

Love in Early Britain

A Collection of Love Poems with Introduction and Notes by Ian Brown

Love is one of the most beautiful sensations in the world. Ever since man has inhabited the earth, love has been prevalent in all humans lives. Whether the love is between a man and a woman, two women, or two men, every person will fall in love in their life, even if they do not want to admit it. Early modern British poetry has some of the most well written, beautiful combinations of words in the English language. The fluidness that the work has and the linguistic excellence these poets possess are impeccable. From the poetry that I have had the pleasure to read, most of my favorites are written by John Donne and Thomas Campion. I found that a great way to express the beauty of love and the beauty of early modern British poetry would be to create a small collection of love poems by John Donne and Thomas Campion and add notes when needed.

Donne and Campion are interesting because they do not always have the most traditional ways of telling a woman that they love them. The poetic voices that these two authors create usually have a begging or silly way of telling a girl that they love them, usually ending with the question of asking the woman to sleep with them. Although some think that this is nonsense or creepy, I believe that it is the epitome of love. Love can be silly thing, but Donne and Campion also understand the severity of it. I have included poems in which Donne and Campion use great references and great negotiation tactics. All of these poems can make the reader think about love in any way imaginable. Without these important works, we may not have the silly little love songs we have in today's society, and without the more serious love poems of Donne and Campion, we may not have ever discovered how great of poets these two men were.

The Flea

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deniest me is;
It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea or two bloods mingled be
Thou know'st that this cannot be said 5
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhood
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered with one blood made of two ;
And this, alas I is more than we would do.

O stay, three lives in one flea spare, 10
Where we almost, yea, more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is.

Donne

*This is a simple and enjoyable piece of poetry by John Donne. There is no difficult wording or phrasing, which made this the perfect poem to start the collection with.

The Good-Morrow

I wonder, by my troth (1), what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not wean'd till then?
But suck'd on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be; 5
 If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;
 For love all love of other sights controls, 10
 And makes one little room as everywhere.
Let sea-discoveries to new worlds have gone;
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown;
Let us possess one world; each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears, 15
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres
Without sharp north, without declining west?
 Whatever dies, was not mix'd equally;
 If our two loves be one, or though and I 20
Love so alike that none can slacken, none can die

Donne

(1) Troth-faithfulness, loyalty

*This poem is slightly more difficult, but is still an enjoyable read and clearly shows the poetic voices love for the woman.

The Indifferent

I can love both fair and brown;
Her whom abundance melts, and her whom want betrays;
Her who loves loneness best, and her who masks and plays;
Her whom the country form'd, and whom the town;
Her who believes, and with her who tries; 5
Her who still weeps with spongy eyes,
And her who is dry cork, and never cries.
I can love her, and her, and you, and soul
I can love any, so she be not true.

Will no other vice (1) content you? 10
Will it not serve your turn to do as did your mothers?
Or have you all old vices spent and now would find out others?
Or doth a fear that men are true torment you?
O we are not, be not you so;
Let me – and do you – twenty know; 15
Rob me, but bind me not, and let me go.
Must I, who came to travel through you,
Grow your fix'd subject, because you are true?

Donne

(1)Vice- Corruption of morals or wicked habits.

*There are several definitions from the Oxford English dictionary for Vice, but I believe that this is the form of the word that Donne intended to use.

The poetic voice is frustrated with the woman's ill behavior. This is the first poem in this collection that Donne has the poetic voice frustrated and tormented with a woman, but not in a funny friendly sort of way.

Witchcraft by a Picture

I fix mine eye on thine, and there
Pity my picture burning in thine eye;
My picture drown'd in a transparent tear,
When I look lower I espy(1);
Hadst thou the wicked skill 5
By pictures made and marr'd to kill,
How many ways mightst thou perform thy will?

But now I've drunk thy sweet salt tears,
And though thou pour more, I'll depart;
My picture vanished, vanish all fears 10
That I can be endamaged by that art;
Though thou retain of me
One picture more, yet that will be,
Being in thine own heart, from all malice (2) free.

Donne

(1) Espy-to act as a spy upon; espionage

(2) Malice-Intention to do evil

*This is the second poem by Donne that the poetic voice feels as though the woman is intending to do evil things to him. He wants the woman to set free all of her malice and let him into her heart.

Cherry Ripe

There is a garden in her face,
Where Roses and white Lillies grow;
A heav'nly paradise is that place.
Wherein all pleasant fruits doe flow.
There Cherries grow, which none may buy 5
Till Cherry ripe (1) themselves do cry.

Those Cherries fayrely doe enclose
Of Orient Pearle a double row;
Which when her lovely laughter showes,
They look like Rose-buds fill'd with snow. 10
Yet them nor Peere nor Prince can buy
Till Cherry ripe themselves doe cry.

Her Eyes like Angels watch them still;
Her Browes like bended bowes doe stand,
Threatning with piercing frownes to kill 15
All that attempt, with eye or hand
Those sacred Cherries to come nigh
Till Cherry ripe themselves do cry.

Campion

(1) Cherry Ripe- ripe like a cherry; also a mode of crying ripe cherries.
*There was no Oxford word for "fayrely," so I am assuming that it is just
simply "fairly."

Sleep, Angry Beauty

Sleepe, angry beauty, sleepe, and feare not me.

For who a sleeping Lyon dares provoke?

It shall suffice me here to sit and see

Those lips shut up, that never kindly spoke

What sight can more content a lover's minde 5

Then beauty seeming harmless, if not kinde?

My words have charm'd her, for secure shee sleepe;

Though guilty much of wrong done to my love;

And in her slumber, see, shee, close-ey;d, weepes!

Dreames often more than waking passions move 10

Pleade, Sleepe, my cause, and make her soft like thee

That shee in peace may wake and pittie mee

Campion

*This is one of my favorite poems from early Britain, which is why I chose to end my collection with it. It sounds slightly "creepy" because a man is watching a woman sleep, but if you think about the different time period, it can easily be read as a lovely ballad.

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