

Metaphysical Realities from the Selected Poems of John Donne: An Overview

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Abstract—Etymologically the term ‘Metaphysical’ has been derived from two Greek words of Meta and Physics which these words imply that ‘Meta’ means beyond and ‘physics’ means Physical nature. Meta physical period is one of the major remarkable literary periods in the history of English literature. Merriam Webster dictionary defines Metaphysical as ‘of or relating to the transcendent or to a reality beyond what is perceptible to the senses’. This research paper highlights the metaphysical elements from the selected poems of John Donne. Metaphysical poetry is a unique division of poetry that deals with philosophical outlook on Nature and as also acclaimed for pedagogical implications of intellect and emotions. The skillful and adept art of poetic form has been progressed by Donne and his contemporary poets even despite of criticisms of breaking Elizabethan tradition of writing. This paper is to examine how John Donne could affect the Metaphysics? Also explores the assessment on the literary endeavors and outstanding metaphysical elements in the selected poems of John Donne.

Keywords—Metaphysical poets, selected poems of Donne, metaphysical realities etc

I. INTRODUCTION

Metaphysical poetry, a term coined by Samuel Johnson, has its roots in 17th-century England. This type of poetry is witty, ingenious and highly philosophical. Its topics included love, life and existence. Metaphysical poetry used literary elements of similes, metaphors, imagery, paradoxes, conceit, and far-fetched views of reality. Metaphysical poetry represents the splendid and thorough amalgamation of intellect and emotion, creative wit and sharp humor so as to accustom the readers with a new model of poetic excellence. John Donne, the pioneer of this metaphysical school of poetry, and his contemporaries like Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan, George Herbert and Richard Crashaw importantly contributed to this new poetic field of metaphysical poetry. In this regard, Grierson rightly describes metaphysical poetry as “poetry inspired by a philosophical concept of the universe and the role assigned to human spirit in the great drama of existence.”

II. METAPHYSICAL REALITIES FROM SELECTED POEMS

As far metaphysical poetry is concerned, it's a curious innovation of John Donne and his other contemporary poets. His highly use of intellectual conceits to describe innermost feelings to achieve unification of sensibility for which T.S. Eliot admired his metaphysical poetry and considered John Donne as the greatest of English poets. Each of his conceit is a wonderful fabrication of imagery which is admired by the poetry lovers. As Donne's poems are concerned they do

possess subtle metaphysical ideology with great intellect and genius. Some profoundly written poems of John Donne have been selected to explore the metaphysical realities as such as: “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” the best example for metaphysical elements overflows in the lines:

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

The poem begins by comparing the love between his beloved and himself with the passing away of virtuous men. Such men expire so peacefully that their friends cannot determine when they are truly dead. Indeed the separation merely adds to the distance covered by their love.

Another significant metaphysical feature prominently practiced by Donne is juxtaposing two different objects resembling with elements of conceit which takes the readers into passionate world. For example, the masterpiece of Donne, ‘The Flea’ presents the subtle metaphysical ideology of a distressed lover when he stops his beloved holding her hand from slashing out a flea. Donne compares himself and his beloved wife to the foot of the compass in which the one fixed foot i.e., his wife, remains fixed and the other i.e., Donne, goes way out and travels around. Though they apart, their souls are still one and such virtuous people never die.

*“And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be
Confess it.... This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is...”*

In the poem, “Love's Growth” Donne makes the readers realize the fact that he describes the infiniteness of true love because infinite things never grow or increase just as the grass that grows with spring and shrinks with winter. It is an admirable lyric by Donne. In the poem, Love is a mixture of both physical and spiritual elements. Hence, it affects both the body and the soul. Love is just like the medicine that cures sorrow by giving more of it.

*I scarce believe my love to be so pure
As I had thought it was,
Because it doth endure
Vicissitude, and season, as the grasse;
Me thinkes I lyed all winter, when I swore,
My love was infinite, if spring make 'it more.*

In the following poem, “Elegie: His Picture” Donne enunciates his metaphysical ideology as:

Here take my Picture; though I bid farewell,

*Thine, in my heart, where my soule dwels, shall dwel.
'Tis like me now, but I dead, 'twill be more
When wee are shadowes both, than 'twas before*

Setting out for a dangerous war, it was natural for him to have his mind filled with thoughts of death. While his giving his picture to his beloved, he assures her that his heart has her picture imprinted on it, the place where his soul dwells. She shall live in his heart till the end of his life.

The picture resembles him both in life and in case he dies it would resemble closer and more intimate. He and the picture will both be mere shadows that will make his memory immortal even after death.

The picture resembles him both in life and in case he dies it would resemble closer and more intimate. He and the picture will both be mere shadows that will make his memory immortal even after death. As far as his profound poem, "The Blossom", Donne marvelously presents his metaphysical analysis as juxtaposing contrastive things. The poet tortures himself pointing that a woman never recognizes a true heart, because she herself has none, and decides to give his heart to one who would be glad to have it.

*Little think'st thou, poore flower,
Whom I have watch'd sixe or seaven days,
And seene thy birth, and seene what every houre
Gave to thy growth, thee to this height to raise...*

The poet compares his beloved with that of a flower that has a short lived beauty that would be soon destroyed with time. Even if the poet passes away, his all sense would be fully satisfied for he will find new friends elsewhere. He would not definitely miss his heart for he has no need of it.

In another poem named 'The Anniversarie', Donne celebrates his love which is now one year old and sweetly remarks that they will celebrate one anniversary after another until sixty years have passed. He commemorates that true love is immortal which transcends love itself. The poet further elaborates that death can't decay their love and it will change neither today nor tomorrow.

*All kings, and their favourites,
All glory' of honors, beauties, wits,
The Sun it selfe, which makes times, as they passe,
Is elder by a yeare, now, than it was
When thou and I first one another saw:
All other things, to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay;
This, no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday,
Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.*

In this dramatic lyric, Donne compares himself and his beloved to kings of the kingdom of love. Just as the kings also have to die one day, they too will die. But they would never part away even if not buried together. Only their bodies will get separated, their souls will continue to love each other in the heaven too. Their love will grow with much passion and intensity.

As in the heaven they will be thoroughly blessed like any other spirit and none will betray each other until one of them

turns faithless. They will love nobly adding year and year to their everlasting love.

In another poem "Sweetest Love, I Do Not Goe" which explores the sweet love of the poet towards his beloved as explains:

*Sweetest love, I do not goe,
For wearinesse of thee,
Nor in hope the world can show
A fitter Love for mee;
But since that I
Must dye at last, 'tis best,
To use my selfe in jest
Thus by fain'd deaths to dye.*

It is one of the sweetest of love-songs of the poet. The scene starts with the poet going abroad and his beloved being very sad about it. The poet asks her not to cry for his departure. He assures her wife that he will love her even more than today and will not look for any other woman outside because he feels his wife to be the most beautiful woman on the Earth.

He further explains that she should get used to it because one or the other day he has to die and she should take this as his temporary departure as a mock imitation of death. When such suffering is caused, then she will not suffer much pain and feel helpless. Their separation is just short lived and there is no occasion to mourn. The poet conveys to enjoy the present intensity of love without thinking about future issues. He requests her not to shed tears because a mere departure cannot separate them for life and they will spiritually be one even when separated physically for a short while.

In an excellent piece of poem "A Hymn to God, The Father" the poet mesmerizes the readers by presenting the abundant love and forgiveness of God as omnipotent and omnipresent. This poem embodies the religious elements overflows the metaphysical elements.

*Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do un still, though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.*

"A Hymn to God, The Father" is a religious hymn composed by the pioneering poet of the metaphysical school, John Donne. It begins with a simple question for God: will He forgive the sins that all humans are born into?

From the very start, Donne speaks of sin and forgiveness. He apologizes to God for the sin that was committed before his birth but still his sin, which was actually committed by Adam, the first man. Even if God forgives the original sin, the poet would have more sins to feel sorry for.

He finds himself guilty for letting others commit sin and for allowing others follow the path of sin. The poet is scared that as a result of these sins, he won't be able to cross the sea of eternity and wants God to guarantee him that at the time of his death, His son, Christ would shine upon him just like the sun shines. Only then he would have deep faith in Him.

Donne's great intellect and genius had marked him as one of those who should do things. He precisely forgotten and ignored style and all literary standards. The world of literature has many men and women and what the exact tendency of literature is to exalt the style at the expense of thought and expression of feeling in works of authors. Donne has occupied a great place nearer to the few great poets.

Jonson as a critic failed to define the sensitive metaphysical poetry by its faults, it is worthwhile to enquire by assuming that the poets of seventeenth century, success may not be attained by adopting opposite method. There was direct and normal development of precedent age. Jonson has hit perhaps by accident one of their peculiarities when he observes that their attempts for always analytic. He would not agree that, after that disassociation they put the material together in a unity.

Donne has reached his highest peak in metaphysical presentations. A good degree of development of sensibility expressed in the dramatic verse of later Elizabethan and early Jacobean poets is not found in any of the prose. John Donne's remarkable performance which made metaphysical poetry vigorous in using sparkling wit and jarring language has become a model among his followers.

Edward Dowden has rightly said, "There was no special coterie of school of metaphysical poets. But this writer or that yielded with ore abandon than the rest to tendency of the time. It is not then by studying Donne as a leader of a school that we shall come to understand him. We get access to his writings, I, believe, most readily through his life, and through an interest in his character as an individual."

Crompton Rickett rightly says, "it will be seen by foregoing that Donne, unlike most of his contemporaries, excelled in reflective imagination. The Elizabethan imagination was on the whole a richly observant one; there were scores of writers overflowing with a wealth of perceptive

life; but save in Shakespeare, there is singularly little metaphysical power in the men of the age".

CONCLUSION

John Donne is one of the most unique and adaptable metaphysical poet. He is popular for his remarkable conceits in metaphysical poetry. He has created abundant resourceful forms of satiric representations of the contemporary times which would even win the hearts of present day poetic admirers. His satires and metaphysical conceits are as natural as anything. He created metaphysical poetry is a unique division of poetry that deals with philosophical outlook on Nature and as also acclaimed for pedagogical implications of intellect and emotions. The skilful and adept art of poetic form has been progressed by Donne and his contemporary poets even despite of criticisms of breaking Elizabethan tradition of writing. This presents how John Donne has explored metaphysical elements through the study of his some selected poems.

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