

The following 20 poems will be considered in class in the order listed below; full texts of the poems follow. (The texts of the poems, along with the numbering of the Sonnets, sometimes varies; our selections are based on the Donne *Luminarium*, an on-line repository of the poet's work. See *John Donne Songs & Sonnets* under Lit Links in the Attic.) It is best that you have a printed copy of each poem with you for making marginal notes in class. Remember that the Individual Oral Commentary and Discussion will be based in large part on Donne; it is possible that any one of the poems below may be the focus of your commentary – about half of them will be chosen for random selection – so know them well!

1. "The Flea"
2. "The Good-Morrow"
3. "Song – Go and catch a falling star"
4. "The Sun Rising"
5. "The Canonization"
6. "The Triple Fool"
7. "Song – Sweetest love, I do not go"
8. "The Anniversary"
9. "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning"
10. "A Nocturnal: Upon St. Lucy's Day"
11. "The Damp"
12. "Twickenham Garden"
13. "Holy Sonnet IV: O my black soul, now thou art summoned"
14. "Holy Sonnet V: I am a little world made cunningly"
15. "Holy Sonnet X: Death, be not proud"
16. "Holy Sonnet XIV: Batter my heart, three-person'd God"
17. "Holy Sonnet XVII: Since she whom I loved hath paid her last debt"
18. "Holy Sonnet XVIII: Show me, dear Christ, thy spouse so bright and clear"
19. "Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward"
20. "Hymn to God, My God, in My Sickness"

THE FLEA

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

O stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, yea, more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is.
Though parents grudge, and you, we're met,
And cloister'd 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 say'st that thou
Find'st not thyself nor me the weaker now.
'Tis true ; then learn how false fears be ;
Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

THE GOOD-MORROW

I WONDER by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved ? 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 desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear ;
For love all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone ;
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown ;
Let us possess one world ; each hath one, and is one.

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

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

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

THE SUN RISING

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

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

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

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 stamp'd face
Contemplate ; what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.

Alas ! alas ! who's injured by my love?
What merchant's ships have my sighs 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 plaguy bill?
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.

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

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

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

THE TRIPLE FOOL

I am two fools, I know,
For loving, and for saying so
In whining poetry ;
But where's that wise man, that would not be I,
If she would not deny ? 5
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, 10
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 15
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, 20
And I, which was two fools, do so grow three.
Who are a little wise, the best fools be.

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
At the last must part, 'tis best,
Thus to use myself in jest
By feigned deaths to die.

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

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

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

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

THE ANNIVERSARY

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

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

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

A VALEDICTION FORBIDDING MOURNING

AS virtuous men pass mildly away,
And whisper to their souls to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say,
"Now his breath goes," and some say, "No."
So let us melt, and make no noise, 5
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 ; 10
But trepidation of the spheres,
Though greater far, is innocent.
Dull sublunary lovers' love
– Whose soul is sense – cannot admit
Of absence, 'cause it doth remove 15
The thing which elemented it.
But we by a love so much refined,
That ourselves know not what it is,
Inter-assurèd of the mind,
Care less, eyes, lips and hands to miss. 20
Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to aery thinness beat.
If they be two, they are two so 25
As stiff twin compasses are two ;
Thy soul, the fix'd 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, 30
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.
Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th' other foot, obliquely run ;
Thy firmness makes my circle just, 35
And makes me end where I begun.

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 limbec, 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 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 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 5
 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, 10
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, 15
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 ; 20
 Kill me as woman, let me die
 As a mere man ; do you but try
Your passive valour, and you shall find then,
Naked you have odds enough of any man.

TWICKENHAM GARDEN

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

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

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

HOLY SONNETS

IV.

O, my black soul, now thou art summoned
By sickness, Death's herald and champion ;
Thou'rt like a pilgrim, which abroad hath done
Treason, and durst not turn to whence he's fled ;
Or like a thief, which till death's doom be read, 5
Wisheth himself deliver'd from prison,
But damn'd and haled to execution,
Wisheth that still he might be imprisoned.
Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lack ;
But who shall give thee that grace to begin ? 10
O, make thyself 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.

HOLY SONNETS

V.

I am a little world made cunningly
Of elements, and an angelic sprite ;
But black sin hath betray'd to endless night
My world's both parts, and, O, both parts must die.
You which beyond that heaven which was most high 5
Have found new spheres, and of new land can write,
Pour new seas in mine eyes, that so I might
Drown my world with my weeping earnestly,
Or wash it if it must be drown'd no more.
But O, it must be burnt ; alas ! the fire 10
Of lust and envy burnt it heretofore,
And made it fouler ; let their flames retire,
And burn me, O Lord, with a fiery zeal
Of Thee and Thy house, which doth in eating heal.

HOLY SONNETS

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 but thy picture[s] be, 5
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'rt slave to Fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell, 10
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.

HOLY SONNETS

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 usurp'd town, to another due, 5
Labour to admit you, but O, to no end.
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy ; 10
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.

HOLY SONNETS

XVII.

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 ravishèd,
Wholly on heavenly things my mind is set.
Here the admiring her my mind did whet 5
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: 10
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.

HOLY SONNETS

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? 5
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 travel we to seek, and then make love? 10
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 is embraced and open to most men.

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, 5
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 to the East. 10
There I should see a Sun by rising set,
And by that setting endless day beget.
But that Christ on His cross did rise and fall,
Sin had eternally benighted all.
Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see 15
That spectacle of too much weight for me.
Who sees Gods 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. 20
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 25
The seat of all our soul's, 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
On His distressed Mother cast mine eye, 30
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, 35
O Saviour, as Thou 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 rust, and my deformity ; 40
Restore Thine image, so much, by Thy grace,
That Thou mayst know me, and I'll turn my face.

HYMN TO GOD, MY GOD, IN MY SICKNESS

SINCE I am coming to that Holy room,
Where, with Thy choir of saints for evermore,
I shall be made Thy music ; as I come
I tune the instrument here at the door,
And what I must do then, think here before ;

Whilst my physicians by their love are grown
Cosmographers, and I their map, who lie
Flat on this bed, that by them may be shown
That this is my south-west discovery,
Per fretum febris, by these straits to die ;

I joy, that in these straits I see my west ;
For, though those currents yield return to none,
What shall my west hurt me ? As west and east
In all flat maps – and I am one – are one,
So death doth touch the resurrection.

Is the Pacific sea my home ? Or are
The eastern riches ? Is Jerusalem ?
Anyan, and Magellan, and Gibraltar ?
All straits, and none but straits, are ways to them
Whether where Japhet dwelt, or Cham, or Shem.

We think that Paradise and Calvary,
Christ's cross and Adam's tree, stood in one place ;
Look, Lord, and find both Adams met in me ;
As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face,
May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.

So, in His purple wrapp'd, receive me, Lord ;
By these His thorns, give me His other crown ;
And as to others' souls I preach'd Thy word,
Be this my text, my sermon to mine own,
“Therefore that He may raise, the Lord throws down.”