

FEATURES OF METAPHYSICAL POETRY OF JOHN DONNE

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ABSTRACT

John Donne [1572-1631] is one of the most important poet of metaphysical poetry. Donne has significant place in the history of English poetry as the founder of "Metaphysical School." The term 'mataphysical' is generally used to a group of poets of 17th century. Chiefly Donne, Carew, Vaughan, Marvell and Cowley. Donne's metaphysical poetry is filled with conceits, wit, dramatic element, imagery and humour. The very term 'metaphysical' implies preoccupation with philosophy. But the term really fits various types of poets. Their chief similarity being a certain quality in style and expression. It stands for the habit, common to this school of poets, of always seeking to express something after, something behind the simple, obvious first sense and suggestion of a subject.

Keywords: Metaphysical, conceit, Imagery, wit, humour.

The metaphysical poetry is quite different from the Elizabethan poetry as well as from the poetry of the age of Dryden and pope. These poets are completely different from their predecessors. They were fond rather of the subtle than the plain, of what lay beneath than on the surface. These poets had in common two things, learning with a kind of misplaced wit and the desire to say something that had never been said before. Donne's wit followed no fashion. It was the natural working of a mind abnormally quick to apprehend likeness in things divergent. He derived analogies from his multifarious learning, In his love poems and his divine poems, wit and passion are fused. Donne

".....ruled as he thought fit

The universal monarchy of wit."

The marks of metaphysical poetry were arresting and original images and conceits, wit, ingenuity, dexterous use of colloquial, speech, considerable flexibility of rhythm and metre, complex theme, a liking for paradox, a direct manner, a caustic humour, a keenly felt awareness of morality, a wonderful capacity for new thought and tersely compact expression.

The metaphysical school is full of conceits and a metaphysical poet enjoys using obscure and unintelligible conceits. Now conceit is a literary form which means for. A strained or far-fetched comparison. It is a means through which a metaphysical poet exhibits his wit Mrs. Bennet observes that "conceit is a focal point at which emotion sense impression and thought are

perceived as one." Intellectual element is the characteristic quality of the metaphysical conceit. Metaphysical conceits conveys a unified experience and at their best they show themselves as the fine balance or reconciliation of opposites or discordant qualities for example:

"This flea is you and I, and this

Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is."

{Donne: The flea}

If wit may be defined as a combination of dissimilar images or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike the metaphysical poets are great with. Aristotle favoured the use of wit in various forms, such as surprise, antithesis and pun to enliven the subject in hand and to make it more effective metaphysical wit is used to combine thought and feeling. It keeps within its bounds vast human's experiences and unifies them into a compact whole. It was the wit of Donne that made Dryden remark that Donne was the greatest wit, though not the greatest poet of our nation.

For example:

"Love with excess of heat,

more young than old.

Death kill with too much of cold."

{Donne: The paradox}

According to Dr. Johnson, the metaphysical poets were men of learning and to show their learning was their sole effort. Metaphysical poetry is laden with scholarship of its poets. The scholarly allusions of only Donne and Cowley will suffice for making a whole book of knowledge from

them. The metaphysical poets were learned, cultivated and intelligent men of rich and wide experience and hunter calls this show of learning as intellectualism as far example in the following lines:

“And new philosophy calls all in doubt the
element of fire is quite put out;
The sun is lost, and the earth, and no man’s wit
Can well direct him where to look for it.”

{Donne: The first Anniversary}

The metaphysical poetry possesses dramatic elements in its abrupt openings where in the poet addresses either god or his sweetheart or sets a scene before the reader or calls our attention to notice this or that particular. The metaphysical poetry is certainly the poetry of the great age of drama and John Donne, its father is said to be a great lover of plays and theatre during his youthful days.

He uses the technique of dramatic monologue in his poems where the first person is none else but the poet himself. The rapid and subtle change of monologue mood within each poem makes the talk natural, while the mystical devotion of the lover to his beloved, intensifies the effect of dramatic element in his poems. Thus, the canonization of Donne opens abruptly with the address his sweet-heart “for god’s sake hold you tongue, and let me love” or the address of Carew in his mediocritic in love rejected “Give me more love, or more disdain.”

A metaphysical poem is often brief and closely woven. Behind much of metaphysical poetry lies the classical epigram, as Helen Gardner observed that a metaphysical poem is an expanded epigram. Unlike a Spenserian stanza, the metaphysical verse “is more like a limiting frame in which words and thoughts are compressed, a box where sweets compacted life.”

It was T.S. Eliot who found his peculiar quality in the metaphysical poetry which gives a unified sensibility to the reader by combining thought and feeling. In the words of Jim Hunter, the metaphysical

Poetry is “the product of intellectual effort as much as of emotion.” The metaphysical poetry possessed a mechanism any kind of experience. They tried to find the vertical equivalent for states of mind and feeling; To Donne a thought was an experience, which modified his sensibility.

The imagery of Metaphysical poets is

scientific astronomical, geographical and theological. They were found of far-fetched imagery and often indulged in dissimilar images of discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. The result of all this is that sometimes they employ concrete metaphors for some abstract thought or deep philosophy. Sometimes the images become sheer non-sensual.

“I saw eternity the other night

Like a great ring of pure and endless light

All calm as it was bright”. (Vaughan: The World)

John Donne in his elegy "To his Mistress Going to Bed" addresses as-'O my America, My new found land'

The thoughts of metaphysical poets are often surprising, but seldom natural. Metaphysical poetry wants natural grace, being full of artificial thought and hyperbolic expression. Discarding reason and even crossing the limits of fancy, they produce combinations of confused magnificence. For example, here is Cowley, assuring to tempestuous sighs in return for a sight of his sweet-heart.

"By every wind that comes this way,

Send me at least a sight or two

Such and so may I'll repay

As shall themselves make kinds to get to you".

Metaphysical poetry is a mixture of the sublime and the trivial. They blend the serious philosophical themes of their poems with the trivial which produces humour in their poems. The real experience is expressed through a composite emerge, constituted of the serious and non-serious elements. Sovereignty and reasonability to the poem, is afforded by the humour thus created.

"We would sit down and think which way

To walk, and pass our long love's day

Thou by the Indian Ganges side,

Should'st Rubies find. I by the tide

Of Humour would complain. I would

Love you ten years before the flood.

x x x

My vegetables love should grow

Vaster than Empire, And more slow

To conclude, the metaphysical poetry is characterized by wit, conceit and euphuism, intellectualism, realism, dramatic element, simple diction, rough verse and love of science and philosophy. With these are also tagged a learned character, extraordinariness of expression, subtlety, comprehensiveness, un-conventionalism, psychological mooning's, penetrating humour and irony, doubts and anxieties, uneven metrical variety,

powerful and sincere expression and harsh tone. The metaphysical poets wrote of god and of theology of the court and of the church, of love and of nature-often elaborately. It also deals with psychological subtleties, and complexities. Its main

forms are- satire, sonnet and lyric. It probes the depth of human consciousness. The union of thought and feeling is one of the most prominent features of the metaphysical poetry.

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