

## Metaphysical poetry – What Donne has done!!!

**M**etaphysics can be defined as something that goes beyond the physical sense or perception. It goes beyond science and lures the reader into an imaginary world full of philosophical concepts written in the style of a mad man obsessed with a particular subject. In general, metaphysical poetry of the 17<sup>th</sup> century has a very significant difference in comparison the predecessors and successors who viewed poetry with different eyes.

### Metaphysical poets – Origin & Popularity

The term *metaphysical poets* came into existence because of two men – John Dryden and Dr. Samuel Johnson. In *Discourse of Satire* [1693], John Dryden uses the word metaphysics to describe the poetry of John Donne. Later, in 1779 Dr. Samuel Johnson uses the word used by John Dryden in *Life of Cowley* to extend the term to a group of poets with similar style as of John Donne.

The popularity of the school [especially Donne] was mainly due to the introduction written by H. J. C. Grierson for *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*. In addition, T. S. Eliot played a major role in supporting metaphysical poetry during his time with the help of a few essays like *Metaphysical Poets* and *Andrew Marvell*.

### Characteristics of Metaphysical poetry

Metaphysical poets exhibit similar style like this throughout with display of great learning and clever use of **wit** to portray that learning in the form of words. Metaphysical poets are highly educated and their intellect provided them with fresh ideas that created great curiosity in the reader's mind.

The **images** used by the poets are sometimes bizarre and implausible, but through wit they present these images in a way that is justifiable and coherent to the subject.

**Hyperboles & Conceits** – These two figures of speech are prominently used in metaphysical poetry irrelevant of the subject. The fanciful notions [conceits] and the exaggerated comparisons [hyperbole] make the rugged style of writing into a concentrated one.

The themes chosen by metaphysical poets are either **spiritual** [religious] or **amorous** [love]. In addition, these themes are presented in **lyrical** style that intensifies the mystical nature of the work.

*“Marke but this flea, and marke in this,  
How little that which thou deny’st me is;  
It suck’d me first, and now sucks thee  
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee;”*

## Classical Arts Universe

These are the starting lines from the poem *The Flea* by John Donne. All the characteristics of Metaphysical school of poetry can be found in these four lines.

**John Donne** was the most significant contributor to the metaphysical school with numerous love poems and religious poems. Those who adhered to metaphysical and lyrical style of writing were categorized under "The School of Donne". Such was the effect of Donne's poetry that spread through the age.

### Important contributions to Metaphysical school

S. No	Name	Important works
1	John Donne	Divine Poems Holy Sonnets A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucies Day A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning The Canonization The Flea
2	George Herbert	The Temple
3	Abraham Cowley	Poetical Blossoms Love's Riddle
4	Thomas Carew	Persuasions to Love
5	Richard Crashaw	The Flaming Heart
6	Henry Vaughan	Silver Scintillans
7	Andrew Marvell	To His Coy Mistress The Garden An Horatian Ode

There are other minor metaphysical poets who contributed with brilliant pieces at times and ordinary ones most of the times. Metaphysical poetry is short lived in the sense of time span and the number of writers who adopted the ideals of the school. But, it had a tremendous impact on poetry in general and later critics highly acknowledged the skill of these 17<sup>th</sup> century poets.