

A Brief Introduction to Metaphysical poetry

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Abstract

This article concentrates on the exploration of the metaphysical poetry, a special branch of poetry that deals with the pedagogic use of wit and emotion in a harmonic style. The common theme of this poetry is metaphysical concerns, which investigates the world by rational discussion of its phenomenon, rather than by intuition or mysticism. There are two most famous literary devices: wit and conceit. Donne is considered a master of the metaphysical conceit, an extended metaphor, most notably Petrarchan conceits, and subtle yet remarkable resemblance. As well as, other Metaphysical poets such as Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, Abraham Cowley, George Herbert, Andrew Marvell and Thomas Carew brought a whole new manner of expression and imagery dealing with emotional, physical and spiritual issues of that time.

Keys words: *Conceit, wit, poetry, Metaphysical poetry*

Introduction

Metaphysical poetry was written in the 17th century by the British poets. Whose verse or poetry is characterized by an intellectually challenging style and extended metaphors comparing disparate things. These poets did not term themselves “Metaphysical poets”. This term coined by Samuel Johnson, who attempted to classify the type of poetry created during this period. He states that, in the beginning of 17th century, a race of writers appeared, who may be regarded as Metaphysical Poets, who shared many general characteristics, particularly ones of wit and intricate style.

The term ‘metaphysical’ it is made from two words ‘meta-’ means beyond and ‘physical’ means our surroundings or non-natural world. This poetry studies the spiritual or intellectual world, goes beyond the ‘world of physical senses’. The common theme of this poetry is metaphysical concerns, which investigates the world by rational discussion of its phenomenon, rather than by

intuition or mysticism. As we know that, in metaphysical poetry, there are two most famous literary devices; wit and conceit, in the seventeenth century used by the poets such as John Donne, George Herbert, and Henry Vaughan. Emerging out of the Petrarchan (*denoting a sonnet of the kind used by the Italian poet*) era, metaphysical poetry brought a whole new manner of expression and imagery dealing with emotional, physical and spiritual issues of that time. Grierson (ed.) argues that, “Metaphysical is a poetry which has been inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence.” (1921) According to Oxford Dictionary:

“A group of 17th-century poets whose work is characterized by the use of complex and elaborate images or conceits, typically using an intellectual form of argumentation to express emotional states. Members of the group include John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, and Andrew Marvell.” (Rafiq Muhammad, 2014 (hubpages))

Metaphysical poets harmonize intense feeling with imaginative thought and often used conceits and glorious imagery, incredible juxtapositions, striking use of wit, irony and wordplay in their poetry to create a greater significance in their style of writing and intended meanings all over the poem. It is observed that the poets’ style of writing initiated with a consideration of argument.

Metaphysical Poets

There are some famous metaphysical poets are as follow:

John Donne

John Donne (1572 – 1631) considered as the great master of English poetry in the seventeenth century. His personal relationship with spirituality is at the heart of most of his work, and his works are famous for their strong, sensuous style and consist of religious poems, love poetry, sonnets, Latin translations, elegies, songs, satires, sermons and epigrams. His poetry is well-known for its delightful of language and inventiveness of metaphor, mainly compared to that of his contemporaries. His primary work, collected in *Satires* and in *Songs and Sonnets*. His Holy Sonnets is exemplified in Holy Sonnet 10, “*Death, be not proud*” is very impassioned and written with a victorious and (at times) mocking tone.

*Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;*

*For those, whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy picture[s] be,
Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow,*

All over the poem Donne emphasizes his view that death is not something to fear. It is, however, the gateway to eternal life, a belief which reflects that of Plato. Donne catches the common view that death is a terrible thing, and negates it.

Donne's early career was also noteworthy for his sensual poetry, especially his elegies, in which he employed unconventional metaphors, such as "The flea" stinging two lovers being compared to sex. It has dramatic conflict, stage action and dialogue:

*Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deniest me is;
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead;*

Donne is considered a master of the metaphysical conceit, an extended metaphor, most notably Petrarchan conceits, found in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning", his works are also witty, employing paradoxes, witticism, and subtle yet remarkable resemblance. His few devotional pieces, ironic and devious, especially regarding love poems are great exponents of all the metaphysical qualities—passionate, paradoxical argument, touched with humor and well-read imagery, we can consider the common subjects of Donne's poems are in three categories "love" especially in his early life, "death" especially after his wife's death, and "religion" had a profound effect on his life.

George Herbert

George Herbert (1593–1633) was a Welsh born English poet, orator and Anglican priest. He is the best known for "The Temple," (1633). He was significant poet who did not live to see a published collection of his poems. The collection of poems in "The Temple" is Herbert's

enactment of saying “*amiss / this or that is*”. Herbert proposes the idea of learning through language in an earlier poem:

*Nothing escapes them both; all must appeare,
And be dispos'd, and dress'd, and tun'd by thee,
Who sweetly temper'st all. If we could heare
Thy skill and art, what musick would it be!*

("Providence," 11. 37-41)

While in “*The Flower*,” the poet refers to written language as the gateway to knowledge and truth, the spokesperson in “*Providence*” denotes that we can realize the same sense of understanding through listening. An example of Herbert’s religious poem is “*The Altar*” A pattern poem in which the words of the poem itself form a shape suggesting an altar, and this altar becomes his conceit for how one should offer himself as a sacrifice to the Lord. Herbert wrote no love poetry, he decided to devote his poetical works to God. . In the Herbert’s extant English poems’ consider the common subjects are religious, faith & doubt, Christianity, God & the Divine and a few have been used as hymns and his poetic terms are Rhymed Stanza, Concrete or Pattern Poetry.

Andrew Marvell

Andrew Marvell (1621–1678) was a satirist and politician. As a metaphysical poet, he is associated with John Donne and George Herbert. His most thoughtful poem “*Upon Appleton House*”, significant to his development both as poet and as man, his best poems are not in large number, and not only must be well known, but also have been enjoyed by several readers.

The entire Poems demonstrate his exclusive skill and immeasurable diversity to the full and include lyrical love-poetry, biting satire and religious works. From the zealously erotic “*To his Coy Mistress*”, the poem is with ending the state of separation and bringing about the union of male and female. The male lover begins by playfully engaging the mistress’s attention with a witty verbal seduction. He urges her to unite with him now as there is not enough time to waste in refusing and being coy. This coyness will only keep them separate:

*Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime.*

*We would sit down and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day;*

We can see in the above stanza the high speed, the succession of strenuous images, each amplifying the original imaginary. However the images in the “*Coy Mistress*” are not only witty, although gratify the clarification of Imagination. The extremely spiritual poem “*On a Drop of Dew*”, in which he considers the nature of the soul, these work are masterpieces of lucidity and metaphysical imagery. Marvell successfully implores to have the senior poet untied. His satirical poems and miscellaneous lyric were collected after his death amid an air of secrecy. Marvell marked politically charged poems that would have cost him his autonomy or his life had they been public. [<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/andrew-marvell>]

Abraham Cowley

Abraham Cowley (1618–1667) was an English poet and essayist who wrote poetry of a fanciful, elegant nature. He also adapted the Pindaric ode to English verse. The first collection of His poetry, “*The Mistress, or Several Copies of Love-Verses*” was published in 1647. There are many works of Cowley significance interpretations like “*Ode: of Wit*” is intellectual, vigorous, and a praiseworthy example of its stretch of time; “*On the Death of Mr. William Hervey*” is an intensely deepest, individual elegy for a beloved friend and its emotion surmount time itself.

His primary requirement is to write enormous poetry, but he can hardly do that if he avoids any part of the world with which poetry must deal. He found evidence of the permanent concern of God with the universe, of the existence of a Platonic reality behind the fabric of this mutable world. In such strength Cowley wrote “*A Proposition for the Advancement of Experimental Philosophy*” and “*To the Royal Society*”. All the same he never lost sight of the importance of poetry and compassionate knowledge. Cowley’s style of poetry has acquired a unique flavor, we can see in the following verse:

*PHilosophy the great and only Heir
Of all that Human Knowledge which has bin
Unforfeited by Mans rebellious Sin,
Though full of years He do appear,*

*(Philosophy, I say, and call it, He,
For whatsoe're the Painters Fancy be,
It a Male-virtue seemes to me)*

Literally, “*To the Royal Society*” emphasizes that the new philosophy and truly Christian achievement including great poems quite naturally belong together. In his famous poem “*Ode: of Wit*” he had allied it with the victorious work of art, which resembles the enduring work of God in its beauty, sense and order; and provides a series of pointers to the extent of his creative choice and the quality of his deep emotion. He starts with a brief introduction:

*Tell me, O tell, what kind of thing is Wit,
Thou who Master art of it.
For the First matter loves Variety less;
Less Women lov't, either in Love or Dress.*

In “*Of Wit*” he expressed of the artist; in “*To the Royal Society*” he expressed of the innate philosopher. However, there was truly no inequality between them. Each was dedicated to the presentation of a creation which is true and which therefore has beauty and unambiguously reflects God.

Richard Crashaw

Richard Crashaw (c. 1613–1649) a British poet, his style of poetry was “*the divine*”. Richard Crashaw (KRASH-aw) wrote mainly religious poetry contemplate the life of Christ and the symbols of Christianity. Crashaw’s poetry is determinedly within the Metaphysical tradition. Although his composition is considered of asymmetrical quality and along with the weakest example of the style, his verse is supposed to be marked by a focus toward “love with the smaller graces of life and the profounder truths of religion, while he seems forever preoccupied with the secret architecture of things” (Clifford, Cornelius. 1908). Crashaw’s major poetry publicized in “*Steps to the Temple*” and “*The Delights of the Muses*”, in 1646, Crashaw’s baroque poetry; expressed in “*The Weeper*”:

*Every morn from hence,
A brisk cherub something sips,
Whose soft influence*

*Adds sweetness to his sweetest lips;
Then to his music: and his song
Tastes of this breakfast all day long.*

(THE WEEPER: 25-36)

It is the most famous verse of Crashaw, it is considered as one of his best poem and fine example of his creative application of symbolism, flourish on paradox, luminous imagery to the point of discrepancy, stock religious symbols, and concern with martyrdom and mysticism or spirituality. The themes of Crashaw's verses are as distinct loveliest and most faultless. The famous poem "*The Flaming Heart*," addressed to St. Teresa, which belong to the highest order of lyric writing.

Crashaw's Latin verse "*Bulla*" (Bubble) provided as the inspiration for Elliott Carter's great orchestral work "*Symphonia: sum fluxae pretium spei*". His poem "*Lo, the Full, Final Sacrifice*" was set to music by the English composer Gerald Finzi. His poem "*Come and let us live*" translated from the Latin poet Catullus. Crashaw was the poet from an early epoch and bright in his exploration of the forms and themes of continental counter-Reformation political forms. He was further imaginative in Latin and Greek than in English.

Thomas Traherne

Thomas Traherne (1636/1637 – 1674) an English poet and prose writer, he was also a clergyman, theologian, and religious writer. Traherne was an irrelevant marvelous figure throughout his life; his works express an enthusiastic, childlike love of God and a firm comprehension in relation of man to the divine. The work for which he is best known today is the "*Centuries of Meditations*," a collection of short paragraphs in which he reflects on Christian life and ministry, philosophy, happiness, desire and childhood. Thomas Traherne's verses are intrinsically numinous, in that they seek to comprehend and embrace the nature of God within his creation and within man's soul. Thus, one of the verses included in "*Christian Ethicks*":

*In all Things, all Things service do to all:
And thus a Sand is Endless, though most small.
And every Thing is truly Infinite,
In its Relation deep and exquisite.*

The “*Sand is Endless*” for the reason that it presents the personality with an occasion to see and know infinity. Traherne’s appearance here is not reasonable; nor do the chapters of “*Christian Ethicks*” proceed reasonably. The order of the cosmos--and of the work--may seem like disorder, but it is illuminated in the smallest segment: “*its Relation deep and exquisite*”. (Poetry Foundation, 2012)

“*Centuries of Meditation,*” is Traherne’s most popular work, he observes the image of the glory and love of God and the frequent theme of the kindness and the majesty of God. He argues that man can only experience this felicity by understanding the will of God and divine love and he describes the beauty of this in childlike terms. (Balakier, James J., 1991)

Traherne’s poetic range of appearance is massive than is often familiar, for, moreover rephrasing and simulating the Psalms and the Canticles, he wrote epigrams, apothegms, hymns, meditative verse, and long poems in heroic couplets. It could be argued that Traherne wrote some of the finest epitaphs of the seventeenth century. (Poetry Foundation, 2012) Traherne is one of the best and most adequate representatives, in the group of 17th century poets, of this type of religious conviction. He was a pure and gracious strength, the master of an unusual and wonderful style.

Henry Vaughan

Henry Vaughan (1622–1695) was a Welsh author, physician and metaphysical poet. He is best known for his religious poetry contained in “*Silex Scintillans*”. Vaughan obtained his literary inspiration from his indigenous ambiance and decided the explicative name “*Silurist,*” derived from his homage to the Silures, “*Olor Iscanus*” the (*Swan of Usk*), it was a secular work it contain “*incongruous passages about natural beauty*”. It was not published until 1651, which was a collection of secular poetry with four prose translations. It is filled with similes and odd words that solicit for attention despite its dark and miserable cognitive appeal.

In “*The Silex Scintillans,*” we imagine Vaughan as a writing theme who places himself in biblical discourse in order to apprehend him and the world. Exclusively, he was linguistically conveying others’ choice of words within particular spiritual and socio-political surroundings. Hence, one of the verses included in “*Silex Scintillans*”:

*First, I am sure, the subject so respected
Is well-disposed ; for bodies, once infected,*

*Deprav'd, or dead, can have with thee
No hold, nor sympathy.*

(The Star, 13-24)

Vaughan's self-authorization and textual valuation strategies will be linked to his biblical identity and his identification of his poetic world. He became a much more mystical poet than Herbert. This may have been connected with his Welsh background which led him to write about nature a great deal, and to draw his imagery from nature rather than from the intellectual concerns of the English poets. There are fewer conceits and much more nature symbolism or emblems. His method is more like that of the emblematic poets such as Francis Quarles or another mystic poet of the period, Thomas Traherne. Vaughan's nature poetry is a far cry from the conventional pastoral poetry of the Elizabethans. He writes of the real countryside he would have seen every day. (Crossref-it.info, 2010)

Thomas Carew

Thomas Carew (1595–1640) pronounced “*Carey*”. Carew has long been known as a prominent figure in English literary history. In the rhymes of Carew, we can observe ourselves rotating around his wit. This means that a study of wit in Carew's verse is a study in what distinguishes him from further poets. Wit may provide a poet in various ways. There is, for instance, the wit of a “*double entendre*” which consent to the speaker to state what is socially concealed.

Granted this as the fundamental strategy of Carew's wit, a lot of his best poems are dissimilarities upon it. Several poems intimidate; furthers, for instance “*A deposition from Love*”, injure. The initial stanza of “*A deposition from Love*” at initial sounds similar to any Petrarchan grievance about a merciless mistress; on the other hand, it merely shows Petrarchan since keywords (‘*paradise*’, ‘*fortresse*’, ‘*within*’, ‘*gate*’) are *double entendre*, we can see in the following stanza:

*I was foretold, your rebell sex,
Nor love, nor pitty knew;
And with what scorne, you use to vex
Poore hearts, that humbly sue;
Yet I believ'd, to crowne our paine,
Could we the fortresse win,
The happy lover sure should gaine*

(A deposition from Love, 5-10)

Carew's genius is the way in which the satiric elements of the poem are carefully balanced and controlled by traditional Renaissance conventions, his poetry deals with the side of realism that is frequently veiled from communal discussion; they require to protect oneself against harm, the demand for fervency and security, the desire to dominate over others and sexual appetites.

Conclusion

The poets are always among the first to feel the direction of spiritual currents, and they are extremely sure voices of the deeper optimisms and aspirations of their age. All the metaphysical poets reveal very clearly the influence of the ideas which were essential in the teaching of the sacred leaders, whom we have been studying. They reflect the freer and less rigidly formulated existing of idea. John Donne's self-absorption with love is not in doubt. However Herbert's spiritual manner appears consistently in the verses in '*The Temple*,' though '*To His Coy Mistress*' is not simply reconciled, Marvell in all of entire Poems demonstrate his exclusive skill and immeasurable diversity to the full and include lyrical love-poetry, biting satire and religious works. Vaughan's amazing virtuous visions may repel us; we cannot neglect the clearness and naivety of his manner.

Abraham Cowley found evidence of the perpetual thought of God with the universe, of the entity of a Platonic reality behind the fabric of this mutable world. In the poems of Carew, we can observe ourselves rotating around his wit. The poets; Herbert, Vaughan, Traherne, Crashaw, speak of the soul and its fuller life, they state quite naturally in terms of love and wonder. Religion has become for them the blossoming of the soul; the flood of the whole being with health and pleasure; the cessation of life; and they notify of it as lovers inform of their discovery and their delight.

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