



Metaphysical Poetry

Geometry & Geography

- The word *metaphysical* means dealing with the relationship between spirit to matter or the ultimate nature of reality. The Metaphysical poets are obviously not the only poets to deal with this subject matter, so there are a number of other qualities involved as well.
- Use of ordinary speech mixed with puns, paradoxes and *conceits* (a paradoxical metaphor causing a shock to the reader by the strangeness of the objects compared; some examples: lovers and a compass, the soul and timber, the body and mind)
- The exaltation of *wit*, which in the 17th century meant a nimbleness of thought; a sense of *fancy* (imagination of a fantastic or whimsical nature); and originality in figures of speech
- Abstruse terminology often drawn from science or law
- Often poems are presented in the form of an argument
- In love poetry, the metaphysical poets often draw on ideas from Renaissance Neo-Platonism to show the relationship between the soul and body and the union of lovers' souls
- The major Metaphysical Poets were John Donne (1572–1631), George Herbert (1593–1633), Andrew Marvell (1621–1678) Saint Robert Southwell (c. 1561–1595) Richard Crashaw (c. 1613–1649), Thomas Traherne (1636 or 1637 – 1674), and Henry Vaughan (1622–1695)
- John Donne is the most popular of the group. Donne's earliest poems showed a brilliant knowledge of English society coupled with sharp criticism of its problems. His satires dealt with common Elizabethan topics, such as corruption in the legal system, mediocre poets, and pompous courtiers, yet stand out because of their intellectual sophistication and striking imagery.
- The Holy Sonnets (also known as Divine Meditations or Divine Sonnets) are a series of nineteen poems. Never published during Donne's lifetime but widely

circulated in manuscript, they have become some of Donne's most popular poems and are widely anthologized. Most of them are written in the *Petrarchan (Italian)* sonnet form, rather than the more restrictive *Shakespearean (English)* sonnet form.

- They were composed between 1609 and 1610, in a period of great personal distress for Donne, with physical, emotional, and financial hardship, as well as religious turmoil: originally a Roman Catholic, Donne did not officially join the Anglican Church until 1615. The Holy Sonnets reflect these anxieties.
- They also try to show a psychological realism when describing the tensions of love.
- This complex doctrine of love which embraces sexuality (the mystical union of souls—see Donne's "The Canonization") but which is directed to an ideal end (discussed in Plato's Symposium) is particularly evident in Donne.
- Platonic love has also come to mean a love between individuals that transcends sexual desire and attains spiritual heights (for example, see some of the courtly romances like Tennyson's Idylls of the King.)
- Donne's work were famous for the themes of his faith in God and women. Though not writing with conventional glamorous style of verse like the Petrarchan style, Donne successfully and beautifully connects the time and space in his poems with extraordinary images.
- Donne's use of diction and language in composing his work is considered revolutionary of his time. His style is regarded as "metaphysical" in the modern study of poem.

Student Lesson

Batter My Heart Analysis

Objectives:

- To be able to recognize the way Metaphysical poets use language to create meaning
- To deconstruct AP Literature poetry prompts accurately
- To acquire strategies for close reading of poems
- To compose a Poetry Focus Statement that can be used as the introductory paragraph of an essay in response to the AP Lit poetry prompt

Elements of Metaphysical poetry

The term metaphysical was applied to a style of 17th Century poetry first by John Dryden and later by Dr. Samuel Johnson because of the highly intellectual and often abstruse imagery involved. Chief among the metaphysical poets are John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Andrew Marvell, and Henry Vaughan. Some common characteristics of metaphysical poetry include:

- **Argumentative structure.** The poem often engages in a debate or persuasive presentation; the poem is an intellectual exercise as well as or instead of an emotional effusion.
- **Dramatic and colloquial mode of utterance.** The poem often describes a dramatic event rather than being a reverie, a thought, or contemplation. Diction is simple and usually direct; inversion is limited. The verse is occasionally rough, like speech, rather than written in perfect meter, resulting in a dominance of thought over form.
- **Acute realism.** The poem often reveals a psychological analysis; images advance the argument rather than being ornamental. There is a learned style of thinking and writing; the poetry is often highly intellectual.
- **Metaphysical wit.** The poem contains unexpected, even striking or shocking analogies, offering elaborate parallels between apparently dissimilar things. The analogies are drawn from widely varied fields of knowledge, not limited to traditional sources in nature or art. Analogies from science, mechanics, housekeeping, business, philosophy, astronomy, etc. are common. These "conceits" reveal a play of intellect, often resulting in puns, paradoxes, and humorous comparisons. Unlike other poetry where the metaphors usually remain in the background, here the metaphors sometimes take over the poem and control it.

Prompt Deconstruction

Directions:

1. Identify the TAG (title, author, genre) found in most prompts.

Title: _____

Author:

2. Identify the BIG (meaning) and Little (language) questions in the prompt. Write these in the space below the prompt before you begin your first reading of the poem. Express the BIG question in the form of an interrogative sentence. Express the Little question in the form of an imperative sentence beginning with a command verb. Always include the poet's name (if given).

Prompt:

Read the following poem carefully. In a well-organized essay analyze how the poet conveys the speaker's complex relationship with God. You might consider such elements as figurative language, imagery, and tone.

BIG Question:

Little Question: Analyze

Sonnet XIV: Batter My Heart

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
 As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
 That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
 Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
 I, like an usurp'd town to another due, 5
 Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;
 Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
 But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.
 Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
 But am betroth'd unto your enemy; 10
 Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,
 Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
 Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
 Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

Close Reading of the Poem

First Reading:

Read the poem slowly, paying close attention to John Donne's language.
 Complete the vocabulary chart. In some cases, hints have been provided for
 you. Number 1 has been defined for you.

Donne's Word Choice	Line #	Synonym/Connotation Based on Context	HINT
1. three-personed God	1	The tripersonal Godhead of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	
2. usurped	5		Someone wanting to be king often tries to do this
3. viceroy	7		A representative of the monarch who....
4. fain	9	gladly	
5. betrothed	10		
6. enthrall	13		

7. chaste	14		
8. ravish	14	violate	

Second Reading (Color Marking):

1. Reread the poem. Highlight the concrete (tangible, touchable) nouns.
2. Using a second color, highlight the abstract (intangible) nouns.
3. Come up with another category of language on your own. Use a third color to highlight words that fall into that category.
4. Create a key for your color marking. Place it under the acknowledgements at the bottom of the page.

NOTE: If you do not have three colors of highlighter, you may substitute other markings such as straight and squiggly lines, boxes, or circles.

5. In the box below, jot down some preliminary ideas about the relationship between the speaker and God

Third Reading (The Poetic Situation):

If you took AP Language last year, you became well-acquainted with the rhetorical situation: speaker, audience, purpose, organization or structure, rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, logos), and DIDLS (diction, imagery, details, language, and syntax). These elements are also present in the genre of poetry.

Answer the questions below about three important elements of the poetic situation. The first question about the speaker has been started for you.

Element of the Poetic Situation	Questions	Your Answers
<p style="text-align: center;">SPEAKER</p>	<p>1. Is the speaker “inside” or “outside” the poem? How do you know?</p> <p>2. What issues concern the speaker? Go beyond the title to provide specific examples.</p> <p>3. What traits does the speaker seem to possess?</p>	<p>1. I know the speaker is “inside” the poem because</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Element of the</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Questions</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Your Answers</p>

Poetic Situation		
SETTING	<p>1. Where is the speaker at the time of the poem?</p> <p>2. What is this place like? Use your own words.</p> <p>3. Why do you think the poet chose this setting for the poem?</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
ORGANIZATION/ STRUCTURE	<p>1. How many sentences are there in the poem?</p> <p>2. What is the greatest number of words in a line?</p> <p>3. What is the least number of words in a line?</p> <p>4. Outline the units of meaning in the poem by drawing horizontal lines across the poem. In other words, you will draw lines across the poem to indicate where the speaker (presumably the poet) shifts from one idea to another. Provide the line #s for and summarize the meaning of each</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p> <p>4.</p>

	division.	
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Fourth Reading (Marginal Notation):

Locate (circle, box, or bracket) and label (in the left margin) all examples of the poetic techniques listed below.

Technique	Definition
alliteration	Repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words
Internal rhyme	The rhymed sounds are within the line.
Enjambment	A run-on line; the line has no end punctuation; it simply runs over to the next line
Anaphora	Repetition of the same word or phrase at the beginning of successive sentences, lines, clauses, or verses
conceit	A conceit is an extended metaphor with a complex logic that governs a poetic passage or entire poem. By juxtaposing, usurping and manipulating images and ideas in surprising ways, a conceit invites the reader into a more sophisticated understanding of an object of comparison.
metaphor	Figure of speech in which two unlike items are compared (without using the words “like” or “as”)
Tactile images	Images appealing to the sense of touch
auditory images	Images appealing to the sense of hearing
Paradox	A paradox is a statement or situation containing apparently contradictory or incompatible elements but upon closer inspection might be true.

POETRY FOCUS STATEMENT { PFS designed by Beth Priem }

Definition:

- **A one to two-sentence summary of the narrative situation, theme, and tone of a poem**

Use:

- **As a potential thesis/introduction for a free-response poetry question on the AP Lit exam**

Critical Attributes:

- (1) includes the title of the poem and the name of the poet
- (2) is written in “literary present tense” (The poet/speaker conveys rather than conveyed.)
- (3) specifies the narrative situation of the poem (who, what, where, when, why)
- (4) includes a thoughtful, but concise indication of them
- (5) identifies the tone(s) of the poem (These may be differing, but complementary. Shifts in tone may be identified as well.)

Note on Critical Attributes: Check your PFS for completion by following these directions: Use four colors of highlighter and a red pen to identify the five critical attributes of a PFS. Create a key under the poem to identify the colors you used.

Directions:

- (1) The syntax of Poetry Focus Statements is compound or complex because you are addressing both the literal (the narrative situation) and the thematic.
- (2) Articulate yourself in a scholarly manner. Incorporate interpretive adjectives and adverbs wherever possible in order to enhance your analysis. These are based on inferences you make from the text (For example, a character’s feelings might be interpreted as optimistic, pessimistic, or even suicidal.) At the same time, avoid qualitative or praise words (e.g., masterfully, great, excellent, etc.). Your job is to analyze rather than evaluate.
- (3) Consider these ways to describe tone:
 - With a single adjective (Use with a part of a text.): ambivalent, ironic, hopeful, hysterical, insistent (AP Lit multiple choice, 2009)
 - With an adjective-conjunction- adjective-construction : callous and reckless, petulant and critical, resigned and reconciled, detached but hopeful, civil but angry (AP Lang multiple choice, 2007)
 - With an adjective-noun construction: guarded optimism, stoic determination, grim despair, bewildering chaos, violent retribution (AP Lit 2009)
 - With an adverb- adjective construction: grudgingly appreciative, cleverly nonjudgmental, bitterly disillusioned, viciously sarcastic (AP Lang 2007)

COLOR	PFS CRITICAL ATTRIBUTE
	Title of poem (in quotation marks) and first and last name of the poet
	Literary Present Tense as indicated by verb endings
	Narrative situation of the poem (who, what, where, when, why)
	Thoughtful, but concise indication of theme
	Tone(s)

In this difficult but wonderful Donne poem, we see the poet's interest in science, religion and art. Deconstruct this particular poem stanza by stanza.

TO GOD, MY GOD, IN MY SICKNESS

SINCE I am coming to that Holy room,
 Where, with Thy choir of saints for evermore,
 I shall be made Thy music; as I come
 I tune the instrument here at the door,
 And what I must do then, think here before; 5

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown
 Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie
 Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown
 That this is my south-west discovery,
Per fretum febris, by these straits to die; 10

I joy, that in these straits I see my west ;
 For, though those currents yield return to none,
 What shall my west hurt me ? As west and east
 In all flat maps—and I am one—are one,
 So death doth touch the resurrection. 15

Is the Pacific sea my home? Or are
 The eastern riches? Is Jerusalem?
 Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar?
 All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them
 Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Shem. 20

We think that Paradise and Calvary,
 Christ's cross and Adam's tree, stood in one place;
 Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me;
 As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,
 May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace. 25

So, in His purple wrapp'd, receive me, Lord;
 By these His thorns, give me His other crown;
 And as to others' souls I preach'd Thy word,
 Be this my text, my sermon to mine own,
 "Therefore that He may raise, the Lord throws down. 30

First Reading: Read the poem from beginning to end. What are your first impressions?

Second Reading: Read the poem slowly, paying close attention to Donne's language. Put a slash after each semi-colon, period, or question mark. Because a sentence is a complete thought, it is easier to analyze a poem by sentences rather than by lines. In this particular poem, though, Donne uses a series of semi-colons and a few end-stops (period or quotation marks), so try to figure out first what each phrase is saying.

Phrase	Paraphrase
Since I am coming to that Holy room, Where with Thy choir of saints for evermore, I shall be made thy music;	
As I come I tune the instrument here at the door, And what I must do then; think here before;	
Whilst my physicians by their love are grown Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie flat on this bed, that by them may be shown That this is my southwest discovery, <i>Per fretum febris</i> , by these straits to die;	* as through fever
I joy, that in these straits I see my west;	
For, though those currents yield return to none, What shall my west hurt me?	
As west and east In all flat maps---and I am one, So death dost touch the resurrection.	
Is the Pacific sea my home?	
Or are the Eastern riches?	
Is Jerusalem?	
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar?	
All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham or Shem.	
We think that Paradise and Calvary, Christ's cross and Adam's tree, stood in one place;	
Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me;	
As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face, May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.	
So, in His purple wrapp'd, receive me Lord;	
By these His thorns, give me His other crown;	
And as to others' souls I preach'd Thy word, Be this my text, my sermon to my own,	

"Therefore that He may raise, the Lord throws down.	
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Third reading:

Element of the Poetic Situation	Questions	Your Answers
SPEAKER	<p>1. What do you know about the speaker?</p> <p>2. What issues concern the speaker? Go beyond the title to provide specific examples.</p> <p>3. What traits does the speaker seem to possess?</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
SETTING	<p>1. Where is the speaker at the time of the poem?</p> <p>2. What is this place like? Use your own words.</p> <p>3. Why do you think the poet chose this</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>

	setting for the poem?	
ORGANIZATION/ STRUCTURE	<p>1. How many sentences are there in the poem?</p> <p>2. What is the greatest number of words in a line?</p> <p>3. What is the least number of words in a line?</p> <p>4. Outline the units of meaning in the poem by drawing horizontal lines across the poem. In other words, you will draw lines across the poem to indicate where the speaker (presumably the poet) shifts from one idea to another. Provide the line #s for and summarize the meaning of each division.</p>	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p> <p>4.</p>

Fourth Reading (Marginal Notation):

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metaphor	Figure of speech in which two unlike items are compared (without using the words “like” or “as”)
Tactile images	Images appealing to the sense of touch
auditory images	Images appealing to the sense of hearing
Paradox	A paradox is a statement or situation containing apparently contradictory or incompatible elements but upon closer inspection might be true.

Poetry Focus Statement: Using the same procedure as the first poem, write a poetry focus statement.

COLOR	PFS CRITICAL ATTRIBUTE
	Title of poem (in quotation marks) and first and last name of the poet
	Literary Present Tense as indicated by verb endings
	Narrative situation of the poem (who, what, where, when, why)

	Thoughtful, but concise indication of theme
	Tone(s)

Additional Donne poems for study:

Sonnet VII

At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow
 Your trumpets, Angels, and arise, arise
 From death, you numberless infinities
 Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go, 5
 All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
 All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
 Despair, law, chance, hath slain, and you whose eyes,
 Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe.
 But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space, 10
 For, if above all these, my sins abound,
 'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace,
 When we are there; here on this lowly ground,
 Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
 As if thou hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

Sonnet IV

Oh my blacke Soule! now thou art summoned
 By sickness, deaths herald, and champion;
 Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
 Treason, and durst not turne to whence hee is fled,
 Or like a thiefe, which till deaths doome be read, 5
 Wisheth himselfe delivered from prison;
 But damn'd and hal'd to execution,
 Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned.
 Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lacke;
 But who shall give thee that grace to beginne? 10
 Oh make thy selfe with holy mourning blacke,
 And red with blushing, as thou art with sinne;
 Or wash thee in Christs blood, which hath this might

That being red, it dyes red soules to white.

A Dialogue between the Soul and the Body (Andrew Marvell)

SOUL

O who shall, from this dungeon, raise
 A soul enslav'd so many ways?
 With bolts of bones, that fetter'd stands
 In feet, and manacled in hands;
 Here blinded with an eye, and there 5
 Deaf with the drumming of an ear;
 A soul hung up, as 'twere, in chains
 Of nerves, and arteries, and veins;
 Tortur'd, besides each other part,
 In a vain head, and double heart. 10

BODY

O who shall me deliver whole
 From bonds of this tyrannic soul?
 Which, stretch'd upright, impales me so
 That mine own precipice I go;
 And warms and moves this needless frame, 15
 (A fever could but do the same)
 And, wanting where its spite to try,
 Has made me live to let me die.
 A body that could never rest,
 Since this ill spirit it possest. 20

SOUL

What magic could me thus confine
 Within another's grief to pine?
 Where whatsoever it complain,
 I feel, that cannot feel, the pain;
 And all my care itself employs; 25

That to preserve which me destroys;
Constrain'd not only to endure
Diseases, but, what's worse, the cure;
And ready oft the port to gain,
Am shipwreck'd into health again. 30

BODY

But physic yet could never reach
The maladies thou me dost teach;
Whom first the cramp of hope does tear,
And then the palsy shakes of fear;
The pestilence of love does heat, 5
Or hatred's hidden ulcer eat;
Joy's cheerful madness does perplex,
Or sorrow's other madness vex;
Which knowledge forces me to know,

Structure	
Meaning	
Imagery	
Language	
Effect	
Paragraph	

