



COGNITIVE CONSCIENCE AND AFFECTIVE ATTENTION IN THE PURSUIT OF SPIRITUAL SALVATION: THE UNIQUE EQUILIBRIUM IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY METAPHYSICAL POETRY

Samapti Banerjee

University of Burdwan, Department of English, Burdwan. West Bengal

ABSTRACT

*Metaphysical poetry is an innovative movement in the English Literature. The movement comprises of sharp wit, a new style of writing, extended metaphor or 'conceit'. The term Metaphysical poetry was first coined by the renowned 18th Century critic Samuel Johnson. In his *The Lives of the most Eminent English Poets (1779-81)* in the chapter of Abraham Cowley Dr. Johnson has mentioned that in the beginning of the 17th Century there "appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets". John Dryden disparagingly remarked about John Donne "He affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love. In this...Mr. Cowley has copied him to a fault." Later in the 20th c. T. S. Eliot has redefined the Metaphysical Poetry which is especially an intellectual adventure of the poets of the 17th Century and it has revived again during the 20th C. According to Dr. Johnson the Metaphysical Poets are influenced by the style of Marino and his followers. Grierson opined that the Metaphysical poets are influenced by Baroque European tradition of using conceits and hyperboles "fantastic conceits and hyperboles which was the fashion throughout Europe". Dryden had keenly observed that wordplay is a unique criterion of the poets as is evident in the poems of George Herbert and other eminent English poets who "torture one poor word ten thousand ways".*

KEY WORDS: *Metaphysical, Conceits, Intellect, Emotion, Yoke Together, Carpe Diem, Spiritual, Intellect, Affectionate, Soul, Spiritual, Equilibrium, Immortality*

METHODOLOGY

The study follows close reading of all the texts. The textual, analytical and interpretative study helps in the deeper understanding of the Metaphysical poetry and its unique features. The theoretical approaches of New Criticism, New Historicism / Historical Materialism, Hermeneutics and Reader-Response Theory and Ecocriticism provide this analytical methodological research a profound wisdom, clarity and detailed understanding of the innovative and ground-breaking revolutionary poetic creations of the Metaphysical poets.

Key features of Metaphysical Poetry

- *Metaphysical Conceits*-Two completely dissimilar things or ideas are forcefully yoked or attached together.
- The poems demand for intellectual attention rather than emotional and affectionate interests. These poems are charged with intellectual sharp wit. The poems appeals to the head, to the intellect more than just only to the heart.
- These poems are important for their analytical and philosophical approach.
- The poems use colloquial language and everyday conversation language
- These poems can be religious poems as well as love poems
- The poems mix emotion and intellect with perfect poise
- Mostly poem deals with the *carpe diem* theme or the concept of 'seize the day'
- The poems wonderfully blend levity with gravity.
- Poems use wit and paradox
- The poems are completely original in their essence and are free from any artificial imitation of styles, techniques and subject matter.
- Word play is a quintessential attribute of the Metaphysical poets.



- Love has taken the form of platonic love.
- These poems deal with the subjective and personal experience of the poet and present with the help of intellectual wit and conceit to provide a universal appeal.
- Intensely personal experiences are wrapped with intellectual detachment and with the help of complex and extended metaphors or conceits demand a universal appeal.
- The core or the content is subjective, the presentation is intellectual and philosophical and the effect is Universal.

Themes of Metaphysical Poetry: These types of poetry can be classified into three categories.

Metaphysical Love: This type of poetry mainly deals with the love theme- it starts initially with the physical love but it transcends to the spiritual love. Thus becoming the *meta* -beyond *physical* –physic. The transcendence of mundane, earthly and physical love to go beyond the physics and therefore experiencing the spiritually fulfilled love is the unique feature of this kind of poetry. This progression of physical love in the journey to attain higher spiritual realm is wittily termed as metaphysical by the intellectual poets.

Religious Poetry: These metaphysical poems are intensely personal and are infused with devotion. There are deep interactions with God. These are the poems of deep insight and introspection reflecting the spiritual enlightenment and are profoundly insightful and meditative.

Carpe Diem Theme/Mortality and Brevity: Human life is a brief experience. A person is meant to live for approximately 70 years in the mundane world. *Ars longa, vita brevis* this is a common Latin adage which suggests the Latin concept of *memento mori*. In this certainty of mortality and brevity of earthly existence human beings must live in the present moment without procrastinating.

Major Metaphysical Poets: Some of the major Metaphysical poets are John Donne, George Herbert, Andrew Marvell, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, and Abraham Cowley et.al.

- **Some major Metaphysical Poets and their Remarkable Works**

John Donne (1571-1631) - He is one of the most significant Metaphysical Poets. Donne's poems are noteworthy for their paradoxes, ironies, intellectual presentation, colloquial languages and witty use of paradoxes. John Donne was a versatile genius. He was a scholar, soldier and a poet and later becomes the Priest in the Church of England. He is the most prominent English metaphysical poet. His poems include love poems, poems of sensuality, religious poems, and poems of devotion. John Donne often regarded as the father of Metaphysical poetry or the foremost pioneer of the Metaphysical Poetical Movement. Donne has effortlessly merges sensuality with spirituality. He has married to Anne More secretly from the public awareness. They had twelve children. Donne was extremely gifted poet. His poetic excellence mainly lies in his masterful use of metaphysical conceit. Despite of profound erudition and poetic talent, he had to live in extreme miserable condition. Donne was elected as an M.P. He wrote poems mainly under the patronage of M.P. Sir Robert Drury of Hawsted. According to the wish of King James, Donne was ordained as the Anglican Priest in the Church of England in the year 1615 and in this year he also received the prestigious Doctorate degree in Divinity from the Cambridge University.

- **The Flea: (1633)** - This poem is an erotic metaphysical poem. In this literary piece there is a prominent undertone of the poet's yearning for sensual gratification and his urge to live the present time and enjoy the erotic pleasure with his lady love. The speaker of the poem constantly urges his beloved for sensual contentment and their intense physical union. The flea is an extended metaphor which serves as their nuptial bed as in it their bloods are being united. The poem is at once a love poem and a poem of sensuousness as in it the poet urges for the completion and fulfillment through passionate physical intimacy.

It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.
The poem alludes to male erection

And pamp'rd swells with one blood made of two;

- **A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning :(1611)** - In this poem the poet urges his love not to cry while parting. The poet is going out for a Continental Europe trip and consoles her lady to accept the separation in a dignified way as the great men breathed their last gracefully. They may be physically distant from each other for this journey. They will be connected in the virtual world due to the spiritual purity in their longing. Like the two pairs of the compass they will ever be connected in the center for their immense love and devotion for each



other. The intelligent use of the compass conceit has enriched the gravity of the substance and the unfathomable depth of their emotional attachment.

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do.

Like the Gold their affection and the pure bond between their souls will be extended and pervaded in thinness rather than be broken.

- **Death, be not proud (Holy Sonnet 10)** - In this poem the poet defies death not to be proud for its power. The conceit "short sleep," suggests that Death is just a rest of the soul before its union with immortality. Death is not at all a horrible concept, it is the servant of the destiny, kings and desperate people. It is a byproduct of war, venom and prolonged physical suffering.

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 pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.

- **The Canonization: (1633)** - In this poem the poet compares the purity of their love with sainthood. It is a holy and intensely passionate experience. The poet establishes the immortality of their romantic affair with the perpetual phoenix bird.

Call us what you will, we are made such by love;
Call her one, me another fly,
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,
And we in us find the eagle and the dove.
The phoenix riddle hath more wit
By us; we two being one, are it.
So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.
We die and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

The poet here uses intellectual metaphysical conceits paralleling the romantic couple with the eagle, dove, fly, the sacred and mythical phoenix and with the tapers also.

Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) is another prominent Metaphysical Poet. T.S. Eliot has opined about Marvell's poetic style that "It is more than a technical accomplishment, or the vocabulary and syntax of an epoch; it is, what we have designated tentatively as wit, a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace". Marvell has used vibrant imagery with sharpest intellect and the carpe diem theme in his poems. T.S. Eliot has associated the 17th Century Metaphysical poetry with the "dissociation of sensibility".

- **To His Coy Mistress**- This poetic piece is the most celebrated creation of Andrew Marvell. This poem is based on the Carpe diem theme where the lover urges his lady love to shed her shamefulness and involve in the passionate physical intimacy.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,



Human beings are permitted with transitory existences in the world so people must not procrastinate and should enjoy the present moment intensely with the hearts' content.

But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;

- **The Garden:** Here in this poetic piece the renowned metaphysical poet Andrew Marvel appreciates the vivacity and vitality of the natural world. According to the poet the spiritual, emotional and intellectual urges of the human soul can best be gratified amidst the abundance of natural resources. The poet here prefers the serene and tranquil natural green ambience rather than the din and bustle of the society. In the natural environment the soul gets its perfect liberation and peaceful abode amidst the greenery.

When we have run our passion's heat,
Love hither makes his best retreat.
The gods, that mortal beauty chase,
Still in a tree did end their race:
Apollo hunted Daphne so,
Only that she might laurel grow;
And Pan did after Syrinx speed,
Not as a nymph, but for a reed.

Henry Vaughan (1621-1695) is the renowned Welsh Metaphysical poet. He is well known for his religious and devotional poetry collection *Silex Scintillans* appeared in two parts in 1650 and 1655.

- **The Retreat:** This is a crucial Metaphysical poem of Henry Vaughan. It is a religious poem published in the poetic collection of *Silex Scintillans* in the year 1650. The poet here laments for the irreparable loss of the inherent innocence of the human soul and passionately yearns to retreat to the innocent days of the infancy.

O, how I long to travel back,
And tread again that ancient track!
That I might once more reach that plain
Where first I left my glorious train,
From whence th' enlightened spirit sees
That shady city of palm trees.

The poet here earnestly yearns for spiritual enlightenment and redemption.

Happy those early days! when I
Shined in my angel infancy.
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race,
Or taught my soul to fancy aught
But a white, celestial thought;
When yet I had not walked above
A mile or two from my first love,
And looking back, at that short space,
Could see a glimpse of His bright face;

George Herbert (1593-1633) - He is a Popular Metaphysical poet and the Priest of the Church of England. He is "one of the foremost British devotional lyricists." Herbert belongs to a prosperous artistic family. King James I has favored him immensely.

- **The Collar (1633):** This religious Metaphysical poem has appeared in Herbert's legendary poetic collection *The Temple (1633)*. The poem is a rebellion against the Collar or the ascetic Priest life and its ordeal and responsibilities. The poet here claims for freedom, pleasure and rejuvenation. Ultimately the divine surrender and submission provide him with solace. The Collar here implies the religious symbol of the clerical order.

And be thy law,
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
Away! take heed;
I will abroad.



Call in thy death's-head there; tie up thy fears;
 He that forbears
 To suit and serve his need
 Deserves his load."
But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild
 At every word,
Methought I heard one calling, *Child!*
 And I replied *My Lord*.

Theoretical Approaches

New Criticism: Metaphysical poetry is enriched and pervaded with intellectual conceits, paradoxes and vivid imageries which demand a close textual reading and analysis.

New Historicism / Historical Materialism: The metaphysical poems reflect the contemporary social context of the 17th C. the social condition, religious faith and skepticism; political change and scientific innovations are vibrantly portrayed through the poems.

Hermeneutics and Reader-Response Theory: Metaphysical poetry demands the active participation of the readers in the interpretative and analytical journey of the poetic literary piece.

Ecocriticism: Andrew Marvell's *The Garden* shows the dominance and significance of nature in the all round growth and development of human beings. Natural world is the perfect refuge of the exhausted human being which rejuvenates the human spirit effortlessly.

CONCLUSION

The Metaphysical Poetry is truly a unique and innovative poetic creation of the English Literature. This poetry is a perfect poise between the intellect and the emotion. The combined association of both the cognitive and the affective domains of human beings together are urging for the highest spiritual elevation of the human soul. The contemporary social condition, the scientific innovations, discoveries and the major scientific revolutions, the tremendous religious divergence between the Protestant and the Catholic beliefs, spiritual skepticism and the ongoing emergence of Individualism and inquisitive mind of the 17th Century assist in the emergence of this new poetic movement. This innovative and ground-breaking poetical experiment not only sharpens the intellect but also nurtures the soul to its ultimate journey for the spiritual enlightenment. The Metaphysical poetry is a perfect and wonderful equilibrium of the intellectual, emotional and spiritual realms or domains of the human entity.

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