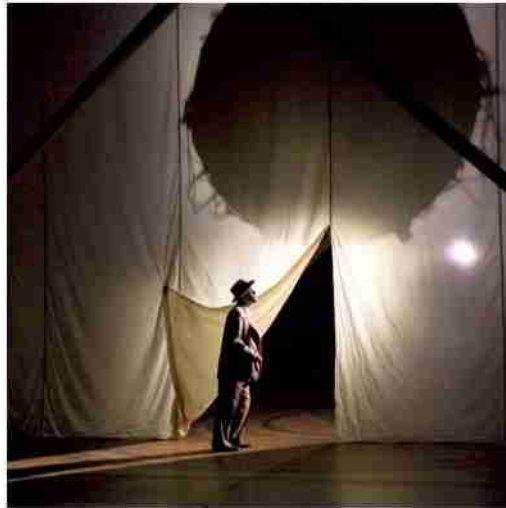


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“Batter my heart”: the (meta)physical
poets



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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.

	wet	dry
hot	air/blood – sanguine, cheerful	fire/yellow bile – choleric, angry
cold	water/phlegm – phlegmatic, sluggish	earth/black bile – melancholy, sad

The Collar from *The Temple* (1633)

by George Herbert

I struck the board¹, 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. 5
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 cordial³ fruit?
Sure there was wine 10
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 bays⁴ to crown it,
No flowers, no garlands gay? all blasted? 15
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 20
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, 25
While thou didst wink and wouldst not see.
Away! take heed;

I will abroad.
Call in thy death's-head⁶ there; tie up thy fears.
He that forbears 30
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!" 35
And I replied, "My Lord."

¹Table

²In attendance, waiting on someone for a favor

³Giving heart's ease. Restorative

⁴The poet's wreath

⁵Illusory constraints

⁶The 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 and 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
- 2 and 3
 - 16 and 17
 - 18 and 19
 - 26 and 27
 - 32 and 33
16. The tone of the address "Child" (line 35) is best described as one of
- benevolent paternalism
 - near desperation
 - uncertainty and fear
 - delight and elation
 - veiled contempt
17. At the end of the poem, the speaker's attitude is one of
- defeat
 - deceit
 - acquiescence
 - bewilderment
 - anger
18. In relation to the entire poem, the title, "The Collar," provides an emblem of
- the road to adventure
 - the fear of death
 - delight in earthly pleasures
 - an artist's search for perfection
 - servitude to God
19. The "Collar" can be thought of a pun on the word
- choral
 - collapse
 - calendar
 - choler
 - 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 5
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, 10
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. 15
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? 20
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 ; 25
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 Ganges³ side
Shouldst rubies⁴ find; I by the tide
Of Humber⁵ would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood⁶;
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews.
My vegetable love⁷ 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 state⁸,
Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot⁹ hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault¹⁰, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms¹¹ shall try
That long preserv'd virginity,
And your quaint¹² 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 dew¹³,
And while thy willing soul transpires¹⁴
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'd¹⁵ power.
Let us roll all our strength, and all
Our sweetness, up into one ball;
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough¹⁶ 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-chapt: 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.”

<http://neoenglish.wordpress.com/2010/11/07/conceits-and-images-of-john-donne/>

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,
Inter-assured of the mind,
20 Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

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

25 If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
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.

Death, be not proud (Holy Sonnet 10)

by John Donne

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou are not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

A HYMN TO GOD THE FATHER.

by John Donne

Wilt Thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which was my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.

II.

Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I have won
Others to sin, and made my sin their door?
Wilt Thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallowed in a score?
When Thou hast done, Thou hast not done,
For I have more.

III.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore ;
But swear by Thyself, that at my death Thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore ;
And having done that, Thou hast done ;
I fear no more.

Henry Vaughan : The Retreat

Happy those early days! when I
Shined in my angel-infancy,
Before I understood this place
Appointed for my second race¹,
Or taught my soul to fancy ought
But a white, celestial thought;
When yet I had not walked above
A mile or two from my first love,
And looking back—at that short space—
Could see a glimpse of His bright face;
When on some gilded cloud, or flower,
My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity;
Before I taught my tongue to wound
My conscience with a sinful sound,
Or had the black art to dispense
A several² sin to every sense,
But felt through all this fleshy dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness.

Oh how I long to travel back,
And tread again that ancient track!
That I might once more reach that plain,
Where first I left my glorious train³;
From whence the enlightened spirit sees
That shady city of palm trees⁴.
But ah! my soul with too much stay⁵
Is drunk, and staggers in the way.
Some men a forward motion love,
But I by backward steps would move
And when this dust falls to the urn,
In that state I came, return.

1 life, some believe the soul had a heavenly existence before life in this world.

2 separate

3 i.e. that way of existence

4 heaven

5 delay

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--

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**