

BA I Semester: II

English Literature

**METAPHYSICAL
SCHOOL OF POETS**

CHARACTERISTIC OF THE METAPHYSICAL SCHOOL:

- 1. DELIGHT IN NOVEL THOUGHT**
- 2. FAR-FETCHED IMAGES**
- 3. AFFECTATION AND HYPERBOLE**
- 4. OBSCURITY**
- 5. DRAMATIC REALISM**
- 6. LEARNING**

Metaphysical poets:

The term **metaphysical poets** was coined by the critic Samuel Johnson to describe a loose group of 17th-century English poets whose work was characterized by the inventive use of Conceits, and by a greater emphasis on the spoken rather than lyrical quality of their verse. These poets were not formally affiliated and few were highly regarded until 20th century attention established their importance.

Given the lack of coherence as a movement, and the diversity of style between poets, it has been suggested that calling them Baroque poets after their era might be more useful. Once the Metaphysical style was established, however, it was occasionally adopted by other and especially younger poets to fit appropriate circumstances.

1. Delight in Novel Thought and Expression:

- Intended to say something that has never been said before
- Were careless about their diction
- Worked out their own manner of expressing thoughts
- Sir Walter Scott, “They played with thoughts, as Elizabethans played with words”.
- Wit is a salient feature of Metaphysical Poetry; Pun and Conceits as typical of Donne’s poetry

Farfetched images:

- Modern critics appreciated the function of farfetched images in Metaphysical Poetry
- Metaphysical manner is intentionally rough using wild conceits
- Ransack knowledge, science, nature for comparisons
- Example: 1. Flea is compared to a marriage bed
2. “The Sun Rising”, brings into the bedroom of two lovers a vision of “both the indias of spice and mine”
- The true function of Metaphysical conceits is not only to impress by its strangeness but to join the parts of a fractured world.

Affectation and Hyperbole:

- Hyperbole is never superficial
- Example: Andrew Marvell's poem "To His Coy Mistress"
Witty elaboration of the supposition "Had we but world enough and time"
- Donne "O more than moon/Draw not not up seas to drowne me in thy sphere"
- Hyperbole is a favorite device of these poets

Obscurity:

- Difficult to understand and ambiguous
- Because of novelty in thought, poetry written before was different, experiences kept apart in the mind through year of mental habits are suddenly yoked together

Dramatic Realism, Dramatic Vividness:

Use of direct speech, colloquial vigour and general air of dramatic realism

Example: **“The Sun Rising”**:

Busy old fool, unruly Sun

Why dost thou thus

Through windows and through curtains call on us...

Geroge Hurbert **“The Collar”**

Learning:

- Laden with the scholarship of its author
- A whole book of knowledge can be compiled from the scholarly allusions in Donne's and Cowley alone. Average readers find it difficult.

Platonic influence:

Ideas of Platonic love had earlier played their part in the love poetry of others, often to be ridiculed there, although Edward Herbert and Abraham Cowley took the theme of "Platonic Love" more seriously in their poems with that title.

In the poetry of Henry Vaughan, as in that of another of the late discoveries, Thomas Traherne, Neo-Platonic concepts played an important part and contributed to some striking poems dealing with the soul's remembrance of perfect beauty in the eternal realm and its spiritual influence.

Examples of Metaphysical elements in Literature

Example

A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning by John Donne

“If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do.
And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.
Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th’ other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.

The poem appreciates the beauty of spiritual love. The poet has painted a vivid picture of his eternal bond that keeps him attached to his beloved even when they are apart. This is a very good example of metaphysical text in literature as Donne has used metaphysical conceits to show the comparison between the spiritual aspect of a person and a physical thing in the world. He has compared his spiritual and holy love with the feet of

Thank You