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Imperfect Pearls from France: Ronsard's Conceits Meet Donne's

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Others in this volume will remind us of the history of the term "conceit" in English; but before we tackle the "conceited verses" of Jack or Dean Donne and their equivalents or predecessors in the poetry of Pierre de Ronsard, it may be useful to remember that OED sees its origins as being "a borrowing probably from French."

In French it remained as *concept* but is not found as such in Claude Hollyband's (Claude de Sainliens') 1593 *Dictionary French and English*, nor in Jean Nicot's 1606 *Trésor de la langue française*, the earliest French dictionary. Holllyband, however, does list the French *conception* as "a conceite," and *la conception de nostre entendement* as "the sense, feeling, or perceiving."[1] In Randal Cotgrave's 1611 *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* the French *concept* is translated into the English "conception"; while a little later the French *conception* becomes, in English, "a conceit; also sence, apprehension, iudgement, under–standing; also, the conception, or conceiving, of women with child; whence, *La conception de notre Dame*, the conception of our Ladie: a solemne holy day kept by the Church of Rome on the eight of December." By 1787 the *Dictionnaire critique de la langue française* had this to say about *concept*: *Vieux mot scolastique, en usage encôre parmi quelques Savans. l'Académie se contente de dire que c'est un terme didactique : Idée, simple*

[1] Claude Hollyband [Claude de Sainliens], *A Dictionarie French and English: Published for the benefite of the studious in that language: Gathered and set forth by Claudius Hollyband* (London: Thomas Woodcock, 1593), p. 105.

vûe de l'esprit. ("An old Scholastic word, still in use among a few scholars. The Academy only says that it is a didactic term [meaning] an Idea, a simple view of the mind.") It then quotes the seventeenth-century Jesuit theologian René Rapin (1620-1687), who in his *Art de prêcher* ("Art of Preaching") wrote "*Crains, d'un brillant concept cherchant l'eclat trompeur, / De doner pour lumière, une fausse lueur*" ("Beware, in seeking the deceptive glitter of a brilliant conceit, of presenting as light a false glimmer.").

These useful lexicographical facts support the impressive arguments and warnings given by Alexander Parker in his 1982 Presidential Address to the Modern Humanities Research Association. Before turning to the Spanish Baroque texts that were the subject of his inquiry, he discussed the concept, and the term, of "conceit." "In literary history and criticism English has two terms which cannot be translated by a single word in the languages of Western Europe. The first is 'romance' as distinct from 'novel'; the second is 'conceit' as distinct from 'concept'. . . Italian and Spanish have to use their forms of 'concept,' *where French has to use the Italian word*, and where German has no recognized equivalent at all."[2]

Parker goes on to point out the confusion which the English word, used indiscriminately by Anglophone critics of other literatures, has caused in comparative literary studies. He cites K.K. Ruthven's useful 1969 book[3] as reminding us that "the Italian *concetto* and the Spanish *concepto* meant much more than the modern conceit," and substantiates this, not only through lexicography but by reference to such texts as Giulio Cortese's 1591 *Avvertimenti nel poetare*, Tasso's *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* (1565/1594), and Camillo Pellegrino's 1598 *Del concetto poetico*. Important for us is his point that at some time between Pellegrino in 1598 and Matteo Peregrini's 1639 *Delle acutezze* "the term *concetto* came to add the idea of 'witty' to that of concept and statement." (xxv)

Returning to France and England, we see first of all that for the French the word very much retained its original meaning as an idea, a conception by the mind. Such an idea might of course be the idea behind a poem, but it might equally be the idea behind a sermon, a

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[2] Alexander A. Parker, "'Concept' and 'Conceit': An Aspect of Comparative Literary History," *MLR* Vol. 77, No. 4 (Oct., 1982): xxii. Our italics.

[3] K. K. Ruthven, *The Conceit*, The Critical Idiom (London: Methuen, 1969).

baby, a political structure or an expedition to the New World. It seems not to have acquired at any time the English (and Peregrini's) connotation of lightness, exceptional wit, or poetic ingenuity (OED III.10.a,b,c). But we also remark that even for Cotgrave, who uses the word "conceit" in 1611, at the height of Donne's poetic career, it seems not to bear that connotation either: he segues seamlessly into "sense, apprehension, judgement, understanding."

Taught by this, we should beware of taking Rapin's glimmer for glitter and of expecting to find "Metaphysical conceits" in the work of, say, the French Pléiade. While poets such as Donne were definitely aware of their French contemporaries and immediate predecessors[4], it is likely that neither side of the Channel had the concept of "conceit" to which Herbert Grierson and Helen Gardner have accustomed a century of scholars.[5] Giles Fletcher, in his *Licia* of 1593, says that too many of his contemporaries have gone to Italy, Spain or France for their "best and choicest conceites." Even a likely Italian such as Pellegrino (1527-1603), writing specifically about poetry, is perfectly in line with Philip Sidney's "*Idea* or fore-conceit" and Edmund Spenser's "Allegory or darke conceit."[6] And even when in 1643 Sir Richard Baker (1568-1645), in his *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, described his acquaintance Mr John Donne as, in the time of King James I, living at the Inns of Court, "not dissolute, but very neat; a great visitor of ladies, a great

[4] See Anne Lake Prescott, *French Poets and the English Renaissance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978); and, for a more recent example, A. E. B. Coldiron, "Watson's 'Hekatompathia' and Renaissance Lyric Translation," *Translation and Literature* 5, no. 1 (1996): 3–25.

[5] Helen Gardner on conceit: "a conceit is a comparison whose ingenuity is more striking than its justness" and that "a comparison becomes a conceit when we are made to concede likeness while being strongly conscious of unlikeness." (*The Metaphysical Poets* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961] p. xxiii). She was to some extent following H. J. Grierson, whose Introduction to *Metaphysical Lyrics & Poems of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), did not, however, so tightly tie the concept of conceit to the image.

[6] Françoise Graziani, "Camillo Pellegrino: Del Concetto Poetico (1598)," *Nouvelle Revue Du XVIe Siècle* 18, no. 1 (2000): 157–81 (full French translation and commentary).

fequenter of playes, a great writer of conceited verses,"[7] it is likely that by "conceited" he chiefly meant a highly intellectual poetic that (as Dryden later wrote) affects the metaphysics.

It might, then, be instructive and even delightful to detach "conceit" from the image and restore to it its wider sense of a clever and original idea, a "find" or *trouvaille* which brings a pleased smile to the poet's face as it comes to him, and which he hopes will, if not please, at least startle his readers into a greater tension of consciousness. The image, in that case, returns to its proper place as the vehicle for the conceit rather than the conceit itself.[8]

If we do this, and if we approach it by way of the image, new and more useful perspectives present themselves. Let us begin with the notorious term of "Petrarchism." This movement, which was for a long time an honored and approved literary model, consisted chiefly of a certain way of seeing love, and crystallized that way of seeing in a category of images. These, one might say, were characterized by contrast and hyperbole in the service of profound, harmonious and faithful love for a sometimes sympathetic but always unattainable beloved. For delight as well as instruction we permit ourselves to quote an example from Petrarch's *Canzoniere* (no. 90):

> Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi
> che 'n mille dolci nodi gli avolgea,

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[7] Sir Richard Baker, *A Chronicle of the Kings of England* (London: for Daniel Frere, 1643), p. 156.

[8] A phrasing we found helpful was this: "Conceits were not only ornamental devices, fulfilling the rhetorical 'office' of *delectare*, but they functioned equally as instruments to think with, as verbal ideas equivalent, indeed superior, to discursive arguments, pursuing didactic or moral intentions (*docere* and *movere*) and guiding the reader through a line of reasoning. It is their complexity and texture that enable them to do this. In a period that admired both concentration of 'matter' and rhetorical finesse, they served as vehicles for surprising, often difficult insight. Charged with intellectual as well as affective power, they tend to explore the edges of familiar systems of thought or move beyond the boundaries of well-trodden philosophical ground." Verena O. Lobsien, "In Other Words: George Herbert's Metaphysical Textures," in Fabian Horn & Cilliers Breytenbach (eds.), *Spatial Metaphors: Ancient Texts and Transformations*, Berlin Studies of the Ancient World 39 (Berlin: Edition Topoi, 2016), p. 222.

e 'l vago lume oltra misura ardea
di quei begli occhi, ch'or ne son si scarsi;

e l'viso di pietosi color' farsi,
non so se vero o falso, mi parea:
i' che l'ésca amorosa al petto avea,
qual meraviglia se di súbito arsi?

Non era l'andar suo cosa mortale,
ma d'angelica forma: et le parole
sonavan altro, che pur voce humana.

Uno spirito celeste, un vivo sole
fu quel ch'i'vidi: et se non fosse or tale,
piagha per allentar d'arco non sana.

Her golden hairs were loosened to the wind
that wound them in a thousand gentle knots,
the faint soft light was kindled beyond measure
by those fine eyes, no longer so unveiled now;

and, true or false, I know not, her face seemed
to turn then to the colors of compassion,
I thought; I, with love's bait hooked in my breast,
what wonder that I flamed in sudden fire?

Her tread was never once a mortal thing
but of angelic form: the words she spoke
sounded unlike a simple human voice

a heavenly spirit, aye, a living sun
was she I saw: if she is not so now,
a loosened bowstring cannot heal a wound.

The hair is gold thread, the eyes can kindle moonlight into day, love is a swallowed bait, the lover bursts into flame, her walk is an angel's, her voice other than human (presumably angelic also); she was a heavenly spirit and a living sun. These "compares," though, are not conceits, not even "Petrarchan conceits." The *conceit* is her more-than-humanness; the images embody and convey it.

In the century-and-a half that followed Francesco, however, the images became so standardized and the Beloved so identified with the ways of writing about her that contemporary readers may have muddled the two categories as much as later scholars. Be that as it may, by the second half of the sixteenth century, poets such as Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) had so codified the "Petrarchan" writing of, say, sonnets and *canzoni* about love that a certain reaction began to make itself felt. Nowhere was this truer than in France. As early as 1542 Antoine Héroët from Lyon, in *La Parfaicte amye*, criticized

> Tous les escripts et larmoyants autheurs
> Tout le Pétrarque et ses imitateurs
> Qui de souspirs et de froydes querelles
> Remplissent l'air en parlant aux estoilles
> Ne facent point soupsonner, qu'a aymer
> Entre les doulx il y ayt de l'amer
> Quand vous voyez ces seruiteurs, qui meurent
> Et en priant hors d'alaine demeurent,
> Euitez les, comme males odeurs,
> Fuyez ces sots, & lourds persuadeurs,
> Pour vous tirer, qui n'ont autre aymant
> Que compter maulx, qu'ilz souffrent en aymant.
>
> *All those writings and weepy authors*
> *All of Petrarch and his imitators*
> *Who with sighs and chilly arguments*
> *Fill the air as they commune with the stars*
> *Would not make you suspect that in loving*
> *Among the sweets there is bitterness also*
> *When you see those 'servants', who 'die'*
> *And are breathless in their beseeching*
> *Avoid them like bad smells*
> *Flee those fools,& heavy persuaders*
> *Who to attract you have no other magnet*
> *Than to count the ills they suffer in loving.* [9]

This was followed in 1553 by Joachim du Bellay, writing as to a lady:

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[9] Antoine Héroët (1492-1568), *La parfaicte amye*, 8vo (Lyons : Pierre de Tours, 1542), D iiij$^{v.}$

J'ay oublié l'art de pétrarquizer.
Je veulx d'amour franchement deviser
Sans vous flater, et sans me deguiser.
Ceulx qui font tant de plaintes
N'ont pas le quart d'une vraye amitié,
Et n'ont pas tant de peine la moitié,
Comme leurs yeulx, pour vous faire pitié
Getent de larmes feintes.

I have forgotten Petrarchizing's art.
I want to talk of love with openness
not flatter you, and not disguise myself.
Those who complain and weep
Don't have a smidge of love that's true and honest
and have no morsel of the hurt they claim
just as their eyes, to draw your sympathy,
Weep tears that are pretence.[10]

Instead of comparing elements of her beauty, as the Petrarchists do, to gold, crystal, marble, ivory, lilies, carnations and roses, he will simply say that her beauty matches her grace and leave it at that. Instead of saying, as the Petrarchists do, that his love is such that, transfixed by ice and fire, he will die of it, he will say only that his love is as perfect as affection for a lovely face can be and leave it at that. (But—he ends, disturbingly—if, having heard this, she still prefers Petrarchizing, he can and will do that too.)

Clearly, a new wave has been building. A group of young men of good family, destined chiefly for the study of law but fond of literature, found itself at the Collège Coqueret in Paris, under the aegis of the great humanist Jean Daurat (1508-88), studying Greek and Latin poetry and writing French. When Du Bellay got there, he found young Jean-Antoine de Baïf (1532-89) and Pierre, the son of the bookish former warrior knight Louis de Ronsard and very much the dominant personality and talent. At least during the moments of Daurat's absence, the atmosphere must have been intriguingly similar to that of young Jack Donne and his literary friends in Lincoln's Inn—with this

[10] Joachim du Bellay (1522-1560), "Contre les pétrarquistes" in *Receuil de poésies*, 2nd edition (1553).

difference, that lads like Baïf and Ronsard were of a class that could easily frequent the Court.

Even in the third generation of the French Renaissance writing love-sonnets came naturally to literary young men whose grandfathers had known Francis I's Italian campaigns. Ronsard did so with gusto, addressing his first batch to the very young daughter of a banker of noble Florentine descent, Cassandre Salviati. Having fought his father's desire to see him study law and purchase an important Court position, and unapt for a military career through early deafness, he had entered into minor orders[11] in 1543 and decided to make his name as a poet. We are here concerned only with his love-poetry, of which the first collection, *Amours*, appeared in 1552, with Cassandre's portrait on the frontispiece.

Even though his friend Du Bellay had crossly rejected "Petrarchizing" the year before, a number of the sonnets to Cassandre still carry on, or appear to carry on, that grand old tradition.

> Ce beau coral, ce marbre qui soupire
> Et cet eben ornement du sourci,
> Et cet albâtre en voûte racourci,
> Et ces saphirs, ce iaspe et ce porphyre :
>
> Ces diamans, ces rubis, qu'un Zephyre
> Tient animez d'un soupir adouci,
> Et ces oeillets et ces roses aussi,
> Et ce fin or, où l'or mesme se mire :
>
> Me sont dans l'ame en si profond esmoy,
> Qu'un autre objet ne se presente à moy,
> Sinon, Belleau, leur beauté que j'honore,
>
> Et le plaisir qui ne se peut passer

[11] The four minor orders are porter, lector, exorcist and acolyte. In most cases, they preceded entry into the major orders of subdeacon, deacon and priest or bishop; but they did not involve a vow of celibacy, and someone in minor orders who did not continue to the priesthood could still marry. The minor orders were abolished by Pope Paul VI in 1972 and replaced by the ministries of reader and acolyte, but they are still practiced in traditionalist areas of the Catholic Church.

De les songer, penser et repenser,
Songer, penser et repenser encore.

That coral exquisite, that breathing marble
that ornament of eyebrow's ebony
that alabaster in a shortened arch
those sapphires, jaspers and that porphyry:

Those diamonds, those rubies, that a Zephyr
keeps with a sigh in motion animate
and then those roses and carnations too,
and that fine gold that mirrors gold itself:

Deep in my soul they live in such emotion
that other subject I encounter none
only their beauty, Belleau,[12] *which I honour*

and, yes, the pleasure that can't help itself
but dream them, think them, and think them anew,
dream them, think them, and then think them still.

However, in others he already confuses conventional readers with startling twists:

Ces liens d'or, ceste bouche vermeille,
Pleine de lis, de roses et d'oeillets,
Et ces sourcis deux croissans nouvelets,
Et ceste joue a l'Aurore pareille :

Ces mains, ce col, ce front, et ceste oreille,
Et de ce sein les boutons verdelets
Et de ces yeux les astres jumelets,
Qui font trembler les ames de merveille,

Firent nicher Amour dedans mon sein,
Qui gros de germe avoit le ventre plein

[12] While describing his love for Cassandre, the sonnet (no. 23 in the *Amours*) is addressed to his friend Rémy Belleau (1528-77), also a poet and member of the Pléïade. This fact, and the extreme "Petrarchization" as well as the slightly dubious repetition in the final tercet, makes us suspect at least a hint of irony.

D'oeufs non formez qu'en nostre sang il couve.

Comment vivroy-je autrement qu'en langueur,
Quand une engence immortelle je trouve,
D'Amours esclos et couvez en mon coeur ?

Those golden bonds—the crimson of the lips,
carnations, roses, lilies all in plenty,
and eyebrows like two crescents newly-formed
and ah, that cheek's complexion, like the Dawn:

Those hands, that neck, that forehead and that ear,
and on that breast the lovely lively buds
and the twin glowing stars that are her eyes
and make all living souls in wonder tremble,

made Love for dwelling-place nest in my breast
who, big with seed, had all his belly full
of unformed eggs he broods on in our blood.

How can I live other than weak and feeble
when I discover an immortal brood
of Loves bred, hatched, and brooded in my heart?[13]

What are we to make of this? What did Ronsard's readers make of it? It is as if, having mounted a horse of a known and trusted breed, we are suddenly, in the middle of the journey, with a kick of its heels and a cunning twist of its back, thrown into the dust.

First of all, we should probably forget Cassandre. While this sonnet is nominally about her, we may safely assume that it was written, and certainly published, to surprise the poet's friends and rivals.[14] If we retain our distinction between *concept* and image, the basic "conceit" here is not unusual: love is, if not a poison, then something incurable in the blood. There is, however, in this case a second stage: the decision to embody the basic conceit in a secondary one of surrealistic

[13] This is no. 6 of the Cassandre sequence.

[14] A good example of this critical point of view (though we might not go quite as far) is Alan F. Nagel, "Literary and Historical Context in Ronsard's Sonnets Pour Hélène." *PMLA* 94, no. 3 (1979): 406–19.

impossibility—Eros, a young boy, becomes a kind of gravid female insect, brooding and breeding immortal larvae in the lover's bloodstream. This surreal *concetto* is presented in an image lively enough to disgust, retroactively creating the whole sonnet as a *barroco*, a pearl with a great flaw. And that in its turn suggests to readers a dark conceit on the subject of love.

As early as 1552, then, we can see that Ronsard was already experimenting with ways to undermine the outmoded art of *pétrarquizer* by means, not so much of new themes concerning love—love is still the terrible tyrant, the lover his helpless victim, the beloved his heedless and even heartless collaborator—but of new *concepts* in which to dress the lasting themes.

From Cassandre Ronsard's sonnet art (and conceivably his heart) moved on, first to Marie, a simple country girl from Anjou whom, he says, he loved for six years, for whom he wrote 69 sonnets, some *chansons*, and at her death a handsome *Elegie*, of which more below. Clearly, he attempts in a number of these to suit his style to her simplicity, and in the process attains a certain freedom from the visible struggles of the Cassandre collection—struggles between *pétrarquisme* and *antipétrarquisme*, between an ornate idealism on the one hand and its self-consciously provocatory opposite on the other.

Incorporating both, and learning a new simplicity from his celebration of Marie, by 1572 he has moved on to his third and final beloved, Hélène de Fonsèque de Surgères (1546-1618), Gentlewoman of the Bedchamber to Catherine de Medici who, legend claims, suggested to the poet that he celebrate her young protégée. The third and last collection of *Amours,* then, appeared in two volumes 1578, and it is with these poems, notably the sonnets, and their conceits that we chiefly concern ourselves. What these have suggested to us will be most clearly shown in discussing half a dozen individual sonnets and summing up our findings afterwards.

> Maîtresse, quand je pense aux traverses d'Amour,
> Qu'ores chaude, ores froide en aimant tu me donnes,
> Comme sans passion mon cœur tu passionnes,
> Qui n'a contre son mal ni trêve ni séjour :
>
> Je soupire la nuit, je me complains le jour
> Contre toi, ma Raison, qui mon fort abandonnes,

Et pleine de discours, confuse, tu t'étonnes
Dès le premier assaut, sans défendre ma tour.

Non : si forts ennemis n'assaillent notre Place,
Qu'ils ne fussent vaincus, si tu tournois la face,
Encores que mon cœur trahit ce qui est sien.

Une œillade, une main, un petit ris me tue :
De trois faibles soudards ta force est combattue :
Qui te dira divine, il ne dira pas bien.

O mistress mine, when Love's predicaments
teem in my mind, how you wax hot and cold,
how, passionless, you fill my heart with passion,
so that it knows no cease-fire and no rest:

at night I sigh, complaining in the daytime
against you, Reason mine, that flee my fortress:
full of fine words, embarrassed and amazed
upon the first assault you quit my towers

O no, those who besiege our citadel
would flee at once if you'd but turn your face
although my heart betrays its own domain

a glance, a hand, a quick laugh, and I'm dead:
a mere three soldiers and your force is vanquished:
who says you are divine is much mistaken.

This sonnet, no. XLVII in the Premier Livre, opens in a manner that reassures readers with a promise of conventionality. *La maîtresse* is inconstant, she waxes hot and wanes cold; cold herself, she fills the lover with a passion that gives him no rest; all these *traverses* of Love are well-known. Then, however, a precocious *volta* intervenes: the addressee changes from the Beloved to Reason, and remains so until the end. The theme, of course, is that reason is no match for love. What, then, is the "conceit"? We consider it to be unambiguously expressed in the last line: Reason, who is supposedly man's godly faculty, is in no way divine. He is routed without a fight by three pygmy entities: a glance, the touch of a hand, a smile. And as such, the image that expresses the conceit is that of a fortress basely betrayed by a

commander quite capable of defending it, one who surrenders when faced with three puny infantrymen.

Such an image, perhaps, might occur to any poet; but is it a coincidence that one finds it again, with a slight variation, in John Donne? "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.*"[15]

(Once again, this may make us ponder the question, fundamental to the understanding of both Ronsard's poetic and Donne's, of conceit's relation to image. There will be more to say about this, but for the moment it is useful to bear in mind that in Ronsard's sonnets *concept*, while frequently related to "comparison" or imagery, is not identical with it and still carries much of the traditional meaning of an intellectual idea.)

Celle, de qui l'Amour vainquit la fantaisie,
Que Jupiter conceut sous un Cygne emprunté :
Ceste sœur des Jumeaux, qui fist par sa beauté
Opposer toute Europe aux forces de l'Asie,

Disoit à son mirouer, quand elle vit saisie
Sa face de vieillesse et de hideuseté :
Que mes premiers Maris insensez ont esté
De s'armer pour jouyr d'une chair si moisie !

Dieux, vous estes jaloux et pleins de cruauté !
Des dames sans retour s'en-vole la beauté :
Aux serpens tous les ans vous ostez la vieillesse.

Ainsi disoit Helene en remirant son teint.
Cest exemple est pour vous: cueillez vostre jeunesse.
Quand on perd son Avril, en Octobre on s'en plaint.

The one whose fancy Cupid bound in thrall
Whom Jove begot beneath a borrowed swan
divine Twins' sister, who by matchless beauty
made Europe and all Asia enemies,

[15] Holy Sonnets, "Batter my heart, three-person'd God" (1633). Italics ours.

said to her mirror, when she saw her face
deformed and scrawled with age and ugliness:
how foolish were my husbands, up in arms
to conquer and enjoy such rotting flesh!

Gods, you are jealous and quite pitiless!
Beauty of ladies, with the wind it goes:
yet even snakes are younger every year.

So Helen said, examining her skin.
Your *story this: enjoy your youth right now:*
When April's wasted, tears come in October.

In this sonnet, no. XXVI in the Second Livre, the theme is once again traditional: *carpe diem*, enjoy your youth while it lasts, for it lasts not long, and concomitantly enjoy your youth by ceding to your lover's (i.e. my) entreaties. It is the same theme that informs Ronsard's most famous sonnet: *Quand vous serez bien vieille, le soir à la chandelle*.

The *concept*, however, is that of Hélène's putative, conceivable identification, by way of her name, with the beauty who occasioned the Siege of Troy. And this *concept* at once produces a memorable and most disturbing image: Helen of Troy in middle age or beyond, looking in her mirror and wincing at what she sees. The image is pursued with merciless precision—not describing what Helen sees but giving an exact portrayal of the emotion the image evokes. Disgust at the *chair moisie*, the "rotting flesh," and wonder that such ugliness could have provoked a desire strong enough to lead to arms. The final two lines, aiming Helen at Hélène in a reminiscence of the prophet Nathan's applying his parable to King David—*Cest exemple est pour vous!*—restate the theme which, while unoriginal, has now through the *concept* and its image, acquired a new and disturbing force.

Ny la douce pitié, ny le pleur lamentable
Ne t'ont baillé ton nom : Helene vient d'oster,
De ravir, de tuer, de piller, d'emporter
Mon esprit et mon cœur, ta proye miserable.

Homere, en se jouant, de toy fist une fable,
Et moy l'histoire au vray. Amour, pour te flatter,
Comme tu feis à Troye, au cœur me vient jetter

Ton feu, qui de mes oz se paist insatiable.

La voix, que tu feignois à l'entour du Cheval
Pour decevoir les Grecs, me devoit faire sage :
Mais l'homme de nature est aveugle à son mal,

Qui ne peut se garder, ny prevoir son dommage.
Au pis-aller, je meurs pour ce beau nom fatal,
Qui mit tout l'Asie et l'Europe en pillage.

Not gentle pity nor a plaining tear
gave you your name: Helene comes from deprive,
from ravish, kill, pillage, and snatch away
my spirit and my heart, your wretched prey

Homer for fun made out of you a fable
my tale's the truth. Love, out to flatter you,
like you in Troy, comes, flings into my heart
your fire, which feeds with greed upon my bones

The voice you charmed and feigned around the Horse
to dupe the Greeks should now have made me wise
but man's by nature blind to meet his bane

can't save himself nor can foresee his ruin.
at worst I die for that sweet fatal name
that put all Asia and Europe to the sack.

Sonnet IX of the Second Livre takes the *concept* of XXVI and turns it into a lethal game. The theme, now distantly perceptible, is the usual one of the lover's suffering; the *concept* takes up all the space and sucks up all the air in the room. What game is this? It is one we shall see again, one of Ronsard's favorite conceits: we might call it the Perverted Connotation. When readers see, at first glance—and we are necessarily intended to suppose that the original, privileged reader was Hélène herself—that the poet will compare her with her Homeric namesake, they (she?) will assume that the purpose of that "compare" is a

compliment to her beauty, a beauty so incomparable that two nations went to war for it.[16]

No. The poet forces us to contemplate not the beauty but the war, and he rubs our reluctant noses in war's ugliness. And in suddenly turning the implied object of the pillage into *mon esprit et mon cœur*, he turns the "compare" of the two Helens into an identification. This he pursues implacably by telling her what *she* (not a namesake) did in Troy. Love has lit in his, the lover's heart a fire as devastating as those *she* lit in Troy. Hearing *her* voice, the voice of the charmer which the Greeks heard around the Horse[17] should have warned him; but we men are powerless against the evil that seeks us out. Homer wrote fiction; my story is true. And if I die of it (as good Petrarchan lovers must) I will die for a name that put all Europe and Asia to the sack.

Not only is this the Perverted Connotation, it is also what Frank Warnke mentions as a characteristic of Early Baroque: "extravagance, extremeness".[18] The relentless asyndeta of ll. 2-3, the fire that feeds with greed upon his bones, and the sonnet's ending with "pillage" as its final word, leave the readers breathless.

> Comme un vieil combatant qui ne veut plus s'armer,
> Ayant le corps chargé de coups et de vieillesse,
> Regarde en s'esbatant l'Olympique jeunesse
> Pleine d'un sang bouillant aux joustes escrimer :
>
> Ainsi je regardois du jeune Dieu d'aimer,
> Dieu qui combat tousjours par ruse et par finesse.
> Les gaillards champions, qui d'une chaude presse
> Se veulent en l'arene amoureuse enfermer :

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[16] Alan Nagel's article goes into the Hélène/Helen topos very thoroughly, yet never specifically examines the surprising brutality of these two sonnets.

[17] The reference is to *Odyssey* IV. 270-290, where Menelaus reminisces: "Three times you made the circuit of our hollow ambuscade, feeling the outside with your hands, and you challenged all the Argive captains in turn, altering your voice, as you called out the name of each, to mimic that man's wife." (tr. E.V. Rieu, Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1956, p. 71.)

[18] In Frank J. Warnke, "Baroque Once More: Notes on a Literary Period," *New Literary History* I: 2 (Winter 1970): 145-162.

Quand tu as reverdy mon escorce ridée
De ta charmante voix, ainsi que fit Medee
Par herbes et par jus le père de Jason.

Je n'ay contre ton charme opposé ma défense :
Toutefois je me deuls de r'entrer en enfance,
Pour perdre tant de fois l'esprit et la Raison.

As an old fighter tired of taking arms
His body battered long by blows and age
Ruefully smiles at the Olympic young
Sword-fighting in their jousts with joyous blood:

So was I looking at the champions bold
*of the young God of love (*he *always fights*
by tricks and sleights) hotly competing
in love's arena fast to lock themselves:

when all at once you greened my wrinkled bark
with charming voice, just as Medea did
with herbs and juice to Jason's agèd father

Against your charm I've entered no defence:
and yet I mourn to be in second childhood,
to lose and lose my Reason and my mind.

A milder sonnet, this no. XXI of the Second Livre: more melancholy, more rueful, and much less aggressive. And yet beyond the obvious and elegant "compare" of the octave which reminds readers, as Ronsard does often, of his age and its drawback for one who still aspires to be a player in the lists of love, there lurk two *concepts* with venom in their tails.

First, there is here another example of what we have called the conceit of the Perverted Connotation. As he was feeling old, Hélène "greened his wrinkled bark" just as Medea did. Now then, the readers say, isn't that a little doubtful? Medea, after all, carries a connotation of bewitching beauty and lethality. No, no, says the sonnet: what I want to call up here is Medea as a dispenser of benevolent magic: when Aeson, Jason's father, could not be present at the celebrations of the Golden Fleece, Medea rejuvenated him through sorcery. This is

comforting; but those readers who actually knew the whole story would remember that Medea's sorcery in this case was associated with Hecate, the goddess of night's terrors. She prepared a caldron of magic liquid, and then cut Aeson's throat, poured out all his blood, and replaced it with the magic potion. And the old man was now once again young and fit.

Well then, we say, here is a connotation *comfortingly* perverted or reversed. We might find the method of throat-cutting a little disturbing, but the result is entirely desirable. Or is it? For there is one more *concept* to come. In the last tercet, he not only cannot defend himself against her charm (and read that noun as a spell: Medea's sorcery?) but no longer tries to; and yet. And yet this yielding to her compelling loveliness makes him grieve, for to be her lover, we discover, is not after all to be a rejuvenated Aeson with greened bark, full of vigor and robustness. To be her lover is by her magic to go back further; or rather, it is to enter into second childhood (remember: he is an *old* fighter, and an *old* poet), and to lose, and to lose repeatedly, on every new occasion, one's wit, one's mind (*esprit* is both) and one's Reason.

The conceit, then, we may say, is that of first perverting readers' partial memory of Medea by evoking a lesser-known episode of her life; and then in turn perverting even that (and thus disturbing even those readers who remembered Aeson) by giving a lamentable twist to the rejuvenation.

> Qu'il me soit arraché des tetins de sa mere
> Ce jeune enfant Amour, et qu'il me soit vendu :
> Il ne faut plus qu'il croisse, il m'a desja perdu :
> Vienne quelque marchand, je le mets à l'enchere.
>
> D'un si mauvais garçon la vente n'est pas chere,
> J'en feray bon marché. Ah ! j'ay trop attendu.
> Mais voyez comme il pleure : il m'a bien entendu.
> Appaise toy, mignon, j'ay passé ma cholere,
>
> Je ne te vendray point : au contraire je veux
> Pour Page t'envoyer à ma maistresse Heleine,
> Qui toute te ressemble et d'yeux et de cheveux,
>
> Aussi fine que toy, de malice aussi pleine.

Comme enfans vous croistrez et vous jou'rez tous deux :
Quand tu seras plus grand, tu me payras ma peine.

Let someone pull him off his mother's breasts,
this brat, this Love, and sell the child to me
he must not grow, he's scuppered me already
a trader comes, I'll put him up for auction.

The price of such a bad boy can't be high
I'll discount him. I've waited far too long.
but see how now he weeps: he's heard me talking.
Calm down, my pretty, all my anger's done.

I'll not sell you: instead what I will do
is send you to Helene, page to my lady,
who is much like you in her eyes and hair

clever like you, as full of tricks as you,
like children both you'll grow and play together
and when you've grown you'll pay me for my grief.

Sonnet XLI of the Second Livre is outrageous, and flamboyantly so. "Extravagance" and "extremeness," indeed. We see here another of the characteristics Warnke ascribes to the Early Baroque: "the illusion of thought in the very process of being thought; verse assimilated to the condition of heightened conversation; a diction at once colloquial and capable of embracing an effectively unlimited range of references to human activities, mundane or learned; a private poetry of the greatest intimacy which we, as audience, have the illusion of not hearing but overhearing."[19]

The *energia* here is initially one of pure exasperation, couching the common theme of protest against Cupid in a new and marvelous *concept*: I, the lover, will buy the blasted child and sell him to the nearest slave-trader, at a discount yet.

Having introduced this, though, the text instantly produces a precocious *volta* halfway through the second quatrain: the "heightened conversation" now involves the reader, invited in a second conceit to see the boy's crying and thus also the poet's kindly reply—which also

[19] Warnke, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

has a sting in the tail, as she is like (i.e. no better than) Cupid, and when he grows up he will have to pay.

J'avois, en regardant tes beaux yeux, enduré
Tant de flammes au cœur, qu'une âpre sécheresse
Avait cuite ma langue en extrême détresse,
Ayant de trop parler tout le corps altéré.

Lors tu fis apporter en ton vase doré
De l'eau froide d'un puits : et la soif qui me presse,
Me fit boire à l'endroit où tu bois, ma Maîtresse,
Quand ton vaisseau se voit de ta lèvre honoré.

Mais le vase amoureux de ta bouche qu'il baise,
En réchauffant ses bords du feu qu'il a reçu,
Le garde en sa rondeur comme en une fournaise.

Seulement au toucher je l'ai bien aperçu.
Comment pourrai-je vivre un quart d'heure à mon aise
Quand je sens contre moi l'eau se tourner en feu ?

The beauty of your eyes had lit such flames
throughout my heart that drought had settled there
and parched even my tongue that talked so much
it had dried all of me: pain and distress—

But then you had them bring me water, cool,
straight from the well in your gold cup: my thirst
hurried me, mistress mine, straight to the spot
where your lip drinking gravely honours it

Ah, but the cup, in love with your mouth's kisses,
so heats his rim with your imprinted fire
it's held within his roundness like a furnace

Only on touching it I found this out:
how can I live a quarter of an hour
when I feel water changing into fire?

We do not know, in the works of Ronsard, when exactly a particular sonnet was written. But this, no. XXXV of the Premier Livre, shows a

version of the *concept* or conceit much more recognizable to readers of English poetry. Here we have no clear distinction between the theme, the *concept*, and the image. A remnant of a distinct theme is found in the opening, which reminds us of the lover's traditional state of burning—whether or not the flames are accompanied by icy frost. But instantly the conceit takes over, and it dominates the poem. The cup, touched once by the lady's lip, has become a lover itself, and thus is also filled with unbearable heat: a heat that invades its entire mass, making it a furnace which in its turn, by implication, boils the water within it, and not only boils it but turning the water, impossibly, into fire itself.

The image, here, is at one with the conceit: the conceit *is* the image. And so by the end of the sonnet we are faced with something that begins to resemble an English "Metaphysical" conceit. Not entirely: it is not a simile or metaphor, it is not a "compare." But it is a sophisticated play with Nature and its laws, not based—as, say, the pair of stiff twin compasses—a *being like* but on a *becoming*, on a transformation that alters a natural fact and, thus, a natural law. The gold cup, contrary to gold's inanimate kind, falls in love; the touch of the Beloved's lips transforms a small vessel of precious metal into a furnace—which, in turn, transforms cool and healing water into a raging and lethal fire.

We think that in one particular sense the reader here begins to see on the horizon the shade of John Donne. There is not, here, the colloquial *energia* that threatens to sell Cupid to a slaver: that energy that Warnke associates with "Early Baroque" and that one of us, finding it in Donne, traced (at least in England) to Philip Sidney; but there is the intensity of a physical (metaphysical?) transformation that creates a sensory and therefore intellectual confusion, with Love to blame for all.[20]

> Cusin, monstre à double aile, au mufle Elephantin,
> Canal à tirer sang, qui voletant en presse
> Sifles d'un son aigu, ne picque ma Maistresse,
> Et la laisse dormir du soir jusqu'au matin.

[20] Roger Kuin, "Sustainable Energy: Philip Sidney and John Donne" *John Donne Journal* vol. 33 (2014), 63-93. The blaming of Love may itself, however, be a sign that both Sidney and Ronsard belong to a slightly earlier poetic generation.

Si ton corps d'un atome, et ton nez de mastin
Cherche tant à picquer la peau d'une Deesse,
En lieu d'elle, Cusin, la mienne je te laisse :
Succe la, que mon sang te soit comme un butin.

Cusin, je m'en desdy : hume moy de la belle
Le sang, et m'en apporte une goutte nouvelle
Pour gouster quel il est. Ha, que le sort fatal

Ne permet à mon corps de prendre ton essence !
Repicquant ses beaux yeux, elle auroit cognoissance
Qu'un rien qu'on ne voit pas, fait souvent un grand mal.

Mosquito, two-winged monster with a trunk,
bloodsucking channel, that in busy flight
hums with high sound, don't sting my lovely mistress
but let her sleep in peace from night till morn.

With atom body and with bloodhound nose
if you must pierce a divine epidermis
I'll offer mine in just exchange for hers:
suck mine and so let my blood be your loot.

But no, I take it back: take from that beauty
some blood, and bring me just one warm, fresh drop
to taste what it is like. Ha, why does fate

not let my body take your nature on?
I'd prick her eyes again, and she would know
how unseen trifles may cause grievous pain.[21]

The first thing Donneans reading this will think of is of course "The Flea." And doubtless rightly so: a witty poem about a small troublesome insect and a presumably beautiful woman is not only a delight but a singularly recognizable theme. But the same Donneans, instructed in literary history and aware that influences may proceed beyond the Channel, will then think also of Madeleine and Catherine Desroches from Poitiers, and of the following history:

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[21] *Second Livre*, no. XXII.

> The 'Grands-Jours' held at Poitiers in 1579 were a new occasion to show off the worth of the Dames Desroches: their drawing-room was the meeting-place for all the city's magistrates called to this solemnity. One day when they were assembled Etienne Pasquier, noticing a flea that had 'settled on the middle of the breast' of Mlle Desroches, pointed to the creature's temerity. A few playful remarks followed, and the incident ended with the exchange of two passages of verse between Pasquier and Catherine Desroches.
>
> That was all it took to set off the poetical humour of all those honest magistrates, who gave themselves to celebrating the flea in French, in Spanish, in Latin, and even in Greek. Etienne Pasquier assembled the various texts produced in this poetical joust, and it is their collection that produced the volume known under the title of *La Puce de Mme Desroches.* The proper title would have been *La puce de Mlle Desroches*, for it is Catherine who was the adventure's heroine.[22]

Was this, as is sometimes thought, the origin of Donne's flea poem? It might be so; but it may be interesting also to point to Ronsard's sonnet about the mosquito, which appeared in the 1578 volume of *Amours*, a year before the event in Poitiers. Let us first look at that.

The "Cusin," also and still today spelled "Cousin," in modern French is technically not a mosquito but a member of the genus *tipulidae*, in Britain called a Daddy Long-Legs and in America a cranefly. It does not bite or sting, but has a long proboscis used for laying eggs. The word does not appear in Hollyband. However, in Nicot it is translated as "genus insecti, Culex," and in the 1694 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* it is a "Sorte de mouscheron piquant, & fort importun." (*a sort of small stinging fly, most importunate).* So we may usefully translate it as "mosquito."

The first thing we notice in Ronsard's sonnet is the Monster with an Elephantine Snout: an image, one might say, under a microscope, an enormous and almost parodic enlargement. The speaker has been

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[22] From the Introduction by D. Joaust, publisher and printer of the 1868 edition of the 1610 original. Our translation.

looking at the mosquito very closely indeed. Very soon this is confused by its "atom body" (not, of course, our atom but that of Epicurus) which at once grows a bloodhound's nose. The whole, aiming itself at the sleeping beloved, is wonderfully surrealistic, suggesting wit and humor from the beginning. The lover's proposing his own skin exchange for that of a Goddess continues this vein. A palinodic *volta* similar to that in his sonnet about Cupid and the slave-trader, though here in its proper place, introduces his wish to taste her blood, while a final extension of that makes him long to *be* the mosquito so that his sting of her may teach her a lesson. Noticeable is the participle phrase "(re)picquant ses yeux," which all dictionaries explain as "stinging or pricking again" but to which Hollyband adds "to spurre."[23] To sting her eyes seems unnecessarily cruel, but if we add an overtone of spurring her to see and understand, the phrase, if not strictly logical, becomes not only comprehensible but cleverly apt.

If we look at this mosquito sonnet in the sense of theme and conceit, we can see that the theme is the lady's sleep while the unquiet lover wakes: the sleep is unconsciousness but also uncaring.[24] And here the *concept*, the conceit, and the image coincide: the mosquito, initially reproved, finally envied, becomes the compact vector of this tiny drama of (un)consciousness.

Clearly, this is the moment for our transition. From mosquito to flea is but a small step, and one of John Donne's most famous poems calls us to trace lines and make comparisons.

> Marke but this flea, and marke in this,
> How little that which thou deniest me is;
> Mee it suck'd first, and now sucks thee,
> And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be;
> Confesse it, this cannot be said
> A sinne, or shame, or losse of maidenhead,

[23] Hollyband, p. 356 s.v. *picquer*: "to pricke, to launce, to spurre, sometime to quilt, to sting."

[24] See, for example, Philip Sidney's characterisation of the German Princes' attitude toward the continental Catholic-Protestant conflict as "asleep." (Philip Sidney to Hubert Languet, 15 April 1574, in Kuin, *Correspondence of Sir Philip Sidney*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, I: 162).

Yet this enjoyes before it wooe,
And pamper'd swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than wee would doe.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where wee almost, nay more than maryed 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 cloysterd in these living walls of Jet.
Though use make thee apt to kill mee,
Let not to this, selfe murder added bee,
And sacrilege, three sinnes in killing three.

Cruell and sodaine, hast thou since
Purpled thy naile, in blood of innocence?
In what could this flea guilty bee,
Except in that drop which it suckt from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and saist that thou
Find'st not thy selfe, nor mee the weaker now;
'Tis true; then learne how false, feares bee:
Just so much honor, when thou yeeld'st to mee,
Will wast, as this flea's death tooke life from thee.[25]

The theme is not quite the same as that of Ronsard's "Cusin": that was a lover's complaint at his lady's indifference, while this is a straightforward seduction poem, challenging the lady's refusal. The image is similar: a troublesome insect stinging, or biting. Yet the *conceit* is quite different. Ronsard's *concept* blended with his image: first offering a substitute target, then imagining himself a substitute predator, the poet-lover concentrates on the insect's aggression. Donne's conceit is far bolder: not only has the aggression been consummated, it has inspired contrasting reactions which, voiced by only one of the two humans, constitute the poem. And, moreover, there are not only words: there are two (re-)actions which we do not see but which take place invisibly in between the stanzas—the first, the woman's reach for the flea; the second, her killing it. And finally, within

[25] *The Elegies, Songs and Sonnets*, ed. Helen Gardner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965). Our subsequent quotations of Donne's poems are from this edition.

the poem's conceit there is the lover's own conceit: the flea, biting both, has mingled their blood just as sex is imagined to do, and has thus become their marriage-bed.

Both poems end with a comment on the insect's insignificance: one contrasts that with the importance of such insignificance's potential effects, the other uses it to argue for a similar insignificance in the refused act of love. How, now, may we compare the conceits? Ronsard's is both simpler and less gripping, because he has the lover addressing the insect. Donne's, creating one side of a human conversation, including physical actions offstage, is far more dramatic, and takes an important stage further what we have seen beginning in Ronsard's development.

Comparing Ronsard and Donne, we may begin with what one of us, Anne Prescott, wrote years ago: "Ronsard's great lines often achieve a classical finality rather than the intellectual compression of Donne at his best . . . yet Donne might have recognized in Ronsard a writer particularly fascinating like himself, for a carefully modulated voice and a sense of self, an often dramatic relationship to the hearer within the poems, varying rhetorical poses, and radical inconsistencies."[26]

It is interesting that Donne seems never to have written a love-sonnet. And yet some of his non-sonnet lyrics could easily fit a sonnet form: "The Indifferent" is an excellent example, with the third and last stanza reading very like a Ronsardian sestet.

What of conceits? Ronsard's conceits, we have seen, are not Metaphysical. Neither, however, are they Petrarchan, at least in the sonnets we have shown. They seem to bear a different relationship to both literary tradition and intellectual individuality. We may distinguish three types, at least in these texts. In the first place there is the Perverted Reference or Connotation. Readers are flattered by a reference they recognize and gratefully provide from their own memories the supposedly correct connotation. The text, however, then upsets their satisfaction by leading from the same reference to a different, and sometimes opposite, connotation. At his virtuoso best, Ronsard can double this, slipping one perversion inside another: the reference to Medea, above, first surprizes readers by providing them

[26] Prescott, *French Poets,* p. 115.

with a connotation of kindliness not usually associated with the character, and then surprises them again by making that connotation lead to an opposite and unwelcome conclusion. Another, and harsher, example of the Perverted Reference is what the poet does with what we may call Helenity. Comparing Hélène (de Surgères) to Helen (of Troy) is so obvious a *concept* that it quickly became a topos, involving other poets as well. In itself it bears a possible complexity, since not only was Helen a famous beauty but she was the cause of a classic conflict. As Nagel and others have shown, that allowed a reference both to love's wars and on occasion to the conflicts in Charles IX's and Henri III's France. But in the first of the two texts we have quoted, Ronsard twists the topos into a Perverted Connotation by adding the element of age. Thus Helen the legendary beauty is followed into age and (self-)disgust, her reflected image made to lead to a harsh *carpe diem* instead.[27]

The second type of conceit we have discerned in the *Amours* for Hélène is what we might call the Outrageous Exaggeration. Clearly, this applies to the proposition to rip little Cupid from his mother's breast and sell him to the lover, who will then resell him at a discount to the first passing slave-trader. This leaves other accusations against the love-god, such as Sidney's "murth'ring boy" with his bloody bullet, far behind. And again, a second twist is built in: after a palinodic volta, he will be joined to Hélène as a new friend or sibling, they being similar not only in eyes and hair but in (appalling) character. A charming example of "extravagance, extremeness."

There is, however, a darker side to the Outrageous Exaggeration. In the second of the two Helen of Troy sonnets quoted above, Ronsard first twists the Helen connotation from beauty to war, and then first bludgeons the reader (and let us not forget that the notional privileged reader was Hélène) with verbs of an all-too-real battlefield, then ties those to his own raped heart, then identifies Hélène with Helen in specific guilty deeds in Troy, and eventually shows the appropriateness of dying for such a murderous name. The connotations are perverted beyond decency, and their instrument is an Outrageous Exaggeration

[27] The influential Classical source for such disgust with age and loss of attraction in women is, of course, Horace's Ode I.25 which does not, however, have the *carpe diem* conclusion.

no longer amusing. Every now and then, in these later sonnets, there is a darker side to Ronsard's *concepts* than we have found in Donne.

The third conceit may be described as the Scientific Surprise. This we have shown in the sonnet referring to the golden cup. Golden cups, of course, are topically so rich a field that connotations necessarily abound. In this case, however, the object's *inamoramento*, followed by its physical transformation into a furnace, which in turn transforms the water it contains, not into boiling water or steam but into fire itself, is a *concept* of a new kind, edging from the physical into the Metaphysical: here the conceit truly becomes the image-sequence itself.

It may be worthwhile to take three more poems, two longer and one a sonnet, both perhaps more profound, as a final comparison. Nothing could, in the lyric mode, be more serious and have more need of the poet's personal commitment, than a poem of mourning. Accordingly, we shall look at Ronsard's "Elegie pour la mort de Marie," his sonnet "Terre ouvre moy ton sein," and John Donne's "Nocturnall upon St Lucies Day."

Marie Dupin, Hélène de Surgères' predecessor in Ronsard's affections, was a simple country girl from Bourgueil in the Anjou, whom the poet loved for six years until she died in 1558 at the age of 21. The only one of his three Muses to do so during his lifetime, she became the subject of a series of thirteen posthumous sonnets, some Stanzas and an Elegy. The latter (see Appendix A) contains twenty-three stanzas of varying length: the first six of eight lines, then one of twelve, one of six, one of four, one of six, one of eight, one of four, three of six, one of eight, two of four, one of eight, one of eight, one of twelve, and two of six. The rhymes are always in pairs, the meter is the alexandrine. There are 158 lines in all, as against 45 for the Donne poem.

Coming to write his grief at Marie's death at some length, Ronsard at first had recourse to Cupid, or Amour. On the day of her death, Love—the Elegy's first conceit—broke his arrows and extinguished his torch, and threw all of them upon her tomb, which he then watered copiously with his tears. After a reminiscence of the poet's *inamoramento*, Amour comes back: we are reminded that in order to affect the hard-hearted poet (already famous for the Classical glories he has bestowed upon French verse), Amour has brought Marie with him, and with one shot launches both her and his arrow into Pierre's

heart. Reason—the second conceit—does not betray the lover but faints, leaving desire and the senses to steer his ship whither they will. Simple as she was, she was a Goddess—the next conceit—, for Divinity, after all, has been known to choose a simple birth. The conceit then moves to her eyes, which, even as they are dead and buried, follow the poet still. A memory of his emotion upon learning of her death is followed by a Complaint that blames Heaven and Nature for creating her and so soon calling her back. A brief vision of her as a blessed soul in Heaven leads to the question what he, abandoned lover, now must do. The only answer is to die also, so that he may be buried in her tomb, and a future passer-by will see that he was killed by the twin arrows of Love and Death: "and so he died, felled by a double grief, / And all for too much love of a young mistress."

If for a moment we may imagine Ronsard, faced with the young woman's death and contemplating such a poem, it seems hard to believe that he, France's supreme poet of love-sonnets, would not at least have thought of the model of Petrarch. The Italian had, after all, written 103 of his Canzoniere's 366 poems "*in morte di madona Laura*"—after, and in large measure about, Laura's death. And the Petrarchan text that comes closest to the Elegie, in length and importance, is the first of the *in morte* poems, "I've pensando" (no. 264). Yet when we read this, which comprises 136 lines arranged in seven 18-line stanzas and one of 10 lines, the mood, the emotions and the tone, are utterly different. Cupid nowhere appears except in one brief and bitter reference: "Love compels me, / he who never lets those who believe / in him too much follow the path of honour."[28] There is a deep and genuine religious consciousness, which is entirely lacking in Ronsard; and between that and the poet's equally deep and genuine love for Laura there is now, after her death, a powerful inner strife which is, in fact, the poem's chief conceit.

We do not know the relative dates of the Elegie and "Terre ouvre moy ton sein," so it would be otiose to imagine the sonnet as either earlier or later. What seems to us evident is that it moves readers as the longer poem does not.

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[28] "mi sforza Amore, / che la strada d'onore / mai nol lassa seguir, chi troppo il crede," tr. A.L. Kline.

Terre ouvre moy ton sein, et me laisse reprendre
Mon thresor, que la Parque a caché dessous toy :
Ou bien si tu ne peux, ô terre cache moy
Sous mesme sepulture avec sa belle cendre.

Le traict qui la tua, devoit faire descendre
Mon corps aupres du sien pour finir mon esmoy :
Aussi bien, veu le mal qu'en sa mort je reçoy,
Je ne sçaurois plus vivre, et me fasche d'attendre.

Quand ses yeux m'esclairoient, et qu'en terre j'avois
Le bon-heur de les voir, à l'heure je vivois,
Ayant de leurs rayons mon ame gouvernee.

Maintenant je suis mort : la Mort qui s'en-alla
Loger dedans ses yeux, en partant m'appella,
Et me fit de son soir accomplir ma journée.

Open your bosom, earth, let me take back
my treasure, that Fate under you has laid:
or if you cannot, earth, hide me as well
in the same tomb with her fair ashes now.

The dart that killed her should have laid my body
beside hers too, to end my care and grief:
for now, given the pain her death has brought me,
I can no longer live, and waiting hurts.

When her eyes lit my life, and I on earth
could relish them, I lived from hour to hour
their gentle beams ruling my grateful soul

Now I am dead: Death who was on his way
to settle in her eyes, took me along
and with her evening ended all my day.

What moves us? we ask ourselves. We could consult Sidney, who might say that here the speech of grief is used as if by someone who had genuinely felt that emotion. This is quite true, as far as it goes; but even Sidney, if pressed, would have to admit that it merely displaces the question. We might perhaps remember the topic of this essay, and

look at conceits. The theme, here, is obviously grief and mourning for a loved one departed. What are the conceits?

The first is wanting to be reunited with her, in life or in death. The second explains the first, in the bleakly complete line 8. The third and last conceit seems to fold into itself a whole three-hundred-year-old Petrarchan tradition, and end that tradition as Death has ended Marie. It is the conceit of the beloved's eyes and their matchless power over the lover. Exceptionally, Ronsard has not ended with an image of their lasting closing, but has magnificently poured the conceit into a final image that unites him with her. (Modern readers, quite as moved as the poet's contemporaries, might have their reading enriched by memories of a similar image in Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth," also a mourning sonnet.) Interestingly, the conceits are mainly the same as those in the Elegie; yet here their greater concentration, and the absence of Cupid, create a vastly different effect.

In Donne's "Nocturnall," the first thing we notice is that a new cerebral context has been added that is both calendrical and scientific. The calendar is announced in the title: the poem is set "upon St Lucies day, beeing the shortest day." This places the poem on the feast of St Lucy, December 13, which in the Julian Calendar, still used in England, was the date of the winter solstice. (Catholic countries had mostly already changed to the new Gregorian Calender; but since the latter had been commissioned and promulgated by the Pope, Protestant countries took longer to adopt it, and England, indeed, did not officially do so until 1752.)

It is this calendrical peculiarity of the winter solstice which furnishes the poem's first conceit, that of the shortest space of sunlight and the longest night. The sun is spent, the world's whole sap is sunk into the earth, its life is dead and buried—yet all this gloom is laughter compared to the poet's state of mind.

The second stanza provides a new conceit: the poet as the object of love's new alchemy.[29] Love has made him the Quintessence of Nothingness. While she was alive there had been moments of grief that

[29] We have called this conceit "scientific": it should be remembered that at this time, the practitioners of natural philosophy included not only the Imperial botanist Clusius but also the Imperial alchemist Edward Kelley (1555-1598).

touched on Chaos; now love has made him the Elixir (which all early dictionaries define as "quintessence") of Nothing. Humans have soul; animals and plants have desires and react to their environment; he has, he is, Nothing.

In a final conceit, he flirts with blasphemy: "nor will my Sunne renew." Even if she is only *his* Sun, and quite unconnected with the common Christian pun, he, John Donne, is still not only a Christian but a priest, who daily avers, in the Creed, his belief in "the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." This conceit, surely, is a deliberate risk, shared with readers, to show the extent and the depth of his grief.

The conceits, then, in this Nocturnall have all become what we think of as "Metaphysical." They have merged with the images. They are superficially surprising and unlikely, but profoundly apposite and deeply moving. In fact, the surprise may be precisely what makes them moving.

In this comparison, Ronsard at first suffers. While his "Elegie pour la Mort de Marie" is elaborate and eloquent, it nowhere moves the twenty-first-century reader and seems unlikely to have done so to our sixteenth-century predecessor. In fact, Philip Sidney's criticism in his *Defence of Poesy* applies perfectly, and explains the problem: "so coldly do they apply fiery speeches . . ." Ronsard, in 1558, was still very much the famous poet, the professional poet who depended for any and all advancement and favors upon his poetic reputation. He was also, at that time, still very much the (brilliant) heir of Italian 16C *Petrarchismo*, the poet of the Cassandre and Marie *Amours*. As a result, however real his grief at young Marie Dupin's death, its expression at least in part followed the codes that had built his fame. And in the terms of our present inquiry, certain conceits are essential component parts of those codes.

The chief one is personified Amour, or Cupid. Whether in poetry or in painting, by the middle of the sixteenth century, this conceit has become so trite as to lack all conviction. That even in an Elegy upon the death of a greatly-beloved woman Ronsard turns instantly to Cupid is a measure of the degree to which the codes still rule his work. (It is instructive to see what Donne does with Cupid: in all the Elegies, Songs and Sonnets he is mentioned only in passing, and never as an

important conceit.) Another conceit that forms part of the code Ronsard inherited is the beloved's divinity: both the elements of her beauty and her walk are more than merely human. In all these cases, the specific images are component parts of, but not the same as, the conceit.

On the other hand, the mourning sonnet does move readers, and one suspects it did so even at the time. It does so, however, in ways and by means very different from Donne's. What they have in common is conveying a sense of the poet's complete involvement in the death: his grief is total and totally experienced; and that totality is conveyed. In Ronsard's case, the means, the conceits, are in no way surprising or modern: Anne Prescott's words, quoted above, apply completely: "Ronsard's great lines often achieve a classical finality rather than the intellectual compression of Donne at his best . . .".

Donne, on the other hand, represents a major advance in Sidneian *energia*. He does so in part because he is *not* a professional poet, which gives him a greater freedom to experiment. He fuses conceit and image, and infuses both with the element of intellectual surprise which struck both Grierson and Gardner. The combination of *energia* and intellectual surprise means that he can convey both an extremity of wit and a power of convincing emotion, as his theme demands.

If we may now proceed cautiously to a conclusion, we should at once remind ourselves that Ronsard himself progressed well beyond his own powers of 1558. The sonnets to Hélène that we examined earlier show a poet who had gained enormously in independence and strength: a poet who can surprise by an ambiguity of emotion, by a singularity of imagery and above all by new and original kinds of conceit. The Perverted Connotation, the Outrageous Exaggeration, and the Scientific Surprise all appear in his late Amours, and signal a further distancing from the codes of *pétrarquisme*. And in all these, and the style of lyric writing of which they are a part, he shows what we might call a transition to the style of Donne.

Donne, with different influences and in another country, nevertheless continues the development we saw happening in Ronsard. If as Anne Prescott has suggested, he probably read a certain amount of Ronsard, what did he do with it? Directly, not a great deal. Ronsard was (fairly) long ago, and in another country, and the wench, if not

dead, was living out a blameless and unmarried life in the château of Surgères. Donne's use, and interpretation, of conceits is infinitely more pyrotechnic and profuse: every development we see beginning to happen in Ronsard is pushed to new limits by his English successor. But there is a line we can trace. Some literary historians, including Warnke himself in another work,[30] have associated the evolution of the Pléïade and the nascent Metaphysical style with Mannerism: "The poets quickly left such Platonic idealism behind and adopted other, more troubling forms of the passion of love. . . The rather classical Ronsard of the [early] *Amours* and the *Odes*, Marcel Raymond thinks, also incorporated the colours of mannerism at the end of his life. In the last quarter of the century, the poets subject the canonical forms of Petrarchism to deformations reminiscent of Mannerist paintings' treatment of the Renaissance's masterpieces. The change does not imply the abandonment of earlier styles but their subversion."[31]

While there is always room for exception in such comparisons between different art-forms, we have not really found in Ronsard the extreme polish, the deliberate distortion, between exquisiteness and caricature, that mark the Mannerist style in painting: certain moments in Desportes might come closer to such work. Rather we tend to agree with Warnke's original insight. The elements he describes as characteristic of the Early Baroque correspond almost perfectly with

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[30] Frank J. Warnke, *Versions of Baroque: English Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972).

[31] "Les poètes ne tarderont pas à délaisser cet idéalisme platonicien et s'attacheront à d'autres formes, plus inquiétantes, de la passion amoureuse … Le Ronsard plutôt classique des *Amours* et des *Odes*, estime Marcel Raymond, connaîtra aussi l'influence de colorations maniéristes à la fin de sa vie.[31] Dans le dernier quart du siècle, les poètes vont faire subir aux formes canoniques du pétrarquisme des torsions qui s'apparentent au travail des peintures maniéristes sur les chefs-d'oeuvre de la Renaissance. La rupture n'implique pas l'abandon des schémas préexistants, mais leur subversion." T. Gheeraert, *Miroitements de l'infini: Maniérisme et baroque, des arts plastiques à la littérature*, ch. 2.3.3 "Voluptés morbides" (U. of Rouen online course, 2018) at http://manierisme.univ-rouen.fr/spip/?2-3-3-Voluptes-morbides. See also Marcel Raymond, "Aux frontières du maniérisme et du baroque," *Baroque* [online], 3 | 1969, uploaded 30 April 2012, consulted 06 February 2022. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/baroque/288.

the traits we have discerned in Ronsard's late *Amours* for Hélène and which we have followed into their Donnean successors: "extravagance, extremeness, asymmetry; the illusion of thought in the very process of being thought; verse assimilated to the condition of heightened conversation; a diction at once colloquial and capable of embracing an effectively unlimited range of references to human activities, mundane or learned; a private poetry of the greatest intimacy which we, as audience, have the illusion of not hearing but overhearing; a syntax . . . which concentrates on the present."[32] The term "baroque" derives from the Portuguese *barroco*, describing a pearl with a flaw, an imperfect pearl. In following the journey from the Continental *concept* to the English conceit, we have seen again the narrowness of the Channel and the jewel's value.

York University & Barnard College

APPENDIX A: Elegie pour la Mort de Marie

Le jour que la beauté du monde la plus belle
Laissa dans le cercueil sa despouille mortelle
Pour s'en-voler parfaite entre les plus parfaits,
Ce jour Amour perdit ses flames et ses traits,
Esteignit son flambeau, rompit toutes ses armes,
Les jetta sur la tombe, et l'arrousa de larmes :
Nature la pleura, le Ciel en fut fasché
Et la Parque d'avoir un si beau fil trenché.

Depuis le jour couchant jusqu'à l'Aube vermeille
Phenix en sa beauté ne trouvoit sa pareille,
Tant de graces au front et d'attraits elle avoit :
Ou si je me trompois, Amour me decevoit.
Si tost que je la vey, sa beauté fust enclose
Si avant en mon cœur, que depuis nulle chose
Je n'ay veu qui m'ait pleu, et si fort elle y est,
Que toute autre beauté encores me desplaist.

[32] Frank J. Warnke, "Baroque Once More," pp. 147-148.

Dans mon sang elle fut si avant imprimee,
Que tousjours en tous lieux de sa figure aimee
Me suivoit le portrait, et telle impression
D'une perpetuelle imagination
M'avoit tant desrobé l'esprit et la cervelle,
Qu'autre bien je n'avois que de penser en elle,
En sa bouche en son ris en sa main en son œil,
Qu'encor je sens au cœur, bien qu'ils soient au cercueil.

J'avois au-paravant, veincu de la jeunesse,
Autres dames aimé (ma faute je confesse) :
Mais la playe n'avoit profondement saigné,
Et le cuir seulement n'estoit qu'esgratigné,
Quand Amour, qui les Dieux et les hommes menace,
Voyant que son brandon n'eschauffoit point ma glace,
Comme rusé guerrier ne me voulant faillir,
La print pour son escorte et me vint assaillir.

Encor, ce me dit-il, que de maint beau trofee
D'Horace, de Pindare, Hesiode et d'Orfee,
Et d'Homere qui eut une si forte vois,
Tu as orné la langue et l'honneur des François,
Voy ceste dame icy : ton cœur tant soit il brave,
Ira sous son empire, et fera son esclave.
Ainsi dit, et son arc m'enfonçant de roideur,
Ensemble dame et traict m'envoya dans le cœur.

Lors ma pauvre raison des rayons esblouye
D'une telle beauté se perd esvanouye,
Laissant le gouvernail aux sens et au desir,
Qui depuis ont conduit la barque à leur plaisir.

Raison, pardonne-moy : un plus caut en finesse
S'y fust bien englué, tant une douce presse
De graces et d'amours la suivoient tout ainsi
Que les fleurs le Printemps, quand il retourne ici.

De moy par un destin sa beauté fut cognue :
Son divin se vestoit d'une mortelle nue,
Qui mesprisoit le monde, et personne n'osoit
Luy regarder les yeux tant leur flame luisoit.
Son ris et son regard et sa parole pleine

De merveilles, n'estoient d'une nature humaine :
Son front ny ses cheveux, son aller ny sa main.
C'estoit une Deesse en un habit humain,
Qui visitoit la terre, aussi tost enlevee
Au ciel, comme elle fut en ce monde arrivee.
Du monde elle partit au mois de son printemps
« Aussi toute excellence icy ne vit long temps.

Bien qu'elle eut pris naissance en petite bourgade,
Non de riches parens ny d'honneurs ny de grade,
Il ne faut la blasmer : la mesme Deité
Ne desdaigna de naistre en trespauvre cité :
« Et souvent sous l'habit d'une simple personne
« Se cache tout le mieux que le destin nous donne.

Vous qui veistes son corps, l'honorant comme moy,
Vous sçavez si je mens, et si triste je doy
Regretter à bon droict si belle creature,
Le miracle du Ciel, le miroër de Nature.

O beaux yeux, qui m'estiez si cruels et si doux,
Je ne me puis lasser de repenser en vous,
Qui fustes le flambeau de ma lumiere unique,
Les vrais outils d'Amour, la forge et la boutique.
Vous m'ostastes du cœur tout vulgaire penser,
Et l'esprit jusqu'au ciel vous me fistes hausser.

J'apprins à vostre eschole à resver sans mot dire
A discourir tout seul, à cacher mon martire,
A ne dormir la nuict, en pleurs me consumer :
Et bref, en vous servant j'apprins que c'est qu'aimer.
Car depuis le matin que l'Aurore s'esveille,
Jusqu'au soir que le jour dedans la mer sommeille,
Et durant que la nuict par les Poles tournoit,
Tousjours pensant en vous, de vous me souvenoit.

Vous seule estiez mon bien, ma toute, et ma premiere,
Et le serez tousjours : tant la vive lumiere
De vos yeux, bien que morts, me poursuit, dont je voy
Tousjours le simulachre errer autour de moy.

Puis Amour que je sens par mes veines s'espandre,

Passe dessous la terre, et r'atize la cendre
Qui froide languissoit dessous vostre tombeau,
Pour r'allumer plus vif en mon cœur son flambeau,
Afin que vous soyez ma flame morte et vive,
Et que par le penser en tous lieux je vous suive.

Pourroy-je raconter le mal que je senty,
Oyant vostre trespas ? mon cœur fut converty
En rocher insensible, et mes yeux en fonteines :
Et si bien le regret s'escoula par mes veines,
Que pasmé je me feis la proye du torment,
N'ayant que vostre nom pour confort seulement.

Bien que je resistasse, il ne me fut possible
Que mon cœur, de nature à la peine invincible,
Peust cacher sa douleur : car plus il la celoit,
Et plus dessus le front son mal estinceloit.
En fin voyant mon ame extrememement attainte,
Je desliay ma bouche, et feis telle complainte.

Ah faux Monde trompeur, que tu m'as bien deceu !
Amour, tu es enfant : par toy j'avois receu
La divine beauté qui surmontoit l'envie,
Que maugré toy la Mort en ton regne a ravie.
Je desplais à moymesme, et veux quitter le jour,
Puis que je voy la Mort triompher de l'amour,
Et luy ravir son mieux, sans faire resistance.
Malheureux qui te croit, et qui suit ton enfance !

Et toy Ciel, qui te dis le père des humains,
Tu ne devois tracer un tel corps de tes mains
Pour si tost le reprendre : et toy mere Nature,
Pour mettre si soudain ton œuvre en sepulture.

Maintenant à mon dam je cognois pour certain,
Que tout cela qui vit sous ce globe mondain,
N'est que songe et fumee, et qu'une vaine pompe,
Qui doucement nous rit et doucement nous trompe.

Hà, bien-heureux esprit fait citoyen des cieux,
Tu es assis au rang des Anges precieux
En repos eternel, loin de soin et de guerres :

Tu vois dessous tes pieds les hommes et les terres,
Et je ne voy qu'ennuis, que soucis, et qu'esmoy,
Comme ayant emporté tout mon bien avec toy.
Je ne te trompe point : du ciel tu vois mes peines,
Si tu as soin là haut des affaires humaines.

Que doy-je faire, Amour ? que me conseilles-tu ?
J'irois comme un Sauvage en noir habit vestu
Volontiers par les bois, et mes douleurs non feintes
Je dirois aus forests : mais ils sçavent mes plaintes.

Il vaut mieux que je meure au pied de ce rocher,
Nommant tousjours son nom qui me sonne si cher,
Sans chercher par la peine apres elle de vivre,
Gaignant le bruit d'ingrat de ne la vouloir suivre.
Aussi toute la terre, où j'ay perdu mon bien,
Apres son fascheux vol ne me semble plus rien
Sinon qu'horreur, qu'effroy, qu'une obscure poussiere,
Au ciel est mon Soleil, au ciel est ma lumiere :
Le monde ny ses laqs n'y ont plus de pouvoir :
Il faut haster ma mort, si je la veux revoir :
La mort en a la clef, et par sa seule porte
Je revoiray le jour qui ma nuict reconforte.

Or quand la dure Parque aura le fil coupé,
Qui retient en mon corps l'esprit envelopé,
J'ordonne que mes os pour toute couverture
Reposent pres des siens sous mesme sepulture :
Que des larmes du ciel le tumbeau soit lavé,
Et tout à l'environ de ces vers engravé :

Passant, de cest amant enten l'histoire vraye,
De deux traicts differens il receut double playe :
L'une que feit Amour ne versa qu'amitié,
L'autre que feit la Mort ne versa que pitié.
Ainsi mourut navré d'une double tristesse,
Et tout pour aimer trop une jeune maistresse.

The dark day when the beauty of the world
left her remains terrestrial in the grave,
perfect to take her place among the perfect,
that day Love lost his arrows and his flames

extinguished torch and broke his weapons all
then threw them on the tomb he drenched in tears
All Nature mourned her, Heaven itself was sad
and Fate regretted cutting such a thread.

From gentle dusk unto the golden dawn
Phoenix found nothing equal to her beauty
such graces in her face, such loveliness:
if I am wrong, I was deceived by Love.
The first time that I saw her, in my heart
her beauty reigned, so that I have not since
seen anything to please, and with such power
that I can like no other loveliness.

So much is she imprinted in my blood
that everywhere I go the blessed portrait
of her beloved face would follow me:
the imprint of such an imagination
had so robbed me of wit and of my brain
thinking of her became my only good:
her mouth, her laugh, her hands, yes, and her eyes
are in my heart as much as in the coffin.

In days before, a victim of my youth,
I had loved other ladies, I confess:
but never had that wound bled very deeply
and on the skin it was but just a scratch,
when Love, who gaily threatens gods and men,
seeing his torch had never warmed my ice,
conceived a ruse, desiring not to spare me:
took her along when he assaulted me.

"True that you have, with trophies grand and lovely
from Horace, Pindar, Orpheus, Hesiod,
and even from Homer's magnificence,
adorned the tongue and honour of the French,
now see this lady: now your valiant heart
will crawl at her behest, and be her slave."
He said this, drew his bow, and with one shot
sent lady and the dart into my heart.

So, blinded by such beauty's beams, my Reason,

poor thing, lost consciousness and all his force,
left the wheel to desire and to the senses
who since have steered the ship just as they please.

Reason, forgive me: even one more careful
would have been caught, so thick the throng of joys
and graces and of loves came with her, very like
flowers that come with Spring, when he returns.

'Twas Destiny that made me know her beauty:
her deity was dressed in mortal cloud
that scorned the world, and barely did one dare
look in her eyes, so starry was their flame.
Her laugh, her glance, yes, and her conversation
were full of miracles, beyond the human:
So were her face, her hair, her footfall and her hands.
She was a Goddess clothed in human dress,
who visited the earth, and straight was rapt
back into heaven, just as she had come.
She left the world in the month of her springtime:
"Excellence here does not enjoy long life."

True, she was born in just a little town
of folk not rich nor honored in degree,
but blame her not: for Deity itself
did not disdain birth in a lowly city:
"And oft the dress of quite a simple person
Hides all the best that Destiny can give."

You who have seen and honored her as I,
know if I lie, and if I'm right to mourn
in sadness deep a creature of such beauty,
wonder of Heaven and the glass of Nature.

O lovely eyes, cruel to me and sweet,
I cannot ever cease to think of you
who were the flambeau of my only light,
Love's truest tools, his forge and workshop.
Each vulgar thought you chased out of my heart
and made me lift my spirit to the skies.

I learnt in your school dreaming without speech,

murmuring to myself, hiding my pain,
not sleeping nights, and drowning in my tears:
so serving you I learnt what love is made of.
From early morning when the Dawn awakes
to evening when the day sleeps in the sea
and while the night turns by the distant Poles
thinking of you, always remembered you.

You were my good, my all, my first of all,
and will be ever: so the lively light
of your eyes, even dead, pursues me, and
I ever see their image all around me.

May Love that's flowing richly in my veins
under the earth go and revive the ashes
that languish cold and dead beneath your tomb
relight more lively his torch in my heart
that you may be my flame, dead and alive,
and my thoughts follow you in every place.

Could I recount the pain that then I felt
hearing your death? my heart converted was
to senseless rock, my eyes were changed to springs:
and grief so surged along my veins that utterly
shattered I fell, a prey to torment's pain
with not a shred of comfort but your name.

Resisting was no use, there was no way
my heart, though naturally strong in pain
might hide its dolor: more it tried to hide it
the more the hurt was written in my face.
And when my soul had reached the ultimate
of torture, my mouth uttered this complaint:

O world of falsehood, how you have deceived me!
Love, you're a child: by you I came to have
the divine beauty far beyond desire
that Death came to your realm and robbed you of.
I hate myself and want to leave the daylight
now that I see Death's triumph over love,
stealing his precious best, without resistance.
Woe to who still believes your innocence!

And, Heaven, you: the "father of mankind,"
your hands should not have drawn such loveliness
to take it back so soon: nor mother Nature,
so soon put what you fashioned in the grave.

Now I have learnt for certain and for sure
that all that lives within this earthly globe
is nought but dream and smoke, a hollow show
that sweetly smiles at us and then deceives us.

Fortunate soul, of Heaven a citizen,
you sit now in the rows of precious angels
in endless rest, and far from cares and warfare:
beneath your feet you see the men and lands
and nought but grief and care and grimness,
as if you'd taken with you all I have.
I do not err: you see my pains in Heaven
if there you care for what we humans do.

What, Love, must I do? What is your counsel?
I'd happily go like a savage dressed in black
into the woods, and tell my honest sadness
to all the forests; but they know my dirge.

Better were I to die here by this rock
saying her name that's music to my ears,
not seek by effort to live after her
getting a bad name for my selfishness.
For all the earth, now I have lost my treasure,
after that dreadful theft seems nothing worth
but horror, fear, and a dark realm of dust.
In Heaven is my Sun, there is my light:
the world and his foul traps there have no power:
Hasten my death, now, if I want to see her:
Death has the key, and only through his door
can I behold the day that soothes my night.

So when Fate pitiless has cut the thread
that holds my spirit snugly in my body.
I hereby order that my bones be laid
simply to rest with hers in the same tomb:

and that the grave be cleansed by heaven's tears
and these words graven round about to read:

O passer-by, hear thou this lover's story.
A double wound he suffered from two arrows:
the one, from Love, was dipped in love and kindness,
the other, Death's, was dipped in grief and pity.
And so he died, felled by a double sadness,
And all for too much love of a young mistress.

APPENDIX B: "A Nocturnall upon St Lucies Day, beeing the shortest day"

'Tis the yeares midnight, and it is the dayes,
Lucies, who scarce seaven houres herself unmaskes;
The Sunne is spent, and now his flasks
Send forth light squibs, no constant rayes;
The worlds whole sap is sunke;
The generall balm th' hydroptique earth hath drunk,
Whither, as to the beds-feet, life is shrunke,
Dead and enterr'd; yet all these seeme to laugh,
Compar'd with mee, 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 Alchimie.
For his art did expresse
A quintessence even from nothingnesse,
From dull privations, and leane emptinesse;
He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot
Of absence, darknesse, death: things which are not.

All others, from all things, draw all that's good,
Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have;
I, by Love's limbecke, am the grave
Of all, that's nothing. Oft a flood
Have wee two wept, and so
Drownd the whole world, us two; oft did we grow
To be two Chaoses, when we did show
Care to ought else; and often absences
Withdrew our soules, 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 preferre,
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 Sunne renew.
You lovers, for whose sake the lesser Sunne
At this time to the Goat is runne[33]
To fetch new lust, and give it you,
Enjoy your summer all;
Since shee enjoys her long nights festivall,
Let mee prepare towards her, and let mee call
This houre her Vigill, and her Eve, since this
Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is.

[33] The Goat: the sign of Capricorn. St Lucy's Day, December 13, was popularly regarded as the shortest day, though in the Julian Calendar the winter solstice varied between December 10 and 12.