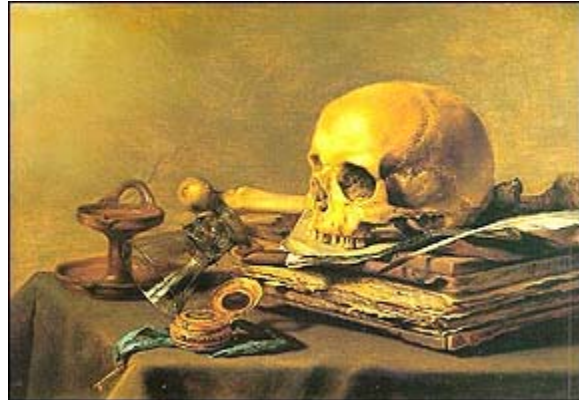


Metaphysical Poets

A term used to group together certain 17th-century poets, including Donne. They share common characteristics of wit, inventiveness, and a love of elaborate stylistic devices.

"Metaphysical" or philosophical concerns are the common subject of their poetry, which investigates the world by rational discussion rather than by intuition or mysticism.

The Metaphysical poets are known for their unusual comparisons or "conceits" such as Donne's comparison of love with astrology (by Donne) and of the soul with a drop of dew (by Marvell).



Pieter Claesz. Vanitas Still Life. 1630.



Frans Hals. Young man with a Skull. c.1626

Reacting against the deliberately smooth and sweet tones of much 16th-century verse, the metaphysical poets adopted a style that is energetic, uneven, and rigorous.

John Donne's Poetry

While a good deal of Elizabethan (C16th) poetry is flowery and decorative, Donne focused his work around highly concentrated images which often involved a dramatic contrast or are notable for their hard intellectualism. Donne liked to twist and distort not only images and ideas, but also traditional rhythmic and stanzaic patterns.

Characteristic of Donne's Poetry

- It adopts a diction and meter modeled on the rawness of actual speech.
- It is usually organized in the dramatic or rhetorical form of an urgent or heated argument (first drawing in the reader and then launching the argument).
- It puts to use a subtle and often outrageous logic.
- It is marked by realism, irony and often a cynicism in its treatment of the complexity of human motives.
- It reveals a persistent wittiness, making use of paradox, puns, and startling parallels.

His life and career can be viewed as having two phases:

Phase I: "Jack Donne "

The most interesting of Donne's early works are the love poems in the collection *Songs and Sonnets*. They show a range of moods, from cynical to violently passionate. The opening of the poems shock the reader into attention, sometimes by asking a question. Then the thought or argument is cleverly developed in terms of ideas derived from philosophy or scientific notions. In these earliest poems, Donne's openings project the reader into the poem in a way that is new in English poetry for the time; once in the poem, the readers is held by a complex development of thought, which twists this way and that. Donne's chief quality in the early work is the union of **passion** and **reasoning**.

Phase II: John Donne, Dean of St. Paul's

Although it changes in focus and theme, Donne's later poetry remains as complex and dense as his early work. The later work reflects his religious tension and his poetic exploration of man's relationship with God. These poems were largely written after the death of Donne's wife, when he had left the worldly, sensuous life behind him and was searching instead for a "right relationship" with God. The 19 *Holy Sonnets* contain Donne's finest examples of religious poetry. These poems are marked by the same intensity and the same combination of passion and argument that can be found in *Songs and Sonnets*, although the object of the passion has now changed.