

*Polemical Poetry*

Amor Ordinem Nescit<sup>1</sup> (Bodleian)

- [fol. 1r] My God, to thee I dedicate  
    This simple work of mine,  
And with it also heart and soul  
    To be for ever thine;  
No other motive I will have, 5  
    But by it thee to praise,  
And to stir up my frozen soul  
    By love itself to raise.
- All things, desires, & loves are vain,  
    But only that which tends 10  
To God alone, our chiefest good,  
    And all things else transcends;  
My soul therefore by this sweet love  
    Shall day and night aspire,  
And rest in God all things above, 15  
    My love and life's desire.
- [fol. 1v] And while I live, I'll never cease  
    To languish<sup>2</sup> for his love,  
Breathing and sighing after him  
    Till he my life remove; 20  
For since I live not where I love,  
    How can I comfort find,  
But only in the song of love  
    By love to me assigned?
- In whatsoe'er<sup>3</sup> this word is writ, 25  
    It yields a silver sound;  
But if this word I miss in it,  
    Methinks I want my ground;  
Nothing so simple can be penned,  
    If it but treat of love, 30  
But that it serveth in some sort  
    My misery to remove.
- And shall my soul by senseless love

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<sup>1</sup> "Love knows no order"; a quotation from St Jerome, Letter to Chromatius, Jovinus, and Eusebius, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Lose or lack vitality.

<sup>3</sup> Whatsoever.

Which yet was never true,  
Have giv'n more love where it was lost 35  
Than where it's only due?  
O no, my God, but rather let  
This folly be to me  
A means to urge my sinful soul  
To love more fervently. 40

[fol. 2r] And henceforth let me draw no breath,  
But to aspire by love  
To thee, my God and all my good,  
By whom I live and move;<sup>4</sup>  
No stag in chase so thirsty is, 45  
Or greedy of sweet spring,<sup>5</sup>  
As is my soul of thee, my God,  
Whilst here I sighing sing.

My soul, where is thy love & Lord,  
Since him thou canst not find?<sup>6</sup> 50  
O cheer up, heart, be comforted,  
For he is in thy mind;  
To him relation one may have,  
As often as he goes  
Into the closet<sup>7</sup> of his heart, 55  
His griefs for to disclose.

As silly lambs from ravening wolves  
For help to shepherds fly,<sup>8</sup>  
So shall my soul in every case  
For help and counsel hie<sup>9</sup> 60  
To thee, my God, by humble prayer  
In hope and confidence,  
That thou, my Lord, wilt succour<sup>10</sup> me

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<sup>4</sup> "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).

<sup>5</sup> "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)

<sup>6</sup> "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).

<sup>7</sup> "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).

<sup>8</sup> "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7:15, Douay-Rheims Bible).

<sup>9</sup> Hasten.

<sup>10</sup> Help.

And be my soul's defense.

[fol. 2v]	For seeing that my God is rich, How can I say I'm poor? He is more mine than I my own; What can I wish for more? And in his majesty and power Much more I will rejoice; Than if of all in heaven and earth I had command and choice.	65      70
	O I desire no tongue nor pen, <sup>11</sup> But to extol <sup>12</sup> his praise, In which excess I'll melt away Ten thousand, thousand ways; And as one that is sick with love <sup>13</sup> Engrafts in every tree The names and praise of them they love, So shall it be with me.	75      80
	Which to attempt if it seem much To those that it espy, <sup>14</sup> Saying tis only for the just, To thee for help to fly; What then becomes of sinners poor, Or to whom shall they go, If not to thee? Ah, pity us, For we may love also.	      85
[fol. 3r]	Jesus did publicans <sup>15</sup> receive, Nor yet did he disdain Harlots <sup>16</sup> and thieves that begged help, Since which who can complain, Or fear that he will them reject When they their sins repent,	      90

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<sup>11</sup> No tongue to speak or pen to write.

<sup>12</sup> Praise enthusiastically.

<sup>13</sup> "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love" (Canticles 5:8, Douay-Rheims Bible).

<sup>14</sup> Catch sight of.

<sup>15</sup> "And it came to pass as he was sitting at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came, and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And the Pharisees seeing it, said to his disciples: Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners?" (Matthew 9:10-11, Douay-Rheims Bible).

<sup>16</sup> "Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matthew 21:31, Douay-Rheims Bible).

And fly unto his mercy sweet, 95  
Whose heart doth soon relent?

When we with tears beseech<sup>17</sup> him to  
Forgive our sins so many,  
And give such grace & strength henceforth 100  
As not to yield to any;  
My God, one thing alone, thou know'st,  
I fear and apprehend,  
Which is my Lord for to displease,  
Whose mercies have no end.

From all that doth displease thy eyes, 105  
Be pleased to set me free;  
For nothing else in heaven or earth  
Do I desire, but thee;  
And let me rather death embrace,  
Than thee, my God, offend; 110  
Or in my heart to leave a place  
For any other friend.

[fol. 3v] Nothing would grieve my soul so much,  
As in me to perceive  
That th' affection to the world 115  
Should me of thine bereave;<sup>18</sup>  
I know thou must possess alone,  
Or else we are not thine  
In manner such as we should be,  
If light to us do shine. 120

As thou desirest it should do  
By grace within our hearts,  
And all the helps that thou hast giv'n,  
And dayly yet imparts  
To us, intended were by thee, 125  
That we might live alone  
To thee, our God who fills pure souls  
With joys that are unknown.

And woe to them a thousand times,  
Who int'rest have in any, 130  
Or have divided hearts to thee,  
After thy gifts so many;

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<sup>17</sup> Implore.

<sup>18</sup> Deprive of.

	For thou hast purchased our love At too, too dear a rate To have a partner in our heart, Which justly thou dost hate.	135
[fol. 4r]	O this thy wrong makes angels blush, O make it far from me, Since I am both body and soul Consecrated to thee; <sup>19</sup> And I will also grieve with them, To see thee have such wrong From souls culled out by thee thyself To sing with them the song	140
	Of love and praise to thee, our God, And even in this place Thee to contemplate in our manner, O sweet and happy grace. If we would die unto ourselves, And all things else but thee, It would be natural to our souls For to ascend and be	145 150
	United to our center dear, To which our soul would hie, <sup>20</sup> Being as proper then for us As fire upwards to fly. O let us therefore love my God, For love pertains to him, And let our souls seek nothing else, But in thy love to swim,	155 160
[fol. 4v]	Till we, absorbed by his sweet love, Return from whence 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, Since that my God, who's love itself Doth only love require.	165
	Come therefore all, and let us love, And with a pure aspect	170

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<sup>19</sup> A reference to the sacred vows that More took when she became a nun.

<sup>20</sup> Hasten.

Regard our God in all we do,  
    And he will us protect.  
O that all things upon the earth  
    Echoed with thy praise,  
My everlasting glorious God, 175  
    The ancient of days.<sup>21</sup>

And I do wish with all my soul  
    Perpetually to sing,  
But seeing this I cannot do,  
    My sighs to heaven shall ring; 180  
Yea, if I writ out all the sea,  
    Yet can I not express  
The joy and comfort I do feel  
    In what thou dost possess.

[fol. 5r] No gifts or grace, or comfort here, 185  
    How great soe'er<sup>22</sup> they be,  
Can satiate<sup>23</sup> my longing soul,  
    Whilst I possess not thee;  
For thou art all my heart's desire,  
    Yea, all that I do crave 190  
In heaven or earth, yea, now or ever,  
    Th'art all my soul would have.

And I do wish with all my soul  
    That to thee I could pray  
With all my heart and all my strength 195  
    Ten thousand times a day.  
Let people, tribes, and tongues confess<sup>24</sup>  
    Unto thy majesty,  
And let us never cease to sing  
    Sanctus, sanctus<sup>25</sup> to thee. 200

Who be adored by ancients all,  
    Whose crowns lie at thy feet  
As justice doth require they should,  
    And as it is most meet;  
And we invited by thy saints 205

<sup>21</sup> "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).

<sup>22</sup> Soever.

<sup>23</sup> Satisfy.

<sup>24</sup> "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).

<sup>25</sup> "Holy, holy"; a reference to a hymn sung during the Mass.

And angels thee to praise,  
Will join with them with voices high  
Our souls by love to raise

[fol. 5v] To thee, of whom I'll never crave  
                  Whilst this my soul hath breath,                   210  
But that I may united be  
                  To thee in life and death;  
My God, my love and very life,  
                  My glory and my crown,  
My light shall only tend to this,                   215  
                  To joy in thy renown.

O let me, as the silver streams  
                  Into the ocean glide,  
Melt into that vast sea of love  
                  Which into thee doth slide!                   220  
The little birds do chirp and sing,  
                  And never weary be  
Of praising my Creator dear,  
                  And I scarce think on thee.

But what I cannot by myself                   225  
                  Accomplish in this kind,  
I'll beg of thy celestial court.  
                  Who to this is assigned  
By thy all-living, loving self,  
                  To whom all love is due,                   230  
To whom my heart hath been most false,  
                  Or rather never true.

[fol. 6r] The which remembering, my poor soul  
                  Doth even fail and faint,  
As any would, that here should find                   235  
                  Me out, my sins to paint;  
But thou thyself doth say to us,  
                  Thou wilt not sinners' death,  
But that we do convert and live<sup>26</sup>  
                  Even while our souls have breath.                   240

And no more then to cease to be,  
                  No more canst thou refuse  
To pardon humble penitents

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<sup>26</sup> "Say to them: As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways: and why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezechiel 33:11, Douay-Rheims Bible).

	That do themselves accuse; Being no person thou excepts, <sup>27</sup> All having cost thee dear, Yea, even thy own life itself. How can I therefore fear?	245
	If ever yet thou hadst disdained Sinners that fled to thee, Then had I little cause of hope, But this none yet did see; For if they do return to thee, Thy heart thou wilt not close, As witness can my wretched soul, That was so like to lose.	250 255
[fol. 6v]	All grace and goodness (if thou hadst Not with thy help prevented), By sins that would by bloody tears Be while I live lamented; If I as grateful were to thee As thou deservest I should, Or as another in my case Unto thy mercy would.	260
	And all that time thou livedst here, Thou many ways didst show That none should be refused by thee, Who didst with mercy flow; And this my wicked heart did find, Who after sins so many. Have found much favor in thy eyes, Without deserving any.	265 270
	O blessed ever be my God For this preventing grace, <sup>28</sup> Which I unworthy have received In this most happy place; I fled from thee by many sins, And thou didst follow me, As if my misery would have caused Some detriment <sup>29</sup> to thee.	275 280

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<sup>27</sup> Rejects.

<sup>28</sup> A reference to the doctrine of prevenient grace, in which God's grace occurs before a human being takes any action.

<sup>29</sup> Loss.



[fol. 7r]	How can this choose but wound my heart When I remember it, And ever serve to humble me Whilst at thy feet I sit? <sup>30</sup> From whence my Lord, & my God, & all, Permit me not to rise, Till I do love thee as thou wouldst, The which doth all comprise.	285
	For as thou knowest, all other loves But thine I do defy, <sup>31</sup> And let this love by thy sweet grace Possess me totally. All others for thy sake I love With equal charity; Only where obligation claims, Justly more love for thee,	290 295
	To those <sup>32</sup> that most advanced my love, And my desire of thee, These by respect thou doest exact Should be esteemed <sup>33</sup> by me; Yet not so much as to forget Or weaken this thy love, Which by thy law & will most just I should prefer above	300
[fol. 7v]	Them, which were but thy instruments; And therefore it would seem Very absurd, if I should them More than thyself esteem, Who didst by them thy counsel <sup>34</sup> give, Which was so good for me, And second it with thy sweet grace; The glory be to thee. Amen.	305 310

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<sup>30</sup> “And she had a sister called Mary, who sitting also at the Lord’s feet, heard his word” (Luke 10:39, Douay-Rheims Bible).

<sup>31</sup> Renounce.

<sup>32</sup> Reference to the confessors and spiritual advisors who helped guide the speaker of the poem to her love of God; God’s “instruments” (line 305).

<sup>33</sup> Valued.

<sup>34</sup> Advice.