

# The Appeal of John Donne to the Modern Age: A critical Study

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**Abstract**—John Donne is generally regarded as the central figure, the founder of the Metaphysical school of poetry which flourished in the early half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The other poets of the school are George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell and Abraham Cowley. John Donne has more of the distinctive qualities of this school of poetry and he is certainly the enkindling influence. The seminal force, for all the poets of this school. Though Donne was a source of inspiration to the different poets of this school his influence was far greater on the religious poets his influence is more than on the secular ones, and even on the religious poets his influence is more in evidence in their technique than on their subject matter.

**Keyword:** Metaphysical, Distinctive, Enkindling, Seminal, Secular

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## I. INTRODUCTION

John Donne's Colloquial rhythms, his imagery, his phraseology were freely imitated by the lesser parts of the 17th Century. His influence was the greatest on George Herbert where imagery also, like that of Donne, works through the mind, and the structure of this poems is also logical like that of the poems of Donne. Vaughan also borrows many of Donne's images and phrases, and influence of Donne's concerts on Crashew is undeniable, and Andrew Marvell "delights, as much as Donne does in al the news to which logical argument can be put, including proof of the absurd and the paradoxical" Though similarities of rhythm, phrase and imagery and other aspects of technique are frequent on closer examination one is forced to conced that Such likenesses are often superficial. The other poets of this school are original in their own way, and there is much in their poetry does not find any parralled in the poetry of Donne. For example, the nature-love of Herry Vaughan and Andrew Marvell is their own, and not derived from Donne. Indeed, one must agree with Helen Gardener when he says, "The metaphysical style heightens and liberates personally. It is essentially a style in which individuality is expressed. The best pupils in the School of Donne learnt from their master how to speak their own minds in their own voices," In the words of Joan Bennett, "Donne's influence over the metaphysical School of poetry was very great, but each of his followers, who deserves seperate attention, contributed something of his own to the tradition.

## II. OBJECTIVES

- i) To understand the influence of Donne's poetic technique to on the modern poets.
- ii) To understand the fluctuations in Donne's popularity.
- iii) To understand the uniqueness in Donne's Poetry

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature. The present is based upon the secondary sources of data which was collected through the literature, books, research papers, website, research articles and various other publications.

## IV. FLUCTUATIONS IN DONNE'S POPULARITY

In his own lifeteme his poems were circulated in manuscript and they were first published in 1633 after his death. His influence and popularity in this life time was, therefore, confined and limited. Subsequent editions appeared in 1633, 1639, 1650, 1654, and 1669, testifying to the continuing popularity of Donne's poetry. It was for his with that Donne was chiefly admired, as is apparent from the praise of Thomas Carew who called him the king of "The Universal mo monarchy of wit". According to Helen Gardener, it was the wit of Donne, not his music and passion, which the Caroline poets' tried to emulate

and when in the classical age of Dryden and Johnson The notion of wit changed - wit came to be regarded merely as happiness of language - Donne sank in repute. After 1669, for over a hundred years, there was only one edition of Donne's poetry, that of Tonson's in 1719. In the classical age, Donne was looked down upon for his many excesses, for his frequent breach of decorum, and for his rough cadence. Dryden criticised him for affecting the metaphysics even in his love-poetry, and called him "the greatest wit, though not the best poet of our nation." As Joan Bennett Says, the younger poets lacked the emotional range, subtlety, and originality of the master, and they could only imitate his many technical innovations, "Donne expresses hate, disgust, Jealousy, lust, love, reverence security and mistrust. He traverses every variety of mood, both as a lover and as a worshipper, and at any given moment the experiences he has already Passed through still present to him. Each poem represents a complex state of mind and a subtle adjustment of impulses.

## **V. JOHNSON'S ADVOCACY OF JOHN DONNE**

It is with Doctor Johnson that the revival of interest in Donne's poetry begins, Says Helen Gardener, By his copious quotations from Donne, and his declaration that to write in the metaphysical manner it was at least- necessary to read and think, Johnson brought back into for literary discussion, a body of poetry that had largely sunk into oblivion. He brought it back as illustrative of a certain kind of 'wit' not his own, "more noble and more adequate conception" of wit as that which is "at once natural and new", but wit, "more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. in singling out this kind of wit as the chief mark of metaphysical poetry and illustrating it so effectively from Donne, Johnson opened a way that criticism in the twentieth century was to take. The 20th century accepted Johnson's definitions, but disputed the qualifications with which he tempered his praise of this poet's originality. What he regarded as perverse was exalted as the sign of a true individuality; and the more heterogeneous the ideas that he, "yoked by violence together", the more praise was thought due to him for his capacity to fuse disparate experiences into a unity.

## **VI. THE ROMANTIC INTEREST IN DONNE**

Though in the romantic age the enjoyment of Donne's poetry is confined to a few intellectuals, yet the great romantics strike a new note in Donne's criticism. Donne the love-poet and Donne the religious poet, replace Donne the satirist, and strength of feeling rather than wit is the quality for which he is praised. It is recognised that the psychological veracity of Donne's love poetry, his power to render "the infinity of passion", and the striking brilliance of isolated lines make Donne if not "an accomplished poetical artist", an "inspired poetical creator". Thus the way is paved for the 20th century appreciation of Donne.

## **VII. GRIERSON'S EDITION**

It was Grierson's classic edition of Donne's poems, published in 1912, says Helen Gardner, which gave to Donne a standing with Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden and Pope. Pre-eminent place was claimed for Donne as a poet of love and in this way his real excellence was stressed. However, the wide popularity and acceptance which Donne subsequently acquired could not have resulted from any edition of his poems, however excellent that edition may be. It is accounted for largely by the close similarity between the age of Donne and the modern age. The age of Donne was an age of transition when old Elizabethan ideals and conventions were breaking down. There was a loss of faith in religion and accepted values and a dissolution of older ideals and beliefs, consequent upon the rise of science. There was a conflict of the old and the new, the medieval and the Renaissance. There was stress and strain, conflict and violence, and a wide spread feeling of insecurity. Melancholy and pessimism also characterised the early 20th century. There was a breakdown of the older Victorian ideals and traditions and the consequent spiritual chaos and feeling of insecurity. It was a period of stress and strain when the people were caught between opposite ideals and values of life. They were caught between two worlds, so to day. It is this striking similarity between the two ages which accounts, to a great extent, for the widespread appeal of Donne in the modern age.

## **VIII. ELIOT AND DONNE**

Among the modern poets, Donne has exercised considerable influence on W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot. Eliot's advocacy of Donne has been decisive in securing the rehabilitation of Donne on both sides of the Atlantic. In his essay on the Metaphysical Poets of the 17th century, T.S. Eliot stressed the fusion of thought and feeling in the poetry of Donne. He claimed for him a

pre- eminent place among English poets, for in him he finds "unification of writers. Donne's uniqueness was thus stressed and interest in him was sensibility", while a "dissolution of sensibility" had taken place in other stimulated. Donne's conceits, his abrupt beginnings, his juxtaposition of the ironic and the serious, his bringing together of opposites, etc., can all be traced in the poetry of Eliot himself, and through him the influence of the Elizabethan poet has filtered down to many a younger poet.

## **IX. DONNE AND THE NEW CRITICS**

The Donne-vogue has also been helped and stimulated by the work of the "New Critics". These critics consider a poem as a thing in itself, and stress a close study of the text, irrespective of its historical and biographical context. As a poem of Donne requires close study and analysis, which is fruitful and rewarding. Donne has been a favourite with the New Critics. It was shown that Donne means more than one thing at one and the same time. They denounced the practice of quoting isolated lines and passages, and emphasised the need of attending to the poem as a whole. All this was favourable to Donne and contributed much to his popularity.

## **X. CONCLUSION**

The Donne-vogue still continues, though in more recent times a reaction against Donne has been visible. It is apparent that on both sides of the Atlantic, Donne is ceasing to be an inspiration for the younger poets. The excesses of the 'New Critics' and the extravagant claims that were made for Donne have done much to cause this reaction. T.S. Eliot himself prophesied this reaction in his second essay on Donne, written in 1931. But reaction or no reaction, Donne would never sink back to obscurity. R.G. Cox beautifully summarises the whole discussion when he writes "Donne is certainly not Shakespeare or Dante, but it seems pertinent to ask whether his best poems are not achieved wholes, whether some kind of mastery of experience is not present in *The Good-morrow*, *The Extasie*, *The Valediction: Forbidding Mourning*, and *The Nocturnall*, to go no further. Mr. Eliot's considered conclusion, however, that he would always remain as, "a great reformer of the English language, of English verse", will be recognized by those familiar with his critical ideas and terminology as by no means faint praise. After twenty years it still seems a safe minimum claim."

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