Texas Christian University
2017 APSI for English

“Batter my heart”: the (meta)physical poets

Jerry Brown

jerry@jerrywbrown.com

website: www.jerrywbrown.com
Holy Sonnets: Batter my heart, three-person'd God

By John Donne

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,
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;
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.

Doctor Atomic

At the northern end of the White Sands Missile Range, in the semi-arid desert of central New Mexico, a road stretches toward the charcoal-colored rockface of the Oscura Mountains, which rise to nearly nine thousand feet. At the end of the road is a neat circular shape, about a half mile in diameter. This is the site of the first atomic explosion, which took place on July 16, 1945. When the bomb went off, it obliterated the creosote bushes that had been growing here, along with every other living thing inside the circle. When plant life returned to the spot, grass and yucca plants took the place of the creosote. The change in vegetation explains why the site is visible from miles away, and probably from space.

White Sands is a mesmerizing place—an outdoor museum of mankind’s highest ambitions and deepest fears. The missile range is still an active facility. Lately, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency has been using an area nearby to study the effects of explosives on underground bunkers. One corner of White Sands is occupied by LINEAR, the Lincoln Near Earth Asteroid Research project, which scans the skies for errant asteroids, particularly those big enough to cause mass extinctions. At the same time, the range functions as an unofficial wildlife refuge, the secrecy of the place serving to protect various species. It is home to herds of oryx, an African antelope. They are noble animals with horns like medieval spikes, and they can go for extended periods without water.
J. Robert Oppenheimer, the man who oversaw the building of the first atomic bombs, called the test site Trinity, in honor of John Donne’s sonnet “Batter my heart, three-person’d God.” The poem contains the words “break, blow, burn, and make me new.” Oppenheimer was made new by the explosion, or, at least, was not the same afterward. The terrain beneath the bomb—Ground Zero, it was called—also underwent a transformation, which scientists are still trying to understand. When Trinity personnel came back to inspect the site, they found a green, glassy substance covering the ground. The latest hypothesis is that this artificial mineral, which was named trinitite, formed when soil, water, and organic matter were lifted off the ground and fused in the heat of the blast. Over the years, tourists have carried away much of the trinitite in their pockets—the site is open to visitors twice a year—and most of the rest was buried beneath the soil. Looking down at the ground, you would never know that anything out of the ordinary had happened here.

What happened at Trinity is the subject of “Doctor Atomic,” a new opera, with music by John Adams and a libretto by Peter Sellars. The opening scenes take place at Los Alamos, the headquarters of the Manhattan Project, two weeks before the test. The rest takes place on the night of July 15th-16th, in the hours leading up to the detonation. It had its première at the San Francisco Opera on October 1, 2005. http://www.doctor-atomic.com/

Additional information about the aria “Batter my heart”.

The crux of the opera arrives: Oppenheimer, alone at the bottom of the tower, sings “Batter my heart, three person’d God.” The most telling lines may be the last: “for I / Except you enthrall me, never shall be free, / Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.” The aria is in the key of D minor, in the manner of a Renaissance lament, with a hint of synagogue chant; Oppenheimer sings a grand, doleful, nobly stammering melody, while the orchestra mimics the sound of viols and lutes.

“That music just sort of fluttered down and landed on my desk one day,” Adams told me. “Part of me said, ‘No, you can’t do that,’ and the other half said, ‘That’s it, go ahead and do it.’” Afterward, I realized the reason it was right. Naming the site after a John Donne sonnet was itself an archaic gesture. Oppenheimer was always referring back to ancient things, summing up his state through very dignified forms.”

The Collar background information

Ancient Greek and Roman thinkers and physicians theorized that physical and mental disorders were the result of an imbalance in one of the four humours. An excess of any of the four was thought to correspond a certain temperament in the patient. A large quantity of blood made the patient sanguine or cheerful, perhaps with too much energy. Too much phlegm (viscous liquid, mucous) made him or her phlegmatic, or cool and apathetic. An excess of black bile, also called spleen or melancholy and thought to be excreted by the spleen, would make a person
melancholic or depressive. Finally, too much yellow bile, or choler, made for a choleric or easily angered temperament.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>wet</th>
<th>dry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hot</td>
<td>air/blood – sanguine, cheerful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cold</td>
<td>water/phlegm – phlegmatic, sluggish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Collar from *The Temple (1633)*

by George Herbert

I struck the board\(^1\), and cried, “No more:
    I will abroad!
    What? shall I ever sigh and pine?
My lines and life are free, free as the road,
    Loose as the wind, as large as store.
    Shall I be still in suit?\(^2\)
    Have I no harvest but a thorn
    To let me blood, and not restore
What I have lost with cordial\(^3\) fruit?
    Sure there was wine
Before my sighs did dry it: there was corn
    Before my tears did drown it.
Is the year only lost to me?
    Have I no bays\(^4\) to crown it,
No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted?
    All wasted?
Not so, my heart; but there is fruit,
    And thou hast hands.
Recover all thy sigh-blown age
On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute
Of what is fit, and not. Forsake thy cage,
    Thy rope of sands,\(^5\)
Which petty thoughts have made, and made to thee
    Good cable, to enforce and draw,
    And be thy law,
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
    Away! take heed;
I will abroad.
Call in thy death’s-head\(^6\) there; tie up thy fears.

He that forbears
To suit and serve his need,
Deserves his load.”

But as I raved and grew more fierce and wild
At every word,
Methought I heard one calling, “Child!”
And I replied, “My Lord.”

\(^1\)Table
\(^2\)In attendance, waiting on someone for a favor
\(^3\)Giving heart’s ease. Restorative
\(^4\)The poet’s wreath
\(^5\)Illusory constraints
\(^6\)The skull, a reminder of death.

The Collar
by George Herbert

DIRECTIONS: Respond to the following statements and/or questions with the **BEST** answer among those given:

1. The poem as a whole dramatizes
   a. a strained love affair
   b. the restraint of political freedom
   c. religious rebellion and reconciliation
   d. the stain of economic loss
   e. lack of parental understanding

2. It can be inferred that when the speaker says “No more” (line 1), he is turning away from
   a. self-discipline and sacrifice
   b. concern for other men’s opinions
   c. devotion to home and family
   d. patriotic loyalty
   e. childish fantasies
3. The speaker’s statements within the quotation marks (lines 1-32) are addressed to
   a. an aging friend
   b. his parent
   c. his loved one
   d. the Lord
   e. himself

4. In context, the phrase “as large as store” (line 5) is best interpreted to mean as
   a. full as abundance itself
   b. expensive as a treasure
   c. burdensome as can be imagined
   d. majestic as a mountain
   e. precious as a pleasant memory

5. The imagery in the phrase “no harvest but a thorn” (line 7) is especially appropriate because it
   a. relates to the harsh side of a farmer’s life
   b. has spiritual as well as physical associations
   c. stresses the difference between the way a man views himself and the way others view him
   d. emphasizes the harvest time or autumn of one’s life
   e. suggests the transcendence of man in nature

6. The tone of the speaker’s questions in lines 3-16 is primarily one of
   a. enthusiasm
   b. timidity
   c. haughtiness
   d. inquisitiveness
   e. bitterness

7. In the context of the poem, “bays,” “flowers,” and “garlands gay” (lines 14-15) imply
   a. youthfulness
   b. freedom from imprisonment
   c. secular pleasures
   d. the beauties of nature
   e. memories of the past

8. The change in tone from lines 1-16 to lines 17-32 can best be described as a change from
   a. restraint to freedom
   b. querying to assertion
   c. assertion to denial
   d. freedom to entrapment
   e. grief to joy
9. The speaker urges his heart to stop its “cold dispute” (line 20) so that he may
   a. regain his emotional composure
   b. become a religious convert
   c. seek the advice of more experienced philosophers
   d. enjoy natural pleasures with enthusiasm
   e. experience the simple life of a farmer

10. The “cage” (line 21) represents a kind of prison formed by
   a. religious scruples
   b. secular tyranny
   c. human bestiality
   d. foolish pleasures
   e. material possessions

11. It can be inferred that the speaker’s desire to go abroad (lines 2 an 28 represents
   a. an initiation rite
   b. an abandonment of the strictures of conscience
   c. a suspect means of self-development
   d. a more mature way to attain freedom
   e. an escape from worldly temptations

12. The statement “tie up thy fears” (line 29) is best interpreted to mean
   a. analyze your aspirations
   b. dismiss your hopes
   c. overcome your anxieties
   d. be aware of your weaknesses
   e. maintain a humble stance

13. The pronoun “He” (line 30) refers to
   a. “death’s-head (line 29
   b. “one” (line 35
   c. “My Lord” (line 36])
   d. anyone who has died
   e. any human being

14. What does the speaker wish for in lines 17-32?
   a. aid from compassionate men
   b. restoration of law and order
   c. rededication to the Lord
   d. unrestricted behavior
   e. more enlightened self-scrutiny
15. The major change in the speaker’s attitude occurs between lines
   a. 2 and 3
   b. 16 and 17
   c. 18 and 19
   d. 26 and 27
   e. 32 and 33

16. The tone of the address “Child” (line 35) is best described as one of
   a. benevolent paternalism
   b. near desperation
   c. uncertainty and fear
   d. delight and elation
   e. veiled contempt

17. At the end of the poem, the speaker’s attitude is one of
   a. defeat
   b. deceit
   c. acquiescence
   d. bewilderment
   e. anger

18. In relation to the entire poem, the title, “The Collar,” provides an emblem of
   a. the road to adventure
   b. the fear of death
   c. delight in earthly pleasures
   d. an artist’s search for perfection
   e. servitude to God

19. The “Collar” can be thought of a pun on the word
   a. choral
   b. collapse
   c. calendar
   d. choler
   e. cholera
The Flea
by John Donne

MARK but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deniest me is;
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead;
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two;
And this, alas! is more than we would do.

O stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, yea, more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is.
Though parents grudge, and you, we're met,
And cloister'd in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to that self-murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail in blood of innocence?
Wherein could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it suck'd from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou
Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now.
'Tis true; then learn how false fears be;
Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

Read through the entire poem once, without making any comments.

Now, read the first stanza

✓ What is the meaning of “Mark(e) but this flea, and mark(e) in this,...”? Why the use of such direct address?
✓ What is the “this”?
✓ Why is it significant that the two people’s blood is joined in the flea?
What is meant by “Thou knowest that this cannot be said/A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead.”?
Define “maidenhead”.
What is meant by the repetition of “this” in the first stanza?
What is the religious imagery in this stanza?
What is the rhyme scheme of the first stanza?
What do you think the first stanza is about (literal then metaphorical)?

Read the second stanza

Visualize the speaker talking to the other person. Where does flea fit in?
What is about to happen that causes the speaker to say “Oh, stay, three lives in one flea spare,...”? Whose lives are in the flea?
What is the religious imagery in this stanza?
What is the definition of “jet”, of “grudge”, and of “cloistered”?
What does the speaker mean when stating “Though use make you apt to kill me...”?
What is the rhyme scheme of the second stanza?
What do you think the second stanza is about (literal then metaphorical)?
How does the speaker’s argument change from the first to the second stanza?

Do the third stanza on your own

General Questions:

What appears to be the relationship between the speaker and who he/she is speaking to?
What is the attitude/tone of the speaker?
What issue or problem is the speaker trying to address?
How does consistent rhyme scheme add to the speaker’s argument.
How does the speaker’s argument “move” through the poem?
If time, write a personal response to the poem explaining what the poem is about and why you think that.

To his Coy Mistress
by Andrew Marvell

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness¹, lady, were no crime.
We would sit down and think which way²
To walk, and pass our long love's day;
Thou by the Indian Ganges'side
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood;
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow.
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long preserv'd virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust.
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none I think do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may;
And now, like am'rous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour,
Than languish in his slow-chapp'd power.
Let us roll all our strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one ball;
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life.
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

1 coyness: Evasiveness, hesitancy, modesty, coquetry, reluctance; playing hard to get.
2 which . . . walk: Example of enjambment (carrying the sense of one line of verse over to the next line without a pause).
3 Ganges: River in Asia originating in the Himalayas and flowing southeast, through India, to the Bay of Bengal. The young man here suggests that the young lady could postpone her commitment to him if her youth lasted a long, long time. She could take real or imagined journeys abroad, even to India. She could also refuse to commit herself to him until all the Jews convert to Christianity. But since youth is fleeting (as the poem later points out), there is no time for such journeys. She must submit herself to him now.
4 rubies: Gems that may be rose red or purplish red. In folklore, it is said that rubies protect and maintain virginity. Ruby deposits occur in various parts of the world, but the most precious ones are found in Asia, including Myanmar (Burma), India, Thailand, Sri, Lanka, Afghanistan, and Russia.
5 Humber: River in northeastern England. It flows through Hull, Andrew Marvell’s hometown.
6 Flood . . . Jews: Resorting to hyperbole, the young man says that his love for the young lady is unbounded by time. He would love her ten years before great flood that Noah outlasted in his ark (Gen. 5:28-10:32) and would still love her until all Jews became Christians at the end of the world.
7 vegetable love: love cultivated and nurtured like a vegetable so that it flourishes prolifically
8 this state: This lofty position; this dignity.
9 Time’s wingèd chariot: In Greek mythology, the sun was personified as the god Apollo, who rode his golden chariot from east to west each day. Thus, Marvell here associates the sun god with the passage of time.
10 marble vault: The young lady’s tomb.
11 worms: a morbid phallic reference.
12 quaint: Preserved carefully or skillfully.
13 dew: The 1681 manuscript of the poem uses glew (not dew), apparently as a coined past tense for glow.
14 transpires: Erupts, breaks out, emits, gives off.
15 slow-chapp’d: Chewing or eating slowly.
16 Thorough: Through.

The title suggests (1) that the author looked over the shoulder of a young man as he wrote a plea to a young lady and (2) that the author then reported the plea exactly as the young man expressed it. However, the author added the title, using the third-person possessive pronoun "his" to refer to the young man. The word "coy" tells the reader that the lady is no easy catch; the word "mistress" can mean lady, manager, caretaker,courtesan, sweetheart, and lover. It can also serve as the female equivalent of master. In "To His Coy Mistress," the word appears to be a synonym for lady or sweetheart.
Great Chain of Being

God (perfect reason and understanding)
Angels (reason and understanding)
Man (reason, emotion, sensation, existence)
Woman (emotion, limited reason, sensation, existence)
Animal kingdom (emotion, sensation, and existence)
Vegetable kingdom (sensation and existence)
Stones and inanimate objects (existence).

Picture at http://www.stanford.edu/class/engl174b/chain.html

“In a metaphysical poem the conceits are instruments of definition in an argument or instruments to persuade. The poem has something to say which the conceit explicates or something to urge which the conceit helps to forward.” (Helen Gardner, “Introduction to The Metaphysical Poets, 1957).

“One of the stock devices used by a poet is imagery. Images which are just and natural are employed by all the poets; conceits, however, are unusual and fantastic similes. Comparisons indicate similarity in dissimilar objects, but conceits emphasise the degree of heterogeneity—the strong element of unlikeness and the violence or strain used in bringing together dissimilar objects. There is more of the incongruity rather than the similarity in a conceit. Comparing the cheeks of the beloved to a rose is an image, while comparing the cheeks of the lover to a rose because they have lost their colour and are bleeding from thorns, (and the consequent gloom) is a conceit.

Donne’s conceits are metaphysical because they are taken from the extended world of knowledge, from science, astrology, astronomy, scholastic philosophy, fine arts, etc. They are scholarly and learned conceits and much too far-fetched and obscure. Moreover, they are elaborate. The well-known conceit of the two lovers being compared to a pair of compasses, where one leg remains fixed at the centre and the other rotates is an elaborate and extended conceit. Similarly, the comparison of the flea to a bridal bed or a marriage temple is another example of an elaborate conceit.”


A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning (1611)

As virtuous men pass mildly’ away,
   And whisper to their souls to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say
   The breath goes now, and some say, no;

5 So let us melt, and make no noise,
   No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,
'Twere profanation of our joys
   To tell the laity our love.

Moving of the earth brings harms and fears,
10     Men reckon what it did and meant;
But trepidation of the spheres,
   Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love
   (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
15     Absence, because it doth remove
   Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined
   That our selves know not what it is,
20     Inter-assured of the mind,
   Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
   Though I must go, endure not yet
25     A breach, but an expansion,
   Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
   As stiff twin compasses are two;
   Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
20     To move, but doth, if the other do.

And though it in the center sit,
30     Yet when the other far doth roam,
   It leans and hearkens after it,
   And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must
   Like the other foot, obliquely run;
35     Thy firmness makes my circle just,
   And makes me end where I begun.
Emily Dickinson

Renunciation—is a piercing Virtue—
The letting go
A Presence—for an Expectation—
Not now—
The putting out of Eyes—
Just Sunrise—
Lest Day—
Day’s Great Progenitor—
Outvie
Renunciation—is the Choosing
Against itself—
Itself to justify
Unto itself—
When larger function—
Make that appear—
Smaller—that Covered Vision—Here—

I felt a funeral in my brain,
    And mourners, to and fro,
Kept treading, treading, till it seemed
    That sense was breaking through.

    And when they all were seated,
        A service like a drum
Kept beating, beating, till I thought
    My mind was going numb.

    And then I heard them lift a box,
        And creak across my soul
With those same boots of lead,
    Then space began to toll

As all the heavens were a bell,
    And Being but an ear,
And I and silence some strange race,
    Wrecked, solitary, here.

    And then a plank in reason, broke,
        And I dropped down and down--
And hit a world at every plunge,
    And finished knowing--then--
**Scaffolding**
by Seamus Heaney

Masons, when they start upon a building,
Are careful to test out the scaffolding;

Make sure that planks won’t slip at busy points,
Secure all ladders, tighten bolted joints.

And yet all this comes down when the job’s done
Showing off walls of sure and solid stone.

So if, my dear, there sometimes seem to be
Old bridges breaking between you and me

Never fear. We may let the scaffolds fall
Confident that we have built our wall.

---

**To the Harbormaster**
by Frank O'Hara

I wanted to be sure to reach you;
though my ship was on the way it got caught
in some moorings. I am always tying up
and then deciding to depart. In storms and
at sunset, with the metallic coils of the tide
around my fathomless arms, I am unable
to understand the forms of my vanity
or I am hard alee with my Polish rudder
in my hand and the sun sinking. To
you I offer my hull and the tattered cordage
of my will. The terrible channels where
the wind drives me against the brown lips
of the reeds are not all behind me. Yet
I trust the sanity of my vessel; and
if it sinks, it may well be in answer
to the reasoning of the eternal voices,
the waves which have kept me from reaching you.
To Waken an Old Lady
William Carlos Williams

Old age is
a flight of small
cheeping birds
skimming
bare trees
above a snow glaze.
Gaining and failing
they are buffeted
by a dark wind --
But what?
On harsh weedstalks
the flock has rested --
the snow
is covered with broken
see husks
and the wind tempered
with a shrill
piping of plenty

I Am In Need Of Music
Elizabeth Bishop

I am in need of music that would flow
Over my fretful, feeling fingertips,
Over my bitter-tainted, trembling lips,
With melody, deep, clear, and liquid-slow.
Oh, for the healing swaying, old and low,
Of some song sung to rest the tired dead,
A song to fall like water on my head,
And over quivering limbs, dream flushed to glow!

There is a magic made by melody:
A spell of rest, and quiet breath, and cool
Heart, that sinks through fading colors deep
To the subaqueous stillness of the sea,
And floats forever in a moon-green pool,
Held in the arms of rhythm and of sleep.
Quarrel In Old Age

Where had her sweetness gone?
What fanatics invent
In this blind bitter town,
Fantasy or incident
Not worth thinking of,
put her in a rage.
I had forgiven enough
That had forgiven old age.
All lives that has lived;
So much is certain;
Old sages were not deceived:
Somewhere beyond the curtain
Of distorting days
Lives that lonely thing
That shone before these eyes
Targeted, trod like Spring.

William Butler Yeats

The Balloon Of The Mind

Hands, do what you're bid:
Bring the balloon of the mind
That bellies and drags in the wind
Into its narrow shed.

William Butler Yeats

The Collar: Answer Key: 1c, 2a, 3e, 4a, 5b, 6e, 7c, 8b, 9d, 10a, 11b, 12c, 13e, 14d, 15e, 16a, 17c, 18e, 19d