

Sappho to Philaenis by John Donne

WHERE is that holy fire, which verse is said
To have? Is that enchanting force decay'd?
Verse that draws nature's works 1 from nature's law,
Thee, her best work, to her work cannot draw.
Have my tears quench'd my old poetic fire? 5
Why quench'd they not as well that of desire?
Thoughts, my mind's creatures, often are with thee,
But I, their maker, want their liberty.
Only thine image in my heart doth sit,
But that is wax, and fires environ it. 10
My fires have driven, thine have drawn it hence;
And I am robb'd of picture, heart, and sense.
Dwells with me still mine irksome memory,
Which, both to keep and lose, grieves equally.
That tells me how fair thou art; thou art so fair 15
As gods, when gods to thee I do compare,
Are graced thereby; and to make blind men see,
What things gods are, I say they're like to thee.
For if we justly call each silly man
A little world, what shall we call thee then? 20
Thou art not soft, and clear, and straight, and fair,
As down, as stars, cedars, and lilies are;
But thy right hand, and cheek, and eye, only
Are like thy other hand, and cheek, and eye.
Such was my Phao awhile, but shall be never, 25
As thou wast, art, and O, mayst thou be ever.
Here lovers swear in their idolatry,

That I am such; but grief discolours me.
 And yet I grieve the less, lest grief remove
 My beauty, and make me unworthy of thy love. 30
 Plays some soft boy with thee, O, there wants yet
 A mutual feeling which should sweeten it.
 His chin, a thorny, hairy unevenness
 Doth threaten, and some daily change possess.
 Thy body is a natural paradise, 35
 In whose self, unmanured, all pleasure lies,
 Nor needs perfection; why shouldst thou then
 Admit the tillage of a harsh rough man?
 Men leave behind them that which their sin shows,
 And are as thieves traced, which rob when it snows. 40
 But of our dalliance no more signs there are,
 Than fishes leave in streams, or birds in air;
 And between us all sweetness may be had,
 All, all that nature yields, or art can add.
 My two lips, eyes, thighs, differ from thy two 45
 But so, as thine from one another do,
 And, O, no more; the likeness being such,
 Why should they not alike in all parts touch?
 Hand to strange hand, lip to lip none denies;
 Why should they breast to breast, or thighs to thighs? 50
 Likeness begets such strange self-flattery,
 That touching myself all seems done to thee.
 Myself I embrace, and mine own hands I kiss,
 And amorously thank myself for this.
 Me, in my glass, I call thee; but alas, 55
 When I would kiss, tears dim mine eyes and glass.
 O cure this loving madness, and restore
 Me to thee, thee my half, my all, my more.
 So may thy cheeks' red outwear scarlet dye,
 And their white, whiteness of the Galaxy; 60
 So may thy mighty, amazing beauty move
 Envy in all women, and in all men love;

And so be change and sickness far from thee,
As thou by coming near keep'st them from me.