

Discuss John Donne as a metaphysical poet with the critical appreciation of his famous metaphysical poem "The Ecstasy"

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Abstract

The present research work deals with John Donne as a metaphysical poet with the critical appreciation of his famous poem "the ecstasy". The ecstasy is a complex as well as metaphysical poem telling about love-physical and spiritual. The poem deals with – Is love simply the union of two bodies or union of two souls. Some critics like Legonis find in it a plan for seduction with emphasis on the physical lover and he was always concerned with exploring the mystery of love. In his poetry, Donne tries to nature of love, while others like Helen Gardner find in it an affirmation of spiritual love. Infact, it deals with the relationship of body and soul in love. Donne was an unconventional reconcile the two opposites the physical and the spiritual or the secular and the religious. Grierson says in reference of this poem. "The ecstasy" resolves the metaphysical issue of the mutual dependence of body and soul. In this essay, we discussed John Donne as a metaphysical poet and the critical appreciation of his famous poem "the Ecstasy".

Keywords: John, D., Metaphysical Poet, the Ecstasy

1. Introduction

John Donne was born on 22 January 1572 and died in 31 March 1631. He was a famous English poet and a derrick in the Church of England. He is considered the pre-eminent representative of the metaphysical poets. His poetry is noted for its vibraity of language and inventiveness of metaphors.

The term "metaphysical" denotes, according to Saintsbury, "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." Donne and his followers strike a note of variance from Spenserian and Elizabethan poetry in general. Metaphysical poetry implies the characteristics of complexity, intellectual tone and abundance of wit, fusion of intellect and emotion colloquial argumentative tone, conceits, scholarly allusions, dramatic tone and philosophical elements. According to Grierson, Donne's poetry is metaphysical, "Not only in the sense of being erudite and witty. But in the proper sense of being reflective and philosophical." Metaphysical poetry is "inspired by a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the great drama of existence." The most important characteristic of the metaphysical is their possession of, what T.S. Eliot calls "undissociated sensibility". There is in Donne poems an intellectual analysis of emotion. Argumentation and reasoning balance the passion in Donne's poetry. No one can deny the passion in "The Sun Rising", but there is plenty of argumentation to prove that the sun has no power over the lovers, as love knows no season or clime when he says.

"Love all alike, no season knows, nor clime, nor hours,
days, months, which are rags of times"

Concentration is an important quality of metaphysical poetry in general and Donne's poetry in particular. In all his poems, the reader is held to one idea or line of argument. His poems are brief and closely woven. In "The ecstasy", the poet

develops the theme without digression and he says, "This ecstasy doth unperplex (We said) and tell us what we love, we see by this; it was not sex, we see, we saw not what did move." Verse forms are simple in general but always suitable in enforcing the sense of the poem.

2. Discussion

"The ecstasy" is a spiritual experience in which the individual soul ignoring the body, holds communion with the divinity. It is a state of trance where the individual has a vision of the Divine. Donne experiences the feelings of two lovers and finds that essence of love is not sexual fulfillment. Infact, true love is the activity of the soul when the two lovers have the experience of divinity and there is amalgamation of two individual souls and makes the lovers realize that love is, in its bur essence, spiritual. In other words, the body is a medium used by the soul to achieve fulfillment of love. Thus, the poet uses a religious and mystical experience to interpret the complexity and depth of secular love.

The first stanza provides the physical setting of the two lovers. They are lying on the bank of a river which is in flood as well as overgrown with violet flowers. The lovers are looking into each other's eyes and holding hands firmly:

"Where, like a pillow on a bed,
A pregnant bank swelled up, to rest
The violet's reclining head,
Sat we two, one another's best;"

This physical union or closeness offers a romantic and pastoral setting to the poem. Then, there is a sudden change in the mood of the poem. Their physical union is followed by spiritual experience. The poet is in the metaphysical manner tries to analyze his spiritual experience i.e., spiritual union makes the poet feel that the essence of true love is not sex.

The poet feels that when the two souls unite and they form a new whole which is beyond decay. Just as the essence of the individual is not the body but the soul, in the same way, the essence of love is not sex but mutual dependence and affection. The body is the channel for the souls to inter-communicate with each other. Donne feels that love is possible only through the physical play of love. Physical love is enriched by the mutual understanding of the souls of the two lovers. Spiritual love is not possible in a vacuum. Love sediments the soul but it is through the medium of the body that love is first experienced. The body is as important as the soul in the matter of love. He says:

“To our bodies turn us then, that so
Weak men on love revealed may look;
Loves mysterious in souls do grow,
But yet the body is his book.”

Donne like a mystic has defined the evolution of love from physical to spiritual plane. Donne has artistically explained the religious and philosophical belief to throw the light on physical. Love the greatness of the poem lies in reconciling the opposites – physical love with the spiritual, the philosophical with the scientific and the abstract with the concrete the poet feels that the physical aspect of love must precede the spiritual union. The poet has carefully selected images, metaphors and concepts to support his view. The inter-dependence of the body and soul is expressed through metaphors. The image of the body as lovers is very vivid and convincing. The romantic setting of the poem is described through the imagery of flowers and their fragrance. The mystical experience is analyzed in a rational manner. The poem takes the form of an argument and has an intellectual appeal.

Striking and subtle wit marks the metaphysical poetry of Donne. He is not only witty but passionately witty. The wit of Donne is realistic and straight forward. Wit in Donne's poems is the means of example from boredom and depression. His wit can be clearly seen in his poem “The canonization”, when he describes himself and his beloved with the legend of the phoenix.”

“The phoenix riddle has more wit
By us; we too being one, are it.”

His wit assumes different moods and attitudes reflecting his perception of the complexity of life. Fondness of conceits is major characteristic of metaphysical poetry and Donne has the mastery of it. Donne's poetry is overloaded with fantastic comparisons, complicated similes and metaphors drawn from the most remote and unfamiliar sources. The most famous and striking one is the comparison of a man who travels and his beloved who stays at home to a pair of compass, in “A Valediction' forbidding Mourning.”

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

In “The Sun-Rising”, the lover-bed is the universe and the walls are spheres. So, the conceits in Donne's poems are the sparks that illuminates the whole poem and imparts to the poem scholarly quality.

Donne has a distinctive quality of being an effective, probative and immortal image-maker. He draws images according to his interest, experiences of life and the impressions on his mind. His images cover a vast canvas of different subjects. Prof. Griesson says, “There are kinds of images, erudite, fanciful and homey which give to Donne's poems a texture so different at first glance.”

The use of colloquial speech echoes in Donne's poetry his poems have abrupt and dramatic opening. He asserts our attention both by the content and the dramatic style of his poetry. Donne has also made the use of hyperboles in his poetry.

3. Conclusion

Thus the poem “The ecstasy” uses a religious and mystical experience to interpret the complexity and depth of secular love. So we can say that Donne's poetry being close packed and dense with meaning becomes difficult for readers to understand at first hand, but Donne represents vaguely called “metaphysical”. He brought the whole of his experience into his poetry. We can say that Donne's poetry is metaphysical not only in sense of being erudite and witty, but in proper sense of being reflective and philosophical.

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