

STUDYING THE CONCEPT OF ANDROGYNY IN JOHN DONNE'S SELECTED POEMS: "A VALEDICTION: FORBIDDING MOURNING", "THE CANONIZATION", "ECSTASY" AND "UNDERTAKING"

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Abstract

Nowadays Freud and his theories are known by most people around the world. One of these theories that has great impact in psychology by defining a new feature of mind based on masculinity and feminine is androgynous that creates a new way of thinking and also causes a revolution in art and literature. Beside that nobody can deny the popular character of Donne as a famous poet whose style of writing was unique and never becomes old. The most famous poems of him are romantic ones which are more about love, emotion, beloved and lover characters and definition of true love through unifying souls. Now the question is based on the definition of androgynous and features of Donne's poem how this theory can reveal in Donne's romantic poems? Is there any relationship?

Keywords: Love, Androgynous, Unifying Souls, Masculinity, Femininity.

1. Introduction

John Donne (22 January 1572 – 31 March 1631) was an English poet and cleric in England. He is considered the pre-eminent representative of the metaphysical poet. His works are noted for their strong, sensual style and include sonnets, love poems, religious poems, Latin translations, epigrams, elegies, songs, satires and sermons. His poetry is noted for its vibrancy of language and inventiveness of metaphor, especially compared to that of his contemporaries. Donne's style is characterized by abrupt openings and various paradoxes, ironies and dislocations. These features, along with his frequent dramatic or everyday speech rhythms, his tense syntax and his tough eloquence, were both a reaction against the smoothness of conventional Elizabethan poetry and an adaptation into English of European baroque and mannerist techniques. His early career was marked by poetry that bore immense knowledge of English society and he met that knowledge with sharp criticism. Another important theme in Donne's poetry is the idea of true religion, something that he spent much

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time considering and about which he often theorized. He wrote secular poems as well as erotic and love poems. He is particularly famous for his mastery of metaphysical conceits. An extended metaphor that combines two vastly different ideas into a single idea, often using imagery. An example of this is his equation of lovers with saints in "The canonization". Unlike the conceits found in other Elizabethan poetry, most notably Petrarchan conceits, which formed clichéd comparisons between more closely related objects (such as a rose and love), metaphysical conceits go to a greater depth in comparing two completely unlike objects. One of the most famous of Donne's conceits is found in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" where he compares two lovers who are separated like the two legs of a compass.

The poem "Canonization" by Donne is a romantic poem that the lover asks his addressee to be quiet, and let him love. If the addressee cannot hold his tongue, the speaker tells him to criticize him for other shortcomings (other than his tendency to love he just repine about what beloved done to him. The poem about the speaker and his lover will cause them to be canonized admitted to the sainthood of love.

The other romantic poem by Donne is "Ecstasy" that Donne applies the feeling of ecstasy to the experience if the lovers find that the essence of love is not sex but the overpowering feeling of unity in diversity. Donne compare the lovers to the two armies only those who are gifted can understand the dialogue of the two souls and realize the true nature of love.

Beside those romantic poems, "Undertaking" is also one of the best of him, In which he says he did something that is great but he doesn't want anyone to know it then he says how he achieved it very hard. He believes the valuable love is what you can hide from others. Then he states not even the color of skin should matter in love. So that love is perished and men shouldn't waste it for it is rare and should be kept hidden from men who misuse it.

The last romantic one that is so considerable and has important figure, is "Epithalamion" or "The marriage song of lady Elizabeth" it's a kind of poem that is written about marriage and describes the day of getting married with artful techniques in which Donne might be considered as the most talented among other poets of this genre.

Masculine traditionally is assumed to mean strong, muscular, active less worried emotionally. Therefore based on this definition masculine poem is a kind of poem in which poet just think in a masculine way which means full of logic and lack of emotion .this kind of poem refers to its poet is kind of one dimensional poem. Thus due to this lack of emotion , the poems which has both elements of masculinity and femininity will be considered.

2. Theoretical and methodological consideration

Sigmund Freud born (6 May 1856 – 23 September 1939) was an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, a clinical method for treating psychopathology through dialogue between a patient and a psychoanalyst. He qualified as a doctor of medicine .upon completing, he was appointed a docent in neuropathology and became an affiliated professor. Freud lived and worked in Vienna, having set up his clinical practice there in1886. In 1938 Freud left Austria to escape the Nazis and died in1939.

Freud's work can be divided in four major periods: the first one is the exploration of neurosis from the inception of practice (1886) until "The studies on Hysteria" (-1895).the second phase is self-analysis-(1895-1899). The third period is Id psychology, in which it was elaborated as the first system of psychoanalytic psychology – (1900-1914). And the fourth and last one is Ego psychology, involving a considerable extension ad elaboration of the earlier ideas, lasting from 1914 until 1939.

Studies of mythology shows that the term androgynous can be also find in Greek gods like Aphrodite. Based on Freud's theory, when a male child turn his curiosity to sexual life, although at first he thought that girls have the same sexual orgasm but in much smaller size, but after that they believe that they are different this matter becomes their complex . Male child thinks that his mother has penis is thus common source from which are derived the androgynous – from mother goddess. In this field we confront the idea of homosexuality that it denies this idea but later when the psychological experts on these type of human find that the mother of this type has masculine character and the confront with the absence of strong father so they feel sexual with men.

The basic concept of androgynous is one in which the psychological aspects of masculine and feminine as generally understood by western society, are synthesized into a harmonious and balanced whole within a feminist epistemology, it offers an opportunity to escape the power structures and values system of patriarchy, and to attain individual fulfillment in both writing and identity.

In the section that follows Freud's theory of androgynous is applied to Donne's four aforementioned poems

3. Discussion

In the poem "Ecstasy", Donne believes that true love only exists when both bodies and souls are inextricably united. Donne compares bodies to the planet, and souls to the angles that body, and that souls are inseparable but they are independent. According to the medieval mystical conception, ecstasy means a trance-like state in which the soul leaves the body, comes out and holds communion with the divine, the supreme or the over soul of the universe. In Christianity also, it denotes the state of mystic/religious communion with God. Donne uses the religious and philosophical to build his own theory of love. Donne agrees with Plato that true love is spiritual. It is the union of souls but unlike Plato he doesn't ignore the claim of body.

The poem begins the narration of the event with a typically passionate scene as the backdrop for the lovers to embrace and experience ecstasy as it is shown in the first stanza line one:

Where like a pillow on a bed

A pregnant bank swelled up to rest

These are the symbols of sexual desires. Their eyes meet and reflect each other they get a kind of sensation within their hearts and blood, resulting perspiration and blushing: in the second stanza line four:

Our eyes upon one double string

They become ecstatic because their souls have escaped from their bodies to rise to a state of bliss when love join two souls they mingle with each other and give birth to a new finer soul,

which removes the defects and supplies whatever is lacking in either single soul and single sex. The new re-animated soul med up of their two separate souls give them ecstasy .but they cannot forget the body, which is the vehicle and container cover and house of the soul as it is shown the third stanza line two:

Was all the means to make us one?

And by all he means body attractions and sexual activity or in fifth stanza line one:

And whilst our souls negotiate there

The united soul is perfect, unchanging and with new energy and the body is the medium of contact of two souls as it is shown the eleventh stanza:

That abler soul, which thence doth flow,

Defects of loneliness controls.

We then, we are this new soul, know

Of what we are composed and made

For th'athomies of which we grow

Are souls, whom no change can invade?

The poem is also criticism of the conventional idea of love that supports the separation of bodies, and hence the souls we can see in stanza that persona asks why our religious institution have imposed blind thoughts diving the body and souls. As we can see the defense of this idea in this line our bodies, why do we forbear.. In last stanza Donne again mention the idea of united so soul into the soul may flow and he believes that the true love never happens but through the united of souls as it is shown in the sixteenth stanza line one and two:

So must pure lovers 'soul descend,

T' affection, and to faculties.

Despite the obvious physical and psychological differences between two sexes, it is now generally recognized that no single individual is entirely and solely male or female. Every man and woman whether they realize it or not, is androgynous in his physical and psychic

constitution. Therefore base on this theory, it can't be said that the male or female elements is one dimensional, masculine or feminine. this is the benefit of human being for falling in love .when a man or woman fall in love he or she should understand each other and understand their emotion or masculinity of each other so they can unite into one soul and it means there isn't any masculinity or femininity, they experience true love because they are united, they have both male and female elements in their souls .that's why we enjoy the poem ecstasy and it's tangible for us. And the theory of united souls obviously point to this idea that a man and woman cannot have successful relationship, unless they have harmony in their mind and when we say united soul it means that they should be feminine and masculine at the same time and not just one dimensional and the result of this harmony can be the true love. Donne himself is androgynous in his mind he uses emotion true his creating of art phenomenon. Logic isn't the only thing that there is in his poems. No one can compose such poem and bring it to the written order even if he thinks this way. So we can conclude that Donne as a successful poet is androgynous himself and because poet is overflowing of feeling he compose this poem as sudden and by means of the feature of his psyche and although he is a man he uses the emotion as a vehicle of composing of poem and we can communicate with this work of art because our minds are androgynous, too. These overflowing of emotion was shown in the way how he illustrate his beloved and her bodies and face's parts.

In the "Canonization" by John Donne the speaker uses spiritual expression such as mysterious hymn canonized reverend and hermitage .All of these words share a religious connotation with using these words when talking about love the speaker implies that love is similar to a love with God, and that love is spiritual. And by the end of the poem reader determines that "canonization" refers to the way that the poet's love will enter the canon of true love, becoming the pattern by which others judge their own love. As it is shown in the last stanza:

Into the glasses of your eyes

(So made such mirrors, and such spies, that they did all to you epitomize)

Countries, town, courts: beg from above

A pattern of your love.

In the middle of the poem he translate their love to eagle and a dove to reach heaven and at the other part translate it to phoenix that burns in fire and is reborn that suggest even though their flame of passion will consume them, the poet and his beloved will be reborn from the ashes of their love it is shown in the fourth stanza line one:

The phoenix riddle hath more wit

In their resurrection their relationship has become a paradox .the key paradox of love that two individuals become one .by uniting in this way “prove/mysterious by this love” these words may imply the mystery of marriage as it reflects the relationship of Jesus and his church .indeed the new union is unsexed even though it incorporates both sexes. We can see the idea of unifying souls in the sixth stanza line two:

By us; we two being one, are it

“To one neutral things both sexes fit” just like in Christ there is no longer any male or female. Compare the story of love in Plato’s Symposium where the original human beings had the marks of both sexes before they were split into male or female, each person being left to seek his or her other half.

In Freud’s theory, there are really four persons present in every act of intercourse. In successful relationship, all four must be satisfied; otherwise, a normally bisexual individual would be ill-matched with a perfect monosexual one AnthonyStorr a well-known psychotherapist, concludes similarly: “if we are to be consistent in assuming that the irrational quality associated with falling in love is always due to the projection of a subjective element, then we cannot escape the hypothesis that we are all in some sense bisexual”(man’s androgynous nature by Raymond Blais ,O.P.page 4)

Base on the poem and what Freud’s said which was later called androgynous .It can be inferred that love as a perfect love and this kind of love never happens unless the beloved and lover united and it means that there is no superiority for masculine or feminine so both should have feminine and masculine characteristic and normal people are in whom masculine and feminine elements are in perfect harmony. So the belief in androgynous is so tangible in Donne’s canonization when he talks about united of souls and so there isn’t any masculinity or feminine, we have both elements now and that is the key of successful relationship and true love that we can see even in Donne’s characteristic how he shows his emotion to beloved and not just logic. As it is shown in the third stanza line three and in sixth stanza line one?

We can die by it, if not live by love

Who says my tears have overflowed his ground

That it shows how love is important for him as a man just logical reaction of him would be expected, but different emotional reactions through the poem was shown that it is known as overflowing of poet's emotions and there isn't any pretense behind that

In the poem "Undertaking" Donne wants to show a different kind of love. He believes that hiding love is much more difficult than confessing to it and if a person confess his or her love to beloved and she or he accept the proclamation of love and a relationship forms keeping it hidden from everyone is very difficult. And he also believes that the confession may have felt like madness to him.

In this poem in stanza five, the speaker asks if the loved one sees virtue in woman as he does and in the rest of the stanza he asks the loved one to forget him and her. Base on this line the first line is meant as a lead into "if you love women, then you love, could you love me even if I am not a woman?" We can see it in the fifth stanza:

If, as I have, you also do

Virtue in woman see,

And dare love that, and say too,

And forget the him and her.

This poem also has the idea of androgynous and is based on the explanation the poet tries to separate the matter of gender and thinks that can you still love her? The speaker indirectly denies the matter of falling in love based on sex differences and believing that the true love is what you and your beloved change to one soul so that is why the speaker calls himself the most powerful and believes that no one can love her like him .the theory of androgynous also suggest that we have mingled elements of femininity and masculinity inside and behind our body so that the successful relationship is the one that the two souls united.

We can see the androgynous mind of the poet through showing his emotion directly in this poem too, in the fourth stanza that how he discuss true love and separate it from all outward reasons:

(But he who loveliness within

Hath found, all outward loathes,

For he who color loves, and skin, love but their oldest clothes)

The last poem is “Epithalamia “or “Marriage song of the lady Elizabeth” that we know this kind of poem as wedding poem. Donne starts the poem with showing the joyful of this event (marriage) through nature as we can see in the second stanza line one and three:

The household bird with red stomacher,

Lyric lark and the great whispering dove

And that’s one of the symbol of showing of his emotion to love and how artfully he shows his emotion by the mean of masterly using of the nature. It shows that he is a symbol of men that has both feminine and masculine elements in his mind and because of this tangible harmony we are interested in his work of arts.

Finally he resembles the bride and groom to the Phoenixes. And points to the idea of that phoenixes regenerate and get born again. It was said in the sixth stanza line two:

Where motion kindles such fires as shall give.

It seems, one hint that shows Donne is androgynous in his mind, is that he believes, by marriage they may undertake rebirth because their soul gets united. And he also talk about phoenix that base on mythology we know that every period we have just one phoenix and it burns in the fire and from the ashes of this phoenix the new phoenix burns .So base on this we have just one phoenix and it shows the unifying of souls two phoenixes. Or in the tenth stanza line four:

To an inseparable union go

We have also the theory of androgynous that they should united to one soul, it means that there isn't just masculinity or feminine but also one soul with both characteristics. Or the other mention of androgynous in these lines in fourth stanza:

(You're twice, inseparable and one

Go then where the bishop stay to make you one, his way, which diver's way

Must be affected: and when all is past, and that you're one, by hearts and handmade fast

You two have one was left, yourselves to entwine

base on this line it can be comprehended that the poet believes that although they are two bodies but they are united in their souls and he also believes that after bishop proclaim that now they are couples ,their souls starts unifying and it means that now they are one and there is no superiority or differences. And base on androgynous it means that the have the both elements of masculine and feminine and they are in harmony that's why they can get along with each other. And finally Donne finishes the poem by discussing the sexual desires and activities between them. And that's what Freud calls it a successful marriage.

4. Conclusion

As a result through surveying of the theory of androgynous in Donne's poem we can easily understand that people are always searching for work of arts that can communicate with. This communication never happens unless we find something that is tangible for us. So because Donne's poem is so harmonized in both poet's character and poem's style of composing, it is so enjoyable for the readers to spend time reading this kind. This harmony means that the balance of masculine and feminine elements that is the harmony of emotion and logic never happened unless the poet who has androgynous mind overflow it. It is obvious in different parts of the poems that Donne speaks about the unifying of souls through which the reader can achieve true love. Or in some lines how masterly shows his emotion, although he is a man. it can't be said that Donne just works a lot and thinks to create this work of art since we know that poem is overflow of writer's feeling. Thus base on Freud's theory a normal man is one who is not one dimensional , which mean you should have both masculine and feminine elements in your mind and Donne has this benefit in his mind personality and therefore in his poems.

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