Elegy XIX. To His Mistress Going to Bed

Come, madam, come, all rest my powers defy,
Until I labor, I in labor lie.
The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
Is tired with standing though he never fight.
Off with that girdle, like heaven's zone glistening,
But a far fairer world encompassing.
Unpin that spangled breastplate which you wear,
That the eyes of busy fools may be stopped there.
Unlace yourself, for that harmonious chime
Tells me from you that now 'tis your bed time.
Off with that happy busk,¹ 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 the hill's shadow steals.
Off with that wiry coronet² and show
The hairy diadem which on you doth grow:
Now off with those shoes, and then safely tread
In this love's hallowed 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, 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, safest when with one man manned,
My mine of precious stones, my empery,³
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 unclothed must be
To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use
Are like Atlanta's balls,⁴ 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 revealed. Then, since that I may know,
As liberally as to a midwife, show
Thyself: cast all, yea, this white linen hence,
Here is no penance, much less innocence.⁵
To teach thee, I am naked first; why than,⁶
What needst thou have more covering than a man.

¹. Corset.
². Part of a woman's headdress.
³. Empire.
⁴. The golden apples dropped by a suitor in a foot race with Atalanta, the fleet-footed huntress of Greek myth, in order to distract and delay her. Donne here adapts the myth to his own use.
⁵. Penance and innocence are both represented by white.
⁶. Then.

1669
Marke but this flea, and marke in this,
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
Mee it suck'd first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled bee;
Confesse it, this cannot be said
A sinne, or shame, or losse of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoys before it woee,
And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than wee would doe.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where wee almost, nay more than maryed 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 cloysterd in these living walls of Jet.
  Though use make thee apt to kill mee,
  Let not to this, selfe murder added bee,
  And sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three.

Cruell and sodaine, hast thou since
Purpled thy naile, in blood of innocence?
In what could this flea guilty bee,
Except in that drop which it suckt from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and saist that thou
Find'st not thy selfe, nor mee the weaker now;
  'Tis true, then learne how false, feares bee;
  Just so much honor, when thou yeeld'st to mee,
  Will wast, as this flea's death tooke life from thee.

1. Donne's love lyrics, scattered in the first edition, were collected together in the second under the heading 'Songs and Sonets'. In my edition I have arranged them in two groups in accordance with my theories as to their probable dates. Here I follow the haphazard order in the edition of 1655.

2. Fleas were a popular subject for jocose and amatory poetry in all countries at the Renaissance.
The Apparition

When by thy scorne, O murdresse, I am dead,
   And that thou thinkst thee free
From all solicitation from mee,

Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,
And thee, fain'd vestall, in worse armes shall see;
Then thy sicke taper will begin to winke,
And he, whose thou art then, being tyr'd before,
Will, if thou stirre, or pinch to wake him, thinke
   Thou call'st for more,
And in false sleepe will from thee shrinke,
And then poore Aspen wretch, neglected thou
Bath'd in a cold quicksilver sweat wilt lye
   A veryer ghost than I;
What I will say, I will not tell thee now,
Lest that preserve thee; and since my love is spent,
I'had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,
   Than by my threatenings rest still innocent.

6. John Donne

"The Flea"
and
"Apparition"
As virtuous men passe mildly away,
And whisper to their soules, to goe,
Whilst some of their sad friends doe say,
The breath goes now, and some say, no:
So let us melt, and make no noise,
No teare-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,
'Twere prophanation of our joyes
To tell the layetie our love.
Moving of th'earth brings harmses and feares,
Men reckon what it did and meant,
But trepidation of the spheares,
Though greater farre, is innocent.
Dull sublunary lovers love
(Whose soule 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 lesse, eyes, lips, and hands to misse.
Our two soules therefore, which are one,
Though I must goe, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to ayery thinnesse beate.
If they be two, they are two so
As stiffe twin compasses are two,
Thy soule the fixt foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the'other doe.
And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth rome,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And growes erect, as that comes home.
Such wilt thou be to mee, who must
Like th'other foot, obliquely runne;
Thy firmnes drawes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begunne.
The Extasie

Where, like a pillow on a bed,  
A Pregnant banke swel'd up, to rest  
The violets reclining head,  
Sat we two, one anothers best.

Our hands were firmly cimented  
With a fast balme, which thence did spring,  
Our eye-beams' twisted, and did thred  
Our eyes, upon one double string;

So to'entergraft our hands, as yet  
Was all our meanes to make us one,  
And pictures on our eyes to get  
Was all our propagation.

As 'twixt two equall Armies, Fate  
Suspends uncertaine victorie,  
Our soules, (which to advance their state,  
Were gone out,) hung 'twixt her, and mee.

And whil'st our soules negotiate there,  
Wee like sepulchrall statues lay;  
All day, the same our postures were,  
And wee said nothing, all the day.

If any, so by love refin'd,  
That he soules language understood,  
And by good love were grown all minde,  
Within convenient distance stood;

He (though he knew not which soule spake,  
Because both meant, both spake the same)  
Might thence a new concoction take,  
And part farre purer than he came.

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

1. One theory of sight held that it was caused by the contact of a beam emitted from the eye with the object seen.
2. They were ‘looking babies’, that is, seeing the image of each reflected in the eyes of the other.
John Donne

But as all severall soules containe
   Mixture of things, they know not what,
Love, these mixt soules, doth mixe againe,
   And makes both one, each this and that.

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

When love, with one another so
   Interinanimates two soules,
That abler soule, which thence doth flow,
   Defects of lonelinesse controules.

Wee then, who are this new soule, know,
   Of what we are compos'd, and made,
For, th'Atomies of which we grow,
   Are soules, whom no change can invade.

But O alas, so long, so farre
   Our bodies why doe wee forbear?
They'are ours, though they'are not wee, Wee are
   Th'intelligences, they the sphære.¹

We owe them thankes, because they thus,
   Did us, to us, at first convoy,
Yeelded their forces, sense, to us,
   Nor are drosse to us, but allay.

On man heavens influence workes not so,
   But that it first imprints the ayre,
Soe soule into the soule may flow,
   Though it to body first repaire.

¹. sphære: the whole physical cosmos, made up of concentric spheres moved by intelligences, or angels.

As our blood labours to beget
   Spirits, as like soules as it can,
Because such fingers need¹ to knit
   That subtile knot, which makes us man.²
So must pure lovers soules descend
   T' affections, and to faculties,
That sense may reach and apprehend,
   Else a great Prince in prison lies.
To our bodies turne wee then, that so
   Weake men on love reveal'd may looke;
Loves mysteries in soules doe grow,
   But yet the body is his booke.
And if some lover, such as wee,
   Have heard this dialogue of one,
Let him still marke us, he shall see
   Small change, when we'are to bodies gone.

¹. need: are necessary.

². In the old physiology, the spirits were rarified and subue substances in the blood, concocted in the liver, purified in the heart and further subtilized in the brain. By them the brain's commands were communicated to the muscles. The union of soul and body, through the working of the spirits, 'makes us man'.
Sonnet #3
This is my playes last scene, here heavens appoint
My pilgrimages last mile; and my race
Idly, yet quickly runne, hath this last pace,
My spans last inch, my minutes last point,
And gluttonous death, will instantly unjoynt
My body, and soule, and I shall sleepe a space,
But my ever-waking part shall see that face,
Whose feare already shakes my every joynt:
Then, as my soule, to heaven her first seate, takes flight,
And earth-born body, in the earth shall dwell,
So, fall my sinnes, that all may have their right,
To where they are bred, and would presse me, to hell.
Impute me righteous, thus purg'd of evill,
For thus I leave the world, the flesh, and devill.

Sonnet #4
At the round earths imagin'd corners, blow
Your trumpets, Angells, and arise, arise
From death, you numberlesse infinities
Of soules, and to your scattred bodies goe,
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despaire, law, chance, hath slaine, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God, and never tast deaths woe.
But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourn a space,
For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,
'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,
When wee are there; here on this lowly ground.
Teach mee how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.

Holy Sonnet
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 in heavenly things my mind is set,
Here the admiring her my mind did whett
To seeke thee God; so streames do shew the head,
But though I have found thee, and thou my thirst hast fed,
A holy thirsty dropsy melts mee yet:
But why should I begg more love, when as thou
Dost wooe my soule, for hers offring all thine:
And dost not only feare least I allow
My love to saints and Angels, things divine,
But in thy tender jealousy dost doubt
Least the World, fleshe, yea Devill putt thee out.

(New York Public Library, Westmoreland M.S.)

1. Ann Donne died in 1617 at the age of thirty-three. She had borne her husband twelve children, of whom seven married.
Sonnet #5
If poysinous mineralls, and if that tree,
Whose fruit threw death on else immortall us,
If lecherous goats, if serpents envious
Cannot be damn'd; Alas; why should I bee?
Why should intent or reason, borne in mee,
Make sinnes, else equall, in mee, more heinous?
And mercy being easie, and glorious
To God, in his sterne wrath, why threatens hee?
But who am I, that dare dispute with thee?
Oh God, Oh I of thine onely worthy blood,
And my teares, make a heavenly Lethean flood,
And drowne in it my sinnes blacke memorie.
That thou remember them, some claime as debt,
I think it mercy, if thou wilt forget.

Sonnet #6
Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not soe,
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow.
Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill mee;
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee.
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.
Thou art slave to Fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, warre, and sickness dwell,
And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well.
And better than thy stroake; why sweU'st thou then?
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally.
And death shall be no more. Death thou shalt die.

Holy Sonnet
Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow mee, 'and bend
Your force, to breake, blowe, burn and make me new.
I, like an usurpt towne, to'another due.
Labour to'admit you, but Oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in mee, mee should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue,
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd faine,
But am betroth'd unto your enemie,
Divorce mee, 'untie, or breake that knot againe,
Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I
Except you enthrall mee, never shall be free,
Nor ever chast, except you ravish mee.

(Poems, 1633)
Let mans Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this,  
The intelligence that moves, devotion is,  
And as the other Spheares, by being growne  
Subject to forraigne motions, lose their owne,  
And being by others hurried every day,  
Scarce in a yeare their naturall forme obey:  
Pleasure or businesse, so, our Soules admit  
For their first mover, and are whirld by it.  
Hence is't, that I am carryed towards the West  
This day, when my Soules forme bends toward the East.  
There I should see a Sunne, by rising set,  
And by that setting endless day beget;  
But that Christ on this Cross, did rise and fall,  
Sinne had eternally benighted all.  
Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see  
That spectacle of too much weight for mee.  
Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;  
What a death were it then to see God dye?  
It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke,  
It made his footstoole crack, and the Sunne winke.  
Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,  
And tune all spheres at once, peirc'd with those holes?  
Could I behold that endless height which is  
Zenith to us, and to our Antipodes,  
Humbled below us? or that blood which is  
The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,  
Make durt of dust, or that flesh which was worn  
By God, for his apparell, rag'd, and torne?  
If on these things I durst not looke, durst I  
Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,  
Who was Gods partner here, and furnish'd thus  
Halfe 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 mee,  
O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree;  
I turne my backe to thee, but to receive  
Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.  
O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,  
Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,  
Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,  
That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.

1. The spheres had more than one motion. Their own natural motion, each being guided by an Intelligence, was from West to East; but the motion of the Primum Mobile hurled them against this, from East to West, every day. Other motions, such as the trepidation of the ninth sphere, prevented the separate spheres from obeying their 'naturall forme', or directing Intelligence.
MEDITATION 17, BY JOHN DONNE

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

Perchance he for whom this bell tolls may be so ill as that he know 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 body which is my head too, and ingrafted into that body 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 translated 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 suit (in which piety and dignity, religion and estimation, 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. 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.

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 scarcely 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 money, his treasure will not defray 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 home, heaven, by it. Another man may be sick too, and sick unto death, and this affliction may lie in his bowels as gold in a mine and be 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.