

Peculiarities of English Baroque in Its Literary Expression

Petru GOLBAN*

Abstract: The present paper considers the general characteristics of the Metaphysical Poetry in English literature in relation to the general cultural attitude of the European Baroque. In the present state of terminology, 'metaphysical' and 'baroque' are accepted as synonyms to describe a period of intense emotional attitudes, complexity and confusion, in which the poetry of John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, Abraham Cowley, and Andrew Marvell received a highest level of prominence.

Keywords: literary history, baroque, metaphysical, conceit, wit, poetry, theme, motive.

İngiliz Barok'unun Özelliklerinin Edebi Anlatımda Kullanılması

Özet: Bu tezde İngiliz edebiyatındaki metafiziksel şiirin genel özellikleri Avrupa Barok'unun genel kültürel tutumları bağlamında incelenmektedir. Günümüz terminolojisinde "metafizik" ve "barok" kavramları yoğun duygusal tutumların hakim olduğu karışık ve karmaşık dönemi tasvir etmek için eş anlamlı kelimeler olarak kabul edilmektedir. John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, Abraham Cowley, ve Andrew Marvell ile bu şiir sanatı en üst düzeye ulaşmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: edebiyat tarihi, barok, metafizik, istiare, duygu, şiirsellik, tema, motif.

1. General Introduction and Theoretical Reflections

In European cultural background, the Baroque poetry was the dominant literary style from the late 1500's to the late 1600's. Its concern with the relation between reality and appearance, its attempt to exceed the rational limits of its background, and especially its general extravagance of poetic themes and techniques were determined by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the conflict between religion and humanism, the new teachings of science which conditioned a doubt in the validity of appearance, a doubt which expresses itself as an obsessive concern for appearance along with a more general religious and spiritual concern. The poetic concerns and preoccupations of the Baroque poets gave rise actually to a number of their characteristic strategies, such as the startling conceit, the dramatic contrast, the hyperbole, the concentration of language, a complex syntax, the development of paradoxical argument, and the apparent contradiction in

* Yrd. Doç. Dr., Dumlupınar Üniversitesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü.

some of love poetry in that the sensuous and physical love was treated in most rational of terms. Hence the form of irony and ambiguity, and of musical or sculptural effects, and especially the form of irrational confusion of senses that the poetic style of the Baroque literature may sometimes reveal due to the poets' attempt to exceed the limits of the background.

The complexity of concerns of the Baroque poetry makes it not a definite style but a group of styles, one of which is Metaphysical. In this respect, John Donne's style, for example, belongs at once to the general classification 'Baroque' and to the more particular one 'Metaphysical'. Metaphysical is the traditional term that came to stand for the English writers of the 17th century, and the first written mentions of the term 'Metaphysical' have been attributed to J. Dryden and Dr. S. Johnson. The former, in 1693, accused John Donne that 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 softness of love*' (**Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire**). The latter, in **Lives of the Poets** (1781), claimed that '*about the beginning of the 17th century appeared a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets*', because the images or imagery that they used were relevant to different spheres of experience (philosophy, geography, astronomy).

The relation of Metaphysical to Baroque reifies the existence of both similarities and differences in the comparative approach to the general Baroque, the general Elizabethan, and the particular Metaphysical. The critical tradition from Dryden to present focuses on 'imagery', and the characteristic image of the Baroque (including Metaphysical) poetry is the *conceit*, which is the metaphor that surprises by the apparent dissimilarity of the things compared. Etymologically, conceit is a poetic device that derives from a concept rather than observation, and this use of ingenious intellect to create imagery links actually all the Baroque styles. The Metaphysical conceit, however, receives its validity and importance as concept, whereas the Baroque conceit shifts its emphasis to the sensuous level. Compared to the Elizabethan conceit, the Metaphysical poets attempted to create a more intellectual, less verbal textual representation of their wit, as in '*more matter and less words*' desiderate which would reveal the attempt to achieve conciseness of expression with a certain irregularity and even roughness in versification. Thus the Elizabethan style, which was highly artificial and rhetorical, gave way gradually to a kind of writing that would approximate the poetic to a more direct, even colloquial speech. Moreover, in matters of the use of original conceits, the main difference is that in Metaphysical Poetry the conceit is used for persuasion, whereas in Elizabethan poetry it is used for decoration.

Metaphysical poems, be them religious or courtly, are thus characterized by concentration and logical coherence; they represent a poetry dense with meaning, which concentrates on the idea or argument, and forces the reader to follow and accept that idea or argument. English Metaphysical poets attempted thus to create a learned, argumentative imagery, and to achieve in their lyrics '*the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination which is their greatest achievement*' (H. J. C. Grierson, Introduction, ***Metaphysical Poetry: Donne to Butler***). The concept of wit together with the use of the conceit is central to the Metaphysical poetic discourse in which a thought represented an experience and modified the poet's sensibility. In order to express accurately the experience, the Metaphysical poets appeals to the mind and the analytical thinking rather than to the senses. This *peculiar blend of passion and thought, or feeling thought* (as T. S. Eliot understood it), is considered to be essential to the reading of Metaphysical poetry, as it is one of the essential ingredients of the Metaphysical conceit.

The main characteristic features of the English Metaphysical poetry may be grouped according to (1) the themes or the subject matter of poetry, and (2) the style and the structural organization of the text.

Firstly, concerning the thematic level of a metaphysical text, the poets perceived a harmonious pattern of the universe, in relation to which stands the significance of human experience in its double hypostases: religion and love. The chief subjects are (1) God, (2) love, (3) death, (4) human frailty, which are expressed and made explicit by the use of (5) *carpe diem* and (6) *tempus edax* motives. As mentioned above, Metaphysical poetry emphasizes (7) the fusion of feeling and mind, passion and thought that are reconciled in a single act.

Secondly, concerning the style, and as presented above, the main features of the Metaphysical poetry are (1) concision and (2) concentration in the poetic expression, which means a conscious tendency of economy in language. The poet is too busy arguing an issue in terms of reason and leaves outside whatever seems irrelevant. Concerning the techniques of textual organization, there is always in a metaphysical poem (3) an argument upon which the entire text is based – the argument is linked to an idea which is usually stated at the beginning, and which is to be developed and explicated step by step in the text. The argument or the need to argue arises from this point at the beginning of the poem, where an actual position or situation is vividly imagined, and an idea about existence or a moment of experience is created. The poet deliberately attempts to explain the idea to and persuade the reader, and in this sense (4) persuasion is also one of the most important

elements in the structural organization of the Metaphysical poetry. The basic structural devices like rhythm and meter were also conceived to enforce the meaning, to express and shape the emotions through logical reasoning, as John Benne, in *Five Metaphysical Poets*, claims about the rhythm that '*its function is that of a stimulant, not a narcotic to the intellect*'.

Thirdly, concerning both the thematic and structural levels of Metaphysical poetry, and what unites these levels in a coherent poetic discourse, is (1) the use of startling imagery, which is often borrowed from different fields of human experience (geography, philosophy, astronomy, technical sciences, etc.). The images or imagery result from a twofold perspective involving (2) the famous Metaphysical wit – representing a means of creating imagery, or the ability of the poet to make apt comparison and to associate ideas in a natural but unusual and striking manner so as to produce surprise joined with pleasure and fun – and (3) the not less famous Metaphysical conceit – representing the textual expression of the wit and/or the result of applicability of the poet's wit in the form of an unusual, much elaborated, and far-fetched comparison, metaphor or simile, with an apparent dissimilarity of the things compared. In other words, both wit and conceit constitute the essence of the Metaphysical imagery, which represents the whole form of a poetical text, and, as such, they create in the reader a surprised recognition of the validity of the relationship presented between seemingly unrelated things.

Conceit, especially, is that poetic device by which the Metaphysical poets achieve the reconciliation between thought and passion, which represents the equilibrium between intellect and feeling in which emotion is curbed by the rational, and the rational is illuminated by emotion. In other words, the Metaphysical conceit appears to be the intellectual equivalent of emotion, the instrument of persuasion in an argument. A Metaphysical poem, however, despite its rational and intellectual argumentation, is not a pure piece of analytical and abstract thinking, because its logic of thought goes hand in hand with emotion, almost every poem starts from a personal experience, and there is always a connection between the abstract and the concrete.

The term 'Metaphysical' was first used derogatorily, the conceit was thought to be far-fetched, as the Metaphysical poetry itself was regarded by its contemporaries with disapprobation and complaint, but it was restored to its dignity and true value at the beginning of the 20th century by T. S. Eliot in his essays on the 17th century English poetry (in particular *The Metaphysical Poets*, 1921). Moreover, Eliot himself, as well as W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound, as representatives of the new poetic movement, found in the Metaphysical poetry a kind of literature that marked the transition towards

the modern sensibility, and a kind of poetry capable of expressing a large range of experience, feelings, and thoughts on the basis of its experimental attempts to free the poetic discourse from any restriction imposed by the poetical conventions. They saw, as we do, the Metaphysical poetry as being difficult, and this difficulty, thinks Eliot, is very much comparable to that of modern poetry, which considers the complexity of our world and the variety of aspects of human experience – in this respect, reasons T. S. Eliot, ‘*The poets of the 17th century possessed a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience*’.

2. English Metaphysical Poetry as Argument

The most famous English metaphysical poet is **John Donne** (1572 - 1631), born in Bread Street, London in 1572 into a prosperous and devout Roman Catholic family, at a time in England when Catholics were being persecuted, which made life uneasy for Donne from the beginning. He was to play the role of the outsider throughout his life and was plagued by religious doubts. His father, John Donne, was a well-to-do ironmonger and citizen of London. Donne’s father died suddenly when Donne was four, and left the three children to be raised by their mother, Elizabeth, the daughter of John Heywood, epigrammatist, and a relative of Sir Thomas More. She married six months later a Catholic physician, Dr John Syminges. Educated at home by Catholic tutors, Donne at the age of 11 and his younger brother Henry went to Hart Hall, University of Oxford. He studied there for three years. He spent the next three years at the University of Cambridge, but took no degree at either university because he could not take the Oath of Supremacy required at graduation. He was admitted to study law as a member of Thavies Inn (1591) and Lincoln’s Inn (1592), and it seemed natural that Donne should embark upon a legal or diplomatic career. In 1593, Donne’s brother Henry died of a fever in prison after being arrested for harboring a proscribed Catholic priest, which made Donne begin to question his faith.

Donne’s first book of poems, *Satires*, written during this period of residence in London, is considered one of Donne’s most important literary efforts. Although not immediately published, the volume had a fairly wide readership through private circulation of the manuscript. Same was the case with his love poems, *Songs and Sonnets*, assumed to be written at about the same time as the *Satires*. Having inherited a considerable fortune, he spent his money on womanizing, on books, at the theatre, and on travels. He had also befriended Christopher Brooke, a poet and his chamber-fellow at Lincoln’s Inn, and Ben Jonson who was part of Brooke’s circle of literary associates. In 1596, Donne joined the naval expedition that Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, led against Cádiz, Spain, and the following year joined an expedition to the Azores, where he wrote *The Calm*. Upon his

return to England in 1598, Donne was appointed private secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, afterward Lord Ellesmere. Donne began a promising career, and in 1601 he was elected MP for Brackley, Northants, an Egerton seat. But in the same year he secretly married Lady Egerton's niece, seventeen-year-old Anne More, daughter of Sir George More, Lieutenant of the Tower, and thereby ruined his chances of a civil career. Donne was dismissed from Egerton's service and imprisoned for some weeks, along with his friends Samuel and Christopher Brooke who had aided the couple's clandestine affair. For the next dozen years the poet had to struggle to support his growing family. Anne's cousin offered the couple refuge in Pyrford, Surrey, and the couple was helped by friends like Lady Magdalen Herbert, George Herbert's mother, and Lucy, Countess of Bedford, women who also played a prominent role in Donne's literary life. It was not until 1609 that reconciliation was effected between Donne and his father-in-law, and Sir George More was finally induced to pay his daughter's dowry. During the next few years Donne made a living as a lawyer, serving chiefly as counsel for Thomas Morton, an anti-Roman Catholic pamphleteer, later Bishop of Durham. Donne may have collaborated with Morton in writing pamphlets that appeared under Morton's name from 1604 to 1607. Donne's principal literary accomplishments during this period were *Divine Poems* (1607) and the prose work *Biathanatos* (posthumously published 1644). In the latter he argued that suicide is not intrinsically sinful. As Donne approached forty, he published two anti-Catholic polemics *Pseudo-Martyr* (1610) and *Ignatius his Conclave* (1611). They were final public testimony of Donne's renunciation of the Catholic faith. *Pseudo-Martyr*, which held that English Catholics could pledge an oath of allegiance to James I, King of England, without compromising their religious loyalty to the Pope, won Donne the favour of the King. In return for patronage from Sir Robert Drury of Hawstead, he wrote *A Funerall Elegie* (1610), on the death of Sir Robert's 15-year-old daughter Elizabeth. The elegy won for Donne and his wife an apartment in Drury House. In the poems, Elizabeth Drury's death represents to Donne the decay of the world, physically and morally; her entry into heaven signifies the hope of the world's regeneration. Donne had refused to take Anglican orders in 1607, but King James persisted in the view that Donne was unfit for confidential employment and urged him to enter the church. In 1615 Donne reluctantly entered the ministry and was appointed Royal Chaplain later that year. In 1616, he was appointed Reader in Divinity at Lincoln's Inn (Cambridge had conferred the degree of Doctor of Divinity on him two years earlier). In the church Donne proved to be a pluralist, and his style, full of elaborate metaphors and religious symbolism, his flair for drama, his wide learning and his quick wit soon established him as one of the greatest preachers of the era. Just as Donne's fortunes seemed to be improving, Anne Donne died, on 15 August, 1617, aged thirty-three, after giving birth to their twelfth child, a stillborn.

Seven of their children survived their mother's death. Struck by grief, Donne wrote the seventeenth Holy Sonnet, *Since she whom I lov'd hath paid her last debt*. According to Donne's friend and biographer, Izaak Walton, Donne was thereafter 'crucified to the world'. Donne continued to write poetry, notably his *Holy Sonnets* (1618), but the time for love songs was over. In 1618, Donne went as chaplain with Viscount Doncaster in his embassy to the German princes. His *Hymn to Christ at the Author's Last Going into Germany*, written before the journey, was full with apprehension of death. Donne returned to London in 1620, and was appointed Dean of Saint Paul's in 1621, a post he held until his death.

Donne's private meditations, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, written while he was convalescing from a serious illness, were published in 1624. In 1624, Donne was made vicar of St Dunstan's-in-the-West. On March 27, 1625, James I died, and Donne preached a sermon before Charles I. But for his ailing health, (he was emaciated and suffering from infections of the mouth) Donne almost certainly would have become a bishop in 1630. Obsessed with the idea of death, Donne preached what was called his own funeral sermon, *Death's Duel*, just a few weeks before he died in London on March 31, 1631. The last thing Donne wrote was *Hymne to God, my God, In my Sicknesse*, written just before his death. John Donne received the position as one of the major English poets of his time, his poems being read in literary circles before they were printed, but they exercised their influence mostly after they appeared in book-form when collected by his son John and published in 1633. Almost the entire Metaphysical poetry in English literature has actually been associated in the minds of its readers and most critics with the poetic work of John Donne, because a certain number of his major themes, literary concerns and techniques occur in all English Metaphysical poetry.

The Good-Morrow is a good example of Metaphysical poetry in that the poet, making use of the dramatic tone, attempts to persuade the reader of something that seems essential for a certain moment in his experience. In the first stanza the lyrical I realizes the inadequacy of his state before he has fallen in love. He discovers that he has been *childishly* engaged in some *country pleasures* that have offered to him just physical gratification. The real love, he understands, is different from all the previous experiences that were just illusions and dreams. In the second stanza the lyrical I meditates on the present love experience, making the necessary distinction between the physical pleasure and the true spiritual love. Now he welcomes the *waking souls* that have no fear of unfaithfulness – the physical pleasure involves jealousy and fears, whereas the true love is free from such thoughts.

The conceit makes itself present in this stanza in the striking declaration that each lover is a world, but through love the lovers create one single world of their own, a world made up of the union of their souls. The Platonic idea of love is employed in that the physical beauty reflects the inner beauty, and the two lovers, each of them representing a universe, ménage to complete each other, to create one perfect universe/world on the basis of their true feelings.

As the poem unfolds, in the last stanza Donne draws on the alchemical notion that the equally mixed substances cannot die and cannot change, and if anything perishes it is because it is imperfectly mixed. The poet concludes that he and his mistress will enjoy a perpetual ecstasy, and become immortal through their non-perishing love.

The theme of love in *The Good-Morrow* takes in another poem, *The Canonization*, new thematic perspectives in that it is a dramatic monologue drawing on analogies from mythical animals to Roman Catholic religious practices. In the first stanza the poet impatiently interrupts a friend who has been criticizing him, asking him to speak of any other subject except the poet's love. This break displays irony, because as the poem unfolds, the lyrical I is the one who will not hold his tongue, and after this sudden interruption the poet's friend turns into a silent listener, having no other possibility to enter the discussion. The friend's concern is with the poet's situation in that he is worried about how the poet is threatening his chances of social advancement because of his relation with his mistress. The poet, on the other hand, expresses scorn for those who are more interested in social positions rather than in the quality of human love. He tells his friend to get a place near the Archbishop, or the Duke, or kings, wherever it pleases him as long as he will let the poet love.

In the second stanza, the lyrical I asks to be allowed to love his mistress neither to please her nor even to please himself, but because it will not harm anyone. In order to express the idea that no one can be injured by his love he develops a parody of some typical Petrarchan conceits: he does not cause flood to anyone; no one is drowned by sighs as strong as tempest; he does not cause a spell of warm weather; he does not cause the death of plagued people with the heat. He and his mistress being in love, the people interested in injuring each other can still find reasons to quarrel. The poet invites everybody to call him and his mistress whatever they like, and he can't be offended even by the name of 'fly', because flies always follow each other and are always together, and at the same time the fly is a symbol of the transitory life. The two lovers can be called 'tapers' as well, and they will die down like burned candles after they consume themselves – there is an allusion to the old superstition that every act of intercourse subtracts a day

from one's life (at the same time, to 'die' in the punning terminology of the 17th century was to consummate the act of sexual intercourse).

As the poet continues to persuade the reader (and his friend) about his feelings he finds time to meditate on the nature of their love. The eagle and the dove are symbols of earthly wisdom, strength and heavenly purity. The Phoenix bird is a symbol of immortality as well as of desire rising from its own exhaustion. Eagle and dove are also alchemical terms for the process leading to the rise of Phoenix. The Phoenix riddle is finally explained through their love, for they become one sexless or hermaphroditic being. By their love they awaken and get up as if from bed, and ascend upwards as if from grave. They resurrect, as the Phoenix bird, from their own ashes. In this respect, the poet argues, their love does not fit tombs but poetry; he and his mistress will form in their bedroom fine verses out of their amorous sighs, and the people – making love or reading these verses - will regard them as saints: '*all shall approve / Us canonized for love*'.

The last stanza represents a hyperbolic conclusion in that the lyrical I imagines other lovers seeking to model themselves on their love. The lovers being one another's hermitage or solitary retreat are reflected into each other's eyes. They will see the miniature of countries, towns, courts in the eyes of their mistresses. The lovers are thus above the world, for they have reached God. This idea is linked to the 17th century belief in, firstly, that God is perfection and everything has to be done to achieve perfection and reach God, and, secondly, that each person represents one half of a whole. By finding each other's second half, the two lovers will create the ideal pair, a complete and perfect whole. This perfect whole represents the perfect love relationship, and only the couples sharing the non-perishable feeling of love and having found the ideal counterpart may reach God – as the lovers in the poem have done, for they are close to God, are canonized, and represent the ideal example and the model that everyone involved in a love relationship should follow.

In the poem called *Song* the reader is likely to expect music, or harmony, or something pleasant, but the 'song' is nothing like that. At first its message sounds lyrical and romantic: to go and catch a falling star is a romantic thing to offer; and the lines 3 and 5 propose similar traditional romantic activities that evoke wonder and pleasure in contemplation. But these activities alternate with other suggestions (lines 2, 4, 6) that create a sharp anti-romantic sentiment. From this contrast we may understand that all these suggestions don't have anything in common with the love poems and popular songs, but rather being a parody or Petrarchan devices that would show the impossibility of measuring the poet's love for his mistress. The result is impossibility of all the proposals: it is impossible to catch a falling

star; it is a supreme impossibility to make a mandrake pregnant; impossibility of telling who created devil's cleft foot. To hear mermaid's singing can be delightful, but impossible; to be untroubled by envious thoughts would be delightful, but again impossible. The speaker desperately tries to find out if there is any possibility of making someone honest.

In the 2nd stanza the poet tries to explain that there is no honesty and faithfulness in the world: if you have an inclination to see strange sights or invisible things, search for 10 000 days and nights till you get old. When you return from the quest, you will be able to tell all the strange things you have seen and at the same time you will be disillusioned that nowhere you may find a 'woman true, and fair'. The speaker knows cynically that a faithful woman is never beautiful and vice versa.

In the last stanza the poet for a moment entertains with the possibility that a woman 'true and fair' could exist and imagines visiting her as a pilgrimage (being something extremely rare, an ideal), but immediately, with a bitter mockery, the poet assumes that even such a woman, although 'she were true when you met her', would betray him two or three times. The poem has a dramatic tone, and as it unfolds, the poet surprises the reader, whose expectation fails, as fails the possibility for the reader to face the wit.

Donne's most popular poem is *A Valediction – Forbidding Mourning*, which contains an example of that may be the most famous metaphysical conceit, when Donne develops an analogy between the two legs of a compass and the temporary separation of two lovers, thereby trying to persuade his beloved not to mourn at his departure. Again, as in Donne's poetry in general, the conceit is the instrument of persuasion, of definition in an argument, and never an instrument in itself.

Donne also wrote sonnets, *Holy Sonnets*, which are characterized by a deep a sense of repentance and a desire to reach redemption and God. In the *Sonnet 5* the poet likens himself to a world composed of body and soul, and as a world, the northern and southern parts must die, as both his body and spirit must perish, because he is sinful. In his remorse he addresses to astronomers and explorers that discover new worlds, asking them to find new oceans to weep or any water to wash away his sins because he is a *world*. He begs God to give flood so that he can suffer and reach salvation. He is committed to the sins of lust and envy – two of the seven deadly sins. As washing and drowning are of no use for him he begs Lord not to burn him in the fire of lust and envy but in the fire of zeal which heals the ones while it burns, thus bringing redemption.

Thematically connected to this one is the *Sonnet 7* in which the poet reflects on the unworthiness to be admitted to heaven of all those people (including the poet) who will have to face God in the Judgement Day. The poem opens with the striking image of '*round earth's imagined corners*' in which the entire round earth resembles the shape of Christian church and is seen as a Christian universe where the 'imagined corners' formed by North, South, East and West suggest the Christian cross. The sound of the trumpets will raise the dead, and those who are alive when Christ returns will be redeemed. The poet expressed an inner conflict in that he has many sins and he believes that when his time comes it may be too late for him to be forgiven by God. Therefore he wants to be taught how to repent, because if he learns it would be equal to the pardon of Christ, who promised forgiveness to all by his sacrifice.

The *Sonnet 14* represents the most striking example of all Donne's daring paradoxes. Like in the rest of the cycle of Holy Sonnets, there is a distressed sinner fearful of his damnation. The poet struggles to bring God into his life, and calls upon God to reveal himself more forcefully. Reason and Love for God represent two sides of the scales and he tries to balance a plea for a violent physical stirring of his passion against an evident intellectual pleasure in the display of theologically resolved paradoxes, but no matter how hard he tries he can't free himself from the bonds in which he finds himself.

Like his Baroque contemporaries Theophile de Viau and Saint-Amant in France, Gongora in Spain, and Marino in Italy, Donne carried the characteristics of the late Renaissance period to extreme, to a cultural extravaganza carrying an exaggerated sensibility subjected to wit in a period when language became more refined, the feeling more crude, and the difference between poetry and prose grew sharper. Donne's poems express the revolt against the poetic conventions of his age, in particular against Spenser and Petrarchan sonnet-writing schools, their highly regular meters and harmonious cadences. Instead, Donne preferred to violate the canons of rhythmical organization, to write freely divided lines, to express at full the complexity of emotion. Donne sought the allegory, epigram, the pastoral poetry, mythology, the fantastic, Platonism, all combined with passion and dramatic turns, and in this complexity of poetic expression anticipating the modern poetry centuries later.

Andrew Marvell (1621 - 1678), another important English metaphysical poet, was born at Winestead-in-Holderness, Yorkshire, on March 31, 1621 to the Rev. Andrew Marvell, and his wife Anne. When Marvell was but three years of age, the family moved to Hull, where his father was appointed lecturer at Holy Trinity Church. He was educated at the Hull Grammar

School, and in December 1633 he matriculated as a sizar at Trinity College, Cambridge, being elected to a scholarship in April 1638 and graduating BA in 1639. Two poems by Marvell, one in Greek, one in Latin, were printed in 1637 in the *Musa Cantabrigiensis* (a Cambridge volume congratulating Charles I on the birth of a daughter). Marvell's mother died in April 1638, his father remarrying in November. Marvell remained a few more years in Cambridge, leaving it for London only after his father's death, by drowning, in 1641. It is uncertain what Marvell did in the years that followed. It is possible that he held a clerkship in his brother-in-law Edmund Popple's trading house from 1640-1642. It is known that he traveled abroad in France, Holland, Switzerland, Spain, and Italy between 1643 and 1647, learning languages, and perhaps deliberately avoiding the civil war. On his return to England he apparently moved in London literary circles and had friends among Royalists. In the early summer of 1650 Marvell wrote *An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland*, perhaps the greatest political poem in England. From 1650 to 1652 Marvell tutored young Mary Fairfax (later Duchess of Buckingham), daughter of Sir Thomas Fairfax, retired Lord General of the parliamentary forces. At the Yorkshire seat of the Fairfax family, Nun Appleton House, it is usually assumed that Marvell wrote, over a period of about three years, most of his lyrical poems, such as *The Garden*, *To his Coy Mistress*, *The Definition of Love*, and perhaps his most profound poem, *Upon Appleton House*, a poem crucial to his development both as man and as poet, in which he examines the competing claims of public service and the search for personal insight. Marvell had befriended John Milton by 1653, when Milton wrote a glowing recommendation for Marvell for the post of Assistant Latin Secretary to the Council of State, a post he eventually secured in 1657. Marvell, who had been a supporter of the King, under the Commonwealth, became an adherent of Cromwell. Meanwhile, in 1653, Marvell tutored Cromwell's nephew and ward, William Dutton, living at Eton. In September, 1657, he was appointed assistant to John Milton, Latin Secretary for the Commonwealth. Marvell was paid a salary of £200, the same as Milton, although his was not a life pension. In his quiet way he seems to have been helpful after the Restoration (1660) in saving Milton from an extended prison term and possible execution. Starting in 1659, Marvell was elected MP for his hometown of Hull, and he continued to represent it until his death. During his last twenty years of life, Marvell was engaged in political activities, taking part in embassies to Holland and Russia. He continued his literary activity, writing political pamphlets, satires (e. g. *Last Instructions to a Painter*), and prose works (e. g. *The Rehearsal Transpros'd*), in which he attacked the financial and sexual corruption at Court and in Parliament, the arbitrary royal power, and set new standards of irony and urbanity. Marvell died on 16 August, 1678, in his house in Great Russell Street from medical treatment prescribed for a tertian ague. Marvell's *Miscellaneous Poems* were printed

posthumously in 1681, from papers found in his rooms by his housekeeper, who gave herself out to be his widow and signed the Preface 'Mary Marvell' in order to get £500 which Marvell had been keeping for two friends. This volume did not contain the satires – these appeared in *Poems on Affairs of State* (1689-97), and the authorship of some of them is still disputed.

In the tradition of the Metaphysical poetry, Andrew Marvell develops his poetic discourse based on strong persuasive principles, each text containing conceits that help the argumentative purpose. Sometimes a whole poem can be one single conceit, as in the case of *On the Drop of Dew*, in which a subtle analogy is progressively created between a drop of dew and the Christian soul aspiring to dissolve itself 'into the glories of th' Almighty Sun'.

Even if Marvell may sometimes deviate from the traditional to Metaphysical poetry religious and love themes, he follows the principles and techniques of this poetic pattern, as for example in the political poem *An Horatian Ode*, which is an ode addressed to the extraordinary vitality of Cromwell – the fulfiller of tradition and the breaker of moulds. Marvell places however a careful tribute to Charles I as the representative of an honorable but dying order. Cromwell outclasses Roman precedent and assumes the role of a Christian hero, a man made by peculiar circumstances of modern times who will act according to the will of God. Unusually for the Christian expectations there is no evidence of peace, because he is stirred to turn from the arts of peace to those of war.

One of the most popular Marvell's poems is *The Garden*, in which the poet uses nature as the starting point for certain philosophical reflections – where nature, reflected in the mind, assumes a life of its own – that go far beyond what the poem seems to promise. People try in vain to win laurels, but the narrow shadows of these crowns do not reflect the efforts that were done to obtain such an honor. Therefore it is regretful that a man tries to so hard, and receives a little reward that may offer just a short moment of glory.

In the 2nd stanza the poet turns to Sweet Solitude and her sister, Innocence, realizing that it was a mistake to look for them in the company of people. Such sacred plants can grow only among the plants in nature. He understands that society, considered as refined, is nothing but rude and vulgar in comparison to solitude. Not many people understand that the beauty of the garden is incomparable with the beauty of a lover. Cruel lovers, emphatuated in their feelings, cut in the trees the names of their mistresses in order to make people pay attention to their emotions, and those who wound the trees are far from the understanding that there is nothing more beautiful than the green garden – the manifestation of nature.

The 4th stanza expresses a change in the attitude: when people exhaust the passion, Love comes to its end, and even gods as Apollo or Pan, that fall in love with mortal beauties, know that after passion ends their lovers would conveniently turn into plants, therefore all passions turn to nature.

In stanza 5 the poet attempts to express a hedonistic idea: the garden is a fertile paradise where fruits offer themselves to be tasted, and at the same time the garden could be the place for important scientific discoveries, as it was the case of Newton who discovered the theory of gravity. The garden is thus the background where scientific and pleasurable things coexist. Even the Fall of man mentioned here doesn't bear anything painful: this fall results from the amorous outreaching of melons and the embraces of flowers. The human being is happy, and the mind savors the pleasures in nature. Human mind is likened to an ocean, and every experience of the mind creates a new sea. In the garden, mind forgets everything and contemplates nature. This passage of the poem typifies metaphysical poetry in its astonishing leap from the concrete to abstract, from objects to the thoughts that do not only reflect things but also reflect upon them. The creative mind finds the strength to annihilate all existing creation into the freshness of '*green thought in a green shade*'.

The 7th stanza develops allegorically the image of the paradise possessed by the solitary Adam. The paradise is described as a garden and its inhabitant finds delight in everything that belongs to the place. The harmony and peace of solitude in nature is disturbed by the God's decision to create Eve. The intrusion of '*the mate*' ends the '*happy garden-state*'. The reference to time in the final image of the poem subtly suggests that the seasonless Eden is separated from a corrupted and transitory world by the consequence of the primordial Fall.

Marvell's most popular poem is *To His Coy Mistress*, thematically divided into three parts that blend together the issues of love and time. Concerning the poetic treatment of love, throughout his argumentative discourse, the speaker attempts to persuade his beloved to give up her timidity and yield to his advances. The time is an important factor for either the fulfillment or lack of accomplishment of their rather physical love. In this invitational lyric, the time equals to eternity unless the act of making love is a present experience. In proffering his invitation, and in developing the image of the incompatibility between time-consuming coyness and the relatively short time of enjoying the pleasure of making love, the poet develops an arithmetical recital of the lady's beauty in which, as in the entire poem, he uses the Ancient motif of *carpe diem* in relation to the equally Ancient motif of *tempus edax*.

In the 1st part, the issue of time is ironically treated in the expression of love fulfillment (the speaker presses the lady to yield before the extinction of passion on the Day of Judgment); the time means eternity which is a pleasant view, as compared to the 2nd part in which the tone is harsh, the eternity is a desert, and the psychological distress is vivid in the anxiety caused by the presumed non-accomplishment of love. The '*long love's day*' is either the day designated for settling personal disputes or the day devoted to making love – in both cases the phrase combines two opposite qualities: 'long' suggesting eternity, the indefinite duration and 'day' meaning the shortness of time devoted to the consumption of erotic experience. Time does not redeem, but destroys the physical beauty and the energy of desire: its '*winged chariot*' rushes the lovers towards the prospect of '*Deserts of vast eternity*' and to grave.

The entire poem both argues against and assaults the idea of resistance to desire, but only the 3rd part offers the most profound argumentative speculations on time and love, expresses the reassertion of love and pleasure, and culminates in the hedonistic idea of enjoying the pleasures of life. Only here the speaker insists that the lovers' energy can try to stop the devouring time, and the poem, although briefly, desperately holds out the possibility of a physical triumph against all the changes of decay.

The life and work of Andrew Marvell are both marked by extraordinary variety and range, and the history of his reputation is extraordinary. Gifted with a most subtle and introspective imagination, he turned his talents in mid-career from incomparable lyric explorations of the inner life to satiric writings on the issues involved in one of England's most crucial political epochs. Indeed, famous in his time as satirist, patriot, and rebel against tyranny, he was virtually unknown as a lyric poet. The century, which followed Marvell's death, also remembered him almost exclusively as a politician and pamphleteer, and even if his poems were published in 1681, they were neglected in the centuries to come (except, perhaps, C. Lamb and some of the 19th century American writers who appreciated and started a gradual revival of Marvell's work). It was not until after WW I, with Grierson's *Metaphysical Lyrics* and T. S. Eliot's *Andrew Marvell*, that the 20th century has lost Marvell as a public figure in the modern high estimation of his lyric poems, and starting with the second half of the 20th century his lyrics received much more critical attention than the work of any other Metaphysical poet, even than that of John Donne.

George Herbert (1593 – 1633), another important poet of that period, was born in Montgomery, Wales, on April 3, 1593, the fifth son of Richard and Magdalen Newport Herbert. After his father's death in 1596, he and his six

brothers and three sisters were raised by their pious mother, friend and patron to John Donne, who dedicated his *Holy Sonnets* to her. Herbert was educated at Westminster School and Trinity College Cambridge, where in 1620 he was elected to the prestigious post of Public Orator of the University, responsible for giving speeches of welcome in Latin to famous visitors, and writing letters of thanks, also in Latin, to acknowledge gifts of books for the University Library. This brought him to the attention of King James I, who granted him an annual allowance, and seemed likely to make him an ambassador. In 1625 the king died, and George Herbert, who had originally gone to college with the intention of becoming a priest, became much involved in court life and, in 1624 and 1625, was elected to represent Montgomery in Parliament. In 1626 he was ordained, and became vicar and then rector of the parish of Bemerton and neighbouring Fugglestone, not far from Salisbury. In 1629, Herbert married his stepfather's cousin Jane Danvers. He served faithfully as a parish priest, and his generosity and good will won him the affection of his parishioners. Herbert had long been in ill health, and died on 1 March 1633, 40 years old. As a priest Herbert was characterized by diligence and humility, traits reflected in his poetry that also expresses the conflict between the religious and secular life. His first two sonnets were sent to his mother in 1610, written on the theme that the love of God is a worthier subject for verse than the love of woman. In 1626, at the death of Sir Francis Bacon (who had dedicated his translation of *Certaine Psalmes* to Herbert the year before) he contributed a memorial poem in Latin.

Shortly before his death, when he realized he was dying of consumption, Herbert sent a collection of his poems in manuscript to his friend Nicholas Ferrar to judge whether to burn them or publish them. The result was *The Temple*, religious poems using common language and rhythms of speech, published after his death to enormous popular acclaim and running to 13 editions by 1680. He also wrote a volume for parish clergy called *A Priest to the Temple; or, The Country Parson*, also published after his death, in 1652, containing prose advice to country clerics and showing the intelligent devotion with which he undertook his duties as priest.

The characteristic features of George Herbert's poetry include the religious themes and the poetic techniques of the Shape (Altar) Poem, of which Herbert was an imitator. In this poetry the shape of the text adds to, enhances and even represents the meaning of the poem.

The typographical shape of *Easter Wings*, for example, is that of a flying bird, a shape that reinforces the poem's meaning that man's fall and rise are likened to the motion of a lark's wings while flying. The beginning of the poem – 'Lord' – is a direct reference to God, revealing the text's religious

thematic concern. The Almighty God created man and gave heaven to him, but he foolishly lost it. Men continuously decayed until the first coming of Christ, and the decay and the subsequent suffering of mankind were the effect of the original sin. The poet longs for God's help to rise, and he wants to be resurrected as Christ was. This spiritual elevation is important for him because as he gets older he becomes more sensitive and fragile. The poet suffers from being sinful, and God punishes sin by illness and shame. Shame was the first knowledge of mankind, for it was shame that Adam and Eve experienced after they ate the forbidden fruit. Realizing their nakedness they couldn't appear in front of angels, and the human being's woes in general came to the world after the consumption of the desirable forbidden fruit. This suffering and remorse make the poet grow thinner than ever, but this illness does not suggest weakness completely – it may suggest corporeal lightness that would help him rise until combined with God. The final point of the poem is that through deep suffering and remorse a man increases the hope to reach purification and God.

The poem *The Altar* is another example of shape poetry and as the title suggests, it is the representation of an altar. The broken Altar is made of heart and cemented with tears because the poet experiences remorse – again, in order to reach salvation one should regret, cry and repent. God gives shape to the heart, and the poet's art is unique, but the heart without love for God is just a stone. Only after the poet's '*hard heart*' meets the frame of religion and love for God, he is able to praise divinity with all his heart. It is a blessing to possess a sensible heart full of love for God, since God created every single part of the poet's heart that bears the name of God and praises the divinity. As long as there is a chance of not committing any sins, all the elements that form his heart will be praising God. The poet wants to sacrifice himself for God and become holy to '*sanctify this Altar to be thine*'.

In another poem, *Jordan (I)*, the poet dropped aside the techniques of the shape poetry as well as his general concern with God and religion, and focused on the theme of beauty of poetry. As the poem begins, the poet challenges the idea that only unreal things make a beautiful poem, and asks '*Is there in truth no beauty?*' – the issue behind this question being that truth also carries beauty. In the 2nd stanza the poet criticizes the pastoral poetry, arguing that the shadow of '*groves*' and '*arbors*' makes more obscure a weak craftsmanship, while the direct poetry is divine because it discloses its meaning openly to the reader. In the last stanza the poet concludes that pastoral poets ask riddles, and those who understand them only guess the meaning. The poet emphasizes the idea that he does not envy shepherds who sing their secular songs, for he writes for God and King. The poem declares that false poetry is secular poetry, like pastoral lyrics, and that divine love poetry and devoted poetry are true and beautiful.

The religious concern of Herbert's poetry takes in *Love (III)* new thematic perspectives in that the lyrical I performs a kind of symbolic voyage from sin to salvation. At the beginning of the poem he is welcomed as a guest in an inn, but his soul '*drew back, / Guilty of dust and sin*'. He is the heir of Adam's fall, therefore sinful and he feels unworthy to enter the place and be there, although the innkeeper named Love claims that he will be. The guest also feels ashamed of his sin, but Love takes his hand, implying that he knows everything, and makes the traveler come to the realization that he should repent in order to be worthy of the place and its host. The poet implies that he searches for salvation; he is conscious of being sinful and should repent, and he doesn't want to carry his shame. The innkeeper replies that Satan is to be blamed and by serving God one can reach salvation. The innkeeper is actually Jesus himself, and the traveler is a guest attending the last supper of Christ – this is also what represents the metaphysical conceit in the poem.

The elegance of Herbert's poetry is as much the result of art as it is an expression of a cultivated spiritual humility. He insisted he would make '*Humility lovely in the eyes of all men*', and his work is permeated with reference to service and to Christ as the type of suffering servant. Today he is remembered chiefly for *The Temple*, the book of poems which have influenced the style of other poets, including Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and several of them have been used as hymns, in particular *Teach me, my God and King* and *Let all the world in every corner sing*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BALD, R.C., **John Donne. A Life**, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984;

COOK, Guy, **Discourse and Literature**, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995;

CUDDON, J. A., **The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory**, 3rd edn., London, Penguin Books Ltd., 1992;

DAICHES, David, **A Critical History of English Literature**, 4 vols., Secker & Warburg, 1975;

FERRY, Anne, **All in War with Time. Love Poetry of Shakespeare, Donne, Jonson, Marvell**, London, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975;

FOWLER, Alastair, **Kinds of Literature. An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes**, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1982;

HYMAN, Lawrence, **Andrew Marvell**, New York, Twayne Publishers Inc., 1964;

JONES, Richard Foster, **The Seventeenth Century, Studies in the History of English Thought and Literature**, Stanford, 1951;

SANDERS, Andrew, **The Short Oxford History of English Literature**, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994.