

Metaphysical Poetry

- Metaphysical is a combination of two words- 'meta' and 'physical' which means that it deals with the things that are beyond the existence of the physical world.
- The term is commonly used to designate the work of a group of English poets of 17th century as in their poetry there is the habit 'of always seeking to express something after, something behind the simple, obvious first sense and suggestion of a subject.'
- It revolted against the contemporary fashions of poetry.
- It intellectualized the prevailing religious spirit and revolted against the Renaissance softness, smoothness and sweet expression.
- It reacted against the idealized Petrarchan and Platonic style and expressed new thoughts in a new way.
- One of the chief characteristics of MP(Metaphysical poetry) is an exhibition of learning and scholasticism.
- It reveals a union of mind and soul, of thought and emotion.
- John Donne was the leader of the group.
- The other poets included Richard Crashaw, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Thomas Carew, John Cleveland, Abraham Cowley and Andrew Marvell.
- Metaphysical poetry mainly deals with love and religion.
- It is characterized by 'masculine expression' which means bold, dramatic, concise, intellectual, analytical and complex expression.
- The most distinctive feature of MP is the use of imagery which is unusual, striking, far-fetched and fantastic. For Donne the parted lovers are like the legs of a pair of compasses and love is a spider.

- There is a perfect fusion of intellect and feelings i.e. ‘unification of sensibility’ according to Eliot. For example- Donne’s poem ‘The Flea’. The situation is one in which young man is attempting to seduce a young woman by use wit:

Mark but this flea, and mark in this

Me it sucked first, and now sucks thee,

And in this flee, our two bloods mingled be;

----- this cannot be said

A sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhood.

- The Elizabethan style of poetry was marked by as note of rich melody and beauty but Metaphysical poets rejected the style and made the style unduly rugged, coarse and hard.
- It is the poetry of intellect indulging in far-fetched witty expressions and conceited thoughts.(Conceits are figure of speech used to compare two dissimilar things whose dissimilarity is very obvious at first sight but on consideration prove relevant and thought provoking.) For example:The lines from Donne’s The Flea

This flea is you and I, and this

Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is.

- Conceits were also employed by Elizabethan poets and dramatists but they used conceits more for ornamentation than confusion.

- In MP, emotions are shaped and expressed by logical reasoning and both sound and picture are subservient to this end.
- Like Wordsworth, they prefer the natural language of men but their practice goes even further than his theory. They use colloquial language and terms from all subjects- science, geography, astronomy, etc.
- There is a flexibility of rhythm and meter. The Elizabethan rhythms were usually derived from the classical or they met the requirements of music. The rhythm of metaphysical poetry emerged from its meaning.
- There is realism, deep humor and irony, dramatic element and love of science and philosophy in MP which brings it close to modern poetry.