

1633

THE ECSTASY

John Donne

Donne, John (1572-1631) - First and greatest of the English metaphysical poets. Donne's work was popular upon its initial (posthumous) publication, but it was not until the early 20th century that he was first considered a major poet. His poems are admired for their wit, beauty, and perception. The Ecstasy (1633) Opening lines: Where, like a pillow on a bed, / A pregnant bank swelled up, to rest ...

THE ECSTASY

Where, like a pillow on a bed,
 A pregnant bank swelled up, to rest
 The violet's reclining head,
 Sat we two, one another's best;

Our hands were firmly cemented
 With a fast balm, which thence did spring,
 Our eye-beams twisted, and did thread
 Our eyes, upon one double string;

So to' intergraft our hands, as yet
 Was all our means to make us one,
 And pictures in our eyes to get
 Was all our propagation.

As 'twixt two equal armies,
 Fate Suspends uncertain victory,
 Our souls, (which to advance their state,
 Were gone out), hung 'twixt her, and me.

And whilst our souls negotiate there,
 We like sepulchral statues lay;
 All day, the same our postures were,
 And we said nothing, all the day.

If any, so by love refined,
 That he soul's language understood,
 And by good love were grown all mind,
 Within convenient distance stood,

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

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

But as all several souls contain
 Mixture of things, they knew not what,
 Love, these mixed souls doth mix again,
 And makes both one, each this and that.

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

When love, with one another so
 Interinanimates two souls,
 That abler soul, which thence doth flow,
 Defects of loneliness controls.

We then, who are this new soul, know,
 Of what we are composed, and made,
 For, th' atomies of which we grow,
 Are souls, whom no change can invade.

But O alas, so long, so far
 Our bodies why do we forbear?
 They are ours, though they are not we, we are
 The intelligences, they the sphere.

We owe them thanks, because they thus,
 Did us, to us, at first convey,
 Yielded their forces, sense, to us.
 Nor are dross to us, but allay.

On man heaven's influence works not so,
 But that it first imprints the air,
 So soul into the soul may flow,
 Though it to body first repair.

As our blood labours to beget
 Spirits, as like souls as it can,
 Because such fingers need to knit
 That subtle knot, which makes us man:

So must pure lovers' souls descend
 T' affections, and to faculties,
 Which sense may reach and apprehend,
 Else a great prince in prison lies.

To our bodies turn we then, that so
Weak men on love revealed may look;
Love's mysteries in souls do grow,
But yet the body is his book.

And if some lover, such as we,
Have heard this dialogue of one,
Let him still mark us, he shall see
Small change, when we're to bodies gone.

THE END