

Polemical Poetry

All things, desires, and loves are vain¹ (1658)

- [46] *All things, desires, and loves are vain,
But only that which tends
To God alone our chiefest good,
And all things else transcends.
My soul therefore by this sweet Love 5
shall day and night aspire,
And rest in God (all things above)
My Love and life's desire.
And while I live, I'll never cease
To languish² for his Love, 10
Breathing, and sighing after him,
Till he my life remove.
For since I am not where I love,
How can I comfort find,
But only in the song of Love 15
By Love to me assign'd?
And wheresoe'er³ this word⁴ is writ,
It yields a silver sound;
But if that word I miss in it,
Methinks I want my ground. 20
Nothing so simple can be penned
If it but treat of Love,
But that it serveth in some sort
My sadness to remove.
And shall my soul by senseless love, 25
Which yet is never true,
Bestow more love where it is lost,
Than wheret is only due?
O no my God, but rather let
Such folly be to me 30
A means to urge my sinful soul
To Love more fervently!
And henceforth let me draw no breath,
But to aspire by Love
To thee my God, and all my good 35
By whom I live and move.⁵*

¹ This poem is a fragment of "Amor Ordinem Nescit," lines 9-72, 101-200.

² Lose or lack vitality.

³ Wheresoever.

⁴ In the 1658 edition, "love" is printed above "word."

⁵ "For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, We are his offspring" (Acts 17:28, Douay-Rheims Bible).

	<i>No Stag in chase so thirsty is, Or greedy of sweet spring, As is my soul of thee my God While I here sighing sing.⁶</i>	40
	<i>My soul, where is thy Love, and Lord, Since him thou canst not find?⁷ O cheer up, heart, be comforted, For he is in thy mind!</i>	
	<i>To him relation thou may'st have, As often as thou goes Into the closet⁸ of thy heart, Thy griefs for to disclose.</i>	45
	<i>As silly Lambs from ravening Wolves For help to Shepherds fly,⁹ So shall my soul in every case For help and counsel hie¹⁰</i>	50
[48]	<i>To thee my God by humble Prayer, In hope, and confidence, That thou my Lord wilt succour¹¹ me, And be my soul's defense.</i>	55
	<i>And seeing that my God is rich, How can I say I'm poor? And he more mine, than I mine own: What can I wish for more?</i>	60
	<i>And in his Majesty and power, Much more I will rejoice, Than if of all in heaven and earth I had command, and choice.</i>	
	<i>My God one thing alone thou know'st I fear and apprehend, Which is my Lord for to displease, Whose mercies have no end.</i>	65
	<i>From all that do displease thine eyes, Be pleased to set me free, For nothing else in heaven or earth</i>	70

⁶ “As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after thee, O God. My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?” (Psalm 41:2-3, Douay-Rheims Bible).

⁷ “By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not” (Canticles 3:1-2, Douay-Rheims Bible).

⁸ “It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me” (Canticles 3:4, Douay-Rheims Bible).

⁹ “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matthew 7:15, Douay-Rheims Bible).

¹⁰ Hasten.

¹¹ Help.

	<i>Do I desire but thee. And let me rather death embrace, Than thee my God offend, Or in my heart to give thy place To any other friend.</i>	75
	<i>Nothing would grieve my soul so much, As in me to perceive Any affection in the world That thine would me bereave.¹²</i>	80
[49]	<i>I know thou must possess alone, Or else we are not thine In such good plight as we should be, If light to us did shine, As thou desirest it should do By grace our souls within; For which are all the helps we have Intended, and have been Imparted, and bestowed by thee, That we might live alone</i>	85 90
	<i>To thee who satiat'st pure souls With joys that are unknown. And woe to them a thousand times, Who interest have in any,¹³ Or have divided hearts to thee, After thy gifts so many. For thou hast purchased our love At too, too dear a rate, To have a partner in our heart, Which justly thou dost hate.</i>	95 100
	<i>O this thy wrong makes Angels blush, O, make it far from me Since that I am both body and soul All consecrate to thee!¹⁴</i>	105
[50]	<i>And I also will grieve with them, To see thee have such wrong From souls selected by thyself To sing with them the song Of Love, and praise to thee, O God, And even in this place To Contemplate thee, as we may, O sweet and happy grace! If we would die unto ourselves</i>	110

¹² Deprive of.

¹³ The text has a manicule pointing to this line.

¹⁴ A reference to the sacred vows that More took when she became a nun.

*And all things else but thee,
It would be natural to our souls* 115
*For to ascend, and be
United to our Center dear,
To which our souls would hie,
Being as proper then to us,
As fire to upwards fly.* 120
*O let us therefore love my God,
For Love pertains to him,
And let our souls seek nothing else,
But in this Love to swim,
Till we absorbed by his sweet Love* 125
*Return from whom we came,
Where we shall melt into that Love,
Which joyeth me to name.
And never can I it too much
Speak of, or it desire,* 130
*Since that my God, who's Love itself,
Doth only Love require.
Come therefore all, and let us love
And with a pure aspect,
Regard our God in all we do,* 135
*And he will us protect.
O that all things upon the earth,
Re-echoed with thy praise
My everlasting glorious God,
The Ancient of days!¹⁵* 140
*And it I wish with all my soul
Incessantly to sing;
But seeing this I cannot do,
My sighs to heaven shall ring;
Yea, if I writ out all the sea,* 145
*Yet could I not express
The joy and comfort I do feel
In what thou dost possess.
No gifts or grace nor comforts here
How great soe'er¹⁶ they be,* 150
*Can satiate¹⁷ my longing soul,
While I possess not thee.
For thou art all my heart's desire,
Yea, all that I do crave,
In earth or heaven now and ever* 155

¹⁵ "I beheld therefore in the vision of the night, and lo, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and he came even to the Ancient of days: and they presented him before him" (Daniel 7:13, Douay-Rheims Bible).

¹⁶ Soever.

¹⁷ Satisfy.

Thou art all that I would have.
And I do wish with all my soul,
That to thee I could pray,
With all my heart and all my strength
Ten thousand times a day.
Let peoples, tribes, and tongues confess¹⁸
Unto thy Majesty;
And let us never cease to sing
Sanctus, Sanctus¹⁹ to thee.

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¹⁸ “For it is written: As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God”
(Romans 14:11, Douay-Rheims Bible).

¹⁹ “Holy, holy”; a reference to a hymn sung during the Mass.