

**A CRITICAL STUDY OF SOME FAMOUS METAPHYSICAL POETS**

Mastan Singh

*(Assistant Professor of English, Shaheed Udham Singh PU Constituent College, Guruharsahai.)*Email: mastanbabbu@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The poets whom we describe as 'the metaphysical poets' are those who wrote during 17th century under the influence of John Donne. There are a large number of poets of the 17th century who are regarded as metaphysical poets. Dr Johnson extended the term metaphysical to designate the group of poets. The work of these poets is characterised by the use of paradoxes, elaborated conceits and abstruse terminology. John Donne is the most prolific metaphysical poet among all. The metaphysical poems sometimes take the form of argument. These poems link intense emotion with intellectual ingenuity. Cleveland, Marvell and Cowley are famous for their secular poetry. Herbert, Vaughan and Crashaw are known for their religious poetry. The primary focus of this paper is to bring out the chief characteristics of metaphysical poets.

Keywords: *Intellectual, Collection, Metaphysical, Romantic.***Citation:**

APA Singh, M. (2018). A critical study of some famous Metaphysical Poets. *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature-JOELL*, 5(1), 266-268.

MLA Singh, Mastan. "A critical study of some famous Metaphysical Poets." *Veda's Journal of English Language and Literature JOELL*, Vol.5, no.1, 2018, pp.266-268.

.Author(s) retain the copyright of this article

Copyright © 2018 VEDA Publications

Author(s) agree that this article remains permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License

Metaphysical poetry is concerned with the whole experience of man. Metaphysical poetry is full of learning, seriousness and intelligence. This poetry is about profound areas of experience; about man's relationship with God, about pleasure, learning and art. Metaphysical means to deal with the relationship between spirit and matter or the ultimate nature of reality. Although the term metaphysical is limited to

the works of some popular 17th English poets yet it may also be applied to any poetry which deals with spiritual or philosophic matters. John Donne, George Herbert, Thomas Carew, Richard Crashaw, John Cleveland, Henry Vaughan, Andrew Marvell and Abraham Cowley are some prominent metaphysical poets of the 17th century. John Donne was the most distinguished among all. Most of the metaphysical



poets wrote metaphysical poetry under the influence of John Donne. John Donne is known as the pre-eminent representative of the metaphysical poetry.

John Donne (1572-1631), the predecessor of all the metaphysical poets in English, started writing poetry in the 1590's. The poetry he wrote was in many ways ahead of that time. John Donne was far more intellectual. His intellectuality is expressed in the matter and the manner of his poetry. Dryden said that John Donne "too much affects metaphysics", meaning that he was too much given to intellectual analysis. The poetry of John Donne is characterised by the use of ordinary speech coupled with paradoxes, elaborated conceits and abstruse terminology drawn from science. John Donne uses puns in a perfectly serious context to achieve not humour but a deeper realization of experience. He is sensitive to complexities and subtitle of experience. He is extremely aware of the resources of the words. His handling of words is remarkably skilful. He demands complete attention and sensory response from the reader. His love poems analyse the relationship of love in all aspects. His divine poems analyse the relationship between the God and the man.

Thomas Carew (1595-1640) is one of John Donne's renowned successors. Thomas Carew wrote the most erotic poem of the 17th century, "A Rapture". His elegy on the death of John Donne is a fine poem. It is not just a poem but a remarkable demonstration of critical insight. His debt to John Donne is to be found in his habit of critical awareness which expresses itself in analysis of feelings. His poem "To Ben Johnson" tells about the awareness of the value of careful artistry. His poem "Integrated Beauty" reveals civilised intelligence and maturity. Carew has used vivid phrases and conceits in his poetry. His best poetry abounds in a fusion of thought, feeling and image. He is also a great Cavalier poet. He was the most favourite poet of the court of Charles I. His poem *To My Friend G.N. From Wrest* represents the best of his Cavalier ideal.

George Herbert (1593-1633) is a major metaphysical poet. He has been recognized as a meticulous poet by literary critics since his time. William Cowper found his poetry to be comforting poetry. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the first critic to

champion him in the 19th century. John Ruskin has declared George Herbert to be his favourite poet. He has written 184 poems. His poem and writings are astonishing in their accessibility. He wrote the first guide of the Church of England clergy. He named it 'The Country Parson'. A reader when he/she reads the poetry of George Herbert feels as if he/she has entered into a room of conversation. His poetry is a process of self discovery. There is, in his poetry, a balance of rhetorical skill and complexity. Simplicity and directness of style are also in an adequate balance in his poetry. So the poet is able to achieve the remarkable clarity through his simplicity, knowledge and craftsmanship.

There are some poems of George Herbert which are popular not because of their lyrical sweetness but due to their visual impact. These poems are known as concrete poems. Concrete poetry is a kind of poetry in which words or the lines are arranged to create a physical image. The shape of the poem on the page contributes significantly to its meaning. His poem 'The Altar' is a good example of his concrete poetry. This poem shows how a broken heart can be moulded into a form of an altar. His posthumously published collection *The Temple* is of paramount importance in English literature. He is a devotional poet. He is devoted to Christ. He enjoys the vision of God. T S Eliot calls *The Temple* "a coherent sequence of poems setting down the fluctuations of emotion between despair and bliss, between agitation and serenity, and the discipline of suffering which leads to peace of spirit."

The poems of George Herbert are always graceful and usually lucid. The ideas, in his poetry, are expressed in a language of purity. He is a poet of complete norms. His poems make their efforts as wholes.

Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) is a poet of varied array of exquisite lyrics that blend his Cavalier grace with metaphysical wit. Although his best poems are not very many yet his poems have been enjoyed by numerous readers. His poetry is a blend in varying proportions. He is one of the best metaphysical poets. His handling of verse is masterly. His poetry became popular after T.S. Eliot wrote a piece about his life. T.S. Eliot recognized Andrew Marvell as a lyrical poet. He is better known for his



two famous poems *The Garden* and *To his Coy Mistress*. In the poem *The Garden* Marvell has used conceits and allusions from the Bible and myths. This poem is a famous metaphysical poem. Romantic expressions have been used in this poem. The form of this poem is classic. The garden, in this poem, is used as a symbol of life in nature. The poem is used as a symbol of life in nature. The poem *To His Coy Mistress* is also a famous metaphysical poem. This poem is an extremely romantic poem. In this poem the poet depicts a man attempting to tempt a virgin female into sexual intimacy.

Henry Vaughan (1621-1695) is a Welsh metaphysical poet. George Herbert has a great influence on Henry Vaughan. Henry Vaughan is known for his religious poems contained in his collection *Silex Scintillans* (sparks from the flint). The poems of *Silex Scintillans* are considered to be the most biblical in English literature. Henry Vaughan became an important poet of the 17th century, following the lead of George Herbert. His collection of poems titled *The Retreat* offers a good sense of the proto-romantic elements to his work. He is known for his religious poetry which is written under the influence of George Herbert. All his secular work is chiefly represented by his poem *A Song to Amoret*. In this poem the speaker addresses his beloved Amoret telling her that if he died and she found another lover who is remarkably young and rich; but still he cannot love her more than the speaker does. Henry Vaughan was one of the most original poets of his day. He had a gift of spiritual vision which helped him to write him freshly.

Richard Crashaw (1613-1649) is purely a metaphysical poet. His work is clearly related to the metaphysical tradition. Although he is a metaphysical poet yet his work diverges from the work of other metaphysical poets such as Donne and Herbert. Crashaw uses conceits not as an essential component of a poem but as a tool of artistic embellishment. His love poetry is idealistic in nature. He uses, in his love poetry, erotic language to express religious emotion. Crashaw lacks in discipline and critical sensibility. Most of his poetry appeared in *Steps to the Temple*. This collection also includes a section of secular poems called *The Delights of the Muses*. In this collection the poet uses plain style. His mastery of

the classical imitation and the metaphysical mode is at its best in this collection. He is known for his serious approach to religion. The religious verses of Crashaw are filled with awkward imagery. His work *Hymn to Saint Teresa* is a powerful example of his awkward imagery. Crashaw is also known for his painting and engraving for his poetry.

Abraham Cowley (1618-1667) noted the importance of biblical themes as opposed to fables as the proper source for poetry. Dr Johnson called him the best metaphysical poet. Coleridge called him the most fanciful poet. He forms a kind of bridge between the early 17th century literature and the age of Dryden. His imagination and elegance of language have deservedly set him in the ranks of English literature. He wrote poetry of a fanciful nature. He adapted Pindaric ode to English verse. His collection *The Mistress* (1647) is his most famous work. This collection exemplifies his metaphysical style of love poetry. His *Miscellanies* (1656) also reflects the themes of metaphysical poets.

The changes in the interest of 18th and 19th century made the metaphysical poets unfashionable. But in the 20th century there has been a revival of interest in metaphysical poetry with its admiration for intellectual clarity and psychological explorations.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Martz, Louis Lohr. (1991). *From Renaissance to Baroque: Essays on Literature and Art*. University of Missouri Press.
- [2]. Falloon, Jane. (2008). *Heart in Pilgrimage: A Study of George Herbert*. Arthur House UK Ltd.
- [3]. Eliot, T.S. (1932). *Selected Essays: 1917-32*. Harcourt, Brace and Company New York.
- [4]. Roberts, John Richard. (1990). *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*. University of Missouri Press.