

Cavalier and Metaphysical Poets

①

Cavalier Poets were a group of monarchists who supported the King Charles-I against the Puritan Parliament. The Puritan Parliament was led by Oliver Cromwell. They are also called "Ben's tribe" or "Ben's boys" as they called themselves. They were the followers of their master Ben Jonson. The main feature of John's Jonson's poetry is a fine balance between classicism and elegance with a personal tone. Ben's lyrics can be seen as a reaction against Petrarch's ornamental language and high-sounding diction. This kind of poetic language reached its climax in Spenser's Faerie Queene. Similar reaction against Petrarchan tradition can also be seen in John Donne's Poems, although there are certain differences between Cavalier and Metaphysical poets.

The most prominent Cavalier poets are Thomas Carew, Robert Herrick, John Suckling and Richard Lovelace. Criticising Spenser's ornamental poetic diction, Jonson asserts that "Spenser writ no language". Johnson's poetry is characterised by highly personal tone, elegance with a combination of classical form and colloquial movement. His elegance and clarity of tone is best represented in the well known line "Drink to me only with thine eyes". Herrick's most of the poems deal with English folk themes, such as celebrations of local festivals, seasonal customs. There is also a sense of "carpe diem" running deep in his poems. For example:

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying,
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying.

In the poems of Thomas Carew, we can see elements of both Metaphysical and Jonsonian poems. Carew

②

poems especially suited to the taste of Charles I. He sometimes shows the frankness of Donne and sometimes elegance and classicism of his master Jonson. He is known for a perfect mixture of Donne's style and Jonson's elegance. Similarly Sir John Suckling shows a mixture of both Metaphysical and Cavalier influences in his poems. He combines the cynical strain in Donne's early love poems and with the joyfulness and elegance of Ben Jonson.

A true Cavalier poet is Richard Lovelace, who is better known for his gallantry. He depicts clearly more about political unrest of his time:

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage.
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage

The Cavalier and the Metaphysical poets combine the elements of style of each other, although the differences between Donne and Jonson are very clear. Their followers show a fine combination of influences of both the masters. Andrew Marvell, for example shows the personal tone and elegance of Jonson and also the metaphysical wit and conceit of Donne. Marvell's poems range from political to personal. In his poem To His Coy Mistress, the metaphysical wit can be clearly observed, when he says:

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, lady, were no crime,
But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near.

The term "Metaphysical" was first used by Dryden to refer to Donne's style of poetry, when he said, "Donne affects metaphysics". The literal meaning of the word "meta" is "beyond" and "physical" means "related to physical nature". Thus, it implies reasoning and understanding relationship between human beings and the elements of this universe. Discussing Metaphysical poetry, Dr. Johnson asserts that in Donne's poetry "heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together". Donne's fame as Metaphysical

poet rests on Songs and Sonnets, which is a collection of 55 lyrics. All these lyrics were published ~~in~~ after his death. Donne's poetical works are divided into three stages:

1. This stage shows Donne's cynical strain and his attitude towards women and love is one of contempt and rejection.
2. The second stage of poetic development shows conjugal love and spiritual peace.
3. The third stage shows a Platonic strain of love, where it is treated like a holy passion, like love of a devotee for his Maker.

The metaphysical poetry was a revolt against Spenserian and Petrarchan traditions. Donne's poetry shows a good fusion of intellectual agility and deep passion. He expresses his own intellectual, spiritual and amorous experiences in frank and direct way. His poems are marked with metaphysical conceits, obscurity, abrupt beginning and colloquial style. An example of abrupt beginning is seen in The Canonisation:

"For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love"

An example of metaphysical conceit is observed when he compares the flea with his nuptial bed:

"This flea is you and I, and this

Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;"

Here we can see that a strange resemblance has been made and proved logically, between flea and the nuptial bed. The obscurity in his poems is caused by imagery from far-fetched sources like theology, astronomy, philosophy, science and geography. Donne's poetry is also appreciated for "unification of sensibility" or intellectual analysis of emotion.