

Investigate! Metaphysical poetry:

Andrew Marvell, *The Definition of Love*

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❖ **Setting the scene:**

- What do you understand by the term metaphysical wit?
 - How is it illustrated by *The Definition of Love*?
- What do you understand about some of the mathematical ideas that Marvell uses, such as parallelism?

❖ **Going deeper:**

- Look through the Summary of *The Definition of Love*
 - Can you suggest other explanations for the first two stanzas?
- What does 'extended Soul', in stanza 3, mean?
 - Look at Donne's *A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning* stanza 6 for a clue.
- How can being in love co-exist with being in despair?

❖ **Themes:**

- Look again at the themes of *The Definition of Love*
 - Why do you think Love cannot manage to get both lines to touch?
 - In terms of communicating the actual experience of being in love, how much does Marvell achieve?
- Compare this poem to Donne's *The Extasie*.
 - What seem to you to be the major differences in what the poets are saying?
 - What are the big differences in what they experience?
- Can you see any other important themes?

❖ **Imagery and symbolism:**

- Explore the force of stanza six of *The Definition of Love*
 - Why do you think the image is so violent?
 - Compare it with the violent images at the end of *To his Coy Mistress*
- What other images in the poem stand out for you?

❖ **Language and tone:**

- What would you say is Marvell's tone in *The Definition of Love*?
- What the difference is between irony as a device and irony as a tone?
 - Can you have one form without the other?

❖ **Structure and versification:**

- Consider the structure of *The Definition of Love*
- Take one of the stanzas and make a full metric analysis of it
 - Now work out the rhythms and tone
- The use of pauses is often important in ironic verse
 - How many pauses does Marvell ask for?
 - What are their effect?
- How much is structured by antithesis?
 - Pick out a few examples
- Compare the overall effect of this poem with that of *To his Coy Mistress*
 - Which effects are similar
 - What differences are there?