



THE AGE OF MILTON

POETRY

Cavalier poets

Their works express a light vein and the joy of life which had characterized the Elizabethan Age, though they reflect the new trend towards more pensive and meditative moods.

The most representative poets are Thomas Carew (c. 1594-1640), Robert Herrick (1591-1674), Sir John Suckling (1609-1642) and Richard Lovelace (1618-1658).

Thomas Carew was a follower of Ben Jonson (→ Chapter 6, Great Writers), but he was also influenced by Donne (→ Chapter 6, Great Writers). He wrote *A Rapture* (probably composed between 1622 and 1624), a love poem, and he may be considered as the pioneer of the Cavalier poets.

Robert Herrick, who belonged to the «Tribe of Ben», is best remembered for his collection of verses *Hesperides* (1648).

Sir John Suckling produced a great number of songs and plays, and fought for the king's cause.

Richard Lovelace, imprisoned during the Commonwealth, wrote his best poetry while in prison, to beguile time; his most famous poem is *Lucasta* (1649).

Metaphysical poets

The term «metaphysical» invented by Dryden in the 18th century loses its traditional philosophical meaning when it refers to a group of poets who did not represent a real literary movement, but their peculiar trait was to express the spiritual crisis due to the end of the Elizabethan Age and the beginning of a new era of unrest and political instability under the Stuart kings. The Metaphysical poets expressed the complexities and contradictions of life, their doubts and questionings and above all the sense of a problematic transition from the Renaissance to the modern world. Their favourite themes were love and religion. The questions they pose in their works always remain unsolved; their diction is unconventional and thought is more important than form.

The most important poets are George Herbert (1593-1633), Richard Crashaw (c. 1612-1649), Abraham Cowley (1618-1667), Andrew Marvell (1621-1678) and Henry Vaughan (c. 1621-1695).

George Herbert was a distinguished courtier and politician; after a period of doubt and anxiety which is reflected in his most moving poems, he took holy orders in 1626 and became an exemplary parish priest. His most famous work is the collection of poems *The Temple* (1633).

Richard Crashaw was the only son of a puritan preacher; he reverted to Roman Catholicism around 1645. More than Donne's example, he was inspired by the Italian poet Giambattista Marino, by the Spanish and Italian baroque and Spanish Mystical poets. His most famous work is *Steps to the Temple* (1646). His religious poems possess a rare touch of enthusiasm, above all his hymn *The Flaming Heart*, dedicated to St. Teresa of Avila.

Abraham Cowley, one of the best known Metaphysical poets, spent many years in exile, as a royalist courtier. He may be considered as a disciple of Donne as he combined humanistic knowledge with the complexity of metaphysical poetry. His main works were *The Mistress* (1647), the influential *Pindarique Odes* (1656) and the unfinished epic on King David, *Davidis* (1656).

Andrew Marvell was Milton's assistant in the Latin Secretaryship to the Council. He cannot be grouped either with the Cavalier or with the Metaphysical poets. His literary production includes poems, political works and satires. His most famous poems are *Upon the Hill and Grove at Billborough*, *Upon Appleton House* and *The Garden*. His political works are *An Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland* and *A Poem upon the Death of His Late Highness the Lord Protector*. Marvell wrote his best satires during the Restoration.

Henry Vaughan practised the medical profession and after his religious conversion (1641) he devoted himself to religious poetry. Vaughan's works reflect his love of nature and mysticism and influenced the work of Wordsworth, among others. Much of his poetry has a particularly modern sound. Vaughan's greatest verse appears in the collection *Silex Scintillans*, published in two parts in 1650 and 1655 respectively.





PROSE

Among the most representative prose-writers of the time figure Robert Burton (1577-1640), Izaak Walton (1593-1683) and Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682).

Robert Burton wrote an eccentric book, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), in which he enquired into the causes and remedies of melancholy.

Izaak Walton was the biographer of John Donne and of George

Herbert. He is also remembered for his work *The Compleat Angler* (1653), a short treatise about the secrets of angling intermingled with his meditations.

Thomas Browne was a doctor of medicine and his most famous work is *Religio Medici* (1642), a collection of opinions concerning his profession and his religious faith. In *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646) or *Vulgar Errors* Browne deals with popular beliefs and superstitions.

