

Investigate! Metaphysical poetry:

George Herbert, *Affliction I*

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❖ **Setting the scene:**

- Who does Herbert see as responsible for his sufferings?
- Look at the final stanza. Is it about rebellion or submission or both?
- What is the poet's deepest desire?

❖ **Going deeper:**

- Read through *Affliction I*.
- What phrases does Herbert use in the poem to suggest that much of his earlier devotion to God was conditional?
- How has his response changed?

❖ **Themes:**

Look at the themes of *Affliction I*

- How does Herbert's early easy existence make him vulnerable when problems come?
- What words or phrases suggest the lack of coherence in Herbert's life?

❖ **Imagery and symbolism:**

- Look through the notes on Herbert's use of metonymy in *Affliction I*
 - Why 'lingering' (l.39)?
 - What does 'book' represent in 'None of my books will show' (l.56)?

- Find at least three other images. Are they conceits as such?

❖ **Language and tone:**

In *Affliction I* 'there is also the language of suffering'

- Pick out words and phrases that suggest Herbert's suffering
- Pick out words that suggest what effect this suffering had on him

❖ **Structure and versification:**

- Re-read Herbert's *Affliction I*
 - What comes over to you about Herbert's honesty?
 - In this I-thou dialogue, does Herbert give God a chance to reply?
 - Or is he all too aware of what God is doing anyway?
- What would you want to question about Herbert's account of his life so far?
- As readers, we have an idea of the next chapter in Herbert's life
 - Does this create for you any dramatic ironies?