

How do i love thee



He claims that it is better to have loved and lost. She claims that it is better to never have loved at all. He spends his free time pining for her. She spends her time with him longing for freedom. While modern stereotypes tend to portray men as standoffish rogues, clinging tirelessly to independence, and women as the swooning, lovesick doters, anxiously awaiting the appearance of a ring, Renaissance and Restoration writers offer a strikingly different image of courtship. Through their subtle use of diction and imagery, Sir Philip Sidney, Lady Mary Wroth, and Thomas Shadwell demonstrate that virtuous men tend to be consumed with love, while virtuous women strive to avoid romance altogether. In his “Sonnet 31” of the sequence *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney portrays a freshly-rejected yet nevertheless virtuous and lovesick speaker who pines for his lover. Having read Sidney’s assessment of the pretentious woman’s rejection of the hero, Lady Mary Wroth retorts with a clever condemnation of men’s fickleness from the perspective of a reasonable and virtuous woman in her “Song 74.” Shadwell’s Restoration comedy *Bury Fair* juxtaposes the noble Bellamy’s consuming love of Gertrude with her sound and honorable rejection. In each of these three texts, the authors portray the actions of virtuous characters regarding love: the men seek it, while the women seek to avoid it. Despite his lover’s rejection of his affections, the speaker in Sidney’s “Sonnet 31” demonstrates his unfailing love for her in his lamentations of love lost. The speaker, presumably *Astrophil*, in his hour of despair seeks “fellowship” with the “Moon” that “climb’st the skies” (9, 1). His invocation of a lunar image indicates that his love extends beyond the physical and corruptible sublunary sphere, thus attesting to his virtue. Through Sidney’s subtle capitalization of “Love,” “Beauties,” and “Virtue,” he indicates that

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Astrophil intends to speak of these qualities in their purest forms, rather than the earthly and corruptible shadows of them (10, 11, 14). Furthermore, his inclusion of these forms in rhetorical questions implies that Astrophil has offered these perfect images of love to Stella only to be denied. In questioning the Moon if they “ call Virtue there ungratefulness,” Astrophil implies that Stella’s rejection of love is dishonorable, whereas his pursuit of love is just (14). In light of his camaraderie with the Moon and use of pure intentions, Astrophil establishes his virtue. The speaker then proves his love for Stella by indicating that his love is “ constant,” though she deems it “ want of wit” (10). Feeling slighted by Stella’s rejection, Astrophil laments that she scorns him “ whom the Love doth possess” (13). Sidney’s careful use of possession indicates that this honorable and devoted man feels consumed by his love for Stella. Astrophil acts as a mere servant of love, helpless to ignore his master’s will. Nevertheless, despite her pride, “ scorn,” and “ ungratefulness,” the speaker remains hopelessly in love with her and is consumed with a torrent of emotion (11, 13, 14). Sidney’s use of perfect forms and faithful love reveal that the virtuous man must endlessly pine for love. While Sidney’s sonnet portrays the deeds of an honorable man in love, Wroth’s “ Song 74” articulates a virtuous woman’s logic for refusal. The speaker of this poem depicts her integrity and practicality through her argument against succumbing to love. She claims that men in love act as children “ ever crying,” for once a woman indulges ever so slightly in their tantrums and pleadings for love, they crave attention and are “ never satisfied with having” (1, 4). While men may profess eternal love, measureless “ desires” and “ endless folly” ultimately cause them to “ breaketh” what they “ promiseth” (5, 6, 7). She proclaims that men “ vow

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nothing but false matter” and “cozen” women in an attempt to gain their affection, only to “leave” and “deceive” them soon thereafter (9, 10, 11, 12). Men’s “virtues” consist of their ability to love, leave, and “triumph” in women’s wailing for being abandoned (15, 14). In her opinion, the love of a man is as “firm in staying” as a feather and as “fierce in preying” as wolves. Because she sincerely doubts the truth of their love and integrity, the speaker of this poem cautions other women to “trust not one word that he speaketh,” “as a child then leave him crying,” and never actively “seek him so given to flying” (8, 19, 20). Since the speaker of this poem believes men to be but a “cause be of [women’s] failing,” she decides to remain virtuous by not becoming entangled in the ruse (14). Through her analytical response to Sidney’s poem coupled with vivid imagery and diction, Wroth maintains that an honorable woman abstains from love. While both Sidney’s and Wroth’s poems present one-sided accounts of virtuous people’s reactions to love, Shadwell’s comedy *Bury Fair* juxtaposes the actions of both men and women in a single text. Bellamy’s integrity appears in his debate with Wildish concerning the attributes of country life. Though he once lived in London and engaged in questionable activities, Bellamy now swears that he could “never be drunk” and believes “he that debauches private women is a knave” (18). Rather than freely engage in worldly temptations, Bellamy holds that he will “no more suffer [his] appetites to master [him],” thus attesting to his virtue (18). Furthermore, though he is present during the hatching of the French imposter scheme, Bellamy acts as the sole voice of reason, forcing Wildish to consider Mrs. Fantast’s feelings by asking what should happen should she fall “in love with him in earnest” (22). In addition to his personal convictions and concern for others, Bellamy also proves his

virtue through his reasons for doting on Gertrude by proclaiming her to have “ all the beauty and wit of her whole sex...and none of all their vanities” (71). Because of these qualities, Bellamy believes it “ impossible for a man to forbear thinking or talking of love, in the presence of so beautiful, so excellent a lady” as Gertrude (62). He becomes “ subdued” with love for her and promises that “ nothing can ever make [his] love decrease” or temper his “ violent fever” of love (71, 86). Though Bellamy ultimately couples with Philadelphia, his obsession with love never subsides, thus proving that virtuous men become consumed with love. In stark contrast to Bellamy’s fixation on love, Gertrude strives to avoid love in order to maintain her freedom. While the Fantast women absorb themselves in materialism and pretension, Gertrude appears as a practical and virtuous counterforce. In her argument with Lady Fantast, Gertrude upholds the importance of “ discretion” and “ common sense” (24). Additionally, she further proves her virtue through her praise of humility and purity when she holds that “ conversation ought to be free, easy, and natural” and that she admires common people because “ they come near nature, and have no art or affectation” (25, 29). Gertrude’s cleverness becomes even more evident upon her introduction to the Count. While the rest of the town ignorantly falls for his disguise, Gertrude immediately deems him “ apish” and a “ mere kickshaw” (41). By her contrast with the frivolous Fantast ladies, her affinity for purity and simplicity, and her keen judge of character, Gertrude exhibits the qualities of a virtuous woman. Despite the admiration of both Wildish and Bellamy, Gertrude pleads that they both “ desist” in their quest for her affections by stating that she has “ joy in freedom, that [she] cannot think of parting with it yet” (86). She believes that love is “ too violent to last,” giving

her “ but a short time to reign” in a husband’s affections (86, 88). Though she ultimately consents to marry Wildish, she insists on “ no raptures” for she “ shall never be quiet for him” (104). While Wildish eagerly offers her his heart, she merely presents him with her hand (104). Through Shadwell’s exposition of Gertrude’s character and his portrayal of her reaction to marriage, he indicates that virtuous women resist submission to love. From Sidney’s “ Sonnet 31” to Wroth’s “ Song 74” to Shadwell’s *Bury Fair*, these sixteenth and seventeenth century writers illustrate the polarized reactions to love displayed by virtuous men and women. Sidney’s speaker illustrates his virtue through allusions to spiritual realms and perfect forms.

Nevertheless, on earth, Astrophil becomes consumed with his love for Stella. Through her careful analysis of men’s habits and infidelities, Wroth’s speaker embodies honor. Her own denial of love coupled with her admonitions to other women reveal that virtuous woman aim to avoid love. Through his comedy *Bury Fair*, Shadwell juxtaposes the actions of Bellamy with Gertrude. Bellamy’s integrity becomes apparent in his personal standards as well as his consideration of others. Nevertheless, love conquers reason when he meets Gertrude. Through her denial of pretensions and vanity, Gertrude reveals herself as a moral and sensible woman. Because of her sensibilities, she views marriage as a surrender of her freedom and therefore resists love. The imagery and diction employed by these writers depict virtuous characters trapped in a dilemma: the men long to be free to love, and the women long to be free.