

Metaphysical School of Poetry

Metaphysical poetry is the richest and most wide ranging in English literature. The features of metaphysical poetry are well known: analytic and self conscious, colloquial in tone, dramatic in emphasis. It is also marked by wild imagery, hyperbole and scrupulous intellectual construction. John Donne was the leader of this school of poetry. The other important poets of this school of poetry were Andrew Marvel, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw, and George Herbert and Abraham Cowley. The term 'Metaphysical' as applied to the poetry of these early 17th century poets, was first used by Dr. Johnson, who borrowed it from Dryden's phrase about Donne "He affects the metaphysics". Dr. Johnson had applied this term to point out their 'learned' way of poetic expression. But he failed to appreciate the merit of such experiment by these poets. The metaphysical poets simply attempted to express faithfully even the most subtle emotions with the help of their extraordinary wide learning and experience.

The metaphysical poetry was a revolt against the copious, formal and rhetorical Elizabethan lyric. The Elizabethan tradition was no longer able to suit the expression of the changing sensibility of the age. Thus they developed a new mode of poetic expression. The most characteristic feature of this new ^{poetic} style was the fusion of thought and feeling. They looked for a connection between their emotion and mental concepts. The term 'metaphysical' refers to style, rather than subject matter and their style reflects an attitude to experience. To metaphysical poets a poetic experience was as much a matter of sensibility.

as of mind and intellect. They achieved a fusion between their thought and feeling. A thought was an experience for them and it modified their sensibility as T. S. Eliot says.

The second characteristic feature of metaphysical poetry is the use of conceits and far-fetched imagery. The metaphysical poets make use of complex images to express their complex emotion or thought. In the words of Mr. Johnson they "yoked by violence discordant ideas". But it is this newness in the use of imagery which makes metaphysical poetry so striking. In "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" Donne has compared the lovers with twin compasses, where the fixed foot follows the moving one. George Herbert in his poem "Virtue" has compared the spring season to a "box where sweets compacted lie" and a virtuous soul to "seasoned limber". A conceit is a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness. In metaphysical poetry conceit helps the poet to bring together emotion, sense impression and thought and thus prove a point. The metaphysical 'wit' so widely used in the poetry of Donne and others was a kind of mechanism to modify any kind of experience.

The metaphysical poets also excelled themselves in inventing the metrical forms that suited them to express the diversity of their poetic experience. In all this they were never interested in the words for words' sake, but they geared diction to the purpose of their thought. From Elizabethan musicality and lyricism, they moved to clarity and precision. Because of their analytical

habit preferred to use words which call the mind into play, rather than those that appeal to senses.

Metaphysical poetry is also distinguishable for its dramatic beginning in many cases. Donne's "The Sun Rising" begins with the line "Busy old fool unsuly Sun". The metaphysical poets have been also blamed for 'obscurity' in their poems. But this is to be considered that in their effort to find the verbal equivalent for states of mind they made themselves difficult to understand. ~~But~~^{4/6} Metaphysical poets can not ^{necessarily} be blamed for the obscurity as reason may be ascribed to an obstacle at the level of reader as well.

Metaphysical poetry revolves itself into the two broad divisions of amorous and religious verses. John Donne, the initiator of this school of poetry excelled in both the kinds of verse.

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