



A Bakhtinian Reading of John Donne's Parody Poem "The Bait"

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Abstract

While conventional critics seek the comic aspect of parody, modernist critics credit parody with questioning mainstream literary trends and subverting literary production. For instance, Mikhail Bakhtin believes in parody's power to create "a decrowning double" by turning the official worldview up-side-down. For experimental poets like John Donne, parody transcends mere comical imitation into a serious practice. Donne, having lived in the heyday of the Renaissance with its overemphasis on decorum and courtly love, sought refuge in parody to resist and disturb existing norms of versification and offer an alternative worldview. This paper examines John Donne's parody poem "The Bait" in the light of Bakhtin's concept of parody as a decrowning double. The analysis shows that not only had Donne resorted to parody to criticize the society, but he also employed it to undermine established rules of poetry. The study concludes that Donne used parody to create an important platform to liberate poetry from dominant modes of versification, invite readers, often by means of defamiliarisation, to reconsider their stance and literary taste, and promote experimental styles; thus, Donne transcends the norms of prevalent courtly love poetry once and for all.

Keywords: John Donne, Parody, Poetry, Mikhail Bakhtin, Canon, Neoclassicism, Intertextuality

1. Introduction

John Donne's age was turbulent: politically, religiously, and intellectually. Donne was born into a Catholic family when England was extremely oppressive to Catholics and tried them for high treason. Donne, realising how dangerous it would be to remain catholic, decided, despite the deep anguish, to convert to Anglicanism. Some critics see this as compromising pragmatism and ambition to seek self-advancement and public positions (Carey 17–18). Surviving on the fringes of society, Donne had to live with the agony of this uneasy decision until he died. According to Carey, "Donne was born into a terror, and formed by it," (Carey 4). Naturally, that influenced the way he composed poetry, in form and content. It seems in writing poetry, however, Donne decided to resist the standing dominant styles of versification rather than compromise his experimental identity. Donne's attempts to break through into the literary scene took the forms of personal and experimental poems that adopted a different worldview, a new sensibility, and different poetic forms. That meant Donne had to come face to face with the well-established rules of poetry of his time. One technique he followed to engage in dialogue with and defy his contemporaries was to resort to parodic poetry.

When Donne started writing poetry at an early age, he had to face a strong literary current that had been in the making for two centuries. It was not easy to fit in writing against the grain. Donne's most famous contemporary, Sir Philip Sidney, defines poetry as "an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in the word mimesis – that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture – with this end, to teach and delight," (Sidney 101). But from his poetry, John Donne seems to have always attempted to depart from these rules of decorum. Donne's new poetic intention is exemplified in his early declaration "I sing not, siren-like, to tempt, for I / Am harsh" (9-10) (Donne and Robbins 50). Donne and his few followers were famously, yet unfairly, framed as Metaphysical Poets. Because Eliot believes the term "metaphysical poets", imposed by neo-classical critics, has long done more damage or "abuse" than good, he prefers the "school of Donne"(Eliot and Rainey 192, 200). Poetry at John Donne's age was heading towards what later was known as the Augustan Age, Neo-classical Age, or the Age of Reason. The term "Augustan Poets" is self-conscious in the sense that the English poets wanted to imitate great Roman poets such as Virgil and Horace who lived during the reign of Caesar Augustus (63BC-14AD), the Emperor of Rome. When Donne's contemporaries dominated the literary scene, imitation was encouraged, supported, and promoted—

experimentation was rejected, framed, and marginalised. Alexander Pope's "Essay on Criticism" (Pope 12) stands witness to these attempts to standardise poetry—he declares

Those rules of old discover'd, not devis'd,
Are Nature still, but Nature methodis'd;
Nature, like liberty, is but restrain'd
By the same laws which first herself ordain'd. (88-91)

Such classical rules of versification practised by ancient poets function, according to Patricia Waugh, primarily by "suppressing" other voices by focusing on the dominant god-like voice (Waugh 6). Therefore, voices undermining rules of decorum and courtly love, like those of Donne, who rejected the mainstream trends in versification, were marginalised.

Described as a metaphysical poet by Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), John Donne was constantly negatively received and framed by his contemporaries and those who came after him. Admitting they are "men of learning", Johnson labelled Donne and his followers as "a race of writers that may be termed the metaphysical poets" (Johnson and Mullan 15). Johnson further describes them as failures and what they wrote as "verse" not "poetry" (15); in a word, a Donne poem might look like a poem but it is so lacking in established poetic standards that reading it reveals it has nothing to do with poetry. Donne's contemporary, Ben Jonson (1572-1637), believed "Donne...deserved hanging" because Donne misplaced the accents i.e. "metrical practice" an accusation Moloney describes as "dogmatic" (234). Misplacing the accents here is a reference to Donne's breaking the established rules of decorum that dictated a regular rhyme scheme, a regular metre, and a poetic language. Still, John Dryden (1631-1700) takes the criticism of Donne a step further by speaking for all women to whom, Dryden believes, Donne's poetry is too difficult to understand. For Dryden, Donne

affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love. (Dryden 7)

Dryden's how-to-do manual for writing poetry shows how critics of his time were didactically advocating certain rules of writing poetry. For a love poem, he suggests to Donne, the heart rather than the mind should be engaged in what he calls "the softnesses of love", a feature very common in the courtly love poetry of the age—something Donne evidently disapproves of. This comment by Dryden summarises the major concerns regarding courtly love in the Renaissance and Neo-Classical poetry. It is this mentality that refused to accept to allow poets like John Donne to experiment and accomplish. Indeed, on several occasions, Donne's poems were rejected by publishers mainly because they were viewed as different. For instance, in his posthumously collected poems for the 1633 edition, both "To His Mistress Going to Bed" and "Love's Progress" were refused "a license for publication" (Damrosch et al. 1647).

Donne was not oblivious to these attempts to silence his voices and marginalise him nor was he unaware of the literary movement. Evidently, many of Donne's poems included implicit and/or explicit references to other existing poems or poetic modes. Intertexting with other texts was not a mere chance but a strategy and a poetic technique to engage in dialogue with existing texts. It is natural that during the repressive classical poetry writing trend and negative reception John Donne experienced that he had to resort to parody as a subtle means of disrupting prevailing rules, promoting himself as a poet of experimentations, and targeting the most significant tenets of classical poetry: the rules of decorum and courtly love. All in all, Donne was consciously writing against the context of his time (Post 4-5). An early Donne's declaration is the ending of a sonnet he sent to a friend advising him on poetry (Donne and Robbins 50):

I sing not, siren-like, to tempt, for I
Am harsh; nor as those schismatics with you,
Which draw all wits of good hope to their crew;
But seeing in you bright sparks of poetry,
I, though I brought no fuel, had desire
With these articulate blasts to blow the fire. (9-14)

Thus spoke Donne whose self-confessed harshness should be read in the context of writing against and parodying the melodious traditional Elizabethan poetry. When writing poetry, Donne confesses, he brings no fuel, i.e. no previously established rules to follow, nor does he entertain with softness, for he is harsh.

2. Parody: Donne and Bakhtin

World literature owes a lot to parody since all major literary movements were either ushered by or ended by parodies. Klarer, for example, explains how one parody changed the course of prose writing in the whole of Europe. According to Klarer (11), Miguel de Cervantes's (1547-1616) "Don Quixote", written between 1605 and 1615, put "an end to the

epic and to the chivalric romance by parodying their traditional elements.” Significantly, mocking a particular mode of writing would inevitably entail pushing it to the background and bringing new modes to the foreground, initiating “a new and modified epic tradition” (Klarer 11). Historically, parody started in ancient Greece as a poetic practice. According to Aristotle, it was Hegemon of Thasos who invented parody. All Thasos did was mere altering, usually slightly, of the wording of a prominent poem where he rendered the poem’s sublime ridiculous (Halliwell 32). The earliest definitions of parody in English literature come from Ben Jonson, Donne’s contemporary, and Dryden, Donne’s major critic. Jonson and Dryden posited that parodied texts are made “absurd” and recreated in a funny way, respectively. Normally assumed to be a form of burlesque, parody seems to be generally thought of in the sense of a funny imitation of another cultural production. In a similar vein, a contemporary definition of parody is best exemplified in M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham’s “Glossary of Literary Terms”. For them,

A parody imitates the serious manner and characteristic features of a particular literary work, or the distinctive style of a particular author, or the typical stylistic and other features of a serious literary genre, and deflates the original by applying the imitation to a lowly or comically inappropriate subject. (Abrams and Harpham 38)

There are two main issues in this definition, which in many ways mirrors the definitions of both Jonson and Dryden: first, the imitation aspect of parody is well-established. Second, the imitating text, Abrams emphasizes, is less serious than the original and even “lowly or comically inappropriate”. While this might be an important definition of “parody”, it still falls short of understanding the major contributions this genre has introduced to literature.

As a result, other critics opine that parody too raises questions about the parodied texts. For instance, Simon Dentith (9) identifies this element in parody as it “provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice.” These definitions approach parody in the light of how it makes the other text look ridiculous by representing it in a humorous way or how it raises questions about the imitated texts while failing to examine the literary experimentations that took place due to parody. This, according to Rose (Rose 169), could be due to the fact that modern understanding of parody is largely based on a “negative modern view of parody as destructive or hostile to its target text.” But it is also this very askew understanding of parody that, while it hides the magnificent role of parody in subverting the canon and inevitably leading to a dialogue between different styles rather than the dominance of one, seems to have necessitated the needs for a better understanding. Indeed, the fact that early canonical critics such as Jonson and Dryden emphasised the “comic” aspect of parody over all other aspects is very telling, since, compared to tragedies with their universally serious themes, comedies were then considered a low form of literature that only tackled lowly themes. Conversely, modern critics see parody as a major contributor that ushered in new changes in literary sensibilities and styles. Parody not only raises questions but subverts the mainstream worldview imposed by established literature.

Therefore, this paper adopts a more comprehensive definition of parody formulated by Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) in his “Problems of Dostoevsky”. Taking the understanding of the dynamic significance of parody steps further than its classical definition, Bakhtin looks at parody from two perspectives not one: first what it does to the parodied text and, second, what the parody itself achieves. To Bakhtin, parodying is the “creation of a decrowning double; it is that same world ‘turned inside out’” (Bakhtin and Emerson 127). That means parody itself is a serious artistic genre that when other modes of expression are suppressed or silenced can play a crucial role in criticizing predominant social and literary standards. Hence, “decrowning” here is an important term which indicates attempts at replacing or at least deconstructing the styles being parodied. The comic element, it seems to us, is only marginal to Bakhtin’s understanding of parody. While Bakhtin does not at all negate laughter as an element of parody, it is parody’s ability to shake existing authorities rather than the comedy that might ensue that concerns him more in this context. In a word, laughter here is only part of parody not all of it. That said, the notion that parody offers alternative artistic styles means that it is a powerful force of freedom because it “relativises” the so-called ‘sacred word’ against other less popular voices (Morris 16). In other words, canonical texts are pushed into the background and peripheral voices are pushed to the centre. A conventionally monologic world with one dominant voice and style is hence resisted through parody which introduces readers to and opens up more possibilities and empowers more voices, ushering a polyphonic world, one with several competing voices.

This paper will elaborate on the above by focusing on two issues in John Donne’s poetry: his anti-decorum and anti-courtly love poetry. Examining Donne’s “The Bait” would shed the light on his parody practice in the light of Bakhtin’s conception of parody as a device that, as Bakhtin believes, plays a fundamental role not only in the evolution of artistic texts but also in social transformation.

3. Discussion of Donne’s Parody “The Bait”

In his poem “The Bait” (132–133), John Donne seems to target the two pillars of poetry in his time: courtly love and rules of decorum. Doing so, Donne appeals to his readers by providing them with more styles of poetry by defamiliarising the poem’s form and content, i.e. readers’ worldview. And since the Donnean style and worldview do not usually conform with traditional standards, they invite the readers to question their own worldview. Further, Donne’s attempts to deconstruct existing modes of poetry writing do not primarily aim to invoke hilarity but rather, according to Bild, “parodic destruction of preceding narrative forms” urges new modes of artistic expression (83).

With its monologic world of a dominant male poet seeking a silent, objectified female, courtly love poetry is heavily criticised by John Donne. This monologic worldview imposed by neo-classicists on writers and readers alike presents women as submissive, naïve, and silent; whereas men are portrayed as poetic, intellectual, and intelligent. Donne's critical stance of this love poetry, we believe, is not merely to protest its form and rules of decorum but also to condemn its restraining view of poetry and life that hinders a much comprehensive and more polyphonic world. In "The Bait", Donne parodies a famous contemporary poem by Christopher Marlowe, "The Passionate Shepherd to his Love" (Marlowe 207), which begins with the famous couplet:

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove, (1-2)

Christopher Marlowe's poem, its theme, diction, tropes, and form are representative of its age. This lyrical poetry was a common feature of the Renaissance: courtly love, a regular rhyme scheme and rhythm, and a refined diction. Furthermore, the couplet with its regular metre and rhyme reflects restricting traditional features of poetry. In the couplet, the poet claims to own "all the pleasures" or at least to have access to them. The emphatic nature of both the rapidly successive and forcefully argued commands at the beginning, "come", "live", and "be", tells of a very confident lover and gives a glimpse of the patriarchal nature of writing at that turn of the 17th century. As the poem goes on, Marlowe's lover describes the hills, valleys, lambs, and shepherds to entice the woman to his arms by offering her more than twenty-five things such as "beds of roses," "a thousand fragrant posies," "a cap of flowers," and "silver dishes". The poem ends in a typical Elizabethan way, "If these delights thy mind may move, / Then live with me and be my Love." (23-24).

The voice of the male speaker in the poem is dominant, the woman's voice absent. Marlowe is by all means dragging the woman into his own world, one he creates and believes to be the ideal world. Now read with Bakhtin thought in mind, this poem can be described as "monologic" for several reasons. First, the poem promotes the voice and the consciousness of the speaker only. He dominates the poem and controls all of its elements including, of course, the female he is addressing. Second, the woman's voice and consciousness are absent. That means, third, the poet/speaker is imposing his own world upon the woman and also upon the reader. Everything we see and hear comes to us through the eyes of the speaker; whereas, the woman remains muted, and blindfolded, so to speak, and is not given or does not have the chance to finalise herself. In such monological texts, Bakhtin confirms, characters "fall silent, close up, and congeal into finished, objectivised images... [and] become mere things," (Bakhtin and Emerson 68). In a word, there is no dialogical relationship (or dialogue) either between the speaker and the woman addressed, the woman and her world, or the reader and the make-believe world of the poem because the poet is following a pre-existing formula. This formulaic art, according to Holquist (33), is not only bad aesthetic, but also bad politics since "authorship is a form of governance" and totalitarian regimes always seek "absolute monologue".

Undermining this worldview, John Donne composed a very conscious imitation of Marlowe's poem. Donne's "The Bait" is evidently a parody as it borrows the first couplet of Marlowe's poem and presents a similar yet very different worldview and portrayal of the female addressee. Donne adopts the very same rhyme scheme (AABB) throughout the poem's seven stanzas. Reading Donne's poem carefully, one senses that Donne is moving far from merely replicating an absurd imitation of a previous poem. Donne's parody is closer to the Bakhtinian concept of "parody [which] introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original [text]," (Bakhtin and Emerson 193). Donne opens his poem (132-133) saying:

Come live with me, and be my love,
And we will some new pleasures prove (1-2)

While the first line is repeated verbatim, in the second line Donne replaces the all-encompassing "all" with "some" and the definite article "the" with "new". Here Donne is clearly proposing a different worldview, one that tries to introduce novel ways of pleasures, probably ways never experienced or known by people of his time. Enticing as it might seem, the offer transcends the attempt to tempt a woman to bed into a whole new experience of writing poetry that empowers rather than objectifies the woman. Donne's poem takes us into a new experience of a journey of an alternative world, in which Donne is conscious he is parodying other poets of his age as evident in the hard intertextuality. Furthermore, he is very realistic in his choice of words as he offers only "some" not "all" the pleasures. Still, Donne, unlike Marlowe, confirms the pleasures he is promising are "new". This newness characterises Donne's poetic endeavours and makes him distinctive.

As the poem goes on, it shifts from the conventional pastoral setting to one about fishing and bait and the readers are exposed to an extended metaphor, rather than chunks of images borrowed from the pastoral scenes and used by previous poets in the same or similar situations. The ingenuity of Donne's metaphor, or conceit, is both original and daring. The conceit, a very witty and elongated metaphor, slows the poem down and invites readers to think not only of what the poet is saying, like the case with Marlowe, but more importantly how the poet is saying that and what poetic techniques and language he is employing. Donne's readers are invited to reconsider their expectations and understanding of the

parodied text. The conceit extends from the second stanza to the last stanza (24 lines of verse) in which men use all tricks and deceitful methods to catch fish, which can be read as symbols of women. The woman, unlike those who deceive, is truthful and genuine. This inartificiality in her makes her different and smart. The poem can also be read as the woman, who swims in the river like the fish, not falling for men's manipulations—she is too smart to fall for them. The imagery, the conceit and the extended argument all invite the reader to imagine the scenery as well as the situation in which a woman outsmarts all the men around her. "The Bait" provokes the readers' doubts. That love and the pursuit of love can be related in any way to fishing throughout 6 stanzas is clearly presented in an argument form rather than matter-of-factly. Thus, both Marlowe and the poetic conventions of the time come under scrutiny here. John Donne uses fishing scenery rather than conventional sheep and green fields to defamiliarise common features of courtly love. The parody plays down the standards of poetry of his time by laying bare the fundamental rules exposing to his readers the artificiality of the parodied text and the fact that both the text and the world it represents can be changed.

This direct interaction where Donne intertexts with other poets can be examined in the light of the pull and push between well-established forms of writing and those emerging ones. Donne seems to be suggesting he can take the traditions into a whole new level of conceptual daring as well as experimentations. Even the parenthetical commas in the first line seem to be conditional in the sense the poet seems to be saying in case you like what I am offering, you might choose to come live with me; otherwise, you can disregard it altogether and choose not to be my love. The commas also limit the intensity of the imperative verbs. That comes in a stark contrast to the commanding tone and language in Marlowe's poem. Further, Donne adds an extra stanza, unlike Sir Walter Raleigh's reply to the same poem that sticks to the same number of stanzas—this could be very telling: John Donne is pushing further the frontiers of poetry, giving it more possibilities for more interpretations.

For a Bakhtinian reader, Donne's "The Bait" is polyphonic, a feature where a text has a variety of usually opposing voices, viewpoints, and autonomous characters. As no single voice in the poem, not even that of the author, dominates. There are many voices in the poem—Marlowe's, representing the traditions, the persona's, the poet's, the other fishermen's, and the woman's. These voices have different interests and different points of views. Further, Donne's female is usually autonomous. Rather than coercing and framing her into adopting a certain decision like the female in Marlowe's poem, Donne's female tends to make up their own mind and even determine, sometimes with their silence, the course of the argument. In addition, the woman is usually the centre of the poem—what she does and how she reacts determine the course of the poem. Marlowe's poem is largely about him and his poetic skill; whereas, the centre of Donne's poem is woman herself. In brief, the multiple voices that constitute the text of Donne's poem disrupt the authority of the author's single voice and give the woman an edge that empowers his position.

Donne's beloved, along with his readers especially women, is fully respected as a subject, shown as a "consciousness" that can never be fully defined or exhausted, rather than as an object fully known, once and for all, in their roles—and then discarded as expendable, like in the case of the naïvely silent woman in Marlowe. Donne's woman is autonomous, and she has the freedom and ability to choose for herself or according to Booth (xxiii) she is an end in herself that does not serve the plans of the author and thus she challenges the poet's attempts to tempt her or even trap her into his world. Further, she is intellectually independent of the author and is capable of making decisions by herself. What happens in Donne's poem is what Bakhtin describes as

the author's consciousness does not transform... the consciousness of the characters into objects, and does not give them the second hand and finalizing definitions. [The author] reflects and re-creates not a world of objects, but precisely these other consciousnesses with their worlds, re-creates them in their authentic unfinalizability (which is, after all, their essence). (Bakhtin and Emerson 68)

And hence Donne ends his poem recreating the once taken-for-granted classical worldview:

For thee, thou need'st no such deceit,
For thou thyself art thine own bait:
That fish, that is not catch'd thereby,
Alas, is wiser far than I. (25-28)

She, Donne says, cannot be tricked or deceived, thus turning Marlowe's poem and by extension the whole genre of love poetry up-side down. The woman throughout the whole poem remains unaffected by the temptations offered to her which makes her unattainable, or to use Bakhtin's word "unfinalizable", in the sense that she is not and will not be moved by the poet's world and therefore will not live with or love him. Consequently, John Donne empowers his female characters and shows that they can defy and challenge societal conventions. In this context, this understanding of "The Bait" conforms with Bakhtin's offers of "a useful framework for the study of individual texts ... acknowledging the social, cultural, and political nature of all texts, and the primacy of context to textual meaning," (Park-Fuller 1). In fact, John Donne's female is different from Dryden's assumed female readers of Donne whose poetry, Dryden believed, "perplexes the minds of the fair sex" (7). That is why Mueller believes that reading Donne, "we glimpse a dynamics of gender and power quite unlike the one Dryden posits. Crucial initiatives for the production and reception of Donne's

poetry rest with these women; they patronize him, not he them,” (Mueller 142). In a Donnean poem, the existence of the woman is not decorative or marginal but complementary and essential. A Bakhtinian reading, therefore, would not only acclaim Donne’s dialogising of his poetic experience, but also, and more importantly, commend his ability “to visualise and portray personality as another, as someone else’s personality, without ... merging it with his own voice ... [or] reducing it to a materialised psychic reality,” (Bakhtin and Emerson 12–13).

In this light, some critics consider Donne a parodist, one that saw engaging in a dialogue with existing canonical texts an important means of voicing his poetic contributions and social reforms. In his parodic works, John Donne usually seems to be concerned about three issues: 1) questioning/disrupting the status quo of existing poetry and refusing to accept that there is only one way to write poetry; 2) rejecting any attempt to standardise, or “methodise” to quote Alexander Pope, poetry into particularly pre-determined templates whether in form or content; and 3) offering an alternative, anti-canonical, styles that, to Donne, are part of the artistic production not all of them, thus liberating poetry from the rigid rules of decorum that dominated for a long time. These three issues mirror Bakhtin’s perspective of parody which decrowns established worldview and inevitably offers an alternative or at least a different worldview.

Further, reading some of Donne’s poetry as parody is essential as it puts aside centuries of framing Donne and locates him as a parodist of existing literary, cultural, and social immobility. “The Bait” can be an evidence to argue against common frames that place Donne as an anti-feminist, and even a misogynist. Benet (Benet 14) blames the cultural and social stagnation for not keeping up with Donne’s revolutionary ideas. She particularly refers to what she calls “the anxieties of men who feared the loss of their traditional dominance over women, and of people who feared that changing sexual roles would bring on the disintegration of family and society,” (Benet 14). In this regard, Benet asserts that we need to take Donne as “topical and often satirical social commentary” in order to reveal what has been classified as odd and perplexing, because unlike classical portrayal of women, Donne’s speakers sometimes “represent the man and the woman as equals in love,” (Mueller 146). This feature of Donne’s poetry is what makes Virginia Woolf describe Donne as a unique poet.

Virginia Woolf gives us a remarkable, yet brief, feminist reading of John Donne. She finds genius in his portrayal of women. Woolf, a major feminist pioneer, disagrees with critics who branded Donne’s poetry perplexing to female readers. And clearly she refuses to consider Donne’s poetry degrading to women.

Donne’s poems reveal a lady of a very different cast. She was brown but she was also fair; she was solitary but also sociable; she was rustic yet also fond of city life; she was sceptical yet devout, emotional but reserved — in short she was as various and complex as Donne himself. (Woolf 29)

Donne’s female, as we can see in his parody “The Bait”, is independent of the speaker (and the author and the social norms of her time). She is no longer a flat character with no depth, variety, or colour. For Woolf, that “is one of the reasons why we still seek out Donne; why after three hundred years and more we still hear the sound of his voice speaking across the ages so distinctly” (Woolf 39). The “Bait” empowers female voices Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd” silences and ushers new themes and styles in poetry. In brief, Donne’s parody generates other voices, a feature at the essence of modernist literature because

[t]he existence of a second voice —or more— in a literary work broadens the perceptual and conceptual horizon of the text through the polyphony and, more importantly, destabilizes the authority of the first domineering voice. (Momeni 39)

4. Conclusion

Parodies are usually written by writers who are not in the mainstream canon. And they use parody to draw attention to both themselves and the literary aspects or genres they are mimicking. This study shows parody as an integral part of John Donne’s poetry. But instead of mere copying and causing laughter like parodies usually do, Donne was instigating social change and offering alternative modes of versification. According to Bakhtin, parody senses its bond with “death/renewal” (128) in the sense that a higher form of parody attempts to decrown the established worldviews and turn them inside out. The study concludes that John Donne’s poetic purposes aimed at subverting dominant literary styles of his time using parody as a platform for experimentations. Hence, John Donne elevated both English poetry and parody as a tool of poetic reflection, something that would prove significant centuries later. Doing so, Donne brought more discourse, options, and styles to poetry. The artificial limits of canonical, authoritarian texts, thus, have been mocked by John Donne’s parodies. Although Donne had not written direct critical statements to reject his cotemporaries’ adherence to rules and decorum, his parody poems and poetic practices do make these rules appear abnormal, inappropriate, and certainly restrictive. For Donne, parody has both artistic and social functions: poetic experimentations and balancing gender dynamics. In “The Bait”, Donne assimilates his styles and ideas into the mainstream poetry and puts them on equal foot, thus empowering women and emerging poets with experimental sensibilities. Opposite to classical definition of parody as a lowly comic practice, John Donne gives us serious examples of parody.

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