John Donne stands out in the history of English literature not merely as the leader of the metaphysical school of poetry but also as one of the masters of the poetic novelties in theme and technique. In this secular works as well as religious, he is found to strike his originality as a creative artist. This is, perhaps, seldom seen such a literary figure with so stupendously a revolutionary Zeal in the poetic world.

The novelty of Donne’s metaphysical poetry is marked more specially in his love poems which are immensely popular of course, there are numerous English poets who have treated love with much intensity and impulsiveness, but there is seen hardly anyone to give love such an intellectual bias as Donne’s is found to have done. Intellectual vigour and depth, restraint and impetuosity are found well combined in him as a characteristic feature of his dignified artistry.

Of Donne’s love poems, ‘The Good Morrow’ may be instanced as a typical one. His novelty as a metaphysical love poet is here exhibited distinctly as elsewhere. The poem remains quite engrossing and entertaining as a specific instance of metaphysical love poetry, combining adjusting intellect and emotion.

Of course, Donne’s theme is here ratting new. It is the old story of love and the old pleading for unity in diversity in love. The poet addresses his lady love, wonders to ascertain what they did before their love, feels confident of their oneness through love and asserts their constancy that nothing can Slacker or Destroy. But the creative theme of the poem is expressed in a highly singular and suggestive manner. The novelty of Donne’s poetry, as also of metaphysical poetry in general, lies not in the matter but in the manner of expression. In this respect, ‘The Good Morrow’ like ‘The Plea’, ‘The Anniversary’ and ‘The Sun Rising’ is a typical instance. The theme in each of the poems is the oneness of and devotion to love. What, however, stands out most here is the way in which this oneness is shown by the poetic imagery which is unconventional and essentially radical for the age to which Donne belonged. Metaphysical poetry consists of conceits. In conceit, two incongruous elements are compared with a profoundly intellectual penetration, causing thereby a mental stir. This is evident in Donne’s compassion of two lovers to ‘two hemispheres’ “without sharp North, without declining West”. The concluding words of the poem specially convey a conceit. Love is so unified that none of the lovers can slacken and none can die.

“If our two love as be one, or thou and of Love so alike that none do Slacken none can die.”

The unification of the lovers is conveyed by means of a roll of the plea in the poem, ‘The plea’. The little insect sucked the lover first and then sucks the lady and it mingles their ‘two bloods’. The plea is the point of union of two lovers and the poet’s assertion is quite novel-

“This plea is you and I, and this marriage bed, and marriage temple is.”
‘The Anniversary’, another significant poem from Donne, illustrates equally the novelty of the metaphysical style in the treatment of love. The complacent mood of the lovers has a quite startling, rather epigrammatic expression-

“All other things to their destruction draw,

Only our love hath no decay;
This no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday,
Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.”

Metaphysical poetry, as asserted already, is essentially intellectual. Donne’s love poetry also is essentially intellectual. This is revealed both in its reflective nature and its play of unit. In “The Good Morrow”, metaphysical intellectualism is found triumphant. The predominance of Donne’s reflection is clearly expressed in his observation on the unity in diversity attained through love. His theme is a simple and solid expression and bears out his profound reflection on the true strength of devoted love.

The reflective element of the poem, however, is made particularly diverting by the play of unit. The poet’s interrogation as to what the lovers did till they had loved indicates this clearly-

“I wonder by my troth, what thou and I did till we lov’d”

Again, his analog of maps to express the devotion of love testifies to the range of his unit and the depth of his intellectualism.

Metaphysical poets are found logical and analytical rather than sensual and emotional. Their uniqueness lies much in the synthesis of divergent elements the abstract and the concrete the remote and the near, the sublime and the commonplace. This is a specific novelty of the metaphysical style and also of Donne’s. His imagery to describe the devotion of love is conceived in a quite novel manner. The images of ‘Sea discovers’ ‘maps’ or well employed to assert love’s constancy and oneness.

“Let sea discovers to new worlds have gone, ------------------and is one.”

The poet’s imagery is taken from unconventional elements. The conventional matter of love is demonstrated and emphasized through elements. This, however, forms the genesis of the metaphysical style and originality.

T.S. Eliot was astute enough to perceive that Donne and his followers were “the successors of the dramatists of sixteenth century”. Their poems were miniature dramas, albeit dramas of ideas and feelings.

In the very opening of “The Good Morrow” also a drama is announced:“I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I Did, till we love’d ? Were we not wean’d till then?

What distinguishes the opening is that it not only assumes the presence of a second person, the mistress, who is mute yet perceptive, but it is so conversational, prosaic, earnest and abrupt that it at once arrests our attention. The lovers suggestively have spent the night together and in the morning are greeting each other with the phrase
of salutation. The line “...good morrow to our walking souls” suggests the physical day break which stands as a symbol of the spiritual dawn, the dawn of love which constitutes the theme of the poem.

Argument is a basic ingredient in the structure of this love poem. The first line articulates a question which is carried forward up to the fourth. The homely metaphor ‘wean’d’ suggests a child snatched away from his mother’s breast and forced into an artificial mode of feeding. It is an exact emblem for the lover’s estrangement for the time. The phrase ‘country pleasures’ with its suggestion of rusticity and typical urban distaste for stale enjoyments makes the initial question more meaningful. ‘Childish’ carries the overtones of ignorance and rustic simplicity, and contrasts them with the lover’s mature knowledge and wholesome sophistication. Thus nature is preferred to artificiality, and yet negated for its ignorance and inability to provide true satisfaction.

As if this were not enough, the poet further elaborates the imagery of sleep and awakening:

“Or snorted we in the seven sleepers den?”
This legend refers to seven youths who took refuge in a cavern in A.D. 250 fearing the persecution by Decius for their Christian faith. There they fell into a miraculous sleep; when they awake after 187 years, they were surprised to find the Christian Churches. This allusion further broadens the implication of the central metaphor sleep and awakening by adding a religious dimension to the profane love the poet celebrates. Compared to the complete contentment for his present love, all other pleasures are mere fancy. It is analogous to the evolution of the truly satisfying faith of Christianity from the credulity of pagan religion.

The first stanza thus toys with different ideas. That ‘love is Paradisal’ is certainly a Christian note, whereas the idea of attaining all aspired beauty in the form of the mistress’ dream is a sure Platonic evolution of love as enunciated in “The Symposium”- love that begins with attachment to physical beauty rises to the beatific moment of union with the source of beauty, is here directly hinted at. Once this higher love is known, “all love of other sights” falls into pattern, and is transformed (controlled). Seen from this height of unalloyed and unshakable happiness, with their souls newly awakened to the wonder of reciprocated love, the passing of time loses all its fearful aspect. Indeed, jealousy and fear of dullness become unsubstantial. The infinite charm of love is stressed when “one little room” where the lovers are, becomes “an everywhere”. And in his zeal for accuracy, Donne draws comparisons from whatever source he can to give the most vivid impression of his mind. The image from the current discovery of the new worlds figures in suggesting the amplitude and variety of this love. The paradox, the map being a world within the world, while resolves the dichotomy between body and soul, great and small, finite and infinite, the indirect preference to the Aristotelian theory of cognition:

“Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one”- resolves the dichotomy between one and two. The lovers retain their identity; they are one plus one, and yet they are united one unit. Unless they are separate from each other, they cannot experience the reciprocity of love; but unless there is a deep spirit of union, love cannot exist.

To show this paradoxical inter dependence in self-sufficiency, a metaphysical poet as he is, Donne dissects, suggests, fixes and then carries his image of ‘world’ forward to a strange conceit of ‘hemispheres’. The lovers are reflected in each other’s eye balls, which are called hemispheres. The Questions: “Without sharp North, without declining West?” --- asserts that the world of love is without coldness, without any possibility of
declining. It is a perfect world of one in two, and hence deathless. The lovers in their union on all planes defy death.

What discriminates this poem of Donne are its apparent characteristics: the dramatic opening, flashes of wit, simple homely diction, colloquial speech pattern, learned and legendary references, striking images derived from various sources, argumentative structure, unexpected but conclusive resolution, confluence of modernism and medieval tendencies, recreation of thought into feeling and advancement toward the intellectual realism. Donne’s verse has a powerful and hunting harmony of its own. He is compared to Mount Vesuvius and his verse to the hot, ‘lava’ flowing out of it. The first six lines of each stanza of the poem consist of ten syllable while the last line is made of twelve, and it itself speaks of the surge of Donne’s poetic heart. For it, a new stanza pattern emerges out. The metaphysical elements, however, help create a love at once felt passionately and held to be an end in itself. “The Good Morrow” enacts a drama calling up two flesh and blood human being to act on relation to each other. At the same time it helps create an impression of Robert Browning beginning:

“My love is a red, red rose.”

The impression of passionate reality is, however, founded on what Coleridge called ‘a deep poetical truth’—that man is a body as well as a soul, and that immorality is not to be purchased at the price of passion; but by extending it to meet its final spiritual fulfillment.