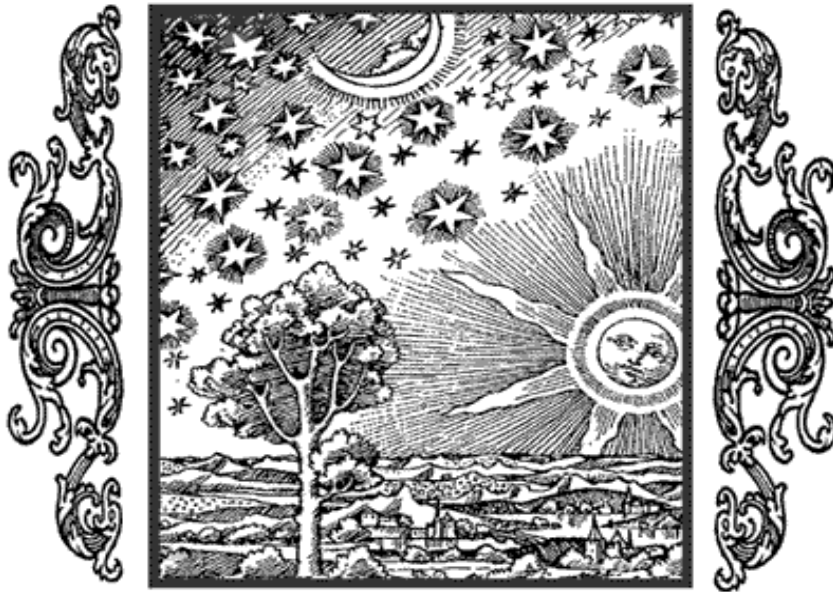


JOHN DONNE



SELECTED POEMS

Compiled by Emma Laybourn 2018

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John Donne

Selected Poems

Introduction

John Donne was born in 1572 into a London Catholic family. His mother was the daughter of the playwright John Heywood, and the great-niece of Sir Thomas More. His father died when he was young and his mother remarried a Catholic physician.

Donne was educated at home, but was debarred by his faith from attending Oxford or Cambridge universities. He became a law student in London in 1592, and renounced the Catholic faith at about the same time. He seems to have sailed to Spain and the Azores with the Duke of Essex and Raleigh, before returning to England to become an MP.

In 1601 he secretly married Ann More, but on the marriage's discovery was dismissed from his post and briefly imprisoned. For the next few years he depended on the help of friends and patrons, including Lucy, Countess of Bedford, to whom he addressed many poems. He entered the Anglican Church as a chaplain in 1615.

Two years later Ann died aged 33 after giving birth to their twelfth child. Donne continued to rise in the church, becoming a celebrated preacher and the Dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London. He died in 1631.

Many of Donne's poems, particularly the *Songs and Sonets*, are impossible to date, although the *Satires* and *Elegies* were apparently written in the 1590s, and a few other works can be dated by events that they refer to. Both his poems and his sermons were collected by his son John and published in the years after his death.

Donne is nowadays considered one of the most notable English poets of both love and religion. He is regarded as the founder and possibly the greatest of the Metaphysical Poets (others included George Herbert and Andrew Marvell.) However, this is not a term that Donne himself would have recognised; it appears to have been first used in the 18th century by Pope and Dr. Johnson. Metaphysical poetry has little to do with Metaphysics, which is a branch of philosophy. Rather, it is characterised by its use of extended metaphors or 'conceits', often elaborate and complex comparisons that weave their way through the poems.

Donne sometimes mingled different types of poetry, so that love poems may double as satires, and religious sonnets are framed like love poems. His work is frequently paradoxical and puzzling; but it can also be direct, heart-felt, and very human.

This selection of seventy poems and extracts has been made from *The Poems of John Donne*, edited by Herbert J.C. Grierson (1912, Clarendon Press, Oxford), which is available free online from [Project Gutenberg](http://www.gutenberg.org). Poems are grouped in the same sequence as within that volume.

In this selection, spellings have been modernised and the punctuation slightly modified for the sake of clarity. Apostrophes have been left in place where they show that two words are to be run together: e.g. in *to'have*, which for the sake of scansion should be one syllable rather than two. Where appropriate, an accent has been added to aid scansion: e.g. to show that the *ed* in *placèd* forms a separate syllable.

Notes have been added after some poems to explain obscure words or references. For more detailed annotations, the Penguin edition of Donne's *Complete English Poems*, edited by A.J. Smith, is recommended.

Emma Laybourn MA PGCE

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From *Songs and Sonets*



The Good-Morrow

I wonder by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we lov'd? Were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd 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 desir'd, 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 every where.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp North, without declining West?
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

Notes

The Seven Sleepers' den: According to Christian and Islamic tradition, the Seven Sleepers were a group of young men from Ephesus in the 3rd century who sought refuge from religious persecution in a cave, and emerged 300 years later.
'*Whatever dies, was not mixed equally*' – this could be a reference to medical theories of the humours, or to the principles of alchemy.



Song (Go and catch a falling star)

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 beest 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.

Note

Mandrake – a plant with a large forked root, thought to resemble the human form and thus to have magical properties.



Woman's Constancy

Now thou hast lov'd me one whole day,
Tomorrow when thou leav'st, 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 purpos'd 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.

Note

scapes – could mean either escapes from a contract; or views, opinions.



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 t' impart
The skill of specular stone,
When he which can have learn'd 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 attir'd 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.

Notes

The Worthies – these were the nine most celebrated warriors in history, from Ancient Troy to the Middle Ages.

specular stone – a legendary type of transparent stone



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 tomorrow late, tell me,
Whether both th' Indias of spice and mine
Be where thou leftst 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 every where;
This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere.

Notes

'*th' Indias of spice and mine*' – the East Indies, renowned for spices, and the West Indies, known for gold mines.

'*Princes do but play us*' – i.e. princes act us, pretend to be us



The Indifferent

I can love both fair and brown,
Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want betrays,
Her who loves loneness best, and her who masques and plays,
Her whom the country form'd, 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?
Oh 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 travail 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, examin'd, and return'd 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.



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 reign, 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 comfitures of Court,
Or city's quelque-choses, let report
My mind transport.

The bargain's good; if, when I'm old, I be
Inflam'd by thee,
If thine own honour, or my shame, or 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 loves me.

Notes

relict = a cast-off or left-over; could also mean a widow

comfiture = *sweetmeat*

quelque-choses – this French phrase meaning ‘somethings’ developed into *kickshaws*, meaning fancy dishes or trinkets.



The Canonization

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsy, or my gout,
My five gray hairs, or ruin'd 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 injur'd by my love?
What merchant's ships have my sighs drown'd?
Who says my tears have overflow'd his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veins fill
Add one more to the plaguey bill?
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.

Call us 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 tombs and 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 canoniz'd 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!

Notes

'*When did my colds a forward spring remove?*' – i.e. when did my chills prevent an early Spring?

the phoenix riddle – the phoenix was a mythical bird, of which only one could exist at a time; it renewed itself by burning, when a new phoenix would rise out of the ashes.

chronicle = history

epitomize = summarise



The Triple Fool

I am two fools, I know,
For loving, and for saying so
In whining poetry;
But where's that wiseman, 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.

Note

'Set and sing my pain' – i.e. set my poem to music

[↑](#)

Song (Sweetest love, I do not go)

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
Must die at last, 'tis best
To use myself in jest
Thus by feign'd deaths to die.

Yesternight the sun went hence,
And yet is here today;
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't 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 lov'st 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 turn'd aside to sleep;
They who one another keep
Alive, ne'er parted be.

↑

The Legacy

When I died last, 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 should 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 ripp'd me, and search'd where hearts did lie,
It kill'd 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 seem'd; and therefore for our losses sad,
I meant to send that heart in stead of mine,
But oh, no man could hold it, for twas thine.

Note

cozen = deceive



A Fever

Oh 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, goest,
It stay, 'tis but thy carcass 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 much 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 persèver.
For I had rather owner be
Of thee one hour, than all else ever.

Notes

wrangling schools = arguing philosophers

firmament = the heavens, which are fixed and unchanging.



Air and Angels

Twice or thrice had I lov'd thee,
Before I knew thy face or name,
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame,
Angels affect us oft, and worship'd be;
 Still when, to where thou wert, I came,
Some lovely glorious nothing I did 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 pinnacle overfraught,
 Ev'ry thy hair for love to work upon
Is much too much, some fitter must be sought;
 For, nor in nothing, nor in things
Extreme, and scatt'ring 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 and Angels' purity,
Twixt women's love, and men's, will ever be.

Notes

subtle = intangible; could also mean crafty

pinnacle = sailing boat

inhere = exist permanently in



The Anniversary

All Kings, and all their favourites,
All glory of honours, beauties, wits,
The sun itself, which makes times, 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 tomorrow 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 blessed;
But we 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.

Notes

corse = corpse

inmates = temporary lodgers



A Valediction: of My Name in the Window

I

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

II

'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.

III

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.

IV

Or if too hard and deep
This learning be, for a scratch'd 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.

V

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.

VI

Till my return, repair
And recompact my scatter'd body so,
As all the virtuous powers which are
Fix'd in the stars, are said to flow
Into such characters as gravèd be
When these stars have supremacy:

VII

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.

VIII

When thy inconsiderate hand
Flings ope 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.

IX

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

X

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

XI

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;
Impute this idle talk, to that I go,
For dying men talk often so.

Notes

'*My ruinous Anatomy*' – my corpse

'*My Genius*' – my spirit



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 vials, 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.

Notes

Twickenham Park was for several years the home of Donne's patroness, the Countess of Bedford.

mandrake – the mandrake plant was supposed to have human properties and to cry out when it was uprooted.



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 divorc'd, 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 rigg'd fair ships to lie in harbours,
And not to seek lands, or not to deal withal?
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.

Note

jointures = money that goes to a widow after her husband's death, often until she remarries



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 phantasy,
Therefore thou wakd'st me wisely; yet
My dream thou brok'st 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 wak'd me;
Yet I thought thee
(For thou lovest truth) an Angel, at first sight;
But when I saw thou sawest 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 show'd 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 cam'st to kindle, goest to come; then I
Will dream that hope again, but else would die.

↑

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, Afrique, 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 mix'd 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.

Notes

divers = different, separate

'to drown me in thy sphere' – the moon's sphere was the extent of its power of attraction



The Flea

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be;
Thou knowest 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.

Oh 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 suck'd from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and sayest 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.



The Message

Send home my long stray'd eyes to me,
Which (Oh) too long have dwelt on thee;
Yet since there they have learn'd 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;
But if it be taught by thine
 To make jestings
 Of protestings,
 And cross 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.

↑

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 interr'd; 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 ruin'd 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 limbeck, am the grave
 Of all, that's nothing. Oft a flood
 Have we two wept, and so

Drown'd the whole world, us two; oft did we grow,
To be two chaoses, when we did show
Care to ought 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.

Notes

It's not known when this poem was written, or about whom; possibly Donne's wife Anne (who died in 1617); or his patroness Lucy the Countess of Bedford, or his daughter Lucy, who both died in 1627.

St Lucy's Day – 13th Dec, which was the shortest day of the year before the British calendar was revised in the 18th century.

flasks – as if the sun contained flasks of gunpowder.

hydroptic – a medical term meaning swollen with fluid, or thirsty.

limbeck = alembic, which is a distilling jar; or something that refines as if by distillation.

The Goat – the constellation of Capricorn, which signified lust.



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.

Then will the river whispering run
Warmed by thine eyes more than the Sun;
And there the 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 dark'nest 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' wand'ring eyes.

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

Notes

The poem echoes Christopher Marlowe's poem of 1599, *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love*, which begins:

Come live with me and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove,
That Valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

Walter Raleigh had already written a response to Marlowe's poem in 1600, with *The Nymph's Reply*. It begins:

If all the world and love were young,
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move
To live with thee and be thy love.

Neither of these poems used Donne's fishing theme.

sleeve-silk = silk thread that is not twisted, and can be used for embroidery – or making fishing flies.



The Apparition

When by thy scorn, O murd'ress, I am dead,
 And that thou think'st thee free
From all solicitation from me,
Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,
And thee, feign'd 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
Bath'd 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 threat'nings rest still innocent.

Notes

feign'd vestal = pretended virgin

aspen = shaking, trembling (like an aspen tree in the wind)



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 flask 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'd 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.

Notes

'it can ten in less space devour' – i.e. love can devour ten people in less than an hour

a flask of powder = a flask of gunpowder

chained shot – a type of cannonball with the two halves of the sphere linked by a chain. This was used to destroy the rigging of boats, and would have a destructive effect on men.

the fry = small fish

'nothing can to nothing fall' – i.e. nothing can be totally destroyed



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,
The breath goes now, 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
Absence, because it doth remove
 Those things which elemented it.

But we, by a love so much refin'd
 That our selves know not what it is,
Inter-assured 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 airy 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 the other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
 And makes me end, where I begun.

Notes

'Moving of th' earth' – i.e. earthquakes

sublunary = literally, under the moon; terrestrial, commonplace



The Ecstasy

Where, like a pillow on a bed,
 A pregnant bank swell'd up, to rest
The violet's reclining head,
 Sat we two, one another's best.
Our hands were firmly cemented
 With a fast balm, which thence did spring,
Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
 Our eyes upon one double string;
So to'intergraft 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 refin'd
 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 mix'd 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 compos'd 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're ours, though they're not we; we are
 The intelligences, they the sphere.
 We owe them thanks, because they thus
 Did us, to us, at first convey,
 Yielded their forces, sense, to us,
 Nor are dross to us, but allay.
 On man heaven's influence works not so,
 But that it first imprints the air,
 So 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
 T'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 reveal'd 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.

Notes

ecstasy in the 17th century had the sense of trance: a state in which the body was stupefied while the mind contemplated divine things.

all several souls = all separate souls

atomies = components, elements

dross = waste matter formed when smelting metals

allay = alloy, or mixture of metals



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 condemn'd to die.

Whate'er she meant by't, bury it with me,
For since I am
Love's martyr, it might breed idolatry,
If into others' 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 save none of me, I bury some of you.

Notes

'to shroud me' – i.e. to prepare me for burial in a shroud.

'the sinewy thread' – refers to the 17th century view of the nervous system.

bravery – can mean bravado as well as courage.



The Blossom

Little think'st thou, poor flower,
Whom I have watch'd 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 fall'n, 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 hop'st her stiffness by long siege to bow:
Little think'st thou,
That thou to-morrow, ere that Sun doth wake,
Must with this 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 tongue, and every part.
If then your body go, what need you a heart?

Well then, stay here; but know,
When thou hast stay'd 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 heart.

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



The Relic

When my grave is broke up again
Some second guest to entertain,
(For graves have learn'd 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 mis-devotion doth command,
Then he that digs us up, will bring
Us to the Bishop, and 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 lov'd well and faithfully,
Yet knew not what we lov'd, nor why;
Difference of sex no more we knew
Than our guardian angels do;
Coming and going, we
Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals;
Our hands ne'er touch'd the seals,
Which nature, injur'd 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.

Note

mis-devotion = devotion aimed at the wrong object



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 thorough 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,
In that you've odds enough of any man.

Notes

damp = unhealthy or poisonous vapour

In some MSS the last line reads: 'Naked you've odds enough of any man.'



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, least 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, least my being nothing lessen thee,
If thou hate me, take heed of hating me.

Yet, love and hate me too,
So, these extremes shall neither's 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 bee;
Lest thou thy love and hate and me undo,
To let me live, O 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 our selves benight our happiest day,
We ask'd none leave to love; nor will we owe
Any, so cheap a death, as saying, Go;

Go; and if that word have not quite kill'd thee,
Ease me with death, by bidding me go too.
Oh, 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.



The Computation

For the first twenty years, since yesterday,
I scarce believ'd thou could'st be gone away,
For forty more, I fed on favours past,
And forty'on hopes, that thou wouldst, they might last.
Tears drown'd 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?

Notes

'that thou wouldst, they might last' – i.e. that you wish they might last.



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 produc'd;
But, now the Sun is just above our head,
 We do those shadows tread;
 And to brave clearness all things are reduc'd.
So whilst our infant loves did grow,
Disguises did, and shadows, flow
From us, and our cares; but now 'tis not so.

That love has not attain'd the high'st 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 oh, love's day is short, if love decay.

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



From *Elegies*

Elegy 1: Jealousy

Fond woman, which would'st have thy husband die,
And yet complain'st of his great jealousy;
If, swoll'n with poison, he lay in'his last bed,
His body with a sere-bark coverèd,
Drawing his breath as thick and short as can
The nimblest crocheting musician,
Ready with loathsome vomiting to spew
His soul out of one hell into a new,
Made deaf with his poor kindred's howling cries,
Begging with few feign'd tears great legacies,
Thou wouldst not weep, but jolly'and frolic be,
As a slave, which tomorrow should be free;
Yet weep'st thou, when thou seest him hungerly
Swallow his own death, heart's-bane jealousy.
O give him many thanks, he's courteous,
That in suspecting kindly warneth us.
We must not, as we used, flout openly,
In scoffing riddles, his deformity;
Nor at his board together being sat,
With words, nor touch, scarce looks, adulterate.
Nor when he, swoll'n, and pamper'd with great fare,
Sits down and snorts, caged in his basket chair,
Must we usurp his own bed any more,
Nor kiss and play in his house, as before.
Now I see many dangers; for that is
His realm, his castle, and his diocese.
But if, as envious men, which would revile
Their Prince, or coin his gold, themselves exile
Into another country, and do it there,
We play'in another house, what should we fear?
There we will scorn his household policies,
His silly plots, and pensionary spies,
As the inhabitants of Thames' right side
Do London's mayor, or Germans, the Pope's pride.

Notes

sere-bark = dry sores, scabs

silly = simple

pensionary = paid

'As the inhabitants of Thames' right side/Do London's mayor' – the authority of the Lord Mayor of London was disputed south of the river Thames.

'Or Germans, the Pope's pride' – the Germans, following Martin Luther, opposed the Pope's authority.



Elegy 2: The Anagram

Marry, and love thy Flavia, for she
Hath all things whereby others beauteous be,
For, though her eyes be small, her mouth is great,
Though they be ivory, yet her teeth be jet,
Though they be dim, yet she is light enough,
And though her harsh hair fall, her skin is rough;
What though her cheeks be yellow, her hair's red;
Give her thine, and she hath a maidenhead.
These things are beauty's elements, where these
Meet in one, that one must, as perfect, please.
If red and white and each good quality
Be in thy wench, ne'er ask where it doth lie.
In buying things perfum'd, we ask if there
Be musk and amber in it, but not where.
Though all her parts be not in th'usual place,
She hath yet an anagram of a good face.
If we might put the letters but one way,
In the lean dearth of words, what could we say?
When by the Gamut some Musicians make
A perfect song, others will undertake,
By the same Gamut chang'd, to equal it.
Things simply good can never be unfit.
She's fair as any, if all be like her,
And if none be, then she is singular.
All love is wonder; if we justly do
Account her wonderful, why not lovely too?
Love built on beauty, soon as beauty, dies;
Choose this face, chang'd by no deformities.
Women are all like angels; the fair be
Like those which fell to worse; but such as she,
Like to good angels, nothing can impair:
'Tis less grief to be foul than to've been fair.
For one night's revels, silk and gold we choose,
But, in long journeys, cloth and leather use.
Beauty is barren oft; best husbands say,
There is best land where there is foulest way.
Oh what a sovereign plaster will she be,
If thy past sins have taught thee jealousy!
Here needs no spies, nor eunuchs; her commit
Safe to thy foes; yea, to a marmoset.
When Belgia's cities the round countries drown,
That dirty foulness guards, and arms the town:
So doth her face guard her; and so, for thee,
Which, forc'd by business, absent oft must be,
She, whose face, like clouds, turns the day to night;
Who, mightier than the sea, makes Moors seem white;
Who, though seven years she in the stews had laid,

A Nunnery durst receive, and think a maid;
And though in childbed's labour she did lie,
Midwives would swear 'twere but a tympany;
Whom, if she accuse herself, I credit less
Than witches, which impossibles confess;
Whom dildoes, bedstaves, and her velvet glass
Would be as loath to touch as Joseph was:
One like none, and lik'd of none, fittest were,
For, things in fashion every man will wear.

Notes

gamut = complete scale of musical notes

husbands could mean farmers or landowners as well as married men.

sovereign plaster = good remedy

marmoset = marmoset, a small monkey

'When Belgia's cities the round countries drown' – when the (flat) land around Belgium's cities floods

stews = brothels

tympany = swelling in the abdomen

'As Joseph was' – in the Bible (Genesis Ch. 39) Joseph refused to sleep with Potiphar's wife.



Elegy 5: His Picture

Here take my picture; though I bid farewell,
Thine, in my heart, where my soul dwells, shall dwell.
'Tis like me now, but I dead, 'twill be more
When we are shadows both, than 'twas before.
When weather-beaten I come back, my hand,
Perhaps with rude oars torn, or sun beams tann'd,
My face and breast of haircloth, and my head
With care's rash sudden storms being o'erspread,
My body's a sack of bones, broken within,
And powder's blue stains scatter'd on my skin;
If rival fools tax thee to 'have lov'd a man
So foul and coarse as, oh, I may seem then,
This shall say what I was: and thou shalt say,
Do his hurts reach me? doth my worth decay?
Or do they reach his judging mind, that he
Should now love less, what he did love to see?
That which in him was fair and delicate,
Was but the milk which in love's childish state
Did nurse it; who now is grown strong enough
To feed on that, which to disused tastes seems tough.

Notes

powder's = gunpowder's

disused = unaccustomed



Elegy 6 (Oh, let me not serve so)

Oh, let me not serve so, as those men serve
Whom honour's smokes at once fatten and starve;
Poorly enrich'd with great men's words or looks ;
Nor so write my name in thy loving books
As those idolatrous flatterers, which still
Their Princes' styles, with many realms fulfil
Whence they no tribute have, and where no sway.
Such services I offer as shall pay
Themselves; I hate dead names: Oh then let me
Favourite in ordinary, or no favourite be.
When my soul was in her own body sheath'd,
Nor yet by oaths betroth'd, nor kisses breath'd
Into my purgatory, faithless thee,
Thy heart seemed wax, and steel thy constancy:
So, careless flowers strew'd on the water's face
The curl'd whirlpools suck, smack, and embrace,
Yet drown them; so the taper's beamy eye
Amorously twinkling, beckons the giddy fly,
Yet burns his wings; and such the devil is,
Scarce visiting them who are entirely his.
When I behold a stream, which from the spring
Doth with doubtful melodious murmuring,
Or in a speechless slumber, calmly ride
Her wedded channel's bosom, and then chide
And bend her brows, and swell, if any bough
Do but stoop down, or kiss her upmost brow;
Yet, if her often gnawing kisses win
The traitorous banks to gape, and let her in,
She rusheth violently, and doth divorce
Her from her native and her long-kept course,
And roars, and braves it, and in gallant scorn,
In flattering eddies promising return,
She flouts her channel, which thenceforth is dry;
Then say I; That is she, and this am I.
Yet let not thy deep bitterness beget
Careless despair in me, for that will whet
My mind to scorn; and Oh, love dull'd with pain
Was ne'er so wise, nor well arm'd as disdain.
Then with new eyes I shall survey thee, and spy
Death in thy cheeks, and darkness in thine eye.
Though hope bred faith and love; thus taught, I shall,
As nations do from Rome, from thy love fall;
My hate shall outgrow thine, and utterly
I will renounce thy dalliance; and when I
Am the recusant, in that resolute state
What hurts it me to be'excommunicate?

Notes

honour's smokes = the insubstantial show of titles and honours

recusant – one who refuses to follow the established religion, especially a Roman Catholic who refuses to obey the Church of England.



Elegy 9: the Autumnal

No spring nor summer beauty hath such grace,
As I have seen in one autumnal face.
Young beauties force our love, and that's a rape,
This doth but counsel, yet you cannot scape.
If 'twere a shame to love, here 'twere no shame,
Affection here takes reverence's name.
Were her first years the Golden Age? That's true,
But now she's gold oft tried, and ever new.
That was her torrid and inflaming time,
This is her tolerable tropic clime.
Fair eyes, who asks more heat than comes from hence,
He in a fever wishes pestilence.
Call not these wrinkles, graves; if graves they were,
They were Love's graves, for else he is no where.
Yet lies not Love dead here, but here doth sit
Vow'd to this trench, like an anchorit;
And here till hers, which must be his death, come,
He doth not dig a grave, but build a tomb.
Here dwells he, though he sojourn ev'rywhere,
In progress, yet his standing house is here.
Here where still evening is, not noon, nor night,
Where no voluptuousness, yet all delight.
In all her words, unto all hearers fit,
You may at revels, you at council, sit.
This is love's timber, youth his under-wood;
There he, as wine in June, enrages blood,
Which then comes seasonabliest, when our taste
And appetite to other things is past.
Xerxes' strange Lydian love, the platane tree,
Was lov'd for age, none being so large as she,
Or else because, being young, nature did bless
Her youth with age's glory, barrenness.
If we love things long sought, age is a thing
Which we are fifty years in compassing.
If transitory things, which soon decay,
Age must be loveliest at the latest day.
But name not winter-faces, whose skin's slack,
Lank as an unthrift's purse, but a soul's sack;
Whose eyes seek light within, for all here's shade;
Whose mouths are holes, rather worn out, than made;
Whose every tooth to a several place is gone,

To vex their souls at resurrection;
Name not these living death's-heads unto me,
For these, not ancient, but antique be.
I hate extremes; yet I had rather stay
With tombs than cradles, to wear out a day.
Since such love's natural lation is, may still
My love descend, and journey down the hill,
Not panting after growing beauties, so,
I shall ebb out with them, who home-ward go.

Notes

anchorit = hermit

under-wood = brushwood

'Xerxes' strange Lydian love, the platane tree' – according to Herodotus, the Persian king Xerxes saw a magnificent plane tree which he admired so much that he ordered it to be adorned and guarded.

lation = movement



Elegy 16: On His Mistress

By our first strange and fatal interview,
By all desires which thereof did ensue,
By our long starving hopes, by that remorse
Which my words' masculine persuasive force
Begot in thee, and by the memory
Of hurts, which spies and rivals threaten'd me,
I calmly beg: But by thy father's wrath,
By all pains, which want and divorcement hath,
I conjure thee, and all the oaths which I
And thou have sworn to seal joint constancy,
Here I unswear, and overswear them thus;
Thou shalt not love by ways so dangerous.
Temper, O fair love, love's impetuous rage;
Be my true mistress still, not my feign'd page;
I'll go, and, by thy kind leave, leave behind
Thee, only worthy to nurse in my mind,
Thirst to come back; O if thou die before,
My soul from other lands to thee shall soar.
Thy (else almighty) beauty cannot move
Rage from the seas, nor thy love teach them love,
Nor tame wild Boreas' harshness; thou hast read
How roughly he in pieces shiverèd
Fair Orithea, whom he swore he lov'd.
Fall ill or good, 'tis madness to have proved
Dangers unurg'd; feed on this flattery,
That absent lovers one in th'other be.
Dissemble nothing, not a boy, nor change
Thy body's habit, nor minds; be not strange

To thy self only; all will spy in thy face
 A blushing womanly discovering grace;
 Richly cloth'd apes are call'd apes, and as soon
 Eclips'd as bright we call the moon the moon.
 Men of France, changeable chameleons,
 Spitals of diseases, shops of fashions,
 Love's fuellers, and the rightest company
 Of players, which upon the world's stage be,
 Will quickly know thee, and no less, alas!
 Th' indifferent Italian, as we pass
 His warm land, well content to think thee page,
 Will hunt thee with such lust, and hideous rage,
 As Lot's fair guests were vex'd. But none of these
 Nor spongy hydroptic Dutch shall thee displease,
 If thou stay here. O stay here, for, for thee
 England is only a worthy gallery,
 To walk in expectation, till from thence
 Our greatest King call thee to his presence.
 When I am gone, dream me some happiness,
 Nor let thy looks our long-hid love confess,
 Nor praise, nor dispraise me, nor bless nor curse
 Openly love's force, nor in bed fright thy Nurse
 With midnight's startings, crying out, Oh, oh
 Nurse, oh my love is slain; I saw him go
 O'er the white Alps alone ; I saw him, I,
 Assail'd, fight, taken, stabb'd, bleed, fall, and die.
 Augur me better chance, except dread Jove
 Think it enough for me to've had thy love.

Notes

'wild Boreas' harshness' – in Greek myth, Boreas, the North wind, fell in love with the princess Orithyia; he abducted her, and in one version, killed her.

spitals = hospitals

'Lot's fair guests' – in the Bible (Genesis Ch. 19) Lot's guests, two angels, were harassed by the local Sodomites.

hydroptic = thirsty, swollen with drink



Elegy 19: Going to Bed

Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defy,
 Until I labour, I in labour lie.
 The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
 Is tir'd with standing though he never fight.
 Off with that girdle, like heaven's zone glittering,
 But a far fairer world encompassing.
 Unpin that spangled breastplate which you wear,
 That th' eyes of busy fools may be stopped there.
 Unlace yourself, for that harmonious chime

Tells me from you, that now it is bed time.
 Off with that happy busk, which I envy,
 That still can be, and still can stand so nigh.
 Your gown, going off, such beauteous state reveals,
 as when from flowry meads th' hill's shadow steals.
 Off with that wiry coronet and show
 The hairy diadem which on you doth grow:
 Now off with those shoes, and then safely tread
 In this love's hallow'd temple, this soft bed.
 In such white robes, heaven's angels used to be
 Received by men; thou angel bring'st with thee
 A heaven like Mahomet's Paradise; and though
 Ill spirits walk in white, we easily know
 By this these angels from an evil sprite:
 Those set our hairs on end, but these our flesh upright.

License my roving hands, and let them go
 Before, behind, between, above, below.
 O my America! my new-found-land,
 My kingdom, safeliest when with one man mann'd,
 My mine of precious stones, my empery,
 How blest am I in this discovering thee!
 To enter in these bonds is to be free;
 Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be.

Full nakedness! All joys are due to thee,
 As souls unbodied, bodies uncloth'd must be,
 To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use
 Are like Atlanta's balls, cast in men's views,
 That when a fool's eye lighteth on a gem,
 His earthly soul may covet theirs, not them.
 Like pictures, or like books' gay coverings made
 For lay-men, are all women thus arrayed;
 Themselves are mystic books, which only we
 (Whom their imputed grace will dignify)
 Must see reveal'd. Then, since that I may know;
 As liberally as to a midwife, show
 Thyself: cast all, yea, this white linen hence,
 There is no penance due to innocence.

To teach thee, I am naked first; why than
 What needst thou have more covering than a man.

Notes

busk = corset

emperry = empire

'Atlanta's balls' – in Greek myth, Atalanta was a huntress who agreed to marry any young man who could outrun her. One suitor asked the help of the goddess Aphrodite in his race; Aphrodite gave him down three golden apples, which he threw down, and which Atalanta stopped to pick up, so allowing him to win.



From Epithalamions, or Marriage Songs

Epithalamion (Hail Bishop Valentine)

I

Hail Bishop Valentine, whose day this is,
All the air is thy diocese,
And all the chirping choristers
And other birds are thy parishioners;
Thou marriest every year
The lyric lark, and the grave whispering dove,
The sparrow that neglects his life for love,
The household bird, with the red stomacher,
Thou makest the blackbird speed as soon,
As doth the goldfinch, or the halcyon;
The husband cock looks out, and straight is sped,
And meets his wife, which brings her feather-bed.
This day more cheerfully than ever shine,
This day, which might enflame thyself, old Valentine.

II.

Till now, thou warmd'st with multiplying loves
Two larks, two sparrows, or two doves;
All that is nothing unto this,
For thou this day couplest two phoenixes;
Thou mak'st a taper see
What the sun never saw, and what the ark
(Which was of fowls and beasts the cage, and park,)
Did not contain, one bed contains, through thee,
Two phoenixes, whose joinèd breasts
Are unto one another mutual nests,
Where motion kindles such fires, as shall give
Young phoenixes, and yet the old shall live.
Whose love and courage never shall decline,
But make the whole year through, thy day, O Valentine.

III.

Up then, fair phoenix bride, frustrate the sun,
Thyself from thine affection
Takest warmth enough, and from thine eye
All lesser birds will take their jollity.
Up, up, fair bride, and call
Thy stars from out their several boxes, take
Thy rubies, pearls, and diamonds forth, and make
Thy self a constellation of them all,
And by their blazing, signify
That a great Princess falls, but doth not die;
Be thou a new star, that to us portends
Ends of much wonder ; and be thou those ends.

Since thou dost this day in new glory shine,
May all men date records, from this thy Valentine.

IV.

Come forth, come forth, and as one glorious flame
Meeting another, grows the same,
So meet thy Frederick, and so
To an inseparable union grow.
 Since separation
Falls not on such things as are infinite,
Nor things which are but one, can disunite,
You're twice inseparable, great, and one;
 Go then to where the Bishop stays,
To make you one, his way, which divers ways
Must be effected; and when all is past,
And that you're one, by hearts and hands made fast,
You two have one way left, yourselves to'entwine,
Besides this Bishop's knot, or Bishop Valentine.

V.

But oh, what ails the sun, that here he stays,
 Longer today than other days?
 Stays he new light from these to get?
And finding here such store, is loth to set?
 And why do you two walk,
So slowly pac'd in this procession?
Is all your care but to be look'd upon,
And be to others spectacle, and talk?
 The feast, with gluttonous delays,
Is eaten, and too long their meat they praise;
The masquers come late, and I think, will stay,
Like fairies, till the cock crow them away.
Alas, did not antiquity assign
A night as well as day, to thee, O Valentine?

VI.

They did, and night is come; and yet we see
 Formalities retarding thee.
 What mean these ladies, which (as though
They were to take a clock in pieces) go
 So nicely about the bride;
A bride, before a good-night could be said,
Should vanish from her clothes, into her bed,
As souls from bodies steal, and are not spied.
 But now she's laid; what though she be?
Yet there are more delays, for where is he?
He comes and passeth through sphere after sphere,
First her sheets, then her arms, then anywhere.
Let not this day, then, but this night be thine,
Thy day was but the eve to this, O Valentine.

VII.

Here lies a she Sun, and a he Moon here,
 She gives the best light to his sphere,
 Or each is both, and all, and so
They unto one another nothing owe,
 And yet they do, but are
So just and rich in that coin which they pay,
That neither would, nor needs forbear, nor stay;
Neither desires to be spar'd, nor to spare,
 They quickly pay their debt, and then
Take no acquittances, but pay again;
They pay, they give, they lend, and so let fall
No such occasion to be liberal.
More truth, more courage in these two do shine,
Than all thy turtles have, and sparrows, Valentine.

VIII.

And by this act of these two Phoenixes
 Nature again restorèd is,
 For since these two are two no more,
There's but one Phoenix still, as was before.
 Rest now at last, and we
As satyrs watch the Sun's uprise, will stay
Waiting, when your eyes opened, let out day,
Only desir'd because your face we see;
 Others near you shall whispering speak,
And wagers lay, at which side day will break,
And win by' observing, then, whose hand it is
That opens first a curtain, hers or his;
This will be tried tomorrow after nine,
Till which hour, we thy day enlarge, O Valentine.

Notes

This poem was written to celebrate the marriage of Elizabeth, daughter of King James I, with Frederick Count Palatine, which took place on St Valentine's Day (14th Feb) 1613.

Little is known of the original Saint Valentine, but some believed him to have been a 3rd century bishop.

halcyon = kingfisher

'*two phoenixes*' – the mythical bird, the phoenix, could only exist singly, one at a time; it reproduced by burning and arising again out of its own ashes.

turtles = turtle doves, which symbolised love



From *Satires*

Satire 3 (on Religion)

Kind pity chokes my spleen; brave scorn forbids
Those tears to issue which swell my eyelids;
I must not laugh, nor weep sins, and be wise;
Can railing then cure these worn maladies?
Is not our mistress fair Religion,
As worthy of all our souls' devotion,
As virtue was to the first blinded age?
Are not heaven's joys as valiant to assuage
Lusts, as earth's honour was to them? Alas,
As we do them in means, shall they surpass
Us in the end, and shall thy father's spirit
Meet blind philosophers in heaven, whose merit
Of strict life may be imputed faith, and hear
Thee, whom he taught so easy ways and near
To follow, damn'd? Oh, if thou dar'st, fear this;
This fear great courage and high valour is.
Dar'st thou aid mutinous Dutch, and dar'st thou lay
Thee in ships' wooden sepulchres, a prey
To leaders' rage, to storms, to shot, to dearth?
Dar'st thou dive seas, and dungeons of the earth?
Hast thou courageous fire to thaw the ice
Of frozen North discoveries? and thrice
Colder than salamanders, like divine
Children in th'oven, fires of Spain, and the Line,
Whose countries limbecks to our bodies be,
Canst thou for gain bear? and must every he
Which cries not Goddess, to thy mistress, draw,
Or eat thy poisonous words? Courage of straw!
O desperate coward, wilt thou seem bold, and
To thy foes and his, (who made thee to stand
Sentinel in his world's garrison) thus yield,
And for forbidden wars leave th'appointed field?
Know thy foes: the foul Devil (whom thou
Strivest to please,) for hate, not love, would allow
Thee fain, his whole realm to be quit; and as
The world's all parts wither away and pass,
So the world's self, thy other lov'd foe, is
In her decrepit wane, and thou loving this,
Dost love a wither'd and worn strumpet; last,
Flesh (it self's death) and joys which flesh can taste,
Thou lovest, and thy fair goodly soul, which doth
Give this flesh power to taste joy, thou dost loathe.
Seek true religion. O where? Mirreus
Thinking her unhous'd here, and fled from us,
Seeks her at Rome; there, because he doth know

That she was there a thousand years ago,
He loves her rags so, as we here obey
The statecloth where the Prince sat yesterday.
Crantz to such brave loves will not be enthrall'd,
But loves her only, who at Geneva is call'd
Religion, plain, simple, sullen, young,
Contemtuos, yet unhandsome; as among
Lecherous humours, there is one that judges
No wenches wholesome, but coarse country drudges.
Graius stays still at home here, and because
Some preachers, vile ambitious bawds, and laws
Still new like fashions, bid him think that she
Which dwells with us is only perfect, he
Embraceth her whom his Godfathers will
Tender to him, being tender, as wards still
Take such wives as their guardians offer, or
Pay values. Careless Phrygius doth abhor
All, because all cannot be good, as one
Knowing some women whores, dares marry none.
Graccus loves all as one, and thinks that so
As women do in divers countries go
In divers habits, yet are still one kind,
So doth, so is Religion; and this blind-
ness too much light breeds; but unmovèd, thou
Of force must one, and forc'd but one allow;
And the right; ask thy father which is she,
Let him ask his; though truth and falsehood be
Near twins, yet truth a little elder is;
Be busy to seek her, believe me this,
He's not of none, nor worst, that seeks the best.
To adore, or scorn an image, or protest,
May all be bad; doubt wisely; in strange way
To stand inquiring right, is not to stray;
To sleep, or run wrong, is. On a huge hill,
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
Reach her, about must and about must go,
And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so.
Yet strive so that before age, death's twilight,
Thy soul rest, for none can work in that night.
To will implies delay, therefore now do;
Hard deeds, the body's pains; hard knowledge too
The mind's endeavours reach, and mysteries
Are like the Sun, dazzling, yet plain to all eyes.
Keep the truth which thou hast found; men do not stand
In so ill case here, that God hath with his hand
Sign'd Kings' blank charters to kill whom they hate;
Nor are they vicars, but hangmen to fate.
Fool and wretch, wilt thou let thy soul be tied
To man's laws, by which she shall not be tried
At the last day? Oh, will it then boot thee

To say a Philip, or a Gregory,
A Harry, or a Martin, taught thee this?
Is not this excuse for mere contraries
Equally strong? Cannot both sides say so?
That thou mayest rightly obey power, her bounds know;
Those past, her nature, and name is chang'd; to be
Then humble to her is idolatry.
As streams are, power is; those blest flowers that dwell
At the rough stream's calm head, thrive and do well,
But having left their roots, and themselves given
To the stream's tyrannous rage, alas, are driven
Through mills, and rocks, and woods, and at last, almost
Consum'd in going, in the sea are lost:
So perish souls, which more choose men's unjust
Power from God claim'd, than God himself to trust.

Notes

'*blind philosophers*' – i.e. ignorant philosophers (because they lived before Christ).

'*children in th'oven*' – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who in the Bible were thrown by Nebuchadnezzar into a fiery furnace to refusing to worship an idol.

'*fires of Spain*' – i.e. of the Spanish Inquisition, who burnt heretics.

'*the Line*' – the equator

limbecks – alembics, heated distilling vessels

Mirreus, Crantz and *Graius* seem to be fictional examples of types of Christian.

'*Careless Phrygius*' – the ancient Phrygians worshipped many gods.

Gracchus – an ancient Roman of a liberal family.

'*A Philip, a Gregory, a Harry or a Martin*' – King Philip II of Spain, Pope Gregory, Henry VIII of England, or Martin Luther of Germany.



From *Letters to Several Personages*

To Sir Henry Goodyere

Who makes the past a pattern for next year,
Turns no new leaf, but still the same things reads,
Seen things, he sees again, heard things doth hear,
And makes his life but like a pair of beads.

A palace, when 'tis that which it should be,
Leaves growing, and stands such, or else decays:
But he which dwells there is not so; for he
Strives to surge upward, and his fortune raise;

So had your body'her morning, hath her noon,
And shall not better; her next change is night:
But her fair larger guest, to'whom Sun and Moon
Are sparks, and short-liv'd, claims another right.

The noble soul by age grows lustier,
Her appetite and her digestion mend.
We must not starve, nor hope to pamper her
With women's milk, and pap, unto the end.

Provide you manlier diet; you have seen
All libraries, which are schools, camps, and courts ;
But ask your garners if you have not been
In harvests too indulgent to your sports.

Would you redeem it ? then yourself transplant
Awhile from hence. Perchance outlandish ground
Bears no more wit than ours, but yet more scant
Are those diversions there, which here abound.

To be a stranger hath that benefit,
We can beginnings, but not habits choke.
Go; whither? Hence; you get, if you forget;
New faults, till they prescribe in us, are smoke.

Our soul, whose country'is heaven, and God her Father,
Into this world, corruption's sink, is sent,
Yet so much in her travel she doth gather,
That she returns home wiser than she went.

It pays you well, if it teach you to spare,
And make you'ashamed to make your hawks' praise yours,
Which when herself she lessens in the air,
You then first say, that high enough she towers.

However, keep the lively taste you hold
Of God; love him as now, but fear Him more,
And in your afternoons think what you told
And promis'd him, at morning prayer before.

Let falsehood like a discord anger you,
Else not be forward. But why do I touch
Things, of which none is in your practice new,
And tables, or fruit-trenchers teach as much;

But thus I make you keep your promise, sir,
Riding I had you, though you still stay'd there ;
And in these thoughts, although you never stir,
You came with me to Mitcham, and are here.

Notes

Sir Henry Goodyere was one of Donne's closest friends.

'Her fair larger guest' – the soul

*camp*s = battlefields

garners = granaries, stores of grain

tables in some MSS reads fables

fruit-trenchers = wooden fruit bowls

[↑](#)

To Mr. Rowland Woodward

Like one who in her third widowhood doth profess
Herself a nun, tied to retirèdness,
So affects my muse, now, a chaste fallowness;

Since she to few, yet to too many'hath shown
How love-song weeds and satiric thorns are grown,
Where seeds of better arts were early sown.

Though to use and love poetry, to me,
Betroth'd to no one art, be no'adultery;
Omissions of good, ill, as ill deeds be.

For though to us it seem'and be light and thin,
Yet in those faithful scales, where God throws in
Men's works, vanity weighs as much as sin.

If our souls have stain'd their first white, yet we
May clothe them with faith, and dear honesty,
Which God imputes as native purity.

There is no virtue, but religion:
Wise, valiant, sober, just, are names which none
Want, which want not vice-covering discretion.

Seek we then our selves in our selves; for as
Men force the Sun with much more force to pass,
By gathering his beams with a crystal glass,

So we, if we into our selves will turn,
Blowing our sparks of virtue, may outburn
The straw, which doth about our hearts sojourn.

You know physicians, when they would infuse
Into any'oil the souls of simples, use
Places, where they may lie still warm, to choose.

So works retirèdness in us; to roam
Giddily, and be everywhere, but at home,
Such freedom doth a banishment become.

We are but farmers of our selves, yet may,
If we can stock our selves, and thrive, uplay
Much, much dear treasure for the great rent day.

Manure thyself then, to thyself be'approved,
And with vain outward things be no more mov'd,
But to know, that I love thee'and would be lov'd.

Note

Sir Rowland Woodward was an old and close friend of Donne.

'*the souls of simples*' – i.e. the essences of simple substances; a reference to alchemy.

'*Manure thyself*' – presumably *manure* here has the old meaning of cultivate land rather than spread with manure.

[↑](#)

To Mr. T.W. (Pregnant again with th'old twins Hope and Fear)

Pregnant again with th' old twins Hope and Fear,
Oft have I asked for thee, both how and where
Thou wert; and what my hopes of letters were;

As in our streets sly beggars narrowly
Watch motions of the giver's hand and eye,
And evermore conceive some hope thereby.

And now thy alms is given, thy letter's read,
The body risen again, the which was dead,
And thy poor starveling bountifully fed.

After this banquet my soul doth say grace,
And praise thee for't, and zealously embrace
Thy love, though I think thy love in this case
 To be as gluttons, which say 'midst their meat,
 They love that best of which they most do eat.

↑

To Mr T.W. (At once, from hence, my lines and I depart)

At once, from hence, my lines and I depart,
I to my soft still walks, they to my heart;
I to the nurse, they to the child of art;

Yet as a firm house, though the carpenter
Perish, doth stand: as an ambassador
Lies safe, how e'er his king be in danger:

So, though I languish, press'd with melancholy,
My verse, the strict map of my misery,
Shall live to see that, for whose want I die.

Therefore I envy them, and do repent,
That from unhappy me, things happy'are sent;
Yet as a picture, or bare sacrament,
 Accept these lines, and if in them there be
 Merit of love, bestow that love on me.

Note

'picture, or bare sacrament' – i.e. a picture of the poet, or a mere symbol of him

↑

To Mr. R.W.

If, as mine is, thy life a slumber be,
 Seem, when thou read'st these lines, to dream of me.
Never did Morpheus nor his brother wear
 Shapes so like those shapes, whom they would appear,
As this my letter is like me, for it
 Hath my name, words, hand, feet, heart, mind and wit;
It is my deed of gift of me to thee,
 It is my will, myself the legacy.
So thy retirings I love, yea envy,
 Bred in thee by a wise melancholy,
That I rejoice, that unto where thou art,
 Though I stay here, I can thus send my heart,
As kindly'as any enamour'd patient
 His picture to his absent love hath sent.

All news I think sooner reach thee than me;
Havens are heavens, and ships wing'd angels be,
The which both gospel, and stern threatenings bring;
Guyana's harvest is nipp'd in the spring,
I fear; and with us (me thinks) Fate deals so
As with the Jews' guide God did; he did show
Him the rich land, but barr'd his entry in:
Oh, slowness is our punishment and sin.
Perchance, these Spanish business being done,
Which as the earth between the Moon and Sun
Eclipse the light which Guyana would give,
Our discontinued hopes we shall retrieve:
But if (as all th'All must) hopes smoke away,
Is not almighty virtue an India?

If men be worlds, there is in every one
Some thing to answer in some proportion
All the world's riches; and in good men, this,
Virtue, our form's form and our soul's soul, is.

Notes

Guyana: Walter Raleigh had recently discovered Guyana (in South America) and there were high hopes that it would be colonised; but Queen Elizabeth was reluctant to send her fleet there, and the Dutch colonised it instead.
'*These Spanish business*' – probably conflict with the Spanish fleet in the Azores.
'*An India*' – i.e. a source of riches

↑

To Mr. B.B.

Is not thy sacred hunger of science
Yet satisfied? Is not thy brain's rich hive
Fulfilled with honey which thou dost derive
From the arts' spirits and their quintessence?
Then wean thyself at last, and thee withdraw
From Cambridge thy old nurse, and, as the rest,
Here toughly chew, and sturdily digest
Th' immense vast volumes of our common law;
And begin soon, lest my grief grieve thee too,
Which is, that that which I should have begun
In my youth's morning, now late must be done;
And I as giddy travellers must do,
Which stray or sleep all day, and having lost
Light and strength, dark and tir'd must then ride post.

If thou unto thy Muse be married,
Embrace her ever, ever multiply,
Be far from me that strange adultery
To tempt thee and procure her widowhead.

My Muse (for I had one,) because I'm cold,
Divorc'd her self: the cause being in me,
That I can take no new in bigamy,
Not my will only but power doth withhold.
Hence comes it, that these rhymes which never had
Mother, want matter, and they only have
A little form, the which their father gave;
They are profane, imperfect, oh, too bad
To be counted children of poetry
Except confirm'd and Bishop'd by thee.

Note

ride post = ride post haste, i.e. with speed gained by a frequent change of horses, at each 'post' along the way



To the Countess of Bedford

Honour is so sublime perfection,
And so refined, that when God was alone
And creatureless at first, Himself had none;

But as of th' elements, these which we tread,
Produce all things with which we're joyed or fed,
And those are barren both above our head:

So from low persons doth all honour flow;
Kings, whom they would have honoured, to us show,
And but direct our honour, not bestow.

For when from herbs the pure part must be won
From gross, by stilling, this is better done
By despis'd dung, than by the fire or sun.

Care not then, madam, 'how low your praisers lie;
In labourers' ballads oft more piety
God finds, than in *Te Deum's* melody.

And ordnance rais'd on towers, so many mile
Send not their voice, nor last so long a while,
As fires from the earth's low vaults in Sicil isle.

Should I say I liv'd darker than were true,
Your radiation can all clouds subdue;
But one, 'tis best light to contemplate you.

You, for whose body God made better clay,
Or took souls' stuff, such as shall late decay,
Or such as needs small change at the last day.

This, as an amber drop enwraps a bee,
Covering discovers your quick soul; that we
May in your through-shine front your hearts' thoughts see.

You teach (though we learn not) a thing unknown
To our late times, the use of specular stone,
Through which all things within without were shown.

Of such were temples; so and of such you are;
Being and seeming is your equal care;
And virtue's whole sum is but *know* and *dare*.

But as our souls of growth and souls of sense
Have birthright of our reason's soul, yet hence
They fly not from that, nor seek precedence;

Nature's first lesson, so, discretion
Must not grudge zeal a place, nor yet keep none,
Not banish it self, nor religion.

Discretion is a wiseman's soul, and so
Religion is a Christian's, and you know
How these are one; her *Yea* is not her *No*.

Nor may we hope to solder still and knit
These two, and dare to break them; nor must wit
Be colleague to religion, but be it.

In those poor types of God (round circles), so
Religion's types, the pieceless centres flow,
And are in all the lines which all ways go.

If either ever wrought in you alone
Or principally, then religion
Wrought your ends, and your way's discretion.

Go thither still, go the same way you went;
Whoso would change, do covet or repent;
Neither can reach you, great and innocent.

Notes

Lucy the Countess of Bedford was Donne's patron and friend.

stilling = distilling

Te Deum is an early Christian hymn.

ordnance = artillery, cannon

specular stone – a mythical transparent stone



To the Lady Bedford

You that are she, and you that's double she,
In her dead face half of yourself shall see;
She was the other part, for so they do
Which build them friendships, become one of two;
So two, that but themselves no third can fit,
Which were to be so, when they were not yet;
Twins, though their birth Cusco and Musco take,
As divers stars one constellation make;
Pair'd like two eyes, have equal motion, so
Both but one means to see, one way to go.
Had you died first, a carcass she had been,
And we your rich tomb in her face had seen;
She like the soul is gone, and you here stay,
Not a live friend, but th' other half of clay.
And since you act that part, as men say, Here
Lies such a prince, when but one part is there,
And do all honour and devotion due
Unto the whole, so we all reverence you;
For such a friendship who would not adore
In you, who are all what both were before,
Not all, as if some perished by this,
But so, as all in you contracted is.
As of this all, though many parts decay,
The pure which elemented them shall stay;
And though diffus'd, and spread in infinite,
Shall re-collect, and in one All unite;
So, madam, as her soul to heaven is fled,
Her flesh rests in the earth, as in the bed;
Her virtues do, as to their proper sphere,
Return to dwell with you, of whom they were;
As perfect motions are all circular,
So they to you, their sea, whence less streams are.
She was all spices, you all metals; so
In you two we did both rich Indies know.
And as no fire, nor rust can spend or waste
One dram of gold, but what was first shall last,
Though it be forc'd in water, earth, salt, air,
Expans'd in infinite, none will impair;
So, to yourself you may additions take,
But nothing can you less, or changèd make.
Seek not in seeking new, to seem to doubt,
That you can match her, or not be without;
But let some faithful book in her room be,
Yet but of *Judith* no such book as she.

Notes

This poem may be about Lady Markham, a dead cousin of the Countess, or a different friend.

Cusco – an Inca city in Peru

Musco – Moscow

'*both rich Indies*' – both the East Indies (famous for spices) and the West Indies (famous for metals)

Judith – in the Apocrypha, Judith saved the Israelites by killing their enemy Holofernes; she signifies beauty, fidelity and courage.



From *Epicedes and Obsequies*

Elegy: Death (upon the death of Mistress Boulstred)

Language thou art too narrow, and too weak
To ease us now; great sorrow cannot speak;
If we could sigh out accents, and weep words,
Grief wears, and lessens, that tears breath affords.
Sad hearts, the less they seem, the more they are,
(So guiltiest men stand mutest at the bar)
Not that they know not, feel not their estate,
But extreme sense hath made them desperate.
Sorrow, to whom we owe all that we be;
Tyrant, in the fifth and greatest monarchy,
Was't, that she did possess all hearts before,
Thou hast kill'd her, to make thy empire more?
Knew'st thou some would, that knew her not, lament,
As in a deluge perish th'innocent?
Was't not enough to have that palace won,
But thou must raze it too, that was undone?
Had'st thou stayed there, and looked out at her eyes,
All had ador'd thee that now from thee flies,
For they let out more light, than they took in,
They told not when, but did the day begin.
She was too sapphirine, and clear for thee;
Clay, flint, and jet now thy fit dwellings be;
Alas, she was too pure, but not too weak;
Whoe'er saw crystal ordinance but would break?
And if we be thy conquest, by her fall
Thou' hast lost thy end, for in her perish all;
Or if we live, we live but to rebel,
They know her better now, that knew her well.
If we should vapour out, and pine, and die;
Since she first went, that were not misery.
She changed our world with hers; now she is gone,
Mirth and prosperity is oppression;
For of all moral virtues she was all
The ethics speak of virtues cardinal.

Her soul was Paradise; the cherubin
 Set to keep it was grace, that kept out sin.
 She had no more than let in death, for we
 All reap consumption from one fruitful tree.
 God took her hence, lest some of us should love
 Her, like that plant, him and his laws above,
 And when we tears, he mercy shed in this,
 To raise our minds to heaven where now she is;
 Who if her virtues would have let her stay
 We'd had a saint, have now a holiday.
 Her heart was that strange bush, where sacred fire,
 Religion, did not consume, but'inspire
 Such piety, so chaste use of God's day,
 That what we turn to *feast*, she turned to *pray*,
 And did prefigure here, in devout taste,
 The rest of her high Sabbath, which shall last.
 Angels did hand her up, who next God dwell,
 (For she was of that order whence most fell)
 Her body left with us, lest some had said,
 She could not die, except they saw her dead;
 For from less virtue, and less beauteousness,
 The gentiles framed them gods and goddesses.
 The ravenous earth that now woos her to be
 Earth too, will be a Lemnia; and the tree
 That wraps that crystal in a wooden tomb,
 Shall be took up spruce, filled with diamond;
 And we her sad glad friends all bear a part
 Of grief, for all would waste a stoic's heart.

Notes

ordinance = *artillery, weapons*

'*the fifth and greatest monarchy*' – Fifth Monarchy Men were an extreme Puritan sect, who believed that after the first four monarchies – Assyrian, Persian, Greek and Roman – Christ and his saints would reign for 1000 years.

'*Her heart was that strange bush, where sacred fire*' – this refers to the Biblical story of Moses (in Exodus Ch. 3), when God appeared to him in a burning bush.

Lemnia – earth or soil from Lemnos supposedly had medicinal properties and could cure the plague.

'*shall be took up spruce*' – shall be renewed



The Progress of the Soul (extracts)

First Song

I.

I sing the progress of a deathless soul,
Whom fate, which God made, but doth not control,
Placed in most shapes; all times before the law
Yoked us, and when, and since, in this I sing.
And the great world to his agèd evening;
From infant morn, through manly noon, I draw.
What the gold Chaldee, or silver Persian saw,
Greek brass, or Roman iron, is in this one;
A work to'outwear Seth's pillars, brick and stone,
And (holy writ excepted) made to yield to none.

*

XXXI.

Into an embryo fish, our soul is thrown,
And in due time thrown out again, and grown
To such vastness as, if unmanacled
From Greece, Morea were, and that by some
Earthquake unrooted, loose Morea swum,
Or seas from Africk's body had severèd
And torn the hopeful promontory's head,
This fish would seem these, and, when all hopes fail,
A great ship overset, or, without sail
Hulling might (when this was a whelp) be like this whale.

XXXII.

At every stroke his brazen fins do take,
More circles in the broken sea they make
Than cannons' voices, when the air they tear:
His ribs are pillars, and his high arch'd roof
Of bark that blunts best steel, is thunder-proof:
Swim in him swallow'd dolphins, without fear,
And feel no sides, as if his vast womb were
Some inland sea, and ever as he went
He spouted rivers up, as if he meant
To join our seas with seas above the firmament.

*

XXXVIII.

This soul, now free from prison and passion,
Hath yet a little indignation
That so small hammers should so soon down beat
So great a castle. And having for her house
Got the strait cloister of a wretched mouse
(As basest men, that have not what to eat,

Nor enjoy aught, do far more hate the great
Than they, who good repos'd estates possess)
This soul, late taught that great things might by less
Be slain, to gallant mischief doth herself address.

XXXIX.

Nature's great master-piece, an elephant,
The only harmless great thing; the giant
Of beasts; who thought, no more had gone, to make one wise
But to be just, and thankful, loth to offend,
(Yet nature hath given him no knees to bend)
Himself he up-props, on himself relies,
And foe to none, suspects no enemies,
Still sleeping stood; vex'd not his fantasy
Black dreams; like an unbent bow, carelessly
His sinewy proboscis did remissly lie:

XL.

In which, as in a gallery, this mouse
Walk'd, and survey'd the rooms of this vast house,
And to the brain, the soul's bed-chamber, went,
And gnaw'd the life-cords there; like a whole town
Clean undermined, the slain beast tumbled down;
With him the murderer dies, whom envy sent
To kill, not scape, (for only he that meant
To die, did ever kill a man of better room,)
And thus he made his foe his prey, and tomb;
Who cares not to turn back, may any whither come.

Notes

'Seth's pillars' – According to Josephus, Seth, the son of Adam, set up pillars engraved with cosmic science for the benefit of posterity.

Morea = the Peloponnese

hulling – floating without a sail

bark = skin



From *Divine Poems*

Holy Sonnets

I

Thou hast made me, and shall thy work decay?
Repair me now, for now mine end doth haste,
I run to death, and death meets me as fast,
And all my pleasures are like yesterday;
I dare not move my dim eyes any way,
Despair behind, and death before doth cast
Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste
By sin in it, which it t'wards hell doth weigh;
Only thou art above, and when towards thee
By thy leave I can look, I rise again;
But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
That not one hour I can my self sustain;
Thy grace may wing me to prevent his art,
And thou like adamant draw mine iron heart.

Note

adamant – a hard stone, often either diamond or magnetic lodestone



IV

Oh my black soul! now art thou summonèd
By sickness, death's herald, and champion;
Thou art like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
Treason, and durst not turn to whence he is fled,
Or like a thief, which till death's doom be read,
Wisheth himself deliverèd from prison,
But damn'd and hal'd to execution,
Wisheth that still he might be imprisonèd.
Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lack;
But who shall give thee that grace to begin?
Oh make thy self with holy mourning black,
And red with blushing, as thou art with sin;
Or wash thee in Christ's blood, which hath this might
That being red, it dyes red souls to white.



VI

This is my play's last scene, here heavens appoint
My pilgrimage's last mile; and my race
Idly, yet quickly run, hath this last pace,
My span's last inch, my minute's latest point,

And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoint
My body and soul, and I shall sleep a space;
But my'ever-waking part shall see that face,
Whose fear already shakes my every joint:
Then, as my soul, to'heaven her first seat, takes flight,
And earth-born body in the earth shall dwell,
So fall my sins, that all may have their right,
To where they're bred, and would press me, to hell.
Impute me righteous, thus purged of evil,
For thus I leave the world, the flesh, the devil.

Note

'*impute me righteous*' – a concept in theology that righteousness is given to believers through their faith.

↑

VII

At the round earth's imagined corners blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall, o'erthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance, hath slain, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God, and never taste death's woe.
But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,
For, if above all these my sins abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace,
When we are there; here on this lowly ground
Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou'dst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

Notes

'*the round earth's imagined corners*' – the Book of Revelations in the Bible refers to four angels standing on the four corners of the earth. (Ch. 7)

dearth in some MSS is given as death

ague = fever

↑

X

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so,
For those, whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which yet thy pictures be,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.

Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war and sickness dwell,
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

↑

XI

Spit in my face you Jews, and pierce my side,
Buffet, and scoff, scourge, and crucify me,
For I have sinn'd, and sinn'd, and only he,
Who could do no iniquity, hath died:
But by my death can not be satisfied
My sins, which pass the Jews' impiety:
They kill'd once an inglorious man, but I
Crucify him daily, being now glorified.
Oh let me then, his strange love still admire:
Kings pardon, but he bore our punishment.
And Jacob came cloth'd in vile harsh attire
But to supplant, and with gainful intent:
God cloth'd himself in vile man's flesh, that so
He might be weak enough to suffer woe.

Notes

inglorious – here means unknown, not yet renowned; rather than the modern meaning of shameful.

'*Jacob came cloth'd in vile harsh attire*' – refers to the Bible story in Genesis, Ch. 27, where Jacob dressed in goatskins in order to supplant his brother Esau in their father's favour.

↑

XIII

What if this present were the world's last night?
Mark in my heart, O soul, where thou dost dwell,
The picture of Christ crucified, and tell
Whether that countenance can thee affright,
Tears in his eyes quench the amazing light,
Blood fills his frowns, which from his pierc'd head fell.
And can that tongue adjudge thee unto hell,
Which prayed forgiveness for his foes' fierce spite?
No, no; but as in my idolatry
I said to all my profane mistresses,
Beauty, of pity, foulness only is
A sign of rigour: so I say to thee,
To wicked spirits are horrid shapes assign'd,
This beauteous form assures a piteous mind.

↑

XIV

Batter my heart, three-person'd God; for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to'another due,
Labour t'admit you, but oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lovèd fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
Divorce me, 'untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you'enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

↑

XVII

Since she whom I lov'd hath paid her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her soul early into heaven ravishèd,
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is set.
Here the admiring her my mind did whet
To seek thee, God; so streams do show their head;
But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts me yet.
But why should I beg more love, when as thou
Dost woo my soul for hers; offering all thine:
And dost not only fear lest I allow
My love to saints and angels, things divine,
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Lest the world, flesh, yea, devil put thee out.

Note

This sonnet seems to have been written on the death of Donne's wife Ann in 1617.

↑

XVIII

Show me dear Christ, thy Spouse, so bright and clear.
What! is it She, which on the other shore
Goes richly painted? or which, robbed and tore,
Laments and mourns in Germany and here?
Sleeps she a thousand, then peeps up one year?
Is she self truth and errs? now new, now outwore?
Doth she, and did she, and shall she evermore
On one, on seven, or on no hill appear?

Dwells she with us, or like adventuring knights
First travail we to seek and then make love?
Betray, kind husband, thy spouse to our sights,
And let mine amorous soul court thy mild dove,
Who is most true, and pleasing to thee, then
When she's embrac'd and open to most men.

Note

'*thy Spouse*' means the Church, whether the Roman Catholic church 'on the other shore, or the Protestant church of Germany.



Good Friday, 1613; Riding Westward

Let man's soul be a sphere, and then, in this,
Th' intelligence that moves, devotion is;
And as the other spheres, by being grown
Subject to foreign motion, lose their own,
And being by others hurried every day,
Scarce in a year their natural form obey:
Pleasure or business, so, our souls admit
For their first mover, and are whirl'd by it.
Hence is't, that I am carried towards the West
This day, when my soul's form bends t'ward the East.
There I should see a Sun, by rising set,
And by that setting endless day beget;
But that Christ on this cross did rise and fall,
Sin had eternally benighted all.
Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see
That spectacle of too much weight for me.
Who sees God's face, that is self life, must die;
What a death were it then to see God die?
It made his own lieutenant, Nature, shrink,
It made his footstool crack, and the Sun wink.
Could I behold those hands, which span the poles,
And tune all spheres at once, pierced with those holes ?
Could I behold that endless height, which is
Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,
Humbled below us ? or that blood, which is
The seat of all our souls, if not of his,
Made dirt of dust, or that flesh which was worn
By God for his apparel, ragg'd and torn?
If on these things I durst not look, durst I
Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,
Who was God's partner here, and furnish'd thus
Half of that sacrifice, which ransom'd us?
Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,
They're present yet unto my memory,
For that looks towards them; and thou look'st towards me,

O Saviour, as you hang'st upon the tree;
I turn my back to thee, but to receive
Corrections till thy mercies bid thee leave.
O think me worth thine anger, punish me,
Burn off my rusts, and my deformity,
Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace,
That thou may'st know me, and I'll turn my face.

Note

'Zenith to us, and our Antipodes' – the height of the sky, and the far side of the world



The Litany (extracts)

I.

The Father

Father of Heaven, and Him, by whom
It, and us for it, and all else for us
Thou madest, and govern'st ever, come
And re-create me, now grown ruinous:
My heart is by dejection, clay,
And by self-murder, red.
From this red earth, O Father, purge away
All vicious tinctures, that new fashionèd
I may rise up from death, before I'm dead.

II.

The Son

O Son of God, who, seeing two things,
Sin, and Death crept in, which were never made,
By bearing one, tried'st with what stings
The other could thine heritage invade;
O be thou nail'd unto my heart,
And crucified again,
Part not from it, though it from thee would part,
But let it be, by applying so thy pain,
Drown'd in thy blood, and in thy passion slain.

III.

The Holy Ghost

O Holy Ghost, whose temple I
Am, but of mud walls, and condensèd dust,
And being sacrilegiously
Half wasted with youth's fires of pride and lust,

Must with new storms be weatherbeat;
Double in my heart thy flame,
Which let devout sad tears intend; and let
(Though this glass lanthorn, flesh, do suffer maim)
Fire, sacrifice, priest, altar be the same.

IV.
The Trinity.

O blessed glorious Trinity,
Bones to philosophy, but milk to faith,
Which, as wise serpents, diversely
Most slipperiness, yet most entanglings hath.
As you distinguish'd undistinct
By power, love, knowledge be,
Give me a such self different instinct
Of these; let all me elemented be,
Of power, to love, to know, you unnumbered three.

V.
The Virgin Mary.

For that fair blessed mother-maid,
Whose flesh redeem'd us, that she-cherubin,
Which unlock'd paradise, and made
One claim for innocence, and disseiz'd sin,
Whose womb was a strange heav'n, for there
God clothed himself, and grew,
Our zealous thanks we pour. As her deeds were
Our helps, so are her prayers; nor can she sue
In vain, who hath such titles unto you.

*

XXIII.

Hear us, O hear us, Lord; to thee
A sinner is more music, when he prays,
Than spheres', or angels' praises be,
In panegyric alleluias;
Hear us, for till thou hear us, Lord,
We know not what to say;
Thine ear to'our sighs, tears, thoughts, gives voice and word.
O thou who Satan heard'st in Job's sick day,
Hear thy self now, for thou in us dost pray.

Notes

'thy flame / which let devout sad tears intend' – let tears stretch out or increase thy flame



A Hymn to Christ, at the Author's last going into Germany

In what torn ship so ever I embark,
That ship shall be my emblem of thy ark;
What sea soever swallow me, that flood
Shall be to me an emblem of thy blood;
Though thou with clouds of anger do disguise
Thy face, yet through that mask I know those eyes,
Which, though they turn away sometimes,
They never will despise.

I sacrifice this island unto thee,
And all whom I lov'd there, and who lov'd me;
When I have put our seas 'twixt them and me,
Put thou thy seas betwixt my sins and thee.
As the tree's sap doth seek the root below
In winter, in my winter now I go,
Where none but thee, th'eternal root
Of true love, I may know.

Nor thou nor thy religion dost control
The amorousness of an harmonious soul;
But thou wouldst have that love thy self; as thou
Art jealous, Lord, so I am jealous now,
Thou lov'st not, till from loving more, thou free
My soul: Who ever gives, takes liberty:
Oh, if thou car'st not whom I love,
Alas, thou lov'st not me.

Seal then this bill of my divorce to all,
On whom those fainter beams of love did fall;
Marry those loves, which in youth scatter'd be
On fame, wit, hopes (false mistresses) to thee.
Churches are best for prayer, that have least light:
To see God only, I go out of sight;
And to'escape stormy days, I choose
An everlasting night.



The Lamentations of Jeremy, for the most part according to Tremelius

(extract)

Chap. III.

I am the man which have affliction seen,
Under the rod of God's wrath having been,
He hath led me to darkness, not to light,
And against me all day, his hand doth fight.

He hath broke my bones, worn out my flesh and skin,
Built up against me; and hath girt me in
With hemlock, and with labour; and set me
In dark, as they who dead for ever be.

He hath hedg'd me lest I 'scape, and added more
To my steel fetters, heavier than before.
When I cry out, he out shuts my prayer: And hath
Stopp'd with hewn stone my way, and turn'd my path.

And like a lion hid in secrecy,
Or bear which lies in wait, he was to me.
He stops my way, tears me, made desolate,
And he makes me the mark he shooteth at.

He made the children of his quiver pass
Into my reins; I with my people was
All the day long, a song and mockery,
He hath fill'd me with bitterness, and he

Hath made me drunk with wormwood. He hath burst
My teeth with stones, and cover'd me with dust;
And thus my soul far off from peace was set,
And my prosperity I did forget.

My strength, my hope (unto myself I said)
Which from the Lord should come, is perishèd.
But when my mournings I do think upon,
My wormwood, hemlock, and affliction,

My soul is humbled in rememb'ring this;
My heart considers, therefore, hope there is.
'Tis God's great mercy we're not utterly
Consum'd, for his compassions do not die;

For every morning they renewèd be,
For great, O Lord, is Thy fidelity.
The Lord is, saith my soul, my portion,
And therefore in him will I hope alone.

Note

The Old Testament Book of Lamentations, traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah, is a lament for the destruction of Jerusalem.



A Hymn To God The Father

Wilt thou forgive that sin where I begun,
Which is my sin, though it were done before?
Wilt thou forgive that sin, through which I run,
And do run still, though still I do deplore?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

Wilt thou forgive that sin by which I have won
Others to sin? and made my sin their door?
Wilt thou forgive that sin which I did shun
A year or two, but wallowed in a score?
When thou hast done, thou hast not done,
For I have more.

I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore;
Swear by thyself, that at my death thy Son
Shall shine as he shines now, and heretofore;
And, having done that, thou hast done,
I fear no more.

Note

'When thou hast done, thou hast not done' – the second *done* is a pun on the poet's name.



No man is an island

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

From: Meditation 17, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, 1624.

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