

## The Elizabethan love sonnet

### 1) Wyatt

XXIV (Muir edition)

Som fowles there be that have so perfaict sight,  
Agayn the Sonne their Iyes for to defend,  
And som bicause the light doeth them offend,  
Do never pere but in the darke or nyght.

Other reioyse that se the fyer bright  
And wene to play in it as they do pretend,  
And fynde the contrary of it that they intend.  
Alas, of that sort I may be by right,

For to withstond her loke I ame not able;  
And yet can I not hide me in no darke place,  
Remembraunce so foloweth me of that face,

So that with tery yen swolne and vnstable,  
My destyne to behold her doeth me lede;  
Yet do I knowe I runne into the glede.

Petrarch (Sonetto in vita, XVII)

Sono animali al mondo di sí altera  
Vista che'n contr'al sol pur si difende:  
Altri, però che'l gran lume gli offende,  
Non escon fuor se non verso la sera:

Et altri, col desio folle che spera  
Gioir forse nel foco perché splende,  
Provan l'altra virtù, quella che'ncende.  
Lasso! El mio loco è'n quest'ultima schiera.

Ch'i' non son forte ad aspettar la luce  
Di questa donna, e non so fare schermi  
Di luoghi tenebrosi o d'ore tarde:

Però con gli occhi lagrimosi e'nfermi  
Mio destino a vederla mi conduce:  
E so ben ch'i' vo' dietro a quel che m'arde.

(There are animals in the world with a sight so powerful that it is able to defend itself even against the sun: others, however, as strong light would harm them, do not venture out until it is evening: and still others, in a mad wish, who hope to find joy in the fire because it gleams, find in fact the opposite virtue, which burns them. Alas, I belong to the last-named group. Since I am not strong enough to withstand the light of that lady, and yet am not able to recover in dark places or when the hour is late: thus, with tearful and unsound eyes my fate leads me to see her [ever again]: and I know perfectly well that I am following that very thing that brings me pain.)

IX (Muir edition)

Was I never yet of your love greved,  
Nor never shall while that my liff doeth last;  
But of hating myself that date is past,  
And teeres continuell sore have me weried.

I will not yet in my grave be buried;  
Nor on my tombe your name yfixed fast,  
As cruell cause that did the sperit son hast  
Ffrom th'unhappy bonys, by great sighes sterred.

Then, if an hert of amorous faith and will  
May content you, withoute doying greiff,  
Please it you so to this to doo releiff:

Yf othre wise ye seke for to fulfill  
Your disdain, ye erre, and shall not as ye wene;  
And ye yourself the cause therof hath bene.

Petrarch (Sonetto i vita, LXI)

Io non fu' d'amar vio lassato unqu'anco  
Madonna, né sarò, mentre ch'io viva;  
Ma d'odiar me medesimo giunto a riva,  
E del continuo lagrimar so stanco;

E voglio anzi un sepolcro bello e bianco,  
Che'l vostro nome a mio danno si scriva  
In alcun marmo, ove di spiro priva  
Sia la mia carne, che po star seco anco.

Però, s'un cor pien d'amorosa fede  
Può contentarvi senza farne strazio,  
Piacciavi omai di questo aver mercede.

Se'n altro modo cerca d'esser sazio  
Vostro sdegno, erra; e non fia quel che crede;  
Di che Amor e me stesso assai ringrazio.

(I have never grown tired of loving you, Madonna, nor will I, as long as I live; but I cannot tolerate hating myself and am tired out by such continuous weeping; and I wish that, when I die, I will be buried in an utterly white tomb, that your name should be inscribed on some slab of marble as the cause of my death. There my body will lie enclosed, separated from its soul – a body that was young enough to have remained united with its soul for some time more. Then, if a heart full of loving faith could satisfy you without destroying you, be so good as to have pity on it; should your disdain try to satisfy itself in some other way, it would fail to bring about what it desires, and I thank Love and myself over and over again that I can combat such a disdain.)

LVI (Muir edition)

Suche vayn thought as wonted to mislede me,  
In desert hope by well assured mone,  
Maketh me from compayne to live alone,  
In folowing her whome reason bid me fle.

She fleith as fast by gentill crueltie,  
And after her myn hert would fain be gone;  
But armed sighes my way do stoppe anone,  
Twixt hope and drede locking my libertie.

Yet, as I gesse, vnder disdaynfull browe  
One beame of pitie is in her clowdy loke,  
Whiche comforteth the mynde that erst for fere shoke;

And therewithall bolded I seke the way how  
To vtter the smert that I suffre within,  
But suche it is I not how to begyn.

CXLV (Muir edition)

Dyvers dothe vse as I have hard and kno,  
When that to chaunge ther ladies do beginne,  
To morne and waile, and neuer for to lynne,  
Hoping therbye to pease ther painfull woo.

And some ther be, that when it chanseth soo  
That women change and hate where love hath bene,  
Thei call them fals, and think with woordes to wynne  
The hartes of them wich otherwhere dothe gro.

But as for me, though that by chaunse indede  
Change hath outworne the favor that I had,  
I will not wayle, lament, nor yet be sad;

Nor call her fals that falsley ded me fede:  
But let it passe and think it is of kinde,  
That often chaunge doth plesse a womans minde.

2) Surrey

I (Padelford edition)

Alas! So all thinges now doe holde their peace:  
Heauen and earth disturbed in nothing;  
The beastes, the ayer, the birdes their song doe cease;  
The nightes chare the starres aboute dothe bring.

Calme is the sea, the waues worke lesse and lesse;  
So am I not, whom loue, alas! Doth wring,  
Bringing before my face the great encrease  
Of my desires, whereat I wepe and Syng,

In ioye and wo, as in a doubtful ease:  
For my swete thoughtes sometyme doe pleasure bring,  
But, by and by, the cause of my disease  
Geues me a pang that inwardly dothe sting,

When that I thinke what griefe it is againe  
To liue and lacke the thing should ridde my paine.

Petrarch (Sonetto in vita, CXIII)

Or, ch'el ciel, e la terra e'l vento tace,  
E le fere, e gli augelli il sonno affrena,  
Notte il carro stellato in giro mena,  
E nel suo letto il mar senz'onda giace;

Vegghio, penso, ardo, piango; e chi me sface,  
Sempre m'è inanzi per mia dolce pena:  
Guerra è'l mio stato, d'ira e di duol piena;  
E sol di lei pensando ho qualche pace.

Cosí sol d'una chiara fonte viva  
Move'l dolce e l'amaro, ond'io mi pasco;  
Una man sola mi risana e punge.

E perché'l mio martír non giunga a riva,  
Mille volte il dí moro, e mille nasco;  
Tanto da la salute mia son lunge.

(Now that the heavens and the earth and the wind  
are quiet, that the beasts of prey and the birds make  
no sound, that the nights draw the wagon of the stars  
across the sky and the sea lies waveless on its bed – I  
see, I think, I burn, I weep, and she who has de-  
stroyed me is constantly before me, like a sweet pain:  
I am at war with myself, because I am full of hate  
and sorrow – and just by thinking of her I gain some  
peace. So, only from a clear, living spring comes the  
bitter-sweetness by which I live; only one hand cures  
and wounds me and, since my torment is never  
exhausted, I dies a thousand times by day and am a  
thousand times reborn; so far am I now from a  
healthy state.)

**The cornet** [horn-shaped head-dress]

I never saw you, madam, lay apart  
Your cornet black, in cold nor yet in heat,  
Sith first ye knew of my desire so great,  
Which other fancies chased clean from my heart.

Whiles to my self I did the thought reserve,  
That so unware did wound my woeful breast,  
Pity I saw within your heart did rest.  
But since ye knew I did you love and serve,

Your golden tress was clad alway in black,  
Your smiling looks were hid thus evermore,  
All that withdrawn that I did crave so sore.  
So doth this cornet govern me, alack!

In summer's sun, in winter breath of frost,  
Of your fair eyes whereby the light is lost.

**To his lady**

Set me whereas the sun doth parch the green,  
Or where his beams may not dissolve the ice,  
In temperate heat, where he is felt and seen,  
With proud people, in presence sad and wise;

Let me in base, or yet in high degree,  
In the long night, or in the shortest day,

In clear weather, or where mists thickest be,  
In lofty youth, or when my hairs be gray;

Let me in earth, in heaven, or yet in hell,  
In hill, in dale, or in the foaming flood,  
Thrall, or at large, alive whereso I dwell,  
Sick, or in health, in ill fame, or in good;

Yours will I be, and with that only thought  
Comfort myself when that my hap is nought.

### 3) Sidney

2 (Astrophil and Stella)

Not at first sight, nor with a dribbed shot  
*Love* gave the wound, which while I breathe will bleed:  
But knowne worth did in mine of time proceed,  
Till by degrees it had full conquest got.

I saw and liked, I liked but loved not,  
I loved, but straight did not what *Love* decreed:  
At length to *Love*'s decrees, I forc'd, agreed,  
Yet with repining at so partiall lot.

Now even that footstep of lost libertie  
Is gone, and now like slave-born *Muscovite*,  
I call it praise to suffer Tyrannie;  
And now employ the remnant of my wit,  
To make my selfe beleieve, that all is well,  
While with a feeling skill I paint my hell.

5

It is most true, that eyes are form'd to serve  
The inward light: and that the heavenly part  
Ought to be king, from whose rules who do swerve,  
Rebels to Nature, strive for their owne smart.

It is most true, what we call *Cupid's* dart,  
An image is, which for our selves we carve;  
And, fooles, adore in temple of our hart,  
Till that good God make Church and Churchman starve.

True, that true Beautie Vertue is indeed,  
Whereof this Beautie can be but a shade,  
Which elements with mortall mixture breed:  
True, that on earth we are but pilgrims made,  
And should in soule up to our countrey move:  
True, and yet true that I must Stella love.

47

What, have I thus betrayed my libertie?  
Can those blacke beames such burning markes engrave  
In my free side? or am I borne a slave,  
Whose necke becomes such yoke of tyranny?

Or want I sense to feele my miserie?  
Or sprite, disdaine of such disdaine to have?  
Who for so long faith, tho dayly helpe I crave,  
May get no almes but scorne of beggerie.

Vertue awake, Beautie but beautie is,  
I may, I must, I can, I will, I do  
Leave following that, which it is gaine to misse.  
Let her go. Soft, but here she comes. Go to,  
Unkind, I love you not: O me, that eye  
Doth make my heart give to my tongue the lie.

71

Who will in fairest booke of Nature know,  
How Vertue may best lodg'd in beautie be,  
Let him but learne of *Love* to reade in thee,  
*Stella*, those faire lines, which true goodnesse show.

There shall he find all vices' overthrow,  
Not by rude force, but sweetest soveraigntie  
Of reason, from whose light those night-birds flie;  
That inward sunne in thine eyes shineth so.

And not content to be Perfection's heire  
Thy selfe, doest strive all minds that way to move,  
Who marke in thee what is in thee most faire.  
So while thy beautie drawes the heart to love,  
As fast thy Vertue bends that love to good:  
'But ah,' Desire still cries, 'give me some food.'

Petrarch (Sonetto in vita, CCX)

Chi vuol veder quantunque po natura  
E'l ciel tra noi, venga a mirar costei,  
Ch'a sola un sol, non pur a li occhi mei,  
Ma al mondo cieco che virtù non cura;

E venga tosto, perché morte fura  
Prima i migliori e lascia star i rei:  
Questa, aspettata al regno di li dei  
Cosa bella mortal, passa e non dura.

Vedrà, s'arriva a tempo, ogni vertute,  
Ogni bellezza, ogni real costume  
Giunti in un corpo con mirabil tempore;

Allor dira che mie rime son mute,  
L'ingegno offeso dal soverchio lume:  
Ma se piu tarda, avrà da pianger sempre.

(Chi vuol veder...) Whoso wishes to see how much  
Nature and Heaven can among us, let him come to  
behold this she, who is alone a sun, not only to my  
eyes, but to the blind world which is careless of  
virtue; and let him come soon, because Death steals  
first the better and leaves standing the wicked: this  
she, awaited in the kingdom of the gods, fair mortal  
thing, passes and does not endure. He shall see, if he  
arrives in time, all virtue, all beauty, all royal man-  
ners joined in one body with marvellous tempering;  
then he shall say that my rhymes are dumb, my  
genius injured [= blinded] by that sovereign light:  
but if he delays longer, he shall have cause to weep  
for ever.