

Chapter 13

The Good-Morrow

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Written while Donne was a student at Lincoln's Inn, the poem is one of his earliest works and is thematically considered to be the "first" work in *Songs and Sonnets*. Although referred to as a sonnet, the work does not follow the most common rhyming scheme of such works — a 14-line poem, consisting of an eight-line stanza followed by a six-line conclusion — but is instead 21 lines long, divided into three stanzas. "The Good-Morrow" is written from the point of view of an awaking lover and describes the lover's thoughts as he wakes next to his partner. The lover's musings move from discussing sensual love to spiritual love as he realises that, with spiritual love, the couple are liberated from fear and the need to seek adventure. The poem makes use of biblical and Catholic writings, indirectly referencing the legend of the Seven Sleepers and Paul the Apostle's description of divine, agapic love – two concepts with which, as a practising Catholic, Donne would have been familiar.

Donne's cartographic references in the third stanza have been the subject of much

analysis, although academics have differed in their interpretation of their meaning and what the lines reference. Robert L. Sharp argues that these references can be logically interpreted as yet another reference to love; the maps with which Donne would have been familiar were not the Mercator-style maps that are common in the modern era, but instead cordiform maps, which appear in the shape of a heart and allow for the display of multiple worlds, which Donne alludes to in lines 11 to 18. Julia M. Walker, while noting that Sharp's work is "essential to an intelligent discussion of this extended image", disagrees with his conclusions and argues that Donne is actually referring to a map showing one world.

Background and structure

Poet John Donne was born on 21 January 1572 to John Donne, a wealthy ironmonger and one of the wardens of the Worshipful Company of Ironmongers, and his wife Elizabeth. After his father's death when he was four, Donne, instead of being prepared to enter a trade, was trained as a gentleman scholar; his family used the money his father had made from ironmongering to hire

private tutors who trained him in grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, history and foreign languages. Elizabeth was soon remarried to a wealthy doctor, ensuring that the family remained comfortable; as a result, despite being the son of an ironmonger and portraying himself in his early poetry as an outsider, Donne refused to accept that he was anything other than a gentleman. After study at Hart Hall, Oxford, Donne's private education eventually saw him study at Lincoln's Inn, one of the Inns of Court, where he occupied his time with history, poetry, theology and "Humane learning and languages". It was at Lincoln's Inn that Donne first began writing poetry, looking upon it as "a life-sign or minor irritation" rather than something which defined him.^[5] This early poetry included "The Good-Morrow" as well as many other works which later went on to comprise his collection *Songs and Sonnets*, published in 1633, two years after his death; "The Good-Morrow" is considered, in terms of its theme and maturity, to be the first of this collection's poems.

Sonnets are, canonically, poems of 14 lines with assorted rhyming schemes. Originating in the 14th century works of Petrarch, the most common form of the sonnet is known as the Italian Sonnet: a stanza of eight lines in which the writer lays out a complex thought, followed by a pause and a six-line conclusion "which is

characteristically both unpredictable and intense". This was interlinked with the idea of courtly love, in which the goal of a romance is not simply passion, but a more significant moral perfection. "The Good-Morrow", although identified by Donne as a sonnet, does not follow this structural layout, although it does follow the thematic one; Donne used "sonnet" simply to refer to any piece of love poetry, ignoring the fact that "The Good-Morrow" was a 21-line work divided into three stanzas.

The poem opens with a reference to a Catholic legend as Donne says:

I Wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
Did, till we lov'd? 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.

— Stanza 1 (lines 1–7)

This refers to the Seven Sleepers, the Catholic legend of seven Christian children, persecuted for their faith during the reign of the Roman emperor Decius, who fled to the shelter of a cave where they slept for more than 200 years. Donne, one of six or seven children and a baptised Catholic during a time of strong anti-Catholic sentiment from both the populace and the government,

would certainly have been familiar with the story.

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.

—Stanza 2 (lines 8–14)

In this passage, the speaker experiences a sense of wonder, having awoken in bed with his lover; he makes the discovery that their love makes finding "new worlds" pale in importance. "[S]ouls" also awake, not just bodies, "as if called by love from the sleep of ordinary life and mere lust".

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 mixed equally;

—Stanza 3 (lines 15–19)

This passage shows the speaker communicating to his lover that they have proceeded from their former "childish" pleasures to this moment, where their souls have finally awakened; something "miraculous" has happened, because the speaker feels the sort of love that [Paul the Apostle](#) claimed would only be encountered in heaven.

If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none
can die.

—Stanza 3 (lines 20-21)

While the version found in *Songs and Sonnets* includes this passage as the last two lines, other manuscripts and a later volume of poetry give the last lines as, "If our two loves be one, both thou and I/Love just alike in all, none of these loves can die".