

A Cognitive Metaphorical Reading of John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"

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الخلاصة

إنَّ أحد الجوانب الرئيسية للشعراء الميتافيزيقيين هو استخدام طريقة استثنائية للمقارنة بين المفاهيم أو الصور غير المتشابهة أو الاستعارة المعرفية. هذا البحث يقدّم قراءة مجازية معرفية لواحدة من أكثر قصائد جون دون: "توديع: النذب الممنوع". يتضمن القسم الأول من البحث سيرة قصيرة لجون دون، وملخصاً لهذه القصيدة، والخصائص الرئيسية للشعر الميتافيزيقي يقدم القسم الثاني تحليلاً مفصلاً لقصيدة "توديع: النذب الممنوع". ينتهي هذا البحث بخاتمة القسم الثالث وقائمة المراجع. كان الشعراء الميتافيزيقيون أنفسهم رجالاً أذكىاء ومتقنين ومتعلمين. يتميز شعرهم بالذكاء والتأمل والتحليلي والنفسي بشكل مميز. تميل القصيدة الميتافيزيقية إلى أن تكون مختصرة، اقتصادية في اللغة، ودائماً ما تكون منسوجة بشكل وثيق. علاوة على ذلك ، فإن الاستعارة تشمل جوانب مختلفة وأبعاداً مختلفة، ومن هذه الأبعاد الإدراك إستيعاب الفكرة في القصيدة الشعرية.

الكلمات الدالة : "توديع: النذب الممنوع"، الشعر الميتافيزيقي، الإستعارة الفكرية، الفلسفة

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ABSTRACT

One of the major aspects of metaphysical poets was the use of exceptional way of comparing highly unlike concepts or dissimilar images, or cognitive metaphor. This paper tries to provide a cognitive metaphorical reading of one of the most renewed poems of John Donne: "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning". The first section of the paper provides includes a short biography of John Donne, a summary on this poem, and main characteristics of the metaphysical poetry. The second section gives a detailed analysis of the poem 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning'. The paper ends with section three conclusion and list of references. The Metaphysical poets were themselves intelligent, cultivated and learned men. Their poetry is characteristically witty, reflective, analytical and psychological. A metaphysical poem tends to be brief, economical in language, and is always closely woven . Moreover, metaphor includes different aspects and different dimensions. One of these dimensions is cognition and realizing the idea in a piece of poetry.

Key terms: "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"; Metaphysical Poetry; Cognitive Metaphor; Philoso

SECTION ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Metaphysical poets were learning men and were very fond of showing their learning off. In their poetry they employed their wit. Some critics have gone so far as to claim that their poetry is merely a lyrical, lavish representation of their expertise. These authors, for example, used their knowledge of geography, astrology, astronomy, etc. to express feelings by using various pictures of lovers and devotees.

John Donne, one of the most famous metaphysical poets. At a point, Donne compared two lovers with the two legs of the compass, which is quite an unusual analogy. The accomplishment of these poets, however, lies in their ability to quite clearly make such far-fetched similes and metaphors understandable. Their poetry did not follow the normal patterns of contemporary times, and the key subjects they dealt with were love and religion. These poets shared a philosophical viewpoint and strongly rejected the idealized human existence and physical love mode that was a tradition in Elizabethan poetry (Abrams, 1999: 158).

"A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is one of the most celebrated and most important poems by John Donne, in which he declares, quite ingeniously, his ideal of divine love that transcends the ordinary and inferior love of others based on mere physicality.

1.2 Biography of John Donne

John Donne was an English scholar, poet, soldier and secretary (1572 to 1631). He was born into a Catholic family in London, a legacy of the Catholic Revival, and became a priest in the Church of England reluctantly. He was (1621-1631) the Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London (Colclough, 2004). He is regarded as the philosophical poets' pre-eminent representative. His literary works, including sonnets, love poems, religious poems, epigrams, are known for their sensual and metaphorical nature.

Donne's style is characterized by abrupt openings and various paradoxes, ironies and dislocations. His early career was marked by poetry that contained enormous knowledge of English society and he met with harsh criticism of that knowledge. The notion of true religion is another significant theme in Donne's poetry, something that he spent a lot of time contemplating and about which he also theorized. He has published secular poetry as well as love and erotic poetry. He is renowned for his mastery of philosophical conceits in particular (Jokinen, 2006).

Donne lived in poverty for many years, in spite of his poetic and educational skills. He spent a lot of the money he inherited on womanizing, literature, pastimes, and traveling during and after his schooling. Donne married Anne More secretly in 1601, with whom he had twelve children (ibid). He was ordained a deacon and then an Anglican priest in 1615, but he did not want to take Holy Orders and did so only because it was ordered by the king. He acted as a remembrance as well.

In 1576, when Donne was four years old, Donne's father died, leaving his mother, Elizabeth Heywood, responsible for raising the children alone (Colclough, 2004). Donne's mother married Dr. John Syminges, a rich widower with three of her own children, a few months after her husband died.

Donne was privately educated; however, there is no proof that he was trained by Jesuits to support the common assertion (ibid). He started studying at Hart Hall, now Hertford College, Oxford, in 1583, at the age of 11. After studying there for three years, Donne was admitted to Cambridge University, where he studied for a further

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three years. However, due to his Catholicism, Donne could not receive a degree from either college, because he declined to take the Oath of Supremacy needed to graduate (Walton, 1999).

Donne spent most of his substantial inheritance on women, reading, pastimes and travel following his education (Langstaff, 1988: 346-349). Donne fell in love with Egerton's niece, Anne More, for the next four years, and they were secretly married just before Christmas. Against the wishes of both Egerton and George More in 1601, who was Lieutenant of the Tower and father to Anne. This engagement, upon discovery, destroyed Donne's career, firing him and putting him in Fleet Jail. (Brooke, 1885). Anne gave birth to 12 children in 16 years of marriage, three died before they were ten. Donne wrote but did not publish *Biathanatos*, his defense of suicide, during this period (Greenblatt, 2012). On 15 August 1617, five days after giving birth to their 12th child, his wife died. Donne mourned her intensely, and wrote in his 17th Holy Sonnet of his love and loss.

In 1602 John Donne was elected as Member of Parliament (MP) for the constituency of Brackley, but membership was not a paid position. Donne again sat as an MP in the Addled Parliament of 1614 for Taunton, but he did not make a reported speech although he attracted five appointments within his company. Even though he was satisfied with Donne's service, James declined to reinstate him in court and encouraged him to take holy orders instead. Donne eventually acceded to the wishes of the king and was ordained a priest in the Church of England in 1615 (Durant, 1961).

Donne received an honorary doctorate of divinity from Cambridge University of 1615 and became a royal chaplain in the same year and a divinity reader at Lincoln's Inn in 1616 (Colclough, 2004). In late November and early December 1623, he contracted a nearly fatal disease, believed to be either typhus or a combination of a cold accompanied by a period of fever. Donne died on March 31, 1631, and was buried in the former Cathedral of St Paul (ibid).

1.3 General Meaning of the Poem

"A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" It displays several characteristics associated with metaphorical poetry in the seventeenth century in general and with Donne's work in particular. At their temporary parting, the poem tenderly comforts the speaker's lover, asking that they separate peacefully and quietly, without tears or protests. The celebration of earthly love by Donne in this way is sometimes referred to the "religion of love," a key feature of many other famous Donne poems.

1.4 Characteristics of Metaphysical Poetry

Metaphysical poetry is defined as a "highly intellectualized poetry marked by bold and ingenious conceits, incongruous imagery, complexity and subtlety of thought, frequent use of paradox, and often by deliberate harshness or rigidity of expression".

Main features of the metaphysical poetry are:

1) Concentration

One of the main characteristics of metaphysical poetry is focus. A philosophical poem is often tightly woven and appears to be short.

2) Metaphysical Dissimilar Images

Its fondness for conceits is a striking feature of metaphysical poetry. A conceit is a contrast that is more striking in its creativity than its justness. "In things unlike, all similarities discover likeness: when we are made to accept likeness while being strongly aware of unlikeness, a comparison becomes a conceit" (Gardner, 1957). Metaphysical poetry is teeming with conceits.

3) **Learnedness**

Metaphysical poets were men of learning, and scholarship laden their poems. They sought to be singular and novel in their reflections, having been learned. They had their own ideas and a new way to convey their ideas was figured out.

4) **Mechanism of Sensibility**

In the midst of the most diverse types of experience, the deep learning of the metaphysical poets had become part of the poetic sensibility and it proved to be of utmost value to them in exploring analogy.

5) **Cynicism**

Cynicism in the erotic verse of philosophical poets is a characteristic that stands out prominently. In the way of Petrarch, "idealizing the lady and falsifying the author," it was the trend to compose love poems. Donne rebelled against this artificiality and, in an original and realistic vein, he wrote love poems.

6) **Unconventional Openings**

The era of Donne saw the drama grow tremendously and Donne himself was a great frequenter of plays. Like him, his followers had good dramatic imaginations as well.

7) **Metrical Harshness**

It seems that the verses of metaphysical poets are harsh and clipped. It was rightly noted that the harshness of Donne cannot be distinguished from his poetic experience. Harshness is an important part of a philosophical poet's poetry. Grierson noted that the harshness of Donne is not an indicator of his carelessness or indifference to his art (Grierson, 1921).

1.5 **Motifs of "Valediction: Prohibiting Mourning"**

1. **Spheres:** The obsession of Donne with spheres rests partly on the beauty of these shapes and partly on the connections that can be drawn from them that are almost infinite. Donne used conceits to expand analogies and to make thematic relations between otherwise dissimilar objects, like other metaphysical poets. The speaker compares her to a faultless form, the sphere, which contains neither corners nor edges, instead of only praising his beloved.
2. **Discovery and Conquest:** In the love poetry of Donne, in particular, trips of exploration and conquest demonstrate the mystery and magnificence of the love affairs of the speakers. "This comparison demonstrates the way in which the beloved's body and personality prove endlessly fascinating to a person falling in love."
3. **Reflections:** Donne makes reference in his love poetry to the reflections that exist in eyes and tears. Donne emphasizes, with this motive, the way in which loved ones and their perfect love could contain each other, creating full, full worlds. "A Valediction: Forbidden Mourning" illustrates the leave-taking process between the two lovers. As the speaker cries, he realizes that in his tears, the picture of his beloved is mirrored.

1.6 **Metaphor**

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A metaphor is "a figure of speech that, for rhetorical effect, directly refers to one thing by mentioning another". It may provide (or obscure) clarification or distinguish two concepts with hidden similarities. Metaphors are also compared, such as antithesis, hyperbole, metonymy, and simile, with other forms of figurative language. Metaphors are contrasted with similes most commonly. For example, it is said that a metaphor is 'a simplified analogy' or 'analogical fusion' or that they 'operate in a similar way' or are 'based on the same mental mechanism' or that 'simple analogy processes are at work in metaphor'. It is also noted that 'a boundary is fuzzy between metaphor and analogy' and 'the difference between them could be defined (metaphorically) as the comparison of the distance between items.' "Metaphor in the Columbia Encyclopedia claims that the objects in the analogy are identical in relation, whereas a simile merely implies a resemblance by using terms such as "like" or "as". A common-type metaphor is usually considered better than a simile for this reason.

1.7 Cognitive Concept

The concept of cognition is closely linked to abstract concepts such as mind, reasoning, perception, intellect, understanding, and many others that explain various human mind capabilities and predicted artificial or synthetic intellect properties.

Cognition is an abstract feature of advanced living organisms; it is thus examined as a direct feature of a brain or an abstract mind. It is used to refer to the mental functions, mental processes and states of intelligent beings in psychology and artificial intelligence (humans, human organizations, highly autonomous robots).

The term "cognition" is also "used in a wider sense to mean the act of knowing or knowledge, and may be interpreted in a social or cultural sense to describe the emergent development of knowledge and concepts within a group that culminate in both thought and action" (Lakof and Mark, 2004).

1.8 Cognitive Metaphor

Cognitive metaphor refers in terms of another to the interpretation of one idea, or intellectual domain. The perception of quantity in terms of directionality (e.g. "the price of peace is rising") or the knowledge of time in terms of money is an example of this (e.g. "I spent time at work today"). Any mental organization of human experience may be a cognitive metaphor. The regularity in which different languages use the same, often perceptually dependent, metaphors has led to the hypothesis that neural mappings in the brain lead to the mapping between mental domains (Feldman, Narayana, 2004: 385–392).

In their work *Metaphors We Live By* in 1980, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson first thoroughly discussed this concept, and a detailed analysis of the underlying processes. In simple terms, cognitive metaphors are useful for interpreting complex concepts and are therefore often used to provide insight into abstract models and theories (Lakof and Mark, 2004).

SECTION TWO

John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"

2.1 Analysis of the Poem

“A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” by John Donne was written by Donne for his wife Anne, in either 1611 or 1612. It was penned before he left on a trip to Europe. The poem is divided into sets of four lines, or quatrains (Stein, 1992: 157) .

In this poem, John Donne incorporates the classical themes of love and spirituality into his poetry while employing the highly popular method of metaphorical comparison. The speaker denies the sorrow that accompanies separated lovers, and also expresses the distinct realms of physical and spiritual love.

The first and second stanzas of Donne’s poem utilize the metaphor of the death of virtuous men along with the undertone of earthly phenomenon and spirituality to deny the mourning of the separated lovers. The poem begins with the image of the dying virtuous men to symbolize the mundane passing of the individual from life to death:

As virtuous men pass mildly away
and whisper to their souls to go” (Donne, 1636)

In comparison to such tragedy, the lovers are metaphorically juxtaposed to death in order to demonstrate their sorrow over separation as trivial. By revealing the image of death in comparison to the separation of lovers Donne shifts the perspective of the reader to realize that the tragedies of love are in fact minor compared to the true tragedy of death. In comparing his departure to the deaths of "virtuous souls," he refers to the fact that there is no fear of death for pious souls who are secure in their religion. Instead, since they know that everlasting life awaits them, they accept it, and they will be embraced by the arm of their Lord (Napierkowski, 1998: 17).

In the second stanza, Donne juxtaposes the image of earthly phenomenon to physical acts of mourning in order to similarly deny those actions as unseemly. He also denies the physical outbursts as equivalently unnecessary. Donne further denies the lover’s lament by stating:

So let us melt, and make no noise
no tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move” (Donne, 1636)

In the third stanza, the poet contrasts the harmless “trepidation of the spheres” (a heavenly vibration) with destructive earthquakes (an earthly vibration) “to differentiate between his and his lover’s spiritual union and the physicality” (Lindberg, 2003: 36). The images are drawn from the geological and astronomical sciences. While earthquakes are a cause of damage, destruction and fear, the movement of celestial bodies, trepidation of the spheres is innocent and harmless. The intolerable and unbearable essence of their separation is thus alleviated by comparing it with the planet’s critical but calm movement (Sebastian, 2017):

Moving of th’ earth brings harms and fears,
Men reckon what it did, and meant;
But trepidation of the spheres,
Though greater far, is innocent.

More overtly than the previous stanza, stanzas four and five further enforce Donne’s theme of spiritual love over physical love by instilling the metaphorical undertone of cosmological phenomenon. Stanza four and five overtly express the theme of spiritual love’s transcendence in order to make an explicit and understandable distinction between the two realms of love. As a result of this highly refined love, Donne asserts the transcendence of spiritual love over physical love. (Barnes and Noble www.sparklenotes.com/poetry/donne/section5/)

Dull sublunary lovers' love

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(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.
But we by a love so much refined,
That our selves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

The sixth stanza reveals Donne's unique form of dissimilar images of beaten gold reveals the ability of spiritual love to not only withstand separation but to grow stronger.

Like gold to airy thinness beat (Donne, 1636)

The lovers are also malleable and adaptive enough to be continually subjected to hardship and not bend nor break. (Stein; 1992, 163)

Donne's extended metaphorical conceit begins in the seventh stanza as he uses the form of the compass to expound the characteristics of spiritual love. The two separate moving feet of the compass symbolize the individual lovers, but the fixed foot symbolizes the spiritual love that bonds and keeps the individuals transfixed into cohesion:

if they be two, they are two so
as stiff twin compasses are two". (Ibid)

Despite the ability of the compass's feet to be moved, each foot moves in relation to the other and acts as a support to create the perfect circle. The neo-platonic nature of love is depicted through the conceits and suggests the union of souls. The twin compasses suggests "a world of twoness united" (Stein; 1992, 165).

The compass conceit is applicable to the separated lovers as it demonstrates the ability of the spiritually bonded lovers to bend and rely on one another in spite of their circumstantial separation. Even in the face of estrangement, the lovers remain unwavering in their love; just as the fixed foot holds the compass together, the lovers are held together by the security of their spiritual connection.

Donne melds the metaphor of fixation and dependence by stating:

Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do".

Through the conceit of the compass, Donne reveals to the readers that it is not enough to reach the realm of spiritual love, but instead the individuals must unite and work as one to uphold the purity of that spiritual love in spite of trials and tribulations.

Furthermore, the eighth stanza maintains the extended metaphor of the compass by revealing the results of yearning through the use of a sexual double entendre. Once again, Donne utilizes the compass metaphor to illustrate the juxtaposition of spiritual love to remain steadfast yet be flexible enough to rotate and adapt to changing situations. Donne states, "and though it in the center sit/yet when the other far doth roam/it leans and hearkens after it".

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home. (Donne, 1636)

The ninth stanza concludes the compass metaphor while harmonizing it with the symbolism of alchemy. Ultimately, the three separate elements of the compass combine through mutual dependence to create the image of the perfect circle.

Donne completes the poem with the image of a return, which is juxtaposed to the previous whole of the poem that dealt with separation: (Martz, 1978)

thy firmness makes my circle just
and makes me end where I begun”.

Through such a contrast Donne reveals the ultimate culmination of spiritual love as he reconciles the individual's ability to withstand estrangement, but also affirms the power to return to the separated lover. (ibid)

Ultimately, Donne's poem shifts the readers' perspective to a more realistic approach to love in which the reader identifies with their personal trials of love. Essentially, this identification by the reader allows them to be able to learn from spiritual love and gain hope that they have the power to overcome their difficulties and emerge at a purer form of love (ibid).

2.2 The use of cognitive metaphor in Donne's Poem

To express his message, Donne relies primarily on extended metaphors. When he dies, he compares his separation from his wife to the separation of the soul of a man from his body (second stanza). Physical love is represented by the body; spiritual or intellectual love is represented by the soul. Although Donne and his wife are different, physical love cannot be expressed; they are, therefore, like the body of a dead man. However, Donne notes, since their souls are one, they remain united spiritually and mentally. So, Donne continues that when they split, he and his wife should let their physical connection "melt" (line 5).

He follows that metaphor with others, saying they should not cry sentimental "tear-floods" or indulge in "sigh-tempests" (line 6) when they say farewell. Such base sentimentality would cheapen their relationship. He also compares himself and his wife with celestial spheres, such as the sun and other stars, since their love is so deep that it resides on a higher plane than the love of husbands and wives whose relationship focuses solely on physical pleasures that demand that man and woman still stay together, physically, to be enjoyed. Ultimately, Donne compares his bond with his wife to that of the two legs of a compass drawing. While the legs are distinct components of the compass, all of them are part of the same object. In unison, the legs work. The inner leg, while its point is fixed at the middle, must rotate in the direction of the outer leg if the outer leg traces a circle. Thus, Donne says, although he and his wife are separated, they remain united as the legs of the compass, since they are part of the same soul.

SECTION THREE

CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Conclusion

"A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" is one of the most celebrated and most important poems by John Donne in which he quite ingeniously declares his ideal of divine love that transcends the ordinary and inferior love of others based on mere physicality.

Like John Donne, cognitive poetics has a groundbreaking outlook on metaphor. In his poem "A Valediction: Grief Forbidden" he makes extensive use of philosophical metaphor. Donne compares his partnership to that of the two legs of a drawing compass with his wife. We will discover Donne's numerous witty metaphors for his identity through these metaphors, as well as the lovers and the relationship

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