Metaphysical Poets

The wits of 17th century poetry...
First, to understand what the “metaphysical poets” are, we should ask: “What is metaphysics?”
The dictionary definition (of “metaphysics”) might help here…

- One definition is:

“The branch of philosophy that examines the nature of reality, including the relationship between mind and matter, substance and attribute, fact and value.”
Another is:
“Excessively subtle or recondite reasoning.”
So, metaphysical poetry is poetry that involves such philosophy &/or such reasoning!

Sounds simple, huh?
Some readers have HATED metaphysical poetry, because …

- “He affects the Metaphysics... in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts.”

  (someone said this about John Donne)
The most famous metaphysical poet is... 

John Donne
The most notable feature of metaphysical poetry is …

- the metaphysical conceit
A metaphysical conceit is...

- A figure of speech “which establish[es] a striking parallel—usually an elaborate parallel—between two very dissimilar things or situations” (Abrams 32).
“I had eight birds hatched in one nest, 
Four cocks there were, and hens the rest. 
I nursed them up with pain and care, 
Nor cost, nor labour did I spare, 
Till at the last they felt their wing, 
Mounted the trees, and learned to sing; 
Chief of the brood then took his flight 
To regions far and left me quite. 
My mournful chirps I after send, 
Till he return, or I do end: 
Leave not thy nest, thy dam and sire, 
Fly back and sing amidst this choir.”
Those are the first lines from Anne Bradstreet’s “In Reference to Her Children”
Another example…

“Make mee, O Lord, thy Spining Wheele compleat.
Thy Holy Words my Distaff make for mee.”

--These lines are from Edward Taylor’s poem “Huswifery”
So let’s look at John Donne’s poem “Song.”
Works Cited


- [http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/metaintro.htm](http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/metaintro.htm)

- [http://www.geocities.com/Athens/2464/bradpoem.html](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/2464/bradpoem.html)

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Spring 2007