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A study in the metaphysical poetry of the seventeenth century

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Thesis
A STUDY IN THE METAPHYSICAL POETRY
OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY
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A Study in the Metaphysical Poetry of the Seventeenth Century

It is the purpose of this thesis to discuss the characteristics of the poetry written during an age in which, according to Barrett Wendell's *The Temper of the Seventeenth Century*, there occurred "the most conspicuous change in literary temper in all history." In the first place, there will be explanations to prepare the reader for some of the peculiarities of this poetry. Then starting back with the work of some thirteenth century continental writers, the movement to distinguish, by the refinement of diction in prose and verse, the language of the cultured people from that of the common classes will be traced through the Elizabethan age. The so-called metaphysical poetry, an outgrowth of this movement, will be carefully studied, and its chief traits will be illustrated by the work of the most important poets of this period. Besides the mere technicalities which characterize this age, it will be found that in the seventeenth century there originated two larger interests: one in such a separation of the ethical element from the aesthetic that the resulting freedom of speech was similar to what is to-day called "art for art's sake;" and the other, the beginning of religious poetry in English Literature. In conclusion there will be a summary of what this age has gained from those preceding and what it has left the ages that were to come.
Before the thesis has progressed further, it may be well to make the reader acquainted with a few of the words which he will often find in the following pages. One of these is "metaphysical" which is applied to the poets and to the poetry of the seventeenth century. The term was first used by John Dryden in an essay on the Progress of Satire. In speaking of John Donne, one of the foremost poets of the period under discussion, he said:

"Donne affects the metaphysical not only in his satires but in his amorous verses where nature should only reign and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy when he should engage their hearts."

Dr. Samuel Johnson used the term later in his Essay on Cowley, one of the series entitled Lives of the Poets. The following quotation from that essay has become so familiar that it is commonly believed that this meaning of the word was created by Johnson:

"About the beginning of the seventeenth century there appeared a race of writers that may be termed metaphysical poets. The metaphysical poets were men of learning and to show their learning was their whole endeavor, but unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme instead of writing poetry, they only write verses and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than the ear, for the modulation was so imperfect that it could only be found to be verse by counting the syllables."
The fourth meaning given to the word "metaphysical" in Webster's Unabridged Dictionary applies here:

"Designating or pertaining to a so-called school of seventeenth century poets whose works abound in cold and forced conceits or elaborate subtleties of thought and expression. It was so called by Dr. Johnson, Donne, Cowley, Herbert, and Crashaw are of this group."

The word "conceit" which is found in the above definition is very often, if not invariably, used by critics who are talking of metaphysical poetry. Chambers' Encyclopedia employs the very same words as Webster's Unabridged Dictionary and refers to "the cold and forced conceits" of the metaphysical school. "Conceit" in this sense is thus defined in Webster's Unabridged Dictionary:

"Fanciful, odd or extravagant notion; variously; a quaint, artificial, or affected conception or a witty thought or term of expression; whim, quip, or trick."

Now that the reader has been introduced to these ideas, he will be ready to look for their origin, and will, therefore, consider some early continental writers and their influence.
In the thirteenth century there was felt a need among the upper class of Italian society "to refine the vocabulary, and syntax by adapting the practice of early writers to the usage of modern conversation." Cino of Pistoria began polishing the language, and Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio left it established on definite principles. Dante called the speech he used the "Illustrious Vulgar Tongue" and explained the name by saying that it was the "Vulgar Tongue exalted by culture and authority so that is exalts its followers with honour and glory."

During the fifteenth century the Castilian dialect was chosen from among the other Spanish vernaculars as the standard. There were no great writers in Spain at this time. It has been noted that the canciones, rondillas, and villancicos which minor poets wrote then were in borrowed Italian verse forms.

Due to the long struggle between the Crown and the Vassals, France was slower than the other nations to become interested in language reform, and the French romans, fabliaux of the trouvères, and songs of the Troubadours waited long for an original genius to put them into permanent shape. In the days of Francis the First, France became the center for art and literature. Then it was that the first poor attempts were made to Latinize the vocabulary. Marot, later, tried to develop a suitable language for the court from the French patois. Ronsard by his genius and enthusiasm introduced the Greek spirit into French poetry, and although he was rather scholarly to be popular, he did much to refine the language.
Antonio de Guzmán, bishop of Guadix, was one of the refiners of Spanish speech in the early sixteenth century. He was the founder of the "alto estilo"—the high style—based on the balanced and antithetical construction of Latin historians and orators. This style in his *El Relox de Principes* met with such favor that the book was at once translated into every foreign language. From the French translation it was re-translated into English as the *Diall of Princes*. Of that book there will be further mention later.

Louis Gongora y Argote, another Spaniard of the sixteenth century, was not satisfied with what Guevara had done. He desired for himself the distinction of making a style which would go beyond the "alto estilo" into the new and unheard of. He succeeded in his purpose, for his *El Principe Constante*, *Soledades*, *Polifemo*, and *Fíraro y Tisbe* though poor in thought made up that lack by an extravagant new manner of writing. It is pedantic and studiously obscured, pompous, high sounding, and full of very absurd imagery. For example, in his *El Principe Constante* he described a simple scene in which a woman picks flowers in a garden, thus:

"My lady Phenix went into the garden, and commanded the play of colors to adorn the basket with its flowers."

This style was, needless to say, popular, and followers of the new "estilo culto" calling themselves "Cultoristas" or "Gongoristas" sprang up all over the continent.
Gianbattista Marini was head of another school, the "Secentisti." His work imitated Ovid, Spanish writers, and early Italian poets, and is again marked by its overwrought mannerisms and florid imagery. The following quotation in which the soul is compared to a scale shows his characteristic style:

"The soul, tormented by so cruel a battle,
While one is struggling with the other,
As a scales, the scale pans of which balance,
Both weights being equal, wavers undecided,
And because of the double spur which torments it,
Now is inflamed by desire, now by rage,
Which now in one direction, now in the other,
Turns it alternately either desire or wrath."

"Marinism" spread rapidly through Italy, Spain, and France to England. France had its own school of affected writers, the Précieuses, whom Molière laughs at in his Précieuses Ridicules, but whose influence was felt nevertheless, for

"new customs

Though they be never so ridiculous
May let them be unmanly, yet are followed,"

Now it is time to see what England did with the newly imported style.

There has already been a reference to the Diall of Princes which was Guévra's El Relox de Principles re-translated from the French to the English by Sir Thomas North in 1557. Guevra was warmly received by all who wished to call attention to
their writings yet had not very much to say. His rhetorical devices, metaphors, allegorical allusions, alliteration, and other affectations were so startling that they disguised the lack of sense. North used this same manner and influenced many later English authors by his style. Among them was George Pettie.

In 1576 there was entered on the "Stationer's Register" a book whose title runs as follows:

"A Petite Pallace of Pettie his pleasure: Contayning many pretie Histories by him set forth in comely colors and most delightfully discoursed. Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci."

This book was the work of George Pettie. It is made up of twelve stories in which the author is less interested in developing plots than in discoursing in long soliloquies and speeches on subjects for the most part to do with love. The literary characteristics of this book have been so influential that it may be well to describe them.

One of its distinctive affectations is the use of the antithetical construction of sentences, in the opposition of words and ideas in sentences balanced against each other: where very often too, three or all of the words are parallel in position and grammatical function, that is, a noun answering to a noun, an adjective to an adjective, a verb to a verb, and an adverb to an adverb.
Another structure which this author favored is a long series of rhetorical questions with answers introduced with "Why". For illustration:

"And shall I then preferre mine owne pleasure before my father's profit? Why Nysus is my father; why Nimos will be my Phere; why Nysus gave me lyfe; why Nimos will yeald me love; why Nysus made me a maide; why Nimos will make me a mother; why Nysus cherished me beeinge young; why Nimos will make mutch of me beeinge olde; why Nature bjudeth mee to love my father; why God commandeth mee to love my husband."

Alliteration in its simple form where the same letter or sound begins several words in succession is illustrated in the title of Pettie's book. A more elaborate form of alliteration is the "transverse" where three or four letters are used in corresponding clauses:

"In my fancy that man is to be begged for a foole who will prefer his wives pleasure before his owne and her profits."

Besides this artificiality of construction, Pettie desired to show in his writing a knowledge of the classics and interest in all sorts of extraordinary culture, so he brought in anecdotes in connection with important historical characters, incidents from mythology, and introduced unusual information about medicine, magic, animal life, religion and natural history. Abstract ideas were personified, and characters were brought in merely that they might enter reflective arguments. In Pettie's book there is the exact
model for a work which is far better known, the Euphues of John Lyly.

The Euphues was the natural result of the Renaissance movement which has been discussed, the movement that strove for elaboration, fineness of phrase, eloquence, and pompousness of diction. It had become the custom for rich young Englishmen to travel to Italy to finish their education. There they came in touch with the Italian culture, with the work of Petrarch, with the use of alliteration and the other new literary conceits, and with love as the most important subject matter. The new forms of writing and of speaking were brought back for use among the highest social classes in England. Lyly was much interested in the improvement and refining of his native language. His Euphues is important, R. W. Bond says, "not because it eminently met the taste of its day, but because it is, if not the earliest, yet the first thorough and consistent attempt in English Literature to practice prose as an art." "We shall be right in assigning to the Euphuist, representing and including his special forerunners North and Pettie, the praise of asserting with an emphasis hitherto unknown the absolute importance to prose-writing of the principle of Design. These three, and Lyly in particular, recognized the need of, and consistently aimed at, what has been well denominated the quality of mind in style, the treatment of the sentence, not as a haphazard agglomeration of clauses, phrases, and words, but as a piece of literary architecture, whose end is foreseen in the beginning and whose parts are calculated to minister to the total effect."
Lyly may have been influenced somewhat by North's subject matter, but he owes it scarcely anything in point of style. Pettie's *Pallace of Pleasure* was his model, and he took over its style with very few changes. He used the same antithetical structure. A very good example is:

"Ah thrice unfortunate is he that is once faithful, and better it is to be a merciless souldiour, then a true lover; the one liveth by an other's death, ye other dyeth by his owne life."

In *Euphues* are found the same series of rhetorical questions. Lyly, however, varied the form of response by the introduction of some answers with "Ay, but-." As an illustration:

"And canst though, Lucilla, be so light of love in forsaking Philautus to flye to Euphues? Canst thou prefer a stranger before thy country man? A starter before thy companion? Why, Euphues doth perhaps desire my love, but Philautus hath deserved it. Why, Euphues feature is worthy as good as I, but Philautus his faith is worthy a better. I, but the latter love is moaste fervent: I, but the first ought to be most faithful. I, but Euphues hath greater perfection. I, but Philautus hath deeper affection."

This passage is sufficient to show the Euphuistic style. Alliteration is still used to a great extent. The desire to show erudition by strange allusions is shown in *Euphues* as in *Pallace of Pleasure*. Lyly is said to have improved on Pettie's paragraph structure. For the most part, however, Euphuism is found in full grown existence in Pettie's book before *Euphues* was ever written.
Euphuism was accepted by society as a pattern for polite style in writing and in speaking. "When Shakespeare came down to London," Huse remarks, "that he was strongly under the influence of Euphuism which was at that time in great favor. Even in the work of his maturity, many a sentence which he utters in all seriousness is filled with Euphuism." R. W. Bond says that Shakespeare's prose was particularly influenced by Euphuism between the years 1596 and 1600. In *Love's Labour's Lost* Shakespeare ridicules the exaggerated and affected speech by reproducing the pedantic and grandiloquent style. It is probable that this was intended as a burlesque on the diction made popular by Gongora y Argote rather than that of Lyly. Euphuism is often found in Shakespeare's prose speeches of refined and educated characters. A noteworthy example is this speech of Portia's from the *Merchant of Venice*:

"If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces. It is a good divine that follows his own instruction. I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done, than to be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching. The brain may devise laws for the blood, but a hot temper leaps o'er a cold decree; such a hare is madness the youth, to skip o'er the meshes of good counsel the cripple. But his reasoning is not in the fashion to choose me a husband. O, me, the word 'choose'! I may neither choose whom I would, nor refuse whom I dislike; so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will -11-
of a dead father. Is it not hard, Nerissa, that I cannot choose one, nor refuse none?"

R. W. Bond's statement which follows is a nice summary of Lyly's service to English writing:

"Though the direct influence of Lyly's Euphuism cannot be traced much beyond the beginning of the seventeenth century, his indirect influence as setting an example of consistent attention to form and aim at force and precision, was probably greater than any writer our literature has known."

Elizabeth and her court adopted Euphuism as a model of correct speech. They adopted its successor, Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia, as a model for correct courtly conduct. This prose pastoral of Sidney's was written in a language even more exaggerated than Lyly's. Sidney knew Greek, and Latin, Italian, and Spanish, and therefore drew freely from an abundance of material which had been written of Arcadia.

Theocritus first mentioned Arcadia as a land of pastoral innocence and simplicity. In the fourteenth century Petrarch referred to it in an allegorical dialogue. Following him Mantuanus, Longas, and Boccaccio alluded to Arcadia. Jacopo Sanazzaro gave it the first modern pastoral note, while Montemayor combined the conventional Arcadia and actual experience, an ideal atmosphere and the manners of modern life. Into the poetical landscapes of Sanazzaro Sidney introduced the complicated love plots of Montemayor and ideal characters "who talk in a dialect not exactly Euphuistic but not natural English."
Sidney was more interested in his style than in his substance. His sentences are often long and tiresome, sometimes filling a page or more. He is fond of detailed descriptions with figurative language, metaphors, and personifications. There are examples in the *Arcadia* of the repetition of words singly and in pairs: "sweetest fairness, and fairest sweetness," paradoxes, and an excessive use of adjectives and epithets. Here is a selection from his description of Arcadia:

"There were hills which garnished their proud heights with stately trees; humble valleys whose base estate seemed comforted with the refreshing of silver rivers; meadows enamelled with all sorts of eye-pleasing flowers; thickets which being lined with most pleasant shade, were witnessed so to, by the cheerful disposition of many well-tuned birds; here a shepherd's boy piping as though he should never be old, there a young shepherdess knitting, and withal singing; and it seemed that her voice comforted her hands to work and her hands kept time to her voice music."

Sidney's style, critics agree, was modelled on that of no one author. It grew out of his acquaintance with the refined diction of foreign writers, including Cicero, but is in itself distinctly Arcadian. Like Lyly's Euphuism, which it more or less superseded, Arcadianism was an experiment, but it went beyond Lyly's style, for occasionally in nature descriptions there is a really lovely suggestion, and the affectation is lost in genuine, spontaneous beauty.
Sidney wrote in verse as well as in prose. Still, it was his prose Arcadia which had more appeal to the jaded courtiers of Elizabeth's day. They delighted in picturing themselves as shepherds. Some of them were successful and wrote the natural, simple, and picturesque verse which is harmonious to the pastoral thought. Others blended the ancient and chivalrous tendencies of Petrarch with the pedantry of their own court and produced strained, and overwrought poems in forms borrowed from the older Italian "concetti makers."

The love passion was the prevailing theme, and the shepherds wooed "fair goddesses" who personified all that is beautiful yet lacked human nature. Their works abound in wit, ingenious epigrams, and classical references. It is not uncommon to find one poor word tortured a thousand ways in order to make it yield some expression never thought of before. A few examples will show the characteristics in thought and style of this poetry.

Richard Barnfield was a gentleman who wrote only as fancy inspired him. In the preface to one of his works, the Epomion of Lady Pecunia, he said:

"Being determined to write of something and yet not resolved of anything, I considered with myself if one should write of love (they will say) why every one writes of love, if of virtue - why who regards virtue? To be short, I could think of nothing, but either it was common or not request."

He fell early into the pastoral mood and did something a little uncommon in the beauties of his descriptions and
original imagery in *The Affectionate Shepherd*, *The Shepherd's Content*, and particularly *The Nightingale*.

Nicholas Breton wrote a Pastoral of Phillis and Coridon. Coridon describes Phillis as "The fairest fair that ever eye did yet behold," and later:

"This is she, the wise, the rich,  
That the world desires to see;  
This is ipsa quae, the which  
There is none but only she.

"Who would not this face admire?  
Who would not this saint adore?  
Who would not this sight desire  
Though he thought to see no more?"

It is the usual thing to compare the beloved woman's beauty as Samuel Daniel does to Aurora's, Thetis's, and Venus'. Samela, the supposed sweetheart of Robert Greene, is portrayed by him thus:

"Like to Diana in her summer weed  
Girt with a crimson robe of brightest dye,  
Goes fair Samela!"

Samela is whiter than the flocks washed by Arethusa, as fair as Aurora, as bright as Thetis; her hair is like gold; her eyes are like glowy streams; her cheeks are "like rose and lily"; her brows are like ebony.

"Thus fair Samela  
Passed fair Venus in her bravest hue,  
And Juno in the glow of majesty,  
For she's Samela;  
Pallas in wit, all three if you will view,  
For beauty, wit, and matchless dignity  
Yield to Samela."

A very interesting writer is Peele, who in his *David and Bethsabe* tells that the bower in which he is to enjoy Bethsabe's love shall be:
"Seated in the hearing of a hundred streams,
That for their homage to her sovereign joys,
Shall as the serpents fold into their nests
In oblique turnings wind the nimble waves
About the circles of her curious walks."

The comparisons in that last quotation have distinctly
metaphysical tendencies.

Marlowe's *Passionate Shepherd to His Love* beginning,
"Come live with me and be my love," is very well known.
Marlowe may be lacking in breadth of Christianity, moral
instinct, and broad sympathy, but with his pagan freedom
and energy of genius, he writes with a strength and vigor
which no other Euphuistic writer of the period had. He
fixed his imagination on the universal elements of human
nature, and in his elemental simplicity, he rose above the
archaism, conceits, and mannerisms which hampered many
other poets of that day.

Spenser is probably one of the most distinguished writers
of pastorals in the Elizabethan age. He followed Sidney by
writing Eclogues and Elegies in the pastoral mood. He wrote,
also, *The Shepherd's Calendar* whose very title suggests its
theme and treatment. Briefly, Spenser is noted for his love of
sensuous beauty, his power of elaborate pictorial description,
and his fondness for melody, found in the flowing sweetness and
diffuse diction of his poetry. His most famous work, *The
Faerie Queene* had a didactic purpose, to teach correct behaviour.
Fortunately, the purpose was not fulfilled, for otherwise the
poem would have been less beautiful. As it stands now,
"nearly every line," Barrett Wendell says, "is alive with the
soul of Elizabethan music." "His mastery of language turns
phrases fit only for humdrum use into deathless beauty."
Spenser, it is said, lacks sincerity, for he felt that no thought could be poetic unless it was distorted into some lifeless image of conventional fiction. He lacked the beauty of simplicity and naturalness. To achieve the novelty he desired Spenser used archaic, foreign, or odd words. His interpretation of life was artificial. Yet, he is the "poets' poet" and has influenced a great number of them.

Among his followers are Drayton, Chapman, Marston, and John Milton, early in his career. Others are Giles and Phineas Fletcher. Phineas Fletcher wrote of the Happiness of the Shepherd's Life. Wither wrote The Steadfast Shepherdess, and William Browne of Pastoral Enjoyments. The Spenserians are distinguished by their worship of beauty and their sensuous love of musical sounds. They have a scholarly satisfaction in introducing learning into their verses. They enjoy classical words and ornate expressions, and they dwell long over details of thought and image. They are content to move gently onward and upward to an elevation of pure poetic thought.

Ben Jonson, who with Spenser exerted more influence over the seventeenth century poets than any of the rest of their predecessors, could not understand nor appreciate Spenser's Italian graces. Jonson, himself, was a strict classicist. He believed that any given theme for literature should fall into some given form, that there was a right model for each. He had a sure sense of technique. He was noted for the constructive excellence of his poems which were always finished if not always passionate and elaborate. Each word
was chosen with a precision which sometimes cramp
ed his imagination but took away none of his natu-
ralness. His poetry was brief and condensed. One word too many might ruin a poem, he thought. He was an exponent of the permanent poetic principles established by the classicists of antiquity. Like them, he introduced pedantry into his poetry. Unlike the Spenserians, however, his classical allusions were for atmosphere and not for decoration. His work is clear and free from affectation. It shows sound sense clothed in pure lan-
guage, which is true classicism.

Professor Saintsbury contrasts the followers of Spenser with the so-called "Tribe of Ben" by saying that whereas the Spenserians were conceited and fantastic, describing "all subjects in the brocaded garb of gorgeous phraseology," the Jonsonians were classical. Their lyrics never introduced metaphysical imagery. Jonson's own poems are well known: The Kiss, Love While We Can, A Vision of Beauty, Character of a Poet, and particularly his Song to Celia which begins:

"Drink to me only with thine eyes,  
And I will pledge with mine."

Some of Jonson's descendants are: Shirley, John Ford, Lucius Carey, Harry King, Waller, remembered for On A Girdle and Go, Lovely Rose, Howell, and Cartwright. Sir John Suckling is called "a feeble son of Jonson." He is particularly noted for his Why So Pale and Wan?, and The Constant Lover beginning:
"Out upon it, I have loved
Three whole days together!
And am like to love three more,
If it prove fair weather."

Richard Lovelace's best and nearly perfect poem is considered his To Lucasta, Going To the Wars containing the lines:

"Yet this inconstancy is such
As thou too shalt adore;
I could not love thee, Dear, so much,
Loved I not Honour more."

Carew and Herrick are well known "sons of Ben." They are both sure artists who have left behind them no inferior work. Their poems are designed as were their master's, so that each one is a complete organism. Their good taste prevent an overpowering amount of classic references, allegory, or mysticism. The Jonsonians wrote graceful, seemingly careless, and trivial verse for the sake of fashion. Carew is the eldest and is sometimes thought of as the best Jonsonian. His field was the life of a man living in a highly organized society. He was self-controlled, had ease, wit, delicacy, perfection of form, and gay "esprit." His "vers de société" is an exact image of the life at the court of James I. Some of his poems are: To a Lady That Desired I Would Love Her, Eternity of Love Protested, A Deposition from Love, and several Songs, one of which begins with the lines:

"Ask me no more where Jove bestows,
When June is past, the fading rose,
For in your beauty's orient deep
These flowers, as in their causes sleep."

Robert Herrick is less sophisticated than Carew. Herrick took a broader subject, nature itself. Carew's field is often
called "a corner of Herrick's garden". Herrick was kind-hearted, simple, naif, and spontaneous. His poems are well-known and well-liked to-day. Among them are: To Daffodils, Upon Julia's Clothes, Cherry-Ripe, To The Virgins To Make Much of Time, and Corinna's Going A-Maying. Felix E. Schelling says in his English Lyrics of the Seventeenth Century:

"The seventeenth century lyric has not the universality of Shakespeare, the scope and majesty of Milton, nor the consummate art of Dryden and Pope, yet Corinna's Going A-Maying is as much appreciated by some people as Paradise Lost."

Whether these and the rest of the seventeenth century poets were followers of Spenser or Jonson, they were first of all followers of John Donne, the acknowledged founder of the metaphysical school. John Donne was influenced by both Spenser and Jonson. Spenser and Donne were both romanticists. While Spenser selected from the outer world pictures of permanent joy, Donne saw with his poetic insight abstract relations between things and presented them cleared by a flood of light. He inherited his intellect from Jonson. Also from Jonson came his rhetorical skill, his analytic and logical handling of themes, and his pure vocabulary.

Aside from these inherited traits Donne made a large contribution of his own to English Literature. The problem of right and wrong interested John Donne. He was a scholar of medieval beliefs and was psychologically curious about the truth of all that he had read. His excessive subjectivity made him almost oblivious of the external world.
Herbert J. C. Grierson believes that metaphysical poetry, originated by this most reflective of the poets, "was inspired as was the Divina Commedia by a philosophical conception of the universe and the role assigned to the human spirit in the drama for existence."

Donne was not consciously metaphysical, but images came to him, as they did to Shakespeare, for vivid and dramatic expression. He disregarded the tried and conventional imagery and the classical references of the sixteenth century literature and substituted very often images of abstraction from contemporary philosophy and science. He knew the graceful poetry of Italy and Spain and could have written musical verse himself, yet he chose to write harsh and rugged poetry. He wished to startle his readers by its apparent crudeness. Also, he desired to make his poetry near the language and form of ordinary speech. Grierson says:

"He writes as one who will say what he has to say without regard to the conventions of poetic diction or smooth verse, but what he has to say is subtle and surprising, and so are the metrical effects with which it is presented."

He was the first great master of poetical rhetoric which was "oratory rather than song".

Professor Saintsbury says that Donne has a "poetical quality which no English poet has ever surpassed. There are vistas in the background of each thought with the depth of
life and the soul." Again, he has said that "in flashes of imaginative ecstasy of the highest order Donne has single lines which are equal to Shakespeare".

Edmund Gosse in his *Jacobean Poets* says that Donne's thoughts are curious, sublime, imaginative, odd, scholastic, and stuffed with meaning. Grierson states that English poetry had never been so reflective, introspective, and serious before John Donne, and that he, as "the great master of seventeenth century poetry" changed the character of Elizabethan wit to one in which there was a "finer psychology expressed by conceits, learned imagery, the argumentative evolution of lyrics, the combination of passion and thought, and the probing experience which gives rise to passion."

Donne's poetry may be roughly divided into two groups. The first group is made up of his love poems. These poems contain a depth of feeling unknown to most of the Elizabethan writers. Donne was very unconventional and discussed freely all the moods of a lover. When Professor Saintsbury said of John Donne, "It is almost necessary that those who do not like him should not like him at all; should be scarcely able to see how any decent and intelligent human creature can like him," he referred, undoubtedly, to the adverse criticism which had risen over the gross eroticism and sensuality of Donne's amatory verses. For many people his witty expressions
do not compensate for the shocking freedom of his speech in all the Elegies, and especially Elegy XVII, To His Mistress Going to Bed, and The Comparison. Still, the sentence which follows the one quoted above from Professor Saintsbury tells how other people think of Donne. "It is almost as necessary that those who do like him should either like him so much as to speak unadvisedly with lips or else curb and restrain their expressions of love for fear that it should seem on that side idolatry." Admirers of Donne's love poems are pleased with his expression of sincere emotion and with his representation of the mystical heights and the mystical depths of love. "If he had had a more perfect artistic sense, more sincerity, and a deeper sense of beauty," Herbert J. C. Grierson believes that he would have been one of the greatest of love poets.

Donne's love poems influenced the young courtiers of his day. They enjoyed, admired, and tried to imitate his "sensual audacities." Among these followers were Carew, Herrick, and Suckling, who have already been referred to as followers of Ben Jonson, and Andrew Marvell. The lyrics of these poets exist for their beauty. One of the poems of Carew is technically and artistically perfect, yet it cannot be quoted to-day. Some of Herrick's are filthy, according to Felix E. Schelling. Yet the theory that "art for art's sake" is permissible seemed to have held good in the seventeenth as well as in the twentieth century.
The other important group of Donne's poetry contains his religious poems. In order to understand the struggle and mental torture expressed in these poems it would be necessary to know that Donne left the Catholic Church and became an Anglican when he was about nineteen years old. Dr. Samuel Johnson has said that "a convert from Popery to Protestantism gives up so much of what he has held as sacred as anything that he retains, there is so much laceration of mind in such a conversion, that it can hardly be sincere or lasting."

Although Donne became a minister of the Anglican Church, and later Dean of Saint Paul's, he was in a continual conflict between the world and the church, and between the two opposing religious faiths. Donne is the first intensely religious English poet.

In the sixteenth century poets were absorbed in the beauties of the world, and they enjoyed and worshipped these beauties without questioning them. Seventeenth century poets questioned and doubted everything. They wrote often of heavenly, instead of earthly, beauty. A few Elizabethan poets felt it their duty to write religious verse occasionally, but it was easier for them to address gods than God. The seventeenth century poets following Donne believed that their poetic talent was given them as a gift with which to serve God. Consequently, there was a deeper note to their religious poetry. Here, then, awakened a new feeling in all English poetry. These religious metaphysical poets express an everlasting truth, "the deep personal sense of religion and those austere ideas of personal purity which made the true strength of the Puritan, mixed with an exquisitely cultivated sense of beauty show the lasting
Among the most important followers of Donne in religious verse were: Richard Crashaw, George Herbert, and Henry Vaughan. Others were George Wither whose Hymns and Songs of the Church is a good example of religious verse which is direct in construction, unadorned, and full of homely sincerity; and Quarles, who wrote religious poetry filled with figurative and enigmatic language, twisted conceits, and often slovenly expression. His work is uneven, however, and when he was really sincere in his religious verse, his poetry surpassed, on account of its genuine emotion, the strained ingenuity of the rest. Herrick wrote well on any theme. Noble Numbers is his book of religious poetry. Even in writing of religion, Herrick is dainty and trifling, so his work is rather shallow. As a whole, though, the English genius of the seventeenth century showed in its religious poetry, particularly, the individual's reaction to Elizabethan traditions and conventions. No country has produced more individual and devout poetry.

The courtly followers of Donne whom Dr. Samuel Johnson described as "courtier pedants who represent the intrusion into poetry of the love of dialectical subtlety encouraged by the still prevalent system of scholastic disputation" tried to imitate the passionate paradoxical reasoning of his love poetry. They had not his complexity of moods nor range of personal feelings, so their poems were more abstract and elaborated wittily one or two common emotions. This was to a certain extent true of the followers of his divine poetry. Yet in the technicalities of their work all members of the
metaphysical school have similar traits. Some of these characteristics have already been mentioned. It is necessary to explain them further.

The point cannot be too much emphasized that one of the purposes of the metaphysical poets was to break with the Elizabethan conventions. They realized that they could not improve the best of the Elizabethan poetry. So it remained for them either to follow the style of the Elizabethans or react against it. They chose the latter course, and their poetry was an enthusiastic experiment in destroying the older traditions. They purposely adopted a hard, crabbed style in which the studied carelessness was carried to a fault. This avoidance of smoothness opened the new era of poetry. John Dryden speaking of Donne's poetry said:

"Were he translated into numbers and English, he would still be lacking in dignity of expression."

Dryden believed that his, the following generation, gave English poetry all its sweetness, dignity of expression, and strength of versification. On the contrary, Grierson has noted, that whereas the seventeenth century expressed fantastic thoughts in correct and harmonious language, the eighteenth century used fantastic language to express trivial thoughts. George Herbert Palmer remarks that this poetry could not have expressed its thought so well, if it had been more smooth. Complex passions and the trying problems of life demand a similarly complex style. He also says that "conceit" is a hard term to define. He thinks of it as meaning "packed with thought." He analyzes "conceits" into those which are "base",

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ingenious for their own sake, and those which he calls "noble" in which the mind that thinks finds, by the association of passion and insight, its own reflections in everything. A reader without the same feeling cannot understand the connection. This corresponds to Dr. Samuel Johnson's remark that "one must think and read as these men do to write on their plan."

The plan of many of these poets was to create the proper rhythmic setting of each situation. They had no favorite meters nor verse forms, but attempted all that were known and experimented with new metrical arrangements of their own. Their stanza rime schemes are impossible to classify, for their plans of rhyming are as varied as the length of their stanzas. They were not over careful in their choice of rime words. "Friend" and "wind", "feast" and "guest", "mud" and "food", "shall" and "all", and "eye" and "memory" are some illustrations of their crude selection of rime words. One of John Donne's peculiarities was to divide words at the end of lines to get the proper length that he had planned:

"As prone to all ill, and of good as forget-Ful, as proud, lustful, and as much in debt."

Another example is:

"A license of old iron, boots, shoes and egg-Shells to transport - - "

Dr. Johnson said that in the work of the metaphysical poets the "happy combination of words which distinguish poetry from prose was rarely attempted." Herbert J. C. Grierson has said about the same thing when he observes that the metaphysical style is a neutral one which is as good for prose as for verse.
Dr. Samuel Johnson commented on the metaphysical poets by saying, "If poetry is an imitative art, these writers will without great wrong lose the right to the name of poet, for they did not imitate nature nor life nor forms of matter nor operations of intellect." Those who deny them the name of "poet", he declares, call them "wits." A "wit" is understood easily to mean a witty person or one who uses wit. "Wit" has a special significance when referring to the metaphysical poets. Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines it as "a felicitous percept or an expression of association between ideas not usually connected such as to produce an amusing surprise." A rather common form of wit is a pun. Wit may come in a flash by accident or it may be deliberately thought out. Felix E. Schelling thinks that the form of wit which depends more on the thought of a keen, sinuous, and reasoning mind and less on accident is more imaginative and revealing. Another expression which is often used in criticism of the metaphysical poetry is that it is "paradoxical". This word is familiar. Still it may be well to quote the definition given by Webster's Collegiate Dictionary of the word "paradox":

"An assertion or sentiment seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense but possibly true."

Now that the reader has these ideas in mind and has an understanding that the poetry will for the most part be so full of thought that it will seem not at all spontaneous with its many odd conceptions expressed in far fetched and fantastic language, he should be ready to study actual examples of metaphysical work.
Every writer of the seventeenth century was more or less touched by the metaphysical movement. John Milton, the greatest poet of the period, at the age of nineteen wrote At A Vacation Exercise In The College, Part Latin, Part English. In this poem he tells his native language that:

"I have some naked thoughts that rove about
And hardly look to have their passage out,
And, weary of their place, do only stay
Till thou hast decked them in thy best array."

He asks:

"-- haste thee straight to do me once a pleasure,
And from thy wardrobe bring the chiefest treasure;
Not those new fangled toys, and trimmings slight
Which takes our late fantasticks with delight."

These last two lines refer without doubt to the work of John Donne and his followers. Milton in one of his prose essays stated, also, that he disapproved of the work of the metaphysical poets. He noted their want of selection of diction and said that they used language far from that of ordinary speech. In spite of these unfavorable comments it is well known that Milton's early poetry was conspicuously tinged with conceits. The Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity offers some striking examples of this. Among them is his reference to Peace,

"With purple wing the amorous clouds dividing."

Another stanza begins:

"So when the sun in bed,
Curtained with cloudy red,
Pillows his chin upon an orient wave,
The flocking shadows pale
Toop to the infernal jail - "

As Milton's art grew more and more sure, he used fewer conceits. In Samson Agonistes, though, one of his latest works, he described "hens" as "tame villatic fowl."
In connection with Milton's Hymn On The Morning of Christ's Nativity it is interesting to note two other metaphysical poems on the same subject. One is by Richard Crashaw who made the only important contribution embodying Catholic doctrines during the seventeenth century. His work is considered unequal, but the poetic fervor of it at its best has been hardly equalled since his day. His hymn is called In the Holy Nativity of Our Lord God A Hymn Sung as by The Shepherds. Here is an apparently paradoxical and conceited stanza from that:

"Gloomy night embraced the place,
Where the noble Infant lay.
The Babe looked up and showed his face;
In spite of darkness, it was day.
It was Thy day, Sweet! and did rise
Not from the east, but from Thine eyes."

The first stanza of the Full Chorus is:

"Welcome, all wonders in one night!
Eternity shut in a span,
Summer in winter, day in night,
Heaven in earth, and God in man.
Great Little One! Whose all-embracing birth
Lifts earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth."

The language of these stanzas is unusual and in the second, particularly, when analyzed by verses seems to be entirely paradoxical. The faith which produced it, and the devout thought shine through and clarify the obvious contradictions. The second hymn On Christ's Nativity was written by Henry Vaughan. He says:

"The sun doth shake
Light from his locks, and, all the way
Breathing perfumes, doth spice the day."

These lines merely illustrate a typical witty conceit.

One type of wit that the metaphysical poets enjoyed using was the play on words, or puns. In his poem The Cross John Donne makes use of this device:
"Be covetous of crosses, let none fall;
Cross no man else, but cross thyself in all."

Again:

"From me no pulpit, nor misgrounded law,
Nor scandal taken, shall this Cross withdraw;
It shall not, for it cannot; for the loss
Of this Cross were to me another Cross."

Henry Vaughan's Love and Discipline puns on the same word:

"Blest be thy dew and blest thy frost,
And happy I to be so crost
And curt'd by crosses at thy cost."

The metaphysical poets were rather fond of displaying their knowledge in fields of all kinds. John Donne in his Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness likens his doctors to cosmographers, students of the science that treats of the constitution of the whole system of worlds:

"Whilst my physicians by their love are grown
Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown
That this is my southwest discovery
Por fretrum frebis, by these straits to die."

He displays his knowledge of geography in Elegy III called Change.

"Though Danube into the sea must flow
The sea receives the Rhine, Volga, and Po."

The rest of the stanza describes the action of water in an effort to prove that change in love should be recognized as beneficial as the water's change of place:

"Waters struck soon, if in one place they abide
And in the vast sea are more putrified;
But when they kiss one bank, and leaving this
Never look back, but the next bank do kiss,
They are the purest; change is the nursery
Of music, joy, life, and eternity."
Sir John Davies was evidently a student of physiology and philosophy. One of his poems is entitled The Soul's Reck
Upon Herself. In one called The Soul is More Than a Perfection
or Reflection of the Sense, he says:

"Sense outside knows, the soul through all things sees;
Sense circumstance; she doth the substance view;
Sense sees the bark, but she the life of trees
Sense hears the sound, but she the concords true."

His poem The Soul is More Than the Temperature of the Humours
of the Body states the relation between them:

"But it on her, (Humours of the Body on the Soul) not
she on it depends
For she the body doth sustain and cherish
Such secret pow'rs of life to it she lends;
That is when they fail, then doth the body perish."

Two of his other titles imply the learning contained in the
poems: In What Manner the Soul is United to the Body and The
Immortality of the Soul.

One of Donne's most interesting comparisons is contained in
A Valediction Forbidding Mourning. He was obliged to go off
on a trip leaving his wife behind. Before his departure, he
tried to console her with the thought that their two souls were
one and with the separation would only expand and not break
apart. He continued:

"If they (souls) be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixt foot makes no show
To move, but doth if the other do.

"And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other doth far roam
It leans and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home."
"Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
Like the other foot, obliquely run. 
Thy firmness makes my circle just, 
And makes me end where I begun."

Andrew Marvell, called by one critic, "a perfect exponent of the metaphysical school," shows geographic, geometric, and astrological learning in his poem The Definition of Love. He and his love are not allowed to marry:

"For Fate with jealous eye does see  
Two perfect Loves, nor lets them close! 
Their union would her ruines be,  
And her Tyrannick pow'r depose.

"And therefore her Decrees of Steel  
Us as the distant poles have plac'd,  
(Though Loves whole world on us doth wheel)  
Nor by themselves to be embrac'd.

"Unless the giddy Heaven fall,  
And Earth some new convulsion tear;  
And us to joy in the world should all  
Be cramped into a Planisphere.

"As Lines so Loves oblique may well  
Themselves in every Angle greet,  
But ours so truly Parallel  
Though infinite can never meet.

"Therefore the Love which us doth bind,  
But Fate so obviously debarrs,  
Is the Conjunction of the Mind,  
And Opposition of the Stars."

In his The Garden, also, Andrew Marvell's erudition suggests a strange idea of the ocean as compared to the mind:

"The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find;  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other worlds, and other seas,  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade."
He tells, too, of a bed of various flowers which opening at successive hours, indicate the time of day. The technical name for this bed is "dial". He mentions that word only and leaves the rest to be explained to those ignorant of its meaning in a footnote.

"How well the skilful gardener drew Of flowers, and herbs, this dial new; Where from above, the milder sun Does through a fragrant zodiac run."

Henry Vaughan foreshadows William Wordsworth in his queer belief that in growing up a child loses its natural vision and insight into the mysteries of nature and knowledge of a life which preceded this early existence. His The Retreat expresses some of the ideas which Wordsworth put into his Ode: Intimations of Immortality:

"Happy those early days, when I Shined in my angel-infancy! Before I understood this place Appointed for this second race, Or taught my soul to fancy aught But a white, celestial thought --."

In "those early days" he could see God's face in clouds or flowers, and,

" -- felt through all this fleshly dress Bright shoots of everlastingness."

In The World Vaughan describes mystically his remarkable conception of "Eternity":

"I saw Eternity the other night, Like a great ring of pure and endless light, All calm, as it wasught; And round beneath it Time in hours, days, years, Driven by the spheres Like a vast shadow moved, in which the world And all her train were hurled."
A few examples of "paradox" have been given already. There are many others. Donne's poem The Anniversarie offers a good illustration in the last line of the following quotation:

"Only our love hath no decay
This no to-morrow hath nor yesterday;
Running it never runs from us away
But truly keeps his first-everlastling day.

There is one in these two verses from Love's Growth:

"Methinks I lied all winter, when I swore
My love was infinite, if spring make it more,"

and in his The Computation which ends:

"Yet call this not long life; but think that I Am by being dead, immortal, can ghosts die?"

Love's Deity contains a paradox in the first familiar lines:

"I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
Who died before the god of Love was born."

The metaphysical "far-fetched and witty conceits" abound in all the poetry of the seventeenth century. Donne is pleased to compare himself to a medal in The Dream:

"Image of her whom I love more than she,
Whose fair impression in my faithful heart
Makes me her medal, and makes her love me,
As kings do coins, to which their stamp impart
The value."

In A Valediction of Weeping he likens his tears to coins:

"Let me pour forth
My tears before thy face whilst I stay here
For thy face coins them, and thy stamp they bear;
And by thy mintage they are something worth,
For they be
Pregnant of thee;
Fruits of much grief they are emblems of more;
When a tear falls, that thou fall'st which it bore.
So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore."
In The Autumnal, Donne says:

"But name not winter-faces, whose skin's slack
Lank as an unthrifty's purse;"
"Name not these living death-heads unto me,
For these not ancient but antique be."

Crashaw's Music's Duel is considered by Edmund Gosse in his Seventeenth Century Studies to be "the most brilliant attempt to make our language express the quality and variety of music."

This poem represents the contest between a nightingale and the player of a lute. It was the nightingale's turn. She burst into:

"-- short thick sobs, whose thundering volleys float
And roll themselves over her lubric throat
In panting murmurs, 'stilled out of her breast,
That ever-bubbling spring, the sugared nest
Of her delicious soul, that there does lie
Bathing in streams of liquid melody."

It is unnecessary to comment on the conceit which could call sobs at once "thundering volleys" and "panting murmurs." The whole passage is representative of conceit at its best. The poem ends with the nightingale's defeat and pictures it thus:

"She fails; and failing, grieves and grieving, dies;
She dies, and leaves her life the victor's prize,
Falling upon his lute. O, fit to have --
That died so sweetly - dead, so sweet a grave!"

Abraham Cowley pictures much the same scene in much the same way in his Praise of Poetry:

"Nightingales, hermless sirens of the air,
And muses of the place, were there
Who when their little windpipes they had found
Unequal to so strange a sound
O'ercome by art and grief, they did expire,
And fell upon the conquering lyre.
Happy, O Happy they! whose tomb might be
Mausolus envied by thee!"
George Herbert would have been ashamed to write a natural and spontaneous poem. He thought that all the niceties of expression should be enlisted to the aid of the proper and polished presentation of his feeling. His poems are full of compact and trenchant thought. When he was most passionate, he was artificial. He chose homely words and illustrations which are on the whole commonplace. This was the way he broke the old conventions. He states his theory of poetry clearly in Jordan:

"Who says that fictions only and false hair
Become a verse? Is there in truth no beautie?
Is all good structure in a winding stair?
May no lines passe, except they do their dutie
Not to a true, but painted chair?

"Is it no verse, except enchanted groves
And sudden arbours shadow coarse-spunne lines?
Must purling streams refresh a lovers loves?
Must all be vaile'd, while he that reades, divines,
Catching the sense at two removes?

"Shepherds are honest people; let them sing:
Riddle who list, for me, and pull for Prime:
I envie no man's nightingale or spring;
Nor let them punish me with losse of ryme,
Who plainly say, My God, My King."

Herbert's readers do not often have to "catch the sense at two removes". He states his thought clearly, yet even his poems have their conceits. His poems *Easter Wings* and *The Altar* represent even by the shape in which they are printed the things described. His *The Collar and The Pulley* are often misunderstood. Their titles are odd, and the thought of the poems is very often difficult to comprehend in one reading. *Virtue* is clear in spite of its original conceits:
"Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky!
The dew shall weep thy fall to-night;
For thou must die.

"Sweet spring, full of sweet days and roses,
A box where sweets compacted lie.
My music shows ye have your closes
And all must die.

"Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like seasoned timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turn to coal,
Then chiefly lives."

Prayer ends with two verses which are not musical and which do
not rhyme perfectly - Herbert was purposely careless this way
in order to avoid too much grace and beauty - yet which contain
a very poetic thought wittily expressed:

"Church-bells beyond the stars heard, the souls blood,
The land of spices, something understood."

There are not many vaguely beautiful suggestions. Herbert's more
characteristic work is found in Jordan, The Elixir, and his
Church Porch. The last named poem is full of practical advice
against "wine and wantonesse", "taking His name who made thy
mouth in vain," and "exceeding your income". He discourses in
a very human way on proper conduct in church. "Kneeling n'er
spoiled silk stocking", he says, and ends the poem with a
valuable hint:

"Judge not the preacher; for he is thy judge;
If thou dislike him, thou conceiv'st him not.
God calleth preaching folly. Do not grudge
To pick out treasures from an earthen pot.
The worst speak something good; if all want sense,
God takes a text, and preacheth patience."

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Henry Vaughan, a follower of Herbert, admitted that George Herbert, "that blessed man", had influenced him and modestly speaks of himself as "the very least of his converts." Under the inspiration of Herbert's work he resolved that he, too, would substitute pious thoughts for his former vanities. This determination is expressed in *Idle Verse*:

"Go, go quaint follies, sugared sin.  
Shadow no more my door!  
I will no longer cobwebs spin  
I'm too much on the score."

Vaughan reflects in his work the quaint conceits used by his master. In *Content* he shows Herbert's characteristic love of simplicity:

"Why then these curl'd puffed points  
Or a laced story?  
Death sets all out of joint,  
And scorches then glory.  
Some love a rose  
In hand, some in the skin;  
But, Crosse to those  
I would have mine within."

In *The Bird* he tells how it praises God by singing. Some people he compares to the discontented birds of night:

"The turtle then in palm tree mourns,  
While owls and satyrs howl  
The pleasant land to brimstone turns,  
And all her streams grow foul."

His *Rainbow* is decidedly far-fetched in its conceits:

"When thou dost shine, darkness looks white and fair,  
Forms turn to music, clouds to smiles and air;  
Rain gently spreads his honey-drops, and pours  
Balm on the cleft earth, milk on grass and flowers."
Vaughan has written a poem on St. Mary Magdalene. He says that her,

"Tears which ran in live
And hasty drops, as if they had
(Their Lord so near) sense to be glad."

After a pleasantry advising all women to learn "Mary's" art of tears and then,

"Say, you have got the day from men" - he becomes again serious and continues:

"Her art whose pensive, weeping eyes
Were once sin's loose and tempting spies,
And now are fixed stars whose light
Helps such dark straglers to their sight."

It is interesting to compare this last mentioned poem with Richard Crashaw's The Weeper which is his fervent tribute to the tears of St. Mary Magdalene. The poem begins:

"Hail sister springs,
Parents of silver-forded rills!
Ever bubbling things!
Thawing crystal! Snowy hills!
Still spending, never spent; I mean
Thy fair eyes, sweet Magdalene."

This poem is much ridiculed for the extravagances of its conceits. Edmund Gosse in his Seventeenth Century Studies says that the line which likens her eyes to "two walking baths", and the one which follows that are the two worst lines in English poetry. In spite of the adverse criticism of the whole, it is easy to find beautiful lines, for instance this one:

"Heavens of ever-falling stars."
Edmund Gosse calls Crashaw's *Wishes to His Supposed Mistress* "one of the loveliest and most original poems of the age." Crashaw describes the woman he could love if

"----- that divine
Idea take a shrine
Of crystal flesh through which to shine."

"I wish her beauty,
That owes not all its duty
To gaudy tire, or glistening shoe-tie."

Crashaw, the religious poet, shows that he knows the ways of most women. He would not choose a girl dependent on a feather or a fan or the spoil of a shop for her beauty. He wants,

"A face, made up
Out of no other shop,
Than what Nature's white hand sethope."

"A cheek where grows
More than a morning rose,
Which to no box his being owes."

He ends:

"I wish her store
Of worth may leave her poor
Of wishes; and I wish - no more."

Crashaw's *Hymn to Saint Teresa* is often spoken of as his best poem. Gosse says that it is a real vision with delicate music in spite of the profuse and ornate imagery. Examples of this imagery are: Crashaw's reference in one passage to the death of St. Teresa as the "uncasing of the soul kept so sweet in her Brest's chaste cabinet," and in another he describes it, as follows:
"And melt thy Soul's sweet mansion,
Like a soft lump of incense, hastened
By too hot a fire, and wasted
Into perfuming clouds, so fast
Shall thou exhale to Heaven at last
In a resolving sigh."

The critic who commented on Crashaw's life and work in Chambers' Encyclopedia said that at his best Crashaw was equal to Spenser and Shakespeare. He remarked on Crashaw's ingenuity and verbal brilliance and said that his poetry was splendid "with the splendour of a rocket not of a glowworm or a star." As an example of Crashaw's best work he quoted the line called Water Turned into Wine:

"The conscious water saw its God and blushed."

Quarles expressed his dependence on God in a poem which is not unlike a riddle, Delight in God Only:

"In having all things and not thee what have I?
Not having thee, what have my labours got?
Let me enjoy but thee, what further crave I?
And having thee alone, what have I not?
I wish not sea nor land; nor would I be Possess'd of heaven, heaven impossess'd of thee."

Abraham Cowley was, Herbert J. C. Grierson says, the last conscious representative of the metaphysical school. His wit was less passionate than his predecessors in the movement, and his reason controlled his imagination. "The spirit of the metaphysical wit remained though the spirit which gave it music and colour had gone." Felix Schelling says that Cowley was caught between two conflicting periods, the metaphysical and the classical. In his own day, however, Cowley was considered a greater poet than Milton. He was called "love's best and greatest prophet." In spite of that Dr. Samuel Johnson believes that "no man who has ever loved will commend his love verses," and Elizabeth Barrett Browning thinks...
that Cowley is "coarsely amorous." Cowley expected that his work would be understood but little, for his "figures are unusual" and his numbers ingenious. A few examples from his poetry will illustrate these points. He begins The Hymn to Light which describes the creation of Light from Darkness thus:

"First born of Chaos, who so far didst come
From the old Negro's darksome womb!
Which when it saw the lovely Child,
The Melancholy Mass put on kind looks and smiled."

He calls The Grasshopper

"Voluptious and wise withal,
Epicurean animal!"

He compares life to a game of chess in Destinie:

"An unseen Hand makes all their moves
Some Wisemen and some Fools we call,
Figures, alas, of Speech, for Destiny plays us all."

He enjoyed being alone and wrote Of Solitude:

"O Solitude! First state of humankind!
Which blessed remained till man did find
Every his own helper's company."

There are many poems in which he pictured himself. One poem is the Epitaph on a Living Author which contains the line:

"Here Cowley sleeps."

He liked to bring his own name into his poetry. He did in The Complaint:

"In a deep vision's intellectual scene,
Beneath a bower for sorrow made,
The incomparable shade
Of this black yew's unlucky green
Mixing with the mourning willow's careful gray,
When reverend Cowley cuts out his famous way,
The melancholy Cowley lay."

The descriptions in this poem lack imagination, it is easily seen. They are forced and rather tiresome. This dullness of representation is even more pronounced when the Muse appears
to him in this same poem. He felt that he must justify her coming, so he explains prosaically:

"(The Muses oft in lands of vision play)"

In order that there shall be no doubt as to her appearance, he gives this realistic suggestion:

"A crown was on her head, and wings were on her feet."

In The Wish he describes his ideal dwelling:

"Pride and Ambition here
Only in far-fetch'd metaphors appear."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning says that Cowley's imagination is "tinsel compared to Donne's solid gold." In contrast to Cowley's work it may be interesting to look back at the conceits of Donne. For example, The Ecstasy:

"Where like a pillow on a bed,
A pregnant bank swelled up, to rest
The violet's reclining head,
Sat we two, one another's best;
Our hands were firmly cemented
By a fast balm, which thence did spring,
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
Our eyes upon a double string."

To make certain that the reader can have no question as to the full meaning of the term "metaphysical poetry" it will be worth while to study some of Donne's longest poems. The second Progress of the Soul would show a great deal of knowledge about the habits of birds, animals, and fish, and an understanding of the theory of metapsychosis. His purpose was "to sing the progress of a deathless soul," and
he does trace its changes from the apple which Eve tasted in the Garden of Eden, to a mandrake, bird, fish, a second fish, whale, mouse, wolf, a dog half wolf, an ape, and finally it passed into the body of a child. However, a more interesting study will be an analysis of his two elaborate elegies on the death of Elizabeth Drury.

When Elizabeth Drury died, Donne, out of no sense of personal loss but rather as a tribute to her father who had given him a house, agreed to write a memorial poem each year. Only two were completed. The first is called: An Anatomy of the World "Wherein By Occasion of The Untimely Death of Mistress Elizabeth Drury, The Fraility and The Decay of The Whole World Is Represented." Donne was so eager to please Sir Robert Drury that he did not control his asseverations of the utter corruption of the world since Elizabeth had left it:

"Sick world, yea, dead, yea putrified, since she Thy intrinsic balm and thy preservative Can never be renewed, thou never live."

He mentioned all the curses which had fallen on man and attributed them to Eve who started the world's ill fortune. He discussed health in his day:

"There is no health, physicians say that we At best enjoy but a neutrality; And can there be worse sickness than to know, That we are never well, nor can be so?"

In the "good old days" people used to live to be old. Alas! we scarce live long enough to try Whether a true made clock run right or lie." "With new diseases on ourselves we war And with new physic, a worse engine far."
That he may unify this and the several other digressions from the mourning over Elizabeth's death, Donne pretends to believe that she had been given such a store of virtue that had she been allowed to live, she could have redeemed the world from all its sin, but - "She is dead." That last quotation is part of the refrain which connects the divisions of the queer poem. The first line is in each case:

"She, she is dead: she's dead: when thou know'st this,"

and the second line is changed in each instance. It is varied thus:

"Thou know'st how poor a trifling thing man is;"
"Thou know'st how lame a cripple this world is;"
"Thou know'st how ugly a monster this world is;"
"Thou know'st how wan a ghost this world is;" and
"Thou know'st how dry a cinder this world is."

Between the comings of the refrain are wise dissertations on astronomy, the signs of the Zodiac and their influence on nature, natural philosophy, mineralogy, and physiology. One passage of comparison shows the width of scope that metaphysical poets allowed themselves:

"But as in cutting up a man that's dead,
The body will not last out to have read
On every part, and therefore men direct
Their speech to parts that are of most effect;
So this world's carcase would not last if I
Were punctual in this anatomy."

The careless tone of the last two lines is not uncommon in this poem. Other examples are:

"So these high songs that to thee suited bin, (notice the Serve but to sound Thy Maker's praise and (odd word) thine."

and

"Ne'er may thy name in our songs be forgot,
Till we shall sing thy ditty and thy note."

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Professor Saintsbury says that *The Anatomy of the World* is "the most marvellous exposition of a certain kind of devotional thought ever given. It is a union of the sensual, intellectual, poetical, and religious which is very rarely voiced."

The second elegy to Elizabeth Drury is: *Of the Progress of the Soul* "Wherein By Occasion of the Religious Death of Mistress Drury, The Incommodities of the Soul in this Life, and Her Exaltation in the Next, are Contemplated." There does not seem to be so much unity in this as in the first elegy. Some very noteworthy passages stand out, however. The first simile is characteristic:

"Or as sometimes in a beheaded man,
Though at those two Red Seas, which freely ran,
One from the trunk, another from the head"—
"His eyes will twinkle, and his tongue will roll,
As though he beckoned and called back his soul.
He grasps his hands, and he pulls up his feet
And seems to reach and to step forth to meet
His soul, when all these motions which we saw,
Are but as ice which crackles at a thaw;
Or as a lute which is moist weather rings
He knew alone, by cracking of her strings
So struggles this dead world, now she is gone;
For there is motion in corruption."

He makes use of the well-known comparison:

"She, to whom all this world was but a stage."

In this poem there is an echo of the refrain of the other:

"She, she is gone; she's gone; when thou know'st this,
What fragmentary rubbish this world is
Thou know'st."
There are many witty conceits about death.

"Think then, my soul, that death is but a groom,
Which brings a taper to the outward room,"

"Think thee laid on thy death-bed, loose and slack;
And think that but unbinding of a pack
To take one precious thing, thy soul, from thence,"

"Think that a rusty piece discharged is flown
In pieces, and the bullet is his own,
And freely flies; this to thy soul allow;"

"Think thy soul broke, think thy soul hatched but now;"

"Think this slow-paced soul, which late did cleave
To a body, and went but by the body's leave,
Twenty perchance or thirty miles a day
Despatches in a minute all the way
Twixt heaven and earth."

The soul is progressing through the firmament:

"And as these stars were but so many beads
Strung on one string, speed undistinguished leads
Her through the spheres, as through the beads a string,
Whose quick succession makes it still one thing;
As doth the pith which lest our bodies slack,
Strings fast the little bones of neck and back."

In her superior state the soul:

"Chides us, slow-paced snails, who crawl upon
Our prison's prison, earth."

He describes the pleasures of heaven:

"Only in heaven joy's strength is never spent,
And accidental things are permanent." (notice the paradox in that last line)

A further mention of heaven contains a rather beautiful conceit:

"Heaven is as near and present to her face
As colors and objects in a room
Where darkness was before, when tapers come."
It is the opinion of Professor Saintsbury that the second of these verses is "The finest single line in English divine poetry":

"These hymns thy issue may increase so long
As till God's great Venite changes the song."

In summing up the ground covered by this thesis it will be discovered that contrary to Edward Dowden, who maintains in his New Studies in Literature that there was no special school of metaphysical poets, but one writer or another simply yielded with more abandon than the rest to the tendency towards ingenious and far-fetched imagery, there was a definite group of metaphysical poets. This is generally recognized. Chambers' Encyclopedia says that "Donne is usually considered as the first of a series of poets of the seventeenth century who under the infelicitous name of Metaphysical Poets fill a conspicuous place in English Literature."

These poets were influenced particularly by a movement which had come down to them from the thirteenth century, the movement to separate the language of the refined classes of society from that of the vulgar. They chose to break with the Elizabethan traditions of smooth and graceful verse and expressed their thoughts and emotions in harsh poetry full of far-fetched rhetorical devices. De Quincey has said that "the art and machinery of rhetoric furnishes as legitimate a basis for intellectual pleasure as any other; that the pleasure is of an inferior order can no more attain the idea or model of the composition than it can impeach the excellence of an epigram that it is not a tragedy."
John Dryden called Abraham Cowley, the last of the
metaphysical poets, "the darling of his youth," and considered
him as "almost sacred." He used Cowley's work as a model for
his own rhetorical and didactic poetry. To Dryden the form
of a poem was more important than the thought. With this end
in view he polished, refined, and made wit eloquent in his
satires and complimentary verses. Pope, following him, ex-
pressed his thought in the clear, correct, cold and conven-
tional language and for [w] of the classical school. Cowley,
then, opened the age of classicism and closed the period of
metaphysical poetry.

The metaphysical poets did not pass without leaving their
contribution to English Literature. Notwithstanding the opinion
of the critic in Chambers' Encyclopedia, the place customarily
granted these poets seems very small. Few people realize that
among their other original work, this group gave English poetry
its first deep and personal religious note. Many people reject
the poetry of this age on account of its freedom of speech;
many others dislike its apparent harshness, complexity, and
obscurity. George Herbert Palmer defends metaphysical poetry
by saying that it is not "clumsily obscure." "A poem which
makes you think is not bad if you get a reward for your
thinking." People who have come after these poets have not
wanted to think, and therefore, they have lost the reward which
Professor Palmer believes that most of their poetry contains.
Frederick Ives Carpenter, in commenting on some of the
metaphysical poems, holds "that they are still modern in all their distinction and ardor, in spite of the strangeness of their apparel, a strangeness no greater perhaps than that of some modern poets, like Browning, as the apparel of their verse will appear two hundred years hence."
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