

By- Dr. Hemant Kumar Thakur, Asst. Prof. (GT) (English) (C.No.- 9470883086)

Topic:- **METAPHYSICAL POETRY AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS.**

The term "metaphysical," as applied to English and continental European poets of the seventeenth century, was used by [Augustan](#) poets [John Dryden](#) and Samuel Johnson to reprove those poets for their "unnaturalness." As [Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#) wrote, however, "The unnatural, that too is natural," and the metaphysical poets continue to be studied and revered for their intricacy and originality.

[John Donne](#), along with similar but distinct poets such as [George Herbert](#), [Andrew Marvell](#), and [Henry Vaughn](#), developed a poetic style in which philosophical and spiritual subjects were approached with reason and often concluded in paradox. This group of writers established meditation—based on the union of thought and feeling sought after in Jesuit Ignatian meditation—as a poetic mode.

The metaphysical poets were eclipsed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by [romantic](#) and Victorian poets, but twentieth-century readers and scholars, seeing in the metaphysicals an attempt to understand pressing political and scientific upheavals, engaged them with renewed interest. In his essay "[The Metaphysical Poets](#)," [T. S. Eliot](#), in particular, saw in this group of poets a capacity for "devouring all kinds of experience."

Donne (1572 – 1631) was the most influential metaphysical poet. His personal relationship with spirituality is at the center of most of his work, and the psychological analysis and sexual realism of his work marked a dramatic departure from traditional, genteel verse. His early work, collected in *Satires* and in *Songs and Sonnets*, was released in an era of religious oppression. His *Holy Sonnets*, which contains many of Donne's most enduring poems, was released shortly after his wife died in childbirth. The intensity with which Donne grapples with concepts of divinity and mortality in the *Holy Sonnets* is exemplified in "[Sonnet X \[Death, be not proud\]](#)," "[Sonnet XIV \[Batter my heart, three person'd God\]](#)," and "[Sonnet XVII \[Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt\]](#)."

Herbert (1593 – 1633) and Marvell (1621 – 1678) were remarkable poets who did not live to see a collection of their poems published. Herbert, the son of a prominent literary patron to whom Donne dedicated his *Holy Sonnets*, spent the last years of his short life as a rector in a small town. On his deathbed, he handed his poems to a friend with the request that they be published only if they might aid "any dejected poor soul." Marvell wrote politically charged poems that would have cost him his freedom or his life had they been made public. He was a secretary to [John Milton](#), and once Milton was imprisoned during the Restoration, Marvell successfully petitioned to have the elder poet freed. His complex lyric and satirical poems were collected after his death amid an air of secrecy.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF METAPHYSICAL POETRY:-**

### 1) Free from artificial styles:-

This school of poetry marks a shift from the former artificial style of their antecedents to one free from poetic diction or conventions. Johnson acknowledged that their style was not to be achieved “by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery and hereditary similes.

### 2) Metaphysical conceits:-

A significant feature of metaphysical poetry is the use of metaphysical conceits. It is the unique quality of metaphysical poetry. A conceit is a comparison of two dissimilar things, which may have very little in common. E.g. Abraham Cowley in his poem “The Mistress” compares his love for ladies to his habit of travelling in various countries of the world.

### 3) Metaphysical wit and wordplay:-

This is also a noteworthy feature of metaphysical poetry. It is the expression of one’s idea and thoughts, using aptly and technically, the words and various figures of speech in such a manner as to provide pleasure to the readers. John Donne is called the “Monarch of Wit” in the history of metaphysical poetry.

### 4) Platonic love:-

It is another feature of metaphysical poetry. Platonic love means, spiritual love, which is free from elements of physical love. There were no aspirations of physical manifestations of love. Poems dealt with the soul’s remembrance of perfect beauty in the eternal realm and its spiritual influence.

### 5) Originality:-

It is the hallmark of metaphysical poets. All the metaphysical poets were unique and original in their ideas and thoughts. They didn’t follow the path of their contemporary poets. They stood against their contemporaries and followed their own way of writing poetry.

### 6) Literary devices:-

Metaphysical poetry uses metaphors, puns, paradoxes and meter to create drama and tension. In addition, Metaphysical poetry uses scientific, medical and legal words and phrases to create arguments about the philosophical aspect of life.