

The Definition of Love

My Love is of a birth as rare
 As 'tis, for object, strange and high;
 It was begotten by Despair
 Upon Impossibility.

5 Magnanimous Despair alone
 Could show me so divine a thing,
 Where feeble Hope could ne'er have flown
 But vainly flapped its tinsel wing.

10 And yet I quickly might arrive
 Where my extended soul is fixed;¹
 But Fate does iron wedges drive,
 And always crowds itself betwixt.

15 For Fate with jealous eye does see
 Two perfect loves, nor lets them close;^o
 Their union would her ruin be,
 And her tyrannic power depose.²

20 And therefore her decrees of steel
 Us as the distant poles have placed
 (Though Love's whole world on us doth wheel),³
 Not by themselves to be embraced,

Unless the giddy heaven fall,
 And earth some new convulsion tear,
 And, us to join, the world should all
 Be cramped into a planisphere.⁴

25 As lines, so loves oblique may well
 Themselves in every angle greet;⁵
 But ours, so truly parallel,
 Though infinite, can never meet.

30 Therefore the Love which us doth bind,
 But Fate so enviously debars,
 Is the conjunction of the mind,
 And opposition of the stars.⁶

ca. 1650–52

1681

1. The soul has extended itself from the speaker's body and fixed itself to his lover.

2. Two perfections, united, would not be subject to change and thereby to Fate.

3. Rotates as on its axis.

4. A two-dimensional map of the world; Marvell images a round globe collapsed into a flat pancake shape, top to bottom, which would bring the two

poles together.

5. Oblique lines can touch in angles, as might "oblique" lovers that (in one meaning of the term) "deviate from right conduct or thought."

6. "Conjunction" is the coming together of two heavenly bodies in the same sign of the zodiac; "opposition" places them at diametrical opposites.