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By Dr Oliver Tearle (Loughborough University) We've curated some exceptional very short poems from the Renaissance era. While we had to exclude a few favorites due to their length exceeding our self-imposed 14-line limit, we wanted to highlight these remarkable poems that showcase the traditional sonnet form's impact during this period. 1. Sir Thomas Wyatt - 'Whoso List to Hunt' One of the first sonnets written in English, this poem was loosely based on an Italian sonnet by Petrarch and explores themes of romantic entanglements and the fleeting nature of life. 2. Ben Jonson - 'On My First Sonne' This deeply moving elegy mourns the loss of Jonson's young son Benjamin, emphasizing the futility of human hopes in the face of mortality. 3. John Donne - 'Death, Be Not Proud' Death is personified as a boastful soldier, boasting of its conquests. In this powerful sonnet, Donne skillfully merges religious and erotic imagery to underscore the insignificance of death in the grand scheme. 4. George Herbert - 'A Wreath' This masterpiece showcases Herbert's technical prowess and poetic syntax, reflecting his devotion through intricate language and clever metaphors that weave a circular pattern around the wreath, symbolizing the totality of faith. 5. Sir Philip Sidney - Sonnet 31 from *Astrophil* We've compiled more of Wyatt's best poems here. Here's a rewritten version of the text, incorporating occasional spelling errors to subtly alter its tone: Stella, Sure if that long-with-love-acquainted eyes Can judge of love, thou feel'st a lover's case; I read it in thy looks; thy languished grace To me, that feel the like, thy state descries ... 'With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climbst in the skies': with this remarkable opening line, the 31st sonnet in Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella* (c. 1582) - the first substantial sonnet sequence written in English - begins. It's an example of apostrophe - of addressing someone or something absent - which, in this case, is the moon. Sidney, reflect on the hopeless love he feels for Penelope Rich (who could have been his wife, but he foolishly turned her down), wonders if the moon shares his lovesickness. The next poem, Sonnet 94 by William Shakespeare, reads: The summer's flower is to the summer sweet, Though to itself, it only live and die, But if that flower with base infection meet, The basest weed outbraves his dignity: For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds; Lilies that fester, smell far worse than weeds ... The final line of this dark and powerful sonnet sums up the thrust of the poem: 'Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.' This poem has attracted a great deal of commentary, but perhaps the simplest way to read it is as a comment on a beautiful lover's ability to misuse those who love them. The next two poems are brief, but no less interesting. Sir John Harrington (1560-1612) wrote: Treason doth never prosper, what's the reason? For if it prosper, none dare call it Treason. Michael Drayton, a Warwickshire poet born one year before Shakespeare, wrote the sonnet 'Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part.' The poem reads: Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part. Nay, I have done, you get no more of me; And I am glad, yea glad with all my heart, That thus so cleanly I myself can free ... Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639) left behind this lovely little couplet: He first deceased; she for a little tried To live without him; liked it not, and died. Finally, Lady Mary Wroth wrote Sonnet 37 from *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*: Night, welcome art thou to my minde distrest, Darke, heauy, sad, yet not more sad then I: Neuer could'st thou find fitter company For thine owne humour, then I thus opprest. If thou beest darke, my wrongs still vnderrest Saw neuer light, nor smallest blisse can spye: If heauy ioy from me too fast doth hie, And care outgoes my hope of quiet rest. Then now in friendship ioyne with haplesse me, Who am as sad and darke as thou canst be, Hating all pleasure or delight of lyfe, Silence, and griefe, with thee I best doe loue. Lady Mary Wroth was a trailblazing English poet who made history with her sonnet sequence, earning admiration from contemporaries including Ben Jonson. She drew inspiration from Sir Philip Sidney's innovative approach to sonnet-writing and honed her craft, as evident in this poem that delves into the depths of depression and darkness. The speaker longs to merge with night, two entities that share a natural affinity for each other. This poignant poem is part of our curated selection of top Renaissance poems and lyrics, featuring notable works by female poets. For more classic poetry recommendations, visit our pages on epic poems, female-authored poems, and love poems. Fans of literature may also appreciate *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse*, a comprehensive anthology that explores the era's rich poetic heritage.