne asks the god of love to spare him when he is young and he would have his body reign; that is, he would enjoy lust, instead of love, when he is young. This maybe explains Donne’s attitude in the two elegies mentioned above.

Emphasis on physical love also appears in some other poets’ lyrics. In “Sonnets II” Sir John Suckling says that it is his own desire, not the woman’s beauty, that makes him crazy about her: “’Tis not the meat, but ’tis the appetite / Makes eating a delight” (17-18). In this case, it seems, Suckling does not care whom he makes love to, so long as there is a female for him to make love to. He appeals to animal instinct only. Donne also expresses a similar idea in “The Indifferent.” In this poem Donne says that he can love any kind of woman:

I can love both faire and browne,
    Her who abundance melts, and her whom want betraies
Her who loves lonenesse best, and her who maskes and plaies,
Her whom the country form’d and whom the town,
Her who believes, and her who tries,
Her who still weepes with spungie eyes,
And her who is dry corke, and never cries; (1-7)
Through these instances, the poet assures us that he can love all the various kinds of women and so, at the end of that stanza he concludes: “I can love her, and her, and you and you, / I can love any, so she be not true” (8-9). This kind of love certainly is only physical lust. And so, when those seventeenth-century poets argue against the idea of chastity, rather than trying to emancipate women, they actually do that for themselves because they want to have women freely. William Cartwright also puts emphasis on physical love when he argues against Platonic love in “No Platonic Love.” In this poem Cartwright describes how he once searched for spiritual love and finally got back to physical love: “I was that silly thing that once was wrought / To practice this thin love; / I climbed from sex to soul, from soul to thought; / But thinking there to move, / Headlong I rolled from thought to soul, and then / From soul I lighted at the sex again” (7-12). Then in the next stanza he refutes the hypocrisy of Platonic love; he says: “As some strict down-looked men pretend to fast / Who yet in closets eat, / So lovers who profess they spirits taste / Feed yet on grosser meat; / I know they boast they souls to souls convey, / Howe’er they meet, the body is the way” (13-18). Similarly, John Cleveland has a poem “The Antiplatonick,” which also denounces Platonic love. In the first stanza, the poet makes clear the main theme by stating:

For shame, thou everlasting Wooer,
Still saying grace, and never falling to her!
Love that’s in contemplation plac’t,
Is Venus drawn but to the wast.
Unless your Parley cause surrender
Y’are Salamanders of a cold desire
That live untoucht amid the hottest fire. (1-8)

Through the poems mentioned above it is obvious that the stress on physical love is
quite common in the seventeenth-century lyrics. This is quite distinct from the consistent encomium of soul and spiritual love in the sixteenth-century sonnets. Through juxtaposition of the two groups of poems: one focuses on physical lust and the other on spiritual love, it seems quite obvious that the seventeenth-century poets’ mind is the battlefield of reason and nature, of Apollo and Dionysus. Those poems stressing the love of souls are testimony to male’s effort to put sexuality under control although, as Paglia suggests, “Sexuality is a murky realm of contradiction and ambivalence. It cannot always be understood by social models . . .” (13). As a result, the early seventeenth century provides us with quite a few poems focusing on sexuality or physical love.

In the tug of war between love and sex, or between reason and sexuality, Donne comes to a compromise by emphasizing both soul and body in love. In “The Extasie” Donne values both the soul and the body. In this poem Donne recognizes the importance of the soul and says: “. . . th’Atomies of which we grow, / Are soules, whom no change can invade” (47-48). Then through a rhetoric question he explains the status of the body:

But O alas, so long, so farre

Our bodies why doe wee forbeare?

They are ours, though they are not wee, Wee are

The intelligences, they the sphæares.

We owe them thankes, because they thus,

Did us, to us, at first convoy,

Yielded their forces, sense, to us,

Nor are drosse to us, but allay. (49-56)

Since the body is inevitable to us, of course, it plays an important role in love. So, near the end of the poem, the poet says: “Loves mysteries in soules doe grow, / But
yet the body is his booke” (71-72). In Donne’s opinion, we can understand the mysteries of love through reading the book of the body. “The aim is to make the bodies as spiritual, as soul-like as possible, even as the soul is maintained in itself and may find its fulfillment unimpeded by the body” (Miner 80). Consequently, both the body and the soul are significant in love. In “Aire and Angels” Donne says: “But since my soule, whose child love is, / Takes limes of flesh, and else could nothing doe, / More subtile than the parent is, / Love must not be, but take a body too” (7-10). So, true love must engage both body and soul. And to Donne true love makes lovers immortal and true love can be eternal. In “The Good-Morrow” Donne says: “If our two loves be one, or thou and I / Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die” (20-21). In “The Sun Rising” Donne expresses the idea that true love means a whole world to the lovers. In “The Canonization” the lovers are even canonized. In “Donne’s Love-Poetry,” Grierson, when commenting on Donne’s love poetry, suggests that Donne’s love poetry surpasses the love poems in medieval period and those in the Elizabethan Age. He thinks that the fundamental weakness of the medieval doctrine of love lies in its dualism, in which love of woman is treated either as “the great ennobler of the human heart” or as a passion that will cause repentance. While in the Elizabethan love poetry poets, such as Sidney and Spenser, praise only virtue and nobility of love and forget the sensuous part. Grierson does not mention Shakespeare’s sonnets, and as mentioned in the third chapter, Shakespeare believes the love between him and the young man is the pure Platonic love while the dark lady just excites his sexual desire. And this idea is still trapped in the common binary oppositions of love and desire, male and female. According to Grierson “[t]he true escape from courtly or ascetic idealism was a poetry which should do justice to love as a passion in which body and soul alike have their part, and of which there is no reason to repent” (33). And in Grierson’s opinion, Donne is the poet that can
achieve this. He says:

It was only the force of Donne’s personality that could achieve even approximate harmony of elements so divergent as are united in his love-verses, that could master the lower-natured steed that drew the chariot of his troubled and passionate soul and make it subservient to his yoke-fellow of purer strain who is a lover of honor, and modesty, and temperance, and the follower of true glory. (34)

It is said that Donne wrote according to his own real experience and the poems about true love were written after Donne met his wife Ann More. In this case, we may conclude that after his struggle between reason and sex, soul and body, he finally gets a more balanced attitude.

In his “Introduction” to *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, Grierson says, “The ‘metaphysicals’ of the seventeenth century combined two things, both soon to pass away, the fantastic dialectics of mediaeval love poetry and the ‘simple, sensuous’ strain which they caught from the classics—soul and body lightly yoked and glad to run and soar together in the winged chariot of Pegasus.” In Grierson’s opinion, soul and body dance harmoniously in the metaphysical poetry. Yet, through the scrutiny of the lyrics in the seventeenth century we can see that most of the time the male poets show their struggle between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, that is, they try to fight against the Dionysian or chthonian feature in woman through the promotion of reason or mind. The praise of woman’s beauty or virtue, the disdain of woman’s inconstancy and wantonness, and the preference for spiritual love over physical love all point to the male poets’ intention to dehumanize, stigmatize, and dominate woman, which, according to Paglia, results from the male’s fear of woman. This helps explain the stigmatic woman image in most of the lyrics in the seventeenth century. This however does not mean that poems in this period
present more sex discrimination against woman than those in the previous century. Compared with the sonnets in the previous century, in which a mistress is described as a goddess with falsified nobility but no blood or flesh, the lyrics in the early seventeenth century give us more truth, not more truth of woman but more truth of man’s fear of woman. The idealized lady represents the male’s total dominance over woman and male’s inclination to the Apollonian, so woman is always of the image that man likes her to be. Most of the sonneteers in Elizabethan Age stand aside and tell a story of created persona and they themselves are not really involved in the love story. While in the seventeenth century, poets, especially metaphysical poets, write in a private mode. As Miner says about Donne’s early poetry and Metaphysical poetry, “We can readily appreciate how natural it was that the immediate experience of an individual, especially the transactions of his private heart, should have come to the major concern of poetry for several crucial decades” (5). Therefore, although the image of woman is more daemon-like in the early seventeenth century, yet this image conforms to the reality more than the noble, virtuous lady in the Elizabethan sonnets. It does not mean that women then were unchaste or wonton. What this study is trying to show is that through this kind of image male poets show their fear of women, or women’s chthonian nature, and their intention to dominate woman. Herrick’s “The Vine” should be a good demonstration of the intention to dominate women and make them sex objects; and it may serve as an ending note to this chapter. In “The Vine” Herrick describes how in his dream he became a vine to embrace his mistress so that “. . . she could not freely stir, / All parts there made one prisoner” (16-17). So the male poet intends to have his mistress as his prisoner. At last, when the poet as a vine tries to cover the parts which maids keep unseen, a kind of fleeting pleasure makes the poet awake and he “found (ah me!) this flesh of mine / More like a stock than like a vine” (21-22). This erotic depiction symbolizes the male poet’s desire to
control woman. All those slanderous accusations mentioned above are just excuses for those male poets to justify their domination of women.