

A Comparative Analysis of T.S. Eliot and John Donne

Bhavya Soni,
Independent Researcher

Abstract: *This paper compares and contrasts the metaphysical imagery used in Donne's and Eliot's poetry. Both Dr. Johnson and Dryden criticized Donne for the unique imagery and symbolism that he used in his writing. W.B. Yeats, Rupert Brooke, W.H. Auden, and T.S. Eliot were all captivated by John Donne's poetry in their own unique ways. Eliot recognized in him both the coming together of mind and emotion as well as the consolidation of sensibility. In addition, modern poets like T. S. Eliot and G. M. Hopkins have suggested in their own works of poetry that the symbolism in Donne's poetry is vitally prophetic for the development of the expression of modern poetry.*

Keywords: *John Donne , T.S. Eliot , metaphysical symbolism.*

Introduction:

John Donne, the leader of the so-called Metaphysical school of poets, which includes George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Abraham Henry Cowley, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, and Bishop King, represents a marked divergence from the Renaissance style. His poetry is no longer a straightforward, immediate, and unreflective statement of emotion; rather, it is an expression of emotion that is derived from rational thought. He integrates logic and emotion into a single

whole. He experiences a simultaneous acceleration in the activity of both his mind and heart. This shows that there is a balance between two things that are generally considered to be opposites. This equilibrium may be attributed not just to the emotional representation of thought but also to a shift in the poet's perception. Both of these factors may have played a role. The metaphysical way of feeling is distinct from the modes of feeling expressed by poets of the Renaissance and the Romantic eras, as well as Augustan poets of the eighteenth century. There are no examples of a dissociation of sensibility in either metaphysical or modern poetry that we can find. In the poetry of the Metaphysical and Modern periods, there is no such thing as an offensive topic or one that falls outside the scope of the genre.

Discussion: There are striking parallels between the time of John Donne and the modern era. Both eras were transitional periods in which traditional values were challenged. The old and the new were in conflict; there was a loss of faith in religion and a search for a new ideal or creed.

Political conflict, bloodshed, and insecurity characterized both time periods. Two world conflicts wreaked havoc and devastation in the twentieth century. People had no sense of security and believed that it was possible that all of human civilization might be wiped out. The renewed interest in Donne's poetry

can be attributed to the similarity of conditions and settings between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. The unpredictability of contemporary existence, the destruction wrought by conflicts and wars, and the spiritual anarchy of the twenty-first century are comparable to the circumstances that occurred during Donne's time. T.S. Eliot asserted: "I believe, Donne's poetry is a concern of the present and the recent past, rather than of the future." He utilized Donne's literary methods and artifices in his poems. He came to the conclusion that Donne was the best qualified poet, both in terms of his skill as a poet and the technique that he uses in his poetry to represent the underlying difficulties of modern life. The other modern poet, W.H. Auden, utilized Donne's poetic methods to address contemporary concerns. Eliot discovered in him the synthesis of mind and emotion, as well as the unification of sensation. He praised Donne's pictures, conceits, abruptness, juxtapositions, unique wit, and all of his literary skill. Thus, the sensitivity of these two distinct but contemporaneous periods acquired an all-consuming quality. The symptoms resulted in conceits that were both enlarged and fleeting in Donne's *A Valediction: forbidding mourning* and *A Valediction: of weeping*, Herbert's *The Pulley* and *The Gift of God*, and *The Flea* and *The Extasie*. Eliot employs a similar technique in poems such as *Prelude* and *Prufrock*, in which images are lengthy and span numerous lines. In these poems, the conceits run throughout the entire poem and assist the poets in clarifying and demonstrating their arguments. In the works of John Donne, the reader can detect

elements of both medieval thought and modern philosophy. Donne, for instance, employs the Aristotelian method of fallacious syllogisms; on the other hand, he makes references to Kepler and Galileo.

As the sun is positioned at the centre of the action in "*The Sunne Rising*," he appears to utilize the heliocentric plan of the universe. In contrast, "*A Valediction: Forbidden Mourning*" expresses a geocentric perspective.

Samuel Johnson, an English critic from the 18th century, felt such excesses to be horrible. Later, he became famous for criticizing metaphysical poetic practices with his claim that in this type of poetry, "the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked together by violence." Even though it is obvious that Eliot does not agree with Johnson's judgment, he will not make an effort to challenge Johnson's decision. The critics, including Burton, Dryden, and Dr. Johnson, had the opinion that the kind of writing used in the Metaphysical was unnatural and contrived. According to Gardner, Burton referred to the poetry of Donne as having "strong lined." In a similar vein, Dr. Johnson made the observation that this "race of writers" may be termed the "Metaphysical poets" and of whom "it is not improper to give some account" (quoted from Johnson's essay on Cowley, which was published in *Lives of the Poets* in 1961).

Instead, Eliot comes to the conclusion that this "telescoping of images and multiplied associations" is "one of the sources of the vitality" of the language that can be found in metaphysical poetry. He even goes so far as to propose that "a degree of heterogeneity of material compelled into unity by the operation of

the poet's mind is omnipresent in poetry." What this means, in general, is that these poets make merging different elements into one cohesive whole the focus of their writing. These poets have made it a pattern of their work to discover connections where none existed before. On other occasions, these parallels are merely coincidental, as is the case with one of Donne's poems titled "The Flea." Because it is thought to be a means by which lovers might be brought together, the flea is being compared in this passage to both a priest and a church. Because the flea causes the blood of the couple to become mixed together, the wedding takes place solely on the plane of images. In metaphysical poetry, sensation and thought are intertwined in a seamless fashion. The poets continue to use their wits and increase their conceits till they are successful in bringing in an exact counterpart of the feeling they are trying to convey. When it comes to The Canonization Donne employs a number of metaphors in an effort to locate an apt analogy for the emotional state of the lovers. Because he was unsatisfied with the three earlier pictures of the taper and the fly, the dove, and the eagle, he decided to establish the image of the phoenix. Because a phoenix belongs to a neutral sex and the lovers had taken the quality of sexlessness at this moment, he argues that the image of a phoenix is representative of the most fitting wit.

According to T.S. Eliot, "I feel, Donne's poetry is a concern of the present and the recent past, rather than of the future." In his poetry, he utilized a number of Donne's artifices and poetic tropes. He came to the conclusion that Donne was the

most suited poet because the artistic style and method of poetry that he employed were adequate for providing an outlet for the fundamental complexities of the modern period.

The images that are used in metaphysical poetry, particularly that of John Donne, are borrowed from many different fields of study, including geography, chemistry, botany, religion, law, and many more. This is due to the fact that Donne was a well-read individual. In addition to the fact that some images of Donne and Eliot are taken from day-to-day life, these images are also frequently new introductions to literary works. The image of a compass from geometry can be found in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," while the image of a globe can be found in "A Valediction: of Weeping," and "The Extasie" reverberates with pictures of plants. In addition to this, Donne draws imagery from everyday aspects of life, like marriage, in the poem "Batter my heart."

The following are some lines from Prelude that we might use to further on Eliot's usage of metaphysical images:

The burnt-out ends of smoky days ...
 And now a gusty shower wraps The grimy scraps
 Of withered leaves about your feet And
 newspapers from vacant-lots, The showers
 beat On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
 And at the comer of the street
 A lonely cab-horse steams and samps.

The burnt out cigarette-ends are a commonplace and unconventional image for the evening. This highlights the meaninglessness of life, a life that is broken and decayed. Images like 'Broken blinds', 'Chimney-pots' and 'Lonely horse' underscore the idea of loneliness.

This is a metaphysical way of supporting the central image through a series of subsidiary images. The LoveSong of J. Alfred Prufrock has a number of literary devices known as conceits. These types of conceits are expressed through the use of symbol-images that allude to a great deal more than what is really presented. One such comparison would be between the fog and a cat. In a similar manner, one could compare the state of Prufrock's mind to that of a patient undergoing an operation. He is aware, yet he is aware of nothing in particular. His thoughts are as empty as a vacuum. On Ash Wednesday, there are many images that represent different symbols, such as the three leopards, the lady in white, the winding stairs, and many others. These kinds of symbols have elements of visual as well as symbolism. It is possible to make the observation that the images of Eliot are fairly clear and realistic, despite the fact that they transmit a mental or emotional complexity. They have a wealth of connotations and associations attached to them.

It wasn't until 1633, two years after Donne had passed away, that the first edition of his poetry was printed. During his lifetime, his poetry was passed around in the form of handwritten manuscripts by his friends and the people who admired him. The subsequent thirty-six years saw the publication of six editions of his poetry collection, which is evidence of the popularity of his work. Carew referred to him as the "King of the Universal Monarchy of Witt," which was a fitting title. His humor, more than his passion, is what makes him famous. Because of his lack of decorum and his harsh tone, his

reputation suffered during the classical period of the eighteenth century.

Conclusion: Poetry by authors like Eliot, Hopkins, and Auden has echoes of the metaphysical poetry of the 17th century and is written in a similar vein. It won't take you long to figure out why this parallelism exists. Reflections on the world wars can be found in modern literature, which brings to mind conflicts such as the British Civil Wars and the European War of the Thirty Years that came before the Restoration. The consequences of the metaphysical battering that occurred in the 17th and 18th centuries effectively put a stop to the study of, and criticism of, this poetry for a considerable amount of time. Coleridge, Hazlitt, and DeQuincy shed some critical light on Donne during the 19th century; but, the genuine resurrection of this sort of poetry does not take place until the latter half of the 19th century and the early 20th century. A number of literary critics, including T.S. Eliot, H. J. C. Grierson, F. R. Leavis, and Joan Bennette, made significant contributions to the restoration of metaphysical poetry.

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