

John Donne

The Songs and Sonnets

The edited text of each poem with a line by line paraphrase,  
and occasional explanatory notes

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*(Note: This version of the Songs and Sonnets follows the 1635 edition, excluding only a single poem 'Deare love, continue nice and chaste'. To view the original texts you can access the excellent [Digital Donne](#) website which contains images of the source volumes.)*

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## **The Flea.**

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,  
How little that which thou deniest me is;  
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,  
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be.  
Thou know'st that this cannot be said  
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead;  
Yet this enjoys before it woo;  
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,  
And this, alas, is more than we would do!

O stay, three lives in one flea spare,  
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 cloistered in these living walls of jet.  
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?  
Wherein could this flea guilty be,  
Except in that drop which it sucked 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;  
Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,  
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

*Verse 1:* Note this flea as a symbol of how small a step is represented by that sexual union which you deny me. This flea has sucked both our blood, and our two bloods are therefore mingled in its one body. What the flea did, as you know, is not a sin, nor does it involve shame or loss of maidenhead. Yet the flea enjoys its meal without asking first or paying court, and swells with over-indulgence, which is more, alas, than we would do.

*Verse 2:* Spare the life of this flea then, which represents three lives, its own yours and mine, since in its body, through the mingling of blood, we are almost more than married, while it represents our marriage bed and marriage temple too. Though you and your parents grudge our meeting, we are already met in this flea's blood, and so confined sacredly in its living form. Though custom and practice make you the appropriate vehicle for killing me (sexually in the 'little death' of the sexual act and emotionally) don't add to that suicide, by killing yourself, and sacrilege, by killing the creature that contains all three lives, in destroying it and our mingled blood.

*Verse 3:* Have you cruelly purpled your finger nail by shedding its innocent blood (as, in a latent image, a man may 'bloody his nail/penis' in taking a woman's maidenhood)? Where was the flea's guilt except in stealing a drop of blood from you? Yet you state triumphantly that neither of us is any the weaker as a result of what it did. That's so, and therefore your fear of the creature and its actions was false, as is your fear of our sexual union. If you yield to me you will lose no more honour than you lost strength as a result of the blood this flea took, or life as a result of its death.

## **The Good-Morrow.**

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 can slacken, none can die.

*Verse 1:* I wonder, truly, what you and I did before we loved one another. Were we not yet weaned, or sucked like babes at the teat on naïve pleasures? Or did we lie there asleep as in the story, in the *Golden Legend*, of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, young Christians who fell asleep, were sealed in a cave, and woke a hundred and more years later only when the cave was again opened? So it has been, but our love now comprises every image of pleasure that can be invented or imagined, because if I every desired and possessed beauty previously it was merely an image of you.

*Verse 2:* Now good-morning to our souls that have awoken from their sleep, and which do not keep a watch on each other, out of fear of our allowing our love to stray elsewhere, since love curbs the love of other sights, and makes out of one little room the whole world. Let explorers have voyaged to new worlds (the New World, the Americas) or let maps of other worlds (stars and planets) have shown many worlds, worlds on worlds (hosts of stars, and moons orbiting planets), let us possess one world, where each possesses a world in the other or both, and is a world in themselves or both.

*Verse 3:* My face is reflected in your eye, your face in mine, and our true hearts are plainly evident in our heart-shaped faces. Where can we find two better hemispheres than our respective eyes, which are devoid of the coldness of the northern hemisphere or the declining sunset of the western one? Whatever dies does so as a result of an imbalance of the mixture of humours in the body (as Galen described). If our two loves make one, or we love so equally that nothing can fall into imbalance, then nothing of it can die.

## Song.

Go and catch a falling star,  
Get with child a mandrake root,  
Tell me where all past years are,  
Or who cleft the devil's foot,  
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,  
Or to keep off envy's stinging,  
    And find  
    What wind  
Serves to advance an honest mind.

If thou be'st born to strange sights,  
Things invisible to see,  
Ride ten thousand days and nights,  
Till age snow white hairs on thee,  
Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me,  
All strange wonders that befell thee,  
    And swear,  
    No where  
Lives a woman true and fair.

If thou find'st one, let me know,  
Such a pilgrimage were sweet;  
Yet do not, I would not go,  
Though at next door we might meet,  
Though she were true, when you met her,  
And last, till you write your letter,  
    Yet she  
    Will be  
False, ere I come, to two, or three.

*Verse 1:* Go and do impossible things – catch a meteor; get a mandrake root (the root of *Mandragora officinarum*, thought to resemble human form) with child; say where past years are; who cleft the devil's foot; and teach me impossible things too – how to hear the song of the mermaid; how to prevent envy's sting; and what serves to advance the prospects of an honest mind.

*Verse 2:* If you're born to achieve such impossibilities, to see strange things and invisible sights, then ride for ten thousand days and nights till your hair turns white with age. When you return you will tell me of all the wondrous things you've seen, but you will swear that a woman who is beautiful *and* faithful is not among them.

*Verse 3:* If you do, by some miracle, find one then let me know, because a pilgrimage to see such a paragon would be a sweet journey. But, on second thoughts, don't tell me, even if she were only next door, because though she might be faithful when you met her, and still be so while you write to me to tell me, she'll be faithless with two or three other men before I manage to arrive.

## Woman's Constancy.

Now thou hast loved me one whole day,  
To-morrow when thou leavest, what wilt thou say?  
Wilt thou then antedate some new-made vow?

Or say that now

We are not just those persons which we were?  
Or that oaths made in reverential fear  
Of Love, and his wrath, any may forswear?  
Or, as true deaths true marriages untie,  
So lovers' contracts, images of those,  
Bind but till sleep, death's image, them unloose?

Or, your own end to justify,

For having purposed change and falsehood, you  
Can have no way but falsehood to be true?  
Vain lunatic, against these 'scapes I could  
Dispute, and conquer, if I would;  
Which I abstain to do,  
For by to-morrow I may think so too.

*Verse:* Now you have loved me for one whole day, what will you say tomorrow when you leave me? Will you make some new vow to some other man, and antedate it (so it takes precedence over oaths we swore on our day of love); or say that we are not now the same two people we were when we swore so invalidating our oath; or that oaths sworn under the duress of passion, and in reverential fear of Love and his anger, are not binding; or that just as death ends true marriage, lovers' contracts which are an image of the marriage contract, are ended by sleep after making love, sleep which is an image of death? Or will you say that, having intended to leave and deceive me, only being false to your oath can render you true to that intention? I could if I were mad, vainly contest these attempts to escape your commitment, and I would win the dispute, but I abstain from doing so, because tomorrow I may use the same arguments to be unfaithful myself.

## **The Undertaking.**

I have done one braver thing  
    Than all the Worthies did;  
And yet a braver thence doth spring,  
    Which is, to keep that hid.

It were but madness now to impart  
    The skill of specular stone,  
When he, which can have learned the art  
    To cut it, can find none.

So, if I now should utter this,  
    Others – because no more  
Such stuff to work upon, there is –  
    Would love but as before.

But he who loveliness within  
    Hath found, all outward loathes,  
For he who colour loves, and skin,  
    Loves but their oldest clothes.

If, as I have, you also do  
    Virtue in woman see,  
And dare love that, and say so too,  
    And forget the He and She;

And if this love, though placèd so,  
    From profane men you hide,  
Which will no faith on this bestow,  
    Or, if they do, deride;

Then you have done a braver thing  
    Than all the Worthies did;  
And a braver thence will spring,  
    Which is, to keep that hid.

*Verse 1:* I have done something braver than the nine Worthies, the nine perfect warriors, exemplars of chivalry, celebrated in the Middle Ages (*Pagan:* Hector, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar. *Jewish:* Joshua, David, Judas Maccabeus. *Christian:* King Arthur, Charlemagne, Godfrey of Bouillon). But an even braver thing arises (springs) from it, which is to keep that original brave deed hidden.

*Verse 2:* It would be considered foolish to teach the skill of ‘specular’ masonry (the use of transparent building ‘stone’ instead of glass, probably sheets of mica, the use being mentioned by Pliny) if when the art of cutting it had been taught there was found to be none of the stone left to practise the skill on.

*Verse 3:* So if I tell about my act of love, others would be forced to carry on loving as before, since (as per the example in *Verse 2*) there is no other woman who could be the subject of such a love.

*Verse 4:* Yet anyone who finds loveliness within a woman, loathes the outward display of loveliness, since he who in women loves their external skin and complexion loves only their latest clothes, the soul and its virtues being created first, prior to the creation of external form.

*Verse 5:* And if you, as I have, have seen Virtue embodied in a woman, and dare to love that Virtue and say so and forget the external sexual aspect, the He and She, Virtue being without sex;

*Verse 6:* And if you hide that love, though it is invested in such a woman, from the profane since they will give it no credence, or if they do they will deride it:

*Verse 7:* Then you have like me done a braver deed than the nine Worthies, and a braver deed still will arise from it, namely the keeping of it hidden.

## The Sun Rising.

Busy old fool, unruly Sun,  
Why dost thou thus,  
Through windows, and through curtains, call on us?  
Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?  
Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide  
Late school-boys and sour prentices,  
Go tell court-huntsmen that the king will ride,  
Call country ants to harvest offices;  
Love, all alike, no season knows nor clime,  
Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.

Thy beams so reverend, and strong  
Why shouldst thou think?  
I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,  
But that I would not lose her sight so long.  
If her eyes have not blinded thine,  
Look, and to-morrow late tell me,  
Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine  
Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.  
Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,  
And thou shalt hear, "All here in one bed lay."

She's all states, and all princes I;  
Nothing else is;  
Princes do but play us; compared to this,  
All honour's mimic, all wealth alchemy.  
Thou, Sun, art half as happy as we,  
In that the world's contracted thus;  
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be  
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.  
Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;  
This bed thy centre is, these walls thy sphere.

*Verse 1:* Prying old fool, unruly sun, why do you visit us with your rays, through windows and curtains? Must lovers' seasons obey your daily motion? Impudent wretch obsessed with rules, go and rebuke schoolboys late for school, or sour-faced apprentices; go and tell the huntsmen at court that the King (a reference to James I?) will ride today; call the farmhands, who swarm like ants, to bring in the harvest; Love, unlike these examples, is indifferent to seasons, weather, hours, days, or months, which are the mere rags that time clothes itself in.

*Verse 2:* What makes you think your rays are so strong, and so much to be revered? I could eclipse them or cloud them, merely by winking my eye, except that I would not wish to lose sight of my love even for as long as that brief instant. If your eye has not been blinded by her bright eyes, look and tell me, late tomorrow after the whole earth has passed beneath your gaze, whether both the East and West Indies and their spice and mines are still where you left them yesterday (last night), or lie here beside me. Ask after the kings you gazed down on yesterday and you'll be told that all of them lay here in this one bed.

*Verse 3:* She is all countries, and I am all their rulers, and nothing else exists. Princes merely imitate us; compared to this, all glory is merely imitative of us too; and all wealth is false gold. You, sun, are almost half as happy as us, in that the world is contracted to this one bed, because you are so old you need rest, and as your task is to warm the world, that is done more easily as you only have to warm us. Shine on us here, and you are shining everywhere; this bed is the centre from which you shine (or the focal point on which you are concentrated) and these walls the boundary of your sphere of light (or the sphere of influence in which you operate.)

## **The Indifferent.**

I can love both fair and brown;  
Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want betrays;  
Her who loves lonesome best, and her who masks and plays;  
Her whom the country formed, and whom the town;  
Her who believes, and her who tries;  
Her who still weeps with spongy eyes,  
And her who is dry cork, and never cries.  
I can love her, and her, and you, and you;  
I can love any, so she be not true.

Will no other vice content you?  
Will it not serve your turn to do as did your mothers?  
Or have you all old vices spent, and now would find out others?  
Or doth a fear that men are true torment you?  
O we are not, be not you so;  
Let me—and do you—twenty know;  
Rob me, but bind me not, and let me go.  
Must I, who came to travel thorough you,  
Grow your fixed subject, because you are true?

Venus heard me sigh this song;  
And by love's sweetest part, variety, she swore,  
She heard not this till now; and that it should be so no more.  
She went, examined, and returned ere long,  
And said, "Alas, some two or three  
Poor heretics in love there be,  
Which think to stablish dangerous constancy.  
But I have told them, 'Since you will be true,  
You shall be true to them who're false to you.'

*Verse 1: (This verse owes much to Ovid's Amores II:4) I can love fair and dark-haired women, the plump and the skinny, the woman who loves solitude and the woman who enjoys society with its masked balls and its (sexual) pleasures and entertainments, the country girl and the town girl, the girl who has faith, and the girl who tests things by experience, the one that weeps and the one that is dry-eyed and never cries. I can love all of you and any of you, so long as you are not faithful.*

*Verse 2:* Are you discontented with other vices? Does it no longer serve your purpose to indulge in the vices your mothers' possessed at your age? Or have you exhausted all the old vices and are now searching for new ones? Or are you tormented by the possibility that men are true? Oh we are not, so you should not be either. Have relations with twenty men and let me do the same with twenty women. Rob me (in the sexual sense of stealing potency?) but don't entrap me, let me go. Must I, who learnt to wander from your example, become yours alone, because you choose to be true?

*Verse 3:* Venus (the goddess of love) heard me sigh this song, and she swore by variety, the enjoyment of change, which is the sweetest part of loving, that she had not heard of a like faithfulness of yours till now, and that it must cease. She went and examined the world, and before long returned saying: 'Alas there are two or three sad heretics, so unorthodox in their love that they intend to establish a dangerous faithfulness. But I have told them, "Since you intend to be true, I shall ensure those you are true to are in turn false to you."'"

## Love's Usury.

For every hour that thou wilt spare me now,  
    I will allow,  
Usurious god of love, twenty to thee,  
When with my brown my grey hairs equal be.  
Till then, Love, let my body range, and let  
Me travel, sojourn, snatch, plot, have, forget,  
Resume my last year's relict; think that yet  
    We'd never met.

Let me think any rival's letter mine,  
    And at next nine  
Keep midnight's promise; mistake by the way  
The maid, and tell the lady of that delay;  
Only let me love none; no, not the sport  
From country grass to confitures of court,  
Or city's quelque-choses; let not report  
    My mind transport.

This bargain's good; if when I'm old, I be  
    Inflamed by thee,  
If thine own honour, or my shame and pain,  
Thou covet most, at that age thou shalt gain.  
Do thy will then; then subject and degree  
And fruit of love, Love, I submit to thee.  
Spare me till then; I'll bear it, though she be  
    One that love me.

*Verse 1:* God of Love, you who lend at such high rates of interest, I will grant you twenty hours, when I'm old and have as many grey hairs as brown, for every hour you will grant me now. Until then, Love, let my body rule me, and let me wander from woman to woman, stay if I choose, seize on one here and there, have her, forget her, pick up again with one I abandoned last year, and think that she and I (and you and I, Love) had never met.

*Verse 2:* Let me open my rivals' letters and assume they are for me, and not keep the assignations for midnight written there until nine in the morning; let me mistake the maid for the lady, and make love to her, and tell her mistress of the reason for my delay; just don't let me love any woman, in the whole game, from the country girls to the 'sweetmeats' (select beauties) at Court, or the 'fancy dishes' (fashion conscious women) of the city; let my mind be carried away by news and tales of them, not the reality.

*Verse 3:* This is the bargain that I'll make with you; if I am inflamed with love when I am old, that's when you will gain most from me, if it's your own glory, and my shame or suffering, you seek. That's when you may do what you wish with me, and you may select the person I'll love, control the depth of my affection, and determine the fruit of it (said ironically: expecting there to be little fruit in old age). Spare me till then, and I'll be able to endure it, even if the woman declares her love for me.

## **The Canonization.**

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love;  
Or chide my palsy, or my gout;  
My five grey hairs, or ruined fortune flout;  
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve;  
Take you a course, get you a place,  
Observe his Honour, or his Grace;  
Or the king's real, or his stamped face  
Contemplate; what you will, approve,  
So you will let me love.

Alas! Alas! Who's injured by my love?  
What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?  
Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?  
When did my colds a forward spring remove?  
When did the heats which my veins fill  
Add one more to the plaguy bill?  
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still  
Litigious men, which quarrels move,  
Though she and I do love.

Call's what you will, we are made such by love;  
Call her one, me another fly,  
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,  
And we in us find th' eagle and the dove.  
The phoenix riddle hath more wit  
By us; we two being one, are it;  
So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.  
We die and rise the same, and prove  
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live by love,  
And if unfit for tomb or hearse  
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;  
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,  
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;  
As well a well-wrought urn becomes  
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,  
And by these hymns, all shall approve  
Us canonized for love;

And thus invoke us, 'You, whom reverend love  
Made one another's hermitage;  
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;  
Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove  
Into the glasses of your eyes;  
So made such mirrors, and such spies,  
That they did all to you epitomize –  
Countries, towns, courts beg from above  
A pattern of your love.'

*Verse 1:* For God's sake keep silent, and allow me to love, or criticise my paralysis instead or my gout, or mock my five grey hairs or my lack of riches, or improve your condition by accumulating wealth, or improve your mind with studying the liberal arts, take up some pursuit, or obtain a post, observe his Honour the Judge, or his Grace the Archbishop or the Duke, or contemplate the King's (James I?) real face, or his face portrayed on coins of the realm. Approve of whatever you wish, so long as you allow me to love.

*Verse 2:* Alas, alas, who is hurt by my love? What merchant's ships have been drowned by my sighs? Who claims that my tears have overflowed onto his land? When did my cold chills prevent an early spring? When did the heat filling my veins add one more name to the weekly list of deaths from plague in London? Soldiers still make war, and lawyers still act for litigious men stirred by some dispute, despite her and I loving one another.

*Verse 3:* Call us what you wish, we are made so by love; call her a butterfly or moth, and me another, we are the candles they are attracted to as well, and die (metaphorically, in the sexual act) having consumed ourselves as candles do, and we are the eagle and the dove (two birds traditionally so antithetical that, even after death, if their feathers were placed together, they would consume themselves); the riddle of the phoenix (a mythical bird combining both sexes, which dies in flame and is resurrected) makes more sense by our example; we two, being as one, represent that same enigmatic creature. We too die (in the sexual act) and are resurrected as we were before, and so demonstrate that mystery of resurrection.

*Verse 4:* We can die by love, even if we don't live by it, and our legend will be fit for verse even if it is not fit for tombs and hearse; and if our tale is not great enough to add to the historical chronicles, at least we will take our place in pretty sonnets; a well-made urn is as suitable for holding the ashes of the greatest men and women as is a tomb occupying half an acre; and by the witness of these hymns of love, all will agree we have been canonized (admitted formally to the calendar of saints) because of our love.

*Verse 5:* And so you may appeal to us as saints, in this manner: 'You whom love, which should be revered, made one another's hermitage; you to whom love was peace that now is passion; you who extracted the whole world's soul (or quintessence) and drove it into the eye-balls of each other's eyes (as if into alchemical vessels), thereby making mirrors of them, and spyglasses such that they condensed everything and represented all in miniature; countries, towns and courts: beg for us from heaven above the pattern of your love on which we may model ourselves!'

## **The Triple Fool.**

I am two fools, I know,  
For loving, and for saying so  
In whining poetry;  
But where's that wise man, that would not be I,  
If she would not deny?  
Then as th' earth's inward narrow crooked lanes  
Do purge sea water's fretful salt away,  
I thought, if I could draw my pains  
Through rhyme's vexation, I should them allay.  
Grief brought to numbers cannot be so fierce,  
For he tames it, that fetters it in verse.

But when I have done so,  
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.  
To love and grief tribute of verse belongs,  
But not of such as pleases when 'tis read.  
Both are increased by such songs,  
For both their triumphs so are published,  
And I, which was two fools, do so grow three.  
Who are a little wise, the best fools be.

*Verse 1:* I know I am doubly a fool, firstly for loving, and then for whining about it in poetry; but where is the wise man who would not exchange places with me, as long as she did not object to it? Then, as the earth's narrow crooked inland streams purge away the sea water's irritating brine, so I thought that if I could present my troubles in the vexatious discipline of rhyme, I might ease them. Grief expressed in poetic meter cannot be as fierce, since whoever imprisons it in verse, also tames it.

*Verse 2:* But when I have done so, some man sets my pain to music and sings it, to display his art and voice, and by delighting many people releases grief again which verse constrained. Verse is a fitting tribute to love and grief, but only verse which fails to please when it is read, as both love and grief are increased by such songs: since the triumph of both is increased by publishing them to others; then I, who was doubly foolish, become triply so: those who have only a little wisdom are the most foolish.

## **Lover's Infiniteness.**

If yet I have not all thy love,  
Dear, I shall never have it all;  
I cannot breathe one other sigh, to move,  
Nor can intreat one other tear to fall;  
And all my treasure, which should purchase thee,  
Sighs, tears, and oaths, and letters I have spent;  
Yet no more can be due to me,  
Than at the bargain made was meant.  
If then thy gift of love were partial,  
That some to me, some should to others fall,  
Dear, I shall never have thee all.

Or if then thou gavest me all,  
All was but all, which thou hadst then;  
But if in thy heart since there be or shall  
New love created be by other men,  
Which have their stocks entire, and can in tears,  
In sighs, in oaths, and letters, outbid me,  
This new love may beget new fears,  
For this love was not vowed by thee.  
And yet it was, thy gift being general;  
The ground, thy heart, is mine; what ever shall  
Grow there, dear, I should have it all.

Yet I would not have all yet.  
He that hath all can have no more;  
And since my love doth every day admit  
New growth, thou shouldst have new rewards in store;  
Thou canst not every day give me thy heart,  
If thou canst give it, then thou never gav'st it;  
Love's riddles are, that though thy heart depart,  
It stays at home, and thou with losing sav'st it;  
But we will have a way more liberal,  
Than changing hearts, to join them; so we shall  
Be one, and one another's all.

*Verse 1:* If I do not have your whole love yet, dear, I will never have it all, because I cannot breathe one more sigh, to arouse your feelings, nor beg one more tear to fall. And all the wealth of demonstrations of love, which should woo you; sighs, tears, oaths, and letters, I have already exhausted. Yet no more love is due to me than you intended when we swore allegiance. If your gift of love then was partial, and others are to receive some of it as well as I, dear, then I will never have it all.

*Verse 2:* Or if you gave me all your love then, it was simply the sum of all that you had then, and if new love has been created in your heart since then, by other men, who still have their wealth of tears, sighs, oaths and letters to expend, and so can outbid me, then this new love adds to my fears, since it is not included in the love you then vowed to me. And yet it was, for since your vow of love was all-encompassing, your heart, the ground of affection, now belongs to me. Whatever grows there, in your heart, dear, I should possess completely.

*Verse 3:* And yet I don't want all your love yet, because he who has all cannot have more, and, since my love increases every day, you should provide new gifts and rewards for me. You cannot give me your heart every day, since if it is still yours to give you cannot have given it to me. Love's paradox is that although you give your heart away it stays where it is, and in losing it to another you keep it. But we will find a more generous way to love than merely exchanging hearts: we will merge them together, so that we are then as one, and we will then be all of each other, and to each other.

## Song.

Sweetest love, I do not go,  
For weariness of thee,  
Nor in hope the world can show  
A fitter love for me;  
But since that I  
At the last must part, 'tis best,  
Thus to use myself in jest  
By feigned deaths to die.

Yesternight the sun went hence,  
And yet is here to-day;  
He hath no desire nor sense,  
Nor half so short a way;  
Then fear not me,  
But believe that I shall make  
Speedier journeys, since I take  
More wings and spurs than he.

O how feeble is man's power,  
That if good fortune fall,  
Cannot add another hour,  
Nor a lost hour recall;  
But come bad chance,  
And we join to it our strength,  
And we teach it art and length,  
Itself o'er us to advance.

When thou sigh'st, thou sigh'st not wind,  
But sigh'st my soul away;  
When thou weep'st, unkindly kind,  
My life's blood doth decay.  
It cannot be  
That thou lovest me as thou say'st,  
If in thine my life thou waste,  
That art the best of me.

Let not thy divining heart  
Forethink me any ill;  
Destiny may take thy part,  
And may thy fears fulfil.  
But think that we  
Are but turned aside to sleep.  
They who one another keep  
Alive, ne'er parted be.

*Verse 1:* Sweetest love, I am not leaving you through weariness of you, nor in hope that the world can display a more suitable love for me. Rather since I will of necessity die in the end, I may as well treat my existence lightly (said ironically: also, 'use myself' in the sexual sense) and feign death by a succession of departures which are little deaths (also, in the sexual sense feign love-making).

*Verse 2:* The sun set last night, but rose again today, and he has no desire or feeling motivating him, and a much longer journey to make, so have confidence in me and have faith that my journeys will be swifter since I have more reasons to return.

*Verse 3:* How feeble our power which prevents us prolonging good luck or retrieving an hour of its duration. But we conspire with bad luck to make things worse.

*Verse 4:* When you sigh you are not sighing breath away but my soul, and when you weep, which is both sweetness and a torment, my life's blood decays. Surely you cannot love me, as you say, if you waste my being which is also your being

*Verse 5:* Don't let your anxious heart seemingly prophesy disaster for me, otherwise fate might second you and bring it about; rather consider it as though we had turned away to sleep. Two lovers who keep one another alive, can thereby never be parted.

## The Legacy.

When last I died, and, dear, I die  
As often as from thee I go,  
Though it be but an hour ago  
– And lovers' hours be full eternity –  
I can remember yet, that I  
Something did say, and something did bestow;  
Though I be dead, which sent me, I might be  
Mine own executor, and legacy.

I heard me say, "Tell her anon,  
That myself," that is you, not I,  
"Did kill me," and when I felt me die,  
I bid me send my heart, when I was gone;  
But I alas ! could there find none;  
When I had ripped, and searched where hearts should lie,  
It killed me again, that I who still was true  
In life, in my last will should cozen you.

Yet I found something like a heart,  
But colours it, and corners had;  
It was not good, it was not bad,  
It was entire to none, and few had part;  
As good as could be made by art  
It seemed, and therefore for our loss be sad.  
I meant to send that heart instead of mine,  
But O! No man could hold it, for 'twas thine.

*Verse 1:* When I died last, dear, and I die whenever I leave you, even though it was but an hour ago, and lovers' hours are a whole eternity, I can still recall that I said a certain something, and declared the gift of a certain something (his, heart; see the next verse); though I am dead now (while parted from her), which sent from me to you, would make me my own executor and my own legacy.

*Verse 2:* I heard myself order myself to say this to her, presently: 'I myself, who am effectively you (since my heart belongs to you), killed me, and when I felt myself dying, I ordered myself to leave you the legacy of my heart when I was gone; but alas I could find no heart when I had ripped myself open and searched in the place where the heart lies (since it already belongs to you); and it killed me again to find that I who was still true in life, should cheat you in my last will and testament.

*Verse 3:* But I did find something like a heart, though it had colours and corners (false appearances and secret places), and was neither good nor bad, belonging to no one completely, while few had part of it. It seemed as good as anything that could be made by artifice, and therefore to commemorate our sad losses, I meant to send it instead of mine, but oh, no man could hold it, because it was yours.' (Note the conceit of the exchange of hearts between lovers, whereby each lover possesses the heart of, and therefore effectively is, the other person. He implies that her heart, and her love, is more un-committed and partial than his own, and that no one man can possess it.)

## A Fever.

O! Do not die, for I shall hate  
All women so, when thou art gone,  
That thee I shall not celebrate,  
When I remember thou wast one.

But yet thou canst not die, I know;  
To leave this world behind, is death;  
But when thou from this world wilt go,  
The whole world vapours with thy breath.

Or if, when thou, the world's soul, go'st,  
It stay, 'tis but thy carcase then;  
The fairest woman, but thy ghost,  
But corrupt worms, the worthiest men.

O wrangling schools, that search what fire  
Shall burn this world, had none the wit  
Unto this knowledge to aspire,  
That this her fever might be it?

And yet she cannot waste by this,  
Nor long bear this torturing wrong,  
For more corruption needful is,  
To fuel such a fever long.

These burning fits but meteors be,  
Whose matter in thee is soon spent;  
Thy beauty, and all parts, which are thee,  
Are unchangeable firmament.

Yet 'twas of my mind, seizing thee,  
Though it in thee cannot perséver;  
For I had rather owner be  
Of thee one hour, than all else ever.

*Verse 1:* Do not die, since I will so hate all women, when you are gone, that I will not even celebrate your memory, for I will remember you were a woman too.

*Verse 2:* And yet I know you cannot die; since to die is to leave this world behind, but when you leave this world, the whole world will vaporise with your dying breath.

*Verse 3:* Or if the world is left behind when you, its soul, depart, it will be merely your dead carcass, and the most beautiful woman will be merely the ghost of you, and the worthiest men will be merely corrupt worms. (Note the sexual innuendo in 'worms').

*Verse 4:* Oh academic theologians who argue over what kind of fire will burn the world (See the Bible, 2 Peter 3:7) have none of you the intelligence to aspire to the knowledge that her fever might be that very fire?

*Verse 5:* And yet she cannot waste away through this fever, or bear this tormenting wrong for long, since she would have to contain a deal of corruption (which she does not) to fuel such a fever for any length of time.

*Verse 6:* These burning bouts of fever are only transient meteors, whose matter is soon consumed in you. Your beauty and everything which is part of you are unchangeable celestial material.

*Verse 7:* Yet the fever agreed with me in seizing upon you, although it cannot last long, since I too would rather possess you for an hour than all else forever.

## Air and Angels.

Twice or thrice had I loved thee,  
Before I knew thy face or name;  
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame  
Angels affect us oft, and worshipped be.  
Still when, to where thou wert, I came,  
Some lovely glorious nothing did I see.  
But since my soul, whose child love is,  
Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do,  
More subtle than the parent is  
Love must not be, but take a body too;  
And therefore what thou wert, and who,  
I bid Love ask, and now  
That it assume thy body, I allow,  
And fix itself in thy lip, eye, and brow.

Whilst thus to ballast love I thought,  
And so more steadily to have gone,  
With wares which would sink admiration,  
I saw I had love's pinnace overfraught;  
Thy every hair for love to work upon  
Is much too much; some fitter must be sought;  
For, nor in nothing, nor in things  
Extreme, and scattering bright, can love inhere;  
Then as an angel face and wings  
Of air, not pure as it, yet pure doth wear,  
So thy love may be my love's sphere;  
Just such disparity  
As is 'twixt air's and angels' purity,  
'Twixt women's love, and men's, will ever be.

*Verse 1:* I loved you two or three times before I knew your face or name; so angels stir us, appearing as a voice or a shapeless flame, and are worshipped so. And I still saw some lovely glorious nothing when I came to where you were. But since my soul, of whom love is the child, inhabits a body with limbs of flesh, and without that could achieve nothing on earth, love cannot be more subtle than its own parent, and must also become material, and acquire a body. And so I told love to find out what you were, and who, and I now allow it to assume your body and settle itself on your lip, and brow, and in your eye.

*Verse 2:* While I thought to weight love with a body in this way, and so progress more smoothly with its cargo of love that would overcome mere admiration, I saw I had overburdened love's vessel, since it is too great a matter for love to try and work with all of your individual hairs at once, and something more suitable must be sought. For, just as love cannot reside in nothingness, it cannot reside either in things separate and brightly scattered. As an angel wears wings and face of air, which are not as pure as itself, but are still pure, so your love can embody my love. The same disparity as exists between air (material) and angel's purity (immaterial) will always exist between the love of women (of the body?!) and that of men (of the soul?!)

## **Break of Day.**

Stay, O sweet, and do not rise;  
The light that shines comes from thine eyes;  
The day breaks not, it is my heart,  
Because that you and I must part.  
    Stay, or else my joys will die,  
    And perish in their infancy.

*Verse 1:* Stay, sweet one, and do not rise from bed. The light that shines comes from your eyes; it is not dawn breaking, it is my heart breaking because you and I must part. Stay, or else my joy will die, and perish while still an infant.

## **Another of the Same.**

'Tis true, 'tis day; what though it be?  
O, wilt thou therefore rise from me?  
Why should we rise because 'tis light?  
Did we lie down because 'twas night?  
Love, which in spite of darkness brought us hither,  
Should in despite of light keep us together.

Light hath no tongue, but is all eye;  
If it could speak as well as spy,  
This were the worst that it could say,  
That being well I fain would stay,  
And that I loved my heart and honour so  
That I would not from him, that had them, go.

Must business thee from hence remove?  
O! That's the worst disease of love,  
The poor, the foul, the false, love can  
Admit, but not the busied man.  
He which hath business, and makes love, doth do  
Such wrong, as when a married man doth woo.

*Verse 1:* (Spoken by a woman, see verse 2) It is true, it is dawn, but what does that matter? Will you rise and leave me because of that? Why should we rise just because it is light? Did we lie down because it was night? Love which brought us together despite the darkness, should keep us together despite day breaking.

*Verse 2:* Light cannot speak, but is all eyes. If it could speak as well as spy on us, the worst that it could say was that I wish to stay being happy, and that I loved my heart and honour so much that I did not wish to leave him who possessed them both.

*Verse 3:* Must your duties take you away from here? Oh. That is love's worst failing, that it can accept the poor, the ugly, the false but not the busy man. He who has duties and makes love does as much wrong as a man who is married does if he woos another woman.

## The Anniversary.

All kings, and all their favourites,  
All glory of honours, beauties, wits,  
The sun it self, which makes time, as they pass,  
Is elder by a year now than it was  
When thou and I first one another saw.  
All other things to their destruction draw,  
Only our love hath no decay;  
This no to-morrow hath, nor yesterday;  
Running it never runs from us away,  
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

Two graves must hide thine and my corse;  
If one might, death were no divorce.  
Alas! as well as other princes, we  
– Who prince enough in one another be –  
Must leave at last in death these eyes and ears,  
Oft fed with true oaths, and with sweet salt tears;  
But souls where nothing dwells but love  
– All other thoughts being inmates – then shall prove  
This or a love increased there above,  
When bodies to their graves, souls from their graves remove.

And then we shall be throughly blest;  
But now no more than all the rest.  
Here upon earth we're kings, and none but we  
Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be.  
Who is so safe as we, where none can do  
Treason to us, except one of us two?  
True and false fears let us refrain,  
Let us love nobly, and live, and add again  
Years and years unto years, till we attain  
To write threescore; this is the second of our reign.

*Verse 1:* All kings (including James 1?), and all their favourites, and all the glory of honoured men, beautiful women and witty people, and even the sun itself, which marks out the ages as they pass, are all older by a year, now, than they were when we first saw one another. All other things move onwards towards their death, and only our love does not decay. Our love has no tomorrow, or yesterday, and flowing on it never flows away, but always remains fixed at its first and last and everlasting day.

*Verse 2:* Two graves must contain your corpse and mine. If only one were to do so then death would not be a parting. Alas, just like other princes, we (who are princes enough in having, and being merged in, one another) must in the end leave our eyes and ears behind, which have often been regaled with true oaths and sweet salt tears. But souls in which nothing dwells but love (all other thoughts merely being temporary lodgers there) will display this love, or a greater love, there above in heaven, when bodies are consigned to the grave, but souls rise from the grave (of their bodies, the flesh being seen as a prison or grave of the soul in Neo-Platonism especially).

*Verse 3:* And then we shall be blessed through and through, though no more than all the other true lovers. Here on earth we are kings, and none can be such kings as we can, nor be kings of such subjects as ourselves. Who is as secure as we are, since no one can betray us except ourselves? Let us refrain from true or false fears, and live nobly, and live on, and add years and years to years, until we reach sixty. This is now the second year of our reign (their love is now more than a year old).

## A Valediction of My Name, in the Window.

My name engraved herein  
Doth contribute my firmness to this glass,  
Which ever since that charm hath been  
As hard, as that which graved it was;  
Thine eye will give it price enough, to mock  
The diamonds of either rock.

'Tis much that glass should be  
As all-confessing, and through-shine as I;  
'Tis more that it shows thee to thee,  
And clear reflects thee to thine eye.  
But all such rules love's magic can undo;  
Here you see me, and I am you.

As no one point, nor dash,  
Which are but accessories to this name,  
The showers and tempests can outwash  
So shall all times find me the same;  
You this entireness better may fulfil,  
Who have the pattern with you still.

Or if too hard and deep  
This learning be, for a scratched name to teach,  
It as a given death's head keep,  
Lovers' mortality to preach;  
Or think this ragged bony name to be  
My ruinous anatomy.

Then, as all my souls be  
Emparadised in you – in whom alone  
I understand, and grow, and see –  
The rafters of my body, bone,  
Being still with you, the muscle, sinew, and vein  
Which tile this house, will come again.

Till my return repair  
And recompact my scattered body so,  
As all the virtuous powers which are  
Fixed in the stars are said to flow  
Into such characters as gravèd be  
When these stars have supremacy.

So since this name was cut,  
When love and grief their exaltation had,  
No door 'gainst this name's influence shut.  
As much more loving, as more sad,  
'Twill make thee; and thou shouldst, till I return,  
Since I die daily, daily mourn.

When thy inconsiderate hand  
Flings open this casement, with my trembling name,  
To look on one, whose wit or land  
New battery to thy heart may frame,  
Then think this name alive, and that thou thus  
In it offend'st my Genius.

And when thy melted maid,  
Corrupted by thy lover's gold and page,  
His letter at thy pillow hath laid,  
Disputed it, and tamed thy rage,  
And thou begin'st to thaw towards him, for this,  
May my name step in, and hide his.

And if this treason go  
To an overt act and that thou write again,  
In superscribing, this name flow  
Into thy fancy from the pane;  
So, in forgetting thou rememb'rest right,  
And unaware to me shalt write.

But glass and lines must be  
No means our firm substantial love to keep;  
Near death inflicts this lethargy,  
And this I murmur in my sleep;  
Inpute this idle talk, to that I go,  
For dying men talk often so.

*Verse 1:* My name engraved on the glass (with some hard object, for example a diamond ring) adds my constancy to it which, since that emblem was cut, has been as firm as the object was that made the engraving. Your eye, seeing it, will give it a value well beyond that of any diamond, classified as of either rock (diamonds were classified as new rock or old rock, the latter being larger, named presumably from their origin in an older series of mine or in more recently discovered mines).

*Verse 2:* It is good that the glass is as honest and transparent as I am, and even *more* so that it reflects your face and shows you to yourself (probably a play on the name of Ann More here). But all such rules concerning reflections love's magic can undo, because here you see my name merged with your reflection, and so I am you.

*Verse 3:* Just as the showers and storms cannot wash away a single point or stroke ornamenting my signature, so I will always remain the same as it will. And you will be better able to remain wholly constant like this, because you will have it before you as an example.

*Verse 4:* Or if such an interpretation is rather too difficult and profound for merely a scratched name to bear, keep it like a gift of a death's head, as a memento signifying that lovers too are subject to mortality (death's-head rings were emblematic of bawds, rakes, sexual adventurers, and so he is being mischievous, to them love is mortal not just lovers. It was also acceptable to preserve the head of an executed man as a memento, see Raleigh's wife), or consider this rough and bony signature to be my ruined anatomy.

*Verse 5:* Then as all my souls (the Aristotelian doctrine allotted human beings three souls, a vegetative soul of growth like plants, a sensitive or sensory soul common to man and animals, and a rational and immortal soul unique to human beings) are vested in you who are my paradise – you in whom alone I understand and grow and see – (referring to the powers of the three souls as described above) my bones which are the rafters of my body being still with you in the form of my signature, then the muscle, sinew and vein which tile this house of the body will return to you (as the reconstituted body will return to the resurrected soul in heaven).

*Verse 6:* Until my return repairs and reconstitutes my body in that way, then since the virtuous powers of the stars are said to flow into such letters as are engraved when those stars are in the ascendant (according to Medieval astrological lore, hence the Talisman or Amulet, capable of exerting an influence through sympathetic magic), and since this name was cut when love and grief had their exaltation both in us two (at our parting) and in the heavens (a planet is in 'exaltation' astrologically when it is in its own house, so Venus the planet of love in Pisces, and Saturn the planet of grief in Libra, a combination occurring around February-April in each year 1598-1600: See Notes and Queries Vol. 242: No.1, Item 80 for a fuller explanation of this tentative dating) then keep yourself open to the influence emanating from it. It will make you more (Ann More?) loving and equally more sad; and until I return you should mourn every day since I will die (from the separation, and sexually by masturbation in a 'little death'?) every day.

*Verse 7:* When you carelessly fling the window open, making the window glass, with my name engraved on it, quiver, in order that you can gaze at some rival, whose mind or possessions aids him in making an assault on your heart, then imagine my name as alive, and that in doing so you offend my guardian angel.

*Verse 8:* And when your maid, who is under my rival's influence having been corrupted by his gold, and his pageboy, has laid his letter on your pillow, argued over it with you to promote his cause, and calmed your anger, and you begin to thaw towards him as a result of it, then may my name appear (reflected from the window glass?) and mask his signature on the letter.

*Verse 9:* And if this disloyalty of yours prompts you to overt action, and you reply to him, then in addressing it may my name flow into your mind from the window glass, and may you put my name as the address rather than his. In that way, you will remember me correctly while forgetting me, and will write to me, though you are unaware of it.

*Verse 10:* But glass and signature must not be the true means by which we remember our firm substantial love; it is the fact that I am near 'death', that is, near the moment of parting from you, which causes this forgetfulness of the truth of our love (lethargy: originally the effect of drinking the waters of Lethe after death, which caused sleep and the erasure of life's memories), and I am murmuring this poem in my sleep; attribute all this chatter to the fact that I am leaving, since dying men often babble in this way.

## Twickenham Garden.

Blasted with sighs, and surrounded with tears,  
Hither I come to seek the spring,  
And at mine eyes, and at mine ears,  
Receive such balms as else cure every thing.  
But O, self-traitor, I do bring  
The spider Love, which transubstantiates all,  
And can convert manna to gall;  
And that this place may thoroughly be thought  
True paradise, I have the serpent brought.

'Twere wholesomer for me that winter did  
Benight the glory of this place,  
And that a grave frost did forbid  
These trees to laugh and mock me to my face;  
But that I may not this disgrace  
Endure, nor yet leave loving, Love, let me  
Some senseless piece of this place be;  
Make me a mandrake, so I may grow here,  
Or a stone fountain weeping out my year.

Hither with crystal phials, lovers, come,  
And take my tears, which are love's wine,  
And try your mistress' tears at home,  
For all are false, that taste not just like mine.  
Alas, hearts do not in eyes shine,  
Nor can you more judge women's thoughts by tears,  
Than by her shadow what she wears.  
O perverse sex, where none is true but she,  
Who's therefore true, because her truth kills me.

*Verse 1:* Blasted with sighs (by the wind, by love, and perhaps by the atmosphere of grief surrounding the death of Lady Egerton at York House on 20th January 1600?) and surrounded with tears (of rain, of love, and perhaps the effect of that mourning, which led to Ann More leaving London for Losely, separating the clandestine lovers) I come to these gardens to look for the springtime, and at my eyes and ears receive such soothing balms (from the gardens by the river: land held by Francis Bacon in 1600, one of Essex's set with whom Donne was acquainted, and also associated with Lucy, Countess of Bedford, Donne's friend, after 1607) as would cure everything else. But a traitor to myself, and my wish for springtime, I bring the spider (a term for a spy or witness, as well perhaps as a reference to the spider creating a noxious poison or at least a foul taste when steeped in wine), Love, which transforms everything and can convert manna (blessing and nourishment, see Exodus XVI) to gall (bitterness, see Matthew 27:34 regarding the drink given at the Crucifixion) ) and so the place may be thought a true paradise (a garden as in Bacon's famous essay on gardens, and also the Biblical Eden) I have brought the serpent (Donne himself, the betrayer and seducer of Ann More?, also therefore, sexually, his penis).

*Verse 2:* It would be more wholesome for me if winter darkness dimmed the glory of this place, and a serious frost (also one that freezes to death) ordered the trees not to smile and mock me to my face (with their early spring leaves), but so that I don't have to endure that disgrace, nor cease loving, Love, let me be some suitable piece of this place, lacking thought; make me a mandrake (the root of *Mandragora officinarum*, considered to mimic human form, and to groan when pulled from the ground) so I may groan here, or a stone fountain weeping away the year.

*Verse 3:* Here you lovers come, with glass vessels (traditionally made for holding tears of grief) and take my tears, which are love's wine, and you can then test your mistress' tears at home, since they are false tears unless they taste like mine; Alas, the true state of the heart is not obvious and visible in the eyes, and you can no more judge a woman's thoughts by her tears, than you can judge her clothes from her shadow. O perverse sex, womankind, where none of them are true but my mistress, who must be true because the proof of it is that her loyalty to others is killing me. (Note: This is an extremely difficult poem to understand fully because of the lack of context. It feels to me like a poem from the period 1600-1601, and that the woman referred to is Ann More, but that may well not be the case.)

## Valediction to his Book.

I'll tell thee now (dear love) what thou shalt do  
To anger destiny, as she doth us;  
How I shall stay, though she eloign me thus,  
And how posterity shall know it too;  
How thine may out-endure  
Sibyl's glory, and obscure  
Her who from Pindar could allure,  
And her, through whose help Lucan is not lame,  
And her, whose book (they say) Homer did find, and name.

Study our manuscripts, those myriads  
Of letters, which have past 'twixt thee and me;  
Thence write our annals, and in them will be  
To all whom love's subliming fire invades,  
Rule and example found;  
There the faith of any ground  
No schismatic will dare to wound,  
That sees, how Love this grace to us affords,  
To make, to keep, to use, to be these his records.

This book, as long-lived as the elements,  
Or as the world's form, this all-gravèd tome  
In cypher writ, or new made idiom;  
We for Love's clergy only are instruments;  
When this book is made thus,  
Should again the ravenous  
Vandals and Goths invade us,  
Learning were safe; in this our universe,  
Schools might learn sciences, spheres music, angels verse.

Here Love's divines – since all divinity  
Is love or wonder – may find all they seek,  
Whether abstract spiritual love they like,  
Their souls exhaled with what they do not see;  
Or, loth so to amuse  
Faith's infirmity, they choose  
Something which they may see and use;  
For, though mind be the heaven, where love doth sit,  
Beauty a convenient type may be to figure it.

Here more than in their books may lawyers find,  
Both by what titles mistresses are ours,  
And how prerogative these states devours,  
Transferred from Love himself, to womankind;  
Who, though from heart and eyes,  
They exact great subsidies,  
Forsake him who on them relies;  
And for the cause, honour, or conscience give;  
Chimeras vain as they or their prerogative.

Here statesmen – or of them, they which can read –  
May of their occupation find the grounds;  
Love, and their art, alike it deadly wounds,  
If to consider what 'tis, one proceed.  
In both they do excel  
Who the present govern well,  
Whose weakness none doth, or dares tell;  
In this thy book, such will there something see,  
As in the Bible some can find out alchemy.

Thus vent thy thoughts; abroad I'll study thee,  
As he removes far off, that great heights takes;  
How great love is, presence best trial makes,  
But absence tries how long this love will be;  
To take a latitude  
Sun, or stars, are fitliest viewed  
At their brightest, but to conclude  
Of longitudes, what other way have we,  
But to mark when and where the dark eclipses be?

*Verse 1:* I'll tell you now, dear love, what you can do to make destiny angry, as she makes us angry; and how I may remain here, though destiny removes me in this way (separates us); how posterity can be made aware of it, also; how your glory might last longer than the Sibyl's (who asked for and was granted eternal life, but forgot to ask also for eternal youth, according to the Greek myth), and eclipse Corinna of Thebes (who defeated Pindar in a poetry contest), and Lucan's wife (who legend has it helped him write the *Pharsalia*) and Phantasia (who was supposed to have written Homer's epics).

*Verse 2:* Study our manuscripts, that pile of letters which have passed between us, and then write our history, and all those who are invaded by love's purifying fire will find in it rules and examples of love. There no one will attempt to cause schism by questioning the loyalty of any pair of lovers, when they see how Love grants us grace, allowing us to make, keep, use and ultimately be these records of love.

*Verse 3:* Write this history of our love, which will be as long-lasting as the elements or the world's form and fixed forever, in a cipher or a new language. We are documenting this for the initiates, the scholars of love, and if the ravenous Goths and Vandals should again attack Europe, learning would be preserved, because from our history, which is our universe of love, scholars might learn science, the celestial spheres how to make their music, and the angels how to compose verse.

*Verse 4:* Here love's theologians (since love is all divinity or miracle it has its own divines or theologians) may find all they are looking for, whether they prefer abstract spiritual love, their souls breathed out in what is invisible, or whether, reluctant to run the risk of testing the fragility of faith by abstractions, they prefer something solid that they can see and make use of (also employ in the sexual sense). For, though mind is the heaven where love resides, a beautiful body may provide a suitable representation of it.

*Verse 5:* Here, rather than in their law books, lawyers can discover by what rights our mistresses belong to us, and how privilege overrules those rights, a privilege transferred by Love himself, to women, who though they demand great tribute from men's hearts and eyes (in love and tears) abandon the man who puts his trust in those same women. And give honour or conscience as their excuse for abandoning him, things which are idle fantasies, as idle as are they themselves and their privilege.

*Verse 6:* Here, statesmen (or, cynically, such of them as know how to read) may understand the nature of their occupation or skill (art), which like love will be damaged by its revelations. If anyone proceeds to examine what that nature is, then it appears that those who excel in statesmanship or in love are those who handle affairs of the moment well, the vulnerability and fragility of which no one speaks about, or dares to speak about. In this book of yours these statesmen and lovers will see a superior example of their own inferior skill, just as some people think they can find substantiation in the Bible for their own inferior belief in alchemy.

*Verse 7:* So express your thoughts in writing; and I'll study you from afar, as a person who wants to measure the height of something very tall stands at a distance (and uses a sighting stick, or measures length of shadow etc). The best test of the extent of a love is made when you are with some one, but absence from them tests how long it will endure. To find out the latitude of a place, the angle of the sun or the pole star is measured (using a quadrant) when they are at their highest point, and therefore brightest (shining through less depth of atmosphere) but in order to determine longitude (lacking the exact chronometers of modern times) we (his era) have no way to do so except by noting the time of an eclipse at different points on the earth's surface. (Note: the poet plays on the meaning of latitude, extent, and longitude, length, as an analogy for the extent and duration of love)

## Community.

Good we must love, and must hate ill,  
For ill is ill, and good good still;  
    But there are things indifferent,  
Which wee may neither hate, nor love,  
But one, and then another prove,  
    As we shall find our fancy bent.

If then at first wise Nature had  
Made women either good or bad,  
    Then some wee might hate, and some choose;  
But since she did them so create,  
That we may neither love, nor hate,  
    Only this rests, all all may use.

If they were good it would be seen;  
Good is as visible as green,  
    And to all eyes itself betrays.  
If they were bad, they could not last;  
Bad doth itself, and others waste;  
    So they deserve nor blame, nor praise.

But they are ours as fruits are ours;  
He that but tastes, he that devours,  
    And he that leaves all, doth as well;  
Changed loves are but changed sorts of meat;  
And when he hath the kernel eat,  
    Who doth not fling away the shell?

*Verse 1:* We are obliged to love the good, and hate the bad, since bad is always bad and good is always good. But there are things which are neither good nor bad (indifferent), and we can choose to hate them or love them alternately, just as our fancy takes us.

*Verse 2:* If Nature had originally chosen to make each woman either good or bad, then we would hate those who were bad and love those who were good. But since she chose to create them so that we can neither automatically love nor automatically hate them (indifferent) then the result is that any man may love or hate any woman just as he chooses.

*Verse 3:* If women were good it would be obvious since goodness is as visible as greenness, and reveals itself to everyone. If women were bad they could not last long, since what is bad destroys itself and others, so it is clear that they neither deserve blame for being bad, nor praise for being good, being neither.

*Verse 4:* But rather they are used by men as fruit is. Those who taste the fruit a little, or completely devour it, or leave it completely alone all do as well as one another: different female lovers are simply different sorts of food, and when a man has eaten the kernel of a nut does he not throw away the shell?

(Note: An extremely misogynistic and cynical poem, the title of which Community means 'joint ownership', presumably of women by men)

## Love's Growth.

I scarce believe my love to be so pure  
    As I had thought it was,  
    Because it doth endure  
Vicissitude, and season, as the grass;  
Methinks I lied all winter, when I swore  
My love was infinite, if spring make it more.  
But if this medicine, love, which cures all sorrow  
With more, not only be no quintessence,  
But mixed of all stuffs, vexing soul, or sense,  
And of the sun his active vigour borrow,  
Love's not so pure, and abstract as they use  
To say, which have no mistress but their Muse;  
But as all else, being elemented too,  
Love sometimes would contemplate, sometimes do.

And yet no greater, but more eminent,  
    Love by the spring is grown;  
    As in the firmament  
Stars by the sun are not enlarged, but shown,  
Gentle love deeds, as blossoms on a bough,  
From love's awakened root do bud out now.  
If, as in water stirred more circles be  
Produced by one, love such additions take,  
Those like so many spheres but one heaven make,  
For they are all concentric unto thee;  
And though each spring do add to love new heat,  
As princes do in times of action get  
New taxes, and remit them not in peace,  
No winter shall abate this spring's increase.

*Verse 1:* I can scarcely consider my love to be as pure as I thought it was, since it survives changes of fortune and season, like the grass. I think I must have been lying all winter when I swore that my love was infinite, if spring can make it more (a play on Ann More's name?), that is, increase it. But if this medicine, Love, which cures every sorrow with fresh sorrow (with more, again a play on her name?), is not the purest of qualities (a quintessence) but a mixture of everything, and brings pain to the soul or the body, borrowing its power to affect us from the sun, then Love is not as pure and abstract as the poets, those who have no mistress but their Muse, are wont to claim. But like everything else which is composed of a mixture of elements Love must sometimes contemplate and view things in the mind, sometimes act and do things with the body (is sometimes spiritual, sometimes physical)

*Verse 2:* Yet Love has not grown greater with the advent of spring, merely more visible, as in the sky stars borrow light from the sun, and shine more brightly though they are no larger (an erroneous belief of the period). Gentle acts of love, like blossoms on a branch form buds as the sap rises from love's awakened root (a spiritual comment, but also an obvious sexual image). If loving a person (you) creates more (another play on her name?) love, as one circle in a pool of water (caused say by a stone falling) creates more circles (waves) around it, then those additions to love, like the celestial spheres, still make one heaven above, since they all centre on you (The idea of the celestial spheres originates in ancient Greek philosophy with Anaximander and was not abandoned until the sixteenth century: the poet here makes use of the old belief and not the new theories becoming current in his own day). And though each spring adds new heat (strength and passion) to love, no winter will cause that increase to lessen, just as rulers levy more taxes in order to wage war, and still levy them even though peace is made.

## Love's Exchange.

Love, any devil else but you  
Would for a given soul give something too.  
At court your fellows every day  
Give th' art of rhyming, huntsmanship, or play,  
For them which were their own before;  
Only I have nothing, which gave more,  
But am, alas, by being lowly, lower!

I ask no dispensation now,  
To falsify a tear, or sigh, or vow;  
I do not sue from thee to draw  
*A non obstante* on nature's law;  
These are prerogatives, they inhere  
In thee and thine; none should forswear  
Except that he Love's minion were.

Give me thy weakness, make me blind,  
Both ways, as thou and thine, in eyes and mind;  
Love, let me never know that this  
Is love, or, that love childish is;  
Let me not know that others know  
That she knows my pain, lest that so  
A tender shame make me mine own new woe.

If thou give nothing, yet thou'rt just,  
Because I would not thy first motions trust;  
Small towns which stand stiff, till great shot  
Enforce them, by war's law condition not;  
Such in Love's warfare is my case;  
I may not article for grace,  
Having put Love at last to show this face.

This face, by which he could command  
And change th' idolatry of any land,  
This face, which, wheresoe'er it comes,  
Can call vowed men from cloisters, dead from tombs,  
And melt both poles at once, and store  
Deserts with cities, and make more  
Mines in the earth, than quarries were before.

For this Love is enraged with me,  
Yet kills not; if I must example be  
To future rebels, if th' unborn  
Must learn by my being cut up and torn,  
Kill, and dissect me, Love; for this  
Torture against thine own end is;  
Racked carcasses make ill anatomies.

*Verse 1:* Any other devil but you, Love, would give something in exchange for my soul being given over to you. Your fellow deities (ironic) at Court every day teach the arts of verse, hunting, and gambling to those who were already in thrall to the Court and its courtiers. I alone receive nothing though I have given more (having given his soul), but rather through being humble I am treated worse.

*Verse 2:* I ask no special exemption allowing me to erase any of my tears or sighs or vows, I do not request you to issue a royal edict exempting me from nature's law of feelings and emotions; those are solely your prerogatives which belong to you and your agents. No one should perjure himself or abjure an oath of love unless he is one of Love's agents himself.

*Verse 3:* Grant me your own disability, and make me blind (the Love god Cupid being portrayed as a blind boy), as you and your agents are blind, in both respects, blind in sight and blind in mind. Love, never let me be aware that this which I feel is love, or that love is childish. Let me be unaware that others can see that she knows my pain, lest, because of it, a tender shame makes me a source of new sorrow to myself.

*Verse 4:* Though you give me nothing, Love, nevertheless you are right to do so, because I placed no trust in your first appearance. Small towns that stand fast until they are taken by a weight of cannon, are not, according to the rules of war, allowed to make conditions for their surrender. The same rules apply to me, in the war of love. I cannot consider Love liable to show me his grace, having put him in the position of having to show his face.

*Verse 5:* His face, by which he can command and change any country's object of worship; his face which, wherever it is, can call (tempt) men who have taken the vow from monasteries, the dead from their tombs, and melt both poles simultaneously (as well as the geographic poles, the sexual 'poles' or seductive parts of men and women once hostile to one another?), and fill deserts with cities (of lovers?) and make a greater number of mines in the earth than there were quarries previously (reveal riches in others).

*Verse 6:* Love is enraged with me for forcing him to show his face, but chooses not to kill me. If I am to be made an example to warn off future rebels, if the unborn must learn by my flesh being cut up, and torn open, then kill me and dissect me, Love. For such torture as you are now applying to me works against your own aims, as bodies that have been tormented on the rack are of little use for anatomical study.

## Confined Love.

Some man unworthy to be possessor  
Of old or new love, himself being false or weak,  
Thought his pain and shame would be lesser,  
If on womankind he might his anger wreak;  
And thence a law did grow,  
One might but one man know;  
But are other creatures so?

Are sun, moon, or stars by law forbidden  
To smile where they list, or lend away their light?  
Are birds divorced or are they chidden  
If they leave their mate, or lie abroad a night?  
Beasts do no jointures lose  
Though they new lovers choose;  
But we are made worse than those.

Who e'er rigged fair ships to lie in harbours,  
And not to seek new lands, or not to deal with all?  
Or built fair houses, set trees, and arbours,  
Only to lock up, or else to let them fall?  
Good is not good, unless  
A thousand it possess,  
But doth waste with greediness.

*Verse 1:* Some man who, through being false or weak himself (being adulterous), was unworthy to experience old or new love, thought his pain and shame would be less if he could wreak his anger (take revenge) on womankind; so the law came about that one woman should only know one man (sexually). But is it the same with other creatures?

*Verse 2:* Are the sun, moon and stars forbidden to shine wherever they like, or lend their light to us? Are birds reprimanded or divorced if they leave their mate and roost somewhere else at night? Beasts do not lose the value of their marriage settlement just because they choose new lovers, but we are in a worse situation than them. (The reference to jointures, and the 'we', suggests a woman is speaking).

*Verse 3:* Whoever went to the effort of rigging a fine ship only to leave it anchored in the harbour, and not use it for exploration or trade? Or built fine houses, planted trees and arbours, only to leave the houses shut up, or decaying? Good is not good unless many people possess it, and wastes away if it is guarded avariciously.

## The Dream.

Dear love, for nothing less than thee  
Would I have broke this happy dream;  
    It was a theme  
For reason, much too strong for fantasy.  
Therefore thou waked'st me wisely; yet  
My dream thou brokest not, but continued'st it.  
Thou art so true that thoughts of thee suffice  
To make dreams truths, and fables histories;  
Enter these arms, for since thou thought'st it best,  
Not to dream all my dream, let's act the rest.

As lightning, or a taper's light,  
Thine eyes, and not thy noise waked me;  
    Yet I thought thee  
– For thou lovest truth – an angel, at first sight;  
But when I saw thou saw'st my heart,  
And knew'st my thoughts beyond an angel's art,  
When thou knew'st what I dreamt, when thou knew'st when  
Excess of joy would wake me, and cam'st then,  
I must confess, it could not choose but be  
Profane, to think thee any thing but thee.

Coming and staying showed thee, thee,  
But rising makes me doubt, that now  
    Thou art not thou.  
That love is weak where fear's as strong as he;  
'Tis not all spirit, pure and brave,  
If mixture it of fear, shame, honour have;  
Perchance as torches, which must ready be,  
Men light and put out, so thou deal'st with me;  
Thou camest to kindle, go'st to come; then I  
Will dream that hope again, but else would die.

*Verse 1:* Dear love, I would not have broken off my pleasant dreaming for anything less than you: the theme of my dream was much too powerful to be fantasy and more suitable to be treated as real and rational. Therefore you were wise to wake me. Yet you did not end my dream, but merely prolonged it. You are so true (faithful) that thinking of you is enough to make dreams real, and fables true histories. Enter my arms: for since you thought it best to wake me, in order for us not to have to dream the rest of my dream let us act the remainder of it.

*Verse 2:* Your eyes, like lightning or a candle-flame, and not your voice woke me. Yet, at first sight, I thought you were (since you love the truth) an angel. But from the moment I realised that you understood my heart, and knew my thoughts, with a power beyond that of any angel, and that you knew what I dreamed, and knew when excess of joy woke me, and came to me then, I confess thereafter it would have been a profanity to consider you anything other than a divinity (being more all-knowing than the angels).

*Verse 3:* Coming to me and staying with me showed you as a divinity, but now you rise and go I am doubtful as to whether you are still true. Love is weak when fear is equally strong. Love is not then a pure brave spirit if it is an impure mixture which also includes fear, shame and honour. Perhaps you treat me as men treat torches which are kept at hand to be lit and quenched again. You came to kindle me, and go away in order to return. So I will dream that hope of your return once more, to prevent myself dying of our separation.

## A Valediction of Weeping.

Let me pour forth  
My tears before thy face, whilst I stay here,  
For thy face coins them, and thy stamp they bear,  
And by this mintage they are something worth.  
For thus they be  
Pregnant of thee;  
Fruits of much grief they are, emblems of more;  
When a tear falls, that thou fall'st which it bore;  
So thou and I are nothing then, when on a divers shore.

On a round ball  
A workman, that hath copies by, can lay  
An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,  
And quickly make that, which was nothing, all.  
So doth each tear,  
Which thee doth wear,  
A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,  
Till thy tears mixed with mine do overflow  
This world, by waters sent from thee, my heaven, dissolvèd so.

O, more than moon,  
Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere;  
Weep me not dead, in thine arms, but forbear  
To teach the sea, what it may do too soon;  
Let not the wind  
Example find  
To do me more harm than it purposeth :  
Since thou and I sigh one another's breath,  
Whoe'er sighs most is cruellest, and hastes the other's death.

*Verse 1:* While I remain here, let me pour out my tears in front of you. For your face coins my tears and they bear your stamp, and because of the way they are minted like this they acquire value, since they are born from you. They are the fruit of much grief (at imminent separation) and emblems of more (their actual parting, also a play on Ann More's name), and when a tear falls the reflection of you that it carried falls also, so that you and I are reduced to nothing when separated by an ocean of tears (as we will be if separated by the real ocean).

*Verse 2:* Just as a craftsman, with the shapes of the continents to hand, can represent Europe, Africa and Asia on a globe, and quickly make the round zero shape of the sphere into a whole world (note the absence of the Americas); so each tear that reflects you is a globe, a world, because of that reflected image of you, until finally your tears mixed with mine overflow this tear-world that has been created, with waters sent from you (her tears, and his tears induced by her), who are my heaven, and who dissolves with tears like rain.

*Verse 3:* O, being more powerful than the moon (a play on Ann More's name), do not create a greater tide than the moon does to drown me in the watery sphere created. Do not mourn for me as if I were dead and in your arms (or, alternatively, do not make me die of weeping in your arms) rather you should avoid teaching the sea to do what it may do in reality all too soon (this implies he is leaving on a sea voyage). Do not let the wind learn, by this example, how to do me more harm than it already intends. Since you and I sigh out one another's breath (being identified with one another through our love) whoever sighs the most is the cruellest, and hastens the other's death.

## Love's Alchemy

Some that have deeper digged love's mine than I,  
Say, where his centric happiness doth lie.

I have loved, and got, and told,  
But should I love, get, tell, till I were old,  
I should not find that hidden mystery.

Oh, 'tis imposture all;  
And as no chemic yet th' elixir got,  
But glorifies his pregnant pot,  
If by the way to him befall  
Some odoriferous thing, or medicinal,  
So, lovers dream a rich and long delight,  
But get a winter-seeming summer's night.

Our ease, our thrift, our honour, and our day,  
Shall we for this vain bubble's shadow pay?

Ends love in this, that my man  
Can be as happy as I can, if he can  
Endure the short scorn of a bridegroom's play?

That loving wretch that swears,  
'Tis not the bodies marry, but the minds,  
Which he in her angelic finds,  
Would swear as justly, that he hears,  
In that day's rude hoarse minstrelsy, the spheres.

Hope not for mind in women; at their best,  
Sweetness and wit they are, but mummy, possessed.

*Verse 1:* Let some men, who have dug love's mine deeper than I have (a sexual image, and also the idea of love as containing riches), say where the core or essence of happiness in love lies. I have loved, and possessed love's wealth and counted it, but if I were to love, possess and count in that way until I were old I still would not comprehend that hidden mystery. Oh, it is all an imposture. Just as no alchemist has yet discovered the elixir of life, but is proud of his alembic, his mixing-vessel, if some sweet-smelling or medicinal compound is produced during the process, so lovers dream of a rich and long-lasting delight, but get a short and summer's night that seems as cold as winter.

*Verse 2:* Shall we expend our contentment, our careful management of our lives, our honour and our time, in order to pay for this idle bubble's shadow (love)? Is love, in the end, merely sexual, in that my servant can be as happy as I can, if he is prepared to endure the brief and ridiculous act of love on the wedding night? The loving wretch who swears that it is minds and not bodies that marry and who finds his bride's mind angelic, would be as correct in swearing that he hears the celestial music of the spheres in the hoarse and vulgar singing that accompanies weddings. Do not hope for intelligence in women. Though they show their greatest sweetness and wit, even then they are still only dead flesh once they have been possessed (or alternatively are mummified flesh possessed by an animating and possibly demonic spirit). (Note: This is another of the poet's misogynistic diatribes against women and love.)

## The Curse.

Whoever guesses, thinks, or dreams, he knows  
Who is my mistress, wither by this curse;  
    Him, only for his purse  
    May some dull whore to love dispose,  
And then yield unto all that are his foes;  
    May he be scorned by one, whom all else scorn,  
    Forswear to others, what to her he hath sworn,  
    With fear of missing, shame of getting, torn.

Madness his sorrow, gout his cramps, may he  
Make, by but thinking who hath made him such;  
    And may he feel no touch  
    Of conscience, but of fame, and be  
Anguished, not that 'twas sin, but that 'twas she;  
    Or may he for her virtue reverence  
    One that hates him only for impotence,  
    And equal traitors be she and his sense.

May he dream treason, and believe that he  
Meant to perform it, and confesses, and die,  
    And no record tell why;  
    His sons, which none of his may be,  
Inherit nothing but his infamy;  
    Or may he so long parasites have fed,  
    That he would fain be theirs whom he hath bred,  
    And at the last be circumcised for bread.

The venom of all stepdames, gamesters' gall,  
What tyrants and their subjects interwish,  
    What plants, mine, beasts, fowl, fish,  
    Can contribute, all ill, which all  
Prophets or poets spake, and all which shall  
    Be annexed in schedules unto this by me,  
    Fall on that man; For if it be a she  
    Nature beforehand hath out-cursèd me.

*Verse 1:* May whoever guesses, thinks or dreams he knows who my mistress is wither as a result of this curse. Let some dull hearted woman be disposed to love his money and no one else's, and nothing else of his except his money, then let her give herself to all his enemies. May he be scorned by a woman, who is scorned by everyone else, swear falsely to others what he has sworn to her, and be torn by the fear of losing her, and the shame of having her:

*Verse 2:* May his sorrow turn to madness and his cramps turn to gout, merely by thinking about the woman who has inflicted him with sorrow and cramp. And may he feel no pang of conscience but merely the pain of scandal, and be anguished not that he had sinned with her, but that it was her he had sinned with. May he revere a woman for her virtue, who despises him for his impotence, and may both she and his potency prove equally traitorous. (There is an alternative version in some manuscripts: 'In early and long scarceness may he rot, for land which had been his if he had not himself incestuously an heir begot': that is, Let him rot in poverty, soon and late, lacking land which would have been his if he had not incestuously begotten an heir.)

*Verse 3:* Let him dream of treason and believe that he meant to carry it out; and confess to it; and die; and no record remain of why he did so. Let his sons be bastards, and let them inherit nothing but his infamy. Or let him provide wealth to flatterers and hangers-on for such a length of time that he would willingly serve them, whom he has himself enriched, and in the end be circumcised in order to be regarded as Jewish and win charity from the Jews.

*Verse 4:* May the venom of all stepmothers, the bitterness of all gamblers, everything that tyrants wish regarding their subjects and subjects wish regarding their tyrants, whatever ills plants, mines, beasts, fowl, and fish can contribute, all ill that prophets or poets declared, and all ill that shall be added in formal lists to this, by me, fall on that man. Since, if it is a she, Nature has already out-cursed me.

## The Message.

Send home my long strayed eyes to me,  
Which, O, too long have dwelt on thee;  
Yet since there they have learned such ill,  
    Such forced fashions,  
    And false passions,  
        That they be  
        Made by thee  
Fit for no good sight, keep them still.

Send home my harmless heart again,  
Which no unworthy thought could stain;  
Which if it be taught by thine  
    To make jestings  
    Of protestings,  
        And break both  
        Word and oath,  
Keep it, for then 'tis none of mine.

Yet send me back my heart and eyes,  
That I may know, and see thy lies,  
And may laugh and joy, when thou  
    Art in anguish  
    And dost languish  
        For some one  
        That will none,  
Or prove as false as thou art now.

*Verse 1:* Send home my eyes, which have strayed from me for a long time now, oh, by gazing at you for too long. And yet since, in doing so, they have learned such ill things, such artificial modes of love, and false passions, that they have been made, by you, unfit for seeing anything good, then you may as well keep them.

*Verse 2:* Send home my heart, incapable of doing harm, which no unworthy thought could stain. But if it has been taught by yours to make a jest of solemn declarations, and to thwart the giving of one's word and sworn oaths (or perhaps make the sign of the cross ironically and blasphemously when speaking them) it cannot be my heart, so keep it.

*Verse 3:* Nevertheless do send my eyes and heart back to me, so I can know and see your lies, and can laugh and be joyous when you are in anguish (like me) and languish for someone who will have none of you, or proves as false as you are now.

**A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day.**

'Tis the year's midnight, and it is the day's,  
Lucy's, who scarce seven hours herself unmasks;  
The sun is spent, and now his flasks  
Send forth light squibs, no constant rays;  
The world's whole sap is sunk;  
The general balm th' hydroptic earth hath drunk,  
Whither, as to the bed's-feet, life is shrunk,  
Dead and interred; yet all these seem to laugh,  
Compared with me, who am their epitaph.

Study me then, you who shall lovers be  
At the next world, that is, at the next spring;  
For I am every dead thing,  
In whom Love wrought new alchemy.  
For his art did express  
A quintessence even from nothingness,  
From dull privations, and lean emptiness;  
He ruined me, and I am re-begot  
Of absence, darkness, death—things which are not.

All others, from all things, draw all that's good,  
Life, soul, form, spirit, whence they being have;  
I, by Love's limbec, am the grave  
Of all, that's nothing. Oft a flood  
Have we two wept, and so  
Drowned the whole world, us two; oft did we grow,  
To be two chaoses, when we did show  
Care to aught else; and often absences  
Withdrew our souls, and made us carcasses.

But I am by her death – which word wrongs her –  
Of the first nothing the elixir grown;  
    Were I a man, that I were one  
    I needs must know; I should prefer,  
        If I were any beast,  
Some ends, some means; yea plants, yea stones detest,  
And love; all, all some properties invest.  
If I an ordinary nothing were,  
As shadow, a light, and body must be here.

But I am none; nor will my sun renew.  
You lovers, for whose sake the lesser sun  
    At this time to the Goat is run  
    To fetch new lust, and give it you,  
        Enjoy your summer all,  
Since she enjoys her long night's festival.  
Let me prepare towards her, and let me call  
This hour her vigil, and her eve, since this  
Both the year's and the day's deep midnight is.

*Verse 1:* It is Saint Lucy's Day (St Lucia) the year's midnight and the day's (the shortest day, which coincided with the winter solstice on the 13th December in the unreformed Julian calendar, now falls on December 21st/22nd) daylight being scarcely seven hours. The sun is at its weakest, and now his powder-flasks, the stars, send out only squibs (fireworks) of light, not constant rays. All the sap of the world has sunk, as it does in the trees during winter. The thirsty earth, as though suffering from dropsy, has drunk all the communal balm or life-giving essence (Paracelsus), such that life has drained, as if through the feet of the bed, into that same earth and is there dead and interred. Yet all these things seem joyful compared to me who am their epitaph.

*Verse 2:* Study me then, you who will be lovers at the next world which is to say the following spring, since I am ever dead thing in whom love works a new kind of alchemy, because his alchemical art extracts a quintessence not from bodies (according to the alchemists' theory) but from nothingness itself; from dull suffering, and lean emptiness. He shattered me to pieces and I am now conceived again from absence, darkness, death, things which are aspects of nothingness.

*Verse 3:* All other men draw what is good; life, soul, form, spirit, from everything and so have being. I, by means of love's alembic (the alchemist's glass mixing vessel) am everything's grave, which is nothing or non-being. We two often wept a flood of tears, and so drowned the whole world. We often became like chaotic voids when we displayed concern for anything other than our love. And often absence quenched our souls, and made us like two corpses.

*Verse 3:* But through her death (a word which wrongs her, since she is eternal) I have become the elixir (alchemist's preparation) of primal nothingness; if I were a man I would be conscious and self-aware; if I were a beast I would still prefer some goals and means to others; yes, even plants and stones hate and love (Pliny e.g. lodestones through magnetic attraction and repulsion); all things are clothed with some property or other; even if I were just a commonplace nothingness, such as a shadow, that would imply the presence of a body and light to cast the shadow.

*Verse 4:* But I am none of these; nor will my sun grow in power again like the sun of the coming year. All you lovers, for whose sake the weakened (and also material rather than spiritual, therefore lesser) sun is now in the sign of Capricorn the Goat (the sign of lust) fetching new lust for you, enjoy your summer which is approaching. Since my sun is at the solstice, which is her long night's festival, let me make ready to join her (if this poem concerns his wife Ann's death in 1617, then he is dedicating himself to her memory and preparing for his own future death when he will join her, and equally her 'long night' is death itself) and let me name this hour as my hour of vigil for her, and her night, since this is both the year's and the day's deep midnight.

## **Witchcraft by a Picture.**

I fix mine eye on thine, and there  
Pity my picture burning in thine eye;  
My picture drowned in a transparent tear,  
When I look lower I espy;  
Hadst thou the wicked skill  
By pictures made and marred, to kill,  
How many ways mightst thou perform thy will?

But now I've drunk thy sweet salt tears,  
And though thou pour more, I'll depart;  
My picture vanished, vanish all fears  
That I can be endamaged by that art;  
Though thou retain of me  
One picture more, yet that will be,  
Being in thine own heart, from all malice free.

*Verse 1:* I fix my eye on yours and there I pity my image (my reflection) burning in your eye, and when I look beneath your eye I see my image again, drowned in a transparent tear. If you possessed the art of witchcraft and were able to kill by creating and marring images, think how many ways there are by which you could carry out that murder.

*Verse 2:* But now I have drunk your sweet salt tears, and though you still weep I will depart. Once my reflection vanishes, then, any fear that I might be harmed by witchcraft vanishes also. Though you still retain one image of me more (a play on Ann More's name?), yet since that is in your heart it must be free from all malice (otherwise it would harm her also, and also implying that her heart is innocent and free of malice).

## **The Bait.**

Come live with me, and be my love,  
And we will some new pleasures prove  
Of golden sands, and crystal brooks,  
With silken lines and silver hooks.

There will the river whisp'ring run  
Warmed by thy eyes, more than the sun;  
And there th' enamoured fish will stay,  
Begging themselves they may betray.

When thou wilt swim in that live bath,  
Each fish, which every channel hath,  
Will amorously to thee swim,  
Gladder to catch thee, than thou him.

If thou, to be so seen, be'st loth,  
By sun or moon, thou darkenest both,  
And if myself have leave to see,  
I need not their light, having thee.

Let others freeze with angling reeds,  
And cut their legs with shells and weeds,  
Or treacherously poor fish beset,  
With strangling snare, or windowy net.

Let coarse bold hands from slimy nest  
The bedded fish in banks out-wrest;  
Or curious traitors, sleeve-silk flies,  
Bewitch poor fishes' wandering eyes.

For thee, thou need'st no such deceit,  
For thou thyself art thine own bait :  
That fish, that is not caught thereby,  
Alas, is wiser far than I!

*Verse 1:* Come and live with me and be my love, and we will discover some new pleasures among golden sands and crystal brooks, with silken lines and silver hooks.

*Verse 2:* There the river will whisper as it runs, warmed by your eyes more than by the sun, and there the fish enamoured of you will linger, begging to betray their presence to you.

*Verse 3:* When you wish to swim in that bath full of living things, each fish in every channel will swim to you amorously, more pleased to catch you than you him.

*Verse 4:* If you are reluctant to be seen by the sun or moon, well you outshine (darken) both, and if I am allowed to look at you then I have no need of their light since I have yours.

*Verse 5:* Let others freeze with fishing rods, and cut their legs with shells and weeds, or treacherously attack the poor fish with a line to strangle them, or a mesh net.

*Verse 6:* Let coarse bold hands wrest the fish from their holes beneath the banks where they are hiding or let unravelled silk flies, traitors that arouse the poor fish's curiosity, bewitch their roaming gaze.

*Verse 7:* As for you, you need no apply no such deception, for you yourself are your own bait. The fish that is not attracted by such bait, alas, is far wiser than I am.

## **The Apparition.**

When by thy scorn, O murd'ress, I am dead,  
And that thou thinkst thee free  
From all solicitation from me,  
Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,  
And thee, feigned vestal, in worse arms shall see :  
Then thy sick taper will begin to wink,  
And he, whose thou art then, being tired before,  
Will, if thou stir, or pinch to wake him, think  
    Thou call'st for more,  
And, in false sleep, will from thee shrink :  
And then, poor aspen wretch, neglected thou  
Bathed in a cold quicksilver sweat wilt lie,  
    A verier ghost than I.  
What I will say, I will not tell thee now,  
Lest that preserve thee; and since my love is spent,  
I'd rather thou shouldst painfully repent,  
Than by my threatenings rest still innocent.

*Verse 1:* When I am dead, O murderess, because of your scorn for me, and you think yourself free of all my demands, then my ghost will come to your bed, and will find you, who feign to be chaste (a Vestal virgin), embraced by an inferior man. Then your candle flame afflicted by my presence will begin to flicker, and the man who has possessed you, who is already tired, will think, if you stir or pinch him to wake him, that you wish to make love again.

*Verse 2:* And feigning sleep will turn away from you. Then poor trembling (quivering like an aspen tree) wretch you will lie there, neglected, silvered with a cold sweat (like quicksilver, mercury), looking more ghostlike than I will. I will not tell you now what I intend to say to you, lest it encourages you to return to me. Since my love for you is over, I would rather force you to repent painfully than remain innocent because my threats warned you.

## **The Broken Heart.**

He is stark mad, whoever says,  
That he hath been in love an hour,  
Yet not that love so soon decays,  
But that it can ten in less space devour;  
Who will believe me, if I swear  
That I have had the plague a year?  
Who would not laugh at me, if I should say  
I saw a flash of powder burn a day?

Ah, what a trifle is a heart,  
If once into love's hands it come!  
All other griefs allow a part  
To other griefs, and ask themselves but some;  
They come to us, but us love draws;  
He swallows us and never chaws;  
By him, as by chain-shot, whole ranks do die;  
He is the tyrant pike, our hearts the fry.

If 'twere not so, what did become  
Of my heart when I first saw thee?  
I brought a heart into the room,  
But from the room I carried none with me.  
If it had gone to thee, I know  
Mine would have taught thine heart to show  
More pity unto me; but Love, alas!  
At one first blow did shiver it as glass.

Yet nothing can to nothing fall,  
Nor any place be empty quite;  
Therefore I think my breast hath all  
Those pieces still, though they be not unite;  
And now, as broken glasses show  
A hundred lesser faces, so  
My rags of heart can like, wish, and adore,  
But after one such love, can love no more.

*Verse 1:* He is stark mad who can claim he has ever been in love for a whole hour without that love decaying so quickly that ten such loves can be consumed in less time than an hour. Who would believe me if I claimed that I had the plague a year (love being as much of an affliction as the plague)? Who would not laugh at me if I said I saw a flask of gunpowder (love being as explosive) burn for a whole day?

*Verse 2:* Ah, what a trifling thing a heart is once it falls into Love's power! All other sorrows (love being a sorrow) allow room for other sorrows to possess us, and demand only a part of our spirit. Other sorrows come to us, but Love draws us to him, and swallows us without chewing. Whole ranks of us are killed by him, as if by chain-shot (cannon balls chained together). He is the tyrant pike and our hearts are the young fish which he consumes.

*Verse 3:* If that is not the case, then what else happened to my heart when I first saw you? I brought my heart into the room, but did not carry it away again. If it had merged with your heart, then my heart would have taught yours to show me more pity. But, alas, Love shivered my heart to pieces like glass at the first blow.

*Verse 4:* And yet nothing can turn into nothing, nor can any space be totally empty. Therefore I think all the broken pieces are still in my body though they are no longer united. Now, as broken mirrors act like a hundred smaller mirrors, and show partial reflections, so my broken remnants of a heart can each like, wish and adore (reflect lesser aspects of total love), but after one such love (is shattered) can love no more.

## **A Valediction Forbidding Mourning.**

As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say,  
“Now his breath goes,” and some say, “No.”

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 th’ earth brings harms and fears;  
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  
Of absence, ‘cause it doth remove  
The thing which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined,  
That ourselves know not what it is,  
Inter-assurèd of the mind,  
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 aery thinness beat.

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.

And though it in the centre sit,  
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 th' other foot, obliquely run;  
Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
And makes me end where I begun.

*Verse 1:* Just as men of virtue die gently, and whisper to the soul telling it to depart, while some of their sad friends say the last breath has gone, and others say no:

*Verse 2:* Let us, now we are separating, melt and make no noise, without floods of tears or storms of sighs. It would profane our joy to show the uninitiated our love.

*Verse 3:* Earthquakes bring harm and act as portents, and men consider the result and the meaning of them, but oscillations of the celestial spheres though more profound are not felt on earth (innocent).

*Verse 4:* The dull love experienced by lovers in the spheres subject to decay and change, i.e. those below the sphere of the moon, has a soul which is subject to sensation, and cannot tolerate absence, because absence removes the sensory things of which it is composed.

*Verse 5:* But we who are mutually assured of each other, in our minds, by a love which is so refined and spiritual that we can't describe or comprehend it, are less concerned about losing sight and touch of each other.

*Verse 6:* So though I must depart, our two souls, which are as one, do not suffer a separation but an expansion, like gold sheet beaten to an airy thinness.

*Verse 7:* If we can distinguish two souls rather than just one, then they are like the two stiff legs of a pair of compasses. Your soul, the fixed leg, does not try to move, but changes angle as the other leg extends or contracts.

*Verse 8:* And though the fixed leg sits in the centre (of an inscribed arc or circle drawn by the other leg) it still extends its angle and leans down towards the other leg as the other leg is moved outwards, and contracts its angle and rises as the other leg is moved inwards.

*Verse 9:* Just such a fixed leg you will be to me, who will be forced to move obliquely on my travels like the other foot of the compasses, since your constancy will make my path a true circle, and force me to end where I began, with you.

## **The Ecstasy.**

Where, like a pillow on a bed,  
A pregnant bank swelled up, to rest  
The violet's reclining head,  
Sat we two, one another's best.

Our hands were firmly cemented  
By a fast balm, which thence did spring;  
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread  
Our eyes upon one double string.

So to engraft our hands, as yet  
Was all the means to make us one;  
And pictures in our eyes to get  
Was all our propagation.

As, 'twixt two equal armies, Fate  
Suspends uncertain victory,  
Our souls – which to advance their state,  
Were gone out – hung 'twixt her and me.

And whilst our souls negotiate there,  
We like sepulchral statues lay;  
All day, the same our postures were,  
And we said nothing, all the day.

If any, so by love refined,  
That he soul's language understood,  
And by good love were grown all mind,  
Within convenient distance stood,

He – though he knew not which soul spake,  
Because both meant, both spake the same –  
Might thence a new concoction take,  
And part far purer than he came.

This ecstasy doth unperplex  
    (We said) and tell us what we love;  
We see by this, it was not sex;  
    We see, we saw not, what did move :

But as all several souls contain  
    Mixture of things they know not what,  
Love these mixed souls doth mix again,  
    And makes both one, each this, and that.

A single violet transplant,  
    The strength, the colour, and the size –  
All which before was poor and scant –  
    Redoubles still, and multiplies.

When love with one another so  
    Interinanimates two souls,  
That abler soul, which thence doth flow,  
    Defects of loneliness controls.

We then, who are this new soul, know,  
    Of what we are composed, and made,  
For th' atomies of which we grow  
    Are souls, whom no change can invade.

But, O alas, so long, so far,  
    Our bodies why do we forbear?  
They are ours, though not we; we are  
    Th' intelligences, they the spheres.

We owe them thanks, because they thus  
    Did us, to us, at first convey,  
Yielded their senses' force to us,  
    Nor are dross to us, but allay.

On man heaven's influence works not so,  
    But that it first imprints the air;  
For soul into the soul may flow,  
    Though it to body first repair.

As our blood labours to beget  
Spirits, as like souls as it can;  
Because such fingers need to knit  
That subtle knot, which makes us man;

So must pure lovers' souls descend  
To affections, and to faculties,  
Which sense may reach and apprehend,  
Else a great prince in prison lies.

To our bodies turn we then, that so  
Weak men on love revealed may look;  
Love's mysteries in souls do grow,  
But yet the body is his book.

And if some lover, such as we,  
Have heard this dialogue of one,  
Let him still mark us, he shall see  
Small change when we're to bodies gone.

*Verse 1:* Where a swollen bank rose, like a pillow on a bed, to give rest to the violet's overhanging head, we two sat, each being the best part of the other.

*Verse 2:* Our hands were glued together firmly by an adhesive life-giving balm sprung from the earth, and our eye-beams (conceived as lines of light from the eye rather than to the eye) intertwined and threaded our sight together as if on a double string.

*Verse 3:* All that was needed to make us truly one was to graft our hands together, and all that was needed to replicate us (produce progeny) was a fresh image of us to be reflected in each other's eyes.

*Verse 4:* Just as the outcome of a battle is uncertain where the opposing armies are of equal strength, our two souls, which had committed themselves to that expansion and elevation of the soul achieved by love, hung between her (therefore the poem is addressed to someone other than his lover) and me.

*Verse 5:* And while our two souls communed there, our bodies lay like statues on a tomb; our postures were the same all day, and our bodies never spoke.

*Verse 6:* If anyone, who had been so refined by experience of love that they could understand the language of the soul, and through loving well had become completely spiritual, had been standing near enough, he, though he could not tell which soul spoke, because both spoke the same words with the same meaning, might have taken away from there a new refinement (of alchemical metals or minerals) and go away purer than he came.

*Verse 7:* This ecstasy removes our perplexity, we said, by telling us what we love. We can see from this that it was not each other's sex (sensual body and sexuality); we can see that what moved us was not visible;

*Verse 8:* Just as all individual souls are a mixture, of unknown qualities, Love re-mixes these mixed souls to make one soul that yet contains both souls, so that each is also the other.

*Verse 9:* A single transplant from a violet, placed in richer soil, doubles in strength, colour and size, and multiplies in number, despite being poor and scant before.

*Verse 10:* When love has mutually connected two souls (inter-inanimated them, that is rendered them jointly motionless and inanimate as in *Verse 5*, but also elevated them above the animal life, in a combined spiritual state: note Donne's apparent coinage of a word which is not to be confused with inter-animated or mutually enlivened.) merging one soul thus with the other (to create the single trans-plant), the combined soul which derives from the process, and is more powerful (abler) than either alone, can control any defects due to each individual separately, any defects that is of the individual souls.

*Verse 11:* We then, who are this new combined soul, know what we are composed and made of, because the separate parts from which we (it, the combined soul) grow are the individual souls, which are impervious to change.

*Verse 12:* But why, alas, do we forbear to use our bodies all this time. They belong to us, though they are not us, since we are the spiritual intelligences which control them, and they are the sphere controlled by those intelligences (as the celestial spheres were said to be controlled by intelligences or angels).

*Verse 13:* We owe our bodies thanks, because they allowed us to meet, allowing their powers and sensory data to be used by our intellects, and are not dross, the worthless residue thrown off in refining precious metals, but an alloy, an inferior metal mixed with the precious metals of the soul.

*Verse 14:* Just as the stars work on man only by first imprinting the air with their influence, so soul may flow into the combined soul, though it first inhabits the body.

*Verse 15:* As our blood works to produce subtle vapours, as like souls as possible, because such fingers of vapour are needed to join body and soul, and so tie the knot that creates a human being (also note the obvious sexual reference):

*Verse 16:* So pure lover's souls must descend into the body and embrace emotions and bodily functions that sense can grasp and comprehend, else a great prince (the soul) is confined to a prison (its own domain or house). (Note: the great prince may also refer to the Earl of Essex, under house arrest at his own York House, in 1599, when Donne was resident there, which would, if true, assign the poem to a later date.)

*Verse 17:* Therefore we turn to the use of our bodies, so that the limited (weak) human mind can see love revealed; Love's mysteries grow in the soul, but the body is the book in which the soul's influence is written and apparent.

*Verse 18:* And if some lover, such as we are, has heard this dialogue of two souls in the one compound soul, let him note how similar the merging of our bodies in lovemaking is to the merging of our souls spiritually.

## Love's Deity.

I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,  
    Who died before the god of love was born.  
I cannot think that he, who then loved most,  
    Sunk so low as to love one which did scorn.  
But since this god produced a destiny,  
And that vice-nature, custom, lets it be,  
    I must love her that loves not me.

Sure, they which made him god, meant not so much,  
    Nor he in his young godhead practised it.  
But when an even flame two hearts did touch  
    His office was indulgently to fit  
Actives to passives. Correspondency  
Only his subject was; it cannot be  
    Love, till I love her, who loves me.

But every modern god will now extend  
    His vast prerogative as far as Jove.  
To rage, to lust, to write to, to commend,  
    All is the purlieu of the god of love.  
Oh, were we wakened by this tyranny  
To ungod this child again, it could not be  
    I should love her, who loves not me.

Rebel and atheist too, why murmur I,  
    As though I felt the worst that love could do?  
Love might make me leave loving, or might try  
    A deeper plague, to make her love me too;  
Which, since she loves before, I'm loth to see.  
Falsehood is worse than hate; and that must be,  
    If she whom I love, should love me.

*Verse 1:* I long to talk with the ghost of some lover of olden times, who died before the god of love was born (invented). I refuse to imagine that the most intense of lovers then could have sunk so low as to love a woman who scorned him. But since the god of love now determines a lover's fate, and accepted practice, custom, which is second nature allows it, I am forced to love her who does not love me.

*Verse 2:* Surely those who made love a god did not intend love to work like this. Nor did he when he was a new (young) god enforce such a perversity. Rather, when a like flame moved two hearts his role was to fit the active agent (the man?) to the passive agent (the woman?). His objective was to unite hearts that corresponded in their feelings. In that case it would not be Love, unless I loved a woman who also loved me.

*Verse 3:* But every modern god has now extended his sovereign rights to cover the same extent as Jupiter's. The god of love now extends his domain over rage, lust, love-letters and flattery, all beyond his original remit. Oh if only we were roused by this tyranny of his to take away his divinity again, then in that case I would not be forced to love her who does not love me.

*Verse 4:* Why do I, a rebel against unrequited love, and an unbeliever as regards love's divinity, complain so much, as though I had felt the worst that love could do to me? For love could indeed do worse, and make me stop loving her, or inflict a greater suffering, and make her pretend to love me too, which since she already loves another would be a torment to see. Deceit is worse than hate, and she would be deceiving me if she, whom I love, pretended to love me.

## Love's Diet.

To what a cumbersome unwieldiness  
And burdenous corpulence my love had grown,  
    But that I did, to make it less,  
    And keep it in proportion,  
Give it a diet, made it feed upon  
That which love worst endures, discretion

Above one sigh a day I allowed him not,  
Of which my fortune, and my faults had part;  
    And if sometimes by stealth he got  
    A she sigh from my mistress' heart,  
And thought to feast upon that, I let him see  
'Twas neither very sound, nor meant to me.

If he wrung from me a tear, I brined it so  
With scorn and shame, that him it nourished not;  
    If he sucked hers, I let him know  
    'Twas not a tear which he had got;  
His drink was counterfeit, as was his meat;  
For eyes, which roll towards all, weep not, but sweat.

Whatever he would dictate I writ that,  
But burnt her letters when she writ to me;  
    And if that favour made him fat,  
    I said, "If any title be  
Conveyed by this, ah, what doth it avail,  
To be the fortieth name in an entail?"

Thus I reclaimed my buzzard love, to fly  
At what, and when, and how, and where I choose.  
    Now negligent of sports I lie,  
    And now, as other falconers use,  
I spring a mistress, swear, write, sigh, and weep;  
And the game killed, or lost, go talk or sleep.

*Verse 1:* How cumbersome, unwieldy, burdensome and corpulent my love would have grown if I had not dieted, and fed it on discretion, which love suffers least happily, so as to reduce it and keep it in proportion.

*Verse 2:* I allowed love not more than one sigh a day, deriving from my fate and my faults. And if sometimes he obtained by stealth a female sigh from my mistress' heart, and thought he would feast on that, I let him see that it was neither well-founded in sorrow, nor was it intended for me.

*Verse 3:* If he wrung a tear from me, I salted it with scorn or shame to the extent that it failed to nourish him. If he sucked her tear I let him know it was not a tear he had ingested, that his drink was false, as was his meat; since eyes which are always turning about to gaze at everyone do not weep, they merely exude moisture from the effort.

*Verse 4:* Whatever he dictated to me I would write down, but then burnt my letters. When she wrote to me and that show of favour fattened him, I said: 'Even if anything is granted to me from her estate by this, what use is it to be the fortieth name in a list of heirs? (i.e. he is merely one of a whole list of lovers who receive the same false promises)

*Verse 5:* So I reclaimed (kept hungry and lean) my buzzard, love, so as to be able to let it fly (when hawking, i.e. seeking a mistress) at what, when, how, and where I choose. Sometimes I rest, neglecting the sport. At other times, as other falconers do, I drive a mistress, like a game-bird, from cover, swear oaths to her, write to her, and sigh, and weep, and the game killed (i.e. the woman possessed sexually) or lost, I go and talk about it, or sleep.

## The Will.

Before I sigh my last gasp, let me breathe,  
Great Love, some legacies; I here bequeath  
Mine eyes to Argus, if mine eyes can see;  
If they be blind, then, Love, I give them thee;  
My tongue to Fame; to ambassadors mine ears;  
    To women, or the sea, my tears;  
    Thou, Love, hast taught me heretofore  
By making me serve her who had twenty more,  
That I should give to none, but such as had too much before.

My constancy I to the planets give;  
My truth to them who at the court do live;  
My ingenuity and openness,  
To Jesuits; to buffoons my pensiveness;  
My silence to any, who abroad hath been;  
    My money to a Capuchin :  
    Thou, Love, taught'st me, by appointing me  
To love there, where no love received can be,  
Only to give to such as have an incapacity.

My faith I give to Roman Catholics;  
All my good works unto the Schismatics  
Of Amsterdam; my best civility  
And courtship to an University;  
My modesty I give to soldiers bare;  
    My patience let gamesters share :  
    Thou, Love, taught'st me, by making me  
Love her that holds my love disparity,  
Only to give to those that count my gifts indignity.

I give my reputation to those  
Which were my friends; mine industry to foes;  
To schoolmen I bequeath my doubtfulness;  
My sickness to physicians, or excess;  
To nature all that I in rhyme have writ;  
And to my company my wit:  
Thou, Love, by making me adore  
Her, who begot this love in me before,  
Taught'st me to make, as though I gave, when I do but restore.

To him for whom the passing-bell next tolls,  
I give my physic books; my written rolls  
Of moral counsels I to Bedlam give;  
My brazen medals unto them which live  
In want of bread; to them which pass among  
All foreigners, mine English tongue:  
Though, Love, by making me love one  
Who thinks her friendship a fit portion  
For younger lovers, dost my gifts thus disproportion.

Therefore I'll give no more, but I'll undo  
The world by dying, because love dies too.  
Then all your beauties will be no more worth  
Than gold in mines, where none doth draw it forth;  
And all your graces no more use shall have,  
Than a sun-dial in a grave :  
Thou, Love, taught'st me by making me  
Love her who doth neglect both me and thee,  
To invent, and practise this one way, to annihilate all three.

*Verse 1:* Before I sigh my last breath, Mighty Love, let me make my will and bequeath some legacies. Here I bequeath my eyes to Argus (the mythical hundred-eyed giant of Greek mythology, i.e. his bequest is to someone who already has more than enough of the thing, or quality bequeathed). If they lack sight I bequeath them to you, Love (since Cupid is portrayed as a blind boy he is again bequeathing like to like). I bequeath my tongue to fame (which is ever spreading word), and my ears to ambassadors (who are all ears); my tears to women (who are always crying) or the sea (which is full of salty drops). You, Love, taught me before this, by making me serve a mistress who had twenty other lovers, only to give to those who possessed too much of the gift already.

*Verse 2:* I give my constancy to the planets (which lack constancy, the name means ‘wanderer’ as the planets appear to wander in their tracks as seen from Earth); my truth to those who live at Court (who lack all truth); my ingenuousness (now a rare use of the word ingenuity) and openness to the Jesuits (who lack both), my thoughtfulness to buffoons, my silence to anyone who has been abroad (since travellers never stop talking about their adventures), and my money to a Capuchin (vowed to poverty). You Love, by making me love where that love would not be returned, taught me only to give to those who lacked the gift.

*Verse 3:* I give my faith to Roman Catholics (who believe in salvation through good works) and all my good works to the Protestant schismatics of Amsterdam (who believe in salvation through faith); my best manners and civility to a university (university students being notoriously scornful of such, uncivil and ill-mannered); my modesty to naked soldiers (who deride it), and my patience to gamesters (who can’t wait to play). You, Love, taught me, by making me love a woman who considers my love incongruous, only to give to those who equally consider my gift ridiculous.

*Verse 4:* I give my reputation to those who were my friends (who are already charged with upholding it); my diligence to my enemies (who are already diligent enough), my doubts to scholars (who already live by the spirit of doubt and enquiry); my sickness to physicians (who already spend their lives among the sick) or to intemperance (which is already well acquainted with it); to Nature everything I have written in verse (which is where I derived the inspiration for it) and my wit to my companions (who have already had the benefit from it). You, Love, by making me adore a woman who had already moved me to love her, taught me to make the gesture of giving that which I was only returning or restoring.

*Verse 5:* I give my medical books to him who is the next to die (i.e. the gift would be useless to the recipient, since the passing bell was rung for the dead), my lists of moral injunctions to the madhouse (Bedlam, a priory for the sisters and brethren of the Order of the Star of Bethlehem, from where the building took its name, was a Royal hospital, but controlled by the City of London after 1557, and managed by the Governors of Bridewell); my ancient bronze coins (useless as currency) to the starving; and my English language to those who travel abroad (where the language would be of no help). You, Love, by making me love a woman who thinks mere friendship is a fit reward for younger lovers, render my gifts similarly inappropriate.

*Verse 6:* Therefore I'll stop giving; and carry on with destroying the world by dying; because then love will die with me. Then all your beauties, Love, will be worth no more than gold buried where it is inaccessible. And all your graces, Love, will be no more use than a sundial in a grave, where there is no light. You, Love taught me, by making me love a woman who neglects me and love also, how to find a way and then execute it of annihilating all three of us.

## **The Funeral.**

Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm,  
    Nor question much,  
That subtle wreath of hair, which crowns my arm;  
The mystery, the sign, you must not touch;  
    For 'tis my outward soul,  
Viceroy to that, which then to heaven being gone,  
    Will leave this to control  
And keep these limbs, her provinces, from dissolution.

For if the sinewy thread my brain lets fall  
    Through every part  
Can tie those parts, and make me one of all,  
Those hairs which upward grew, and strength and art  
    Have from a better brain,  
Can better do't; except she meant that I  
    By this should know my pain,  
As prisoners then are manacled, when they're condemned to die.

Whate'er she meant by it, bury it with me,  
    For since I am  
Love's martyr, it might breed idolatry,  
If into other hands these relics came.  
    As 'twas humility  
To afford to it all that a soul can do,  
    So 'tis some bravery,  
That since you would have none of me, I bury some of you.

*Verse 1:* Whoever comes to dress me in my shroud when I am dead, do not harm or examine overmuch the subtle wreath of hair (made from the hair of his loved one) that encircles my arm. You must not touch that symbol, that secret charm, because it is my external soul. It is the second in command to my internal soul, and can act with sovereign powers on its behalf, so that when my inward soul has gone to heaven, it will leave this external one in command, and keep the body, its material domain, from decay.

*Verse 2:* For if the nerves that extend from my brain to every part of my body can unify those parts (all the limbs etc) and make one person of the separate segments of me, then these hairs which grew upward (on her head) and took their strength and qualities from her more virtuous brain, can effect that unification and tie my parts together better than my nerves can. Unless she intended by this bracelet of hair a different kind of tie, in that it would make me aware of my fate (doomed to die of her love, yet tied to her by love) as prisoners are manacled when they are condemned to die.

*Verse 3:* Whatever she meant by it, bury it with me. For since I am a martyr to Love, worship of this bracelet as a sacred object might be wrongly encouraged, if it falls into other hands. Just as it exhibited humility on my part to allow it to do to me whatever a soul can do, so it is a sign of defiance to bury a part (her hair) of you with me, since you refused to save me from dying of your love (i.e. yield to me).

## **The Blossom.**

Little think'st thou, poor flower,  
Whom I have watched six or seven days,  
And seen thy birth, and seen what every hour  
Gave to thy growth, thee to this height to raise,  
And now dost laugh and triumph on this bough,  
    Little think'st thou,  
That it will freeze anon, and that I shall  
To-morrow find thee fallen, or not at all.

Little think'st thou, poor heart,  
That labour'st yet to nestle thee,  
And think'st by hovering here to get a part  
In a forbidden or forbidding tree,  
And hopest her stiffness by long siege to bow,  
    Little think'st thou  
That thou to-morrow, ere the sun doth wake,  
Must with the sun and me a journey take.

But thou, which lov'st to be  
Subtle to plague thyself, wilt say,  
Alas, if you must go, what's that to me?  
Here lies my business, and here I will stay  
You go to friends, whose love and means present  
    Various content  
To your eyes, ears, and taste, and every part;  
If then your body go, what need your heart?

Well then, stay here; but know,  
When thou hast stayed and done thy most,  
A naked thinking heart, that makes no show,  
Is to a woman but a kind of ghost.  
How shall she know my heart; or having none,  
    Know thee for one?  
Practice may make her know some other part;  
But take my word, she doth not know a hear

Meet me in London, then,  
Twenty days hence, and thou shalt see  
Me fresher and more fat, by being with men,  
Than if I had stayed still with her and thee.  
For God's sake, if you can, be you so too;  
I will give you  
There to another friend, whom we shall find  
As glad to have my body as my mind.

*Verse 1:* Little do you know, poor flower, that I have watched for six or seven days, and seen your birth and seen what each hour added to your growth, so as to raise you to this height, and that now laughs and triumphs on this bough, little do you know that the air will freeze soon and tomorrow I will find you fallen or reduced to nothingness.

*Verse 2:* Little do you know, my poor heart, that still endeavours to find a nest, and thinks by hovering here to make a conquest of a forbidden (married?) or forbidding (one who refuses) tree (a woman, with a sexual connotation of entering among its boughs), and hopes to conquer hostility by a long siege: little do you know that before that sun (lady) wakes you must take a journey with me in the sunlight.

*Verse 3:* But you, my heart, who love to make fine distinctions to your own detriment, will ask why my going must concern you. 'Here is where my business lies', you will say, 'and here I will stay: you are visiting friends whose love and means will content your eyes, ears, tongue and every part in various ways. So, since your body is going, why do you need your heart?'

*Verse 4:* Well then, stay here, but you will realise after your stay when you have done the most you can, that a naked thinking heart without a body is to a woman only a kind of ghost; how will she know you are my heart, or since she lacks a heart how will she recognise that you are one? Practice may make her know some other part (practice of sex may make her recognise the sex organs) but take my word for it that she does not know what a heart is (note the conventional misogynistic sentiment).

*Verse 5:* Meet me in London then, twenty days from now, and you will see me more relaxed and contented from being with men, than if I had stayed behind with you and her. If you can be likewise more content with male company, be so: once there I would present you to another friend, who will be as glad to have my body as my mind.

**The Primrose: being at Montgomery Castle**  
**Upon the hill on which it is situate.**

Upon this Primrose hill,  
Where, if heaven would distil  
A shower of rain, each several drop might go  
To his own primrose, and grow manna so;  
And where their form, and their infinity  
Make a terrestrial galaxy,  
As the small stars do in the sky;  
I walk to find a true love; and I see  
That 'tis not a mere woman, that is she,  
But must or more or less than woman be.

Yet know I not, which flower  
I wish; a six, or four;  
For should my true-love less than woman be,  
She were scarce anything; and then, should she  
Be more than woman, she would get above  
All thought of sex, and think to move  
My heart to study her, and not to love.  
Both these were monsters; since there must reside  
Falsehood in woman, I could more abide,  
She were by art, than nature falsified.

Live, primrose, then, and thrive  
With thy true number five;  
And, woman, whom this flower doth represent,  
With this mysterious number be content;  
Ten is the farthest number; if half ten  
Belongs to each woman, then  
Each woman may take half us men;  
Or – if this will not serve their turn – since all  
Numbers are odd, or even, and they fall  
First into five, women may take us all.

*Verse 1:* On this primrose-covered hill, where if heaven were to distil a shower of rain, each drop could fall on its own primrose there are so many, and so provide manna, i.e. spiritual nourishment. And where their form and their boundless number form the image of a galaxy, like those made by the tiny stars in the sky, only on earth: I walk to find a true love (a double meaning, since a primrose sport with four or six petals instead of the normal five was also called a 'true love') and I see that such a true love must be more or less than an ordinary woman.

*Verse 2:* Yet I am not sure which sport I desire, one with six petals or one with four. For if my true love is less than a woman should be (a four-petalled flower) she would hardly be worth anything, and if more than she should be (a six-petalled flower), she would be above all thoughts of sex, and seek to make my heart merely contemplate her rather than loving her. Both such options are monstrous. Since women are of necessity false, I would be happier with art rather than nature falsifying her.

*Verse 3:* So let primroses live and thrive with the regular number of petals, five. And let women who are represented by the flower (associated with love) be content with this mysterious number (five, the number of the pentagram, was also in alchemy the number of the five elements which included the ether or quintessence). Ten is the farthest number, being the number of the tenth celestial sphere, the *Primum Mobile* (added to Ptolemy's model of the heavens by medieval thinkers) which moves all the others. If each woman is represented by the number five which is half ten, then each woman may consort with or take (sexual connotation also) five men. Or if this is not adequate, then since all numbers are odd or even, and five is the sum of the numbers two and three, even and odd, and therefore represents all numbers, then women may take all men.

## The Relic.

When my grave is broke up again  
Some second guest to entertain,  
– For graves have learned that woman-head,  
To be to more than one a bed –  
And he that digs it, spies  
A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,  
Will he not let us alone,  
And think that there a loving couple lies,  
Who thought that this device might be some way  
To make their souls at the last busy day  
Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

If this fall in a time, or land,  
Where mass-devotion doth command,  
Then he that digs us up will bring  
Us to the bishop or the king,  
To make us relics; then  
Thou shalt be a Mary Magdalen, and I  
A something else thereby;  
All women shall adore us, and some men.  
And, since at such time miracles are sought,  
I would have that age by this paper taught  
What miracles we harmless lovers wrought.

First we loved well and faithfully,  
Yet knew not what we loved, nor why;  
Difference of sex we never knew,  
No more than guardian angels do;  
Coming and going we  
Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals;  
Our hands ne'er touched the seals,  
Which nature, injured by late law, sets free.  
These miracles we did; but now alas,  
All measure, and all language, I should pass,  
Should I tell what a miracle she was.

*Verse 1:* When my grave is re-opened so that a second body can be interred there (to utilise the space, a traditional practice, the bones being interred in charnel houses), as graves have acquired that female trait, to be a bed to (or simply, to bed, sleep with) more than one man, and the grave-digger spies a bracelet of bright hair about the bone, surely he will leave us alone, believing that a loving couple lies there, who thought that the charm might allow them to meet at the grave, on Judgement Day, for a short while?

*Verse 2:* If that should occur in a time or reign where Catholicism (mis-devotion, i.e. incorrect religious practice) holds sway, then the grave-digger will take our bones to the Bishop and King, as relics. Then you will be regarded as a Mary Magdalene (traditionally represented with bright or golden hair) and I a person associated with her, one of her lovers (since Christ rose from the tomb, according to Christian belief, Donne clearly does not intend himself as Christ, anyway a blasphemous concept). All women (who all adore lovers) and some men will reverence us. And since people look for miracles at such a time, I would like that future age to be taught by this poem what miracles we harmless lovers performed.

*Verse 3:* Firstly, we loved well and faithfully (a miracle in itself), yet had no idea what or why we loved. We took no more note of each other's sexuality (a second miracle) than our guardian angels would have (the angels being beyond sexuality). Then we might happen to kiss on arrival or departure as is customary, but not between those moments of affection (meals, in the sense of feeding on love: a third miracle). Our hands never touched the seals (each other's sexual organs, a fourth miracle) which nature sets free (allowing free love) while the (then current) laws of marriage precluded sex between unmarried people. These miracles we performed. But now alas, I would exceed all measure and the powers of language if I were to say what a miracle she was (being the fifth miracle, and as *The Primrose* suggests five is the number associated with women).

## **The Damp.**

When I am dead, and doctors know not why,  
    And my friends' curiosity  
Will have me cut up to survey each part,  
When they shall find your picture in my heart,  
    You think a sudden damp of love  
    Will through all their senses move,  
And work on them as me, and so prefer  
Your murder to the name of massacre,

Poor victories; but if you dare be brave,  
    And pleasure in your conquest have,  
First kill th' enormous giant, your Disdain;  
And let th' enchantress Honour, next be slain;  
    And like a Goth and Vandal rise,  
    Deface records and histories  
Of your own arts and triumphs over men,  
And without such advantage kill me then,

For I could muster up, as well as you,  
    My giants, and my witches too,  
Which are vast Constancy and Secretness;  
But these I neither look for nor profess;  
    Kill me as woman, let me die  
    As a mere man; do you but try  
Your passive valour, and you shall find then,  
Naked you have odds enough of any man.

*Verse 1:* When I am dead and the doctors have no idea why, and my friends, curious to know, perform an autopsy to examine each part, and they find your picture in my heart, you believe that a sudden poisonous mist of love will invade their senses, and act on them as it did on me, and so promote what you have done from murder to massacre.

*Verse 2:* That is a cheap victory over us men. But if you dare to be brave, and take true satisfaction from your conquest, first kill the enormous giant Disdain, and then slay the enchantress Honour (both guardians of feigned chastity), and like the Goths and Vandals deface the public records (e.g. at the sacking of Rome in 455), and therefore the histories of women's deceptions and triumphs over men, and then kill me when free of those advantages.

*Verse 3:* For I could muster my giant and my witch, Constancy and Secrecy (the cloaks under which a man might lay siege to a woman) though I neither expect them from you, nor profess to them myself. Kill me (make me die of love, also exhaust me sexually) as woman does, and let me die being a mere man. Be brave in a passive manner, and you will find that naked you have the advantage (in inspiring love, and in sexual stamina) over any man.

## **The Dissolution.**

She's dead; and all which die  
To their first elements resolve;  
And we were mutual elements to us,  
And made of one another.  
My body then doth hers involve,  
And those things whereof I consist hereby  
In me abundant grow, and burdenous,  
And nourish not, but smother.  
My fire of passion, sighs of air,  
Water of tears, and earthly sad despair,  
Which my materials be,  
But near worn out by love's security,  
She, to my loss, doth by her death repair.  
And I might live long wretched so,  
But that my fire doth with my fuel grow.  
Now, as those active kings  
Whose foreign conquest treasure brings,  
Receive more, and spend more, and soonest break,  
This – which I am amazed that I can speak –  
This death, hath with my store  
My use increased.  
And so my soul, more earnestly released,  
Will outstrip hers; as bullets flown before  
A latter bullet may o'ertake, the powder being more.

*Verse 1:* She's dead, and all things that die dissolve to their primal elements; and we supplied mutual elements to each other, and were made up of one another. My body therefore includes hers, and hence the things I consist of, become over-abundant in me, and overburden me, and smother me instead of nourishing me. The four materials or elements that compose me, my fire of passion, my sighs of air, my water of tears, and sad earthly despair, which were nearly exhausted by love's wastefulness (a former usage, 'security' meaning lack of consideration, carelessness), she by her death re-supplies, to my disadvantage. And I might live wretchedly a long time like this, except that my fire, passion, grows again with the new fuel for it. Now, as kings who wage war gain treasure by foreign conquest acquire more wealth, but spend more and are the first to become bankrupt, this death (which I am amazed I can speak about) has increased my expenditure of the elements (in passion, sighs, tears and despair) with their increase within me. And so my soul, released more forcefully by this increased expenditure of elements leading to my death, will overtake hers, as a bullet launched by a greater charge of gunpowder will overtake one fired with a lesser charge (note the play on Ann More's name, the powder, the charge, being 'more')

## A Jet Ring Sent.

Thou art not so black as my heart,  
Nor half so brittle as her heart, thou art;  
What would'st thou say? Shall both our properties by thee be spoke,  
– ‘Nothing more endless, nothing sooner broke?’

Marriage rings are not of this stuff;  
Oh, why should ought less precious, or less tough  
Figure our loves? Except in thy name thou have bid it say,  
– ‘I’m cheap, and nought but fashion; fling me away.’

Yet stay with me since thou art come,  
Circle this finger’s top, which didst her thumb;  
Be justly proud, and gladly safe, that thou dost dwell with me;  
She that, O, broke her faith, would soon break thee!

*Verse 1:* You (the ring) are not as black as my heart, or as brittle as hers. What thought do you express or betoken? Do you symbolise both qualities of our love, nothing is more eternal (just as the ring is endless, being circular) nothing is sooner broken (just as jet is brittle)?

*Verse 2:* Marriage rings are not made of jet. Why should something less precious than is used for them, or less durable, be used as a token of our two loves? Unless by your very name (to jet, to throw out or away) you express the thought: ‘I am of little value, and merely a thing of fashion, of the moment: so throw me away.’

*Verse 3:* But remain with me now you are here, and circle my finger as you did her thumb. Be rightfully proud, and enjoy being safe in being with me, since she who broke her faith to me, would soon break you.

## Negative Love.

I never stooped so low, as they  
Which on an eye, cheek, lip, can prey;  
    Seldom to them which soar no higher  
    Than virtue, or the mind to admire.  
For sense and understanding may  
    Know what gives fuel to their fire;  
My love, though silly, is more brave;  
For may I miss, whene'er I crave,  
If I know yet what I would have.

If that be simply perfectest,  
Which can by no way be expressed  
    But negatives, my love is so.  
    To all, which all love, I say no.  
If any who deciphers best,  
    What we know not, ourselves, can know,  
Let him teach me that nothing. This  
As yet my ease and comfort is,  
Though I speed not, I cannot miss.

*Verse 1:* I have never stooped so low as those who can only find love in a lovely eye, cheek or lip. And I have seldom stooped as low as those who can be satisfied with finding and admiring a lover's virtue or intellect. Because in the one case the senses, and in the other the understanding can grasp what it is that fuels their passion. My love, though foolish or innocent, is braver than theirs. May I fail to find what I crave if it is merely something I already comprehend.

*Verse 2:* If the most perfect thing can only be expressed (as Aquinas speculated concerning the deity) by what it is not, by negatives, then my love is perfect. To all the things other men love, I say no. If any man is so skilled at deciphering mysteries that he is able to understand what we have no understanding of, our own selves, then perhaps he can teach me about that nothingness. This is my consolation so far, that though I do not succeed (former usage for 'speed', to be or make successful) I cannot fail (since no one can fail to find nothing).

## **The Prohibition.**

Take heed of loving me;  
At least remember, I forbade it thee;  
Not that I shall repair my unthrifty waste  
Of breath and blood, upon thy sighs and tears,  
By being to thee then what to me thou wast;  
But so great joy our life at once outwears.  
Then, lest thy love by my death frustrate be,  
If thou love me, take heed of loving me.

Take heed of hating me,  
Or too much triumph in the victory;  
Not that I shall be mine own officer,  
And hate with hate again retaliate;  
But thou wilt lose the style of conqueror,  
If I, thy conquest, perish by thy hate.  
Then, lest my being nothing lessen thee,  
If thou hate me, take heed of hating me.

Yet love and hate me too;  
So these extremes shall ne'er their office do;  
Love me, that I may die the gentler way;  
Hate me, because thy love's too great for me;  
Or let these two, themselves, not me, decay;  
So shall I live thy stage, not triumph be.  
Lest thou thy love and hate, and me undo,  
O let me live, yet love and hate me too.

*Verse 1:* Beware of loving me, or at least remember, I forbade you to love me. Not because I will restore my breath and blood with your sighs and tears, which I heedlessly wasted (in producing my sighs and tears), by being to you what you once were to me, but because such great joy wears out our being, our life. So if you don't wish your love to be frustrated by my dying, then if you love me, beware of loving me.

*Verse 2:* Beware of hating me, or triumphing too much in your conquest of me. Not because I will act on my own behalf and repay hatred with hatred, but because you will lose the right to be called a conqueror if I, your conquest, perish through your hatred. So if you don't wish my being reduced to nothing to detract from your triumph, then if you hate me, beware of hating me.

*Verse 3:* Yet, love and hate me too (cf: Catullus 85: *odi et amo*), so these two extreme passions cancel each other out. Love me, so I may die the gentler way (through orgasm). Hate me, since your love is too powerful for me. Or let these two not destroy me themselves, and then I shall be a living exhibition, a stage, for you to display your conquest, rather than a triumph (where captives were later slaughtered). Lest you destroy your love and hatred and me, in order to let me live, love and hate me too.

## **The Expiration.**

So, so, break off this last lamenting kiss,  
Which sucks two souls, and vapours both away;  
Turn, thou ghost, that way, and let me turn this,  
And let ourselves benight our happiest day.  
We ask none leave to love; nor will we owe  
Any so cheap a death as saying, "Go."

Go; and if that word have not quite killed thee,  
Ease me with death, by bidding me go too.  
Or, if it have, let my word work on me,  
And a just office on a murderer do.  
Except it be too late, to kill me so,  
Being double dead, going, and bidding, go.

*Verse 1:* So, so, break off this last sorrowful kiss, which sucks out our two souls and turns them to vapour. You, ghost, turn that way, and let me turn this, and let us darken our own day ourselves (by parting). We never asked anyone for permission to love, nor will we owe anyone for our death, so easily obtained merely by saying: go.

*Verse 2:* Go, and if the word itself has not quite killed you, make my death easy by telling me to go too. Oh, if it has killed you, let the word I uttered work against me, and perform a just sentence on the murderer by executing me. Except that it is too late to kill me in that way, since I am already doubly dead through parting from you, and telling you to go also.

## **The Computation.**

For my first twenty years, since yesterday,  
    I scarce believed thou couldst be gone away;  
For forty more I fed on favours past,  
    And forty on hopes that thou wouldst they might last;  
Tears drowned one hundred, and sighs blew out two;  
    A thousand, I did neither think nor do,  
Or not divide, all being one thought of you;  
    Or in a thousand more, forgot that too.  
Yet call not this long life; but think that I  
Am, by being dead, immortal; can ghosts die?

*Verse 1:* For the first twenty years (at a rate of a hundred years for each hour) since yesterday, I hardly believed you had gone. For the next forty years I thought about past favours from you, and spent the next forty on hopes that you and your favours would endure. Tears drowned a hundred years, and sighs blew out two hundred, and for another thousand I neither thought nor acted, or I did not divide them, since they were all one thought of you. Or perhaps in a further thousand years (making two thousand four hundred in all, or twenty four hours) I forgot that thought too. But don't call this a lengthening of life (hundreds of years for hours), rather think me immortal being dead (killed by their parting) and can ghosts die?

## **The Paradox.**

No lover saith, I love, nor any other  
    Can judge a perfect lover;  
He thinks that else none can or will agree,  
    That any loves but he;  
I cannot say I loved, for who can say  
    He was killed yesterday?  
Love with excess of heat, more young than old,  
    Death kills with too much cold;

We die but once, and who loved last did die,  
    He that saith, twice, doth lie;  
For though he seem to move, and stir a while,  
    It doth the sense beguile.  
Such life is like the light which bideth yet  
    When the life's light is set,  
Or like the heat which fire in solid matter  
    Leaves behind, two hours after.

Once I loved and died; and am now become  
    Mine epitaph and tomb;  
Here dead men speak their last, and so do I;  
    Love-slain, lo, here I die!

*Verse 1:* No lover says: I love. Nor can any other person pass judgement on an exacting lover. For he thinks that no one else can say, I love: nor that anyone can be in love but himself. And I cannot say, I loved, because who can say that he was killed yesterday (since love kills but one cannot be dead and yet alive)? Love, which possesses excess heat being younger rather than older, Death kills, through excessive cold (disdain etc.). We only die once, and he who loved lately died of it. Whoever says we die twice is lying. Though the lover seems to breathe after death, and move for a while, it is a sensory deception. Such an extension of apparent life is like the twilight that lingers after sunset, or like the heat left behind in solid material by a fire that has died out two hours previously. I once loved and died, and now I am my own epitaph and tomb. Here dead men speak their last words (in epitaphs they write for themselves) and so do I: I lie here slain by Love.

**Song.**

Soul's joy, now I am gone,  
    And you alone,  
    – Which cannot be,  
Since I must leave myself with thee,  
    And carry thee with me –  
    Yet when unto our eyes  
    Absence denies  
    Each other's sight,  
And makes to us a constant night,  
    When others change to light;  
    O give no way to grief,  
    But let belief  
    Of mutual love  
    This wonder to the vulgar prove,  
    Our bodies, not we, move.

Let not thy wit bewEEP  
    Words but sense deep;  
    For when we miss  
By distance our hope's joining bliss,  
    Even then our souls shall kiss;  
    Fools have no means to meet,  
    But by their feet;  
    Why should our clay  
Over our spirits so much sway,  
    To tie us to that way?  
    O give no way to grief, &c.

*Verse 1:* Soul's joy, I am gone and you are left alone, which cannot be, since I leave my heart with you and take yours away with me. Yet when absence denies us sight of each other and makes it continual night for us when it is day for others, don't grieve, but allow belief in mutual love to prove to the uninitiated that though our bodies are apart, we ourselves are not.

*Verse 2:* Don't let your mind grieve over words which are only as deep as the senses, since though the distance between our bodies causes us to lose the bliss of our bodies' meeting which we hope for, even then our souls will kiss. Fools can only meet by using their feet to bring their bodies to one another; but why should our bodies hold so much power over our spirits? Don't grieve, but allow belief in mutual love to prove to the uninitiated that though our bodies are apart, we ourselves are not.

## Farewell to Love.

Whilst yet to prove  
I thought there was some deity in love,  
So did I reverence, and gave  
Worship; as atheists at their dying hour  
Call, what they cannot name, an unknown power,  
As ignorantly did I crave.

Thus when  
Things not yet known are coveted by men,  
Our desires give them fashion, and so  
As they wax lesser, fall, as they size, grow.

But, from late fair,  
His highness sitting in a golden chair,  
Is not less cared for after three days  
By children, than the thing which lovers so  
Blindly admire, and with such worship woo;  
Being had, enjoying it decays;  
And thence,  
What before pleased them all, takes but one sense,  
And that so lamely, as it leaves behind  
A kind of sorrowing dullness to the mind.

Ah cannot we,  
As well as cocks and lions, jocund be  
After such pleasures, unless wise  
Nature decreed (since each such act, they say,  
Diminisheth the length of life a day)  
This; as she would man should despise  
The sport,  
Because that other curse of being short,  
And only for a minute made to be  
Eager, desires to raise posterity.

Since so, my mind  
Shall not desire what no man else can find;  
I'll no more dote and run  
To pursue things which had endamaged me;  
And when I come where moving beauties be,  
As men do when the summer's sun  
Grows great,  
Though I admire their greatness, shun their heat.  
Each place can afford shadows; if all fail,  
'Tis but applying worm-seed to the tail.

*Verse 1:* While still inexperienced (to be proven) I thought Love was some kind of deity and worshipped him accordingly. As atheists at their dying hour call on some unknown power which they cannot bring themselves to name, so I craved in my ignorance for love. Just as men desire things which are as yet unknown, and their desire gives shape to them, making them seem less when the desire is less, greater when the desire is greater.

*Verse 2:* But an image (or equivalent) of a king in a golden chair bought at the fairground is as neglected after three days as is the object of a lover's desire, wooed so adoringly. Being had (sexually etc), enjoyment wanes, and what once pleased all the senses now occupies only one, and that unpleasantly, since it leaves behind a kind of sorrowing dullness in the mind (traditionally the sixth sense).

*Verse 3:* Why can't we be as happy as cocks or lions after such pleasures? (Galen suggested they do not feel post-coital depression). Unless wise Nature decreed it, since they say that each sexual act diminishes the length of life by a day, so that men would despise love-making because the other curse of it lasting only briefly would otherwise encourage men to repeat it often (to produce posterity: children, and successive moments of pleasure).

*Verse 4:* Since this is so, my mind shall not desire what no other man can find (a deity in Love). I will no longer dote on and pursue things which harm me. And when I come to where beautiful women are that might move me to love, I will shun their passion though admiring their power, as men do when the summer sun is hot and they shun its heat. Every place (or level of society) gives opportunities for shadow (or opportunities to shun society). If all that fails, it is only a case of applying worm-seed (the minute flower buds of the Levantine plant, *Artemisia cina*, used traditionally in Europe to expel worms from the intestine and combat fever) to the tail (slang for the male or female sexual organ, that is to treat the penis like a worm and treat it with a specific against worms, i.e. with an aphrodisiac, or to treat the vagina likewise and have it expel all male organs, or worms).

## A Lecture upon the Shadow.

Stand still, and I will read to thee  
A lecture, Love, in Love's philosophy.  
    These three hours that we have spent,  
    Walking here, two shadows went  
Along with us, which we ourselves produced.  
But, now the sun is just above our head,  
    We do those shadows tread,  
    And to brave clearness all things are reduced.  
So whilst our infant loves did grow,  
Disguises did, and shadows, flow  
From us and our cares; but now 'tis not so.

That love hath not attained the highest degree,  
Which is still diligent lest others see.

Except our loves at this noon stay,  
We shall new shadows make the other way.  
    As the first were made to blind  
    Others, these which come behind  
Will work upon ourselves, and blind our eyes.  
If our loves faint, and westwardly decline,  
    To me thou, falsely, thine  
    And I to thee mine actions shall disguise.  
The morning shadows wear away,  
But these grow longer all the day;  
But O! Love's day is short, if love decay.

Love is a growing, or full constant light,  
And his short minute, after noon, is night.

*Verse 1:* Stand still, love, and I will read you a lecture about the philosophy of Love. During the three hours we have spent walking here our two shadows, which we produced, accompanied us. But now the sun is directly overhead and so we tread on those same shadows and everywhere is free of shadow, and seen sharply clear. In the same way, while our loves had their infancy and were growing, our cautiousness meant that we masked them from others and let shadows flow from us to cloak our love. But that is not the case now.

*Verse 2:* That love is not at its zenith, has not achieved its greatest intensity, which still takes care that others do not see it.

*Verse 3:* Unless our love remains at its zenith, we will be obliged to produce new shadows on the opposite side of us, as the sun sinks and we walk on. The first shadows were designed to conceal our love from others, but the new ones will affect us and blind our eyes. If our love grows faint and declines towards the west like the sun, you will disguise your actions towards me, deceitfully, and I will do the same with mine towards you. Morning shadows grow shorter, but afternoon shadows lengthen all the rest of the day until sunset, though love's day is short in duration if love is decaying.

*Verse 4:* Love is a growing, or a constant light (at its zenith), and its first minute after noon (when it begins to fade) is already night.

**End of the Songs and Sonnets**