

The Poetry of John Donne

[Aoife O'Driscoll](#)

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Donne - Timeline

Born to Roman Catholic parents. Father was a well-off ironmonger

Studies at Hertford College, Oxford, and after three years there, goes to Cambridge University for another three years

Donne is admitted to Lincoln's Inn after some years of legal studies

1572

1576

1583

1588

1592

1593

Father dies; mother remarries soon afterwards

Stepfather dies and his mother marries again

Donne's younger brother Henry is arrested for harbouring a Catholic priest. Henry dies of bubonic plague in prison.

Timeline

Donne becomes a Protestant around this time and fights with the Earl of Essex and Sir Walter Raleigh against the Spanish

1596

1598

Returns from his travels and becomes Secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton

Donne secretly marries Egerton's niece, Ann More. Her father has him briefly thrown in prison. He is released and Ann's cousin gives them a house in Surrey

1601

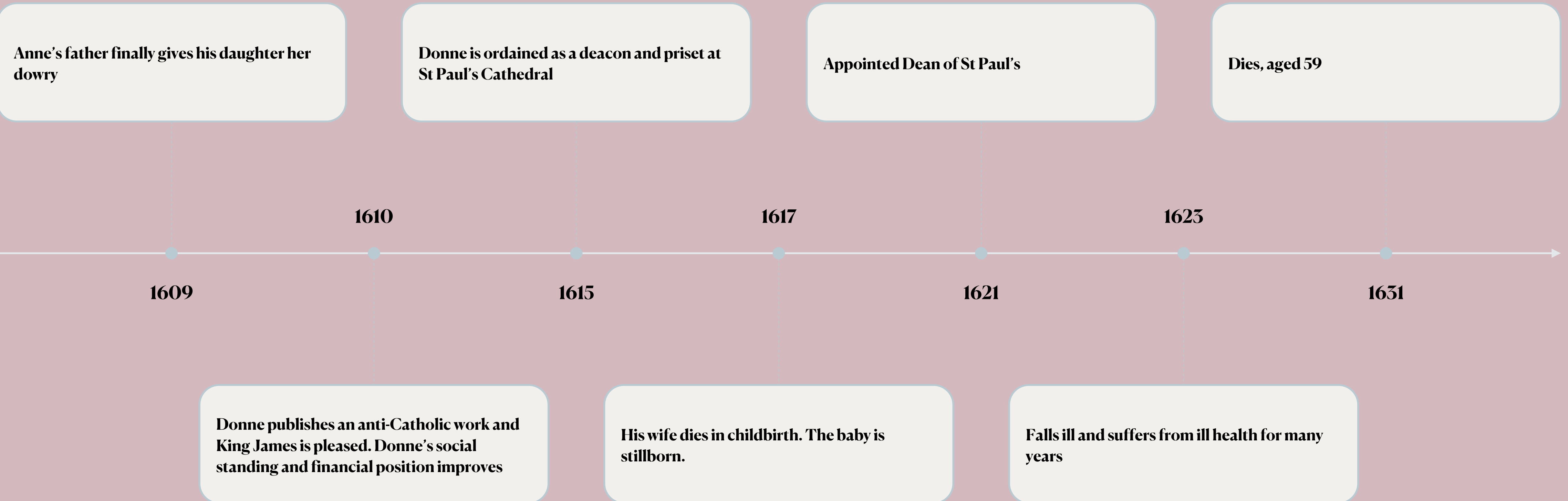
Donne becomes an MP but this is not a paid position, and he is under financial strain

1602

The Donnes have two children now and they move to London. Donne works as a lawyer.

1605

Timeline

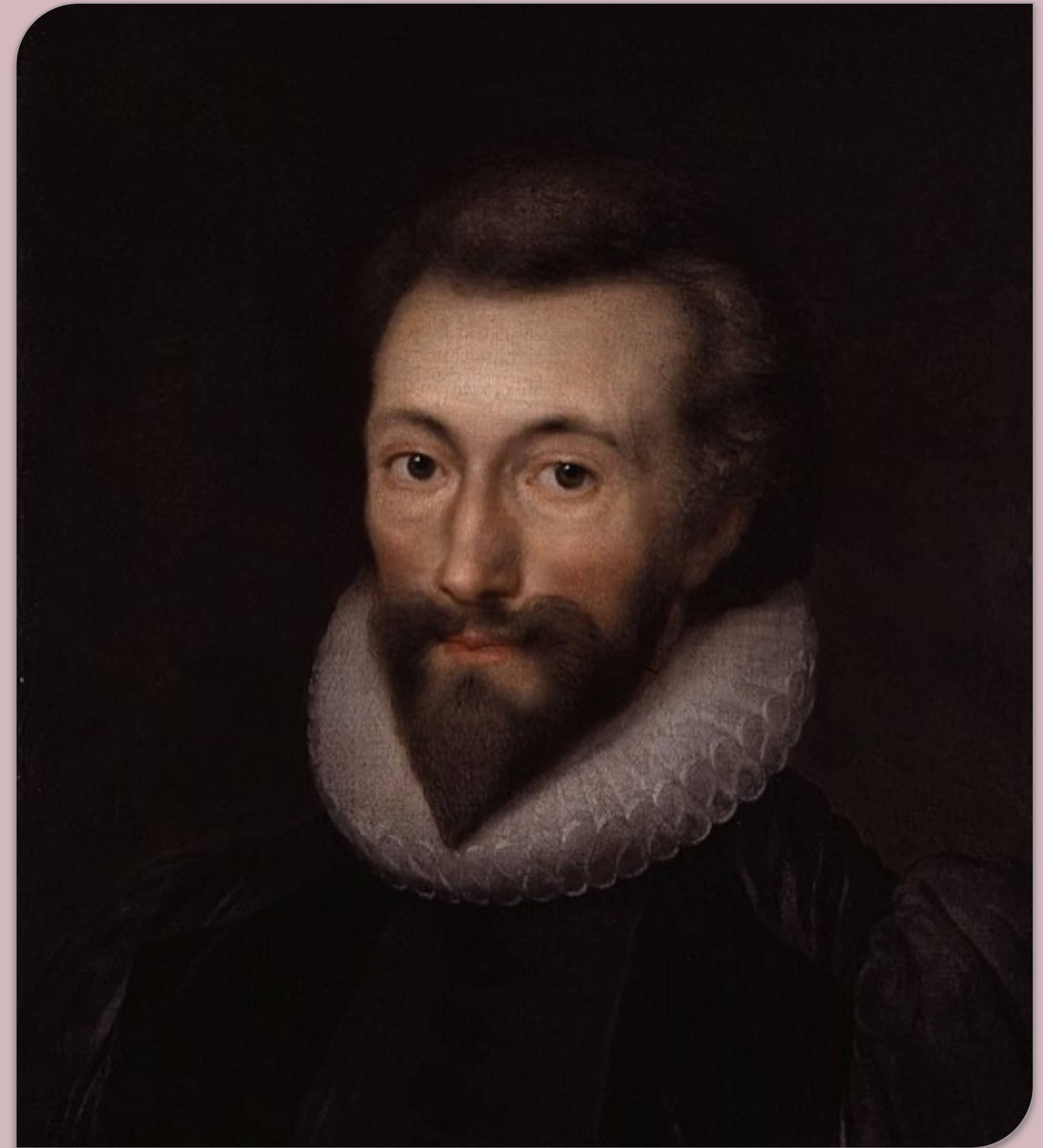


Before you read...

Simon Schama's Documentary

<https://vimeo.com/474425294>

The video ends at 58 minutes.



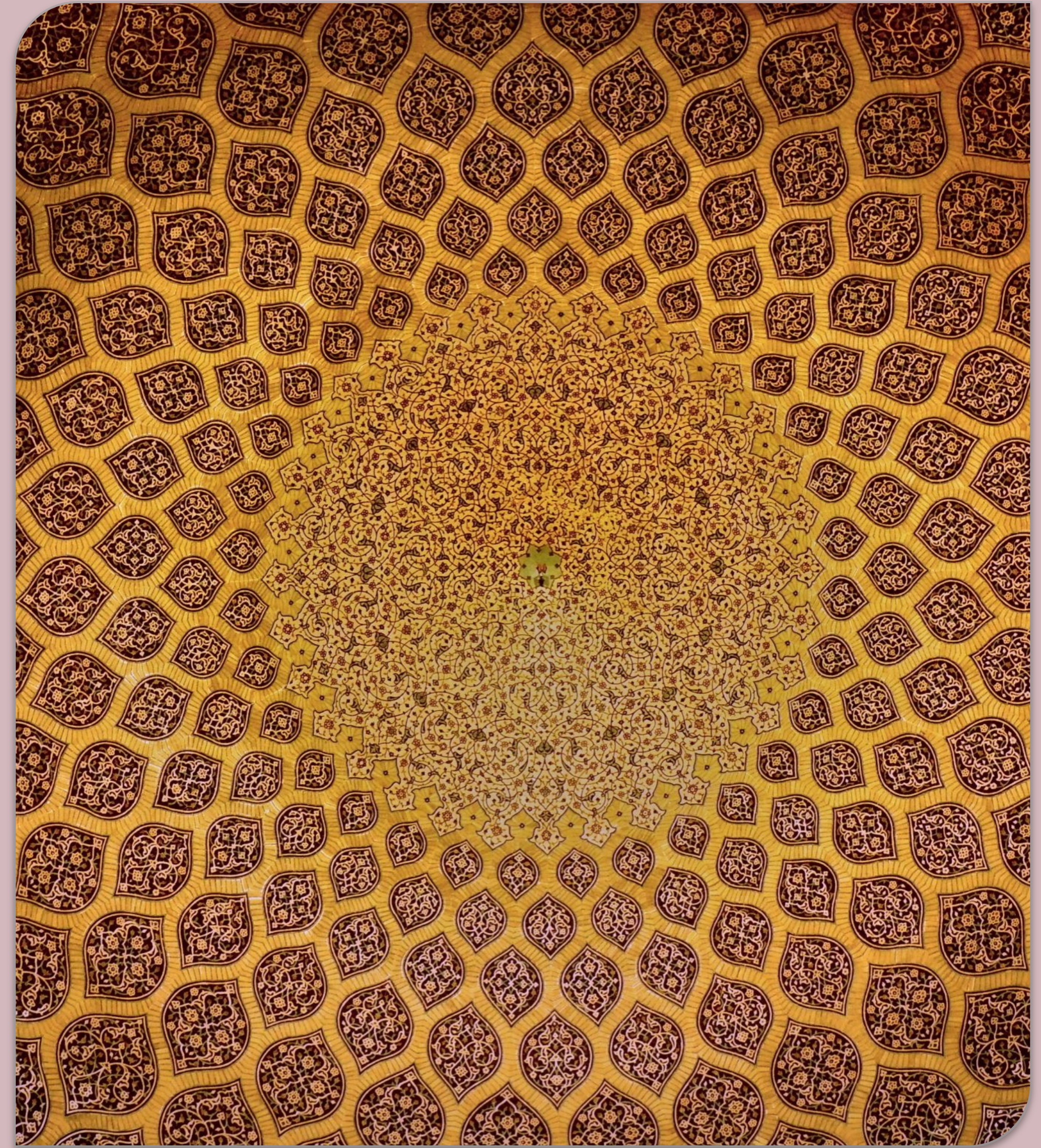
Watching the Video

Worksheet Questions

- What do you learn about Donne's background?
- What do you learn about Donne's love life?
- Do you think the time and place in which Donne lived affected him?
- When and why did Donne turn to religion once more?
- What do you learn about Donne's character?

Metaphysical Poetry

Beyond the physical
Complex
Deep, passionate thought



Metaphysical Themes

Love

Lust

Religion

Morality

Death

Features

Blend of emotion and intellect

More concerned with analysing feelings than expressing them

Inventive use of conceits (explained in later slide)

Philosophical speculation about topics such as religion or love

Witty and surprising

Designed to surprise the reader and force him or her to think through an argument

Conceits

- Generally associated with the 17th century metaphysical poets
- Differs from an extended analogy in the sense that it does not have a clear-cut relationship between the things being compared.
- Metaphors drawn from scientific and technical fields rather than nature, myth or history
- An example occurs in John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning", in which a couple faced with absence from each other is likened to a compass.



Not always popular!

Other poets and critics at the time disliked the metaphysical poets' intellectual approach. They felt that the metaphysical poets were focused on showing off their cleverness rather than expressing genuine emotion.



“He affects the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign; and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love.”

–John Dryden speaking of John Donne

“The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and, to show their learning was their whole endeavour [...]The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.”

–Samuel Johnson

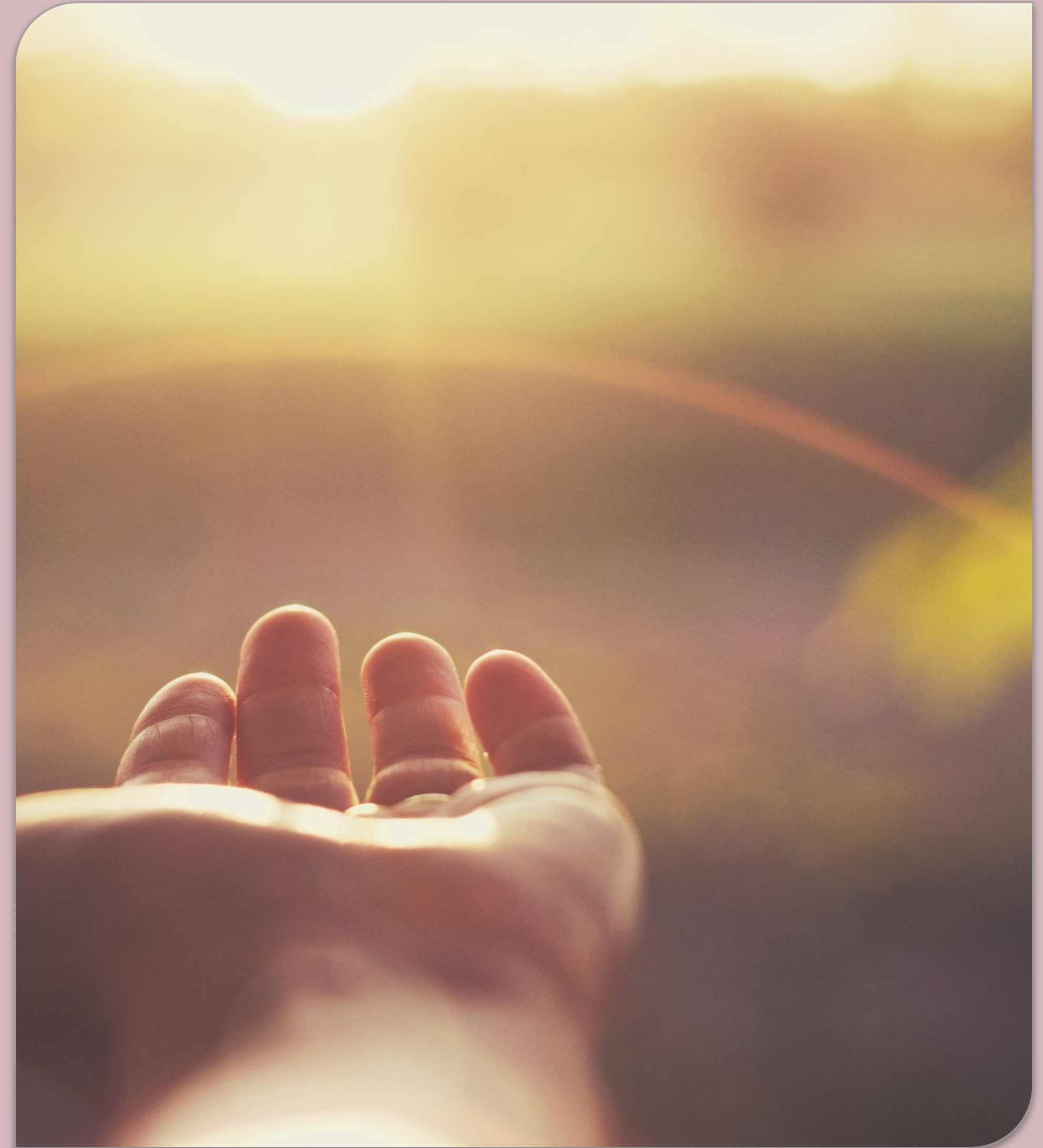
“A conceit is a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness [...] a comparison becomes a conceit when we are made to concede likeness while being strongly conscious of unlikeness.”

–Helen Gardener

Themes

Ten Poems on the Course

The Sun Rising
Song (Go, and catch a falling star)
The Anniversary
Song (Sweetest love, I do not go)
The Dream
A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning
The Flea
Batter my heart
At the round earth's imagined corners
Thou hast made me



Themes

Seven addressed to a lover

Three addressed to God

Love

Unconventional, even bawdy and perhaps immature at times: *The Flea*

Rejects the idealised notion of love that was popular at the time

Playful approach to constancy in love: *Go, and catch a falling star*

Contentment, sweetness and joy: *Sweetest love I do not go, The Anniversary and A Valediction: Forbidden Mourning*

Delight and a belief that the lovers only need one another: *The Sun Rising, The Dream*

Passionate; belief in the fusing of body and soul

Lovers become a microcosm of the entire world – a common idea at the time

Death

- Desire for love to transcend death, even though this is not possible
- Fear of death intensifies in the Holy Sonnets. Donne is terrified at the prospect of hell and implores God to save him from this dreadful fate.
- Donne commissioned a drawing of himself wrapped in a shroud and standing on an urn. After his death, it was carved in stone and placed in St Paul's cathedral as a memorial to the poet.

Religion

- Donne switched from Catholicism to Anglicanism
- Rejected earlier, wild youth although he remained understanding of the antics of young men
- Linked to fear of death
- Daring, sexual imagery used to describe relationship between God and man, as in *Batter my heart*
- Came to believe God did not allow him to succeed in the secular world because He wanted him to devote himself to his ministry and only then could he find fulfilment.



Style

Style

- Dramatic: *The Sun Rising*, *The Flea* feature conflict, drama, tension, pacing etc.
- The reader is dropped straight into the action of the title and shares intimate moments
- Energy, excitement, playfulness and fun give a new slant on traditional love poetry
- Tone can be envious or unpleasant at times, depending on our reading of the poems.
- Witty conceits surprise us and encourage us to look at the themes in a new way
- Simple, everyday language
- Sudden change in the middle of the poem, as in *The Flea* and *The Sun Rising*
- Some see his poems as a vehicle for his cleverness and wit rather than genuine emotion

Exam Questions

2003 SEC: “Why read the poetry of John Donne?”

Write out the text of a talk that you would give, or an article that you would submit to a journal, in response to the above title. Support the points you make by reference to the poetry of John Donne on your course.

2006 SEC: Write an introduction to the poetry of John Donne for new readers. Your introduction should cover the following:

- 1.- *The ideas that were most important to him.*
- 2.- *How you responded to his use of language and imagery.*

Refer to the poems by John Donne that you have studied.

2008 SEC: “John Donne uses startling imagery and wit in his exploration of relationships.”

Give your response to the poetry of John Donne in the light of this statement. Support your points with the aid of suitable reference to the poems you have studied.

2017 SEC: “Donne’s poetry can be simultaneously playful and challenging both in style and content.”

To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Support your answer with reference to the poetry of John Donne on your course.

2015 DEB: John Donne

“Donne’s inventive use of language results in poetry that is both thought-provoking and humorous.”

Discuss this statement, supporting your answer with reference to both the themes and language found in the poetry of John Donne on your course.

2017 Examcraft: “Donne explores both the physical and the spiritual aspects of life with skilled use of logic and wit.”

Discuss this statement, supporting your answer with reference to the poetry of John Donne on your course.

Building up to the essay

- Choose a question
- After the first poem has been studied, answer the exam question using that poem only
- Correct students' attempts on the board
- Discuss examples of excellence and places where improvement is needed
- Students write brief reflections on their previous efforts before adding the second poem
- Continue through all six poems
- Discuss editing, selecting most relevant poems and adding an introduction and conclusion

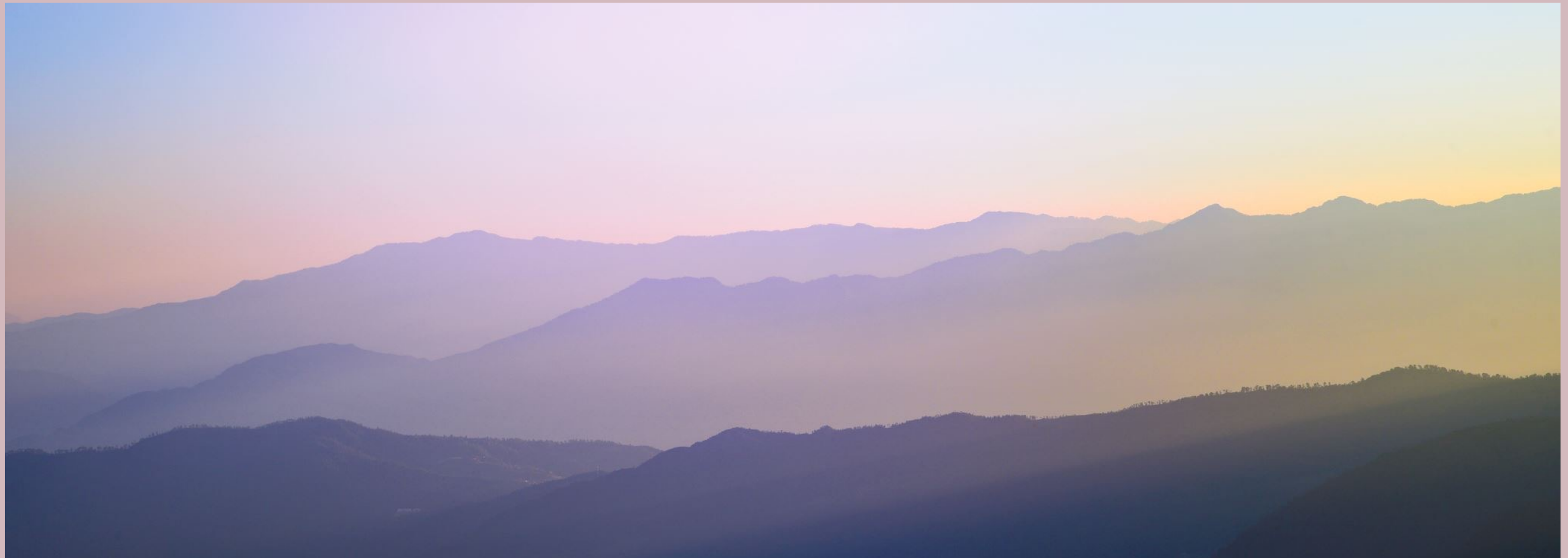
The Poems

Note

Size constraints in these slides mean that the line breaks
are not always accurate.

Refer to your poetry book for the correct layout.

The Sun Rising



Glossary

- Busy: Meddling, interfering
- Unruly: disorderly
- Pedantic: excessively concerned with rules
- Chide: scold
- Prentices: apprentices
- Court-huntsmen: courtiers who go hunting with the king in the hope of impressing him; hangers-on
- Country ants: farmers
- Offices: duties
- Clime: climate
- Both th'Indias: East and West Indies, where spices and gold were found
- Play us: imitate
- Alchemy: forerunner of chemistry, best known for trying to turn base metals into gold; byword for fraudulence

Lines 1-3

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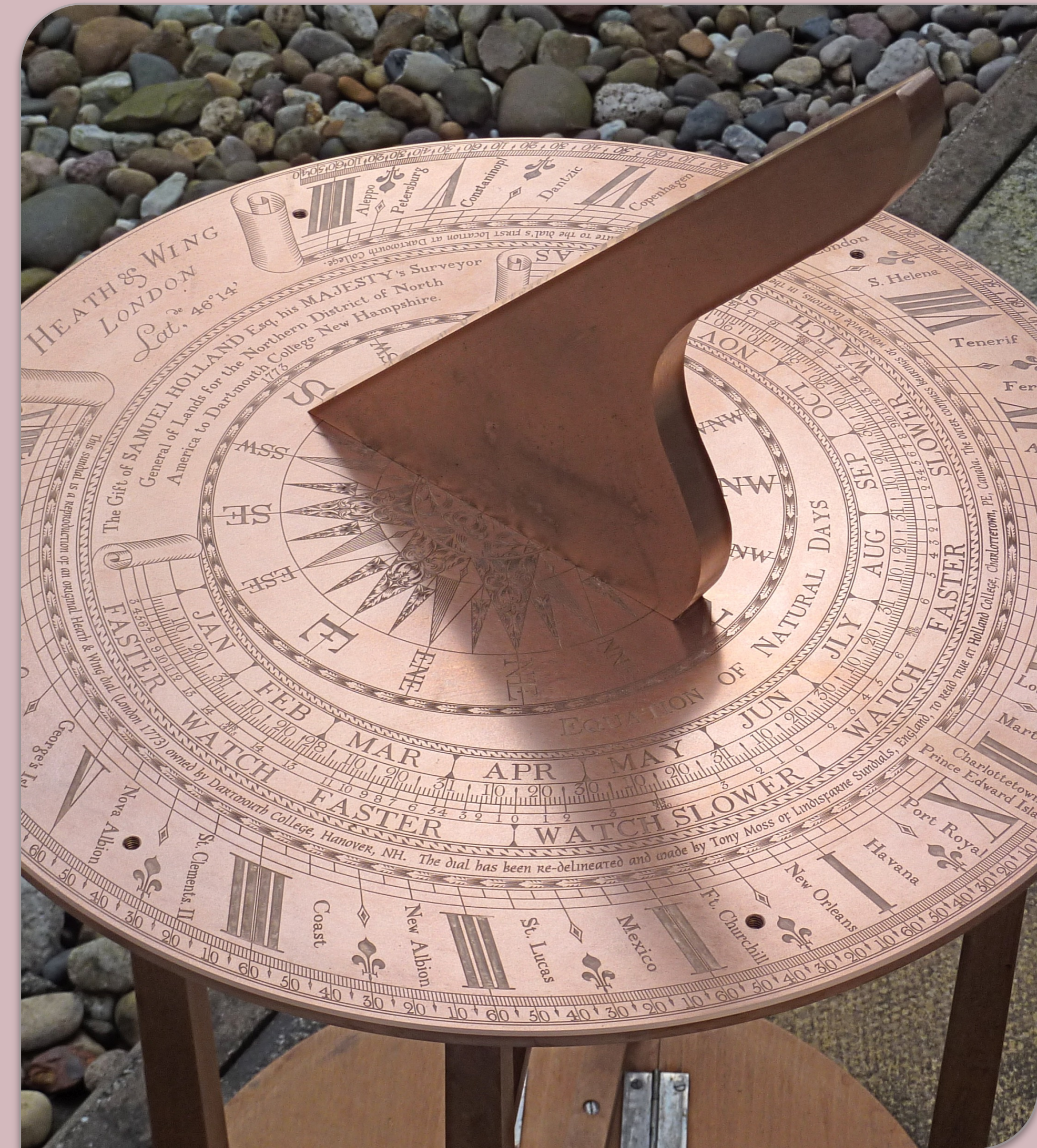


Busy old fool, unruly sun,
Why dost thou thus,
Through windows and through curtains,
call on us?

- Donne opens with a direct address to the sun
- It is a dramatic and energetic start to the poem
- Tone is irreverent: the sun is personified as a 'Busy old fool'
- Immediate, conversational language
- The sun is chided for being 'unruly'
- Conceit is that the sun is an old man who rouses people from sleep and sends them off to work

Line 4

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Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?

- Donne is dismissive of the sun here.
- He wonders why lovers should obey the sun.
- Lovers, it is implied, are above such commands.
- The sun represents the outside world and Donne does not want to be reminded of it right now.

Lines 5-6

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Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
Late school-boys, and sour prentices,

- Again, Donne belittles the sun
- It is a fussy, saucy 'wretch' but has no power over him and his loved one
- The sun should concern itself with those over whom it actually has power: school-boys and apprentices.
- The apprentices are 'sour'; the sun's call to work brings no joy compared to the joy the lovers feel in their quiet contentment.
- The lovers transcend time: all the others mentioned are subject to outside influence and power.

Lines 7-8

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Go tell court-huntsmen that the King
will ride,

Call country ants to harvest offices;

- Now the sun should busy itself with waking the huntsmen who serve the king and the farmers who reap the harvest
- 'offices' here means duties
- The quiet of the lovers' bed is contrasted with the frenetic activity of the outside world

Lines 9-10

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Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,
Nor hours, days, months which are the rags
of time.

- The poem now moves from questions and orders to the more romantic description of love
- This rhyming couplet sums up the idea that love transcends time
- Unlike all the people named earlier, Donne and his lover are free from both the control of others and the sun
- 'hours, days, months' are dismissed as 'the rags of time'. They are mere divisions of time but have no importance for the lovers.

Lines 11-13

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Thy beams, so reverend and strong

Why shouldst thou think?

I could eclipse and cloud them with a
wink,

- Donne appears to change his attitude towards the sun.
- It is 'reverend and strong'.
- However, Donne points this out simply to show the power he has over it. He reverts to his previous mocking tone when he says that simply by closing his eyes, he could 'eclipse' the sun's beams.

Line 14

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But that I would not lose her sight so
long

- This is a powerful expression of Donne's love
- He would not close his eyes for even a moment as it would mean that he could not see his beloved
- The soft 's' sounds in this line emphasise the gentle romance of the poet's sentiments

Lines 15-18

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If her eyes have not blinded thine,
Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,
Whether both th'Indias of spice and
mine
Be where thou leftst them, or lie here
with me

- The woman's eyes are so bright that they outshine the sun.
- The poem moves from the confines of the bedroom to the wider world
- The sun, which has shone on all corners of the globe, is asked whether all that is precious in the world exists in the East and West Indies or in the lovers' bedroom

“The world of love contains everything of
value; it is the only one worth exploring
and possessing.”

Achsah Guibbory: *The Cambridge Companion to English Poetry: Donne to
Marvell*

Does Donne succeed in persuading us that he and his lover exist in a world apart?

Earlier, Donne claimed that what one critic calls 'his internal world of love' is not subject to the 'hours, days, months, which are the rags of time' but now he does not want to close his eyes because it would mean his losing sight of his lover for 'so long'. He also refers to 'tomorrow late' and 'yesterday' which seems to suggest that the little world of their bedroom is not, after all, capable of transcending time and resisting or ignoring the outside world.

Lines 19-24

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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.

- Donne tells the sun to travel the world and see all its treasures and its great rulers. It will find that they are not there as everything of value is in bed with him. His lover is 'all states' and therefore he is ruler of the world.
- This hyperbole emphasises and elevates the love Donne feels. Nothing else can be as important. Nothing truly exists but he and his lover. Anything else is a poor imitation. All honour and wealth outside the bedroom is fake. Their room has become the centre of the universe.
- Hyperbole combines well with the litotes (deliberate understatement) of the earlier lines in which time was reduced to 'rags' and the following in which all wealth is merely 'alchemy'.
- The simplicity and brevity of the line 'Nothing else is' ensures it stands out. It is authentic and heartfelt.

“‘Nothing else is’ – everything important
and intense about love distilled into one
perfect phrase.”

Simon Schama

Again, we ask if Donne has truly succeeded in

showing the unimportance of the outside world?

Earlier Donne rejected the sun and all the various social classes from peasants to kings. Now, however, his language shows that the outer world still has power. Why else would he compare his lover to 'all states' and himself to 'all princes'? Remember, Donne was keen for social elevation but lost it all when he secretly married Anne.

There is also a note of conquest here and a hint that women are inferior. After all, she is merely the territory he rules.

“[The speaker and his lover] become the world and occupy the same position of centrality as the sun. They become, in short, the still point around which all else is supposed to revolve, and around whom all time passes.”

Thomas Docherty - *John Donne, Undone*

Lines 25-28

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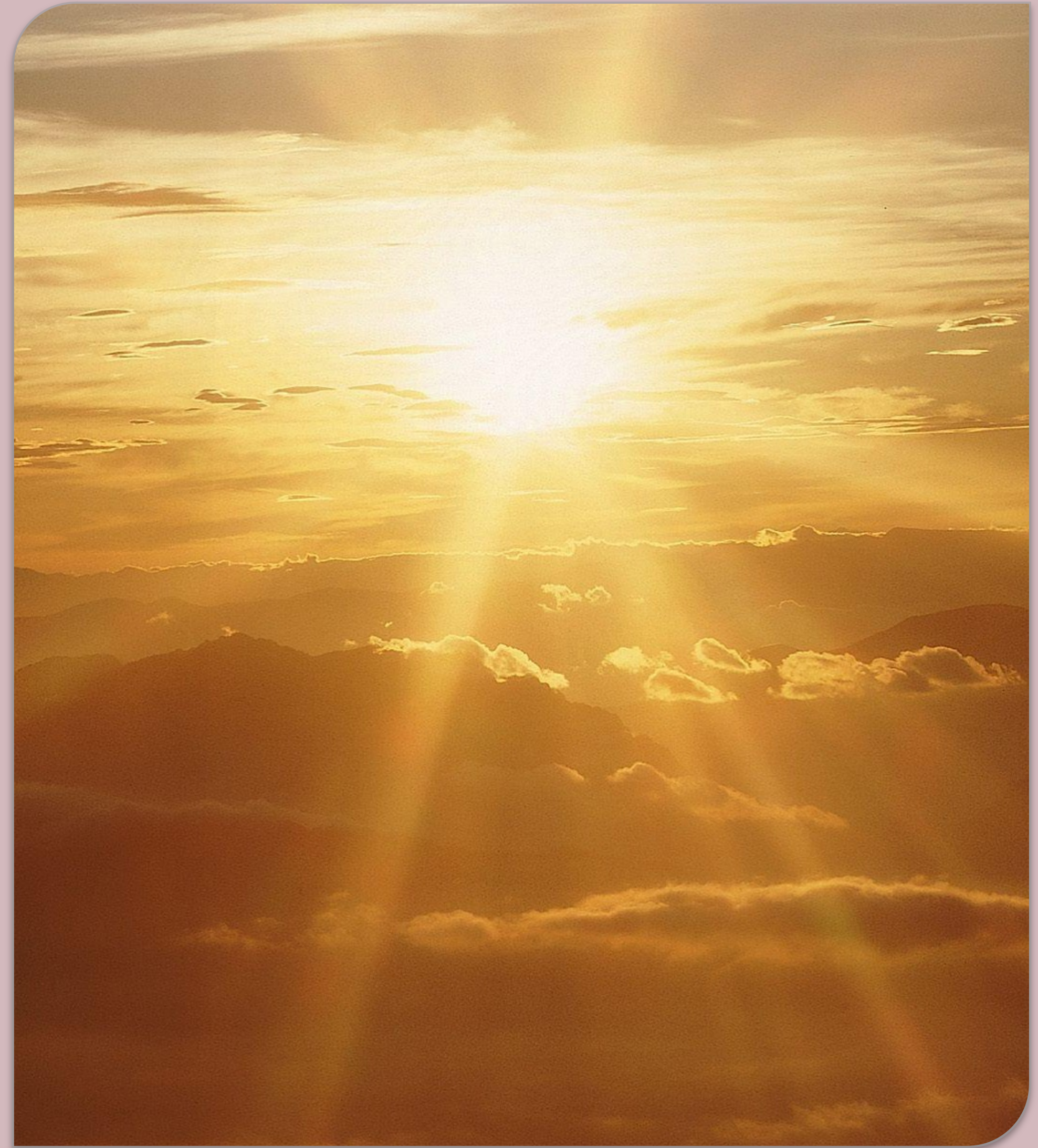


Thou sun art half as happy as we,
In that the world's contracted thus,
Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
To warm the world, that's done in warming us.

- Donne pities the sun which, because it is alone, can only be 'half as happy' as the lovers.
- The world has been shrunk down to the bedroom in which the lovers lie.
- Donne shows mock pity for the sun, telling it that it deserves to rest as it is old (think back to 'Busy old fool'). He offers it comfort, saying that if it shines on the lovers, it will effectively be shining on the whole world.
- Note the change from 'I' and 'Me' to 'Us' and 'We'.

Lines 29-30

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Shine here to us, and thou art
everywhere;

This bed thy centre is, these
walls, thy sphere.

Donne's shift in attitude towards the sun - from regarding it as a 'Busy old fool' to pitying it for having to work so hard when it is old - is typical of his poetry.

The rhythm slows down in the last four lines as he moves from annoyance and challenge to a concern for the ageing sun.

It is worth comparing the view of love and seduction compare to that in 'The Flea'.

Consider

Does Donne protest too much in this poem?
He claims not to envy those who have
position and wealth, but we know he was
keenly aware of his social status and
resented inability to rise once he had
married Ann More.



Themes and Style

Aubade: a poem which greets the dawn

Aubades usually focus on lovers sorrowful parting at dawn

Donne's take is unusual: rather than greeting the sun he rebukes and mocks it for waking him and the lady with whom he has spent the night

Three ten-line, rhyming stanzas create a structured argument

Key Terms

Aubade

**Direct
address**

Irreverent

**Conceit: sun
is an old man**

Dismissive

**Lovers
transcend
time**

Hyperbole

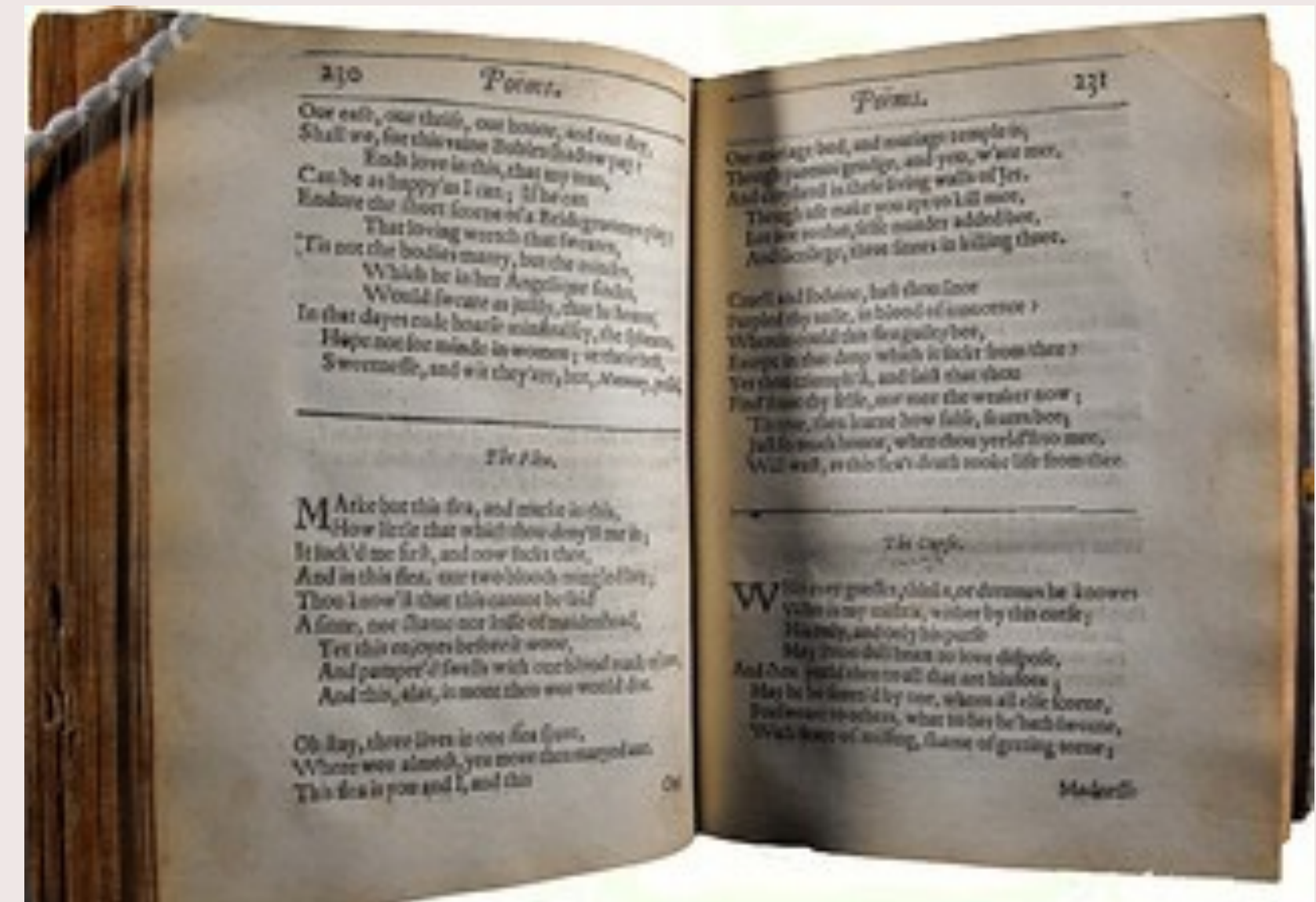
Litotes

**Conversatio
nal language**

The Flea

The Flea - Dramatised

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ef-kn3fvJu0>



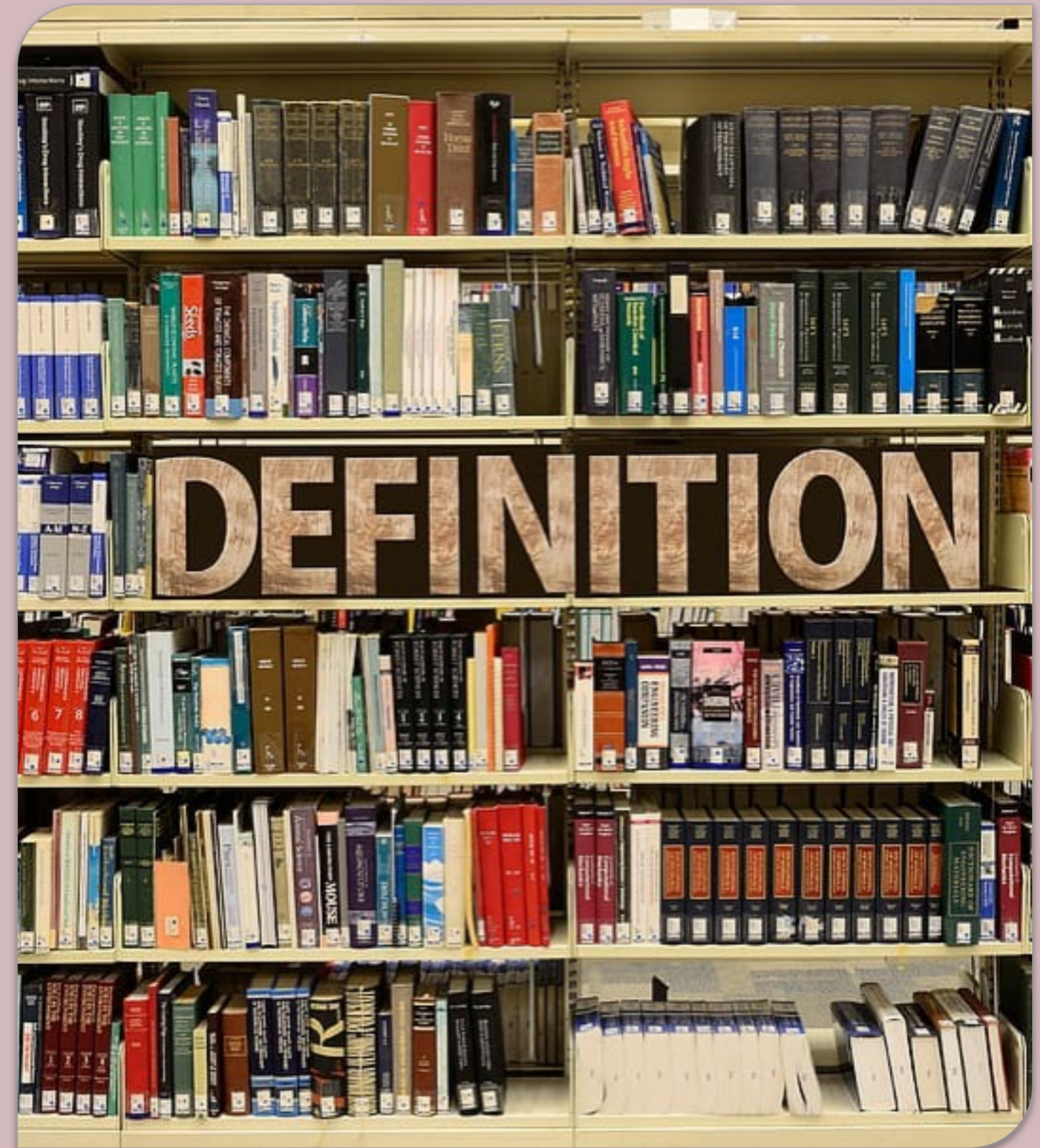
Glossary

Mark: Note

Maidenhead: Virginity

Pampered: Indulged; given
affection and attention

Cloistered: Enclosed



“Donne burst out from a poetic tradition that watched him, dismayed, as he laid waste their rules and traditions. Ben Jonson wrote that Donne, “for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging”. Many other poets of the time were still playing the “my lady is a perfect dove” game. Donne saw that we need more than that: words that encompass the strangeness and mad sweep of human desire, human hunger. He summoned fleas, mathematical instruments, mythical fish, snakes, planets, kings.”

Katherine Rundell in *The Guardian*:

Plague poems, defiant wit and penis puns: why John Donne is a poet for our times

Lines 1-4

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Mark but this flea, and mark in this
How little that which thou deny'st me is;
Me it sucked first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be

- Opens with an imperative: 'Mark'. We are dropped straight into the argument. Although 'Mark' was usually used in a serious argument or speech, here it is used in a playful, fun way.
- Donne assumes the woman will appreciate, understand and be able to respond to his argument.
- The speaker's argument is as follows: the flea has sucked blood from both of them, sex is a mingling of bloods (17th century idea) so they might as well sleep together.
- Unusually, the poem focuses on the flea rather than on the woman's body. (There were many other poems at the time dealing with where the flea might wander...)
- At the time, the letter 'S' was elongated and resembled an 'F'. This obviously makes the poem even more risqué!

Lines 5-9

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Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood
made of two
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

- The argument continues. The speaker's tone is urgent as he tries to persuade the woman that it is no sin to have their blood mingled in the flea. If there is nothing wrong in that, then surely there can be nothing wrong in the couple consummating their relationship.
- The flea has not even had to court or woo the woman to enjoy her. It is satisfied in a way the speaker is not. The little creature is like a rival who has succeeded where he failed. It grows or 'swells' as it 'enjoys' the woman.
- The reference to the flea swelling with blood can, of course, be seen as a reference to arousal.
- The poet's frustration and envy is obvious in the final line here. The mock-heroic 'alas' is separated with punctuation marks, emphasising his emotion. The final line could indicate petulance as well as regret.

“The most merely disgusting
[poem] in our language.”

Arthur Quiller-Couch

Lines 10-13

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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

- Abrupt change of tone: 'O stay'.
- Now the woman is about to kill the flea and the poet urges her to stay her hand.
- Although we never hear the woman's words, she is obviously unimpressed by the argument.
- The poet argues that they are as good as married because their bloods are mingled in the flea. If she kills it, the woman is killing herself and her suitor too.

Lines 14-18

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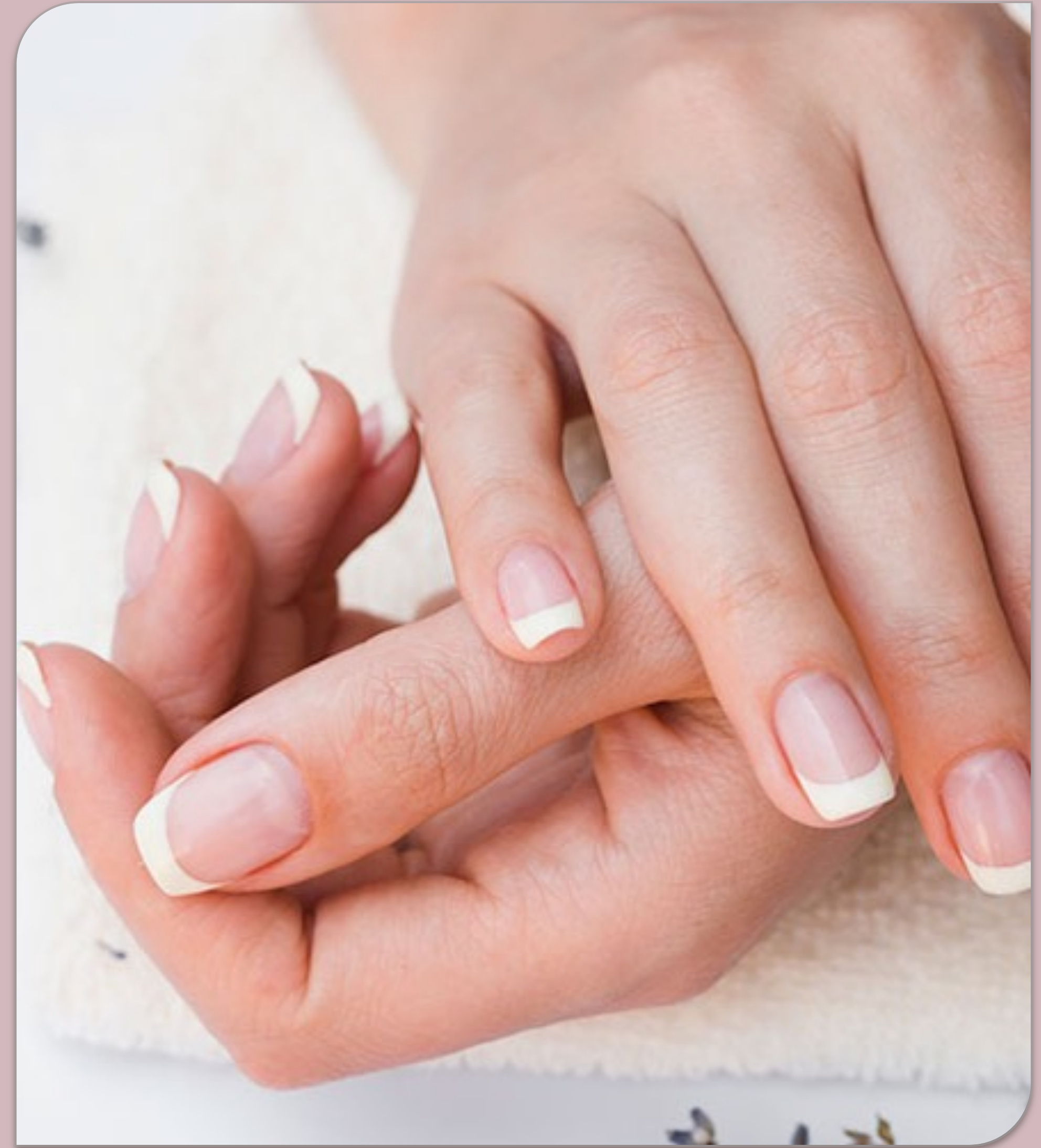


Though parents grudge, and you, we're met
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to that self-murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three

- The reference to opposition to the marriage may indicate the poem is about Ann More. She was his employer's niece and she and Donne did marry secretly, which led to his brief imprisonment.
- The poet says that, despite the opposition, they are joined in a sacred union. Religious imagery drives home this message: 'cloistered', 'sacrilege', 'three sins' etc.
- The argument is slightly ridiculous but not meant to be taken seriously.
- If the woman kills the flea, she will effectively kill herself and the poet as well as destroying their 'marriage temple'.
- The references to death would, at the time, be understood as euphemisms for sexual satisfaction. The 'petit mort' or 'little death' was another way of saying orgasm.
- The argument is very weak here, but it may be a way of the poet's saying that just as killing the flea would not be that bad in reality, so agreeing to have sex would not be so terrible either.

Lines 19-22

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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 sucked from thee?

- The poet fails and the woman kills the flea with her nail. He describes her action as 'cruel and sudden' but this refers to her symbolic rejection of him in her gesture rather than her disposing of the insect.
- The tone is pleading as the poet asks why she has killed the innocent flea. All it did was take a drop of blood from her.
- The implication is that the woman is being equally cruel to him in denying his request. However, what he wants is far from innocent, so the comparison is ridiculous.

Lines 23-27

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Yet thou triumph'st and say'st that thou
Find'st not thy self, 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.

- We don't actually hear the woman's words, but we can read between the lines. She says that nothing bad has resulted from killing the flea, despite the poet's pleas.
- He now turns the argument on its head, saying that she has proven his point. Fears of sin or lost honour are 'false' and she might as well yield to his desire.
- Although it is unlikely a woman would be swayed by the poet's argument, it is quite likely his friends would have enjoyed it!

Theme and Style

The poem is an exercise in intellectual seduction and rhetoric

Each stanza consists of three rhyming couplets and a triplet

The man, the woman and the flea: all three become one

The conceit of the flea is central to the poem.

The poem is an exercise in intellectual seduction and rhetoric

Language is colloquial and conversational

Key Terms

Dramatic

**Direct
address**

**Exercise in
intellectual
seduction**

**Conceit: flea
is the site of
their
marriage**

**Risqué,
sexually
suggestive**

Euphemistic

**Religious
imagery**

**Conversatio
nal language**

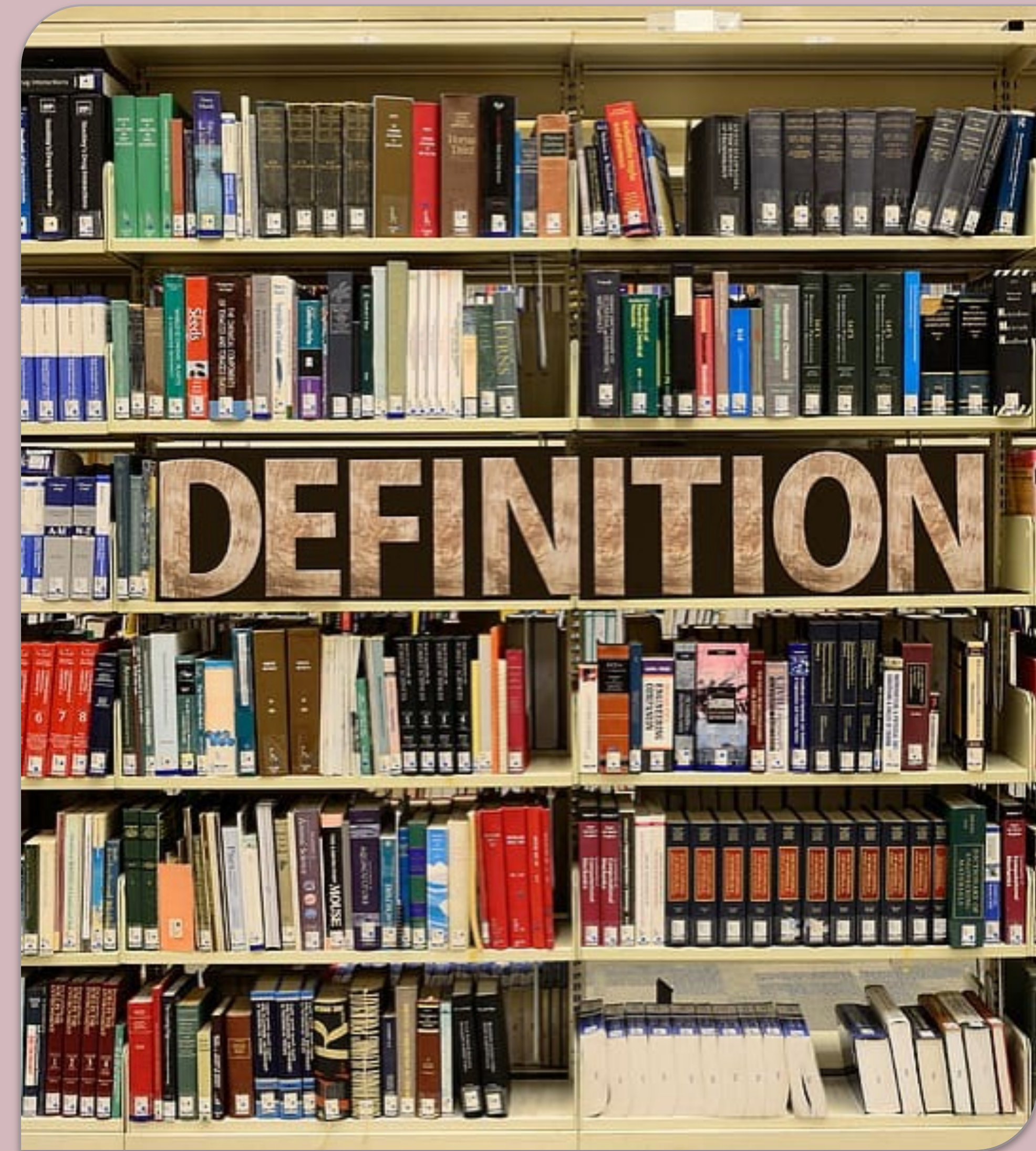
Song (Go, and catch a falling
star)

Glossary

Mandrake: poisonous plant with forked roots; thought to resemble a human body; associated with contraception

Cleft: split, as in hooves

Befell: happened

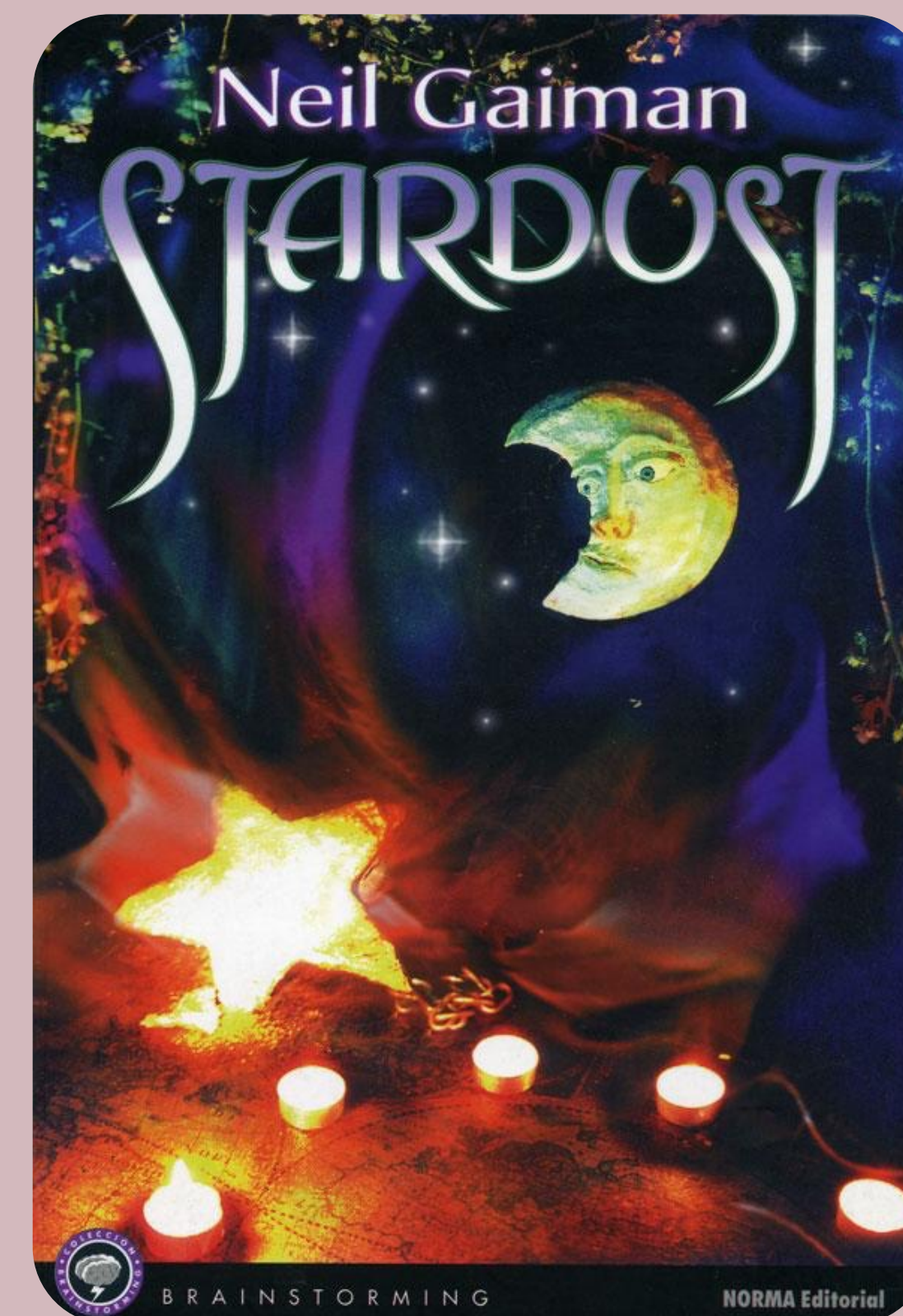


Mandrake



"There were things I knew I wanted to do going into it—one of which was very quietly to almost offer a reply to John Donne's 'Song,' which is the single most misogynist little piece of poetry in the entirety of the English language. It's the epigraph to *Stardust*."

Neil Gaiman



Lines 1-9

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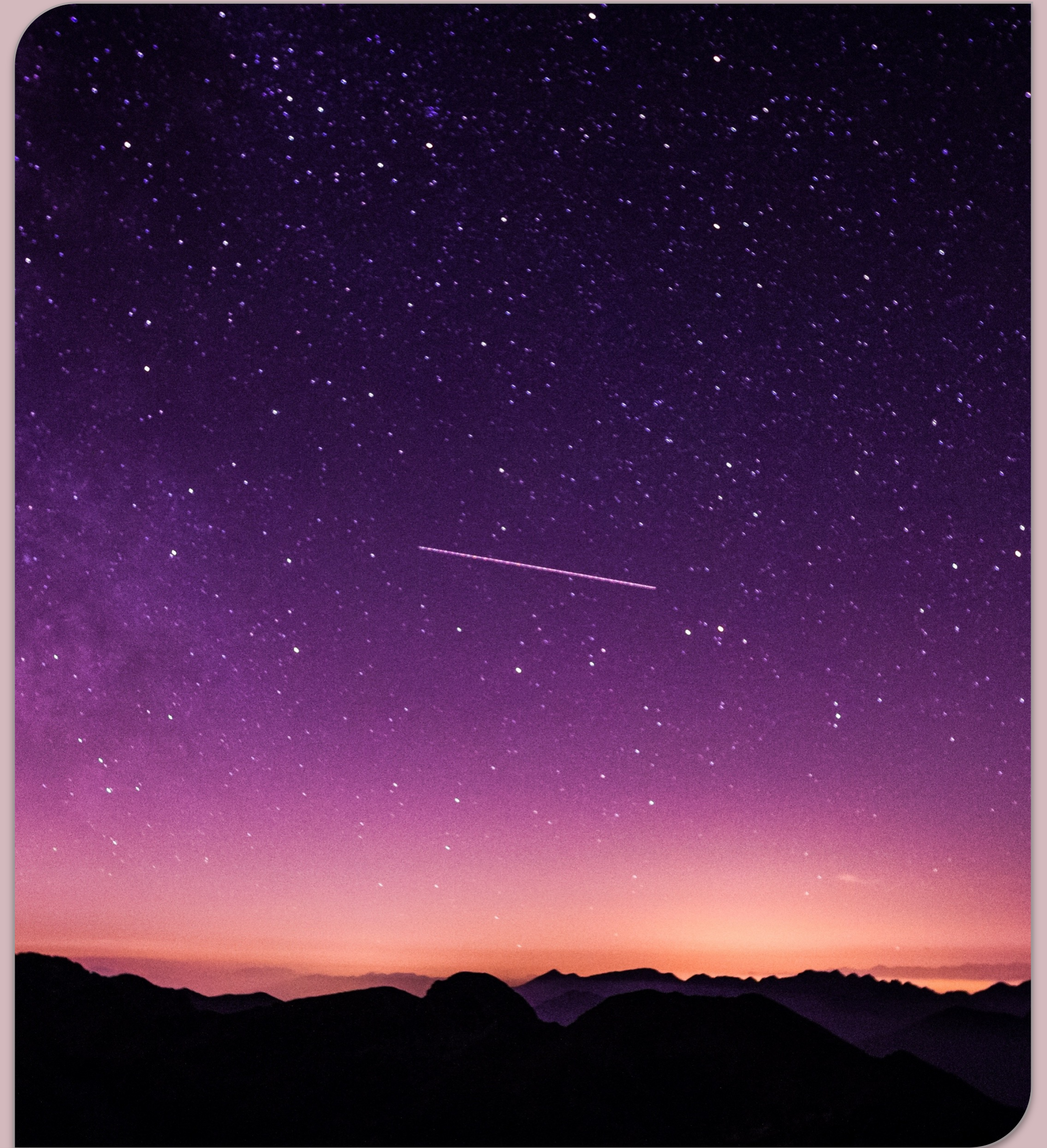


Go and catch a falling star,
Get with child a mandrake root,
Tell me where all past years are,
Or who cleft the devil's foot,
Teach me to hear mermaids singing,
Or to keep off envy's stinging,
And find
What wind
Serves to advance an honest mind.

- The title is romantic and magical but the poem is far from that.
- The poem opens with a series of imperatives. The tone is brisk and unromantic. The second image is dark and disturbing. Any sense of the wonder or beauty of love is brutally removed in the instruction to 'Get with child a mandrake root'.
- The series of impossible tasks continues, the imagery alternating between magical and deeply unpleasant.
- The last four lines ask for something that might be more possible: what could make everyone honest and avoid the sting of jealousy.
- The implication is that this task will be as impossible as the others. However.

Lines 10-18

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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.

- Donne asks the reader to ride out for ten thousand days and nights until they are old and grey.
- He is convinced that no matter what 'strange wonders' they might encounter, they will never be able to find a woman who is both faithful and beautiful.

Lines 19-27

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Christ ayez Pitié De nous
seigneur ayez Pitié De nous
Christ exultez NOUS; christ exultez. Nous
Par Marie Qui êtes Dieu ayez pitié De nous
Fils Rédempteur Du monde ayez Pitié De nous
L'Esprit St Qui êtes Dieu ayez Pitié De nous
Trinité sainte Qui êtes Dieu ayez Pitié De nous
Ste Marie priez pour nous
Ste Anne De Dieu pour nous
St Bernard priez pour nous
et de la volonté De Votre mere Ne divinement
fils De splendeur
fleur De Pureté
traits d'honneur
d'humanité même

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 bitterness of the previous stanzas seems to have been replaced by resignation.
- Possibly a note of yearning in the thought of a 'pilgrimage' to worship at the shrine of such a paragon of virtue.
- Even if the traveller claims to have found such a woman, Donne doubts that the woman would remain faithful and honest for the length of time it would take a letter about her to reach him.
- The woman will have proven unfaithful to several men within a short space of time, he is certain.

Theme and Style

This is a satirical poem exploring the idea of female constancy and mocking the Petrarchan poetry which placed women on a pedestal.

It reads as if it were meant to shock and impress

Tone is superior, bitter and pompous

Language resembles everyday speech

Plays with the convention of using hyperbole to describe the poet's love for an adored object

Key Terms

Satire

Imperative
s

Alternatin
g imagery

Quest

Bitterness

Pomposity

Yearning

Subverts
conventio
n

The Anniversary

Glossary

Honours: important people who have rank and status in society

Elder: older

Corse: corpse

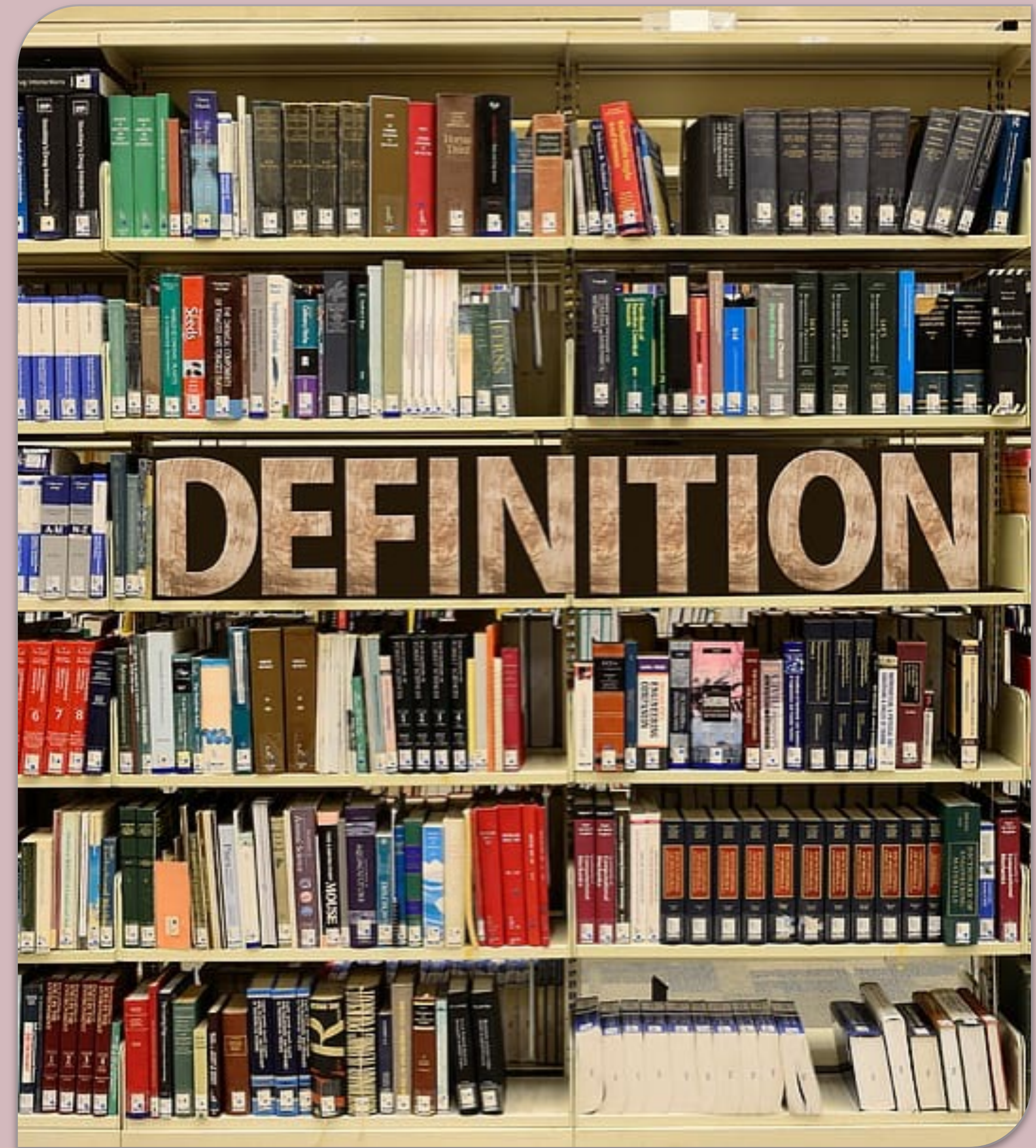
Inmates: temporary lodgers

Thoroughly: thoroughly, completely

Refrain: put aside / stop doing

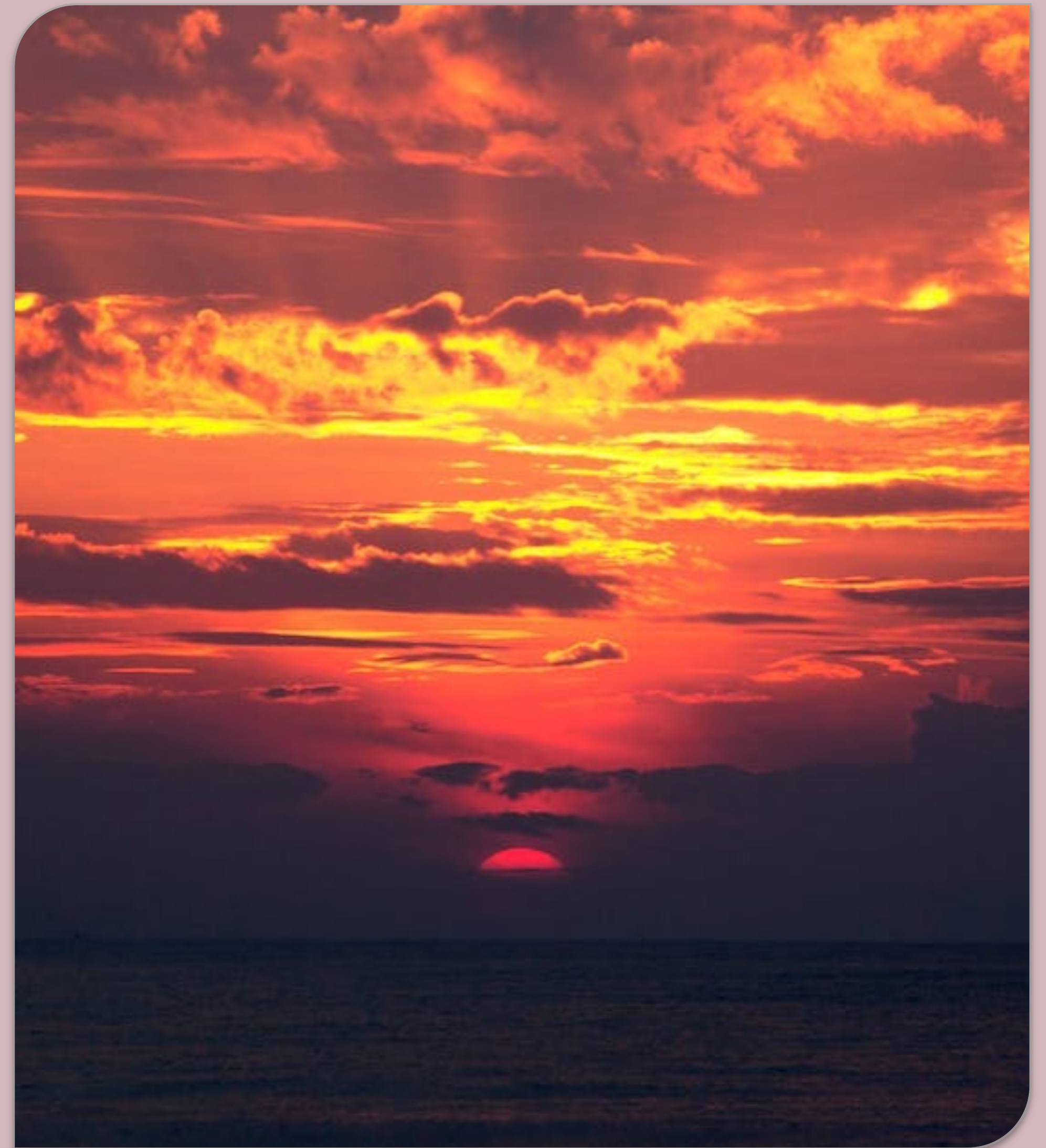
Treason: treachery

Threescore: sixty (three times twenty)



Lines 1-5

www.aofesnotes.com



All kings, and all their favourites,
All glory of honours, beauties, wits,
The sun itself, which makes times, as they pass,
Is elder by a year now than it was
When thou and I first one another saw:

- The poem opens on a somewhat conventional note. Images of royalty and cosmology were common at the time.
- The repetition of 'All' reinforces the impressive scope of the imagery.
- The couple has been together for one year.
- Imagery of kings and noblemen and even the sun is used only to show that everything, even the sun itself (which creates divisions of time) is subject to the laws of time. Nothing lasts forever.
- After the sobering thought that all things pass, the lovers are brought into the poem. The implication would seem to be that their love too cannot last forever, but the lines that follow turn that assumption on its head.

Lines 6-10

www.aofesnotes.com



All other things to their destruction draw,
Only our love hath no decay;
This no tomorrow hath, nor yesterday,
Running it never runs from us away,
But truly keeps his first, last, everlasting day.

- Neo-Platonic idea that love endures because it is greater than anything earthly thing could ever be. Love is supreme.
- The lovers are forever caught in a perfect moment: there is no past or future, only the now.
- Paradox: Donne acknowledges that they have been together for a year but also insists that their love is infinite and not subject to temporal laws. 'Running it never runs from us away' means that though time passes, it does not destroy their love. It alone does not decay or lose its freshness.
- The final line here is longer than any so far in the poem; thus emphasising the everlasting nature of love.

Lines 11-16

www.aoifesnotes.com



Then, after the vision of timelessness conjured at the end of stanza one, Donne crash-lands back in earthly time, and, with a kind of blunt bravura, calls a spade a spade: "Two graves must hide thine and my corse ... "

Carol Rumens: The Guardian April 2014

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;

- Donne accepts the reality of death. The couple will die and be buried in their separate graves.
- The image of royalty is used once more, both to point out that everyone – no matter how important – must die, and also to say that the couple have their own kingdom in one another.
- When they die, the eyes which gazed on one another and the ears into which they murmured promises of faithful love will be no more.
- ‘Sweet salt tears’ is an oxymoron. It may refer to the fact that though life has its sadness, the couple’s love for one another sweetens even these moments.

Lines 17-20

www.aofesnotes.com



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.

- A change is introduced by the word 'But'.
- Donne claims that after death, everything unimportant will vanish: all other thoughts are merely temporary 'inmates'.
- The couple's souls will be free to enjoy perfect love together.
- Their bodies may go down into the earth, but their souls will soar upwards.

Lines 21-26

www.aofesnotes.com



And then we shall be throughly blessed;

But we no more than all the rest.

Here upon earth we're kings, and none but we

Can be such kings, nor of such subjects be;

Who is so safe as we? where none can do

Treason to us, except one of us two.

- The couple will be thoroughly blessed but no more than anyone else in heaven.
- On earth, however, they are superior, and nobody can equal their great love for one another.
- Nobody can damage their relationship, except themselves, and the poet's confidence indicates that this is not likely.

Lines 27-30

www.aofesnotes.com



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.

- The poet acknowledges that there can be problems in relationships but remains confident that he and his beloved will remain free from such threats.
- Royal imagery is used again as he suggests they continue to 'love nobly' and live to a ripe old age. After all, they are merely entering the second year of their marriage.
- The repetition in 'Years and years unto years', with its long vowel sounds, reinforces the idea that they have a great deal of time left to enjoy their love.

Theme and Style

Fidelity

The continuity and supremacy of love

Conceit: the lovers are like royalty and their love creates their own kingdom

Paradox of celebrating the passing of a year but saying they are not subject to temporal laws

Ten-line, rhyming stanzas: regular structure reinforces the logical nature of the argument presented

Key Terms

**Timelessness
s of love**

**Conceit:
lovers are
like royalty**

**Supremacy
of love**

Paradox

**Neo-
Platonist**

A Valediction: forbidden Mourning

Glossary

Valediction: farewell

Virtuous: good; holy

Tear-floods: floods of tears

Sight-tempests: a storm of sighing

Profanation: insulting; desecration

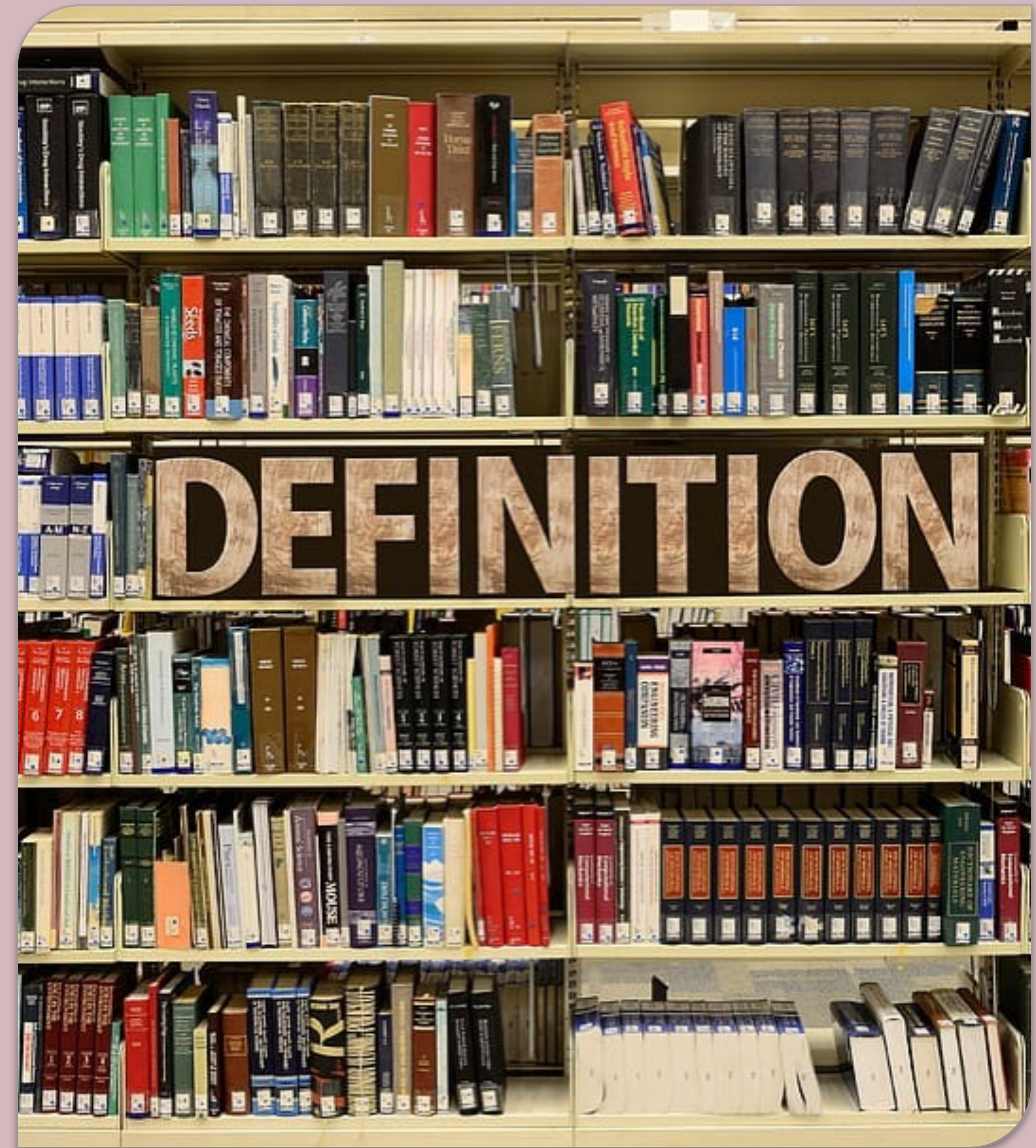
Laity: people who are not ordained; ordinary people

Moving of th' earth: earthquake

Trepidation of the spheres: planetary movement

Dull: ordinary

Sublunary: under the moon; changeable, like the phases of the moon; inconstant



Glossary

Elemented: formed; made up of

Refined: purified

Inter-assured: trusting one another

Breach: break or separation

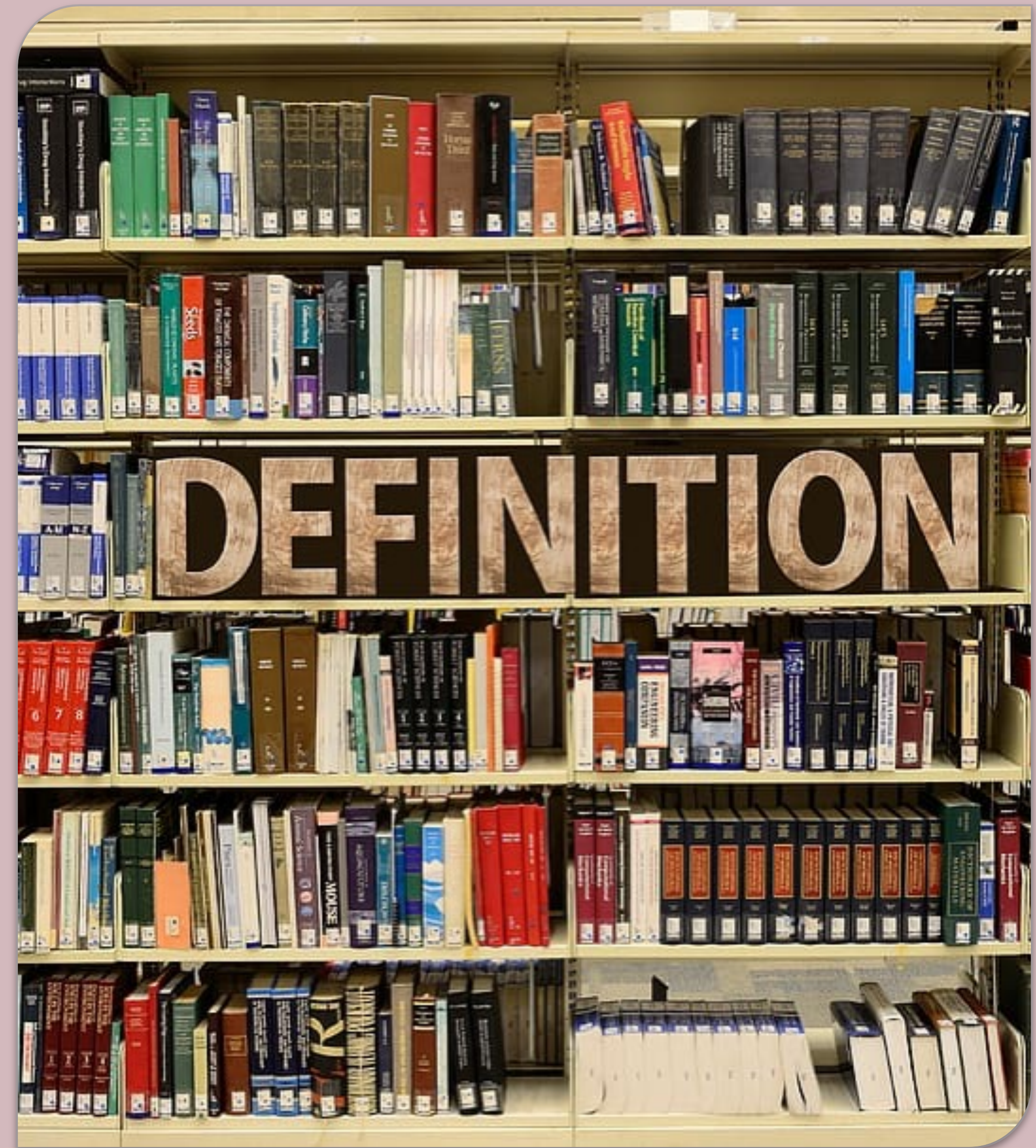
Airy thinness: as thin as gold leaf

Hearkens: listens

Wilt: will

Obliquely: curved

Just: perfect



“Donne wrote, when his wife was
alive, some of the tenderest, subtlest,
most moving expressions imaginable
of a love both profane and sacred.”

Roz Kaveney: John Donne, priest and poet, part 3: loss and
grieving

Background

The poem may have written to Anne, Donne's wife. Donne was setting out on a journey to Europe and she was unhappy at the thought of his absence.



Lines 1-4

www.aofesnotes.com



As virtuous men pass mildly away,

And whisper to their souls to go,

Whilst some of their sad friends do say

The breath goes now, and some say, No:

- The poem opens with an image of good men dying gently, so gently that their friends are not sure if they have gone.
- Quiet, calm opening
- Regular rhyme scheme reinforces the idea that all is natural and good.
- The sibilance in this stanza underlines the silence of these gentle deaths.

Lines 5-8

www.aofesnotes.com



So let us melt, and make no noise,
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;
'Twere profanation of our joys
To tell the laity our love.

- The poet argues that he and his beloved should part equally calmly and gently. Their separation should be as gentle as something that melts or dissolves quietly.
- He does not want excessive shows of grief to profane their love, or make it less sacred.
- The compound words 'tear-floods' and 'sigh-tempests' highlight the stormy, unbecoming nature of loud shows of grief.
- If there is a noisy farewell, the 'laity', or ordinary people, will know of their great love and that will desecrate it. Their love is above ordinary, earthly love.
- Religious imagery is used to show their sacred bond.
- The title 'Forbidden Mourning' makes sense now.

Lines 9-12

www.aofesnotes.com



Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,
Men reckon what it did, and meant;
But **trepidation of the spheres,**
Though greater far, is innocent.

- The poet compares ordinary lovers' problems to earthquakes: they are loud and noticed by all.
- He and his beloved are, it is implied, above such earthly shows of grief. They are like the planets which move far more than does the earth during a quake, yet nobody notices.
- Their love is more spiritual than earthly.
- The reference to the planets brings to mind the image of heaven.

Lines 13-16

www.aofesnotes.com



Dull sublunary lovers' love

(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.

- The imagery comes back down to earth now.
- Poets commonly used images of the moon in love poetry. Donne rejects this convention, however.
- He says ordinary lovers are 'Dull' and cannot cope with parting because their love depends on physical closeness; it is all they have.
- The repeated 'L' sounds and the harsh 'D' of 'dull' underline the commonplace, uninspired nature of other couples' love compared to the poet and his beloved.

Lines 17-20

www.aofesnotes.com



But we by a love so much refined,
That our selves know not what it is,
Inter-assured of the mind,
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

- The poet says he and his beloved share a love so pure that even they cannot even fully comprehend it themselves.
- The compound word 'Inter-assured' means that their confidence in one another is shared or reciprocated.
- They do not care so much about not being able to touch one another because their love is so perfect and spiritual. It is above such earthy concerns.
- Other love poets of the time praised their beloved's physical features, but Donne again rejects convention.

Lines 21-24

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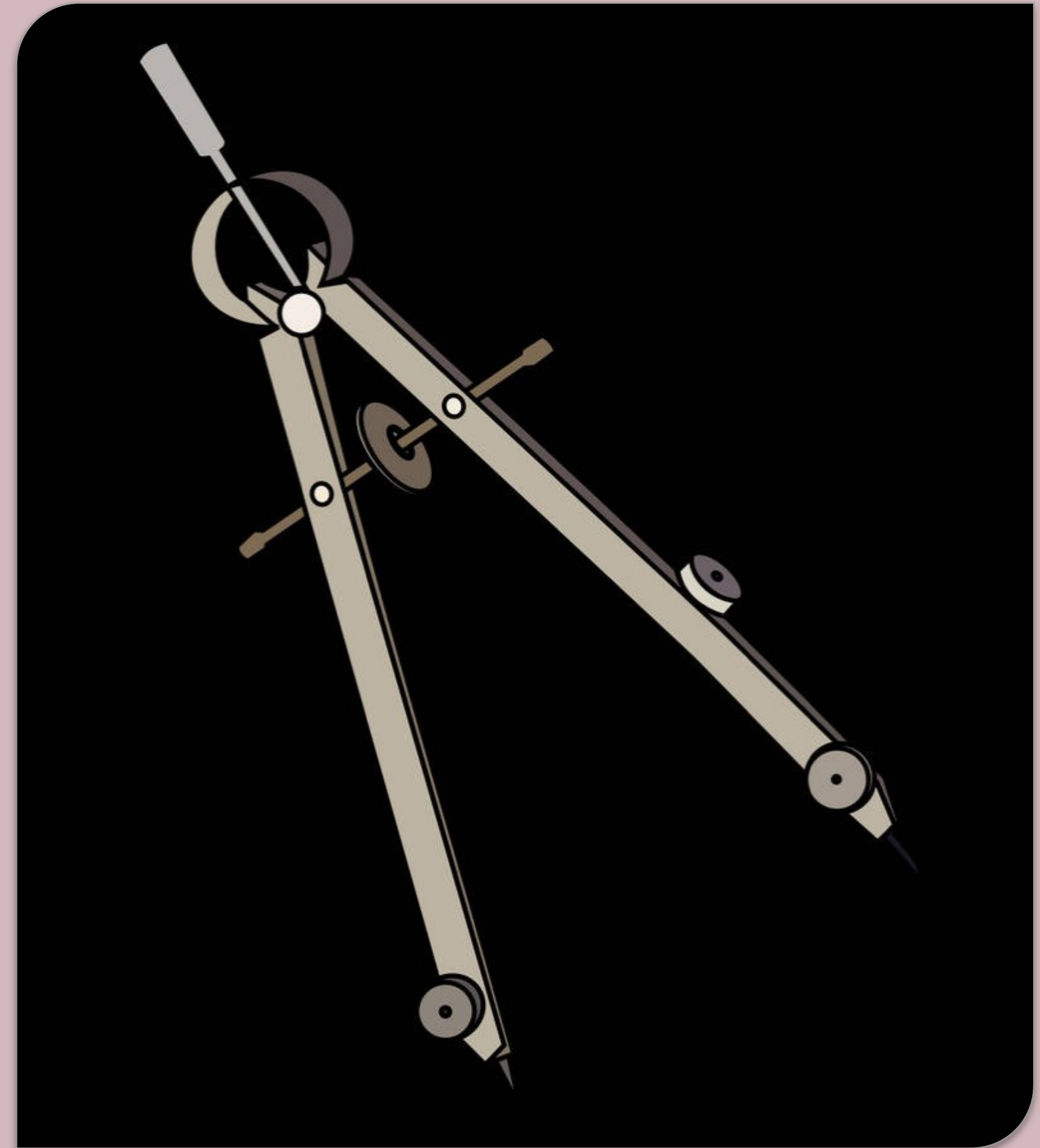


Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

- Their souls are so united that their separation will not be a break but simply an expansion of their love. Their relationship is like gold that can be beaten to a thin leaf which covers a great distance.
- Their love will achieve an 'airy thinness'. 'Airy' has connotations of ascension and exaltation.

Lines 25-28

www.aofesnotes.com

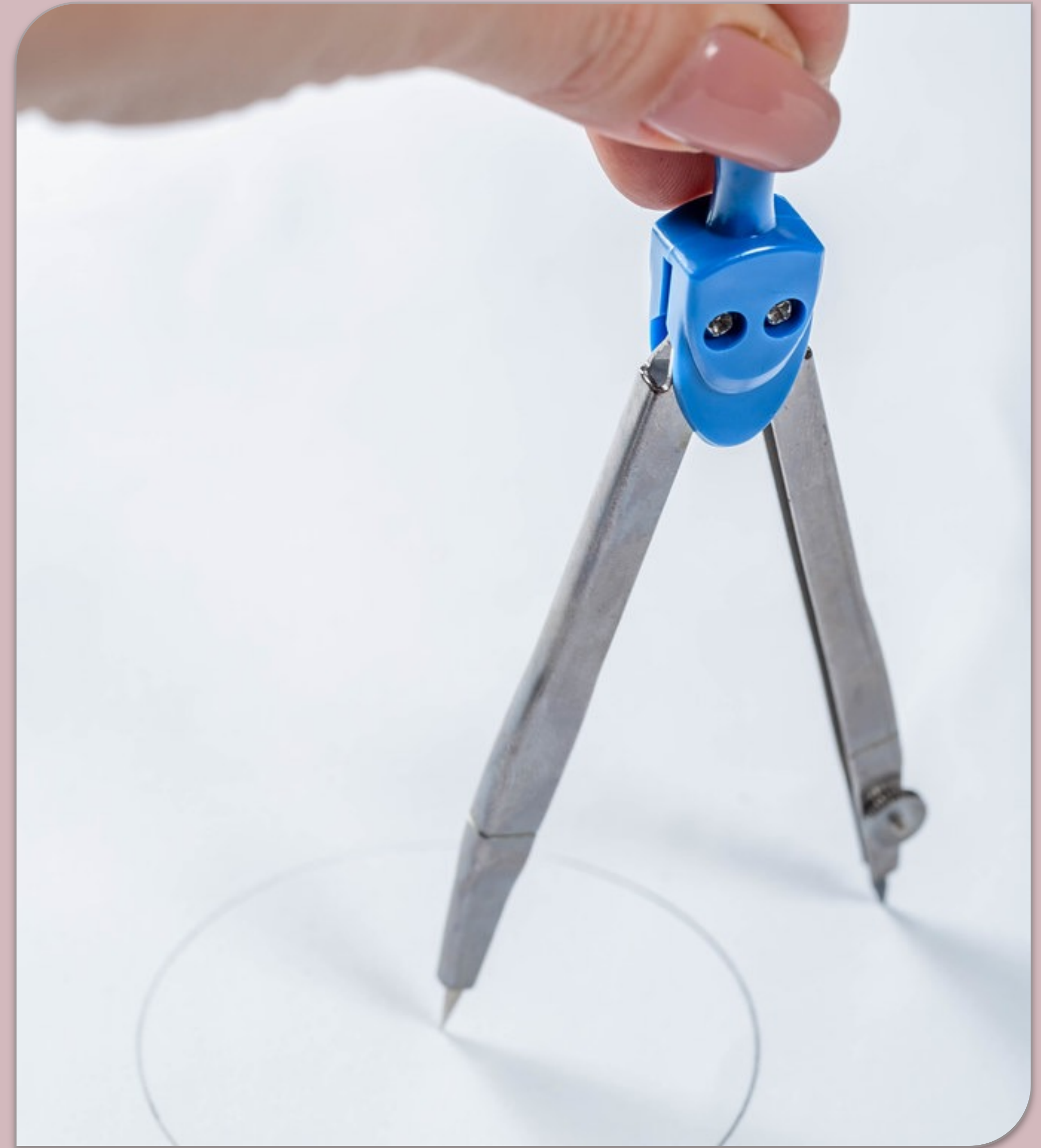


If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do.

- Conceit: the lovers souls are like the two legs of a drawing compass.
- They are two parts of one thing.
- The woman is the fixed point of the compass and he, because he is travelling, is the foot that moves in a circle.
- However, the fixed point of the compass does spin in place, even if its motion is not obvious. In the same way, their parting should not be an open show of grief.
- A circle returns to its starting point, just as he will return.

Lines 29-32

www.aofesnotes.com

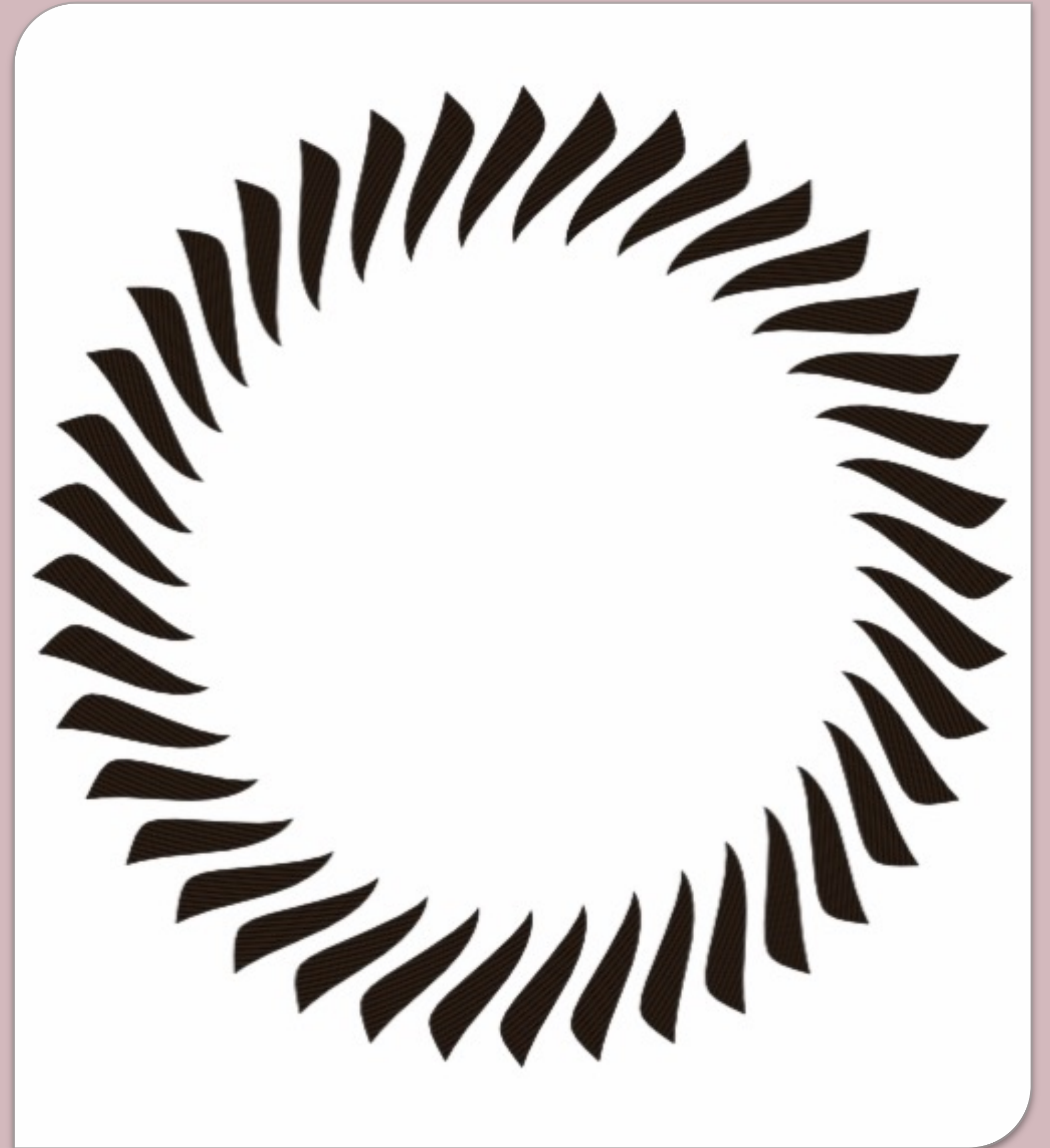


And though it in the centre sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

- The woman is the fixed point which, though it remains steady, leans towards the other foot of the compass.
- Personification: the fixed foot yearns for its other half
- The final line may be seen to be sexually suggestive. Donne loved to play with erotic images in his poetry.
- Katherine Rundell, in her book on Donne, calls it 'a pun so obvious it might as well be a little sketch' of a private part.

Lines 33-36

www.aofesnotes.com



Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.

- The poem concludes with the image of the completion of the circle drawn by the compass.
- While he 'must' leave, their connection will not be broken.
- Her constancy and steadfastness will allow him to lean on her and return full circle.

“His best poetry is a triumphant call of desire,
sincerity, joke, all bound into one.”

Katherine Rundell: *Super-Infinite: The Transformations of John Donne*

Theme and Style

True, spiritual love transcends physical distance

Central conceit: the compass - the concrete describes the abstract

Hyperbole in the compound words 'tear-floods' and 'sigh-tempests'

Personification of the compass heightens emotional impact

Key Terms

Spiritual love

**Conceit of
compass**

**Compound
words**

**Rejects
convention**

**Unbroken
circle**

**Steadfast,
constant
love**

Thou Hast Made Me

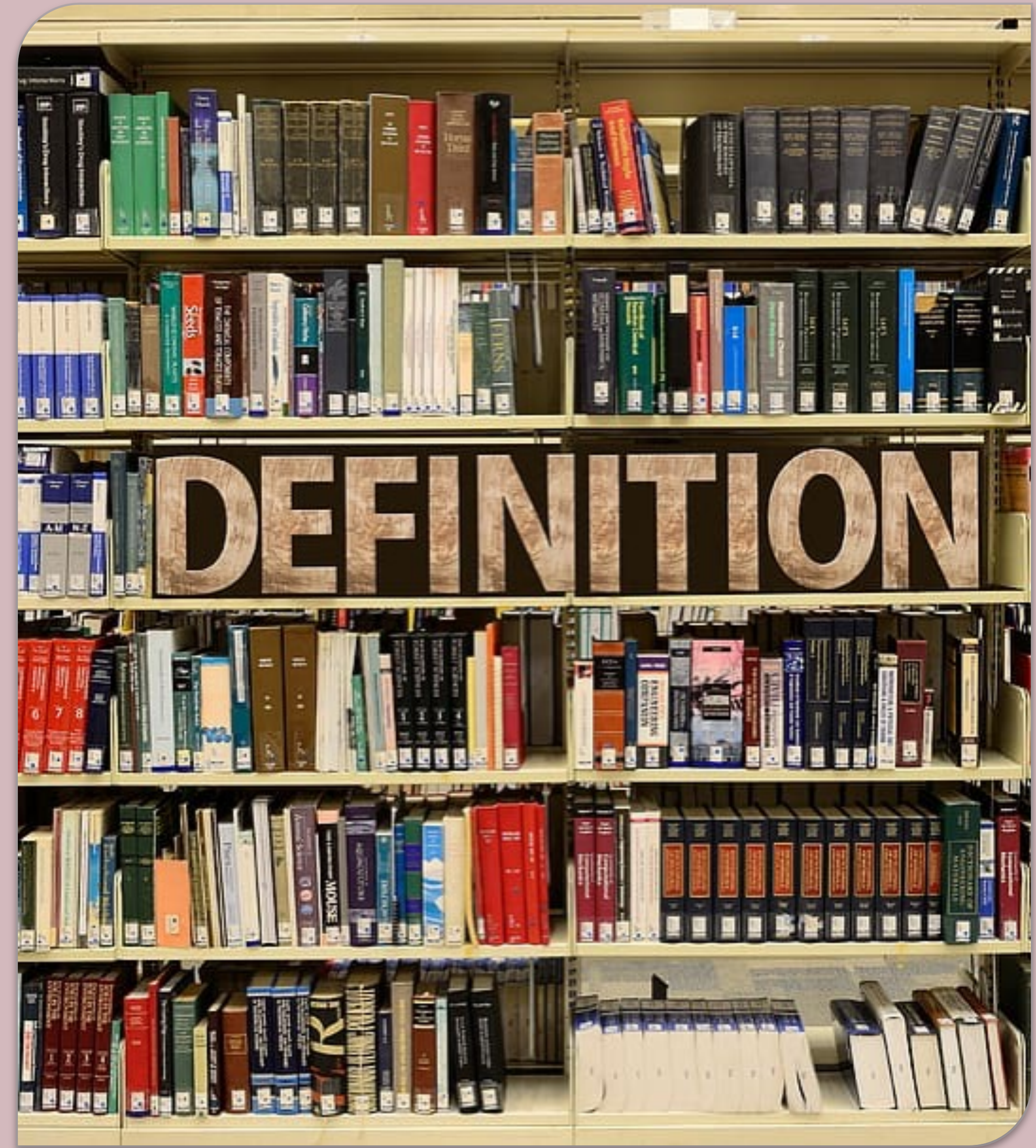
Glossary

Dim: blurred

Feeble: weak

Subtle: clever, cunning, sly

Adamant: magnet (lodestone)



Lines 1-3

www.aofesnotes.com



Thou hast made me, and shall thy work
decay?

Repair me now, for now mine end doth
haste,

I run to death, and death meets me as fast,

- Dramatic opening
- Direct address to God which is both a request and a command: 'Repair me now'
- Anguished plea to God to repair him is similar to that in 'Batter my heart'
- Sense of urgency as the end of the poet's life draws near: repair must happen 'now'
- Death is personified. Poet and death run towards one another, suggesting both inevitability and a sort of intimacy. Balance of this line beautifully evokes a couple running towards one another.

Line 4

www.aofesnotes.com



And all my pleasures are like
yesterday;

- The poet's life up to this point fades into insignificance in the face of death
- He can take no pleasure in life now and wishes only to be cleansed of past sins and brought to God

Lines 5-8

www.aofesnotes.com



I dare not move my dim eyes any way,
Despair behind, and death before doth cast
Such terror, and my feeble flesh doth waste
By sin in it, which it towards hell doth
weigh.

- The poet is clinging to his soul and his vision of God and dares not look anywhere else.
- There is nothing behind him but despair and nothing in front of him but death, and he is terrified.
- Harsh 'd' sounds drive home the sense of misery and despair: 'dim eyes', 'Despair behind, and death before'
- He fears he is too weak to hold on much longer and may be dragged down into hell.

Lines 9-10

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Only thou art above, and when towards thee
By thy leave I can look, I rise again;

- Change in mood
- If God helps the poet to look towards him, he may be saved.
- He cannot achieve salvation alone.

Lines 11-14

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But our old subtle foe so tempteth me,
That not one hour I can myself sustain;
Thy grace may wing me to prevent his art,
And thou like adamant draw mine iron heart.

- Conceit of man being a machine made by God is continued here: he has an 'iron heart' and God is the magnet or 'adamant' which can draw him upwards.
- Speaker fears he is susceptible to temptation and that sin is the iron in his soul.
- God's grace may, like an angel, 'wing' the poet towards heaven. The word 'may' suggests a sense of doubt. However, the sestet offers a note of hope that is absent from the octet.

“We think of him partly as the poet of love, and partly as the poet of death and its terrors – the pain of disease or violence, and the fear of hell. Donne had been to war; friends had been far too close for comfort to treason and its hideous punishments; his wife died, and he feared it was his fault. Those of us who have seen fewer nightmares, and who share neither his hope of heaven nor his fear of damnation can still share with him his sense of unworthiness, his sense of sin, his hope of reconciliation to the end of life.”

Roz Kaveney: *John Donne, priest and poet, part 1: love, conscience and martyrdom*

Theme - Relationship with God

- ❖ Presents himself as a supplicant, yet uses authoritative language when telling God what to do:
- ❖ 'Thou hast made me [...] / Repair me now'
- ❖ As in 'Batter my heart', the speaker implies that God created him so is responsible for repairing him
- ❖ The speaker is like a flawed machine



Language and mood

- ❖ Note the change in mood from the octet to the sestet.
- ❖ Octet is full of despair and this is reflected in the language: 'decay', 'death' used three times, 'dim', 'Despair', 'terror', 'feeble', 'waste', 'sin,' 'towards hell doth weigh'.
- ❖ The poet is being dragged down and fears even to look around lest he plunge towards hell.
- ❖ The language in the sestet is about ascension: rising up towards God and heaven: 'above', 'I rise', 'Thy grace may wing me', 'Thou like adamant draw mine iron heart'.



Key Terms

Sonnet

Dramatic
opening

Anguished
plea

Death
personified

Urgency

Despair

Ascension

At the round earth's imagined
corners

Glossary

Dearth: famine

Agues: fevers

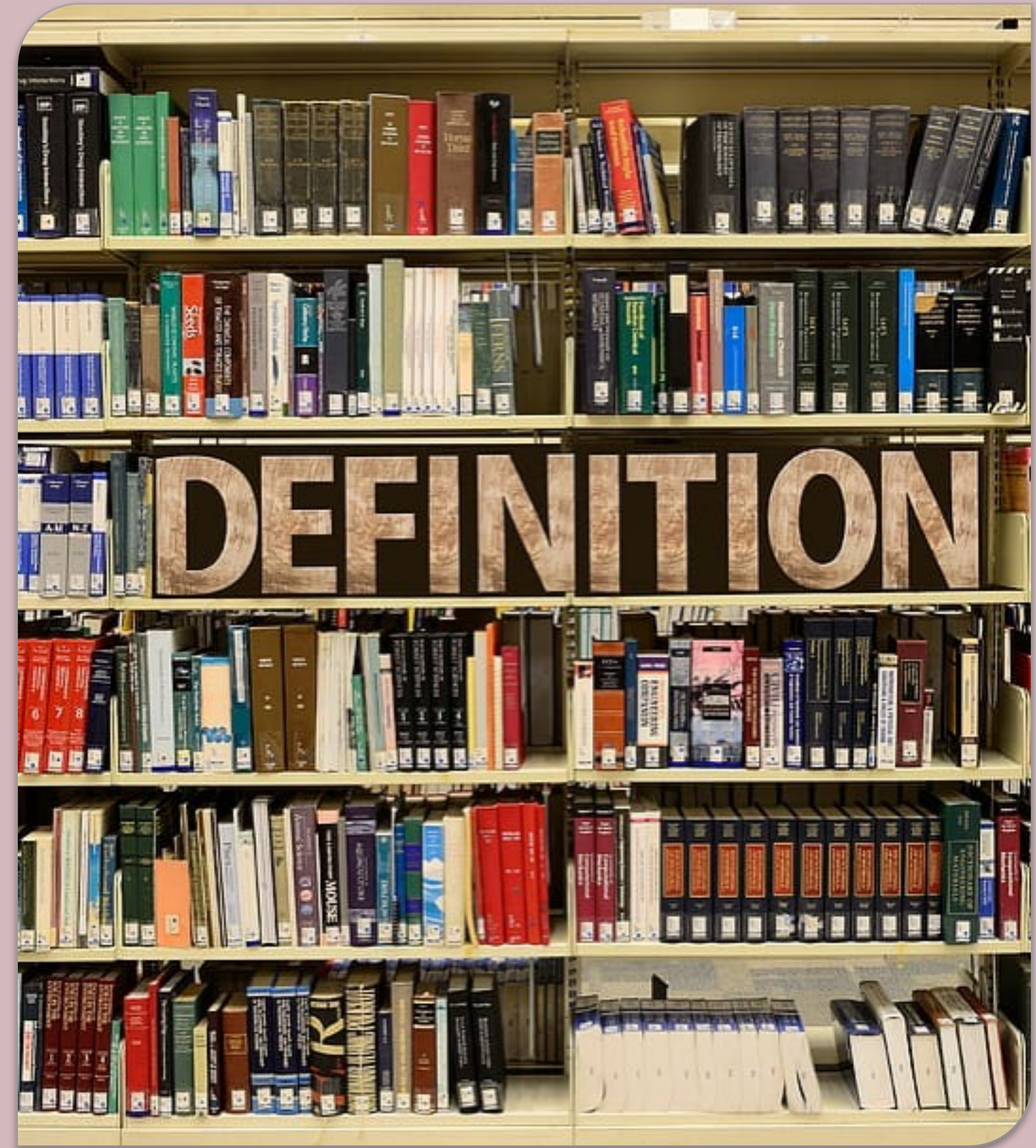
Slain: killed

Woe: sorrow

Abound: exist in large amounts

Abundance: plenty

Repent: express regret



Lines 1-8

www.aofesnotes.com



At the round earth's imagined corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go;
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you whose
eyes
Shall behold God and never taste death's woe.

- The poet imagines the Day of Judgement
- Poem opens with imperatives, adding drama
- Allusion to the *Book of Revelation* which describes four angels standing at the corners of the earth on the last day.
- Impossibility of the round earth having imagined corners reflects the difficulties inherent in fully understanding the transcendent
- Apocalyptic vision
- The dead will rise in infinite numbers: those who died in flood (perhaps the flood described in the Bible) fire, war, famine, old age, unjust regimes, suicide, execution or simply bad luck
- This list of calamities is depressing and sobering, but there is a note of hope.
- Those who are still alive on the Day of Judgement and those who died at any time in the past will all be brought into the presence of God.

Lines 9-14

www.aofesnotes.com



But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,
For if above all these my sins abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace
When we are there; here on this lowly ground
Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou had'st sealed my pardon with thy
blood.

- Volta – typical of Petrarchan sonnet
- Abrupt change of mood
- The poet now asks God to postpone the Day of Judgement
- All the grandeur and awe of the octet vanishes and the tone becomes more intimate.
- The poet feels he has sinned more than anyone and begs God to help him repent
- Reference to Christ dying on the cross to redeem mankind seems to promise salvation no matter what.
- Regardless of how much the poet has sinned in the past, God's forgiveness is infinite.
- Note of humility in 'lowly ground'.

Themes and Style

Vision of the Apocalypse

God's generosity in forgiving sinners and offering salvation to all

Awe-inspiring, terrifying images in the octet give way to a quieter tone in the sestet

Key Terms

Sonnet

Imperative
s

List of
calamities

Volta

Intimacy
in the
sestet

Belief in
salvation

Wonder at
God's love

Batter my heart, three-personed
God

Glossary

Three-personed God: the Holy Trinity

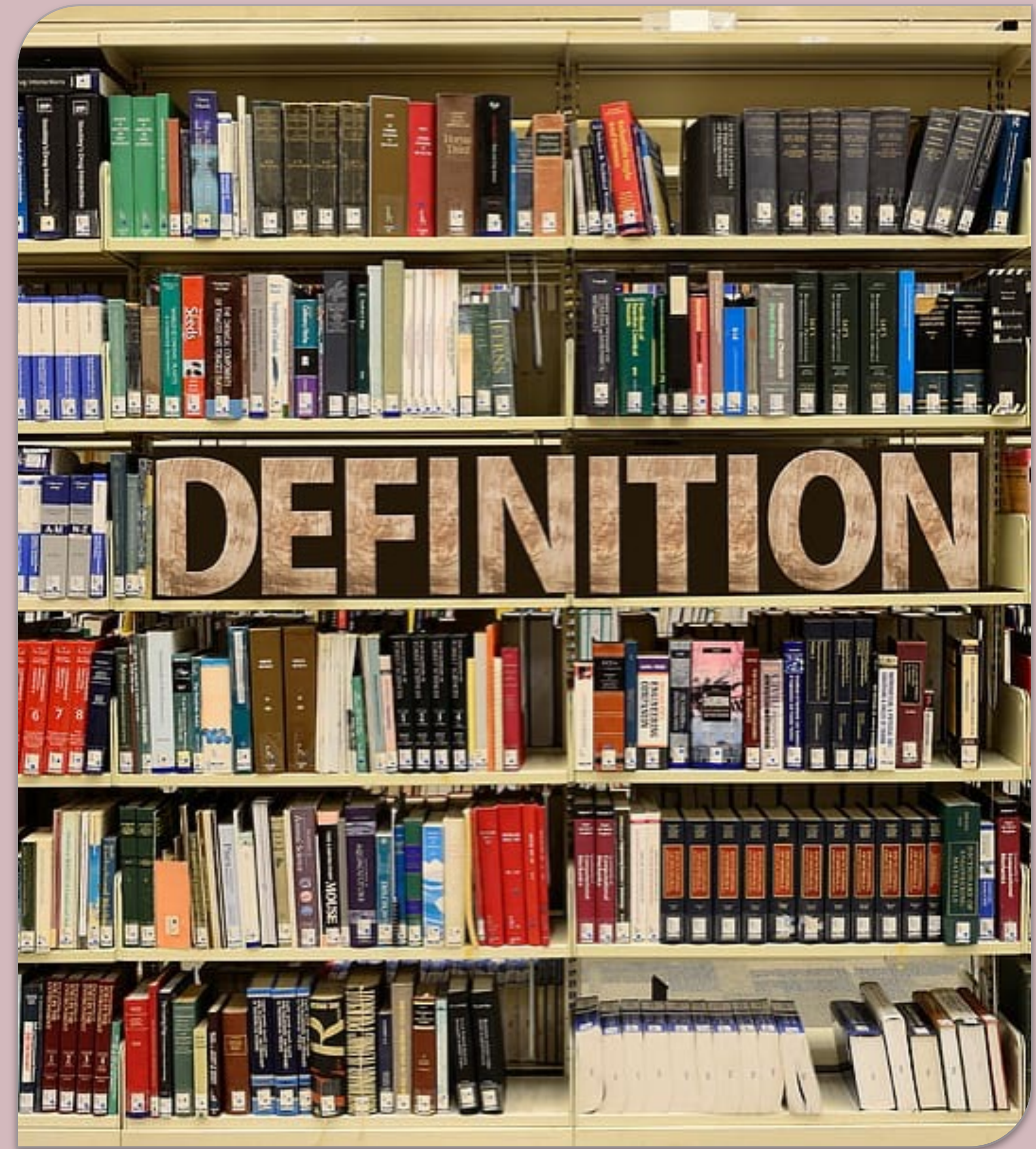
Usurped: captured by force

Viceroy: the king's substitute or representative

Fain: gladly

Chaste: virginal

Ravish: take by force



Lines 1-4

www.aoifesnotes.com



Batter my heart, three-personed God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to
mend;

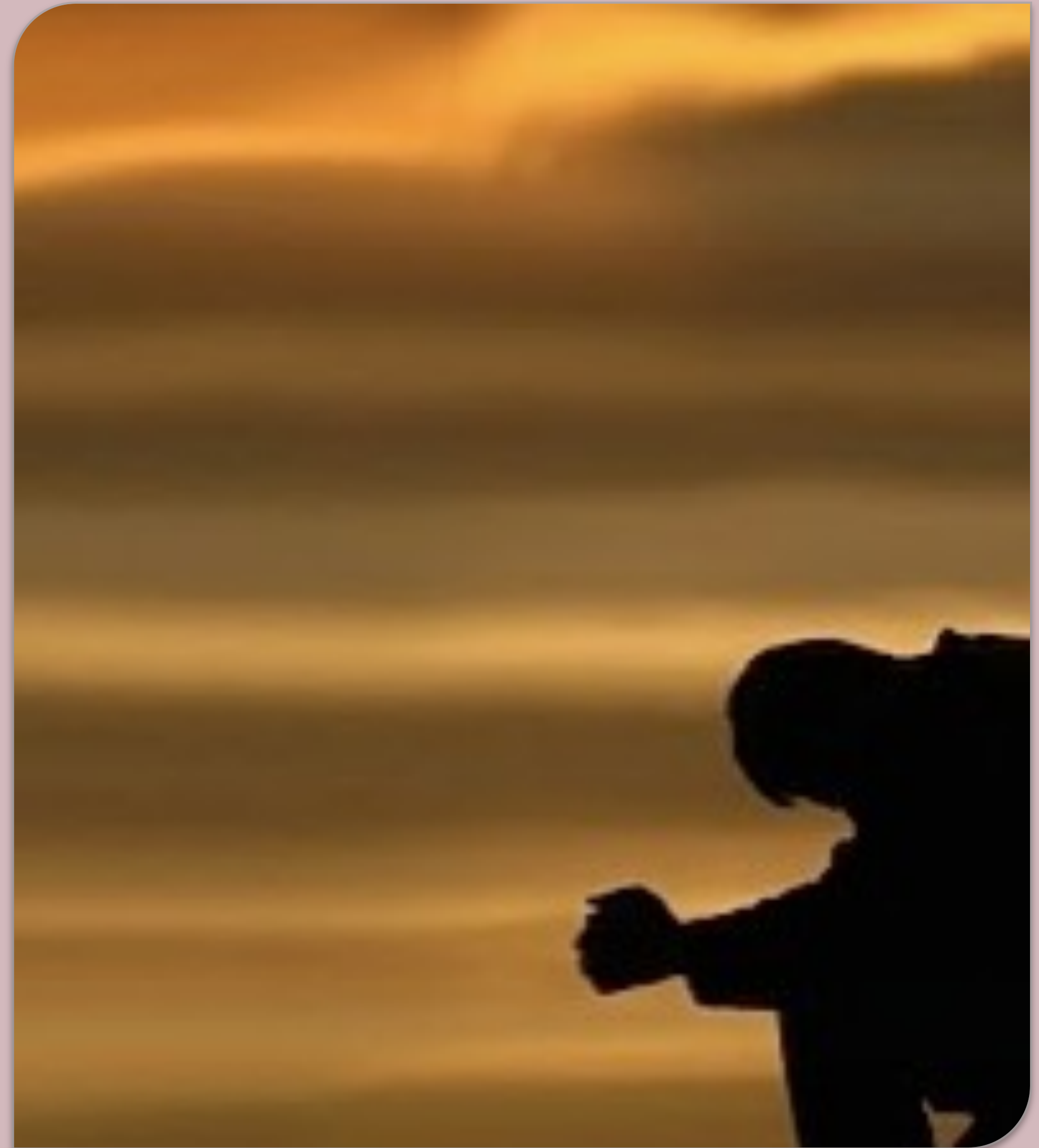
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and
bend

Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me
new.

- The poet demands that God take his heart and not be too gentle with him
- 'Batter' brings to mind battering rams used to open a gate or door by force
- The metaphor of the poet's heart being like a fortified town that must be conquered runs throughout the poem.
- God, the poet suggests, is too gentle at the moment. Gentle wind and sunshine will not meet the occasion: brute force is required
- Paradox: in order for the poet to stand upright in God's presence, he needs to be knocked down.
- Second paradox: in order to be made new, he must be broken
- The poet believes that he can only be reborn and made whole if his old self is destroyed
- The harsh, alliterative 'break, blow, burn' reflect the same sound in the opening word of the poem and underline the forceful action the poet desires

Lines 5-8

www.aofesnotes.com



I, like an usurped town to another due,

Labour to admit you, but oh, to no end;

Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,

But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.

- The comparison to a fortified town that must be captured continues in the simile 'like a usurped town'.
- The town has been captured by an enemy: the poet has given in to sin
- In Donne's time, it was believed that reason or logical thought was an important aspect of religious belief, but the poet lacks that too.

Lines 9-11

www.aofesnotes.com



Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie or break that knot again,

- There is a change at this point in the poem, as would be expected in a Petrarchan sonnet
- This 'volta', or shift in tone, changes the imagery to love
- The poet says he loves God dearly and fervently wishes to be loved in return. However, his sinful nature makes this impossible at the moment. He begs God to rescue him from his relationship with God's enemy (sin or the devil).

Lines 12-14

www.aofesnotes.com



Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

- The poet wants God to imprison him so that there is no possibility of his sinning once more
- Paradox: unless God enslaves him, he cannot be free. Nor can he be pure unless God ravishes him.
- The final line is quite shocking: he compares his union with God to a forced sex act.

Themes and Style

A plea for God to save him

Fervent desire for complete union with God

Sense of unworthiness

Metaphor and simile of a fortress that must be captured

Erotic imagery is shocking but may point to spiritual rather than physical union

Paradoxes used to great effect to force us to examine the poet's ideas closely

Key Terms

Sonnet

Volta

**Metaphor
and simile**

**Violent
imagery**

**Erotic
imagery**

Paradoxes

Essay Writing



The question

- No matter how the questions are phrased, they are all basically asking you to do the same thing – talk about the poet's themes and style.
- Each question also requires you to prove that you have engaged with the works of the selected poet.



Varying your vocabulary



Identify key words and think of synonyms if possible. This will help to ensure that your language is varied while still focusing on the terms of the question.



Ask yourself what the coding for the question might be. Make sure that each and every point in your plan could be coded by the examiner. This will ensure that you are remaining focused on the question.



TIP!

tip

- Each of the poets you have studied has a signature style.
- They also deal with a limited number of themes.
- Work these out, and you will be prepared for any question.

Choosing your poems

Choose four to five poems which are relevant to the question.

You are making a case in your essay, so you must have a thesis.

The examiner is not interested in reading a re-hash of your poetry notes.

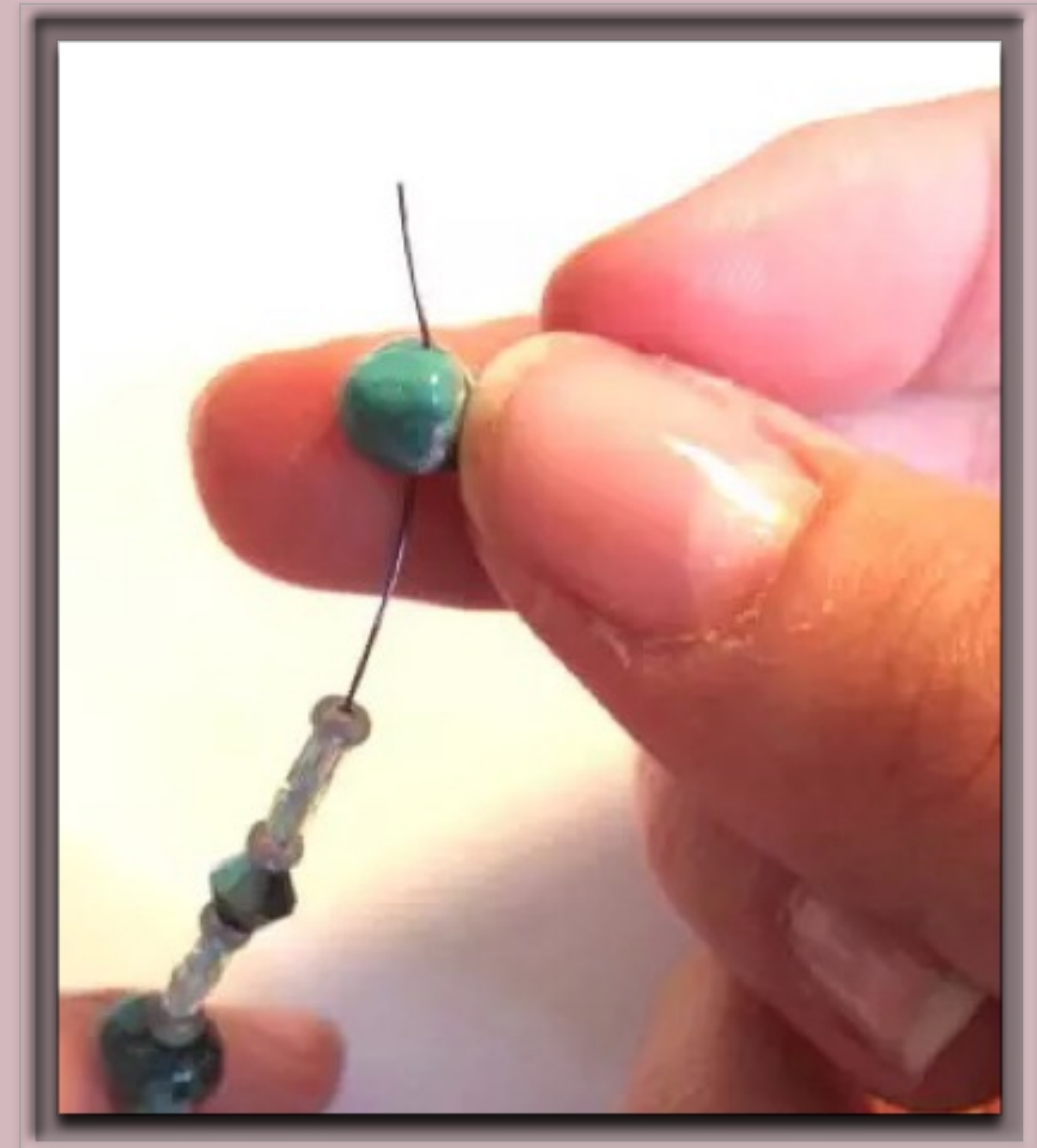
Organisation

HAVE A REASON FOR PUTTING THE POEMS IN A CERTAIN ORDER



Order

YOUR THESIS SHOULD BE THE THREAD
HOLDING YOUR ESSAY TOGETHER



Structure

There is no hard and fast rule here; use whatever structure has worked for you in the past.

Introduction: Refer to the question and outline your approach

Two paragraphs on each poem

Link sentence at the start of each new poem

Conclusion: it is effective to end on a quote if possible

Some suggestions

Move from poems written about the poet's childhood to poems written about middle age or old age.

Move from poems written when the poet was young to poems written when he / she was an older person.

Move from positive to negative or vice versa.

Move from personal to public or vice versa.

Planning - continued

If you cannot make a link at the planning stage, forget that poem and move on to another one. This is the benefit of plans. If you just launch into your essay without a clear idea of where each poem is taking you, you will get a low grade

A poem-by-poem approach can make a daunting essay title seem quite manageable. Remember, you are aiming to write two strong paragraphs on each poem, as well as an introduction and conclusion.

You should aim to write on four to five poems in your exam answer.

**What poems would you use
next?**

Think of the ORDER in which
you would place your poems,
and the links between them.



Introduction



You can - and should - work the terms of the question into your opening paragraph



Avoid the temptation to include too many points in your introduction. You must only mention themes / aspects of style that you intend to explore fully in the rest of the essay. Be wary of phrases like 'a multitude of themes' or 'many interesting ways'. Those are big claims. Can you back them all up? A focused thesis is a better idea.

Pitfalls

'I agree with the above statement'. It is best not to begin an essay this way, especially if the statement is not above your introduction!

Mentioning topics in your introduction but failing to deal with them in the answer

Writing an unbalanced answer in which you deal with one or two poems in great detail and skip quickly over others

Body of the Essay

Each paragraph should advance your argument

The topic sentence in each paragraph should answer the question

Each paragraph should be linked to those before and after it

Use link words or phrases to connect your paragraphs: however; it is not only; we can also see; it becomes increasingly clear; as the poem progresses...

LINK PHRASES TO CONNECT EVIDENCE AND/OR QUOTATION

This idea is reinforced by / when...

This is cemented by / when...

X adds to the sense of...

This is further driven home by / when...

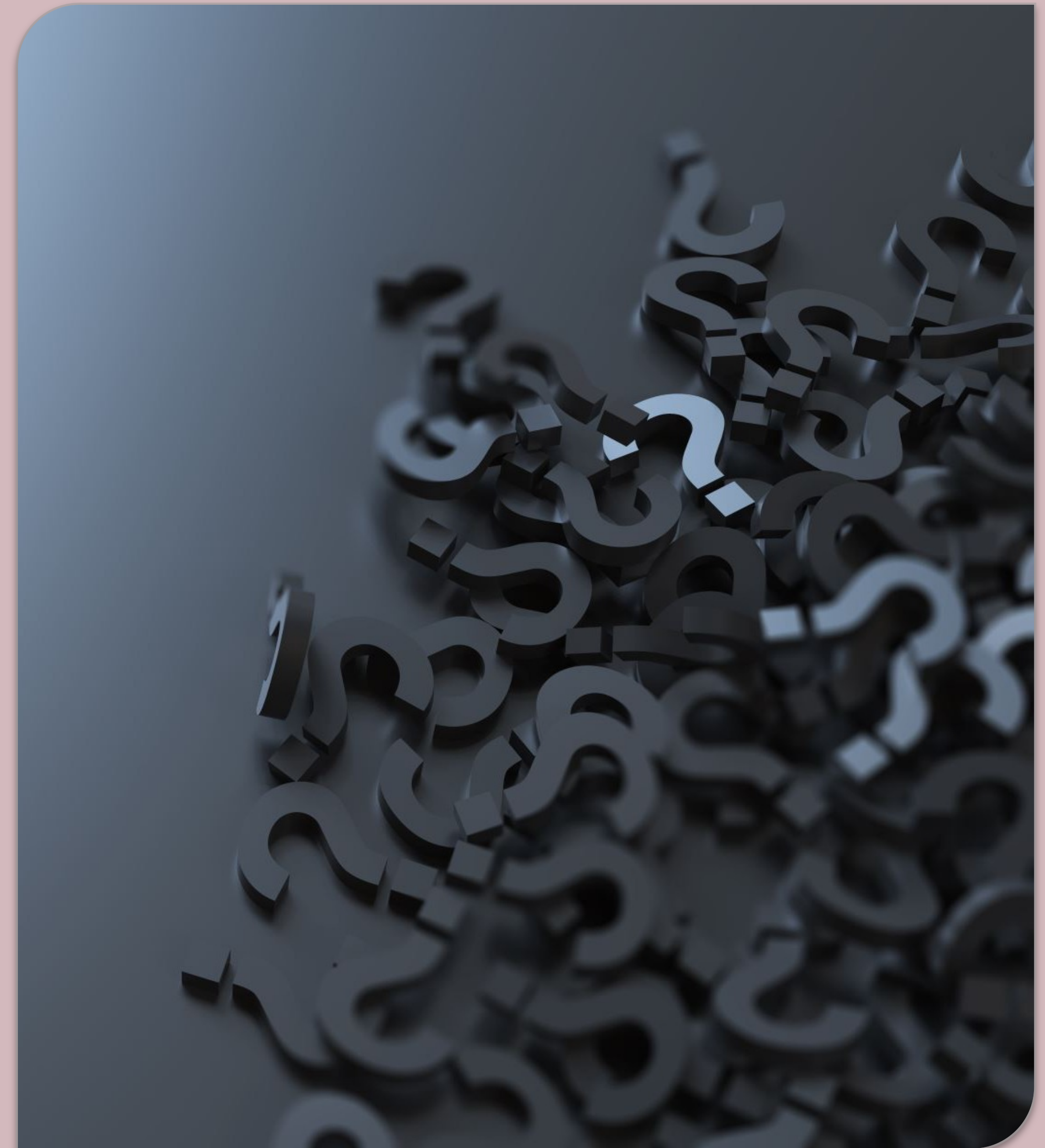
This message is even more powerfully
expressed by / when...

We see this same idea...

In much the same way...

Furthermore...

In addition...



**STRUCTURING EACH
PARAGRAPH – THERE IS
NO ‘RIGHT’ WAY, BUT THIS IS ONE
OPTION**

Sentence One: Topic sentence which addresses the question

Sentence Two: Explain your point in a little more depth (this may take more than one sentence)

Sentence Three: Use evidence, including quotations, to support your point

Sentence Four: Comment on the evidence / quote and explain how it proves the point you made in your topic sentence

Sentence Five: Use a link phrase to introduce your second piece of evidence / quotation (see next slide for link phrases) and give your second piece of evidence

Sentence Six: Comment on the evidence etc.

Conclusion



Your conclusion should tie up your ideas and be a very brief rewording of your thesis/introduction.



There is no need to say, 'As I have shown in this essay'. Let your points speak for themselves.



Make sure not to raise any new points in your conclusion.



If you have an apt quote by or about the poet, this is a good time to use it.

Structuring an Answer: Approach for Each Poem

1

**Point in
relation to the
question**

2

**First piece of
evidence to
support the
point**

3

**Comment on
the evidence in
relation to the
point**

4

**Second piece
of evidence to
support the
point**

5

**Comment on
the evidence in
relation to the
point**

DEB Pre Sample Question

“Donne is admired for exploring ideas and feelings through his exciting use of language.”

Discuss this statement, supporting your answer with reference to both the themes and language found in the poetry of John Donne on your course.

Marking Scheme

Ideas and Feelings

- ✓ Poems like “The Anniversary” reflect on very difficult and interesting concepts such as love, life and the passing of time
- ✓ In Donne’s poetry there is very little purely ornamental or sensuous language. He nearly always appeals to the mind or the intellect when advancing his arguments and at times this can be to exclusion of feelings, etc.

Exciting Language

- ✓ In many of Donne's poems, while the end rhyme is insistent and regular, the poetry achieves most of its energy through the rhyming of verbs
- ✓ Donne's exciting use of language is, in general, characterised by its inventiveness, ingenuity, use of paradox and frequent obscurity
- ✓ Donne's exciting use of language and interesting ideas are enhanced by a wide range of references. He uses science, literary allusion, parody and his wit in equal measure to produce a striking body of poetry
- ✓ He nearly always appeals to the mind or the intellect when advancing his arguments. This is exciting as it engages the reader in a debate
- ✓ Donne often uses bizarre comparisons (exciting use of language) to draw shocking conclusions
- ✓ His poems like to catch us off guard, change direction and thereby foil our expectations, etc.

Analysing the Question

- All questions are about themes and style.
- What is the poet saying, and how is he saying it?
- In Poem 1, decide on the ideas and feelings that are expressed.
- How does the poet use exciting language to express these feelings and ideas?
- Continue planning in the same vein.
- Remain focused on the terms of the question throughout.

Sample Approach

The Sun Rising

Feeling of contented love and sense that this love is the most important thing in the world. When he has his loved one, the speaker needs nothing else.

Constancy of love

Startling opening: addressing the sun as a 'Busy old fool'. Later he calls it a 'saucy pedantic wretch'. Why does he dismiss the sun in this way? Thought-provoking and leads to the dominant concepts in the poem: the couple's love transcends time and space. The sun may traverse the earth but the lovers have no need to leave the confines of their room to as everything on earth they could need is contained within its four walls: 'She's all states and all princes I'. **Extraordinary** idea: the couple's love is so important that, 'This bed thy centre is'. The strength of their love should define the sun's orbit: these walls, thy sphere'.

Wonderfully **dramatic shift** in final stanza when Donne, who had earlier ordered the sun to 'go chide' others and leave him and his lover alone, now pities the sun which is only 'half as happy' as the couple is, and invites it now to 'shine here to us'.

The sun does not regulate everything: 'Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run? Love 'no season knows, nor clime'. The description of the division of day and night, hours and minutes as merely 'the rags of time' is **wonderfully dismissive** and stresses the constancy of love, which transcends time.

The Anniversary

Celebrates love's growth and continuity

Opens with a magnificent list of all those who have distinguished themselves: 'All kings, and all their favourites,' including 'The sun itself'. What is **arresting** about this is that the poet gives the list only to belittle it. Stresses the importance of love, as in 'The Sun Rising', by putting himself and his lover at the centre of the universe and showing through the comparison with 'All other things' that 'Only our love hath no decay'.

Logical and philosophical approach to love. **Unconventional:** does not describe the woman's beauty but **surprises** us by proposing a realistic detail such as transience or death and defeats it with his interpretation of love and time. Just as he dismissed the importance of the sun compared to his love in 'The Sun Rising', so he dismisses kings, princes and even death in 'The Anniversary'. After death, there is not an ending but a further stage of heightened happiness awaiting the couple: 'And then we shall be thoroughly blessed'.

Song: Go, and catch a falling star

Different view of love: playful but cynical approach. In 'The Anniversary', the poet is confident of his loved one's fidelity but here he says women are faithless and wise men should avoid becoming entangled with them.

Fantastical comparisons highlight the impossibility of finding a woman who is both beautiful and trustworthy: Donne instructs the imaginary listener to catch a falling star, impregnate a mandrake root etc.

The Flea

Having bemoaned women's lack of chastity in 'Song', Donne now bemoans his lover's virtue. This is a rather one-dimensional view of love and contains none of the deeper emotions found in 'The Anniversary', for example.

Witty exercise in which Donne shows off his cleverness. **Playful** language ensures we do not take his view too seriously.

Brilliant, inventive treatment of a complex issue. This poem is an exercise in rhetoric. Donne uses an outrageous argument in a poem that would have been considered quite raunchy in his day (although indecent poems about fleas were common in certain circles at the time).

Ingenious logic: as their blood is already mingled in the flea, it cannot be said 'a sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhood' to consummate their relationship.

Memorable conceit in which the flea's body, its 'living walls of jet' becomes a sacred place in which the poet and his lover have effectively been married. Quite a **shocking** comparison.

Outlandish, entertaining debate taken even further when the woman kills the flea. **Amusing exaggeration** in calling the flea's death 'Cruel and sudden'. We cannot help but admire the poet's **wit** as he turns his own argument on its head, claiming that the woman will lose no more honour when she sleeps with him than the flea's death took from her.

Most **entertaining** part of the poem is the to-and-fro of a debate. A wonderful exercise in intellectual seduction.

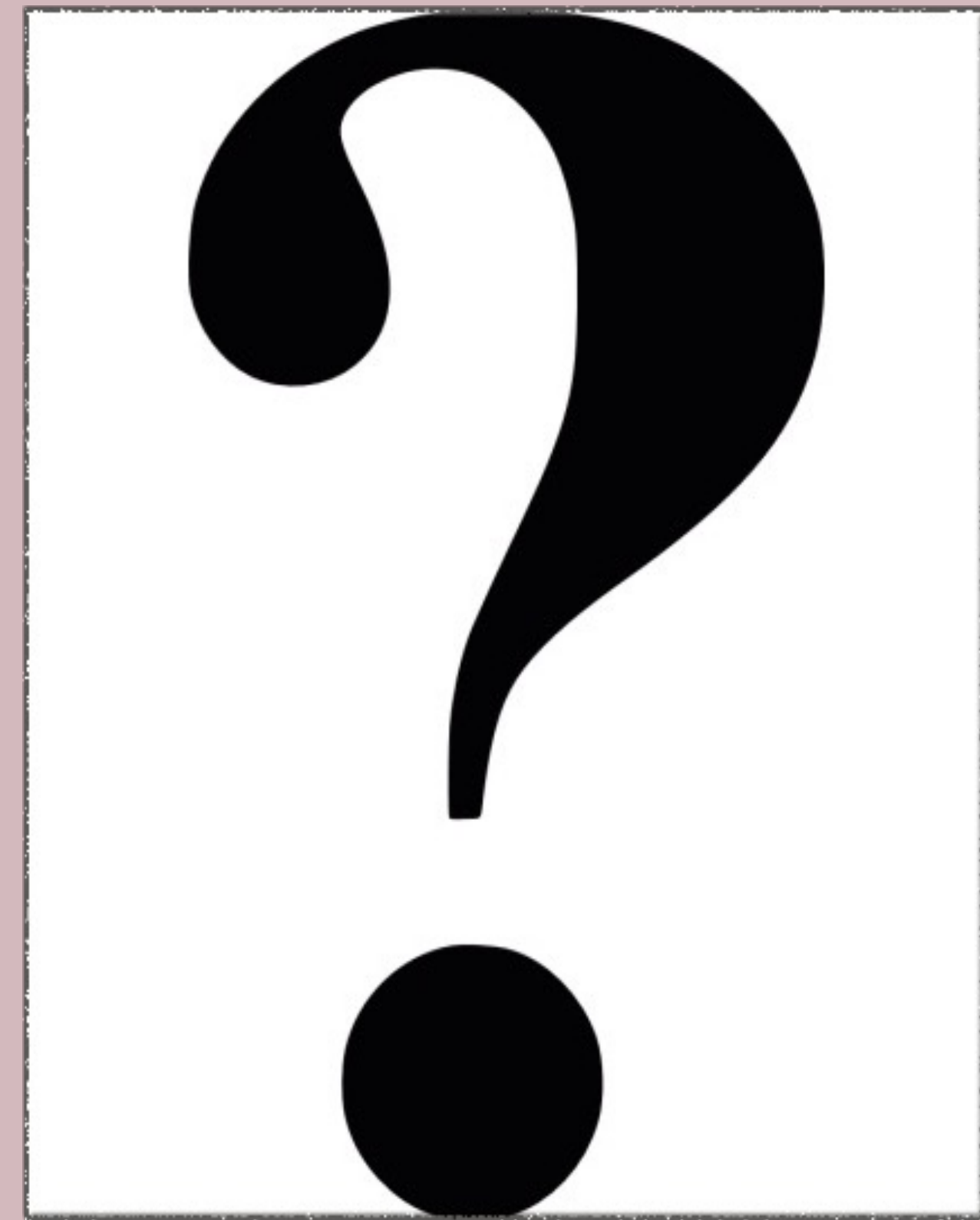
John Donne

2008 Leaving Cert Question

The Question

John Donne uses startling imagery and wit in his exploration of relationships.

Give your response to the poetry of John Donne in the light of this statement. Support your points with the aid of suitable reference to the poems you have studied.



The Marking Scheme

Reward responses that show clear evidence of personal engagement/involvement with the poetry of John Donne. Expect discussion (though not necessarily equal) of Donne's effective use of both imagery and wit in exploring relationships.

Code DI/R for Donne's use of imagery in exploring relationships. Code DW/R for Donne's use of wit in exploring relationships.

- metaphysical wit/ingenuity – paradoxes, puns, conceits, etc. in his religious/love poetry

- wide-ranging imagery – religious, sensual, natural, etc.

- unexpected/daring images used to explore his relationship with God

- witty arguments exploring relationships

- drama, power and freshness of Donne's language in elucidating relationships Etc.

Approaching the Essay

Introduction should address the question

Do not say 'I agree with this statement'

Outline your thesis (eg. Donne explores relationships between men and women and between man and God. He does so in a way... Etc.)

You may wish to discuss the poems you will use in your answer, but work them into your thesis statement:
'Whether it is Donne's playful celebration of sexual love in "The Flea" or his devout plea to God in "Batter my heart", the imagery remains...'

Student's Introduction

Although John Donne's poetry is four hundred years old, its startling imagery and wit provides it with an enduring quality that continues to fascinate readers today. Donne's exploration of relationships encompasses romantic relationships as well as his relationship with God. Indeed in some poems, there is an overlap in terms of language and imagery between physical and spiritual relationships. The essay begins by examining Donne's imagery and wit in his personal poems and leads to the more religiously-themed poems selected from his Holy Sonnets.

Student's Introduction

John Donne uses poetry to explore his own identity, express his feelings, and most of all, he uses it to deal with the personal experiences occurring in his life. Donne's poetry is a confrontation or struggle to find a place in this world, or rather, a role to play in a society from which he often finds himself detached or withdrawn. This essay will discuss Donne's states of mind, his views on love, women, religion, his relationship with God; and finally how the use of poetic form plays a part in his exploration for an identity and salvation.