

Candid love: The crux of Mtaphysical poetry

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Abstract - Literally the word 'Metaphysical' is a blending of two different words 'meta' meaning *beyond and 'physical' meaning the earthly world or the material world. The very term 'Metaphysical' was first coined by the 18th century English poet, playwright, essayist, and critic Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) in his book 'Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets (1779-1781)'*

Dr. Johnson Writing about Abraham Cowley made a gross generalization about the English poets of the age writing:

'About the beginning of the 17th century appeared a race of writers that may be termed as Metaphysical poets.'^[1] *He further wrote that these poets were scholars and tried to display their knowledge in their poems. They ransacked nature and art for 'illustrations, comparisons and allusions' and created conceits in which the most 'heterogeneous ideas' are hitch by violence composed. They were more concerned with the admirability than the understandability of their conceits. He quotes from the different poets of the time to substantiate it:*

'By every wind that comes this way,

send me, at least a sigh or two'

(Cowley)

or, the medicinal knowledge conveyed by John Donne in "To The Countess of Bedford":

"In everything there naturally grows, A balsamum to keep it fresh and new." Dr. Johnson used the term 'metaphysical' as a piece of literary slung.

Keywords: *Metaphysical, ransack, allusions, illustrations, yoke, violence, heterogeneous, conceit, substantiate, scholar, admirability, balsamum, slang*

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INTRODUCTION

'Metaphysical Poetry' is a group of typical poems sharing common characteristics. These are all extremely intellectualized, using rather strange imageries in exuberance as well as using frequent paradox containing extremely complicated thought. In his work, Dr. Johnson conducted a thorough analysis of British poets from the 17th century, including John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, and Henry Vaughan. He found that these writers had a lot in common, particularly humor and intricate style.

The towering personality of Dr. Johnson pushed the so called Metaphysical poets (T.S. Eliot) into the oblivion

for nearly two centuries until Prof. H.J.C Grierson published his book 'Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems' in 1921. He defended them for presenting their illumined and unified comprehensions of life. 'Their poems were inspired by a philosophical conception of universe. They combined passion and thought and their learned imagery was more intellectual and less verbal than the conceits of the Elizabethans.'^[2] Prof. Saintsbury, F. R. Leavis, H. Reed and T.S. Eliot in his essay 'Metaphysical poets'^[3] Published in 1921, resurrected these poets.

ABOUT METAPHYSICAL

It has been earlier discussed that the term 'Metaphysical' means beyond the material world (the physical world).

Basically 'Metaphysical' deals with the questions that cannot be explained in a scientific way and questions the nature gives birth to some collective Philosophical questions:

1. Whether God exists.
2. Identifying the distinction between reality and perception, or whether there is any difference between how things seem to the general public and how they actually are.
3. Whether everything that happens are already predetermined, if yes then is allowed choice non-existent.

CHARACTERISTICS OF METAPHYSICAL POETRY

- 1) The Metaphysical poets desired to say what they hoped had been never said before. They were casual with their diction and took care to think alone. They cared to be singular in their thoughts and were careless of their diction. They had their own thoughts and worked out their own manner of expressing them. Sir Walter Scott points out: They 'played with their thoughts' as the Elizabethans had 'played with words'[4].
- 2) A characteristic feature of Metaphysical verse is indulgence in "dissimilar images or discovery of occult resemblance in things apparently unlike."
- 3) The Metaphysical poets in the task of trying to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind and feeling made themselves difficult to understand.
- 4) The Metaphysical poetry reveals the scholarship of its author. Dr. Johnson observes that what is the most unfortunate about the Metaphysical poets is that they
- 5) "Sometimes drew" their conceits from the 'recesses of learning not very much frequented by common readers of poetry.'
- 6) Metaphysical poetry falls into two broad divisions of amorous and religious verse. The former was practiced largely by the courtly poets- Carew, Suckling etc. and the latter by Herbert, Crashaw and Vaughan.

METAPHYSICAL POETRY: LUMINARY OF PHILOSOPHY

John Donne (1571-1631), a born and brought up Catholic had renounced Rome in 1578. He loved Anne to whom he was married. He did not hold a woman to be a goddess but held her to be a creature only, desirable indeed but not adorable. That is why some of his love poems are frankly even arrogantly, sensual; while some are splendidly passionate like "For God's sake hold thy tongue and let me love", "I wonder by my troth what thou and I did till we lov'd", "Sweetest love I do for weariness of thee" or "Go and catch a falling star"

and some other poems express the tears of passion with shame and scorn:

"Blasted with sighs and surrounded with tears." His love poems are a reaction to the romantic love presented in the Elizabethan comedies. "Lover's Infiniteness" presents his playful love but ends with a serious note:

"Love's riddles are, that though thy heart depart, It stays at home, and thou with losing savest it." [5] [Lines 29-30]

On the death of his wife Anne in 1617, he became an ascetic and a devotee and furthered the king's pressure by becoming the dean of St. Paul's Church in London, and writes his strange testament of love in his songs, sonnets and elegies. He wrote in the Petrarchan sonnet form ending with a concluding couplet as introduced by Sir Thomas Wyatt but he did not write a single sonnet. His divine poems are frank as 'A Hymn to God the Father', 'A Hymn to God My God' and 'A Hymn to Christ' besides the holy sonnets:

"Thou hast made me and shall thy work decay?" [6] [line 01 Sonnet-I]

And "show me dear Christ thy spouse so bright and clear." [Holy Sonnet-XVI]

His satires are his early work dealing with the commonplace Roman satires but the 3rd one warns the reader to doubt wisely. As a representative of Metaphysical poets, John Donne's poems were featured with "exquisite conceit, profound meaning and unconventionality." [7]

Robert Herrick (1591-1674), was not very popular in the beginning though his "Litany" and "Thanks Given" are great. His poem "To Daffodils" is very popular and a philosophical one presenting the temporariness of life and whatsoever in this world is living whether bright and beautiful but the rule of nature surely will compel it to bid good bye to this earth.

It was George Herbert (1593-1633) who was greatly influenced by John Donne, through his mother lady Magdalen to whom Donne addressed his early sonnets. We remember Herbert for his poems-

'The Collar', 'Love', 'Life', 'Virtue', and 'Jesus'.

The concluding three lines of his poem 'The Pulley'-

"Let him be rich and weary that at least, if goodness let him not,

yet weariness may toss him to my breast", [8] are remarkable.

[Lines 18-20]

His comparison to 'God' with 'the pulley' is typically metaphysical in essence.

Thomas Carew (1594-1640) is a fine disciple of Donne and is never obscure.

Sir John Suckling (1609-42) was witty and humorous without being cynical.

Although Richard Crashaw (1613–49) wrote secular poetry, his religious poetry is his best work. Religion was everything to him. His poetry stands out for its holy fervor and fire, as well as its startling yet surreal Conceits. It is less deliberate and more sentimental. His imagery is mysterious, and his poetry is primarily lyrical. In his poem "Love's Horoscope", he speaks of love as 'immortal' even the lovers die:

"While Love shall thus entombed lye, Love shall live, although he dye".^[9] [Last two lines]

He is remembered for his rapturous eloquence in "Hymn to St. Teresa." Crashaw's; "The Weepers" is a typical affliction in Metaphysical poetry.

Richard Lovelace (1618-1658) struck a serious note in his poem- "To Althea From Prison." He got fame with "To Lucasta" where he compares love with angels describing love as eternal and immortal and in Heaven the spirits of love are united forever.

A man with a wide range of literary interests, Abraham Cowley (1618–67) stood out as a classical scholar who authored plays, essays, chronicles, and poetry. He wrote an epical romance "Pyramus and Thisbe" (1628) when he was only ten years of age. His well known poems are: "The Mistress", a collection of love poems and the "Pindaric Odes."

Being the final metaphysical poet and, in many ways, a precursor to the English classicists, Cowley is a significant transitional poet of his time. Cowley is initially an intellectual despite his devotion, fancy, conceits, and Pindarism. He is entitled to be regarded as a humanist because of his understanding of the ancients, whom he emulated. In any case, he was deserving of being categorized as one of Donne's students.

Cowley's couplets though foreshadow the 18th century heroic couplet still they are not so inspiring. His lyrics are often graceful yet he is neither with the song writers nor with the vigorous satirists of the age. His work has a historical importance that could not be underestimated and very aptly he is called the harbinger of John Dryden and Alexander Pope.

Like Crashaw, Henry Vaughan (1622–95) was a mystic at heart despite being a pupil of Herbert. Wordsworth's "Ode on Immortality" was affected by his mysticism, which he conveyed in "The Retreat." Sacred verse was more comfortable for him than secular verse. Although he was gifted with a great deal of fantasy, which he employed to embellish his somber poetry, his work never quite reaches the heights reached by Crashaw. Ben Jonson had an influence on Vaughan's secular poetry.

Edward Albert observes:

His regard for nature', moreover has a 'closeness and penetration' that sometimes suggest William words worth the great- Romantic poet.

Andrew Marvell (1621-78) was the only Puritan among the Meta physicals. He wrote the famous poem "To His Coy Mistress" telling, her coyness is fatal because life is short and by the time she shakes off her coyness it may be very late for his 'vegetable love'. Marvell complains:

"Had we but world enough, and time

This Coyness, lady, were no crime"^[10] [Lines 1-2]

Donne's complain in his love poems 'Lover's Infiniteness'-

"If yet I have not all they Love,

Dear I shall never have it all."^[11] [Lines 1-2]

Marvell Complains to his mistress against her bashfulness and innocence. If they had been immortal and their love beyond the span of time they would have passed long 'Lover's Day'. He asks her to roll their strength into one ball, enjoying life, defining in the last lines-

"Let us roll all our strength and all

Our sweetness up into one ball."^[12] [lines 41-42]

The term 'vegetable Love is metaphysical. In 'The Definition of Love' he calls his love rare and is the conjunction of mind.

His mystical ecstasy is expressed in "The Garden", expressing his feeling for nature. Both the poems 'To his Coy Mistress,' and 'The Definition of Love' are witty and passionate. Here he appears to be the Supreme Metaphysical poet. Lamb admired his witty delicacy. James Lowell observed that Marvell's poems form the 'synthesis' of Donne and Butler. He further comments that the combination of with moral sense Marvell displays, is rare.

CONCLUSION

The fundamental component of metaphysical poetry is a metaphysical conceit, which is typically categorized as a subtype of metaphor. It is a complex, remarkably unusual, and startlingly implausible metaphor, exaggeration, contradiction, simile, paradox, or oxymoron that shocks the viewer with the seeming "distance" or difference between the subjects being compared. Metaphysical poets challenge conventional notions of morality, love, and carnality through the use of intricate dramatic expressions and a range of literary devices, such as prolonged conceits, paradoxes, and images in informal and intimate language. Because it combines two disparate things to generate conceits

and metaphors that are distinct from those of earlier poets of the day, it is intellectually innovative and occasionally startling.

To conclude it would not be an exaggeration that the 'love' which had been the cardinal factor of the metaphysical poetry and almost all the poets of the race had tried to cough out that as has been discussed earlier that 'Love' is not merely an infatuation or nor only a flesh game between the persons of two opposite genders rather it is divine and perennial and exists even after the decadence/demise of the body. Some lines and conceits quoted earlier from the works of the different poets of the age justify that most of the poems composed by them; contained the elements of love in which sexual desire or romantic features are sublimated and only the feeling of enjoying each other's company had been the whole and sole endeavour of the speaker which is the fundamental characteristic of 'Platonic Love'.

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