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John Donne: "The Anniversary"

John Donne, a relative to Sir Thomas More, was born into a Catholic family, but had to live under the dissension and prosecution of Catholics under counter Anglican forces like Queen Elizabeth I of England. Donne forbiddingly married Anne More, and throughout his life, he created numerous poems such as "The Anniversary", which directly paralleled to his beliefs. "The Anniversary" can be understood through the blend of Donne's background, style, and metaphysical attributes.

Donne's impact and pioneering of metaphysical poetry greatly characterizes "The Anniversary" to adhere to his validated principles. For instance, Donne "applies common characteristics of Metaphysical poetry—like punctuation throughout, at end of most stanzas to show stream of consciousness in conjunction to declarations throughout" (Inglis). Donne's poem flows in conjunction with declarations and punctuation, as seen in "Only our love hath not decay; This no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday." Such pausing offers separations between thoughts, and makes the message appear conversational between his beloved and himself. Moreover, "Donne uses metaphors to address his point," which include "All Kings" and "The sun itself" (Donkar). Through the use of such conceits, extremely high powers are applied in comparison to their love, as "all other things [like the sun and kings] to their destruction draw." Such comparisons harness the immensity being the love shared between the individuals. Additionally, Donne typically

applies “largely simple, monosyllabic diction,” like “But we no more than all the rest,” which offers a clear, concise statement of their affections (Donkar). Such adherences to metaphysical style denote that through Donne’s “The Anniversary,” “true love refuses to obey external laws of space and time,” “transubstantiates all,” and as Donne indicates—“ everlasting”— in every respect (Zawacki).

With relation to metaphysical concepts, John Donne’s timeless message is optimized through complex style choices. An important aspect of metaphysical poetry is that from a base idea comes “immediate shock of contradiction” (Low). This idea is epitomized through “The Anniversary,” as Donne initially writes how “Only our love hath no decay,” but then shifts to “When bodies to their graves.” Their love was inherently discussed to be eternal—escaping death—but then shockingly ends. But, this shock adds to the greater resolve that their “love inaugurates a temporal infinity” (Zawacki). Furthermore, “among metaphysical poets, the technique of rhythm as well as the use of imagery, is inseparably allied to the artist’s background of thought” (Smith). “The Anniversary” connotes the classic rhyme scheme through “When thou and I first one another saw: All other things to their destruction draw.” Such rhyming patterns correlate with the imagery of having to “leave in death these eyes and ears, Oft fed with true oaths, and sweet salt tears” to signify the vivid state of their tenderness in accordance to his consistent inconsistency of his rhyme pattern. Donne’s imagery proves to be “crystal-clear, serving as a window, through which the thought may be observed,” and “not as an ornament which detracts from the central design” (Smith). Often, metaphysical poets will apply “The small, everyday image linked with a large idea,” like how Donne describes how their individual love “hath no decay” on Earth, but that their love will “increasè[d] were above” in heaven

(Smith). By such stylistic choices, the theme of love-everlasting within “The Anniversary” is wholly understood.

Along with his stylistic choices, Donne’s Catholic roots plays into the writing of his poems. Donne highlights that “When bodies to their graves, souls from their graves remove,” and there lies “a love increased there above.” Catholic doctrine notes that “true *spiritual* marriage is made by God, and is therefore eternal,” which means that Donne views “death were no divorce” (Woofenden). Hence, Donne’s spiritual genesis relates to his emotional connections and ideals throughout “The Anniversary”.

In addition to such stylistic components, Donne implements the true meaning of being a metaphysical poet into his writing. It should be noted that “The metaphysical poet is interested first in his own life and experiences,” as John Donne uses pronouns like “I,” “our,” and “us” to distinguish that the vast devotion discussed is distinguishable to his own history and life (Smith). Likewise, metaphysical poets predominantly discuss “love, death, or religion as the more important matters of experience in the life of the poet” (Smith). Donne evidently notes all aspects of metaphysical poetry by even specifically referencing “death,” “love,” and using the words “blessed,” and “there above” to suggest a religious connotation for the eternal power within love. In alignment to the metaphysical movement, Donne reveals the course of “The Anniversary” to be similar to his own life in conjunction to the guidelines of topics typical to the period.

“The Anniversary” proves to align with metaphysical principles, not only in structure, but in content. John Donne’s stylistic elements of rhyming, imagery, conceits, and punctuation establish “a special region, distinguished from the social world of king and court, and by an act of will” that “sets it apart from the destructive powers of time” (Low). Not only does the divine

act of love “hath no decay,” but John Donne pioneers “The Anniversary” toward the “reinvention of love” to a ceaseless, pious level (Low).

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