

Metaphysical Poetry - Poets - school (10)

The term metaphysical was first employed by Dr. Johnson to the poetry of the Seventeenth Century poets, specially the poetry of John Donne and Cowley. The metaphysical poetry is packed with affectation and conceits. The metaphysical poets surprise the readers by the boldness and novelty of images and often indulge in strained images and far-fetched similes. As a result their poetry is obscure and complex. Besides, they compare dissimilar things by planting imaginary similarity between them. Cowley makes a comparison of the world to a chess board and Donne compares two lovers to a pair of compasses.

The metaphysical poetry is purely intellectual and makes an appeal to intellect. The thoughts are often new but seldom-natural. The metaphysical poets see beneath the surface of life and illuminate the deeper places and devote their imagination to reflect upon God and Man and their relation. They are also called the mystic poets for their is an expression of communion with God in their poetry. They believe that the spiritual is the alone the real world and the things of this world are mere shadows. Their mystic visions pierce through the shadows of the world and interpret them as symbols.

The Elizabethan poetic style is characterised by a note of melody and beauty. But the metaphysicals have made them induly rugged, coarse and hard. They have substituted diffuseness by compression and straight-forward similes and imagery by subtle and unexpected comparison. From description they

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Have turned to analysis and from the healthy acceptance of the world to the morbid brooding on religion and probing of souls. Furthermore, for smoothness they have substituted roughness of metre and instead of idealistic and conventional love poems they write realistic and cynical ones.

John Donne is the leader of the Metaphysical School of poets. He breaks away from the Elizabethan traditions and revolts against the easy, fluent style and pastoral conventions of Spenser's followers. He has made startling innovations in both the matter and form of poetry. He is distinguished from the Elizabethans by his conceits, metaphysical wit and his religious zeal. He has written lyrics, elegies, satires and religious poems. He has introduced subtlety, wit, witicism, reflective imagination in poetry and has made it an amalgam of curiosity, obscurity and wit. He has brought together remote and opposite ideas. His subtlety and conceits coupled with witicism present him as a complex poet. **M.A. HAQUE**

George Herbert is the most conspicuous disciple of Donne. He is known as the saint of the metaphysical school. 'The Temple' is the best collection of his poems. In the true fashion of the Donnean tradition, his poetry is marked by elaborate use of conceits, far fetched images and religious tone. His poems are honest, intimate, sincere and modest. Simplicity is the secret of his power. Richard Crashaw is another ardent follower of the metaphysical tradition. He began his poetic career by writing on love, but soon became a great religious poet. His principal poetic work is 'The Step to the Temple', a collection of the religious poems. His images are pictorial rather than intellectual and his poetry shows an unbridled rapture.

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Henry Vaughan is not a priest like Herbert or Crashaw. He is at heart a mystic, more sacred than secular in verse. He is remembered for his 'Silex Scitellanus'. Thomas Traherne is mainly linked with the metaphysicals by his Witticism. Like Vaughan he also considers how Man can regain his lost joy. Abraham Cowley stands mid-way between the metaphysical verse writers and the Commonsense School of Dryden. He has written love poems in the fashion of the day. 'The Mistress' is a collection of his love poems. Though he begins with the metaphysical spirit, he cannot keep it intact and links himself with the classicists. Andrew Marvell is the only Puritan among the metaphysicals, but not gloomy like the Puritans of the age. His poems speak of his religious ardour as well as his love for wine, women and song that present him as a son of the Renaissance.

Thus, the metaphysical poetry displays distinct traits from those of the Elizabethan & Augustan. Though the literary critics have levelled several derogatory remarks against the metaphysical poets, yet their contributions to English poetry is highly applauded.

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