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The Metaphysical Poetry as a Peculiar Trend of the Baroque Art

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Abstract. The Metaphysical poetry is concerned with the whole experience of man, but the intelligence, learning and seriousness of the poets means that the poetry is about the profound areas of experience especially – about love, romantic and sensual; about man's relationship with God - the eternal perspective, and, to a less extent, about pleasure, learning and art. The Metaphysical poets created a new trend in history of English literature. These poems have been created in such a way that one must have enough knowledge to get the actual meaning. The Metaphysical poets made use of everyday speech, intellectual analysis, and unique imagery. The creators of the Metaphysical poetry, John Donne along with his followers, are successful not only in that period but also in the modern age.

Keywords: Metaphysicals, poetry, conceit, Baroque, word, image, religion, death, love

In the still predominantly British study of English literature, the term "Baroque" is hardly ever used to describe the era between the Renaissance and the age of Neoclassicism, and it seems that only scholars of comparative literature who have dared look across the Channel, such as American literary critic René Wellek in his work "The Concept of Baroque in Literary Scholarship" [11], as well as cultural scholars use it in their approach. In British studies of English literature, the term "Metaphysical" is still given preference. Originally, "Metaphysical" was used as a derogatory term by the Neoclassicists in order to differentiate their aesthetics, which was based on reason and clearly defined rules, from the Baroque aesthetics of the "last age". From their point of view the Baroque poets had offended against the eternally valid norms of reason and nature and so, in this dysphemistic sense, Metaphysical was meant to describe something "unnatural" or "adverse to nature" rather than the "supernatural".

The term Metaphysical applied to poetry has a long and interesting history. It refers to a specific period of time and a specific set of poets. In 17th-century England, there was a group of poets who, while they did form a formal group, have been considered the The Metaphysical poets. There is no scholarly consensus regarding which seventeenth-century English poets or poems may be regarded as in the Metaphysical genre. There are, in most lists, few poets that belong, and they are as follows: John Donne (1572–1631), George Herbert (1593–1633), Andrew Marvel (1621–1678), Henry Vaughan (1622–1695), Richard Crashaw (1613–1649), Abraham Cowley (1618–1667), Thomas Traherne (1636–1674). There are additional poets that are sometimes also considered to be part of this small group of 17th century The Metaphysical poets, and they are George Chapman, Richard Leigh, Katherine Philips, Edward Taylor, Anne Bradstreet and John Wilmot, 2nd Earl of Rochester.

Donne is, and this is almost undisputed, the quintessential Metaphysical poet. If none other is read, Donne is generally recommended for a reader to get a good idea of what The Metaphysical poetry is all about.

In Baroque rhetoric, the conceit replaced the Renaissance image just as the oval replaced the Renaissance circle in Baroque architecture, giving the reader an equal sense of distortion. A typical example is the famous divine poem on the repentant sinner Mary Magdalene, "The Weeper", and its strong-line coda, "The Tear", by the Roman Catholic and Counter-Reformatory poet Richard Crashaw. The poem disrupts the well-proportioned and by now time-worn Petrarchan comparison of eyes with fountains or orbs and tears with springs or stars in the most extravagant and illogically mixed ways. In rapid and broken succession, the eyes are no longer fountains but become extended to "portable and compendious oceans" faithfully and paradoxically following their beloved Christ, and the tears are drops weeping for their own loss, or, more paradoxically, moist sparks, watery diamonds, maiden gems worn by a wanton woman blushing at Christ, her very masculine and beautiful lover, pearls of dew carried on pillows stuffed with the down of angels from the sinner's lowly dust to heaven, to be metamorphosed into stars and singers in the heavenly choir of angels [4]. Besides concrete physical objects such as eyes and tears, abstracts such as moderation, repentance, grace, wisdom, and love could also be illustrated by such far-fetched and original vehicles. Thus, the obvious and harmonious comparison of love with fire in Petrarch was replaced by the artificial and eccentric comparison of love with a flea in Donne [9]. This *concettismo* was closely related to the originally anti-Calvinist and Counter-Reformatory mixed genre of the emblem. Complementing a Baroque history painting, the emblem was chiefly meant to convey abstract doctrines of faith and philosophy to the human senses, in a tripartite combination of word and picture. This task would almost necessarily put a strain on the emblem writer's inventiveness in finding eccentric vehicles, as when he illustrated the universal indispensability of divine and human love by depicting the world as a cask and Amor-Christ as a cooper binding together that cask's loose planks. It is typical of this Baroque *ut pictura poesis*[1] that, for instance, the concept comparison of divine grace with a magnet, which alone can draw the iron human heart up to God, was used both in John Donne's "Holy Sonnets".

Much has been written about the theatricality and dramatic quality of The Metaphysical poetry, especially in its earlier phase. In their radical opposition to Calvinistic theology, Metaphysical poems are intensely picturesque, displaying the entire pictorial splendor usually associated with the flashy illusory stage-designs of the Stuart court-masque. Moreover, against the background of the sister arts *ut pictura poesis*, attention should be paid to the theatricality both of Baroque church architecture and of Baroque painting. Baroque churches were splendidly designed as *theatrum sacrum*, and theatrical illusion was consciously made use of in order to involve the senses *ad majorem Dei gloriam*[2]. The heavens opening and revealing

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[1] Latin, literally "As is painting so is poetry".

[2] The Jesuit motto (*To the Greater Glory of God*).

God surrounded by his hierarchies of angels in all their glory was portrayed as a theatrical pageant comparable to (and exceeding) that of the most splendid court-masques, giving observers a sensual foretaste of the delights to come in the world beyond. Baroque paintings, too, are full of theatre motifs and heavy drapery, with curtains allowing glimpses of what seemingly was not meant to be seen. This, of course, had the contrary effect: disclosing rather than concealing, arousing curiosity and guiding the eye directly to what was only half-heartedly hidden. Christ in the manger or Christ on the cross no longer carries a napkin or loincloth hiding his shame, but rather a theatre curtain revealing it and conveying Christ's erotic potency and soteriologic fertility to the astounded spectator.

Not only in literary comparisons but also in the context of the two conflicting world pictures and two conflicting religions - even the most remote elements were connected in *contentio* or composition (now called antithesis) or *synoeciosis* or opposition (now called paradox). We find heaven and hell, life and death, fire and water almost automatically linked, just as Baroque literature reflected the increasing awareness of a world out of joint on all levels. In their massive accumulation and complex clusters, antithesis and paradox became distinctive characteristics of Baroque rhetoric. Thus, in his two earliest verse letters referring to his participation in the Islands Expedition (1597), John Donne opposed the descriptions of two contrary experiences *in extremis*[3], a sea storm and sea calm. Both not only threatened the sailors' lives, the second even more than the first, but confronted them with two versions of pristine, pre-Creationist, Godless chaos. In "The Storm":

...Darkness, lights elder brother, his birth-right
Claims o'er this world, and to heaven hath chas'd light.
All things are one, and that none can be,
Since all formes, uniforme deformity
Doth cover, so that wee, except God say
Another Fiat, shall have no more day... [7, 125].

And in "The Calm":

...Fate grudges us all, and doth subtly lay
A scourge, 'gainst which we all forget to pray.
He that at sea prays for more wind, as well
Under the poles may beg cold, heat in hell.
What are we then ? How little more, alas,
Is man now, than, before he was, he was ?
Nothing for us, we are for nothing fit ;
Chance, or ourselves, still disproportion it.
We have no power, no will, no sense ; I lie,
I should not then thus feel this misery [7, 127].

All aim is lost in disorientation; all coherence (of the fleet) is gone. All order, distinctions, and laws of causality are annihilated in a hell of shrieking noises or baking heat. The speaker can no longer distinguish directions and seasons, day and light, sleep and death, health and disease. And every thing and act planned for the sake of survival either fails or turns to its very contrary. The accumulated paradoxes underline the obliteration of all created relationship between cause and effect, as of all rational order. Another of Donne's eschatological poems either composing or opposing extremes is "The First

Anniversary" (1611). Here the old world, shaken by a severe fever with hot and cold flushes, doubts whether the end of this crisis signifies the world's survival or its death, only to learn that its inevitable decay due to sin is the (certainly very Utopian) precondition of its rebirth into a virtuous and prelapsarian state.

Situational as well as rhetorical paradoxes can be found in all epochs of literature, and have been aptly classified in three types: the serious and unresolvable paradox, the comical and satirical paradox, and the playful or semi-jocular paradox. The distinctively Baroque paradox belonged to the first type. Like the conventional serious paradox, it opposed extreme opposites in seeming logicality; but it aimed at eccentric surprise. In John Donne's "Holy Sonnets", each speaker tries to overcome the broken state of the world and the church in a private illogical communion between two lovers, himself and his desired God. The speaker will never be free unless God chains him, and will never be chaste unless God rapes him. God has to overthrow him in order that he may firmly stand [1].

In Richard Crashaw's "Hymn to Saint Teresa", penetration is the precondition of virginity as well as ignorance the precondition of knowledge, bankruptcy the precondition of trade, weakness the precondition of strength, martyrdom and death the precondition of life, and fall and sin the precondition of resurrection and salvation. In their theological and philosophical unresolvability, such serious paradoxes, homiletically conventional or sensationally shocking, were radically different from the traditional comical and satirical type of paradox on the one hand, and from the traditional playful or semi-jocular type of paradox on the other hand. And they also differed from the paradox that modern literary theory postulates for all poetry or even prose. The distinctive feature of Baroque paradoxes is their shocking choice of joined opposites as well as the sheer quantity of obsessive paradox cumulation, which sets them apart from the serious paradoxes that survived in the Augustan age, with its self-imposed obligation to a return to harmony and to the restrictive rule of decorum. The typically Baroque use of paradoxes must be understood as the literary expression of an age that did not only have to face new contradictory theologies, philosophies, and views of history [1]. The age had, above all, been taken by surprise in having to face a totally new, non-geocentric world picture.

As shown above, Baroque literature's characteristic feature of replacing logical lines of argumentation by paradoxes, syllogisms, barocones[4] and other kinds of witty and spurious argumentation reflects the feeling of an original community and continuity increasingly torn apart. George Herbert's broken altar (fragmented in violation of biblical law) symbolizes the broken church, and is wittily associated with the psalmist's broken heart as well as the speaker's broken poem. The speaker's poetic sacrifice, like all sacrifice, aims at an "at-one-ment" with God, though (paradoxically) to the exclusion of both the church and the community. Donne's "First Anniversary", his above- mentioned poetic anatomy of the dead old world,

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[3] Latin, in extremity, in dire straits.

[4] This medieval Latin word for a form of syllogism as the possible etymon for "Baroque" was originally suggested by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his "Dictionnaire de musique" (1768).

provides another type of such unexpected disruptions of the train of thoughts. It teems with sudden changes of argument and truncated thoughts, marked by aposiopeses or interruptions of the type of "But no!" and underlined by numerous antitheses and unresolvable paradoxes. Another splendid instance is Donne's poem "A Noctural upon St Lucy's Day", with its wittily paradoxical and surprising treatment of alchemy. The speaker, *tout seul*[5] by the death of his beloved lady and in his isolation from "all others", feels more than ordinarily depressed on St Lucy's day, being the shortest, darkest, and most sapless day of the year. All others stand in expectation of the next spring, which will renew their erotic vitality. The speaker, however, feels his own death multiplied into utter nothingness. Alchemy, the ultimate goal of which was the transformation of lower into higher matter, is replaced by a "new alchemy", transforming nothingness into a higher form of nothingness. Then this utter bodilessness will exalt him far above the mere fleshly and goatlike regeneration of "all others" and effect his regeneration into an infinitely higher love.

Thus, nothingness distilled to its "quintessence" and "elixir" becomes a higher life, the nadir turns zenith. A dense erotic imagery (alchemy and alembics, the tropic of Capricorn, sap and balm, lust, goat, bed) is inseparably interwoven with an equally dense religious number symbolism (3, 5, 7, 9, 12) and imagery (sun, vigil, eve). Such a definitely non-prudish sensuality as appears in these paradoxes refers to still another source of the logically broken disposition of the classical literary rhetorical discourse: the *trompe l'oeil*[6] argumentation of the Jesuits, i.e. the deliberate satisfaction of the senses, condemned by Calvin, by deceiving the senses (as well as in the above-mentioned *trompe l'oeil* perspective of Baroque church ceiling paintings) *ad majorem Dei gloriam* following Ignatius of Loyola and the Council of Trent (1545-1563).

In his "Ars Poetica", Horace had recommended the golden mean between elliptical brevity and long-winded detail; and the early Neoclassicists of the School of Ben Johnson followed this conventional rule of "Breve esse laboro Obscurus fio". The Baroque poets of the School of Donne, however, revolted by making the very contrary, "masculine" elliptical brevity for the purpose of stylistic obscurity, their poetic ideal. In classical literary rhetorical discourse, obscurity had ever been a stylistic device of the *ornatus*. Thus, even in its own time, the term "strong lines" was used for English Baroque poetry, vehemently opposed by the early Neoclassical School of Ben Johnson [6]. In the transition from the Renaissance to the Baroque age models changed: they shifted from Demosthenes' dense precision of thought to Isocrates' dazzling external form, from Cicero's balanced stylistic clarity to the epigrammatic and elliptical taciturnity of Tacitus and Seneca. This also explains the popularity that Tacitus's contemporary Martial and his "Epigrammata" enjoyed with the Metaphysicals, who delighted in writing terse epigrams both in English and Latin: Donne's "Epigrams", Herbert's "Passio Discerpta", Crashaw's "Epigrammata Sacra", Marvell's "Inscribenda". Thus, the stylistic ideal of the

Golden Latinity of Horace and Cicero was replaced by the later stylistic ideal of the Silver Latinity of Tacitus and Martial. Art historians, and, in their wake, literary historians consequently attempted to explain the Baroque as a returning phenomenon of decadence following classical peaks [10]. This was done, for example, by the art historian Jacob Burckhardt in 1855 and in 1860, until in "Renaissance und Barock (1880) his pupil Heinrich Wölfflin suggested accepting Baroque decadence as an art form of its own. Decades later, this was still the case with Ernst Robert Curtius: in "Europäische Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter" (1948) he opposed classicism and mannerism as *virtus* and *vitium*.

The plain, partly colloquial, and often consciously deformed poetic style is a particularly striking feature of the English Protestant Baroque. John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell, and Thomas Traherne demonstratively rejected the poetic diction and high stylization of Renaissance poetry from Petrarch to Shakespeare, as well as the *ornatus malus* of stylistic Mannerism (Euphuism, Gongorism, Marinism). Thus, the plain style of English Baroque poems stood in antithetical tension to their highly complicated and intellectual content. George Herbert expressed this most controversially - and even paradoxically - in his two "Jordan" poems, with an artificial pun on the "plains of Jordan":

Who says that fictions only and false hair
Become a verse? Is there in truth no beauty?
Is all good structure in a winding stair?
   May no lines pass, except they do their duty
   Not to a true, but painted chair?
<...>
Shepherds are honest people; let them sing;
   Riddle who list, for me, and pull for prime;
   I envy no mans nightingale or spring
Nor let them punish me with lose of rime,
Who plainly say, My God, My King [8, 197].

It should, however, be noted that Herbert's "Jordan" poems are self-deconstructive in their apparent contradiction between their argument in favor of pristine, original, 'natural' plainness (analogous to the Protestant recourse to "primitive" Christianity) on the one hand, and their 'artificial' though non-mannerist rhetoric on the other hand (analogous to the Roman Catholic insistence on post-primitive tradition and ornament). This expresses the Anglican Church's and the Metaphysical poet's tension between their Protestant and their Roman Catholic heritages, also reflected in the palace architecture of the period, where plain Neoclassical façades concealed ornate Baroque interiors, – the more private the rooms the more ornate their decorations.

The Metaphysical poets created a new trend in history of English literature. These poems have been created in such a way that one must have enough knowledge to get the actual meaning. The Metaphysical poets made use of everyday speech, intellectual analysis, and unique imagery. The creators of the Metaphysical poetry, John Donne along with his followers, are successful not only in that period but also in the modern age. The Metaphysical poetry takes an important place in the history of English literature for its unique versatility and it is popular among thousand of peoples till now.

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[5] Latin, alone, all by oneself.

[6] French, a painting or decoration giving a convincing illusion of reality.

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Безруков А.В. Метафизическая поэзия как особое направление барочного искусства

Аннотация. Возникшая на почве общественной реакции, поэзия метафизической школы порывает с реалистическими и гуманистическими традициями ренессансной лирики, приобретает спиритуалистический характер, становится выразительницей поэтики барокко. Эта эволюция особенно заметна в творчестве зачинателя и виднейшего представителя "школы" Джона Донна. Религиозная тематика, мистические настроения характерны и для других поэтов "школы" – Джорджа Герберта, автора сборника стихов "Храм" (1633); Ричарда Крэшо, автора сборника "Шаги к храму" (1646); Генри Вогана. Для поэтов метафизической школы характерна крайне усложненная форма; они изобретали изощренные образные концепции (кончетто), изысканные метафоры, трудно расшифровываемые символы и аллегории. Влияние поэтики метафизической школы сказалось на первых произведениях поэта-роялиста А. Каули и республиканца А. Марвелла, творчество которого в целом знаменует становление английского классицизма. Интерес к метафизической поэзии возродился в Англии в XX в. среди модернистов (Т.С. Элиот и др.).

Ключевые слова: метафизики, поэзия, кончетто, барокко, слово, образ, религия, смерть, любовь