

Metaphysical Poetry

Metaphysical School of poetry was founded by John Donne. The term was first related to the poetry of metaphysics but later on came to be associated with the poetry of Donne and his followers. The term was first applied to the poetry of Donne's school by Dr. Johnson who himself borrowed it from Dryden's famous phrase "Donne affects the metaphysics not only in his satires but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign!" ~~metaphysical~~ metaphysical poetry represents a revolt against Elizabethan poetry. Elizabethan poetry exhibits smooth sweetness, buoyancy of spirit, ecstasy of joy and a full throated ease. These things, with the lapse of time, had degenerated into mere conventionalism. The metaphysicians revolted against this convention and introduced more and more intellectual element in their poems.

John Donne - He was one of the most important figures of the Elizabethan period. Though an Elizabethan in time, he had nothing of the Elizabethan spirit in him. He is regarded as the founder of the new school of poetry known as metaphysical poetry. His poetry may be categorised as (a) amorous (b) metaphysical and (c) satirical. A new era started with him in English lyrical poetry, English satires and elegiac and religious verses. With him Elizabethan poetry ends and Caroline poetry begins. His poetry is akin to the poetry of Shakespeare and Spenser in the sense that it expresses a strangely blended temperament, a strange emotion and a vivid imagination. As for the theme of his poetry, Grierson says, "The central theme of his poetry is ever his own personal moods, as a lover, a friend, an analyst of his own experiences worldly and religious!"

Donne influenced a large number of poets who became his close followers. His poems are both subjective and dramatic. Some of his well-known poems are 'The Flea', 'The Good-morrow', 'The Apparition', 'The Sunne Rising', 'The Break of Day' etc. Donne has written religious poems also collected in 'Divine poems'.

George Herbert - He is the most devotional of all the religious poets of the age. His treatment of the religious themes is simple of all the metaphysical poets he is the most widely read. 'The Temple' is his singular work which is full of faith and fervour and also subtlety, ornament and pointed phrases. All his poems are expressions of his piety as a man and as a priest. His most popular poem is 'The pulley' or 'The gifts of God'. Herbert's theme is the psychology of his religious experiences. Talking about the language of Herbert's poem Dr.

Hutchinson says, "Few English poets have been able to use the ~~poetic~~ plain words of ordinary speech with a greater effect of simple dignity than Herbert."

George Herbert is regarded by many as the saint of the metaphysical school.

Henry Vaughan - He has composed some love poems too but the influence of Herbert changed completely and he devoted his pen to the service of God. The difference between Herbert and Vaughan is like difference ~~between~~ between Wordsworth and Coleridge. Herbert is a profound preacher but Vaughan is less effective in that field and also in the field of art. On the other hand Vaughan is a mystic. At times Vaughan's description of childhood resembles the description of Blake and Wordsworth. His best work is 'Silex ~~et~~ Scintillans' which contains 'The Retreat' and 'Beyond the Veil'. 'The Retreat' anticipates Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode'.

His other important works are 'Poems', 'Dior gascanus' and 'Thalia Rediviva'.

Richard Crashaw - He was at first an Anglican but later on he turned a Catholic. He was very much attracted by the Spanish mystics such as 'Marino' and composed his poems after their fashion. He is found at his best in religious verse. His secular verse is called 'Delights of the Muses'. His principal poetical work is 'The Steps to the Temple', a collection of religious poems, which reveals the strains of Spanish mysticism in him. His best work is 'The Flaming Heart'.

Andrew Marvell - He is the only puritan among the metaphysical poets. He composed many verses which reveal the sincerity of his faith. His poems do not speak much of his religious fervour. He revered 'the Bible' but also loved wine, women and song. Marvell's poem

is based on the adoration of Nature. He found pleasure to indulge in the happy contemplation of natural scenery. He was the first to sing the glory of gardens and orchards. 'The Garden' reveals his nature worship. He takes delight in buds, blossoms and bushes. Marvell's works hold us with their passion.

Abraham Cowley - He falls in between the metaphysical verse writers and the common sense school of Dryden. He is the last considerable representative of metaphysical poetry. Cowley's best poems are found in his 'miscellanies' which contains moving elegies and odes. 'The mistress' is a collection of his love poems. One of his small masterpieces is 'Ode of wit' in which he dissects wit in a witty manner. Cowley is the harbinger of Dryden and Pope and his work has historical importance.

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