Metaphysical Poetry

Metaphysical poetry came out of 17th century England. It is characterized by strange conceits (comparisons), images, or paradoxes (seemingly contradictory statements that actually have truth to them). Often centering on love, religion, or morality, these types of poems offer a logical or philosophical argument. Therefore, the poet will weave in comparisons that seem very out of place. However, once analyzed, these images or conceits do somehow relate to the poet's overall point.

A great poet to read is John Donne. Known as a highly religious poet, Donne has written quite a few metaphysical poems. One of his most famous is "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." Donne weaves in an extended metaphor of a mathematical compass as the speaker tries to convince his lover that his leaving is only temporary. The speaker refers to the compass to prove that he will return because their love is true.

John Donne:

John Donne is regarded a great metaphysical and love poet. Though it is a fact that he remained under darkness for a couple of hundred years, yet today he is acknowledged as a remarkable poet of his era. He changed the dynamics of love poetry which was severely resented by the conventional poets, the Elizabethans. Living in his age, the bold treatment of love both in his love as well as divine poems is surprising but intellectually appealing. The subtlety of style and use of conceits sometimes shocks but appeals to the intellect. The rigid approach and accusations of his critics that "he perplexes the minds of the fair sex with the speculations of philosophy" were eclipsed by the commending remarks of T.S Eliot and the likes. Donne is a passionate and bold poet. To grasp & understand the true sense of metaphysical poetry and its use by John Donne, let us discuss various aspects of this genre of verse in the light of his poetry. The poet boldly treats the matter of physical love and union and the disturbance caused by the sun "buie old foole, unruly sunne" in "The Sun Rising". He goes on to ask God to "batter my heart" because the poet feels that he has sinned so much that there is no escape for him except that God renews his heart and makes it anew. He seeks spiritual renewal with the grace of God. There are several examples as to the passion and boldness of his poetry e.g. "Death be not proud", "Twicknam Garden" etc.