Study Material by

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**The Good-Morrow**

[JOHN DONNE](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/john-donne)

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I

Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?

But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?

Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers’ den?

’Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.

If ever any beauty I did see,

Which I desired, and got, ’twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,

Which watch not one another out of fear;

For love, all love of other sights controls,

And makes one little room an everywhere.

Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,

Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,

Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,

And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;

Where can we find two better hemispheres,

Without sharp north, without declining west?

Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;

If our two loves be one, or, thou and I

Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

The metaphysical poets were a loose group of British lyric poets of the 17th century, who shared an interest in metaphysical concerns and a common way of investigating them, and whose work was characterised by inventiveness of metaphor (these involved comparisons being known as metaphysical conceits). These poets were not formally affiliated; most of them did not even know or read each other. Their poetry was influenced greatly by the changing times, new sciences and the new found debauched scene of the 17th century.

“Metaphysical” when applied to poetry usually involves Love, Science, Geology, Romance, Sensuality and man’s relationship with God. Metaphysical poems are lyrical poems usually containing intense meditations, characterized by striking use of wit, irony, and play on words. Underneath the formal structure is the underlying structure of the poet’s argument. Metaphysical poetry usually contains conceits, which is an image which you extend, which you develop; an extended metaphor. The Metaphysical poetry follows the structure of a strong first line; these “strong lines” brings attention to other elements in metaphysical poetry. The term is used in connection with prose as well as with verse and so invites us to look at metaphysical poetry in a wider context. At the time Metaphysical poetry’s definition was ‘An equal of ideas yoked by violence together.’

The term “metaphysical” when applied to poetry has a long and interesting history. You should know this, but the information in Helen Gardner’s Introduction to The Metaphysical Poets (Penguin) is more than adequate. Luckily, you have no time in an exam for a lengthy discussion. The examiner wants to see you discuss the text.

Metaphysical poetry is concerned with the whole experience of man, but the intelligence, learning and seriousness of the poets means that the poetry is about the profound areas of experience especially – about love, romantic and sensual; about man’s relationship with God – the eternal perspective, and, to a less extent, about pleasure, learning and art.

Metaphysical poems are lyric poems. They are brief but intense meditations, characterized by striking use of wit, irony and wordplay. Beneath the formal structure (of rhyme, meter and stanza) is the underlying (and often hardly less formal) structure of the poem’s argument. Note that there may be two (or more) kinds of argument in a poem. In To His Coy Mistress the explicit argument (Marvell’s request that the coy lady yield to his passion) is a stalking horse for the more serious argument about the transitoriness of pleasure. The outward levity conceals (barely) a deep seriousness of intent. You would be able to show how this theme of carpe diem (“seize the day”) is made clear in the third section of the poem.

Reflections on love or God should not be too hard for you. Writing about a poet’s technique is more challenging but will please any examiner. Giving some time to each (where the task invites this), while ending on technique would be ideal.

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Here are some suggestions as to how to look at the detail of individual poems under a very broad heading.

John Donne’s poem The Good Morrow is considered to be of a metaphysical realm as it Donne’s is typically metaphysical in its startling beginning, its dramatic nature and progression of thought, its striking metaphysical conceits, its range of intellectual imagery from the worlds of theology, geography, chemistry and cosmology, its catalogic mode, the use of hyperbole, the mingling of gravity and levity, the colloquial language, the presentation of the lovers as microcosms, and finally the union of the physical and the psychological in love.

The Good Morrow’ is a typical Donnian love poem, divided into three stanzas. It’s one of those love poems in which he praises the spiritual relation and hails it so ardently.

In the opening stanza, the poet expresses his wonder as to what he and his beloved did before they fell in love with each other. He becomes surprised remembering their past love experiences. He compares the love experiences of himself and his beloved with `weaning’, falsely sucking country pleasures’ and `snorting.’ The reference to these three physical activities indicates that they spent a life of worldly enjoyment. But now the poet using the conjunction ‘But’ makes a contrast and say’s that all these past physical activities seem to be utterly meaningless. The closing two lines of the first stanza imply that though the poet indulged himself in ‘country pleasures’, he has never been unmindful to perfect beauty of ideal spiritual love, which he always desired and has finally ‘got’ in his present beloved.

Obviously there is a shift from physical to spiritual love, sleeping to waking period, sensuous appearances to ideal reality and as if from platonic cave to the world of light in the poet and his beloved. Here the poet seems to have touched the metaphysics of Plato. In his metaphysics, Plato at first takes something concrete such as man, but soon he leaps into abstract namely the Form of man. Similarly Donne also begins with physical love and soon he turns to Platonic or metaphysical love.

The first stanza contains several Donnian elements. It opens abruptly with an explosive question. This abrupt colloquial beginning, which is so characteristic of Donne startles us and captures our attention. Another noticeable thing is that Donne swears his true relation – ‘I wonder by my troth’. Here he is unconventional. Any of his contemporary of Elizabethan poets might swear to God, but Donne has not done it. Then there are the references of physical union and the use of imageries in the following three lines. The fourth line contains a legendary conceit,a legend that tells of seven young men of Ephesus who took refuge in a cave during the persecution of Diocletian and were entombed there. They were found alive two centuries later. Here Donne compares himself and his beloved with the seven sleepers. Here he is cynical when he utters the word ‘did’. Surely the word ‘did’ includes the connotations of sexual doing – what did we ever do with the time?

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The second stanza begins with hail and celebration. The unconscious past of flesh is over and a new conscious spiritual relationship begins. So the speaker cerebrates the present. “Now good morrow to our waking souls”. He also makes declaration that their souls have also learnt not to spy one another. That the married women or men involve in extra-marital affair was a dominant theme in the Elizabethan and Jacobean literature. So, fear only works in sensual lovers as motivation for watching over each other, least the other should become unfaithful to his or her mate. But the speaker and his beloved have overcome this fear and a peaceful satisfaction prevails their love. And for their faithful love they will control the temptations of other things. They love so faithfully and ardently that their love has the force to be merged into the universal love and to move out to become “an every where”.

As spiritual lovers, the poet and his beloved are indifferent to earthly pleasures and possessions – let the sea-lovers and map-lovers do what they like to do. The lovers want to be happy with their joint world though they have their individual worlds but their individual worlds are fused into a single world. Now they are the joint owners of a single world.

Here in this stanza, we find the presence of imagery from the contemporary geographical world. That is to say the contemporary geographical interest of the explorers.

The third stanza opens with endearing words from the speaker. The two lovers stand so closely that their respective faces are reflected in each others eyes. The simplicity of their heart is also reflected in their faces, which are conceived as two hemispheres of their world. But their world of love is so unearthly that its hemispheres are free from coldness and decay. They are not afraid of separation or break up of their “relation, because” ‘what ever dyes, was not mixt equality’. The ingredients of their love have been proportionately mixed and there is no ware and woof between them. They have love equally and proportionately.

Thus the poem ends with the establishment of true friendship. After an abrupt beginning, there is calmness at last. The couple has rejected the country pleasures and entered into a true inter-dependent friendship. They have renounced the mundane world in order possess an unearthly world. Experience has thought them that the true happiness can be achieved through a mutual spiritual friendship.

In the first stanza, there is the regret for past doings, in the second stanza the pleasure of discovering something in the last stanza, the prospect/hope of doing better/using the discovery. The abrupt beginning of the poem, the use of conceits form everyday life and myth in the first stanza, the geographical reference of stanza two, the use of scholastic philosophy in stanza three, and ultimately the emphasis of spiritual love continue to make it one of those poems of Donne which combine intellect and emotion. These above motioned qualities have made the poem get a certain place in honored, treasured lyrics written by John Donne.