

What is a metaphysical conceit?

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What is a metaphysical conceit? Trace elements of conceits in Donne's poetry. Or What is meant by a metaphysical conceit? Write a note on the use of conceits in Donne's poetry. Or What is meant by conceit? Write a note on the use of conceit in John Donne's poems.

John Donne (1571-1631) is the pioneer and most prominent metaphysical poet of the 17th century. His poems are widely celebrated and notable for the use of metaphysical conceits.

Metaphysical Conceit is a comparison between two far-fetched things. They are characterized by their elaborate and extended metaphors. The intellectual comparison that occurs between two unlike things innovates a new meaning. It is a notable feature of metaphysical poetry. Generally, metaphysical poets use conceits in their poems. While using conceits, a poet showcases wit, intellect, and profound knowledge.

Comparing the Lovers with the Legs of a Compass

In John Donne's poem "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," metaphysical conceits explore the depth of love and the connection between two souls. The poem opens with the speaker addressing his lover during a short departure, assuring her that their parting should not be accompanied by sorrow or grief. He compares their love to a drawing compass, stating:

If they be two, they are two so

As stiff twin compasses are two;

Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show

To move, but doth, if the other do.

Here, the conceit of the compass is used to express the idea that their souls are inseparably linked, despite physical separation. Just as a compass remains connected to its fixed center point while one leg travels, the lovers' love remains intact and unaffected by distance. The comparison highlights the steadfastness and stability of their bond.

Defend the Love and make it Divine

In Donne's poem "The Canonization," metaphysical conceits are employed to celebrate and defend the love between the speaker and his beloved. The poem argues that love isn't just a silly game for young people to play, but a serious, lasting, and even holy force. The poem's speaker, a middle-aged man, has fallen deeply in love, and he spends the first stanzas of the poem telling a friend of his to stop making fun and just let him be in love, already. Love, he insists, is much more than an emotional storm that silly kids get caught up in. It's a power so strong, transformative, and purifying that true lovers are "canonized" by their love. In other words, love can make people into saints, wholeheartedly devoted to a sacred task. The speaker argues:

*We can die by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombs and hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And by these hymns, all shall approve
Us canonized for love:*

Worldly Bedroom

"The Sun Rising," is an excellent example of Donne's treatment of love and use of conceits. In this poem, the speaker rebukes the sun, telling it to go away because it's interrupting a special moment with his lover. In the later stanzas, Donne uses striking conceits to prove the intense love between the lovers.

The speaker argues that he and his beloved are so content with each other that they don't need anything else. Their bedroom renders the whole world. The sun won't find the West Indies and East Indies to their places, but everything is now inside the lovers' bedroom. The lovers are everything themselves, they are all the kings' states and princes.

*She's all states, and all princes, I,
Nothing else is.*

Donne's poetry is a striking example of his use of conceits. The metaphysical conceits help to develop the themes of the poems through the use of intellect and witty arguments. His poems are widely celebrated and notable for the use of metaphysical conceits.