Rewarding Learning

eGUIDE//English Literature

The Study of Poetry Pre 1900

Unit A2 2

John Donne

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Starting Point

In this Unit you will explore 16 of John Donne's poems (listed in Appendix 1).

In this Unit there are 4 Assessment Objectives involved – AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO4.

AO1: Textual knowledge and understanding, and communication

In this examination, the candidate should be able to articulate informed and relevant responses that communicate effectively knowledge and understanding of poetry.

This Assessment Objective (AO) involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the poem or poems, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently, using appropriate terminology and concepts. Specialist vocabulary should be used where necessary and appropriate. Quality of written communication is taken into consideration in all units.

AO2: Poetic methods

In this examination, the candidate should analyze the poet's use of such poetic methods as form, structure, language and tone. **This AO is the driver of Unit A2 2: Section A and is of primary importance.**

The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in poems. This means identifying poetic methods such as form, structure and particular uses of language, and showing how these methods relate to the key terms of the question.

Discussing poetic methods - advice to students:

1. The poetic method should be:

identified, using appropriate terminology if possible;

illustrated, quotation will be expected and this should be relevant and sufficient to illustrate the feature in full. It should observe the layout of the original text, and should follow the conventions with regard to smooth and syntactically appropriate combining of the quotation with the student's own words;

analysed so as to show that the student understands its operation and effect; and

related to the key term of the question.

2. Use of the terms "image" and "imagery"

For our purposes in this section "images" and "imagery" are to be sought and found in the language of the poems, and not in the mind of the reader. The student should be discouraged from such formulations as "In this poem the reader has the image of nature as a destroying force" where "image" is really being used to mean impression. For the purpose of AO2 analysis in this section, what we mean by "image" is a figure of speech, where the "figure" (simile, metaphor, personification, etc.) has a significance more than literal. Where there is no such significance, the student might be advised to use a term such as detailing.

3. Use of the term "tone"

Tone is usually understood as the poet's words in combination with his or her attitude towards subject or reader. It may be considered both in the light of a poetic method and as an effect of other methods e.g. diction, syntax. This feature, if it is to be handled productively, requires careful treatment. As with all methods, the tone must be:

identified - here no specialist vocabulary is needed, merely a precisely chosen adjective or adjective phrase (e.g. acerbic, admiring, mocking);

illustrated - a full and apt quotation should be selected;

analysed – so as to demonstrate that the student understands how the tone is achieved (e.g. through a consideration of the syntactical features of the quotation offered); and

related to the key term of the question.

The importance of shifts of tone as a structural device (in e.g. contrast, characterisation or development) should be understood by students.

AO3: Contexts

In this examination, the candidate should demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which poetry is written and received by drawing on appropriate information from outside the poem(s).

No specific sources are prescribed or recommended. Nevertheless, the questions address a contextual issue – social, cultural, historical, biographical, or literary – and candidates will be expected to provide appropriate information from outside the text. Contextual information of the stipulated type which is made relevant to the key term of the question will be rewarded. Students should be aware that little credit can be given for contextual information that is introduced merely for its own sake. They should remember that the text has primacy over the context. A good response will use contextual information sparingly and judiciously.

To meet the requirements of this Assessment Objective, you must:

- **Demonstrate knowledge of the context which shaped the poems** – this could include social, cultural, historical, biographical and/or literary detail.
- **Comment on the significance of chosen contextual information** – link your selected contextual details to their impact on the poems' intention and/or creation.
- **Use only relevant contextual information appropriately applied** – as stated before, it is important to focus on what is actually asked and shape your information accordingly.

Be aware that while context is important in consolidating our understanding of the poetry, you should not overuse contextual information, especially at the expense of textual analysis. A few contextual details, succinctly expressed and strictly related to the question, are far superior to entire paragraphs on the world outside of the poem(s).

AO4: Connections

In this examination, the candidate should explore connections between and within poems discussing features such as similarities, contrasts, continuity and development in the handling of themes and poetic techniques, and in context. Significant, pointed connections which are made relevant to the key term of the question will be rewarded.

The following is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students as they begin to explore Donne's poetry. Students should be encouraged to be flexible in their thinking, realising for example that the text is likely to embody more than one theme, or that a writer's preoccupation may not receive explicit statement in a poem.

AO1: Textual knowledge and understanding

As you read this guide, you will begin to develop knowledge and understanding of meaning and form your own interpretations of the poems. This guide will suggest areas for discussion and further research. You will need to adapt knowledge and understanding in order to frame an examination response that is relevant to the key terms of the question. You will need to support your ideas with relevant reference to the text, and present logical interpretations. You will need to use accurate and clear language and appropriate literary terms.

AO2 Poetic Methods

You will need to analyse ways in which the poet uses form, structure, language and tone to shape meanings in poems. You will need to communicate clear, well-developed exploration of the writer's methods, in relation to the key terms of the question.

Form

The sonnet form
Understanding of the sonnet form is crucial in studying these poems. Donne exploited the form of the Petrarchan sonnet. You will need to consider the influence of the Renaissance Italian poet, Petrarch (1304–1374).

The **form** of the Petrarchan sonnet:
A sonnet is composed of fourteen lines, divided into two distinct parts: the octave (eight lines, presenting a problem, idea or situation) and the sestet (six-lines, presenting a response or comment).

You will need to establish accurate information on the structural pattern, the rhythmic pattern (meter), rhyme scheme, volta or `turn', and punctuation. Explore the technical terms introduced in this guide. You will need to *analyse the sonnet form in relation to the key terms of the question*.

Petrarchan sonnets were written in iambic pentameter. Explore the use of alternating stress on the words - five stresses per line - in each sonnet.

Petrarchan sonnets employ a specific rhyme scheme, in particular ABBAABBACDECDE. Consider the manner in which Donne's sonnets deviate from this standard rhyme scheme and the reasons that informed this deviation.

You will also consider the influence of Shakespeare (1564–1616) and the Shakespearean (or Elizabethan) sonnet form: three quatrains and a rhyming couplet.   The effect of this couplet at the end of the poem is often that of a final, decisive statement.

Imagery

You will explore Donne's **conceits** in depth. In the sonnets, Donne explores images of bodily decay and sinfulness and creates forceful images to communicate the saving power of God.

The Holy Sonnets

You will explore 16 of Donne's poems in this Unit. Of these 16 poems, 7 are drawn from The Holy Sonnets. You will need to develop understanding of the context that informs this series of poems, grouped together and sometimes known as the Divine Meditations or Divine Sonnets (see Context section). The titles 'Holy' and 'Divine' indicate Donne's religious intent and the religious tone of these poems.

Approaching the sonnets
Read the sonnets as a group of poems to develop awareness of religious tones and content. Then examine each sonnet and develop awareness of distinct meanings.

You will examine 7 sonnets:

Batter my heart (c. 1609)
Death be not proud (Feb.-Aug. 1609)
Thou hast made me (c. 1609-11)
I am a little world
Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side
Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt (written after Aug. 1617)
This is my play's last scene

Donne explores a range of **themes** in the sonnets: salvation, a sense of sinfulness, repentance and death. (N.B. This list is not exhaustive.)

Theme: A sense of sinfulness; repentance

Thou hast made me, I am a little world and **This is my play's last scene**
In the sonnets, the speaker is conscious of bodily decay: *"mine end doth haste"*, *"my feeble flesh doth waste"* ('Thou hast made me') and is mindful of his mortality, *"both parts must die"* ('I am a little world').

Donne makes frequent direct references to his sinfulness: *"black sin"* ('I am a little world'). He cites the wages of sin as death and damnation, *"my feeble flesh doth waste/By sin in it, which it towards hell doth weigh"* ('Thou hast made me');*"black sin hath betrayed to endless night/My world's both parts"* ('I am a little world') *and "So, fall my sins, that…would press me, to hell"* ('This is my play's last scene').

Consider Donne's use of language to describe *"black sin"* and the fires of hell. Consider the effect of contrast to communicate the purifying effect of the *"flames"* that *"heal"* ('I am a little world'): *"But oh it must be burnt"* ('I am a little world').

Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side
In the harshest sonnet, 'Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side', Donne is so

conscious of his sins that he puts himself in the place of Jesus on the cross. In this sonnet, the speaker exploits harsh, forceful language not to implore the forceful intervention of the Father, but to invite scorn: *"Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side,/Buffet, and scoff, scourge, and crucify me."* The poet uses a series of venomous verbs, *"spit," "pierce," "buffet"* and *"scoff", "scourge"* and *"crucify,"* inviting a relentless attack. He emphasises that he has *"sinned,"* using the personal pronoun, *"I have sinned"* and continues to sin yet, *"only he,/Who could do no iniquity, hath died."* Indeed, he stresses that even his death cannot atone for his sins, for his sins *"pass the Jews' impiety."* In spite of the immediate effect of the provocative opening line, *"Spit in my face ye Jews"* - often identified as anti-Semitic - the speaker is keen to emphasise his grievous sin and stresses that he conspires in Christ's suffering: *"I/Crucify him daily."*

Donne exploits the structure of the Shakespearean sonnet so that the first two quatrains are considered together as an octet which imagines the scene of the sinful speaker being crucified. In the sestet Donne considers the *"strange love"* of Jesus for man. Whilst the closing lines form part of the traditional sestet of a Petrarchan sonnet, these two lines take the form of the rhyming couplet in a Shakespearean sonnet: concluding that God, in order to suffer like man, *"clothed himself in vile man's flesh, that so/He might be weak enough to suffer woe."*

A Hymn to God the Father
In 'A Hymn to God the Father,' Donne adopts a confessional tone, admitting the extent of his sinfulness. The poet addresses God directly and asks for forgiveness: *"Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun...?"* He persuades the reader of his abasement before God. The poet repeats the refrain, *"Wilt thou forgive that sin…?"* in recognition of the authority of God but also in recognition of his repeated sins.

Donne uses a second refrain, punning on his own name, to close the first two stanzas: *"When thou hast done, thou hast not done/For, I have more"*, and modifies it slightly but tellingly in the third *"And, having done that, thou hast done/ I fear no more."* In contrast to some of Donne's earlier poems, the speaker is not presenting himself as arrogant and powerful, but rather admitting that he is destined to sin again: *"And do run still: though still I do deplore?"* The speaker communicates understanding of man's inherent sinfulness: *"Which was my sin, though it were done before?"* The speaker, therefore, seeks God's intervention and forgiveness in order to achieve redemption as he is powerless to achieve redemption without God.

The poet is careful to make a full and frank confession and admits that he has, *"won/ Others to sin?"* However, he stresses that his faith in the power of *"thy son"* to redeem him leads him to *"fear no more."*

Theme: Salvation

In a number of the Holy Sonnets, the speaker communicates his fervent desire to achieve salvation, that is, deliverance from sin and its consequences.

Thou hast made me and **Batter my heart**
The speaker uses imagery of movement and position (*"above," "towards" "rise"*) to communicate his aspiration towards the saving power of God: *"Only thou art above, and when towards thee/By thy leave I can look, I rise again"* ('Thou hast made me'). Donne emphasises that as a human being he is inadequate to achieve his own salvation, *"But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,/That not one hour myself I can sustain"* ('Thou hast

made me') and *"I, like an usurpt town, to another due,/Labour to'admit you, but oh, to no end … for I/ Except you'enthral me, never shall be free"* ('Batter my heart').

In the sonnets, the speaker makes frequent direct appeals for salvation. In 'Thou hast made me' Donne uses the imperative verb to address God: *"Repair me"*. In the second line of the sonnet, the poet emphasises his immediate concern,*"now mine end doth haste."* The poet uses the rhythmic and syntactic structure of the lines to communicate the speaker's fear,*"I run to death, and death meets me as fast"* and *"death before doth cast/ Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste."* Donne's rhythmic structure replicates the pace that Death attempts to enforce. However, the speaker's assured tone in the line *"By thy leave I can look, I rise again"*, achieved by the grouping of accented syllables and the resulting slowing of pace emphasises that his faith that he will achieve salvation through God outweighs his fear, and marks a contrast to the pace of the earlier lines. In 'Batter My Heart' Donne again makes a direct appeal for salvation. He fervently implores God's forceful intervention to purge him of his sins: to *"o'erthrow me'and bend/Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new … ravish me"* ('Batter My Heart').

I am a little world, This is my play's last scene and **Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side**
He repeats his belief in the need for forceful purgation of sin: *"And burn me O Lord, with a fiery zeal/Of thee and thy house, which doth in eating heal"* ('I am a little world') and *"Impute me righteous, thus purged of evil"* ('This is my play's last scene'). He communicates absolute faith in God, *"thus purged of evil"* ('This is my play's last scene'). In 'Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side,' the speaker is humbled and recognises Man's unworthiness: *"Oh let me then, his strange love still admire,"* and *"God clothed himself in vile man's flesh."*

A Hymn to God the Father
In 'A Hymn to God the Father,' Donne again explores the idea that man is inadequate to achieve his own salvation and makes repeated direct appeals to God, *"Wilt thou forgive that sin…?"* In the concluding lines of the poem, he manages his fear of death and stresses his faith: *"at my death thy son/Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore…I fear no more."* The poet concludes that he will achieve salvation through Christ.

Theme: Death

This is my play's last scene and **Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt**
As the first line suggests, in 'This is my play's last scene,' the speaker is conscious of the onward march of Time and his inevitable death and develops motifs: *"This is my play's last scene"* and *"My spans last inch, my minute's latest point"*. The poet selects adjectives to personify Death describing *"gluttonous death"* anticipating the speaker's demise. Death, he believes, will *"instantly unjoint/My body, and soul … my soul, to'heaven her first seat, takes flight,/And earth-born body, in the earth shall dwell"*. The poet's use of the awkward verb, *"unjoint"* indicates a dramatic separation of body and soul. In 'Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt,' the speaker refers to his wife's soul, *"early into heaven ravished"*, where the violence of the verb selected suggests an event which was abrupt and unexpected.

Death be not proud
Most famously, the speaker addresses Death directly in the sonnet 'Death be not proud.' Personification is extended throughout the poem – this is the central conceit. The poet draws great strength from his faith: *"One short sleep past, we wake eternally,/And death*

shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die". In other sonnets, he characterises his adversary as eager to defeat him, *"I run to death, and death meets me as fast"* ('Thou hast made me'). In contrast, in 'Death be not proud,' he seeks to overturn by the use of a paradox the traditional view of fearsome Death.

A Hymn to God the Father
In 'A Hymn to God the Father,' Donne alludes to the image of the fates, spinning the thread of life, to present his fear of death without salvation: *"I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun/My last thread, I shall perish on the shore."* The verb *"perish"* with its emphatic consonantal qualities supports the poet's religious belief (presented in the sonnet 'This is my play's last scene') that the soul "*to'heaven…takes flight" but the "earth-born body, in the earth shall dwell."*

Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt
Donne writes about personal experiences, most notably his grief at the death of his wife Anne More, expressed in the sonnet, 'Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt' (written after her death in 1617). Izaak Walton writes that, after the death of his wife, Donne was "crucified to the world."

In the sonnet, he addresses the impact of her death on his life and on his poetry, "*Wholly in heavenly things my mind is set"* and explains, *"admiring her my mind did whet/To seek thee God."* After her death, he resolves to focus his love on "things divine": "thou/Dost woo my soul."

Love Poems

Theme: Attitudes to sexual love

Donne explores sexual love or physical love in poems such as 'The Flea' and 'The Sun Rising.' Presentation of a boastful, posturing male stance is characteristic of Metaphysical poetry. However, the speaker's attitude to the female lover differs in these poems, to the extent that critics imagine that Donne writes about an early lover in 'The Flea' whereas 'The Sun Rising' refers to his relationship with Anne More.

The Flea
In 'The Flea,' Donne presents the speaker's attempt to persuade his lover to surrender to his sexual desires. The poet manages form, structure and language with such ease that, at first, rhythmic structure is unnoticed and the poet's ingenious exploitation of meter and rhetoric seems but the masterful voice of a living male speaker. The poet develops one of his most famous and memorable conceits in this poem. You might like to examine similarities and differences between 'The Flea' and another Metaphysical poem which exploits the concept of 'carpe diem,' Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' (written in the 1650s).

In the first two stanzas, gender roles are traditional - the speaker fulfils the male role - to pursue, to possess, to dominate - and weaves an intricate argument whilst his silent lover fulfils the traditional female role - to abstain, to resist, to submit. Donne's male speaker attempts to command the female listener's attention, and certainly captures the reader's ear. The poet exploits imperative verbs to establish a firm, instructional tone: *"Mark but this flea, and mark in this"* but the use of the verb, *"deny'st"* alludes to the female power of withholding that the male seeks to undermine. The speaker's skill is evident and asserts the basic premise that sexual intercourse does not represent loss of honour: *"this cannot be said/A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead."* The speaker's fabricated claim to shared knowledge leads the reader to criticise his attempted manipulation of the female lover.

In each nine-line stanza, Donne uses the rhyme scheme, AABBCCDDD. Donne manages the pace of the lines to allow the speaker to feign composure and thus contain his urgent sexual desire. Close examination of the metrical arrangement of each couplet reveals that the lines alternate between iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter – this and the variations of the stress pattern enable the creation of a persuasive speaking voice. The poet employs sexual language (*"sucked"*) whilst belittling the significance of the sexual act, since the actions of sexual union are echoed in the actions of a mere flea, *"Me it sucked first, and now sucks thee,/And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be"*. The speaker attempts to manipulate his lover, as he dismisses her concern and dispels religious objections to physical love. The speaker feigns regret, exploiting the expressive interjection *"alas"* to exclaim: *"And this, alas, is more than we would do."*

In the second stanza, the poet extends the conceit, affecting concern for the life of the flea: *"Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,"* as it represents the lovers' *"marriage bed."* Donne uses a metaphor of some solemnity to support his pursuit of sexual pleasure: *"This flea is you and I, and this/Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is."* The speaker makes extensive use of hyperbolic language but this, in fact, causes the speaker's claims to appear disingenuous: *"Let not to this, self-murder added be,/And sacrilege, three sins in killing three."* At the end of the second stanza, the speaker's voiced fear, *"three sins in killing three"* marks the turning point in the female listener's reception of the speaker's argument and anticipates her unpredictable action as she overthrows his desire.

At the beginning of the third stanza, Donne again engages in hyperbolic language, feigning horror: *"Cruel and sudden, hast thou since/Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?"* It seems the male agenda has been overthrown. However, the male speaker recovers his composure to re-direct her *"Cruel and sudden"* action, using the absence of consequence to persuade her of the validity of his original argument: *"In what could this flea guilty be,/Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?"* The simplicity of the rhyme implies the ease with which his argument might be assimilated. In the closing lines of the poem, the male speaker claims triumph – in argument at least: *"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."* The absence of physical success and the speaker's flexible verbal movement create humour for the reader. However, Donne's management of form, structure and language creates unquestionable admiration for the poet.

The Sun Rising

Knowledge of biographical context will heighten understanding of the poem, 'The Sun Rising.' In 1598, Donne was appointed private secretary to Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England. He became a Member of Parliament in 1601, as MP for Brackley, and sat in Queen Elizabeth's last parliament. He was expected to embark on a promising political career. However, in 1601, Donne married Egerton's seventeen-year-old niece, Anne More. Her father, George More, Lieutenant of the Tower, condemned the marriage. This led to Donne's imprisonment until the marriage was proven valid. The reaction to the marriage ruined Donne's career and thwarted his social ascent. In 'The Sun Rising,' Donne attempts to guard *"lovers' seasons."* Although, the speaker does not address a human critic – he presents a direct address to the sun - it is clear that the poem is born of personal frustration and that the poet feels impelled to express a persuasive defence of love.

Donne elevates romantic love in 'The Sun Rising'; however his immediate attention is wrested from the female lover due to the sun's intrusion. The poem is composed of three ten-line stanzas. The first stanza of the poem contains the ill-tempered speaker's virulent assault on the sun. The conceit is embedded in the poem: Donne exploits derisive adjectives to extend personification, attacking the sun's attempts to interfere in the lovers' pursuit of pleasure: *"Busy old fool, unruly sun."* The poet varies line lengths and meter – iambic tetrameter in line 1, 5 and 6 of each stanza, dimeter in line 2 and iambic pentameter in lines 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10 - and frames the rhyme scheme (ABBACDCDEE) to reinforce the speaker's powerful and exasperated tone of voice. Donne establishes an intimate setting – the lovers' bed – therefore, the reader is plunged into intimate association and is conscious of the intrusion. The poet suggests the speaker's irritated tone through the question: *"Why dost thou thus,/Through windows, and through curtains call on us?"*

The speaker rejects the sun's *"motions"* and instead utilises imperative verbs, directing the sun to *"go chide," "Go tell,"* and *"Call"*. The speaker rejects the sun's call to the lovers to abide by the same timetable as, *"Late school-boys, and sour prentices"* and provides a range of alternative figures whom the sun can force into action: *"Go tell court-huntsmen that the King will ride,/Call country ants to harvest offices."* The speaker demands concession for *"lovers' seasons,"* and the exasperated tone shifts to idealistic as he claims that lovers are not subject to the conventions and obligations of Time: *"Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,/Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time."*

The speaker uses rhetorical questions to undermine the sun's power: *"Thy beams, so reverend and strong/Why shouldst thou think?"* In contrast to other love poems, the female lover's physical form is not drawn to the reader's immediate attention; however, the speaker claims he *"could eclipse and cloud [the sun] with a wink,/But that I would not lose her sight so long."* The speaker's confidence increases as he boasts of his riches, rejecting material wealth in favour of the riches of his lover's presence: *"Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,/Whether both th'Indias of spice and mine/Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me."* The speaker claims to exceed the wealth of great rulers: *"She'is all states, and all princes, I"*. The short line, *"Nothing else is"* indicates that the reality of their situation obliterates everything external to it. However, he cannot resist the temptation to boast: *"Princes do but play us"* culminating in the bragging line, *"Thou sun art half as happy'as we."* The speaker undermines the sun's main function: *"since thy duties be/To warm the world, that's done in warming us."* The reader engages with the conceit as a figurative construct - as the sun incurs the speaker's wrath, the reader imagines its increasing shame and, thus, the sun is viewed as a pitiable figure rather than powerful. The speaker claims the lovers' bed as the centre of the world, *"Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;/This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere,"* indicating that love empowers and strengthens the speaker. (Some allowance must be made for the playful element of bragging and posturing, a histrionic attitude not uncommon in Donne's poetry, and in Metaphysical poetry generally.)

Theme: Spiritual Love

The Anniversary

You will observe clear connections between 'The Sun Rising' and 'The Anniversary.' In both poems, the speaker presents a boastful, posturing male stance - characteristic of Metaphysical poetry – however, it is important to compare the speakers and highlight similarities and differences in the speaker's attitude to love, including emphasis on physical love or spiritual love.

Donne wrote 'The Anniversary' to celebrate the first year of the lovers' *"reign."* The speaker replicates the claim made in 'The Sun Rising' that the lovers are satisfied with each other and have no need for the wealth of princes: *"Here upon earth we'are kings, and none but we/Can be such kings."*

However, in 'The Anniversary,' Donne also emphasises aspects of spiritual love: "*souls where nothing dwells but love/…then shall prove/This, or a love increased there above."* Donne repeats his assertion that love is immune to the passage of Time: *"All other things, to their destruction draw,/Only our love hath no decay" exploiting alliteration to communicate the inevitable decay of "all other things."*

The Good Morrow
'The Good Morrow' centres on the speaker's contemplation and veneration of spiritual love. Donne manages the pace of the lines by delaying the arrival of the verb *"did"* to create the speaker's sense of awe in the opening question, *"I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I/ Did, till we loved?"* Although the speaker describes the lover's physical form, *"but this, all pleasures fancies be"* and gives a nod to the pursuit of physical love *"If ever any beauty I did see,/Which I desired, and got"* the reader is conscious of spiritual resonance: " *'twas but a dream of thee."*

In contrast to poems such as 'The Flea' in which the speaker pursues sexual love and 'The Sun Rising' in which the speaker boasts of his possession, in 'The Good Morrow' the speaker forgoes the desire to compete: *"Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,/ Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown"*. The speaker presents the lovers' possession of each other as entirely reciprocal, *"Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one."* Donne does not invest in persuasive devices with the same urgent design as in `The Flea', instead he presents a conceit that seems to arise as a result of contemplation of the lover's face, *"Where can we find two better hemispheres/ Without sharp north, without declining west?"* The speaker is conscious that love has wrought a change in his perspective: *"For love, all love of other sights controls,/And makes one little room, an everywhere."* Indeed, in 'The Good Morrow,' Donne persuades the reader of the positive effects of love – the tone of calm contentment illustrates the speaker's overwhelming sense of completion and wholeness.

Theme: Partings

A Valediction: forbidding Mourning
Donne wrote the poem to his wife, Anne More, who was heavily pregnant, in 1611 or 1612.

The theme of parting from a lover is explored in 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning.' Knowledge of biographical context will heighten understanding of the poem. The word 'valediction' is defined as, "a statement or address made at or as a farewell." Donne wrote the poem in 1611-12 and addresses his wife Anne More before he leaves to go on a trip to Continental Europe with Sir Robert Drury.

In a letter to Henry Goodyer, Donne described his regret at any separation from his "dear children" and his "utterly devoted wife" whom he calls "hujus aurea" ("this golden one"). During Donne's trip Anne miscarried - an event about which Walton says the poet suffered a "dreadful vision" of her with their stillborn child.

The poem is written in the form of nine four-line stanzas. Throughout the poem, Donne asserts his ideal of spiritual love. Donne draws a parallel between the parting of the lovers and the leave-taking of *"virtuous men,"* who *"pass mildly away"* in death. He asks and advises his wife to emulate the behaviour of the *"sad friends"* of virtuous men, hoping that she will *"make no noise,/No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move"*. The poet warns against desecration or defilement of their love: *"'Twere profanation of our joys/To tell the laity our love."*

Donne draws a distinction between *"Dull sublunary lovers' love"* and the spiritual *"refined"* love that he and Anne More experience. He cautions his wife against replication of the thoughts and feelings of *"Dull sublunary"* lovers, men and women who are senseless of the unseen motions of the spheres but for whom *"Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears"*. Donne creates a stately rhythmic structure of iambic tetrameters to assuage his wife's sorrow at their parting and enforces a calm, measured response. He claims that their parting is not an occasion for mourning or sorrow because it represents mere physical separation of two lovers who, *"Inter-assured of the mind,/Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss."* He asserts a sense of order and establishes control through the use of the ABAB rhyme scheme and the slight variations of the iambic tetrameter in each stanza.

Donne exploits linguistic and figurative devices to persuade his wife that she can endure this physical parting. On a spiritual plane, he argues, *"Our two souls therefore, which are one,/Though I must go, endure not yet/A breach, but an expansion,/Like gold to aery thinness beat."* He changes the conceit from the beating out of gold leaf to the use of a pair of compasses. The intention is still to comfort his wife as he likens their two souls to the two legs of the compass: *"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 th'other do."*

In the closing lines of the poem, Donne establishes a sense of wholeness, balance and completion in an extension of the compass conceit: *"Thy firmness makes my circle just,/ And makes me end, where I begun"*, persuading the reader of his calm faith in his spiritual love for his wife.

Donne explores the theme of parting from a lover in both 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning' and 'Elegy 5 *His Picture*'. You will be able to draw clear parallels between these poems.

Elegy 5 *His Picture*
It is thought that Donne wrote this poem before he left to join Sir Walter Raleigh's expedition to Cadiz in 1596 and to the Azores in 1597. The poet did not become secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper of England, until 1598, after he had returned from these expeditions and therefore it is possible that he addresses a previous lover in 'Elegy 5' rather than his wife, Anne More.

Donne communicates the speaker's attempt to exert influence over the female listener. In 'Elegy 5 *His Picture*' he exploits the imperative verb, commanding her, *"Here take my picture."* Donne negates the consequence of their parting, claiming that her picture *"in my heart, where my soul dwells, shall dwell."* This concept, undeveloped here, receives extended treatment through the likening of the two souls to the two legs of the compass in 'A Valediction: forbidding Mourning.'

Donne elucidates the range of changes that might occur to his physical body: *"When weather-beaten I come back; my hand,/Perhaps with rude oars torn, or sun-beams tanned"*. The poet urges his lover to refer to his picture, *"If rival fools tax thee to'have loved a man,/So foul, and coarse, as oh, I may seem then"*. Donne presents his belief that love that is *"grown strong enough"* is no longer dependent on the physical form: *"That* *which in him was fair and delicate,/Was but the milk, which in love's childish state/Did nurse it: who now is grown strong enough/To feed on that, which to disused tastes seems tough."* The inherent criticism of *"loves childish state"* leads the lover to aspire to the state of mature, developed love and encourage his lover to be strong and confident in her belief in his worthiness.

Theme: Negative Aspects of Love

A Jet Ring Sent
In 'A Jet Ring Sent,' the speaker addresses an inanimate object, a jet ring that his former lover has returned to him. In the first stanza, the speaker apostrophizes the ring with reference to what it is not: *"Thou art not so black, as my heart,/Nor half as brittle, as her heart, thou art"*. The ring is a device to frame criticism of his lover.

The poet varies line length and meter, writing the first line in iambic tetrameter and the second and fourth lines in iambic pentameter. The third line in each stanza extends to fourteen syllables. In the fourteen syllable line in the first stanza – shaped as a rhetorical question addressed to the ring – the speaker challenges the ring, asking if it can represent both lovers, his eternal constancy and her fickleness. Donne's tone is one of bitter resignation - he presents a contrast between his constant love (*"Nothing more endless"*) and his lover's fickle love (*"nothing sooner broke"*). The speaker engages in harsh criticism of the lover, cloaking his disdain by imagining that his lover has bid the ring, *"say,/I am cheap, and naught but fashion, fling me away"*.

The speaker anticipates the stronger *"stuff"* of *"Marriage rings"*, anticipating constant love and claims that the ring is *"safe"* now with him, and that *"She that, oh, broke her faith, would soon break thee."*

The Triple Fool
In 'The Triple Fool' Donne debates love's foolishness and reflects on the *"pain"* and *"Grief"* of love. However, the poet claims that the state of being in love is a state that a *"wiseman"* aspires to experience. Donne continues to present a number of paradoxical statements. The speaker laments his attempts to acclaim his love *"In whining poetry"*. He describes the function of verse: *"I thought, if I could draw my pains/Through rhyme's vexation, I should them allay."* Donne personifies his grief to emphasise its force: *"Grief brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,/For, he tames it, that fetters it in verse."* However, in another paradoxical statement, he explains that instead of restraining his pain, the act of sharing it with others refreshes his pain: *"Some man, his art and voice to show,/Doth set and sing my pain,/And, by delighting many, frees again/Grief, which verse did restrain."*

The poet writes in an unusual form of two eleven-line stanzas. The rhyme scheme (AABBBCDCDEE) helps to create the sense of irrational, paradoxical thoughts leading to the ambiguous conclusion that whilst he has increased in foolishness, the best fools are a little wise: *"And I, which was two fools, do so grow three;/Who are a little wise, the best fools be."* There is, of course, an inherent paradox in writing a poem about love in which the speaker laments the act of writing poems about love.

N.B. The selection of poems under the thematic headings are offered merely as guidance for the student. Many of the poems in the Anthology will relate to a number of themes. The important examination issue is to choose a poem that may convincingly be argued to express the theme identified in the question.

AO3 Contexts

Critical context

John Donne was a Renaissance poet; he is considered as the most prominent 'Metaphysical' poet. The term 'Metaphysical' poets refers to a number of poets, including John Donne (1572–1631), Andrew Marvell (1621–1678) and Henry Vaughan (1622–1695) who demonstrate specific characteristics in their poetry.

Donne's poetry provides evidence of his intellectual vigour and powers of reasoning. He often explores abstract phenomena. He develops a range of memorable conceits: unusual and striking comparisons of dissimilar things.

Critical opinion on the Metaphysical poets is varied. Donne was considered by Ben Jonson (1572-1637) as one of the greatest poets. However, John Dryden (1631-1700) is credited with the introduction of the term 'metaphysic' with critical intentions. He criticised Donne, writing: "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." Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) criticised the Metaphysical poets and claimed that they "were not successful in representing or moving the affections" and that neither "was the sublime more within their reach." His criticism of the poets' style was grounded in his typically eighteenth-century assertion that "Great thoughts are always general" and that the metaphysical poets were too particular in their search for novelty. He did concede, however, that "they…sometimes struck out unexpected truth" and that their work is often intellectually, if not emotionally stimulating.

Metaphysical poets had a significant influence on twentieth-century poetry, due to T. S. Eliot's essay 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921). He praised the anti-Romantic and intellectual qualities of which Johnson and his contemporaries had disapproved and helped bring their poetry back into favour with readers.

Biographical context

John Donne was born as a Roman Catholic, in 1572, at a time when the Roman Catholic faith was under threat.

In 1593, John Donne's brother, Henry, was convicted of Catholic sympathies and died in prison soon after. The incident led John Donne to question his Catholic faith and there is clear evidence that his personal religious turmoil had a significant impact on his poetry.

The *Holy Sonnets* are believed to date mostly from 1609 - 1610. In 1610, Donne published 'Pseudo-Martyr', an anti-Catholic polemic. This text and 'Ignatius his Conclave' published in 1611 provided public testimony that he was renouncing his Catholic faith. In 'Pseudo-Martyr' Donne proposed the argument that Roman Catholics could pledge an oath of allegiance to James I without compromising their religious loyalty to the Pope. This won Donne the favour of King James I.

King James had wanted Donne to take Anglican orders in 1607 and to be his personal chaplain, although he was not a priest. Donne had refused and the king stipulated that he would not receive preferment unless he entered the Anglican ministry.

In 1615, he converted to Anglicanism and was appointed Royal Chaplain. In 1616, he was appointed Reader in Divinity at Lincoln's Inn. As a preacher, Donne's use of elaborate metaphors, religious symbolism, his flair for drama, his obvious intellect and his quick wit were admired. He was viewed as one of the greatest preachers of his era.

Anne More, his wife, died in 1617. Donne wrote the *Holy Sonnet*, 'Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt' in his grief at her death. He continued to write his *Holy Sonnets* in 1618.

In 1621, he was appointed as Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London. As Donne's health continued to fail, he devoted great attention to the theme of death. He preached what was called his own funeral sermon, 'Death's Duel,' a few weeks before he died in London, on 31st March 1631.

Publication

The *Holy Sonnets* were published in the posthumous collection, *Songs and Sonnets* in 1633, not during Donne's lifetime. However, Donne circulated these poems amongst friends in manuscript form and he was involved in the arrangement of the published manuscripts. Each poem has a numerical order, for example, 'Holy Sonnet X'. However, the numerical sequence of the sonnets varies, depending on the arrangement of the manuscripts and there are three known arrangements. Donne's close friend, the Earl of Westmoreland, prepared a sequence in 1620 and this sequence included three sonnets omitted from the 1633 series: 'Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side,' 'Batter my heart' and 'Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt.'

Timeline: Donne's Life

1572	John Donne was born on 22nd January 1572. He was born into a Catholic family during a period of strong anti-Catholic sentiment in England.
1583-1589	Donne entered Hart Hall, Oxford, in 1583 and the University of Cambridge in 1586, where he studied for three years. He did not receive a degree, as he would not take the Oath of Supremacy because of his Catholicism.
1590s	Donne spent much of his inheritance on women, books and travel. He wrote most of his love poems and erotic poems during this time. His first books of poems, *Satires* and *Songs and Sonnets*, were recognised and applauded by a small group of admirers.
1592	Donne began studying law at Lincoln's Inn and seemed destined for a legal or diplomatic career.
1593	John Donne's brother, Henry, was convicted of Catholic sympathies (he had harboured a Catholic priest). Henry died in prison soon after. The incident led Donne to question his Catholic faith and inspired some of his best writing on religion.

1596-97	Donne fought with the Earl of Essex and Sir Walter Raleigh against the Spanish at Cadiz in 1596 and the Azores in 1597.
1597	Donne was appointed private secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England. He was established at Egerton's London home, then the most influential social centre in England.
1601	John Donne became a Member of Parliament.
1601	John Donne married 16-year-old Anne More, the niece of Sir Egerton. Both Lord Egerton and Anne's father, George More, strongly disapproved of the marriage, and, as punishment, More did not provide a dowry. Lord Egerton fired Donne. Donne was imprisoned for a short time. This had a significant impact on Donne's social ascent – John and Anne lived in near-poverty.
1609-10	The *Holy Sonnets* are believed to date from 1609-1610. In 1610, Donne published his anti-Catholic polemic 'Pseudo-Martyr,' renouncing his Catholic faith. He proposed that Roman Catholics could support James I without compromising their religious loyalty to the Pope. This won him the king's favour and patronage from members of the House of Lords.
1615-16	Donne converted to Anglicanism. He was appointed Royal Chaplain. He was an eloquent preacher, using elaborate metaphors, religious symbolism. In 1616, he was appointed Reader in Divinity at Lincoln's Inn.
1617-18	Donne's wife, Anne, died in August 1617, shortly after giving birth to their twelfth child. Donne continued to write the *Holy Sonnets* in 1618.
1621-24	Donne was appointed dean of St. Paul's Cathedral. In late 1623, he suffered from a near-fatal illness. He wrote a number of prayers and meditations, published in 1624 as 'Devotions upon Emergent Occasions' (including the famous lines, "ask nor for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee" and "no man is an island").
1625	Donne became a Royal Chaplain to Charles I. In the last years of his life, his poems became increasingly sombre and pious.
1631	Donne delivered his famous "Death's Duel" sermon before King Charles I in February. He died on March 31, 1631 and was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral.

AO4 Connections

Students should be keenly aware that there are equal marks available for their treatment of the given poem and the second poem selected in the exam.

In this examination, the candidate should explore connections within and between Donne's poems, discussing similarities and differences in the handling of themes and poetic techniques, and in contexts. Significant, pointed connections which are made relevant to the key term of the question will be rewarded.

To meet the requirements of this Assessment Objective, you must:

- **Explore the connections** between the poem printed in the Resource Booklet and the poem you choose, and the external/contextual information you have studied. Always bear in mind that the Driving Objective for this unit is **AO2** (Poetic Methods).
- **Note both similarities and differences** – this could be between voices, themes, aspects of imagery or any other techniques you find.
- **Make sure the connections noted are significant and relevant.**

Exploring connections
In spite of the clear distinction in subject matter you will, for example, be able to trace links between the poems in which Donne explores sexual love or physical love (for example, 'The Flea,' 'The Sun Rising') and the *Holy Sonnets* in which he seeks a closer relationship with God.

Examination of certain ideas in Donne's poems helps to establish a bridge between these apparently contrasting themes. In 'Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt,' Donne claims that his admiration of his wife whetted his spiritual thirst: *"Here the admiring her my mind did whet/To seek thee God."* He devises a conceit to explore spiritual desire, *"though I have found thee, and thou my thirst has fed,/A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet."* Donne adopts the structure of the Petrarchan sonnet, using the octet to explore his spiritual thirst and the sestet to characterise God as the active lover. From the beginning of the sestet - marked as a turning point (or volta) through the use of the word, *"But"* - Donne describes God wooing the speaker. Indeed, he adds to his exploration of the conflict between surrender to sin and salvation in other sonnets, presenting God as a jealous lover, who does not *"only fear lest I allow/My love to saints and angels, things divine"* but fears that the poet will succumb to sin, mortal pleasures and the devil, *"But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt/Lest the world, flesh, yea Devil put thee out."* Donne uses an arguably irreligious phrase, *"in thy tender jealousy,"* stretching the reader to accept the identification of God as a lover, and the connection with his relationship with his wife.

In the last paragraph we noted how the vocabulary of earthly love infiltrates Donne's religious poems. Look for the reverse as well. You will find some of the themes which are handled and the language used in the *Holy Sonnets* putting in an unexpected appearance in the *Love Poems*.

Specimen question:

> By referring closely to *The Flea* (Poem **2(a)**), printed in the accompanying Resource Booklet and one other appropriately selected poem, and making use of relevant external contextual information on the nature of Metaphysical poetry, examine the poetic methods which Donne uses to write about the theme of physical love.
>
> **N.B. Equal marks are available for your treatment of each poem.**

The candidate has selected 'The Sun Rising' as the second poem.

Do I understand the key terms of the question?

In both 'The Flea' and 'The Sun Rising,' Donne engages with the theme of **physical love**, though in both there is a considerable admixture of intellectual ideas. Donne's presentation of intellectual argument is a characteristic of Metaphysical poetry. Donne presents the poems as dialectical arguments, that is, a discourse between two or more individuals who hold different points of view in relation to physical love but wish to establish the truth through reasoned arguments. However, the reader must infer the female lover's viewpoint in 'The Flea' – the poet does not permit her to speak; whereas in 'The Sun Rising' the speaker presents a direct address to the insensate sun. The poet is keen to present original arguments – he explores daring subject matter in a beguiling manner – this is characteristic of Metaphysical poetry. In 'The Flea,' the male speaker seeks to persuade his lover to surrender to his physical desires. Indeed, the speaker seeks to redress a perceived imbalance of sexual power and attempts to overthrow the female lover's power of withholding physical love. In 'The Sun Rising,' the speaker defends *"lovers' seasons"* and it is clear that the poet feels impelled to frame a persuasive defence of physical love. The speaker rails against the sun's intrusion on physical love and his unwelcome presence in the lover's bed. The speaker's attitude to his lover and to physical love differs in these poems. In 'The Flea' the female lover is the source of frustration; whereas in 'The Sun Rising' the speaker seeks to protect the lover and attacks an external force, leading critics to claim that 'The Sun Rising' refers to his relationship with Anne More.

Compare gender roles in relation to physical love
In both poems, the speaker's attitude to physical love determines specific gender roles. In the first two stanzas of 'The Flea,' gender roles are traditional. The speaker fulfils the male role - to pursue physical love, to seek to physically possess and dominate the lover, and he weaves an intricate argument. The unheard female lover fulfils the traditional female role: to abstain from physical love, and to resist seduction. It is characteristic of Metaphysical poetry that it endeavours to capture the reader's ear from the outset of the poem. In 'The Flea,' Donne's male speaker commands the female listener's (and the reader's) attention. The poet exploits imperative verbs to establish a firm, instructional tone: *"Mark but this flea, and mark in this".* The speaker demonstrates skilful use of rhetoric to redress the imbalance of sexual power through the indirect exclamation of *"How little that which thou deny'st me is."* The use of the verb, *"deny'st"* alludes to the female power of withholding physical love that the male seeks to undermine. The speaker's skill in the art of persuasion is evident in his apparent concession that she already knows what he

is about to say, and he asserts the basic premise that physical love does not represent loss of honour: *"Confess it, this cannot be said/A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead."* The speaker's specious argument about the denial of physical love leads the reader to criticise his manipulation of the female lover. In contrast, in 'The Sun Rising,' the male speaker's dominance is not asserted to undermine the female lover – his force is asserted as a means to protect and preserve the opportunity for physical love. In the first stanza of 'The Sun Rising,' the speaker directs an irritated assault on the sun. He rejects the sun's assumption that physical love is subject to his *"motions."* Donne uses imperative verbs directed at the sun *"go chide," "Go tell,"* and *"Call"* to regain power. This direct address and the speaker's caustic tone are characteristic of Metaphysical poetry. (We see a similar direct address in another situation which would traditionally be deemed inappropriate in 'Batter my heart'.) The speaker rejects the sun's expectation that physical love will adhere to a quotidian timetable and provides a range of alternative figures whom the sun can force into action: *"Late school-boys, and sour prentices"* and *"Go tell court-huntsmen that the King will ride,/Call country ants to harvest offices."* The speaker demands a concession for *"lovers' seasons,"* and claims that physical love is not subject to the conventions and obligations of Time: *"Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,/Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time."* In both poems, the male speakers assert power and make persuasive claims in relation to physical love.

Form, structure and meter

In both poems, Donne uses form, structure and meter to enforce a distinct male perspective on physical love. 'The Flea' is written in the form of three nine-line stanzas. In the first two stanzas, the speaker feigns composure as he seeks to develop an argument to persuade the female lover to surrender to physical love. Donne manages the pace of the lines to allow the speaker to seem to contain his urgent physical desire. Close examination of the metrical arrangement of each couplet reveals that the lines alternate between iambic tetrameter: *"Yet this enjoys before it woo"* and iambic pentameter: *"And pampered swells with one blood made of two."* Donne presents evidence of both the male speaker's control of the argument and his investment in the pursuit of sexual pleasure - he emphasises *"enjoys"* - and replicates sexual union in rhyme: *"woo"/"two"/"do"*. 'The Sun Rising' is constructed of three ten-line stanzas. The first stanza of the poem is concerned with the ill-tempered male speaker's attack on the sun in defence of physical love. The poet varies line lengths and meter – iambic tetrameter in line 1, 5 and 6 of each stanza, dimeter in line 2 and iambic pentameter in lines 3, 4, 7, 8, 9 and 10 - to develop the speaker's powerful and pronounced tone of voice. Donne establishes the intimate setting for physical love – the lovers' bed; therefore, the reader is plunged into intimate association with the event and is conscious of the intrusion. The poet creates the speaker's contemptuous tone through the accusatory question: *"Why dost thou thus,/ Through windows, and through curtains call on us?"*, exploiting the rhymes *"thus/us"*. In both poems, Donne's skilful management of meter to contain tersely compact expression is evidence of the poet's intellectual energy and characteristic of Metaphysical poetry.

Donne employs a range of linguistic devices in both 'The Flea' and 'The Sun Rising' to offer a persuasive argument in relation to physical love. In 'The Flea,' the poet uses the rhyme scheme, AABBCCDDD. In the third and fourth line of the first stanza, Donne strengthens his attempts to belittle the significance of the physical act through manipulation of rhyme in its simplest form: *"sucks thee," "mingled be."* He uses a casual tone, claiming that the effects of physical union are innocuous, echoed in the actions of a mere flea: *"Me it sucked first, and now sucks thee,/And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be."* The speaker's argument is used to manipulate his lover, as he dismisses her concern and dispels religious objections to physical love. The speaker feigns regret, exploiting the expressive interjection *"alas"* to exclaim: *"And this, alas, is more than we would do."* At the beginning of the third stanza, Donne again uses hyperbolic language, feigning horror: *"Cruel and sudden, hast thou since/Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?"* It seems the male agenda has been overthrown. However, the male speaker recovers his composure to re-direct her *"Cruel and sudden"* action, using the lack of consequences to persuade her of the validity of his original argument: *"In what could this flea guilty be,/Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?"* The use of simple rhyme implies the ease with which his argument might be assimilated. In the closing lines of the poem, the male speaker claims triumph: *"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."* The lack of physical success, despite the rather desperate use of *"when" instead of* "if", creates humour for the reader. The poet's presentation of ingenious argument and flexible verbal movement is characteristic of Metaphysical poetry. Donne also elevates physical love in 'The Sun Rising'; however, the speaker's immediate attention is wrested from the female lover by the sun's intrusion. The speaker uses rhetorical questions: *"Thy beams, so reverend and strong/Why shouldst thou think?"* Similarly to 'The Flea', the details of the female lover's physical form are not drawn to the reader's immediate attention; however, the speaker claims he *"could eclipse and cloud [the sun] with a wink,/But that I would not lose her sight so long."* Donne uses rhyme to strengthen his argument: *"think/wink."* The speaker's confidence increases and his boastful tone is evident as he rejects material wealth in favour of the richness of the lover's physical presence: *"Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,/Whether both th'Indias of spice and mine/Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me."* Presentation of a boastful, posturing male stance, often for humorous purposes is characteristic of Metaphysical poetry. The speaker claims to exceed the wealth of great rulers: *"She'is all states, and all princes, I."* The short line, *"Nothing else is"* is persuasive - its uncomplicated structure creates a tone of absolute confidence. However, he cannot resist the temptation to boast that *"Princes do but play us"*, culminating in the immodest line, *"Thou sun art half as happy'as we"*. The speaker undermines the sun's main function: *"since thy duties be/ To warm the world, that's done in warming us."* Donne's wit, ingenuity and skilful use of language is characteristic of Metaphysical poetry.

The use of conceits

The conceit is a central device in Metaphysical poetry, evident in both 'The Flea' and 'The Sun Rising.' Donne presents one of his most famous conceits in 'The Flea;' made memorable because of its improbability and far-fetchedness. The bite of a common flea is compared to sexual union. In the second stanza, the poet extends the conceit, affecting concern for the life of the flea: *"Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,"* and now it represents the lovers' *"marriage bed."* Donne exploits a religious metaphor to support his pursuit of physical love: *"This flea is you and I, and this/Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is."* The poet's preoccupation with analogies – drawing parallels – is characteristic of Metaphysical poetry. The speaker makes extensive use of hyperbolic language but this, in fact, leads the speaker's claims to appear disingenuous: *"Let not to this, self-murder added be,/And sacrilege, three sins in killing three."* At the end of the second stanza, the speaker's voiced fear, *"three sins in killing three"* marks the turning point in the female listener's reception of the speaker's argument and foreshadows her dramatic action as she rejects his expression of physical desire. A conceit is also embedded in 'The Sun Rising': Donne exploits derisive adjectives to extend personification, attacking the sun's attempts to interfere in the lovers' pursuit of physical love: *"Busy old fool, unruly sun."* Note the unexpectedness, typical of the conceit, of the adjective *"unruly"* to apply to the great time-keeper of the world! The reader engages with the conceit as a figurative construct - as the sun incurs the speaker's wrath, the reader imagines his increasing shame and, thus, the sun is viewed as a pitiable figure rather than powerful, so reversing the reader's expectations. The speaker claims the lovers' bed as the centre of the world, *"Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;/This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere,"* indicating that physical love empowers and strengthens the speaker. In both poems, arresting and original images and conceits are used and conventional ideas are reversed – all frequent features of the “Metaphysical” school of poetry.

In both poems, Donne uses language and meter to present an intellectual argument in defence of physical love. The speakers give voice to a distinct male agenda. It is clear that both poems are born of the speakers’ frustration regarding obstacles to physical love. Donne’s management of form, structure and language in both poems creates unquestionable admiration for the poet.

Remember:
- Stick to the key terms used in the question
- Think what the question is really asking you to do
- Make connections throughout, demonstrating your knowledge of the poems and the poet, and your ability to link concepts, ideas and references.

Appendix 1

Selected Poems named for study:

The Anniversary
The Flea
The Good Morrow
A Jet Ring Sent
The Sun Rising
The Triple Fool
A Valediction: forbidding Mourning
Elegy 5 *His Picture*
Thou hast made me
I am a little world
This is my play’s last scene
Death be not proud
Spit in my face ye Jews, and pierce my side
Batter my heart
Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt
A Hymn to God the Father

Sample Annotation for ‘Death be not proud’

Death[1] be not proud,[2] though some have called thee	A
Mighty and dreadful,[3] for, thou art not so[4]	B
For, those, whom thou think’st[5] thou dost overthrow,	B
Die not,[6] poor Death,[7] nor yet canst thou kill me;[8]	A
From rest and sleep,[9] which but thy pictures be,	A
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,	B
And soonest our best men with thee do go,[10]	B
Rest of their bones, and soul’s delivery.[11]	A
Thou’art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,[12]	C
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,[13]	D
And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,[14]	D
And better than thy stroke; why swell’st thou then?[15]	C
One short sleep past,[16] we wake eternally,	E
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.[17]	E

[1] The speaker addresses the poem to Death. Death is personified.
[2] The speaker delivers an instruction to Death, “be not proud” – attempting to curb Death’s behaviour.
[3] The speaker seeks to contradict the traditional view of Death as fearsome, declaring that Death is not “Mighty and dreadful.”
[4] The speaker describes Death’s character. The reader notes the confidence of the speaker.
[5] The speaker’s tone of voice mocks Death: “whom thou think’st” indicates the speaker’s conviction that Death is wrong.
[6] The speaker advances the Christian belief that Death is defeated through the promise of eternal life.
[7] The phrase “poor Death” presents Death as a pitiable character.
[8] The speaker taunts Death, “nor yet canst thou kill me.”
[9] It is common in literature to refer to “rest and sleep” as pre-cursors of Death. (The words are common euphemisms on tombstones.) Refer to Shakespeare’s sonnets for further examples.
[10] The speaker presents the idea that the best men die young.
[11] Death will mean rest for the body (“bones”) and liberation (“delivery”) for the soul. The syntax appears to be compressed.
[12] The speaker states that Death is not in control. Death is “slave to fate, chance, kings and desperate men”, all of whom have Death at their command. He seeks to puncture Death’s arrogance/confidence.
[13] Death’s friends or acquaintances are ridiculed, “dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell.”
[14] The speaker asserts that Death’s skill is not even unique – “And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well.”
[15] i.e. swell with pride
[16] Death is a “short sleep” in contrast to eternal life which is prolonged.
[17] The simple closing statement is a powerful threat to Death, defeating Death through its own means: “Death thou shalt die.”

GLOSSARY - this glossary is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

Alliteration	the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of two or more words in close proximity.
Anaphora	a rhetorical feature where the same word or phrase is deliberately repeated at the beginning of a sentence or clause.
Caesura	a break or pause in the middle of the poetic line, usually indicated by a punctuation mark such as a semi-colon, colon or full stop. The effect is to break the rhythm of the line.
Chronological sequence	the sequencing of events into the order in which they happened in time.
Conceit	A far-fetched metaphor which compares two things which are dissimilar, with the intention of producing shock or surprise or amusement.
Digression	going aside or diverting from the main subject.
Enjambment	the running on of the poetic line into the next, or from one stanza into the next without a break. The opposite of end-stopped lines.
Euphemism	a mild word used in place of another word which might be considered unpleasant, harsh or offensive.
First-person perspective	where the poem is spoken from the viewpoint of a speaker or persona who is talking directly about him/herself, usually indicated by 'I' or 'we'.
Hyperbole	language that uses exaggeration for particular effect.
Imagery	This word generally applies visually, to vivid or figurative language that stimulates a picture in the imagination. Tactile imagery appeals to the sense of touch. Auditory imagery appeals to the imagination by echoing or creating sound effects. (See advice on discussing imagery).
Idiom/Idiomatic	group of words established in everyday speech, but where the meaning is not deducible from the literal meaning of the words used.
Implied listener	the reader or audience the author imagines as the addressee of the text; the person to whom the poem is addressed.
Juxtaposition	deliberate placing of two contrasting characters, things, ideas close together for a particular purpose.

Metaphor	where one thing is described directly as another, to enhance meaning or effect. When this is used for a more protracted purpose it is called an extended metaphor.
Meter/Metre	metre is the measurement of rhythm, expressed as the number and kind of metrical feet in a line of poetry. This measurement considers the number of syllables and where the stresses fall in each foot.
Monologue	a long speech made by one character.
Motif	a dominant or recurring idea or figure of speech within a work of art or within the work of an artist, musician or writer.
Persona	See speaker.
Personification	to attribute human characteristics to a non-human subject.
Pun	a word or phrase that has more than one meaning, often used humorously.
Rhetoric	the art of using language to persuade; rhetoric takes in a range of devices.
Rhetorical question	a question which does not require or cannot receive an answer; it is used for a number of purposes.
Simile	where something is directly compared to something else, using “like” or “as”.
Speaker	the person or speaking voice narrating the poem, often but not always associated with the poet.
Symbol/ symbolism	where what is shown, often a material object (the symbol) comes by association to stand for or represent something else, usually non-material.
Theme	a main idea or concern explored in a work of art.
Tone	the emotion or attitude intended by the writer, conveyed through use of language, rhythm and punctuation. (See advice on tone).