

Air and Angels

Twice or thrice had I loved thee,
 Before I knew thy face or name;
 So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame,
 Angels affect us oft, and worshipped be;
 5 Still^o when, to where thou wert, I came, *always*
 Some lovely glorious nothing¹ I did see.
 But since my soul, whose child love is,
 Takes limbs of flesh, and else could nothing do,²
 More subtle^o than the parent is *rarefied*
 10 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.
 15 Whilst thus to ballast love I thought,
 And so more steadily to have gone,
 With wares which would sink^o admiration, *overwhelm*
 I saw I had love's pinnacle^o overfraught;^o *small boat / overballasted*
 Every thy hair for love to work upon
 20 Is much too much, some fitter must be sought;
 For, nor in nothing, nor in things
 Extreme and scatt'ring^o bright, can love inhere. *diffused, dazzling*
 Then as an angel, face and wings
 Of air, not pure as it, yet pure doth wear,
 25 So thy love may be my love's sphere;³
 Just such disparity
 As is 'twixt air and angels' purity,
 'Twixt women's love and men's will ever be.⁴

1633

Break of Day¹

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

Light hath no tongue, but is all eye;
 If it could speak as well as spy,

1. Spiritual beauty, the true object of love in Neoplatonic philosophy.

2. My soul could not function unless it were in a body.

3. Each sphere was thought to be governed by an angel (an intelligence).

4. It was commonly believed that angels, when they appeared to humans, assumed a body of air

which, though pure, was less so than the angels' spiritual essence.

1. An aubade, or song of the lovers' parting at dawn, this poem is unusual for Donne in having a female speaker. The poem was given a musical setting and published in 1622, in William Corneille's *Second Book of Ayers*.

This were the worst that it could say,
 10 That being well, I fain^o would stay, *gladly*
 And that I loved my heart and honor so
 That I would not from him, that had them, go.
 Must business thee from hence remove?
 O, that's the worst disease of love.
 15 The poor, the foul, the false, love can
 Admit, but not the busied man.
 He which hath business, and makes love, doth do
 Such wrong, as when a married man doth woo.

1622, 1633

A Valediction:¹ Of Weeping

Let me pour forth
 My tears before thy face whilst I stay here,
 For thy face coins them, and thy stamp^o they bear, *image*
 And by this mintage they are something worth,
 5 For thus they be
 Pregnant of thee;
 Fruits of much grief they are, emblems^o of more— *symbols*
 When a tear falls, that thou falls which it bore,
 So thou and I are nothing then, when on a diverse^o shore. *different*
 10 On a round ball
 A workman that hath copies by can lay
 An Europe, Afric, and an Asia,
 And quickly make that, which was nothing, all;²
 So doth each tear
 15 Which thee doth wear,³
 A globe, yea world, by that impression grow,
 Till thy tears mixed with mine do overflow
 This world; by waters sent from thee, my heaven dissolvèd so.

O more than moon,
 20 Draw not up seas to drown me in thy sphere;⁴
 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
 25 To do me more harm than it purposeth;
 Since thou and I sigh one another's breath,
 Whoe'er sighs most is cruelest, and hastes the other's death.

1633

1. A farewell poem, one of four so titled in the *Songs and Sonnets*. Another is "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," p. 1275.

2. I.e., on a blank globe one can place maps of the continents and so convert a cipher ("nothing") into

the whole world ("all").

3. Which bears your image.

4. A star or planet with more power of attraction than the moon might not only affect tides but draw the very seas unto itself.

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
35 Me fresher and more fat^o by being with men
Than if I had stayed still with her and thee.
For God's sake, if you can, be you so too:
I would give you
There to another friend, whom we shall find
40 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 learned that woman-head^o
To be to more than one a bed),¹
5 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
10 To make their souls, at the last busy day,^o
Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

If this fall^o in a time, or land,
Where mis-devotion² doth command,
Then he that digs us up will bring
15 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;
20 And since at such times, miracles are sought,
I would have that age by this paper taught
What miracles we harmless lovers wrought.

First, we loved well and faithfully,
Yet knew not what we loved, nor why,
25 Difference of sex no more we knew,
Than our guardian angels do;
Coming and going, we
Perchance might kiss, but not between those meals;³
Our hands ne'er touched the seals^o

1. Graves were often used to inter successive corpses, the bones of previous occupants being deposited in charnel houses.

2. False devotion, superstition, i.e., Roman Catholicism.

3. The kisses of salutation and parting.

30 Which nature, injured by late law, sets free:⁴
These miracles we did: but now, alas,
All measure and all language I should pass,
Should I tell what a miracle she was.

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
5 Along with us, which we ourselves produced;
But, now the sun is just above our head,
We do those shadows tread
And to brave^o clearness all things are reduced.
So, whilst our infant loves did grow,
10 Disguises did and shadows flow
From us and our care;^o but now, 'tis not so.

That love hath not attained the high'st degree
Which is still diligent lest others see.

Except^o our loves at this noon stay,
15 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,
20 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.

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

Elegy¹ 16. On His Mistress

By our first strange and fatal interview,
By all desires which thereof did ensue,

4. Human law forbids the free love permitted by nature. "Late": recent (comparatively speaking).

1. In Latin poetry, an elegy is a discursive or reflective poem written in "elegiacs" (unrhymed

couplets of alternating dactylic hexameters and pentameters). This meter was used for funeral laments and especially for love poetry. The most famous collection of elegies was Ovid's *Amores*.

prosperous

1633

female trait

Judgment Day

happen

sexual organs

1633

splendid

caution

unless

1635

Nunc lento sonitu dicunt, morieris.

Now this bell tolling softly for another, says to me, Thou must die.

in our bodies were extended to rivers, and all the sinews to veins of mines, and all the muscles that lie upon one another to hills, and all the bones to quarries of stones, and all the other pieces to the proportion of those which correspond to them in the world, the air would be too little for this orb of man to move in, the firmament would be but enough for this star. For as the whole world hath nothing to which something in man doth not answer,⁴ so hath man many pieces of which the whole world hath no representation. Enlarge this meditation upon this great world, man, so far as to consider the immensity of the creatures this world produces. Our creatures are our thoughts, creatures that are born giants, that reach from east to west, from earth to heaven, that do not only bestride all the sea and land, but span the sun and firmament at once: my thoughts reach all, comprehend all.

Inexplicable mystery! I their creator am in a close prison, in a sick bed, anywhere, and any one of my creatures, my thoughts, is with the sun, and beyond the sun, overtakes the sun, and overgoes the sun in one pace, one step, everywhere. And then as the other world produces serpents and vipers, malignant and venomous creatures, and worms and caterpillars, that endeavor to devour that world which produces them, and monsters compiled and complicated⁵ of divers parents and kinds, so this world, our selves, produces all these in us, in producing diseases and sicknesses of all those sorts; venomous and infectious diseases, feeding and consuming diseases, and manifold and entangled diseases made up of many several ones. And can the other world name so many venomous, so many consuming, so many monstrous creatures, as we can diseases of all these kinds? O miserable abundance, O beggarly riches! How much do we lack of having remedies for every disease, when as yet we have not names for them?

But we have a Hercules against these giants, these monsters: that is the physician. He musters up all the forces of the other world to succor this, all nature to relieve man. We have the physician but we are not the physician. Here we shrink in our proportion, sink in our dignity in respect of very mean creatures who are physicians to themselves. The hart that is pursued and wounded, they say, knows an herb which, being eaten, throws off the arrow: a strange kind of vomit.⁶ The dog that pursues it, though he be subject to sickness, even proverbially knows his grass that recovers him. And it may be true that the druggier is as near to man as to other creatures; it may be that obvious and present simples,⁷ easy to be had, would cure him; but the apothecary is not so near him, nor the physician so near him, as they two are to other creatures.⁸ Man hath not that innate instinct to apply these natural medicines to his present danger, as those inferior creatures have. He is not his own apothecary, his own physician, as they are. Call back therefore thy meditation again, and bring it down.⁹ What's become of man's great extent and proportion, when himself shrinks himself and consumes himself to a handful of dust? What's become of his soaring thoughts, his compassing thoughts, when himself brings himself to the ignorance, to the thoughtlessness, of the grave? His diseases are his own, but the physician is not; he hath them at home, but he must send for the physician.

Perchance he for whom this bell¹ tolls may be so ill as that he knows not it tolls for him; and perchance I may think myself so much better than I am, as that they who are about me and see my state may have caused it to toll for me, and I know not that. The church is catholic, universal, so are all her actions; all that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that head which is my head too, and ingrafted into that body² whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me: all mankind is of one author and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated³ into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated. God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again for that library where every book shall lie open to one another. As therefore the bell that rings to a sermon calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come, so this bell calls us all; but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness. There was a contention as far as a suit⁴ (in which piety and dignity, religion and estimation,⁵ were mingled) which of the religious orders should ring to prayers first in the morning; and it was determined that they should ring first that rose earliest. If we understand aright the dignity of this bell that tolls for our evening prayer, we would be glad to make it ours by rising early, in that application, that it might be ours as well as his whose indeed it is. The bell doth toll for him that thinks it doth; and though it intermit again, yet from that minute that that occasion wrought upon him, he is united to God. Who casts not up his eye to the sun when it rises? But who takes off his eye from a comet when that breaks out? Who bends not his ear to any bell which upon any occasion rings? But who can remove it from that bell which is passing a piece of himself out of this world? No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.⁶ 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.⁷ Neither can we call this a begging of misery or a borrowing of misery, as though we were not miserable enough of ourselves but must fetch in more from the next house, in taking upon us the misery of our neighbors. Truly it were an excusable covetousness if we did; for affliction is a treasure, and scarce any man hath enough of it. No man hath affliction enough that is not matured and ripened by it, and made fit for God by that affliction. If a man carry treasure in bullion, or in a wedge of gold, and have none coined into current moneys, his treasure will not defray⁸ him as he travels. Tribulation is treasure in the nature of it, but it is not current money in the use of it, except we get nearer and nearer our

4. Correspond.

5. Mixed.

6. Deer supposedly expelled arrows wounding them by eating the herb dittany.

7. Medicinal plants.

8. One who administers drugs might do this for

man as well as for other creatures, but one who sells drugs ("the apothecary") and the physician do not know how to prescribe for man as well as for other creatures.

9. I.e., apply it to the present situation.

1. The "passing bell" for the dying.

2. The church.

3. Punning on the literal sense, "carried across."

4. Controversy that went as far as a lawsuit.

5. Self-esteem.

6. Mainland.

7. This phrase gave Hemingway the title for his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

8. Meet his expenses.

home, heaven, by it. Another man may be sick too, and sick to death, and this affliction may lie in his bowels as gold in a mine and be of no use to him, but this bell that tells me of his affliction digs out and applies that gold to me, if by this consideration of another's danger I take mine own into contemplation and so secure myself by making my recourse to my God, who is our only security.

From *Expostulation* 19

[THE LANGUAGE OF GOD]

My God, my God, thou art a direct God, may I not say a literal God, a God that wouldst be understood literally and according to the plain sense of all that thou sayest. But thou art also (Lord, I intend it to thy glory, and let no profane misinterpreter abuse it to thy diminution), thou art a figurative, a metaphorical God too: a God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions, such spreadings, such curtains of allegories, such third heavens of hyperboles, so harmonious elocutions, so retired and so reserved expressions, so commanding persuasions, so persuading commandments, such sinews even in thy milk and such things in thy words, as all profane⁹ authors seem of the seed of the serpent that creeps; thou art the dove that flies. Oh, what words but thine can express the inexpressible texture and composition of thy word; in which, to one man, that argument that binds his faith to believe that to be the word of God is the reverent simplicity of the word, and to another, the majesty of the word; and in which two men, equally pious, may meet, and one wonder that all should not understand it, and the other as much that any man should. So, Lord, thou givest us the same earth to labor on and to lie in; a house and a grave of the same earth; so, Lord, thou givest us the same word for our satisfaction and for our inquisition,¹ for our instruction and for our admiration too. For there are places that thy servants Jerome and Augustine would scarce believe (when they grew warm by mutual letters) of one another that they understood them, and yet both Jerome and Augustine call upon persons whom they knew to be far weaker than they thought one another (old women and young maids) to read thy Scriptures, without confining them to these or those places.²

Neither art thou thus a figurative, a metaphorical God, in thy word only, but in thy works too. The style of thy works, the phrase of thine actions, is metaphorical. The institution of thy whole worship in the old law was a continual allegory; types and figures³ overspread all, and figures flowed into figures, and poured themselves out into further figures. Circumcision carried a figure of baptism,⁴ and baptism carries a figure of that purity which we shall have in perfection in the New Jerusalem. Neither didst thou speak and work in this language only in the time of the prophets; but since thou spokest in thy son it is so too. How often, how much more often, doth thy son call himself

9. Secular.

1. Investigation.

2. Saints Jerome and Augustine did in fact differ over the proper way of interpreting the Bible, yet they both encouraged its use by the unlearned.

3. Anticipations or prefigurations, especially persons and events in the Hebrew Bible that were read

as prefiguring Christ, or some aspect of the New Testament or of Christian practice. For a beautiful poem exemplifying this process, see Herbert, "The Bunch of Grapes" (p. 1617).

4. Both circumcision and baptism are rites of admission to a religious community.

a way and a light and a gate and a vine and bread than the son of God or of man? How much oftener doth he exhibit a metaphorical Christ than a real, a literal? This hath occasioned thine ancient servants, whose delight it was to write after thy copy,⁵ to proceed the same way in their expositions of the Scriptures, and in their composing both of public liturgies and of private prayers to thee, to make their accesses to thee in such a kind of language as thou wast pleased to speak to them, in a figurative, in a metaphorical language; in which manner I am bold to call the comfort which I receive now in this sickness, in the indication of the concoction⁶ and maturity thereof, in certain clouds⁷ and residences⁸ which the physicians observe, a discovering of land from sea after a long and tempestuous voyage. * * *

1623

From *Death's Duel*¹

[Donne's last sermon, on Psalm 68.20: "And unto God the Lord belong the issues² of Death"—i.e., from death.]

* * * First, then, we consider this *exitus mortis*, to be *liberatio à morte*, that with God, the Lord are the issues of death, and therefore in all our deaths, and the deadly calamities of this life, we may justly hope of a good issue from him; and all our periods and transitions in this life, are so many passages from death to death. Our very birth and entrance into this life is *exitus à morte*, an issue from death, for in our mother's womb we are dead so, as that we do not know we live, not so much as we do in our sleep, neither is there any grave so close, or so putrid a prison, as the womb would be unto us, if we stayed in it beyond our time, or died there before our time. In the grave the worms do not kill us, we breed and feed, and then kill the worms which we ourselves produced. In the womb the dead child kills the mother that conceived it, and is a murderer, nay a parricide, even after it is dead. And if we be not dead so in the womb, so as that being dead, we kill her that gave us our first life, our life of vegetation,³ yet we are dead so, as David's Idols are dead. In the womb we have eyes and see not, ears and hear not.⁴ There in the womb we are fitted for works of darkness, all the while deprived of light: And there in the womb we are taught cruelty, by being fed with blood, and may be damned, though we be never born. * * *

5. Text.

6. Ripening.

7. Cloudy urine.

8. Residues.

1. The printed version of this sermon (1632) has the subtitle "A Consolation to the Soul, against the dying life, and living death of the body." Donne's friend and executor Henry King (later bishop of Chichester) supplied the further information that the sermon was delivered at Whitehall, before King Charles, that it was delivered only a few days before Donne's death, and that it was fitly styled "the author's own funeral sermon." Donne was a powerful and popular preacher, and this sermon was especially moving according to the testimony of many auditors, including Izaak Walton (see his

account of Donne on his deathbed, p. 1309). Besides the personal drama of the preacher himself visibly ill and perhaps dying, the audience must have responded to the almost unbearably graphic analysis of the forms of death and decay—a theme that often preoccupied Donne. As in his poems, the language is personal, rich in learning and curious lore, dazzling in verbal ingenuity and metaphor. As in the *Devotions*, the sentences are long, sinuous, and elaborate. Typically, he uses a number of Latin phrases, but almost always translates or paraphrases them immediately.

2. Passages out.

3. I.e., of growth.

4. Paraphrases Psalm 115.5–6.

1624