

## ENGLISH: *DONNE/W;T*

**“Times change but human values remain static.” Discuss this statement with close reference to the context, values and language of both *W;t* and Donne’s poetry. (James Ruse Trial 2010)**

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Humanity is defined by the question of the way in which we live our lives, the choices we make and the relationships that we form. Through the comparison of the context, values and language of both *W;t* and Donne’s poetry, their connections shape and reshape meaning of human values. In the pursuit of intellectual accomplishment in life, Donne succeeds through poetry in what Vivian Bearing fails to achieve with language. With Donne’s metaphysical poetry from the Jacobean context inter-textually applied in parallel with Edson’s dramatic play *W;t*, it is evident that human values through language have the potential to transcend time.

The fundamentals of human values being life, death and God are all examined both directly and subtly amongst the vary contexts of the Jacobean and post-modern eras. John Donne is a distinctive Christian and religious poet in contrast to Edson whom reclines her position in order to allow the audience to establish their own understandings and interpretations of *W;t*. Vivian Bearing’s closing actions are signatory to the void of the absolutes in life and religion. Edson maintains that a “true relationship with God, rids the need for religion” which is characterised through the literal nakedness of Bearing as she looks into the light at the end of the play. On the other hand, texts of the Jacobean era were highly conservative and certain of the afterlife which is poeticised by Donne and his belief and dependence on an omnipresent God. Within the Christian contexts of his time, Donne comments that death is a time to “leave the world, the flesh, the devil” and that he will “wake eternally” in contrast to Bearing looking blankly into the afterlife.

There is a surprisingly substantial connection between the role of intellectual and its role that it plays towards the values of humanity. As dramatized by Edson through the breaking of the fourth wall, Vivian Bearing on frequent occasions addresses the audience as if they were part of her emotional mantles which she lacks. Donne also through language directs his thoughts and language to external personas. The dichotomies of intellectual and emotional connectives play an important role in the comparisons of *W;t* and Donne’s poetry despite the difference of nearly four centuries in publication. Vivian Bearing is a literal symbol of desolation and of a disconnected soul whom prefers time alone in the library then being able to “lie down”. Edson’s diction of “lie down” as uttered by Posner is an inter-textual and inter-contextual reference to the Jacobean and Victorian era where women were afraid of personal and intimate relationships. Thus in some cases the lack of sexual expression is also evident in John Donne’s metaphysical poetry highlighting the suppression of emotions between both contexts.

Language being a key medium for communication has been carefully manipulated by Edson throughout *W;t* using it to obfuscate. The ability for a human connection between even the most unlikely bedfellows is eventually briefly witnessed as Vivian Bearing and Susie share a rare moment of inter-personal relationships within the play. Towards the closing stages of Vivian Bearing’s dialogue and actions, there is a glimmer of laughter and humour as the use of the word ‘soporific’ is drawn into the spotlight. Vivian Bearing though being borne down with the realities of her cancer highlights the ability of language to bring moments of joy into one’s life and the essentiality for humans to receive an emotional connection. Similar, diction and literary conceit play an important role within Donne’s metaphysical poetry. As evident in *The Sunne Rising*, the sun is personified as it is addressed directly as a “busy old fool”. The reference to the sun’s beams as “so reverend, and strong” is conveyed in a sarcastic manner in order to create tension and emotion within the situation. Both *W;t* and Donne’s poetry using literary conceit and wit to further extend human values across eras.

Despite the differences in social setting and context, the language which conveys the values of humanity remain constant. The underlying message of life, death, God and everything in between is

explored through the intensity of the single act play *W;t* by Edson and throughout Donne's metaphysical poetry. As Edson concludes in *W;t* by reemphasising that "nothing but a breath – a comma – separates life from life everlasting" as a direct inter-textual reference to John Donne and the Christian religious beliefs of the Jacobean era, it is done through literary means as a focal point of human communication. It is through the use of language both poeticised by the metaphysics of Donne and the characterisation of Bearing that helps the audience shed light upon life and death. Though the contexts between Donne and Edson are of polarity, the core ideals facing humanity remain constant. Although Bearing and Donne eventually succumb to reality of death, both personas through the use of diction and imagery are survived by their language.