

The metaphysical poets
The metaphysical poetry may be classified into two broad divisions of amorous and religious verse. The former was written largely by courtly poets - Carew, Suckling etc. and the latter by Herbert, Crashaw and Vaughan. The metaphysical element, it seems, first made its appearance in love poems, written after the Italian pattern, which Donne adopted as his models. "The metaphysicals ~~of~~ of the seventeenth century", says H. J. C. Grierson "combined two things... the fantastic dialectics of medieval love poetry and simple, sensuous strain caught from the classical..."

John Donne (1537-1631) -
Donne, the founder of the 'metaphysical school of poetry' is the greatest poet of this school. He was a great scholar and theologian. For his clandestine marriage he was

imprisoned and on writing to his wife subscribed his letter "John Donne, Anne Donne un-done". His famous works are the 'Pseudo martyr' (1610), 'The Progress of the Soul' (1601), 'An Anatomy of the World, An Elegy' (1611), 'Epithalamium' (1613) and 'Satires', 'Songs and Sonnets', 'Elegies' which were published posthumously about 1633. His poetry falls naturally into three divisions

- (i) Amorous Poetry - Donne's love poetry was written in his brilliant and turbulent youth. His 'Songs and Sonnets' is a collection of love poems which are intense and subtle analysis of all the mood of a lover, expressed in vivid and startling language, which is colloquial rather than conventional. An undercurrent of satire runs even in his love poetry. His best known love poems are 'Aire and Angels', 'A Nocturnal upon

3. 'Lucies Day', 'A valediction: For bidding - mourning' and 'Entasie Donne' " is essentially a psychological poet whose primary concern is feeling. His poems are intensely personal and reveal a powerful and complex being."

(ii) Religious Poetry - Donne's religious poetry was written after 1610 'Holy Sonnets' and 'Lyrics' such as 'A Hymn to God the Father' are his finest religious poems. His religious and devotional poems are in the form of confessions or prayers.

(iii) Satirical Poems - Donne wrote satires, such as of the 'Progress of the Soul' (1600) reveal his cynical nature and keenly critical mind. They show his dissatisfaction with the world around him. They were written in the couplet form, which was later adopted by Dryden and Pope.

Dryden said about Donne!

"He affects the metaphysics".
The term "metaphysical" is applied to Donne and the group of poets who followed him. The word "metaphysical" strictly means "based on abstract general reasoning". But Donne's poetry shows more than this. Donne's poetry is scholarly. His images are far fetched, obscure, unusual and striking; for example

"So doth each tear
Which thee doth wear,
A globe, year word by
that impression grow,
Till thy tears mixed
with mine do overflow"

This world, by waters sent
from thee, my heaven dissolved so.

Donne immensely influenced both the courtly and the religious poetry of the seventeenth century. All

metaphysical poets show directly or indirectly Donne's influence.

George Herbert (1593-1633) Herbert, whose poems were collected in 'The Temple' (1633) is a religious poet who showed an ardent interest in the Church of England. His poetry is distinguished by clarity of expression, concrete imagery and intelligible conceits. He ~~preferred~~ preferred simple, homely, vernacular language and naturalness of expression, for example -

"He that for bears
To suit and serve
his need,
Deserves his load
But as I rav'd and
grew more fierce
and wild
At every word
me thought I heard
the callings child
And I, reply'd, my
Lord."

Richard Crashaw (1613-1649)
Crashaw's best work 'Steps
to the Temple' (1646) is both
secular and religious. His
poetry is noticeable for its
vivid and fantastic conceits
and religious fire and fervour.
It is emotional and
not thoughtful. It is mainly
lyrical.

• Henry Vaughan (1622-1695)
Vaughan's work includes
'Poems' (1646), 'Olor Scaenus'
(1657), 'Silen Scintillans'
(1650) and 'Thalia Rediviva'
(1678). He is a mystic at
heart. His poems, which are
religious in nature are con-
spicuous for fantasy, int-
ellectual power and origi-
nality.

Thomas Carew (1594-1639)
- Carew reveals undoubted
lyrical ability in 'Poems'
(1640). All his poetry is the
work of an amorist, whose
richness of fancy, lyrical
spontaneity and ~~spontaneity~~

golden felicity of diction are superb, for example:

"ASK me no more if east
or west
The phoenix builds its
spicy nest,
For unto you at last
she flies
And on your fragrant
bosom dies."

His style and versification are so polished and refined that he anticipates Waller and Denham.

Abraham Cowley (1618-1667) Cowley, a distinguished classical scholar, was a man of versatile literary interest. He successfully wrote poems, essays, plays and history. His well known poems are 'The mistress' (1647), 'The Davideis' (1656) and the 'Pindaric Odes'. He is an important transitional poet of this period. He is considered to be the last of the metaphysical poets.

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and a true disciple of Donne. With all his piety, his fantasy, his conceits and his Pindarism, Cowley is first of all an intellectual. His ~~po~~ lyrics are often sweet and graceful.

The end.

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