JOHN DONNE

From Devotions upon Emergent Occasions

Meditation XI

Nobilibusque trahunt, a cincto corde, venenum, succis et gemmis, et quae generosa, ministrant ars et natura instillant. They use cordials to keep the venom and malignity of the disease from the heart.

Whence can we take a better argument, a clearer demonstration, that all the greatness of this world is built upon opinion of others and hath in itself no real being nor power of subsistence, than from the heart of man? It is always in action and motion, still busy, still pretending to do all, to furnish all the powers and faculties with all that they have; but if an enemy dare rise up against it, it is the soonest endangered, the soonest defeated of any part. The brain will hold out longer than it, and the liver longer than that; they will endure a siege; but an unnatural heat, a rebellious heat, will blow up the heart like a mine in a minute. But howsoever, since the heart hath the birthright and primogeniture, and that it is nature’s eldest son in us, the part which is first born to life in man, and that the other parts, as younger brethren and servants in this family, have a dependence upon it, it is reason that the principal care be had of it, though it be not the strongest part, as the eldest is oftentimes not the strongest of the family. And since the brain and liver and heart hold not a triumvirate in man, a sovereignty equally shed upon them all, for his well-being, as the four elements do for his very being, but the heart alone is in the principality and in the throne as king, the rest as subjects, though in eminent place and office, must contribute to that, as children to their parents, as all persons to all kinds of superiors, though oftentimes those parents, or those superiors, be not of stronger parts than themselves that serve and obey them that are weaker; neither doth this obligation fall upon us by second dictates of nature, by consequences and conclusions arising out of nature, or derived from nature, by discourse (as many things bind us even by the law of nature, and yet not by the primary law of nature; as all laws of propriety in that which we possess are of the law of nature, which law is, To give every one his own, and yet in the primary law of nature there was no propriety, no meum and tuum, but an universal community over all; so

1. The Private Devotions were written during an attack of illness in the winter of 1623. They describe in detail the stages of Donne’s disease and recovery; each stage comprises a meditation on the human condition, an expostulation and debate with God, and a prayer to Him. The book was published almost immediately it was written, and to great effect—the blend of private feeling and public moralizing rendering it particularly accessible to 17th-century readers. And its eloquent periods have provided a title for at least one major modern novel. “Emergent” occasions are those which arise casually or unexpectedly.

2. Donne’s Latin epigraphs are followed by his English translations, some of them very free ones indeed.

3. The specific meaning of “liqueur” had not yet in the 17th century been clearly separated from the general sense of “a medicinal liquid good for ailments of the heart.”

4. Earth, air, fire, and water work together to sustain man’s existence; they are of equal authority, unlike the royal heart and its subordinate brain and liver.

5. Property.

6. Community of goods, i.e., communism, man’s original economic condition. In Paradise Lost (4.751–52), Milton says marriage is “sole propriety [property] / In Paradise of all things common else.” “Meum and Tuum”: mine and thine.
the obedience of superiors is the law of nature, and yet in the primary law of nature there was no superiority, no magistracy); but this contribution of assistance of all to the sovereign, of all parts to the heart, is from the very first dictates of nature, which is, in the first place, to have care of our own preservation, to look first to ourselves; for therefore doth the physician intermit the present care of the brain or liver because there is a possibility that they may subsist though there be not a present and a particular care had of them, but there is no possibility that they can subsist if the heart perish: and so when we seem to begin with others in such assistances, indeed we do begin with ourselves, and we ourselves are principally in our contemplation; and so all these officious and mutual assistances are but compliments towards others, and our true end is ourselves. And this is the reward of the pains of kings: sometimes they need the power of law, to be obeyed; and when they seem to be obeyed voluntarily, they who do it, do it for their own sakes. O how little a thing is all the greatness of man, and through how false glasses doth he make shift to multiply it and magnify it to himself! And yet this is also another misery of this king of man, the heart, which is applicable to the kings of this world, great men, that the venom and poison of every pestilential disease directs itself to the heart, affects that (pernicious affection), and the malignity of ill men is also directed upon the greatest and the best; and not only greatness, but goodness loses the vigor of being an antidote, or cordial, against it. And as the noblest and most generous cordials that nature or art afford, or can prepare, if they be often taken and made familiar, become no cordials, nor have any extraordinary operation, so the greatest cordial of the heart, patience, if it be much exercised, exalts the venom and the malignity of the enemy, and the more we suffer, the more we are insulted upon. When God had made this earth of nothing, it was but a little help that he had, to make other things of this earth: nothing can be nearer nothing than this earth; and yet how little of this earth is the greatest man! He thinks he treads upon the earth, that all is under his feet, and the brain that thinks so is but the earth; his highest region, the flesh that covers that, is but earth; and even the top of that, that wherein so many Absaloms take so much pride, is but a bush growing upon that turf of earth. How little of the world is the earth! And yet that is all that man hath or is. How little of man is the heart! And yet it is all by which he is; and this continually subject, not only to foreign poisons conveyed by others, but to intestine poisons, bred in ourselves by pestilential sicknesses. O who, if before he had a being, he could have sense of this misery, would buy a being here upon these conditions?

Twicknam 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 everything;

7. The word “insult” retained in the 17th century its Latin meaning of “jump on” or “trample,” hence Donne uses it with the preposition “upon.”
8. Absalom, King David’s bastard son, was fatally proud of his long hair (II Samuel 14.25–26, 18.9).
9. Internal.
1. The poem takes its title from the country house at Twickenham Park, of Lucy, Countess of Bedford; she was one of Donne’s patrons.
But oh, self traitor, I do bring
The spider love, which transubstantiates all,
And can convert manna to gall; 2
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 groan here, 3
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 woman’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.

To the Countess of Bedford

MADAM,
Reason is our soul's left hand, faith her right,
By these we reach divinity, that's you;
Their loves, who have the blessings of your light,
Grew from their reason, mine from fair faith grew.

But as, although a squint left-handedness
Be ungracious, yet we cannot want 2 that hand,
So would I, not to increase, but to express
My faith, as I believe, so understand. 3

Therefore I study you first in your saints,
Those friends whom your election glorifies,
Then in your deeds, accesses, and restraints,
And what you read, and what yourself devise.

But soon the reasons why you are loved by all
Grow infinite, and so pass reason's reach,
Then back again to implicit faith I fall,
And rest on what the catholic voice doth teach;

That you are good: and not one heretic
Denies it: if he did, yet you are so.
For, rocks which high-topped and deep-rooted stick,
Waves wash, not undermine, nor overthrow.

In every thing there naturally grows
A balsamum, to keep it fresh and new,
If 'twere not injured by extrinsic blows;
Your birth and beauty are this balm in you.

But you of learning and religion,
And virtue, and such ingredients, have made
A mithridate, whose operation
Keeps off, or cures, what can be done or said.

Yet, this is not your physic but your food,
A diet fit for you; for you are here
The first good angel, since the world’s frame stood,
That ever did in woman’s shape appear.

Since you are then God’s masterpiece, and so
His factor for our loves; do as you do,

Make your return home gracious; and bestow
This life on that; so make one life of two.

For so God help me, I would not miss you there
For all the good which you can do me here.

The Curse

Who ever guesses, thinks, or dreams he knows
Who is my mistress, wither by this curse;
His only, and only his purse
May some dull heart to love dispose,¹

4. Universal.
5. Paracelsus and other early physicians have much to say of a natural balsam, or balm, which preserves life and cures all human ailments.
6. From Mithridates, the Persian king, who (it is related) ate poisons in small doses to render himself immune from large ones; hence, an immunizing dose.
7. Medicine.
8. A factor is one who does business for another, an agent. The sense of the last stanza is dark. “Home” (line 35) and “there” (line 37) certainly refer to heaven; he is, then, asking her to become a saint and intervene with God in his behalf, rather than help him in a worldly sense, the shape of which remains rather ill-defined.
1. I.e., may some dull heart fall in love with him for his only purse, and only for that.
And she yield then to all that are his foes;
May he be scorned by one whom all else scorn,
Forswear to others what to her h’ hath sworn,
With fear of missing, shame of getting, torn:

Madness his sorrow, gout his cramp, may he
Make, by but thinking, who hath made him such:
And may he feel no touch
Of conscience, but of fame, and be
Anguished, not that ’twas sin, but that ’twas she:
In early and long scarceness may he rot,
For land which had been his, if he had not
Himself incestuously an heir begot:

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

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

Lovers’ Infiniteness

If yet I have not all thy love,
Dear, I shall never have it all;
I cannot breathe one other sigh to move,
Nor can entreat one other tear to fall;

And all my treasure, which should purchase thee,
Sighs, tears, and oaths, and letters, I have spent.
Yet no more can be due to me
Than at the bargain made was meant;
If then thy gift of love were partial,
That some to me, some should to others fall,
Dear, I shall never have thee all.

2. I.e., may he have so many parasites that he’ll have to be parasitic on them.
3. Stepmothers and gamblers are represented as particularly malicious; tyrants are understood to wish the death of their subjects, and vice versa.

1. The influence of Donne’s legal training is very clear here; the poem is a series of technical verbal quibbles on the word “all.”
Or if then thou gavest me all,
All was but all which thou hadst then;
But if in thy heart since there be or shall
New love created be by other men,
Which have their stocks entire, and can in tears,
In sighs, in oaths, and letters outbid me,
This new love may beget new fears,
For this love was not vowed by thee.
And yet it was, thy gift being general,
The ground, thy heart, is mine; whatever shall
Grow there, dear, I should have it all.

Yet I would not have all yet.
He that hath all can have no more;
And since my love doth every day admit
New growth, thou shouldst have new rewards in store.
Thou canst not every day give me thy heart;
If thou canst give it, then thou never gavest it.
Love's riddles are, that though thy heart depart,
It stays at home, and thou with losing savest it.
But we will have a way more liberal
Than changing hearts, to join them;² so we shall
Be one, and one another's all.

The Storm¹

To Mr. Christopher Brooke

Thou which art I² (tis nothing to be so),
Thou which art still thyself, by these shalt know
Part of our passage; and a hand or eye
By Hilliard³ drawn is worth an history
5
By a worse painter made; and (without pride)
When by thy judgment they are dignified,
My lines are such: 'tis the preeminence
Of friendship only to impute excellence.

England, to whom we owe what we be and have,
10
Sad that her sons did seek a foreign grave
(For Fate's or Fortune's drifts⁵ none can soothsay,⁶ intentions/predict appearance
Honor and misery have one face⁶ and way),

². To join hearts is more liberal than to “change” (exchange) them; “liberal” implies amorous generosity, also relief from legal hairsplitting.
¹. The Storm is a display of virtuoso wit, but it is also factual reporting of a historical event. In 1597, Elizabeth, alarmed by reports of a second Armada being prepared by Philip II of Spain, authorized a preemptive strike under the primary leadership of Essex and Raleigh. Donne went along as a gentleman volunteer. Having started against Cádiz, the fleet ran into a violent storm, a result of which was this verse letter; later in the summer, after refitting at Plymouth, the fleet sailed again toward the Azores. But there the adventurers ran into exactly the opposite weather problem, a prolonged calm, about which Donne wrote a second verse letter, probably addressed, like the first, to Christopher Brooke, a close friend from the Inns of Court, who also attended Donne’s clandestine marriage.
³. In Neoplatonic philosophy, friends have, as it were, one soul in two bodies.
⁴. Nicholas Hilliard, the most famous portrait painter and miniaturist of the Elizabethan age.
From out her pregnant entrails sighed a wind
Which at th’ air’s middle marble room did find
Such strong resistance that itself it threw
Downward again; and so when it did view
How in the port our fleet dear time did leese,°
Withering like prisoners which lie but for fees,⁵
Mildly it kissed our sails, and fresh and sweet
As to a stomach sterved,⁶ whose insides meet,
Meat comes, it came; and swole our sails, when we
So joyed, as Sara her swelling joyed to see.⁷
But ’twas but so kind as our countrymen
Which bring friends one day’s way, and leave them then.
Then like two mighty kings, which dwelling far
Asunder, meet against a third to war,
The south and west winds joined, and as they blew,
Waves like a rolling trench before them threw.
Sooner than you read this line did the gale,
Like shot, not feared till felt, our sails assail;
And what at first was called a gust, the same
Hath now a storm’s, anon a tempest’s name.
Jonas, I pity thee, and curse those men
Who when the storm raged most did wake thee then;⁸
Sleep is pain’s easiest salve, and doth fulfill
All offices of death except to kill.
But when I waked, I saw that I saw not;
I° and the sun which should teach me had forgot
East, west, day, night, and I could only say,
If the world had lasted, now it had been day.
Thousands our noises were, yet we ’mongst all
Could none by his right name but thunder call.
Lightning was all our light, and it rained more
Than if the sun had drunk the sea before.
Some coffined in their cabins lie, equally
Grieved that they are not dead and yet must die;
And as sin-burdened souls from graves will creep
At the last day, some forth their cabins peep,
And tremblingly ask what news, and do hear so
Like jealous husbands what they would not know.
Some sitting on the hatches would seem there°
With hideous gazing to fear° away fear.
Then note they the ship’s sicknesses, the mast
Shaked with this ague, and the hold and waist°
With a salt dropsy clogged, and all our tacklings
Snapping, like too-high-stretched treble strings.
And from our tattered sails rags drop down so

4. The coldest middle region, where hail, snow, and fierce storms took form.
5. Prisoners often languished in jail for lack of money to pay the jailors’ fees.
6. Donne’s fondness for repeating in immediate proximity the same sound or word, not always as puns, is apparent here: “meat/Meet”; “comes, it came”; and in line 30, “sails assail.”
7. Sarah, wife of Abraham, laughed with joy when she learned she was pregnant with Isaac at age 90; Abraham was 103 (Genesis 2.6–7).
8. Jonah, asleep in his storm-tossed vessel, was awakened and accused of bringing bad luck (Jonah 1.5–6).
As from one hanged in chains a year ago.⁹
Even our ordnance, placed for our defense,
Strive to break loose and 'scape away from thence.¹
Pumping hath tired our men, and what's the gain?
Seas into seas thrown we suck in again.
Hearing hath deafed our sailors, and if they
Knew how to hear, there's none knows what to say.
Compared to these storms, death is but a qualm,
Hell somewhat lightsome, and the Bermuda calm.²
Darkness, light's elder brother, his birthright
Claims o'er this world, and to heaven hath chased light.
All things are one, and that one none⁰ can be,
nothing
Since all forms uniform deformity
Doth cover, so that we, except God say
Another Fiat, shall have no more day.³
So violent yet long these furies be,
That though thine absence serve⁰ me, I wish not thee. famish

1597 1633

Elegy I. Jealousy¹

Fond² woman, which wouldst have thy husband die,
And yet complaintst of his great jealousy:
If, swoll'n with poison, he lay in's last bed,
His body with a cere-bark³ covered,
Drawing his breath as thick and short as can
The nimblest crocheting musician,⁴
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 would'st not weep, but jolly and frolic be,
As a slave which tomorrow should be free;
Yet weep'st thou when thou seest him hungrily
Swallow his own death, heart's-bane jealousy.
Oh give him many thanks, he is 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

9. After being executed, criminals were often left chained indefinitely on the gallows, as a warning to others.
1. Cannon (“ordnance”) torn loose from their moorings were a fearful peril in a rough sea.
2. The Bermudas lie in a turbulent area of ocean; compare Shakespeare, “the still-ve'd Bermoothes” in The Tempest 1.2, and the modern-day “Bermuda triangle.”
3. By saying “Let there be light” (Fiat lux), God created the first day (Genesis 1.3).
4. Crochets (pronounced to rhyme with “pockets”) are quarter-notes, to be played very fast.
With words nor touch, scarce looks, adulterate.\(^5\)
Nor when he swoll’n and pampered 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,\(^6\) or Germans the Pope’s pride.

Elegy IV. The Perfume\(^1\)

Once, and but once found in thy company,
All thy supposed escapes are laid on me;
And as a thief at bar is questioned there
By all the men that have been robbed that year,
So am I (by this traitorous means surprised),
By thy hydroptic\(^2\) father catechized.
Though he had wont to search with glazéd eyes,
As though he came to kill a cockatrice,\(^3\)
Though he hath often sworn that he would remove
Thy beauty’s beauty, and food of our love,
Hope of his goods, if I with thee were seen,
Yet close and secret as our souls we have been.

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5. Commit adultery.
6. Suburban inhabitants of the “liberties” on the south bank of the Thames were beyond the jurisdiction of the municipal authorities. Houses of prostitution were therefore frequent there. Donne is not trying to compliment the lady.
1. In Latin poetry, an elegy is not necessarily a funeral lament, but may be simply a discursive or reflective poem written in elegiac meter (alternating dactylic pentameters and hexameters). In English, the genre has been even vaguer, partly because this metrical pattern is unusual; and many early poems in pentameter couplets have been classified as elegies simply because they discussed some matter more or less consecutively and severely. Twenty poems by Donne are customarily grouped together as elegies; they are not so rough as the satires nor so clearly musical as many of the Songs and Sonnets, but to find any other common denominator will not be easy. They include dramatic sketches and monologues, short stories in verse, satires, jokes, epigrams, and simple love lyrics. Apparently they were written over a considerable period of time, and with no single purpose or unifying theme in mind.

Elegy IV is rowdy and cynical, with a “low” point of view and a sour, suspicious eye for everyone’s worst motives—including the poet’s own. The poem is addressed to the speaker’s mistress, a girl living with her parents. (Others of the elegies are to married women, court ladies, or to nobody in particular.) The circumstances of the poem suggest a middle-class family, probably of merchant status; the poet assumes the part of an adventurer, ruthless and greedy. Clearly Donne is playing here with a situation. Hence the word “escapes” meaning “sexual lapses,” is not really an insult, for the whole situation is that of a comic story of sexual misadventure.
2. Thirsty for information, curious; with the additional overtone of “dropsical,” i.e., swollen with disease and money, flabby.
3. The cockatrice, or basilisk, was a fabulous beast, reputed to kill its enemies by its very glance; the girl’s father is so suspicious of the speaker that he scarcely looks at him. In this situation of unmasked social warfare, the speaker can admit that for him the beauty of the girl’s beauty (i.e., its essence) is hope of her father’s goods.
Though thy immortal mother, which doth lie
Still buried in her bed, yet will not die,
Takes this advantage to sleep out day light,
And watch thy entries and returns all night,
And when she takes thy hand, and would seem kind,
Doth search what rings and armlets she can find,
And, kissing, notes the color of thy face,
And, fearing lest thou art swollen, doth thee embrace;
To try if thou long, doth name strange meats,
And notes thy paleness, blushing, sighs, and sweats;
And politicly will to thee confess
The sins of her own youth's rank lustiness;
Yet Love these sorceries did remove, and move
Thee to gull thine own mother for my love.
Thy little brethren, which like fairy sprites
Oft skipped into our chamber, those sweet nights,
And kissed and ingled on thy father's knee,
Were bribed next day to tell what they did see:
The grim, eight-foot-high, iron-bound serving-man,
That oft names God in oaths, and only then,
He that to bar the first gate doth as wide
As the great Rhodian Colossus stride,
Which, if in hell no other pains there were,
Makes me fear hell, because he must be there:
Though by thy father he were hired to this,
Could never witness any touch or kiss.
But O, too common ill, I brought with me
That which betrayed me to my enemy,
A loud perfume, which at my entrance cried
Even at thy father's nose, so were we spied.
When, like a tyrant king that in his bed
Smelt gunpowder, the pale wretch shiveréd.
Had it been some bad smell, he would have thought
That his own feet, or breath, that smell had wrought.
But as we, in our isle imprisonéd,
Where cattle only, and divers dogs are bred,
The precious unicorns strange monsters call,
So thought he good, strange, that had none at all.
I taught my silks their whistling to forbear,
Even my oppressed shoes dumb and speechless were,
Only thou bitter-sweet, whom I had laid
Next me, me traitorously hast betrayed,
And unsuspected hast invisibly
At once fled unto him, and stayed with me.
Base excrement of earth, which dost confound

4. All the stock tests for pregnancy are being applied.
5. With policy (in order to provoke a counter-confession from her daughter).
6. Fool, deceive.
7. Fondled, caressed.
8. The giant statue of Apollo at Rhodes was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.
9. The reference may be to James I and the Gunpowder Plot, which would date the poem sometime after 1605.
Sense from distinguishing the sick from sound;  
By thee the silly amorous sucks his death
60 By drawing in a leprous harlot’s breath;  
By thee the greatest stain to man’s estate  
Falls on us, to be called effeminate;  
Though you be much loved in the prince’s hall,  
There, things that seem exceed substantial;²
65 Gods, when ye fumed on altars,³ were pleased well  
Because you were burnt, not that they liked your smell;  
You are loathsome all, being taken simply alone,  
Shall we love ill things joined, and hate each one?⁴  
If you were good, your good doth soon decay;  
And you are rare, that takes the good away.⁵
70 All my perfumes I give most willingly  
To embalm thy father’s corpse; What? will he die?⁶

1633

**From Paradoxes and Problems¹**

*Paradox VI. That It Is Possible to Find Some Virtue in Women*

I am not of that seared² impudence that I dare defend women, or pronounce them good; yet we see physicians allow some virtue in every poison. Alas! why should we except women? since certainly they are good for physic³ at least, so as some wine is good for a fever. And though they be the occasioners of many sins, they are also the punishers and revengers of the same sins: for I have seldom seen one which consumes his substance and body upon them, escapes diseases or beggary; and this is their justice. And if *suum cuique dare⁴* be the fulfilling of all civil justice, they are most just; for they deny that which is theirs to no man.

*Tanquam non liceat nulla puella negat.⁵*

And who may doubt of great wisdom in them, that doth but observe with how much labor and cunning our justicers and other dispensers of the laws study to embrace them: and how zealously our preachers dehort⁶ men from them, only by urging their subtleties and policies and wisdom, which are in them? Or who can deny them a good measure of fortitude, if he consider how valiant men they have overthrown, and being themselves overthrown, how much and how patiently they bear? And though they be most intemperate, I care not, for I undertook to furnish them with some virtue, not with all. Necessity, which

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2. I.e., at court more attention is paid to empty appearances than to matters of substance.
3. Incense.
4. The ingredients in perfume are often unpleasant individually; why should we like the end product?
5. I.e., that (your rarity) spoils any good you may possess.
6. The word “corpse” gives the speaker sudden hope.
1. In 1633, two years after Donne’s death, a volume of his *Juvenilia*, or youthful productions, appeared. The “Paradoxes and Problems,” as they are subtitled, are bits of logical horseplay, loaded with legal aphorisms perversely misapplied, and perfectly impudent in their cheerful, brassy assurance. This is the mood, and sometimes the mode, of many of the Songs and Sonnets; *Go and Catch a Falling Star* involves a playful misuse of logic akin to that of Paradox VI.
2. Insensitive, unfeeling.
3. As a medicine, to cure a morbid condition.
4. “To give each his own.”
5. “So long as it’s forbidden, no girl will deny it.”
6. Discourage, draw away.
makes even bad things good, prevails also for them, for we must say of them, as of some sharp pinching laws: If men were free from infirmities, they were needless. These or none must serve for reasons, and it is my great happiness that examples prove not rules, for to confirm this opinion, the world yields not one example.

**Problem II. Why Puritans Make Long Sermons?**

It needs not for perspicuousness, for God knows they are plain enough: nor do all of them use sem-brief accents, for some of them have crotchets enough. It may be they intend not to rise like glorious tapers and torches, but like thin-wretched-sick-watching-candles, which languish and are in a divine consumption from the first minute, yea in their snuff, and stink when others are in their more profitable glory. I have thought sometimes that out of conscience they allow “Long measure to coarse ware.” And sometimes that, usurping in that place a liberty to speak freely of kings, they would reign as long as they could. But now I think they do it out of a zealous imagination that it is their duty to preach on till their auditory wake.

**Problem VI. Why Hath the Common Opinion Afforded Women Souls?**

It is agreed that we have not so much from them as any part of either our mortal souls of sense or growth; and we deny souls to others equal to them in all but in speech, for which they are beholding to their bodily instruments: for per chance an ox’s heart, or a goat’s, or a fox’s, or a serpent’s would speak just so, if it were in the breast, and could move that tongue and jaws. Have they so many advantages and means to hurt us (for, ever their loving destroyed us) that we dare not displease them, but give them what they will? And so when some call them Angels, some Goddesses, and the Palpulian heretics make them bishops, we descend so much with the stream to allow them souls? Or do we somewhat (in this dignifying of them) flatter princes and great personages, that are so much governed by them? Or do we in that easiness and prodigality, wherein we daily lose our own souls to we care not whom, so labor to persuade ourselves, that sith a woman hath a soul, a soul is no great matter? Or do we lend them souls but for use, since they for our sakes give their souls again, and their bodies to boot? Or perchance because the devil (who is all soul) doth most mischief, and for convenience and proportion, because they would come nearer him, we allow them some souls, and so as the Romans naturalized some provinces in revenge, and made them Romans only for the burden of the commonwealth; so we have given women souls only to make them capable of damnation?

7. The sem-brief (now spelled semibreve) is, in modern music, the longest note in ordinary use, a whole note; the crotchet is a note with half the value of a minim, a very short note indeed. But Donne is also playing with another meaning of “crotchet”: a cranky idea on an unimportant point.
8. I.e., extra quantity to atone for poor quality.
9. 17th-century anatomy imputed to man several vital principles in addition to his immortal soul. The “animal spirits” and “vital spirits” which governed man’s senses and his growth might be referred to freely as “souls.”
1. “Palpulians,” a nonsense word, is probably a misprint for “Peputians.” The Montanist sect, which centered at Pepuza in Phrygia, admitted women to the offices of deacon and sometimes of priest; Donne exaggerates when he mentions bishops.
2. I.e., usury. Donne is suggesting that women’s souls are only rented, to yield a profit to men.
All our life is a continual burden, yet we must not groan; a continual squeezing, yet we must not pant; and as in the tenderness of our childhood, we suffer and yet are whipped if we cry, so we are complained of if we complain, and made delinquents if we call the times ill. And that which adds weight to weight and multiplies the sadness of this consideration is this: that still the best men have had most laid upon them. As soon as I hear God say that he hath found "an upright man, that fears God and eschews evil," in the next lines I find a commission to Satan to bring in Sabeans and Chaldeans upon his cattle and servants, and fire and tempest upon his children, and loathsome diseases upon himself. As soon as I hear God say that he hath found "a man according to his own heart," I see his sons ravish his daughters and then murder one another, and then rebel against the father and put him into straits for his life. As soon as I hear God testify of Christ at his baptism, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” I find that Son of his “led up by the Spirit, to be tempted of the devil.” And after I hear God ratify the same testimony again, at his transfiguration (“This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,”), I find that beloved Son of his deserted, abandoned, and given over to scribes, and Pharisees, and publicans, and Herodians, and priests, and soldiers, and people, and judges, and witnesses, and executioners; and he that was called the beloved Son of God and made partaker of the glory of heaven, in this world, in his transfiguration, is made now the sewer of all the corruption, of all the sins of this world, as no Son of God but a mere man, as no man but a contemptible worm. As though the greatest weakness in this world were man, and the greatest fault in man were to be good, man is more miserable than other creatures, and good men more miserable than any other men.

But then there is Pondus Gloriae, an exceeding weight of eternal glory, that turns the scale; for as it makes all worldly prosperity as dung, so it makes all worldly adversity as feathers. And so it had need, for in the scale against it there are not only put temporal afflictions, but spiritual too; and to these two kinds we may accommodate those words, “He that falls upon this stone” (upon temporal afflictions) may be bruised, broken, “but he upon whom that stone falls” (spiritual afflictions) “is in danger to be ground to powder.” And then the great and yet ordinary danger is that these spiritual afflictions grow out of temporal: murmuring and diffidence in God and obduration, out of worldly calamities; and so against nature, the fruit is greater and heavier than the tree, spiritual heavier than temporal afflictions.

Let me wither and wear out mine age in a discomfortable, in an unwholesome, in a penurious prison, and so pay my debts with my bones and recompense the wastefulness of my youth with the beggary of mine age; let me wither in a spittle under sharp and foul and infamous diseases, and so recompense

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1. This is the story of the Book of Job.
2. The story of David.
3. The temptation on the mount, Matthew 4.1–11.
4. Followers of Herod, listed among the enemies of Christ.
6. Hospital.
the wantonness of my youth with that loathsomeness in mine age; yet if God withdraw not his spiritual blessings, his grace, his patience, if I can call my suffering his doing, my passion his action, all this that is temporal is but a caterpillar got into one corner of my garden, but a mildew fallen upon one acre of my corn; the body of all, the substance of all is safe as long as the soul is safe. But when I shall trust to that which we call a good spirit, and God shall deject and impoverish and evacuate that spirit, when I shall rely upon a moral constancy, and God shall shake, and enfeeble, destroy and demolish that constancy, when I shall think to refresh myself in the serenity and sweet air of a good conscience, and God shall call up the damps and vapors of hell itself and spread a cloud of diffidence and an impenetrable crust of desperation upon my conscience; when health shall fly from me and I shall lay hold upon riches to succor me and comfort me in my sickness, and riches shall fly from me, and I shall snatch after favor and good opinion to comfort me in my poverty; when even this good opinion shall leave me and calumnies and misinformations shall prevail against me; when I shall need peace because there is none but thou, O Lord, that should stand for me, and then shall find that all the wounds that I have, come from thy hand, all the arrows that stick in me, from thy quiver; when I shall see that because I have given myself to my corrupt nature, thou hast changed thine; and because I am all evil towards thee, therefore thou hast given over being good towards me: when it comes to this height, that the fever is not in the humors but in the spirits,7 that mine enemy is not an imaginary enemy, fortune, nor a transitory enemy, malice in great persons, but a real and an irresistible and an inexorable and an everlasting enemy, The Lord of Hosts himself, The Almighty God himself, the Almighty God himself only knows the weight of this affliction, and except he put in that Pondus Glorae, that exceeding weight of an eternal glory, with his own hand, into the other scale, we are weighed down, we are swallowed up, irreparably, irrevocably, irrecoverably, irremediably.

If you look upon this world in a map, you find two hemispheres, two half worlds. If you crush heaven into a map, you may find two hemispheres too, two half heavens; half will be joy, and half will be glory, for in these two (the joy of heaven and the glory of heaven) is all heaven often represented unto us. And as of those two hemispheres of the world, the first hath been known long before, but the other (that of America, which is the richer in treasure), God reserved for later discoveries; so though he reserve that hemisphere of heaven which is the glory thereof, to the resurrection, yet the other hemisphere, the joy of heaven, God opens to our discovery and delivers for our habitation even whilst we dwell in this world. First think, that as a man must have some land or else he cannot be in wardship, so a man must have some of the love of God or else he could not fall under God’s correction; God would not give him his physic, God would not study his cure, if he cared not for him. And then think also, that if God afford thee the shadow of his wings, that is, consolation, respiration, refreshing, though not a present and plenary deliverance in thy afflictions, not to thank God is a murmuring, and not to rejoice in God’s ways is an unthankfulness. Howling is the noise of hell, singing the voice of heaven; sadness the damp of hell, rejoicing the serenity of heaven. And be that hath not this joy here, lacks one of the best pieces of his evidence for the joys

7. I.e., not superficial but in the root and marrow of my existence.
of heaven, and hath neglected or refused that earnest by which God uses to
bind his bargain, that true joy in this world shall flow into the joy of heaven as
a river flows into the sea; this joy shall not be put out in death and a new joy
kindled in me in heaven; but as my soul, as soon as it is out of my body, is in
heaven and does not stay for the possession of heaven nor for the fruition of
the sight of God till it be ascended through air, and fire, and moon, and sun,
and planets, and firmament, to that place which we conceive to be heaven, but
without the thousandth part of a minute’s stop, as soon as it issues, is in a glo-
rious light, which is heaven (for all the way to heaven is heaven; and as those
angels which came from heaven hither, bring heaven with them and are in
heaven here, so that soul that goes to heaven meets heaven here; and as those
angels do not divest heaven by coming, so these souls invest heaven, in their
going). As my soul shall not go towards heaven but go by heaven to heaven, to
the heaven of heavens, so the true joy of a good soul in this world is the very
joy of heaven.

From Sermon LXXVI

[ON FALLING OUT OF GOD’S HAND]

* * * When God’s hand is bent to strike, “it is a fearful thing to fall into the
hands of the living God”; but to fall out of the hands of the living God is a hor-
ror beyond our expression, beyond our imagination. That God should let my
soul fall out of his hand into a bottomless pit and roll an unremovable stone
upon it and leave it to that which it finds there (and it shall find that there
which it never imagined till it came thither) and never think more of that soul,
never have more to do with it; that of that providence of God that studies the
life of every weed and worm and ant and spider and toad and viper there should
never, never any beam flow out upon me; that that God who looked upon me
when I was nothing and called me when I was not, as though I had been, out
of the womb and depth of darkness, will not look upon me now, when though
a miserable and a banished and a damned creature, yet I am his creature still
and contribute something to his glory even in my damnation; that that God
who hath often looked upon me in my foulest uncleanness and when I had shut
out the eye of the day, the sun, and the eye of the night, the taper, and the eyes
of all the world with curtains and windows and doors, did yet see me and see
me in mercy by making me see that he saw me and sometimes brought me to
a present remorse and (for that time) to a forbearing of that sin, should so turn
himself from me to his glorious saints and angels as that no saint nor angel nor
Christ Jesus himself should ever pray him to look towards me, never remem-
ber him that such a soul there is; that that God who hath so often said to my

1. Of Donne’s estimated 180 sermons, the extraordinary total of 160 survive—monumental
evidence that he was both a prolific and a popular
preacher. The reasons for his popularity are clear:
the sermons are not only rich in learning and curi-
ous lore; they are characteristically personal and
powerful in their phrasing. Concepts which Donne
used in his poems continually recur in the ser-
mons, and the fuller context of the prose often
sheds useful light on the meaning of the poetry.
Our present selection comes from the concluding
part of a sermon preached "to the Earl of Carlisle
and his company, at Sion" on the text, Mark 16.16:
“He that believeth not, shall be damned.” The date
is some time after 1623, when Sion College was
founded in London by Dr. Thomas White.
3. Remind.
soul, Oudre morieris? why wilt thou die? and so often sworn to my soul, Vivit Dominus, as the Lord liveth, I would not have thee die but live, will neither let me die nor let me live, but die an everlasting life and live an everlasting death; that that God who, when he could not get into me by standing and knocking, by his ordinary means of entering, by his word, his mercies, hath applied his judgments and hath shaked the house, this body, with agues and palsies, and set this house on fire with fevers and calentures, and frightened the master of the house, my soul, with horrors and heavy apprehensions and so made an entrance into me; that that God should frustrate all his own purposes and practices upon me and leave me and cast me away as though I had cost him nothing; that this God at last should let this soul go away as a smoke, as a vapor, as a bubble; and that then this soul cannot be a smoke, a vapor, nor a bubble, but must lie in darkness as long as the Lord of light is light itself, and never spark of that light reach to my soul; what Tophet is not paradise, what brimstone is not amber, what gnashing is not a comfort, what gnawing of the worm is not a tickling, what torment is not a marriage bed to this damnation, to be secluded eternally, eternally, eternally from the sight of God? * * *

1640

A Nocturnal upon Saint 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 unmask’d;
The sun is spent, and now his flasks
Send forth light squibs, no constant rays.

The world’s whole sap is sunk;
The general balm th’ hydroptic earth hath drunk,
Whither, as to the bed’s feet, life is shrunk,
Dead and interred; yet all these seem to laugh,
Compared with me, who am their epitaph.

Study me, then, you who shall lovers be
At the next world, that is, at the next spring;
For I am every dead thing
In whom love wrought new alchemy.

For his art did express
A quintessence even from nothingness,
From dull privations and lean emptiness.
He ruined me, and I am re-begot
Of absence, darkness, death: things which are not.

All others from all things draw all that’s good,
Life, soul, form, spirit, whence they being have;
I, by love’s limbeck, am the grave
Of all that’s nothing. Oft a flood
Have we two wept, and so

4. Fever with delirium.
Drowned the whole world, us two; oft did we grow
To be two chaoses when we did show
Care to aught else; and often absences
Withdrew our souls, and made us carcasses.

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

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

The Blossom

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

Little think’st thou, poor heart,
    That labor’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 tomorrow, 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 stayed and done thy most,
A naked thinking heart that makes no show
Is to a woman but a kind of ghost.
How shall she know my heart; or, having none,
Know thee for one?
Practice may make her know some other part,
But take my word, she doth not know a 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 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
As glad to have my body as my mind.

A Lecture upon the Shadow

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

That love hath not attained 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.

Holy Sonnet 17

Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt
To Nature, and to hers, and my good is dead,
And her soul early into heaven ravished,
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is set.

Here the admiring her my mind did whet
To seek thee, God; so streams do show the 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, whenas 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.