

Donne's style

Donne's Technical originality

John Donne was, we sometimes forget, an Elizabethan poet. But the most striking feature about Donne is that he chooses to do something different from his predecessors. He rejected the most melodious fluency of Elizabethan lyrics and started writing poems in the dry and hard language of day to day speech. Donne has written:-

"Busy old fool; unruly sun
Why dost thou thus through
Windows and through curtains call on us
Must to thy motions lover's season run"

We are at once startled to find utterly unpoetical words busy, old, fool in poetry. Besides, the immediate effect of these lines is of vivid speech rather than song. What Shakespeare did in drama, Donne did in lyric poetry. Donne did not aim at sweetness, grace or verbal melody and that is why, he writes:

For God sake, hold your tongue and let me love

Such lines of Donne give the illusion of talk. The speech quality is such that one is reminded of blank-verse. In fact, characteristic of metaphysical verse may fairly be described as dramatic. For, the stress patterns are dictated by the meaning and the tone and seek to represent the movement of impassioned ^{impulsive} thought spoken aloud. Donne writes in The Second Anniversary: What permanent effect of brevity causes? Dost thou love beauty?

There is a characteristic use of the slight pause at the end of a line in the question 'Dost thou love Beauty?' to produce the conversational effect of an ^{not} implied ^{questioning} for example a shall we see say before coming down with special stress on the important word. That is why, the very movement of the verse dictates the meaning. It is because of this fact that we are not tempted to blame Donne for harshness.

and ruggedness or a defective ear in the real sense of the term.

This is not to say that Donne could not sing. He had sung in the song; "sweetest love I do not go"
For the weariness of knees."

His principal innovation was to make the cleanliness of the speech the staple of his rhythm. It is this which makes the opening lines of his poems often asserting:

Now thou hast loved me one whole day

Tomorrow when thou leaves, what will thou say

His conception of imagery was as original as the conception of his rhythm. He was not confined for his source of his imagery to some such conception of his poetic as the poetical. Sometimes he uses images of such a mundane nature as that of repairing a building, in the first two lines of one of his "Holy Sonnet":

"Thou hast made me

And shall ~~thou~~^{thy} work decay

Repair me now"

Some of Donne's images derive their force from everyday and common place experience. For, the lover in The Sun Rising says hours, days, months are the rags of the time and death in The Second Anniversary becomes "a goosome". Donne rejected the traditional imagery and traditional rhythm because they were associated with traditional theme. But Donne wanted to express the complexity of his own moods, crude & subtle, harmonious & discordant. That is why, his imagery differs in range and variety from that of his contemporaries and predecessors.

Donne was highly learned and intellectual. He drew on his intellectual knowledge ~~from~~ much of the imagery by which his ideas and feelings were communicated. He often explained his emotional

statements by an intellectual parallel. For example, I
has compared the South to a bag of catfish in
'contradictions for bidding morning'. "If they be two
they are two, as it still have completed all the
again, no days in "clouds" or "mists". True
hearts do in the forest road, where can we do
two better, perhaps?"

Here, Donne has tried to do
and conception connection between his emotional attitude
It is for

of the second element in the imagery of Donne that his
poetry has often been called obscure and difficult.
He demanded complete concentration; an agile mind
emotion, intellectual and sensory response from the
reader. For example, Donne may not use an image such as that
in "A Fleck upon a Sunbeams Day" "Love is an altar
expensive, a quinquessence we can not understand if we
not realize that quinquessence means means the power
essence obtained by distillation. That is why, his poetry
becomes unintelligible.

The characteristic that has often
caused Donne's poetry to be described as the writings
of Donne do illustrate his relations with mistress by a
reference to such intellectual interests as astronomy, or
a recording of new geographical experience and intellect
concepts. The peculiarity of the Metaphysical is not that
but that the relations they receive are often of logical
than sensual and emotional. They constantly connect
abstract with concrete, the remote with the near
and the sublime with the common place. Sometimes
intellectual concepts themselves generate feelings in him,
as T.S. Eliot has said "A thought to Donne was an action
it modified his sensibility". So, it is that in metaphysical
we find a remarkable fusion of thought and feeling. In
in Augustan poetry the intellect is predominant, and in
18th century poetry. The ideal is poet poetry concerned
and confused in soul. This is not to say that the

poets did not feel and Romantics did not think, but their feeling and thinking did not harmonize as ~~they~~ did that of the metaphysicals. sensation, emotion, and thought are interfused. The best work of Donne and his followers in a way to ^{the} extent that they never are in any poetry of the 18th and 19th century. That is why, Emerson speak of the blending of thought and feelings as his greatest achievement.

It is important to note that this tendency is result of the fact that Donne treats the whole of experience as poetic raw material. No part of experience is regarded as unpoetical, all is equally available to him in the act of composition. He had the capacity to bring into poetry all his experience and activities and speculations. That is why, Dr. Johnson has said "The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together in his poetry" most critics would admit the heterogeneity but deny that they "yoked by violence" was a fair description of the general effect.

It was both the drama and the metaphysical poets in mind that Mr. Eliot made his remark about a mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience and suggest that in the latter 17th century a dissociation of sensibility took place from which we have never recovered.

Donne's poetry goes to the definition of the poet given by Eliot as one who constantly mixing disparate experience out of the matter so diverse as reading to spinoza falling in love, smelling dinner cooking. Really, it is an essential character of his mind that he recognizes trivial mundane affairs as part of the same experience as death or eternity.
