The Good-Morrow

POEM TEXT

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?
But sucked 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.

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.

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

SUMMARY

What did you and I even do before we were in love? Were we still breastfeeding? Did we only enjoy simple, childish things? Or were we fast asleep with the Seven Sleepers? It's true. But all of this is just pleasure's dream. If I ever wanted and gained something beautiful, it was just a dream of you.

And now good morning to our souls, which are waking up. They do not watch each other out of fear. There's no need for jealousy; love makes it so that we don't need to look at anything except each other. And it makes one small room as wide as the world. Let explorers cross the ocean to discover new worlds. Let other people make maps, charting worlds upon worlds. Let us have just one world: each of us is a world, and so each of us *has* a world.

My face appears in your eye and your face appears in my eye. And the truth of our hearts is visible in our faces. Where can we find two better globes, without the cold of the north or the darkness that comes when the sun sets in the west? When something dies, it dies because its parts were not appropriately mixed. But our loves are so perfectly matched that we have become one, and thus our love will not lose its power, and we will not die.

THEMES

LOVE AS AN AWAKENING

"The Good Morrow" is a celebration of love, which it presents as an intense and unparalleled pleasure. All the joys that the two lovers experienced before they found each other pale in comparison to the joy they experience together. Indeed, love is so powerful that the speaker describes it as an *awakening* of the soul: it is almost a religious experience. And like a religious experience, it reshapes the lovers' attitude to the world at large. Like monks or nuns who dedicate themselves to religious practice, the two lovers dedicate themselves to love above adventure and career success. "The Good Morrow" thus translates romantic—and erotic—love into a religious, even holy, experience. Love itself, the speaker suggests, is capable of producing the same insights as religion.

"The Good Morrow" separates the lives of the lovers into two parts: before they found each other, and after. The speaker describes the first part of their lives with disdain: the pleasures they enjoyed were "childish." Indeed, they were not even "weaned": they were like babies. Like children, they had a limited understanding of life. They were aware of only some of its "country" (or lowly) pleasures, going through the motions of life without knowing there could be something more.

But once they find each other, it feels as though their eyes have been opened. The speaker realizes that any "beauty" experienced before this love was really nothing more than a "dream"—a pale imitation—of the joy and pleasure the speaker has now. "Good-morrow to our waking souls," the speaker announces at the start of stanza 2, as though the lovers had been asleep and are just now glimpsing the light of day for the first time.

Since the sun is often associated with Jesus Christ in Christian religious traditions and light is often associated with enlightenment, the speaker's description of this experience is implicitly cast in religious terms. That is, the speaker makes waking up alongside a lover sound like a religious epiphany or a conversion experience. The consequences of this epiphany are also implicitly religious. Having tasted the intense pleasures of love, the lovers give up on adventure and exploration: instead they treat their "one little room" as "an everywhere." In this way,

they become like monks or nuns: people who separate themselves from the world to dedicate themselves to their faith.

Further, the lovers' devotion to each other wins them immortality: "none can die," the speaker announces in the poem's final line. Immortality is more commonly taken to be the reward for dedicated religious faith, not earthly pleasures like romantic love. In describing this relationship in religious terms, the speaker breaks down the traditional distinctions between love and religion. Where many religious traditions treat erotic love as something potentially harmful to religious devotion, the speaker of "The Good Morrow" suggests that erotic love leads to the same devotion, insight, and immortality that religion promises.

However, the speaker doesn't specify the nature of the love in question. If the lovers are married, for instance, the reader doesn't hear anything about it. Instead, the speaker focuses on the perfection of their love, noting the way the two lovers complement each other. Unlike other poems that argue for the holiness of married love specifically (like Anne Bradstreet's "To My Dear and Loving Husband"), "The Good Morrow" holds out an even more subversive possibility: that *all* love is capable of producing religious epiphany, whether or not it takes a form that the Church sanctions, like marriage.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-21

EXPLORATION AND ADVENTURE

"The Good Morrow" was written during the Age of Discovery, the period of intense European sea exploration lasting roughly from the 15th to 17th centuries. This context informs the poem's second and third stanzas, with their focus on "sea-discoverers," "new worlds," "maps," and "hemispheres." The poem compares the desire to chart new lands with the pleasures of love itself, and finds the latter to be more powerful and exciting. Indeed, the speaker finds love so pleasurable that he or she proposes to withdraw from the world in order to dedicate him or herself entirely to that love. Instead of seeking adventure, the speaker proposes that the lovers "make one little room an everywhere." For the speaker, then, love creates its own world to explore.

Note how, in the poem's second stanza, the speaker proposes that the lovers renounce their worldly ambitions. The speaker says that instead of crossing the oceans or mapping foreign countries, they should stay in bed and gaze into each other's eyes. Indeed, the speaker argues in stanza 3, they will not find better "hemispheres" out in the world than each others' eyes. This means that, for the speaker, giving up the outside world is not a sacrifice. Indeed, the speaker finds a *better* world in bed with this lover.

Importantly, however, this "lovers' world" is not totally separate from the wider world. Instead, it *recreates* it in miniature, essentially resulting in a microcosm that reproduces the entire world itself *within* the lovers' relationship. The poem thus argues that true love can be a way of experiencing the entirety of existence. Essentially, there's no need to, say, seek adventure on the high seas, because *everything* is already contained within the experience of love itself.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 8-21

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?

The first four lines of "The Good-Morrow" establish the poem's broad concerns and hint at its unusual form. The speaker begins by asking a series of questions, directed at his or her lover. The speaker wants to know what the two lovers did before they fell in love. These questions are rhetorical in that the speaker isn't actually interested in the lover's response. In fact, the speaker has already made up his or her mind. Before they met each other, their pleasures were "childish." The speaker characterizes these early, childish pleasures in a variety of ways: they were like babies, still nursing (and therefore "not weaned"). Or they were only interested in unsophisticated "country pleasures"—potentially an obscene pun on a word for women's genitalia . Finally, the speaker alludes to an important tradition in Christianity and Islam: the myth of the seven sleepers, a group of young people who hid in a cave for 300 years to escape religious persecution. The speaker and the lover were thus like pious Christians; now that they've woken up, they are rewarded for their piety with a new life. This allusion sets up the poem's core argument that erotic love can have effects that are just as profound as the effects of religious practice.

Because the poem encourages the reader to imagine that the speaker is directly addressing his or her lover, the poem takes on the qualities of apostrophe in these lines: speaker talks to the lover, but the lover is unable to respond to the speaker or contest the speaker's account of their relationship. This establishes a pattern that will continue throughout of the speaker monopolizing the poem's descriptions of love.

These lines look like a fairly standard stanza of English poetry: they are in iambic pentameter and rhymed in a criss-cross

pattern, *ABAB*. This is a widely used stanza form in English, but there are some details that are slightly askew. For instance, the speaker uses a slant rhyme in lines 1 and 3, "I" and "childishly." As the poem progresses, there will be several such instances of formal sloppiness, such as loose meter and imperfect rhymes. The speaker's attention is evidently focused elsewhere. Indeed, the speaker seems to pay closer attention to sound inside the lines. The first two lines of the poem contain an almost overwhelming quantity of alliteration, assonance, and consonance, on /w/, /l/, /o/, and /ee/ sounds. The speaker's enthusiasm and joy come through in the poem's play of sound.

If this play of sound seems exuberant, even out of control, the speaker asserts control in other, subtler ways. Though the first line of the poem is enjambed, the next three are end-stopped, establishing a pattern that will persist through the poem. Overall, the poem is mostly end-stopped. The speaker is exuberant, but he or she is nonetheless able to carefully calibrate his or her thoughts to the length of the poem's lines.

LINES 5-7

'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.

In line 5, the speaker offers an answer to the rhetorical questions posed in lines 1-4: "'Twas so." This concise answer indicates, again, how much the speaker monopolizes the poem. Not only does the speaker pose questions; the speaker also answers them. The speaker then goes on to offer a kind of moral: all the pleasures and desires the speaker experienced before meeting the lover were, at best, "a dream of [the lover]." In other words, those pleasures and desires were false and lacking substance. They were only images of the pleasure and joy the speaker experiences now, in his or her relationship with the lover. This idea is underscored by the use of alliteration in line 7: the repeated /d/ sound in "**d**esired" and "**d**ream" emphasizes that the speaker's desire was just a dream.

These lines break formally from the previous four lines, introducing a new rhyme scheme and a new meter. Lines 5-7 are rhymed *CCC*. The full rhyme scheme of the first stanza is:

ABABCCC

Though the first four lines of the stanza look more or less like a normal stanza of English poetry, the stanza as a whole is highly unusual. There are very few poems in English with 7 lines to a stanza, in part because the uneven number of lines (and thus rhymes) is awkward and hard to manage. Indeed, Donne's stanza feels like two different stanzas stuck together, a quatrain and a tercet, each with its own rhyme scheme. Further, the final three lines of the stanza introduce a wrinkle in the poem's meter: though lines 5 and 6 are in iambic pentameter, line 7 is in iambic hexameter. As the meter expands as it moves into line 7, so too does the speaker's thought: line 6 ends with the poem's second enjambment, closing a long series of end-stopped lines.

In this stanza, the break between lines 1-4 and lines 5-7 acts as a kind of miniature volta—that is, a point where the poem takes a turn in its thinking, sometimes to answer a question that it previously posed. In the first four lines, the speaker asks a series of questions; in the next three, the speaker answers them. The seam between the two parts of the stanza, however, is not particularly marked. A reader is more likely to experience the lines as a single unit, conceptually. The poem's unusual and original form thus raises as many questions as it answers, and different readers will have different ideas about what the poem's form suggests.

LINES 8-11

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.

The first stanza of "The Good-Morrow" reflects on the past and the childish pleasures the speaker and his or her lover enjoyed before they met each other. The second stanza turns instead to the present, situating the poem in time and space: it is morning, the sun is just rising, and the speaker and the lover are together.

The morning described here serves as a symbol for the awakened souls of the speaker and the lover. It is not only morning in the literal world, it is also morning for their souls, which are just now waking up and encountering reality for the first time. Additionally, the sun is often a symbol for Jesus Christ in Christian tradition. The mention of morning here thus suggests that the awakening of the lovers' souls is a religious experience—a potentially controversial assertion, since there's no sign in the poem that they are married.

The speaker then meditates on love itself. The speaker notes that there is no jealousy in love: the lovers don't need to watch each other carefully to see if their attention is wandering. Love limits their sight; they are no longer interested in looking at other people ("all love of other sights controls").

Then, the speaker makes a bold assertion: love "makes one little room an everywhere." In other words, the room that the speaker and the lover occupy together is so rich and satisfying that it substitutes for all the other pleasures and riches in the world. This is an allusion to an important philosophical tradition in the Renaissance. Many philosophers believed that small things reflected larger things. So, for instance, the human body might serve as an image of the universe more broadly. That is, the microcosm contains the macrocosm. So too, the speaker claims that the little room described here contains the whole world. This line is also a pun, since "little room" is a literal translation of the Italian word "stanza." This is the word used in English to describe groups of lines in a poem. The pun suggests something about the speaker's attitude. That is, perhaps the

literal room that the speaker and the lover share won't serve as "an everywhere," but the poem might do it instead.

The formal pattern established in the first stanza continues here: the lines are rhymed *ABAB* in iambic pentameter. They are all end-stopped, though line 8 is a weak end-stop; some readers may interpret it as an enjambment because although line 8 makes sense on its own, the idea and grammar of line 8 also continue into line 9. The speaker's sloppiness in formal matters continues here: lines 9 and 11 are a slant rhyme, "fear" and "everywhere."

LINES 12-14

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.

Lines 12-14 expand the consequences of the bold assertion the speaker makes in lines 11: "[love] makes one little room an everywhere." If that's true, the speaker argues, the lovers should give up their worldly ambitions.

First of all, the speaker says, other people ("sea-discoverers to new worlds) can cross the ocean to map and explore the Americas. Though the poem generally withholds information about its historical and political context, the speaker gives the reader a hint here about that context: it takes place during the European effort to colonize the Americas. These lines also situate the speaker in the poem's intellectual context. Alluding again to the Renaissance idea that the microcosm contains the macrocosm, the speaker argues that each of their bodies is a world unto itself. By virtue of their love, then, each lover already has access to a whole world—there's no need for dangerous adventures outside their "little room."

In terms of form, the final three lines of the second stanza follow the patterns established in the first stanza. They switch into a new rhyme scheme, *CCC*, with two lines of iambic pentameter followed by a line of iambic hexameter. All of the stanza's lines are end-stopped, similar to the first stanza. What's more, there is again a kind of volta in this stanza: in lines 12-14, the speaker expands the consequences of the ideas introduced in lines 8-11. This volta is more marked than the previous stanza's: the speaker uses anaphora in lines 12-14, which bind the lines together by repeating the word "let." They sound like a single unit, a single argument.

As elsewhere, the speaker's careful attention to the poem's formal architecture is matched here by a kind of casualness with its details. "Shown" in line 13 does not fully rhyme with "gone" and "one" in lines 12 and 14—it is another slant rhyme.

Additionally, line 12 contains a puzzling set of metrical substitutions. Perhaps the most intuitive way to scan it is:

Let sea dis**cov**erers to new worlds have gone

In addition to interruption of the pyrrhic in the third foot, the meter of line's final three syllables is confused. They could be scanned as a dactyl or as two trochees, with a catalectic final foot. The next line is good iambic pentameter, but the third foot is split in half by a caesura:

Let maps to oth**er**, worlds on worlds have shown,

The line's meter and its grammar are at odds, producing a strange syncopation that perhaps reflects the sense of simultaneous motion (exploring the world) and stillness (staying in the "little room") that the speaker describes. As these instances show, the speaker is quite casual about the meter of the poem, seeming somewhat overcome with passion even during moments of rhetorical intensity.

LINES 15-18

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?

In the second stanza, the speaker describes the room the lovers share as "an everywhere"—a microcosm of the whole world. In lines 15-18, the speaker zooms in even further, claiming that the two lovers' eyes are a world unto themselves.

The stanza opens with the lovers are gazing into each other's eyes. Indeed, they are so close together that they can see their faces in each other's eyes. (And, in their faces, they can see each other's "plain hearts"—the truth of who they are and what they care about). The speaker asks, rhetorically, whether better "hemispheres"—i.e. globes—exist than their eyes. According to the speaker, their eyes are little worlds without the frigid weather in the north or the setting of the sun in the west. These descriptions make the lovers' eyes seem changeless and placid; they seem not to contain any of the suffering or change that characterizes the real world. In this sense, the speaker suggests that the lovers' eyes are not only microcosms of the entire world—they are *better* than the world.

The speaker's rhetorical question here is more controlled than the rhetorical questions that appeared in the first stanza. There, the speaker used four rhetorical questions in as many lines, piling one on top of each other. Here, the speaker gradually builds up to the question, introducing an idea in lines 15-16 and then posing a question based on that idea in lines 17-18. In these lines, the speaker seems to be restrained and in control.

This control is also evident in some of the lines' other formal features. For instance, throughout the poem, the speaker uses assonance with exuberance, piling up sound as a way of expressing his or her joy in his or her relationship with the lover. In line 15, however, the speaker focuses on an /i/ sound, which appears in a chiastic pattern in "my," "thine," "eye," "thine,"

and "mine." The chiasmus emphasizes the relationship between the lovers: the eye is at the center of their relationship, and the lovers form a symmetrical shape around this idea of gazing at each other. The sound of the line thus provides a subtle and sophisticated reinforcement of the speaker's claims about the lovers' bond.

LINES 19-21

Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

In the poem's final three lines, the speaker makes his or her boldest claim about love. In stanzas 1 and 2, the speaker has already suggested that love is almost a religious experience, even saying in line 8 that love leads to the soul's awakening. In lines 19-21, the speaker goes even further, arguing that love will also grant the lovers immortality.

In other words, the speaker describes a world in which erotic love replaces Christianity, offering eternal life in the way that religion traditionally might. This a shocking and controversial argument for a poet like Donne to make, who lived in a deeply Christian culture and later became an important figure in the Church of England—especially since there is no clear sign that the love the poem celebrates takes place in a marriage, the form of sexuality permitted by the Church.

The speaker makes this argument by alluding to the theory of the humors, which was a key part of Renaissance medicine. In that theory, the human body contains four humors: black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood. These were thought to be physical substances; to stay healthy, people had to carefully manage the mixture of these humors in their bodies. An improper balance caused disease and death—hence the speaker's assertion in line 19: "Whatever dies, was not mixed equally." The line mimics the unequal mix it describes. It lacks the strong alliteration and consonance the poem otherwise uses throughout; the line itself is an unequal and inelegant mix of sounds. But the speaker and his or her lover *are* perfectly mixed, the speaker says. As a result, their love will never diminish and neither of them will ever die. The purity of their love grants them immortality.

The poem closes following the formal pattern established in the first two stanzas. The third stanza is rhymed *ABABACCC*, with a slant rhyme between lines 19, 20, and 21. The first six lines are iambic pentameter and the final line iambic hexameter. As in the first stanza, the stanza's second-to-last line, line 20, is enjambed; as the meter expands, the speaker's thought does too. Otherwise, the stanza is strongly end-stopped.

SYMBOLS

MORNING

When the speaker bids "good-morrow" to "our waking souls," he or she is likely being literal, inviting the reader to imagine that the two lovers have spent the night in bed together and are watching the sunrise. However, there are also several symbols associated with the rising sun. First, the sun can symbolize rebirth. Second, it is closely associated with Jesus Christ, in part because "sun" and "son" sound so much alike. Finally, it can also symbolize insight or enlightenment. Indeed, the word "en*light*enment"—which means "liberated from ignorance"—contains the word *light*.

Overall, the "morrow" in this poem symbolizes the experience of learning or realizing something so important that it feels like a religious conversion or profound insight. The literal and symbolic senses of the "morrow" are thus linked together: because the lovers have spent the night together, they now experience an awakening of their "souls," which is so powerful it feels religious.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 8:** "good-morrow"

LITTLE ROOM

The speaker and his or her lover occupy a "little room" together—a place they find so fulfilling and full of joy that the speaker proposes they abandon the rest of the world and stay there forever. This is likely a literal place, referring to the room where the lovers have spent the night together before waking up to the "good-morrow."

But the "little room" also symbolizes the idea of poetry as a place of refuge. "Little room" is a literal translation of the Italian word "stanza." The word "stanza" is important in the study of poetry: it describes a group of lines that form a smaller unit within a poem. With this understanding in mind, it seems that the "little room" may be more than a literal place: it may be a symbol for the poem itself. In other words, it may be unreasonable to expect that the "little room" will literally serve as an "everywhere" for the lovers—they will eventually have to leave it for some reason or another. But the poem itself might serve as such a refuge for them, a place where they can enjoy their love forever, without interruption.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 11:** "little room"

HEARTS

Here, the image of the lovers' "hearts" serves as a symbol for their close emotional bond. The heart is the organ that pumps blood—though John Donne didn't know that. It wasn't until after Donne's death that William Harvey even proved that the blood circulated through the body. But Donne did know that the heart was central to the body, important to health and life. He understood that in some sense, the heart was the core of the body, the thing on which everything else relied.

The speaker thus uses the heart as a symbol toward the end of the poem. In this instance, the heart is not a physical organ (if it were, it couldn't "rest" in the "faces" of the lovers). Rather, it represents the truth of a person—their true character, undisguised and honest. For the speaker, to see someone's heart is to know who they truly are, and the symbol of the heart helps convey how intimately the lovers know each other.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 16:** "hearts"

POETIC DEVICES

ENJAMBMENT

"The Good-Morrow" contains few moments of enjambment. When the poem does use enjambment, it does not employ any strict pattern: the enjambments are scattered irregularly throughout the poem, with one in the opening line and two more in lines 6 and 20 (recall that enjambment need not always align with punctuation, and is more concerned with the grammatical unit of one line spilling over onto the next—which is why line 6 is enjambed).

Notably, however, two of the poem's three enjambments fall in the second-to-last line of a stanza. This is potentially significant since the poem's meter switches after those lines (line 6 and line 20): where the first six lines of each stanza are in iambic pentameter, the final line is in iambic hexameter. The final lines (line 7 and line 21) of these two stanzas stretch out across the added syllables, and the speaker's thoughts stretch out with them, breaking the pattern of keeping each thought in its own line—a boundary the speaker otherwise largely respects. (However, the speaker is careful to avoid using this strategy too often: the penultimate line of stanza two is not enjambed).

The poem's first enjambment is its most suggestive and interesting. Line 1 is a grammatically incomplete unit: its verb is the first word of line 2, "Did." "Thou and I" stands by itself, cut off from the verb—and the activities that verb describes. This enjambment allows the speaker to separate the lovers from what they did before they knew each other; it's as if the speaker is building a kind of quarantine that cuts them off from the past and highlights how insignificant it was. The speaker again highlights the words "thou and I" with the enjambment at the end of line 20, echoing the end of line 1 and reinforcing that the two lovers are the true core of the poem (and perhaps the world).

Enjambment thus does not have a broad, global significance in the poem, but it is often suggestive and meaningful in its individual instances.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "I / Did"
- **Lines 6-7:** "see, / Which"
- **Lines 20-21:** "I / Love"

END-STOPPED LINE

"The Good Morrow" contains very few enjambments: two in the first stanza and one in the final stanza. For the most part, the poem is strongly end-stopped, which emphasizes how most of the time, the speaker's ideas match perfectly with the length of his or her lines. (And, further, each stanza is end-stopped.) This choice suggests that the speaker is unusually confident and satisfied; that is, the speaker does not feel the need to stretch out his or her sentences. The speaker feels confident that his or her lover understands the ideas expressed, without much need for elaborate explanation.

Some of the end-stops are stronger than others. For example, although line 8 is technically grammatically complete on its own, line 9 relies on the grammar of the previous line—it doesn't make sense without it. This makes the end of line 8 feel more like an enjambment. The same is true of lines 17-18. With subtle exceptions like these, the poem avoids seeming too lock-step, too regular: these weak end-stops, alongside the scattered enjambments, allow the poem to sustain a sense of energy and spontaneity. Furthermore, since there is no clear pattern as to when the speaker uses enjambment or end-stop, the enjambments, when they arrive, jolt and surprise the reader. They serve to maintain the poem's energy and the reader's engagement with it.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "then?"
- **Line 3:** "childishly?"
- **Line 4:** "den?"
- **Line 5:** "be."
- **Line 7:** "thee."
- **Line 8:** "souls,"
- **Line 9:** "fear;"
- **Line 10:** "controls,"
- **Line 11:** "everywhere."
- **Line 12:** "gone,"

- **Line 13:** “shown,”
- **Line 14:** “one.”
- **Line 15:** “appears,”
- **Line 16:** “rest;”
- **Line 17:** “hemispheres,”
- **Line 18:** “west?”
- **Line 19:** “equally;”
- **Line 21:** “die.”

CAESURA

“The Good-Morrow” contains a surprising number of caesuras for a poem that uses enjambment so sparingly. (Often, caesura is a consequence of enjambment, as when a grammatical unit spills over the end of one line and concludes in the middle of the next.)

Many of these caesuras are relatively weak. They often simply separate parenthetical phrases (like “by my troth” in line 1) from the rest of the line. But some of them are more interesting. For instance, the caesuras in lines 10, 13, and 14 all separate two parts of a sentence from each other. For example, in line 13, “Let maps to other” is one idea and one grammatical unit; “worlds on worlds have shown” is another. Instances like these demonstrate just how controlled and confident the speaker is—and how skillful the poem's use of end-stop is. That is, the speaker isn't just using simple sentences to get the end-stops; many of poem's sentences are complicated, with multiple clauses, but the speaker still manages to fit them into single lines.

However, the caesuras do sometimes interfere with the poem's meter. Line 13 is a good example, because its caesura falls in the middle of the line's third foot:

> Let maps | to oth- |-er, worlds | on worlds | have shown,

The pause between "other" and "worlds" is at odds with the line's otherwise steady meter, giving it an awkward, syncopated feel. This effect fits with the poem's general pattern: while it attends with extraordinary precision to some formal details, it is lazy or even careless about others. The speaker's concerns, it seems, elsewhere—most likely with his or her lover.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** “,” “”
- **Line 2:** “?”
- **Line 3:** “”
- **Line 5:** “;” “”
- **Line 7:** “,” “”
- **Line 10:** “”
- **Line 13:** “”
- **Line 14:** “,” “”
- **Line 15:** “”
- **Line 18:** “”
- **Line 19:** “”
- **Line 20:** “,” “”
- **Line 21:** “,” “”

APOSTROPHE

“The Good-Morrow” seems to take a place in the speaker's bedroom after a long and passionate night. As they watch the sunrise together, the speaker directly addresses his or her lover directly. Unlike many love poems (including some of Donne's own, like “The Flea”), the speaker is not trying to convince his or her lover to have sex: the lovers already have. Theirs is apparently a happy, mutual relationship. This marks a major break from the central traditions of Renaissance love poetry, which, although it frequently relies on apostrophe, often addresses lovers who are distant, inaccessible, and thus unable to reply.

However, “The Good-Morrow” does preserve one key aspect of Renaissance love poetry: the speaker monopolizes the poem. The speaker's lover does not reply to the speaker, and the speaker shares no meaningful details about the lover. Indeed, for all the reader knows, the speaker's lover may feel quite differently about their relationship. What's more, the speaker avoids engaging with the lover in a meaningful way, using rhetorical questions instead of asking questions that might require the lover to answer. The poem thus uses apostrophe throughout, despite the proximity between speaker and lover. Even if one imagines that the lover is in the room with the speaker as the speaker pronounces the poem, the speaker does not allow the lover to take part in the poem, whether to challenge or confirm the speaker's account.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-21

ALLUSION

“The Good-Morrow” makes allusions to several important traditions in Renaissance philosophy and religion.

In line 4, the speaker asks, rhetorically, if “we” “snorted…in the Seven Sleepers' den?” This is an allusion to a Christian and Islamic tradition. According to legend, a group of young people took refuge in a cave outside Ephesus around 250AD to escape persecution for their Christian faith. They emerged from the cave 300 years later, having been asleep the entire time. With this allusion, the speaker suggests that the speaker and the lover are like these pious youths: they have spent a long time asleep and are now being rewarded for their piety with a new life. The allusion establishes a parallel between the lovers'

erotic love and the youths' religious piety, a parallel the speaker will expand in the following stanza.

In the final two stanzas of the poem, the speaker also alludes to an important tradition in Renaissance philosophy: the idea of the microcosm and the macrocosm. Many Renaissance thinkers believed that the part (the microcosm) and the whole (the macrocosm) reflected each other. That is, one might find an image of the whole in the part. Thus, for instance, the human body might serve as an image of the whole universe. The speaker alludes to this tradition by suggesting that the "one little room" might serve as "an everywhere." In their room, speaker and lover are not cut off from the world; because the room is a microcosm of the world, it contains all the pleasures and riches of the world within it. The speaker makes a similar allusion when comparing the lover's eyes to "hemispheres." Those eyes are like the world, since both are globes. But, more importantly, they serve as replacements for the world: they actually contain (and improve on) the world.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?"
- **Lines 11-14:** "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."
- **Lines 17-18:** "Where can we find two better hemispheres, / Without sharp north, without declining west?"

ANAPHORA

In the final three lines (12-14) of the second stanza of "The Good-Morrow," the speaker voices a series of wishes or prayers. Let other people cross the ocean, explore the Americas, and make maps, the speaker says; we have all the world we need right here in this room. To introduce these wishes, the speaker uses anaphora: each line begins with the word "let."

This is the poem's only use of anaphora and as a result, it stands out. And it attracts further attention to itself because it falls in the final three lines of the stanza, right where the rhyme shifts. This is the only stanza where the shift in the rhyme is marked by a strong formal and conceptual change as well: the speaker discusses one topic in the first four lines of this stanza and then switches to something different in its final three lines, and the anaphora kicks in to emphasize this change.

As a result of these formal and conceptual changes, lines 12-14 stand out, and they feel like a single unit. The speaker of "The Good-Morrow" often makes detours and digressions, but here, the speaker's attention is focused and the argument is passionate and intense. In part because of the anaphora, these lines feel like the center of the poem's argument and highlight its point of greatest rhetorical intensity and conviction.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 12:** "Let"
- **Line 13:** "Let"
- **Line 14:** "Let"

RHETORICAL QUESTION

The speaker of "The Good-Morrow" employs rhetorical questions in the poem's first and final stanzas. In the first stanza, the rhetorical questions pile up, with four in the first four lines. Taken together, they suggest incredulity: the speaker simply can't believe his or her luck in finding the lover and raises a series of questions to emphasize this sense of passion and excitement. Rather than organizing these thoughts into an elegant, single question, the speaker poses question after question, conveying a sense of irrepressible delight.

These rapid-fire questions contrast starkly with the poem's final rhetorical question, in lines 17-18. Here the rhetorical question comes as the culmination of four lines of thinking. The speaker describes the lover's eyes in lines 15 and 16, then begins pose a question about them in line 17, then finally completes the question at the end of line 18. It seems that the speaker has calmed down; he or she is able to carefully and slowly develop ideas, gradually building one powerful rhetorical questions instead of rushing through several weaker ones.

The use of rhetorical questions also suggests something about the speaker's relationship with the lover. Instead of asking the lover meaningful questions that the lover might actually be able to answer, the speaker poses these unanswerable questions. Though the speaker and the lover are presumably together physically, the rhetorical questions suggests that the speaker doesn't want the lover contributing to the poem's discussion of their love. They also create the sense that the poem is an instance apostrophe, even though the lover is there and might theoretically have been able to respond.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "Did, till we loved?," "Were we not weaned till then?"
- **Line 3:** "But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?"
- **Line 4:** "Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?"
- **Lines 17-18:** "Where can we find two better hemispheres, / Without sharp north, without declining west?"

ALLITERATION

"The Good-Morrow" makes frequent use of alliteration. Often, these alliterations are marked and notable. For instance, in line 7, the speaker alliterates on a /d/ sound, "desired" and

"dreamed." This line is not saturated with alliteration; rather, the alliteration picks out two particularly important words in the line and binds them together. In this instance, and others like it (such as the /s/ sound in line 4 with "snorted," "Seven," and "Sleepers'"), the alliteration underlines the speaker's argument. The alliteration emphasizes that, before the speaker met the lover, his or her desire was as insubstantial as a dream.

Elsewhere, the speaker uses alliteration in a less careful fashion. For instance, the poem's first two lines contain 6 /w/ sounds. Not all of these are particularly important words: the alliterative line between "wonder," "we," and "weaned" is suggestive and interesting, but the alliterations on "what" and "were" are less consequential. Here the alliteration does underline the speaker's argument to some extent, emphasizing the relationship between the lovers' current relationship and their previous experiences of being "weaned." But this instance of alliteration also goes beyond rhetorical usefulness, saturating the lines with sound. Here, the speaker is showing off; his or her enthusiasm is reflected in the poem's sheer excess of playful alliteration. The /w/ sound remains prominent throughout all three of the poem's stanzas, suggesting a sense of coherence mixed with uncontrollable excitement—much as the lovers' relationship is both serious and overwhelmingly passionate.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "w," "w"
- **Line 2:** "w," "W," "w," "w"
- **Line 4:** "s," "S," "S"
- **Line 5:** "b," "b"
- **Line 6:** "b"
- **Line 7:** "d," "d"
- **Line 8:** "w"
- **Line 9:** "W," "w," "o," "o," "o"
- **Line 10:** "l," "l," "o," "o"
- **Line 11:** "l"
- **Line 12:** "w"
- **Line 13:** "o," "w," "o," "w"
- **Line 14:** "o," "w," "o," "o"
- **Line 15:** "i," "th," "th," "i"
- **Line 16:** "i," "th"
- **Line 17:** "W," "w"
- **Line 18:** "W," "w," "w"
- **Line 19:** "W," "w"
- **Line 20:** "o," "o," "o"
- **Line 21:** "L," "l," "n," "n"

ASSONANCE

"The Good-Morrow" employs assonance throughout—and, at points, it does so in inventive ways. Generally speaking, the poem is full of assonance; it is dense with playful, pleasing use of sound.

Often, the poem's assonance backs up its alliteration. For instance, the heavy alliterative /w/ sound in the first two lines is accompanied by strong assonance on /o/ and /ee/ sounds. Like the alliteration in these lines, these plays of sound don't always make a specific point. Rather, they demonstrate the speaker's enthusiasm and eagerness to show off his or her literary skill.

However, there are points in the poem where the use of assonance seems to be more purposeful. For example, line 15 contains five hard /i/ sounds. (The /i/ sound in "in" is slightly different and so doesn't count as part of the pattern of assonance). The /i/ sound appears repeatedly in the words "my," "thine," and, most importantly, in the word "eye." This word stands at the center of the line and at the center of a chiastic pattern. The repeated /i/ sound thus dramatizes the exchange the line describes: the speaker's face appearing in the lover's eye and vice versa. In the repetition of the sound, the distinction between "thine" and "mine" begins to dissolve; the lover and the speaker literally blur together. This is an unusually significant and rich use of assonance and it demonstrates that the speaker is capable of formal control and precision—despite being overwhelmed by enthusiasm elsewhere in the poem.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "I," "y," "y," "I"
- **Line 2:** "i," "i," "e," "e," "ea," "i"
- **Line 3:** "u," "ou," "y," "y"
- **Line 4:** "O," "o," "e," "e," "ee," "e"
- **Line 5:** "ie," "e"
- **Line 6:** "I," "y," "y," "I," "i," "ee"
- **Line 7:** "i," "I," "i," "a," "a," "ea," "ee"
- **Line 8:** "o," "o," "ou," "ou"
- **Line 9:** "o," "o," "o," "o"
- **Line 10:** "o," "o," "o," "o," "o," "o"
- **Line 12:** "o," "e"
- **Line 13:** "o," "o," "o," "o"
- **Line 14:** "o," "o," "o," "o," "o"
- **Line 15:** "y," "i," "eye," "i," "i"
- **Line 16:** "ue," "ai," "o," "a"
- **Line 17:** "e," "e"
- **Line 18:** "i," "ou," "i," "ou," "i," "i"
- **Line 19:** "a," "a"
- **Line 20:** "o," "o," "ou," "I"
- **Line 21:** "o," "o," "i," "o," "o," "a," "o," "a," "ie"

CONSONANCE

"The Good-Morrow" is a poem full of sonic pleasure and play; the speaker expresses joy through dense patterns of alliteration, assonance and consonance. For instance, the first two lines contain an alliterative /w/ sound, assonance on /o/ and /ee/ sounds, and consonance on /t/, /l/, /n/, /r/, and /d/ sounds. The poem is so dense here (and in many other spots) that it defies interpretation: though there are some significant

and interesting plays of sound, the overall effect is simply one of overflowing joy. The speaker seemingly overcome by the pleasure of his or her relationship with the lover, and that overwhelming excitement comes through in the poem's sonic density.

Throughout, the poem is rich with consonance: almost every line contains consonance on more than one sound. As a result, the most thematically interesting passages are actually those where the speaker mostly refrains from using consonance, as in line 19. That line does contain alliteration on a /w/ sound, in "Whatever" and "was," but the alliteration is not particularly strong, since the meanings of the words are not important in the line and the /wh/ of "whatever" only imperfectly aligns with the /w/ of "was." This change from the poem's overall sonic pattern is fitting: the line is about imperfect mixtures, so it contains an imperfect and less pleasant combination of sounds. The refusal to use consonance thus underlines and strengthens the speaker's argument here, given how strong the consonance is in almost every other line.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "w," "r," "t," "r," "th," "w," "t," "th"
- **Line 2:** "D," "d," "t," "ll," "w," "l," "d," "W," "r," "w," "n," "t," "w," "n," "ll," "n"
- **Line 3:** "t," "s," "ck," "c," "t," "r," "s," "r," "s," "l," "s," "h," "l"
- **Line 4:** "r," "s," "n," "r," "n," "S," "S," "r," "s," "n"
- **Line 5:** "s," "s," "b," "t," "s," "ll," "l," "s," "c," "s," "b"
- **Line 6:** "b," "d," "d"
- **Line 7:** "W," "d," "d," "t," "t," "w," "t," "d"
- **Line 8:** "n," "n," "w," "rr," "w," "r," "w," "s," "s"
- **Line 9:** "W," "ch," "w," "ch," "n," "t," "n," "n," "r," "t," "f," "f," "r"
- **Line 10:** "F," "r," "l," "v," "ll," "l," "v," "f," "s," "t," "s," "n," "t," "l," "s"
- **Line 11:** "n," "m," "n," "m," "n"
- **Line 12:** "L," "t," "v," "r," "r," "t," "w," "w," "l," "v"
- **Line 13:** "L," "w," "l," "w," "l"
- **Line 14:** "L," "s," "ss," "ss," "w," "l," "n," "n," "s," "n"
- **Line 15:** "M," "n," "th," "n," "th," "n," "n," "m," "n"
- **Line 16:** "n," "t," "r," "n," "r," "t," "n," "r," "t"
- **Line 17:** "W," "r," "w," "f," "r," "s," "ph," "r," "s"
- **Line 18:** "W," "th," "t," "th," "w," "th," "t," "w," "t"
- **Line 19:** "W," "w"
- **Line 20:** "r," "l," "s," "n," "r," "n"
- **Line 21:** "L," "s," "l," "k," "n," "n," "d," "s," "ck," "n," "n," "n," "n," "d"

CHIASMUS

"The Good-Morrow" contains one particularly rich and interesting use of chiasmus, in line 15:

> "My face in thine eye, thine in mine [...]"

The line describes how the speaker's face appears in the lover's eye and vice versa. The pronouns referring to speaker and lover appear in an *ABBA* pattern in the line: my / thine / thine / mine. The speaker thus uses chiasmus to emphasize the mutuality of the exchange: there is a kind of balance or equality in the way the pronouns are arranged across the line. However, the speaker's pronouns ("my" and "mine") appear on the outside of the line, around the lover's ("thine"). This suggests a kind of embrace; the speaker seems to hug and contain the lover.

At the center of the chiasmus is the word "eye." It functions as a kind of axis around which the chiasmus bends. The eye is key to the line in several senses. First, it literally makes the exchange possible: because it is partially reflective, the lovers can see themselves in each others' eyes. Additionally, the word "eye" is the center of the line; the rest of the line seems to focus on this word, just as the lovers' eyes focus on each other. What's more, it also highlights the assonance that runs through the line. The word "eye" has a strong /i/ sound (in fact, it has *only* a strong /i/ sound), which also appears in "my," "thine," and "mine." This assonance erases the difference between the speaker and lover; through its sound, they seem to become one being, bound together. The assonance thus completes the chiasmus, reinforcing the mutual exchange it describes.

Where Chiasmus appears in the poem:

- **Line 15:** "My face in thine eye, thine in mine"

VOCABULARY

Troth (Line 1) - A strong oath of affirmation. "By my troth" means something like "On my honor" or "I swear it."

Thou (Line 1, Line 20) - You. The word is obsolete now, but until the 19th century, English speakers had two ways of saying "you": "thou" and "you." "Thou" was much more informal; it was generally reserved for intimate friends and family members. The speaker's use of it here indicates closeness and intimacy.

Weaned (Line 2) - No longer breast-feeding or relying on one's mother. The word can extend, metaphorically, to mean something like "mature" or "grown-up."

Country Pleasures (Line 3) - Literally, the phrase means, "unsophisticated pleasures." (It relies on the idea that life in the country is less sophisticated than life in the city). But many poets and writers in the Renaissance used the word "country" as an obscene pun, referring to an offensive slang word for the vagina. For example, in Hamlet III.2, Hamlet offers to put his "head" in Ophelia's lap and then asks, "Do you think I meant country matters?" Donne may be making a similar pun here.

Snorted (Line 4) - Snored.

Seven Sleepers' Den (Line 4) - In Christian and Islamic tradition, the seven sleepers are a group of young people who hid inside a cave outside the city of Ephesus to escape religious

persecution. According to legend, they emerged 300 years later, having spent the intervening years asleep. Their "den" is thus the place where they sleep.

Fancies (Line 5) - Fantasies.

Morrow (Line 8) - The morning or the dawn. The word situates the poem in time: it happens in the morning, perhaps just as the sun rises.

Controls (Line 10) - Restrains or limits. In other words, the lovers don't need to be jealous of each other because their love keeps them from checking out other people or being interested in anything but each other.

Thine (Line 15) - The word is now obsolete, but it once served as a more informal way of saying "yours"—something that people would say to close friends and family members.

Plain (Line 16) - Truthful, honest, or unconcealed.

Hemispheres (Line 17) - A "hemisphere" is half of a globe. The word is usually used in geography, to describe the northern and southern halves of the world. But it can be used to describe any globe-shaped object, including an eye. Here, the speaker is suggesting that a lover's eye, in part because it looks like a globe, can serve as a substitute for the globe.

Declining (Line 18) - This can be another word for "descending." Here, it seems to refer to the way the sun goes down in the west.

Slacken (Line 21) - To diminish or decrease in strength. The speaker is saying, in other words, that his or her love will not weaken with time, but rather will always remain as strong as it is in the present.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

During his life—and afterwards—John Donne was famous for his sloppiness in the formal aspects of poetry. Ben Jonson, one of Donne's contemporaries, and himself an accomplished formalist, complained: "Donne, for not keeping of accent, deserved hanging." Jonson was so offended by Donne's mishandling of poetic form that he joked (or perhaps even thought) that Donne should be executed! But Donne's sloppy attention to form comes with some advantages: his poems are often unusual and original. Instead of following traditional forms, they develop their own idiosyncratic forms.

"The Good-Morrow" is a good example of Donne's unique approach to form. The poem has three stanzas, each with seven lines. This is very unusual: most English stanzas have an even number of lines. This helps poets keep their rhyme schemes orderly and symmetrical, since it's awkward to fit an extra line into the rhyme scheme. And Donne's poem does have a strange rhyme scheme.

Each seven-line stanza is rhymed ABABCCC, and each can be divided into two units: a quatrain and a tercet. The initial quatrains are rhymed ABAB, while the final tercets are rhymed CCC. To make matters even stranger, the poem's meter is irregular. The first six lines of each stanza are in iambic pentameter; the final line is in iambic hexameter.

The poem's odd form thus cries out for interpretation, but it is not entirely clear what it means.The break between the two parts of the stanza acts as a kind of volta, or a turn in the poem's thinking. But these breaks are not particularly strong. In Petrarchan sonnets, for instance, the volta is usually an occasion for the speaker to reconsider and to change his or her mind. The speaker here generally does not do so; that is, the stanzas feel like single conceptual units that each express one idea, despite their voltas.

Another possible interpretation is that breaking each stanza into two distinct parts is meant to symbolize the two distinct parts of the lovers' lives: they used to be asleep, and now they are "waking." Or one might see the first four lines of each stanza as imitating the structure of a Shakespearean sonnet, which has the same rhyme scheme and meter as the quatrains here do, before splitting into something different in the tercet. The poem's form is unusual and thus invites interpretation, but with so many different possibilities, readers will have to decide for themselves exactly *how* to interpret it.

METER

"The Good-Morrow" has two meters. The first six lines of each stanza are in iambic pentameter (five poetic feet with a da DUM rhythm, creating a total of ten syllables per line) while the final line of each is in iambic hexameter (six poetic feet and twelve syllables per line). `

For example, look at the pattern of lines 20 and 21 (and also note that the first foot of line 21 could also be scanned as starting with two stressed syllables, creating a spondee):

> If our | two loves | be one, | or, thou | and I
> Love so | alike, | that none | do slack- | en, none | can die.

By the time Donne wrote "The Good-Morrow," in the late 1590s or early 1600s, iambic pentameter was already a prestigious meter. Marlowe and Shakespeare used it for great tragedies like *Edward II* and *Romeo and Juliet*; several centuries before, Chaucer—then the most famous English poet—had used it for poems like *The Canterbury Tales*. The meter was used for the most serious, elevated topics.

To use it in a love poem like "The Good-Morrow" is thus almost provocative: it seems like a misuse of a meter designed for more important ideas. But the speaker argues in "The Good-Morrow" that love is as important and powerful as any heroic quest: it "makes one little room an everywhere." It seems that

the speaker is being intentionally provocative, using the meter to underline and strengthen the poem's argument for the dignity and importance of love.

In the final line of each stanza, the speaker switches from iambic pentameter to iambic hexameter. This meter is not widely used in English poetry, though it is the standard meter for much French poetry (where it is called an *alexandrine*). The reasons for this switch are not entirely clear. Perhaps the speaker wishes to make the poem feel international and emphasize once again that love encompasses the entire world.

The switch between iambic pentameter and iambic hexameter is not standard in English poetry, and it does not correspond to any inherited form. But while the poem is careful to preserve this metrical pattern, it does not pay as much attention to the details within the lines of meter. "The Good-Morrow" is full of metrical substitutions, as in line 12:

> Let sea dis**cov**erers to new worlds have gone

The line's third foot is a pyrrhic (the two unstressed syllables of that conclude the word "dis**cov**erers"). The fourth foot ("to new") returns to an iambic rhythm, but its final three syllables are confused and ambiguous. They could be scanned as a dactyl, though "gone" is a strong word and likely carries at least some stress. Perhaps it is better scanned as two trochees, with a catalectic final foot. The details of how to scan the line are ultimately unimportant: what matters is how far the line strays from a standard iambic rhythm. What's more, it does so at the end of the line, a place where poets usually try especially hard to maintain good meter.

Even when the speaker keeps good meter, the metrical feet are often divided by caesuras, as in the next line:

> Let maps | to oth- | -er, worlds | on worlds | have shown,

The line is technically good iambic pentameter, but the caesura in the middle of the third foot upsets the rhythm, creating an awkward syncopation. Again, the poem's meter is not particularly skillful; the speaker's attention seems to be elsewhere, perhaps tied up with thoughts of his or her lover.

RHYME SCHEME

"The Good-Morrow" has an unusual, innovative rhyme scheme. The first four lines of each stanza are a rhyming quatrain:

> ABAB

This is a widely used rhyme scheme in English; for instance, the first twelve lines of a Shakespearean sonnet follow this pattern.

However, the next three lines of each stanza diverge sharply from standard English rhyme patterns. Each stanza concludes with a rhyming tercet:

> CCC

The stanzas are thus internally divided between the two rhyme schemes. This would seem to encourage a division between the content of the two parts of the stanza, a kind of volta. For instance, the second stanza introduces anaphora in its final three lines, repeating the word "let." But the stanzas do not draw a clear conceptual distinction between their first four lines and their final three: instead, each one generally reads as an expression of a single idea.

The poem's rhyme scheme thus invites interpretation, but it is difficult to say exactly what it means. Each reader may develop a different understanding of it. However, there are some plausible possibilities. For instance, the first four lines of each, with their criss-cross rhyme, feel quite different from the repeated single rhyme in the final tercet. The former suggests distance and difference; the latter, intimacy and proximity. Perhaps the rhyme scheme reflects the transformation that the poem itself recounts: the distance that once separated the lovers has been replaced by intense closeness, just as the rhymes in each stanza go from distant to close.

The difficulties in interpreting the poem's rhyme scheme are also compounded by the speaker's rather casual attitude toward the rhyme itself. The poem contains four slant rhymes: between "I" and "childishly" in lines 1 and 3, "fear" and "everywhere" in lines 9 and 11, between "gone," "shown" and "one" in lines 12-14, and finally between "equally," "I," and "die" in lines 19-21. This is an unusually high number of slant rhymes for such a short poem, and these imperfections indicate that the speaker is perhaps too overcome with excitement about his or her lover to bother with such formal details.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "The Good-Morrow" is an anonymous lover. The poem does not provide much information about this lover; the reader does not even learn the speaker's name or gender (though almost all scholars assume the speaker is male), nor the speaker's class, profession, or nationality. Similarly, the poem refrains from giving its readers much information about the speaker's lover—though it seems that, whoever he or she is, the speaker does not resent or resist the speaker. Unlike some of Donne's other poems, like "The Flea" where the speaker pleads with a recalcitrant lover, "The Good-Morrow" seems to describe a happy, mutually fulfilling love affair.

In a way, the anonymity of the speaker and his or her lover is fitting: neither of them has any identity in the poem outside of their love for each other. "The Good-Morrow" is a poem about how love "makes one little room an everywhere." Love, the speaker argues, is as good as, if not better than, seeking one's fortune and happiness in the outside world. The speaker seems to take this argument to heart by allowing his or her identity to

come entirely from love. Beyond that love, the speaker is anonymous and indistinct, but within it, the speaker leads a life of vibrancy and passion.

SETTING

The speaker of "The Good-Morrow" actively refuses to engage with the world, preferring instead the satisfactions of an intimate, loving relationship. But the speaker does not consider this to be a sacrifice; rather, he or she focuses on the way that love is, in itself, an adventure as satisfying and rich as any explorer's journey across the sea. Love, the speaker insists, "makes one little room an everywhere." It seems reasonable, then, to take the speaker's word when it comes to the poem's setting. It likely takes places in just such a "little room": the speaker and his or her lover are lying next to each reflecting on the beauty and passion of their love.

The poem thus comes from a specific relationship in a specific time and place. But the speaker does not provide much information about that time and place, and he or she does not allude to the historical or political events that surround the poem's love affair. This gives the poem a potentially universal feeling: it could describe any relationship, in any time and any place. Although the poem was written in a specific historical moment—the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign in England, at the end of the 16th century—its focus on the satisfactions of love allows it to transcend this immediate setting and speak to nearly any point in history.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"The Good-Morrow" was likely written at the end of the 1590s or in the early 1600s. The 1590s were an unusually rich decade for English love poetry. Prompted by the 1590 publication of Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*—a sonnet sequence dedicated to the unrequited love between a man (Astrophil) and a distant, uninterested lady (Stella)—many English poets dedicated themselves to writing love sonnets. Following Sidney's example, they wrote long series of such sonnets, and these series tended to focus on unrequited love.

By the time John Donne wrote "The Good-Morrow," the enthusiasm for such poems was beginning to die out. In the first decade of the 17th century, the sonnet lost its popularity. (Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, first published in 1609, sold poorly, despite his immense popularity in the period as a poet and a playwright). Accordingly, Donne's poem tries to find new energy—a new way of writing about love. It breaks formally with the other poets writing about love in the 1590s; though it shares some formal elements with Shakespearean sonnets, it is not a sonnet. What's more, it does not describe unrequited love. Instead, the poem celebrates a mutually rewarding relationship between people, a love so powerful it creates its own world. Instead of distance between the speaker and his or her beloved, as in most sonnets, the poem describes (and cherishes) the distance between the unified lovers and the world around them. In "The Good-Morrow," the reader thus encounters a poet actively wrestling with and trying to transform the literary traditions and practices of his moment.

The poem also implicitly refers to an important Renaissance philosophical doctrine: the microcosm and the macrocosm. Renaissance thinkers believed that the part and the whole reflected each other, serving as images of each other. So, for instance, the human body could be a microcosm (a miniature image) of the universe as a whole. Donne's speaker believes that the lovers' bedroom serves in a similar capacity: it is an "everywhere." Though it is only part of the universe, the passion and intensity of their love turn their home into an image of the whole world.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"The Good-Morrow" actively suppresses its historical context. The speaker and his or her lover retreat from politics into "one little room"; that is, they make a rich and satisfying world out of the intensity of their love for each other. They have no interest in the wider world. The speaker describes that wider world only in the most general terms, outlining what he or she will gladly refuse for love.

But the things the speaker refuses are revealing; they situate the speaker in a particular moment in history. When the speaker imagines the broader world and its most appealing possibilities, he or she thinks of exploration, crossing the sea, and discovering and mapping new worlds. This locates the speaker in a period of colonization, just as Europeans began to settle the Americas. Indeed, in the 1590s, when Donne wrote the poem, Spanish colonization of the Caribbean and Latin America had been underway for more than a century. English privateers like Sir Francis Drake were regularly raiding Spanish settlements and stealing the gold the Spaniards mined (using indigenous people as slaves) in the Americas. For the speaker, however, this is all far away and irrelevant to his or her life; the poem refuses to engage with the realities of colonialism as it developed in the 16th century. This distance from historical context allows the poem to feel universal. That is, the love that it celebrates seems independent from any particular historical moment and may thus be applicable to any passionate love affair.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Richard Burton Reads "The Good-Morrow" — The British

actor Richard Burton reads "The Good-Morrow" aloud. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0a8MoJTh_E)

- Biography of John Donne — A detailed biography of John Donne from the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/john-donne)
- The First Edition of Donne's Poems — Images of the first printing of Donne's poems (which were not published until 1633), including an image of "The GoodMorrow." (https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/first-edition-of-john-donnes-poems-1633)
- A Brief Guide to the Metaphysical Poets — A guide to the group of 16th and 17th century poets which Donne lead, the "metaphysical poets." (https://poets.org/text/brief-guide-metaphysical-poets)
- John Donne and Metaphysical Poetry — A guide to metaphysical poetry from the British Library, with a detailed analysis of "The Good-Morrow." (https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/john-donne-and-metaphysical-poetry)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER JOHN DONNE POEMS

- A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning
- Death, be not proud
- The Flea
- The Sun Rising
- To His Mistress Going to Bed

HOW TO CITE

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