

## Lyric Poetry: Nature, Love, and Death Seminar V – Wednesday, April 16, 2025

Selections from John Donne, Andrew Marvell, and George Herbert

### **The Flea**

By John Donne

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,  
How little that which thou deniest me is;  
It sucked 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 pampered swells with one blood made of two,  
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,  
Where we almost, nay more than married are.  
This flea is you and I, and this  
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;  
Though parents grudge, and you, w'are 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.

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?  
 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 honor, when thou yield'st to me,  
     Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

## **A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning**

By John Donne

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:

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.

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.

Dull sublunary lovers' love  
     (Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
 Absence, because it doth remove  
     Those things which elemented it.

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.

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.

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.

And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth roam,  
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,  
And makes me end where I begun.

## The Apparition

By John Donne

When by thy scorn, O murd'ress, I am dead  
     And that thou think'st thee free  
 From all solicitation from me,  
 Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,  
 And thee, feign'd vestal, in worse arms shall see;  
 Then thy sick taper will begin to wink,  
 And he, whose thou art then, being tir'd before,  
 Will, if thou stir, or pinch to wake him, think  
     Thou call'st for more,  
 And in false sleep will from thee shrink;  
 And then, poor aspen wretch, neglected thou  
 Bath'd in a cold quicksilver sweat wilt lie  
     A verier ghost than I.  
 What I will say, I will not tell thee now,  
 Lest that preserve thee; and since my love is spent,  
 I had rather thou shouldst painfully repent,  
 Than by my threat'nings rest still innocent.

## A Nocturnal upon St. Lucy's Day

By John Donne

'Tis the year's midnight, and it is the day's,  
 Lucy's, who scarce seven hours herself unmask;  
     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,  
 Compar'd 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.

## **Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward**

By John Donne

Let mans Soule be a Spheare, and then, in this,  
 The intelligence that moves, devotion is,  
 And as the other Spheares, by being growne  
 Subject to forraigne motion, lose their owne,  
 And being by others hurried every day,  
 Scarce in a yeare their naturall forme obey:  
 Pleasure or businesse, so, our Soules admit  
 For their first mover, and are whirld by it.  
 Hence is't, that I am carryed towards the West  
 This day, when my Soules forme bends toward the East.  
 There I should see a Sunne, by rising set,  
 And by that setting endlesse day beget;  
 But that Christ on this Crosse, did rise and fall,

Sinne had eternally benighted all.  
 Yet dare I almost be glad, I do not see  
 That spectacle of too much weight for mee.  
 Who sees Gods face, that is selfe life, must dye;  
 What a death were it then to see God dye?  
 It made his owne Lieutenant Nature shrinke,  
 It made his footstoole crack, and the Sunne winke.  
 Could I behold those hands which span the Poles,  
 And tune all spheares at once peirc'd with those holes?  
 Could I behold that endlesse height which is  
 Zenith to us, and our Antipodes,  
 Humbled below us? or that blood which is  
 The seat of all our Soules, if not of his,  
 Made durt of dust, or that flesh which was worne  
 By God, for his apparell, rag'd, and torne?  
 If on these things I durst not looke, durst I  
 Upon his miserable mother cast mine eye,  
 Who was Gods partner here, and furnish'd thus  
 Halfe of that Sacrifice, which ransom'd us?  
 Though these things, as I ride, be from mine eye,  
 They're present yet unto my memory,  
 For that looks towards them; and thou look'st towards mee,  
 O Saviour, as thou hang'st upon the tree;  
 I turne my backe to thee, but to receive  
 Corrections, till thy mercies bid thee leave.  
 O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,  
 Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,  
 Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,  
 That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face.

# The Canonization

By John Donne

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,  
     Or chide my palsy, or my gout,  
 My five gray hairs, or ruined fortune flout,  
     With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve,  
     Take you a course, get you a place,  
     Observe his honor, or his grace,  
 Or the king's real, or his stampèd 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 drowned?  
 Who says my tears have overflowed 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 us 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 the 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 tombs and 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!"

## Holy Sonnets: Batter my heart, three-person'd God

By John Donne

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,  
 Labor to admit you, but oh, to no end;  
 Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,  
 But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.  
 Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,  
 But am betroth'd unto your enemy;  
 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.

## Easter

By George Herbert

Rise heart; thy Lord is risen. Sing his praise  
 Without delays,  
 Who takes thee by the hand, that thou likewise  
 With him mayst rise:  
 That, as his death calcined<sup>1</sup> thee to dust,  
 His life may make thee gold, and much more, just.  
  
 Awake, my lute, and struggle for thy part

With all thy art.  
 The crosse taught all wood to resound his name,  
 Who bore the same.  
 His stretched sinews taught all strings, what key  
 Is best to celebrate this most high day.

Consort both heart and lute, and twist a song  
 Pleasant and long:  
 Or, since all musick is but three parts<sup>2</sup> vied  
 And multiplied,  
 O let thy blessed Spirit bear a part,  
 And make up our defects with his sweet art.

I got me flowers to straw thy way;  
 I got me boughs off many a tree:  
 But thou wast up by break of day,  
 And brought'st thy sweets along with thee.

The Sunne arising in the East,  
 Though he give light, & th' East perfume;  
 If they should offer to contest  
 With thy arising, they presume.

Can there be any day but this,  
 Though many sunnes to shine endeavour?  
 We count three hundred, but we misse:  
 There is but one, and that one ever.

# Easter Wings

By George Herbert

Lord, who createdst man in wealth and store,  
Though foolishly he lost the same,  
Decaying more and more,  
Till he became  
Most poore:  
With thee  
O let me rise  
As larks, harmoniously,  
And sing this day thy victories:  
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

My tender age in sorrow did beginne  
And still with sicknesses and shame.  
Thou didst so punish sinne,  
That I became  
Most thinne.  
With thee  
Let me combine,  
And feel thy victorie:  
For, if I imp my wing on thine,  
Affliction shall advance the flight in me.

## Love (III)

By George Herbert

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back  
    Guilty of dust and sin.  
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack  
    From my first entrance in,  
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,  
    If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:  
    Love said, You shall be he.  
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,  
    I cannot look on thee.  
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,  
    Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame  
    Go where it doth deserve.  
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?  
    My dear, then I will serve.  
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:  
    So I did sit and eat.

# The Garden

By Andrew Marvell

How vainly men themselves amaze  
To win the palm, the oak, or bays,  
And their uncessant labours see  
Crown'd from some single herb or tree,  
Whose short and narrow verged shade  
Does prudently their toils upbraid;  
While all flow'rs and all trees do close  
To weave the garlands of repose.

Fair Quiet, have I found thee here,  
And Innocence, thy sister dear!  
Mistaken long, I sought you then  
In busy companies of men;  
Your sacred plants, if here below,  
Only among the plants will grow.  
Society is all but rude,  
To this delicious solitude.

No white nor red was ever seen  
So am'rous as this lovely green.  
Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,  
Cut in these trees their mistress' name;  
Little, alas, they know or heed  
How far these beauties hers exceed!  
Fair trees! wheres'e'er your barks I wound,  
No name shall but your own be found.

When we have run our passion's heat,  
Love hither makes his best retreat.  
The gods, that mortal beauty chase,  
Still in a tree did end their race:  
Apollo hunted Daphne so,  
Only that she might laurel grow;  
And Pan did after Syrinx speed,  
Not as a nymph, but for a reed.

What wond'rous life in this I lead!  
Ripe apples drop about my head;  
The luscious clusters of the vine  
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;  
The nectarine and curious peach  
Into my hands themselves do reach;  
Stumbling on melons as I pass,  
Ensna'ed with flow'rs, I fall on grass.

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,  
Withdraws into its happiness;  
The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find,  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other worlds, and other seas;  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade.

Here at the fountain's sliding foot,  
Or at some fruit tree's mossy root,  
Casting the body's vest aside,  
My soul into the boughs does glide;

There like a bird it sits and sings,  
Then whets, and combs its silver wings;  
And, till prepar'd for longer flight,  
Waves in its plumes the various light.

Such was that happy garden-state,  
While man there walk'd without a mate;  
After a place so pure and sweet,  
What other help could yet be meet!  
But 'twas beyond a mortal's share  
To wander solitary there:  
Two paradises 'twere in one  
To live in paradise alone.

How well the skillful gard'ner drew  
Of flow'rs and herbs this dial new,  
Where from above the milder sun  
Does through a fragrant zodiac run;  
And as it works, th' industrious bee  
Computes its time as well as we.  
How could such sweet and wholesome hours  
Be reckon'd but with herbs and flow'rs!



## To His Coy Mistress

By Andrew Marvell

Had we but world enough and time,  
This coyness, lady, were no crime.  
We would sit down, and think which way  
To walk, and pass our long love's day.  
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side  
Shouldst rubies find; I by the tide  
Of Humber would complain. I would  
Love you ten years before the flood,  
And you should, if you please, refuse  
Till the conversion of the Jews.  
My vegetable love should grow  
Vaster than empires and more slow;  
An hundred years should go to praise  
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;  
Two hundred to adore each breast,  
But thirty thousand to the rest;  
An age at least to every part,  
And the last age should show your heart.  
For, lady, you deserve this state,  
Nor would I love at lower rate.

But at my back I always hear  
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;  
And yonder all before us lie  
Deserts of vast eternity.  
Thy beauty shall no more be found;  
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound  
My echoing song; then worms shall try  
That long-preserved virginity,

And your quaint honour turn to dust,  
And into ashes all my lust;  
The grave's a fine and private place,  
But none, I think, do there embrace.

Now therefore, while the youthful hue  
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,  
And while thy willing soul transpires  
At every pore with instant fires,  
Now let us sport us while we may,  
And now, like amorous birds of prey,  
Rather at once our time devour  
Than languish in his slow-chapped power.  
Let us roll all our strength and all  
Our sweetness up into one ball,  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife  
Through the iron gates of life:  
Thus, though we cannot make our sun  
Stand still, yet we will make him run.