Analysis of John Donne's "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day"

Is it truly better to have loved and lost rather than to have never loved at all as Alfred, Lord Tennyson expressed in his poem “In Memoriam A. H. H.?” The speaker of John Donne’s poem "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day" struggles with this question upon the death of his female lover. Several scholars propose the poem’s speaker is Donne writing upon his wife’s death, because it is known Donne passionately loved Anne and explicitly grieved her death. In Donne’s poem setting and literary devices convey the speaker's anguish upon his lover’s death, while allusions to Donne's other poems suggest the speaker and his lover may be Donne and his wife, respectively.

St. Lucy's Day, the shortest day of the year, occurred on December 13, traditionally known as the winter solstice. Astrologically speaking, it is the day when the sun entered the House of Capricorn, the first House of Death (Frost 153-154). Therefore, this day may metaphorically represent the speaker’s short time with his lover, and thereby, establishing the metaphorical connection between the sun and the speaker’s lover. Specifically, the poem’s setting is the eve of St. Lucy's Day, the longest night of the year. Night symbolizes darkness and death, enhancing the metaphorical connection between this day's death with the lover’s death. This longer night gives the speaker more time to reflect upon death and wallow in his anguish. Furthermore, the setting implies the speaker may
metaphorically represent his lover as St. Lucy, because he may see her as his personal Saint of the blind, or his source of light.

Donne’s use of literary devices begins with "year's midnight" (line 1), which metaphorically represents the year’s death, because midnight signals the day’s end. Thus, “midnight” begins the poem’s theme of death, indicating the speaker’s fixation on death, and thereby, establishing his anguish over his lover’s death. Additionally, the implication of the year's death confirms it is December, the last month of the year. December occurs in winter, a season associated with the death of plants and animals; therefore, the setting of December adds depth to this night's metaphorical relation to death, emphasizing the theme of death. Moreover, December’s cold temperature and the speaker’s frequent references to death develops the stanza’s "colder" tone, and thus, emphasizes the speaker's "colder" emotion. The progression from "year's midnight" to the day's midnight to Lucy's midnight focuses readers' attention on the more personal concept of St. Lucy's, or metaphorically, the lover’s, death.

In the next line, alliteration of "s" and "h" in the phrase "who scarce seven hours herself unmasks" (line 2) aesthetically connects “scarce” with “seven” and “hours” with “herself” and conceptually links all four words, emphasizing the shortness of both Lucy's day, and metaphorically, the lover's life. “Scarce” has a connotation of rarity that extends to St. Lucy's day, and metaphorically, the lover's life, by alliteration. This extension shows the speaker's admiration of his lover.
Also, "herself," which describes the day's gender, hints the metaphorical connection between this day's death and the death of the speaker's lover.

Furthermore, "unmasks," indicates night metaphorically masks the day as death metaphorically masks the lover's life, because it has the implication of human involvement.

Lines three through five are slightly indented, drawing readers' attention towards them. "The sun is spent, and now his flasks/ Send forth light squibs, no constant rays" (lines 3-4) provides the imagery of a setting, or dying, sun, continuing the speaker's fixation on the theme of death, and thus, emphasizing his anguish. This imagery also hints at the speaker's emotional pain since people associate daytime with light and positive emotions, such as happiness, and nighttime with darkness and negative emotions, such as loneliness. Since the setting sun is male, it may metaphorically insinuate the speaker experiences death, stressing the speaker's anguish. Both the imagery and metaphor convey the death of the speaker's lover extinguished his source of light, emphasizing his inter-connection with his lover, and thereby, his anguish over her death. The sun's limited ability to send out the less-substantial "light squibs" not "constant rays" maintains the metaphorical bond between the speaker and his lover, and therefore, suggests the speaker's anguish over her death. Alliteration of "s" in the phrase "The sun is spent" aesthetically connects "sun" to "spent," emphasizing the theme
of death, the day's death, and the lover's death, because of the metaphorical relationship between the sun and the speaker's lover.

Additionally, alliteration of "w" and "s" in "world's whole sap is sunk" (line 5) aesthetically connects "worlds" to "whole" and "sap" to "sunk" and conceptually links all four words, again emphasizing the theme of death, and metaphorically, the lover's death. "Whole," indicative of entirety, and "sap," the life force of plants, both convey value, metaphorically proposing the speaker valued his lover's life. The placement of "whole" between "world" and "sap," aesthetically relates "whole" to both words, stressing the lover's value to the speaker and the great effect her death has on his well-being. Lastly, "sunk" has a negative connotation of depression and permanent loss, which emphasizes the speaker's anguish.

In line six, Donne continues the speaker's fixation on the theme of death, stating "The general balm th' hydroptic earth hath drunk." The "general balm," a medicinal treatment, may metaphorically represent his lover's life, demonstrating the speaker's belief his lover positively influenced both his and the world's well-being. There is also a pun on "balm" as in "embalming" the dead, continuing the speaker's fixation on death, thereby, emphasizing his agony. Line six may additionally metaphorically represent the burial of his lover's body, because the imagery of the earth "drinking" his lover's body resembles the process of a burial and the body's natural decomposition into the surrounding earth. Moreover,
“hydroptic,” defined as insatiably thirsty, hints at the speaker's disapproval over his lover's death, because its negative connotation as greedy is inflicted on "earth." “Drunk” has a negative connotation of permanent loss; therefore, it conveys the speaker's fixation on death and his anguish.

Another important word is "Whither" in "Whither, as to the bed's feet, life is shrunk" (line 7). “Whither,” meaning to go by forceful movement, resembles "wither," meaning to die, continuing the speaker’s fixation on death, thereby, stressing his anguish. “Life” is personified as it is forced to shrink to "To the bed's feet," therefore, it is vulnerable. Line seven is a simile for how a dying person shrinks to their bed's feet and "life is shrunk" is a metaphor for dying. During the Renaissance time period, the bed served as the place of birth, marriage and sex, and death (Sabine 246). Keeping in mind this progression, one's life literally shrinks while on their bed; therefore, the mention of the bed continues the speaker's fixation on the theme of death, and thereby, stresses his anguish over his lover's death. Additionally, "shrunk" has the connotation of permanent loss, continuing the speaker's fixation on death, and consequently his anguish over his lover's death. A hissing and buzzing sound, produced by the repetition of the sounds “s” and “z” in this stanza adds to the dark tone of the poem (Hollingsworth 91-92).

The reality of the lover’s death is also conveyed by the short phrase "Dead and interred" (line 8), because "dead" and "interred" have negative connotations.
The separation of these three words from the preceding phrase by a comma and the following phrase by a semi-colon emphasizes their importance. By this point in stanza one, darkness and deprivation govern the poem; the speaker's physical world has no light, moisture, or and life (Frost 150). Additionally, the images of the sun setting, the world's sap sinking, and life shrinking are apocalyptic in nature, suggesting the departure of the lover's spirit has resulted in the death of the world. (Guibbory 217-218).

Lines eight and nine truly show the speaker's anguish when he metaphorically calls himself the epitaph of the previously mentioned dead things. As Carol Sicherman notes, the speaker's claim he exists as an "epitaph" shows his underlying connection to life, because epitaphs are created by living beings (81). Essentially, the speaker has a link with life; however this link revolves around death. The rhyme link between "laugh" (line 8) and "epitaph" (line 9) further demonstrates the speaker's anguish because the two words are emotional opposites. Furthermore, the order of these two contrasting words metaphorically represents the death of the speaker's happiness, because "epitaph," associated with unhappiness due to its former association with death, follows "laugh," associated with happiness (Sabrina Light).

Stanza two, is different from stanza one, because the speaker addresses the readers and discusses the effect of his lover's death on a slightly less metaphorical level. The imperative sentence structure in "Study me then, you who shall lovers
be/ At the next world, that is, at the next spring" (lines 10-11) demonstrates the speaker wishes future lovers to learn from him, implying the speaker was once a lover. "Then" adds a sense of helplessness and hopelessness to the speaker's voice by indicating the speaker cannot change his feelings, emphasizing his anguish. It also starts the speaker's warning to future lovers to study him (Unger 47), because it sets up a cause and effect dynamic. Furthermore, the phrase "you who shall lovers be" sounds slightly belittling, because of the speaker's direct clarification of "you" and his assumption of audience's naivety, which helps show the speaker's darker mood. “Next" associates "spring," a season symbolic of youth, liveliness, and happiness, with the future lovers, not the speaker, augmenting his sense of hopelessness and anguish.

Similarly to lines three through five, lines twelve through fourteen are indented, drawing readers' attention toward these lines. In lines twelve and thirteen, the speaker metaphorically and paradoxically states "For I am every dead thing, /In who love wrought new alchemy" (lines 12-13), demonstrating his emotional conflict, and thereby his anguish. "Every" conveys the speaker's overwhelming grief, because it is all-encompassing. Readers observe the speaker blames love for his grief, because he states it "wrought new alchemy," conveying his anguish. "Alchemy" usually denotes a chemical transformation from metal to gold, but "new" changes the word's meaning. Instead of describing an improvement of metal, this "new alchemy" describes a harmful transformation of
the speaker. Moreover, "art," in the phrase "For his art did express" (line 14) has a positive connotation, which it transfers to "love" because it is love's "art," showing the speaker's conflicting attitudes towards love, and thereby, communicating his anguish. During the Renaissance, "express" meant to squeeze out, so love's "art" squeezed something from "every dead thing/ In whom Love wrought new alchemy," or the speaker, substantiating his feelings of emptiness and anguish. Scholar Andrea Hollingsworth observes this poem's implied power of love to both leave someone with nothing and change them into nothingness upon the death of their lover (Hollingsworth 90).

In lines fifteen through eighteen, the speaker explains love made him worse than "nothingness" (line 15) because it squeezed a "quintessence" from his "nothingness" (line 15), making him the purest form of nothing. A "quintessence," a fifth element that composed celestial bodies, was supposedly extracted through alchemical distillation, adding meaning to the metaphor of love's alchemy. The magical and pure connotations of quintessence signal that its extraction has spiritual implication for the speaker (Dr. Louis Martin), but the fact this quintessence is "of nothingness" suggests the spiritual implications are dark. “Nothingness" may also metaphorically represent the speaker's disposition, communicating he feels lonely and worthless without his lover.

After his "quintessence" was extracted, the speaker dramatizes his anguish through the redundant, descriptive, complex phrases "dull privations" (line 16)
and "lean emptiness" (line 16). Specifically, "lean," supports the speaker's feelings of "emptiness," because it means lacking in flesh, which relates to the speaker's loss of his lover. "Ruined," in "He ruined me" (line 17), has strong negative connotations, conveying the speaker's grief and anger towards love for perpetrating this destructive alchemy.

As a result of this alchemical process, the speaker is paradoxically "re-begot," or re-procreated, of "absence, darkness, death," meaning he is the "child" of concepts that do not physically exist. "Re-begot" also has a religious connotation, deepening the implications of the speaker becoming filled with "things that are not" and showing his agony on a spiritual level. This word contributes to the implication that love inverts the life-giving Sacrament, leaving the speaker incapable of dying (Guibbory 218). An aesthetic (alphabetical order) and conceptual (seriousness) progression in "absence, darkness, death" demonstrates the speaker's overwhelming grief and anguish. Furthermore, "nothingness" (line 15), "emptiness" (line 16), "absence" (line 18), and "darkness" (line 18) have negative connotations as "things which are not" (line 18), and all end with the "ess" sound, making the words fade away to nothingness, stressing their meanings. "Death" is last in the aforementioned progression, and does not end with "ess," therefore, it, and the speaker's fixation on death, is further emphasized, demonstrating the speaker's continued agony. Lastly, the speaker's
clarification of these concepts as "things which are not," shows he purposefully chose these words, thereby, emphasizing their importance and his emotional pain.

At the start of stanza three, repetition of "all" in the phrase "All others, from all things, draw all that's good" (line 19) dramatizes the speaker's anguish, because "all" denotes "the greatest possible." The vague words of "others," "things," and "good" convey the speaker's indifference to the "things" that "others" have that are "good," since he only cares about his "good," his lover. Their vagueness also emphasizes the speaker's anguish, because the concept of vagueness is imprecise, making the words seem all-encompassing. Listing the "all that's good" as "life, soul, form, spirit" (line 20), the speaker implies he, and the world around him, lack these qualities of "being," demonstrating the catastrophic nature of his lover's death (Guibbory p.217). Moreover, line twenty conveys the speaker's belief he has become the embodiment of "nothingness" and "death," and thus, conveying his anguish.

At this point in the poem, it is important to recognize that the speaker repeatedly references the number five. Scholar Clarence Miller states that, because its association with the Virgin in traditional meditation, the number five was also associated with exaltation of ideal women. He notes the speaker's "quintessence" is divided into five words of representation ("privations," "emptiness," "absence," darkness," and "death"). Also, he notes that the speaker describes the state contrary to his "nothingness" in five words of representation
Given the association of five with ideal women, and that the speaker repeatedly uses the number five, it may be assumed the speaker may be trying to convey that his lover was an ideal woman, and maybe even that he became an "ideal" "nothingness" in contrast to an ideal "being."

Indentation draws readers’ attention to lines twenty-one through twenty-three, emphasizing their importance. In “I, by love’s limbeck, am the grave/ Of all, that’s nothing” (lines 21-22), “by love's limbeck" continues the metaphor of love's "new alchemy," since a "limbeck" is used in distillation. “By” indicates the speaker again blames love for his anguish; therefore, his anguish is worsened because it is not within his control. Alliteration of "l" in "love's limbeck" stresses the speaker's disdain toward love, because it connects "love" with "limbeck," portraying love as the perpetrator of the detrimental "new alchemy."

Metaphorically comparing himself to a grave, the speaker conveys his anguish through his fixation on death. This metaphor corroborates lines seventeen and eighteen, where the speaker states he has been re-begotten of death, because graves are re-begotten of dead bodies. Furthermore, “the” in line twenty-one has connotations of uniqueness, thereby, making the speaker’s metaphorical grave, or his current state of existence, unique. Because “All” is indicative of entirety, it emphasizes his anguish. Additionally, the speaker’s paradoxical existence as
something that is “nothing,” or “not at all,” emphasizes his confliction, and thereby, his anguish.

The speaker’s hyperbole "Oft a flood/ Have we two wept, and so/
Drowned the whole world, us two" (line 23-26) expresses his belief that he and his lover shared a powerful relationship via the word pairs of "flood" and "drowned” and "whole" and "world," which have connotations of severity and power, respectively. Additionally, this hyperbole demonstrates the power of the lovers’ relationship in stating, together, their tears could negatively affect the entire world. This idea is shown in line five in which the speaker states "the world's whole sap is sunk," hinting at the negative consequences of the lovers’ parting, and thereby, emphasizing the power of their relationship. In lines twenty-three through twenty-seven, words such as "we," "us," and "our" demonstrate a non-physical, spiritual unity between the speaker and his lover. Additionally, "we" (line 23) shifts the audience from "you lovers" to the speaker's deceased lover, presenting a softer, more reflective tone, and consequently, showing the speaker's love for his late companion.

“Oft did we grow/ To be two chaoses, when we did show/ Care to aught else” (lines 24-26), a second hyperbole employed by the speaker, stresses the disconnection from reality he felt while separated from his lover during her life. The word “chaos” dramatizes the speaker’s anguish, because it has negative connotations of disorder, disconnect, and shapelessness. The reflective nature of
this hyperbole augments the current anguish of the speaker upon his lover’s permanent absence. Together, lines 22-29 reverse Genesis (Miller 310), conveying the speaker's spiritual suffering, and thereby, deepening his anguish.

Lines twenty-six through twenty-seven, “Often absences/ Withdrew our souls, and made us carcasses,” introduce a third hyperbole that shows the power of the lovers’ bond by asserting their souls were literally, and figuratively, drawn out of their bodies when they were separated during his lover’s life. Figuratively, it conveys the disconnection from the physical world that the lovers felt in the absence of one another, and thus, augments the speaker’s current anguish upon his lover’s permanent absence. The speaker’s mention of their souls also makes his and his lover’s love more spiritual, emphasizing its purity and richness. Furthermore, hard "c's" in the already harsh word (Emmy Reber) "carcasses," make the word sound even harsher, emphasizing the effect of their souls' literal and figurative disconnection from their bodies and the world, and thus, augmenting the speaker’s anguish upon his lover’s permanent absence.

Repetition of "oft" (lines 22, 24, and 26) and the use of past tense verbs (lines 22-27) momentarily changes the poem's tone from cold, despondent, and melancholic to warm, contented, and reminiscent, demonstrating the speaker's fondness of his lover. The new tone also softens this part of the poem, exposing the speaker's true anguish in thinking about his lover’s permanent absence. Moreover, the repetitive progression from "we," or “us,” to "two" (lines 23-25)

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emphasizes the eventual separation of the lovers, and consequently, the speaker's fixation on death and his current agony.

Starting the fourth stanza, "But," in the phrase "But I am by her death (which word wrongs her)" (line 28), signifies the poem's turning point; the speaker's admission that his anguish is over his lover's death. In this stanza, the speaker does not address a specific audience and returns to discussing the effect of his lover's death on his existence, returning his tone to cold, despondent, and melancholic. The "colder" tone reflects the speaker's "colder" emotional state. Parentheses distinguish the phrase "which word wrongs her" (line 28), emphasizing the speaker's belief death "wrongs" his lover. Additionally, both the alliteration of "w" in this phrase and the harsh sound of "ngs" in "wrong" emphasize "her," stressing the speaker's belief death "wrongs" his lover.

Because of the lover's death, the speaker is "Of the first nothing, the elixir grown" (line 29), meaning the speaker has grown into the "elixir" from the "first nothing." This line shows the lover's value in the speaker's life and validates his belief he has become a worse than nothingness. "The elixir grown" continues the alchemical metaphor previously mentioned, because an "elixir" is literally a preparation that is used to change metals into gold. “Elixirs" usually prolong life, but the speaker's elixir prolongs his "living death," creating a situation that is an oxymoron to show the speaker's great suffering.
Indentation of lines thirty through thirty-three draws readers' attention to these lines. "Were I a man, that I were one" (line 30) dramatizes the speaker's anguish, because the speaker questions whether or not he were even a man, something which is known to be true. The implication of the speaker's questioning attitude conveys the speaker's belief that he is worse than nothing. The words "needs" and "must" in the following phrase "I needs must know" (line 31) indicate the answer to this question is necessary for the speaker to function, and therefore, shows the speaker's emotional instability in the wake of his lover's death. In the next few lines, the speaker conveys his inability to cope with his seemingly endless state of "nothingness," emphasizing his anguish. The conjecture "I should prefer, /If I were any beast, /Some ends, some means" (lines 31-33) shows the speaker's desire be something besides "nothingness." Repetition of "some," emphasizes the speaker's desire, and therefore, his current anguish. The speaker states "yea plants, yea stones detest and love" (line 33-34) meaning even they have attractions and repulsions compared to him, who does not, emphasizing his belief he has become the embodiment of "nothingness." Furthermore, repetition of "all" in line thirty-four, "all, all some properties invest" conveys everyone/everything but the speaker has "some properties," emphasizing his anguish in his existence as a worse than "nothingness."

In lines thirty-five and thirty-six, the speaker uses a simile to compare himself to an "ordinary nothing" (line 35), like a "shadow" (line 36), as he
questions if his existence is like a shadow's existence. The speaker's asking himself if he is an "ordinary nothing" metaphorically conveys his low opinion of himself without his source of light, his lover, because shadow or not, the speaker believes he is some sort of nothingness. Furthermore, the simile of the shadow stresses his struggle to cope with his anguish because "if" (line 35) and "must" (line 36), which have connotations of uncertainty and necessity, respectively. These connotations indicate the speaker is unsure if a "light" (line 36) or "body" (line 36), symbols of his spiritual and physical reason for existence, respectively, are within him.

In the fifth and final stanza, the speaker declares "But I am none"(line 37), deciding he is not an "ordinary nothing." According to line thirty-six of the last stanza, this means he acknowledges that he does not possess a "light," a spiritual reason for existence, or a "body," a physical reason for existence. Taking the phrase in a religious context, the speaker may be saying he is isolated from God (Guibbory 219), demonstrating that the speaker is also suffering spiritually. This declaration extends the metaphor of a setting sun in the first stanza, because a setting sun causes a shadow to disappear, similar to how his lover's death caused him to cease to exist as something.

"Nor will my sun renew" (line 37) again contains the idea of the sun setting permanently. "Renew" means to regain something that has already passed or been lost, but in the context of the line, readers observe the sun will not renew,
deepening his metaphorical relation of the sun to his deceased lover because his female companion cannot return to life. The imagery produced by this metaphor also demonstrates the speaker's dark, depressive mood, because a setting sun covers the world in darkness, a concept associated with depression.

Metaphorically, the sun setting permanently may also represent the speaker's loss of hope, happiness, and his reason to live, because the sun is associated with carrying the promise of new day and life-sustaining sun rays. An third metaphorical implication is that the speaker's suffering is on a spiritual level, because there may be a pun on "sun" as "son," as in Christ, the son of God.

Taking into consideration the pun on sun and the metaphorical relation of the sun to the speaker, it may be asserted the speaker sees his lover as Christ (Guibbory 219). Therefore, the third metaphor of the permanently setting of the sun hints the speaker is left-behind by his lover and Christ conveying the speaker's inability to be saved from his anguish. Lastly, line thirty-seven is the shortest sentence of the poem, thus, it stands out, and adds the qualities of raw truth and utter realization to the speaker's misery. The speaker may fear he is forever separated from both his lover and God for his idolatrous love of his pure lover (Guibbory 219).

By switching his audience back to the other lovers, the speaker shows his acceptance of his existence as an unordinary "nothingness," and his intentions to remain as such in line thirty-eight, "You lovers, for whose sake the lesser sun."

"Lesser" denotes something inferior, therefore, the phrase "lesser sun," indicates
the speaker's belief his source of light, his lover, was greater than any of the other lovers' suns, or lovers. The Goat, mentioned in "At this time to the Goat is run/
To fetch the new lusts, and give it you" (lines 39-40) was often viewed as lustful. Thus, by saying the lovers' "lesser" suns went to the "Goat" to get "new lust," the speaker belittles the romantic integrity of the other lovers' relationships suggesting the other lovers' relationships are based on lust, or physical attraction, unlike his and his lover's relationship, which he believed based on a deeper, spiritual attraction.

As an ending message to the lovers, the speaker states "enjoy your summer all" (line 41). The imperative sentence structure, indicated by the starting word "Enjoy," conveys the speaker's tone of warning. "Summer" metaphorically represents the lovers' time together before death, because it occurs after spring, the season of birth, but before fall and winter, seasons associated with death. Therefore, this line is the speaker's warning to future lovers to enjoy their time together now, before it is too late, emphasizing the speaker's anguish over his lover's death.

In lines forty-two through forty-three, the speaker states "Since she enjoys her long night's festival/ Let me prepare towards her." "She" may represent St. Lucy, or metaphorically, the speaker's companion, transferring a connotation of sacredness to the speaker's lover. The phrase "her long night's festival" may indicate the celebration of St. Lucy's Day or may metaphorically represent
heaven, since "festival" has positive connotations and it is often associated with celebrations. Additionally, it may pun on the three-day festival of marriage, during which newlyweds may have had a "long night" because of required abstinence from sex (Sabine 248). The speaker may have used this pun to convey his hope that he would be spiritually reunited with his lover after abstaining from physical contact for a long time. "Let me prepare towards her" can also demonstrate the speaker's eagerness to be with his lover, and, conveys his admiration and his love toward her. Together, "Since" (line 42) and "Let" (line 43), present a cause and effect dynamic between the speaker and his lover, showing the speaker's dependency on his lover and his loyalty to her. His dependency and loyalty deepen his anguish because the speaker seems alone and lost without his lover.

By metaphorically comparing his lover to St. Lucy earlier in the poem, in line forty-four, the speaker not only calls the night St. Lucy's vigil and eve, but also his lover's vigil and eve, adding a connotation of holiness and sacredness to the female's character. Specifically, the term "vigil" has double meaning: 1) the eve of a holy day or festival (Christian Church); 2) the funeral custom, known as a wake, of people watching the body of the deceased during all or part of the time from their death to burial. Therefore, the "vigil" in the poem may refer to both the night before St. Lucy's Day and the wake of the speaker's lover. "Both the year's, and the day's deep midnight is" (line 45), brings the poem full circle,
demonstrating that the speaker's love for his lover and his anguish upon her death are endless. "Is" fades the poem away to nothingness, leaving readers feeling an emptiness and hopelessness similar to that the speaker experiences throughout the poem.

Overall, by the poem's end, the speaker's anguish is exhibited through the presence of his conflicting attitudes. Early in the poem, the speaker warns future lovers of love's negative consequences, but then foretells their joy in stanza five. Additionally, upon stating "her long night's festival" (line 42), the speaker associates his lover's death with the mortal world in a negative fashion in stating "long night," but also associates it in a positive manner in calling it her "festival." Lastly, the phrase "Let me prepare towards her" (line 43) shows the speaker's suicidal, but faithfully promising attitude toward his own death (Unger 49).

Many scholars debate whether or not Donne wrote this poem upon the death of his wife Anne More Donne in 1617 (Frost 150). Opposed to the idea, Scholar Doniphan Louthan believes Donne wrote this poem after the marriage of Lucy Harington to Edward Russell, the third Earl of Bedford. However, as Louthan himself states, Louthan cannot support his hypothesis with biographical context, because it is believed Donne and Lucy may have only met twelve years after the poem was written (144). Unlike Louthan, scholar Rodney Edgecombe believes the subject of Donne's poem is Anne More, since it seems to take an antithetical approach to Edmund Spenser's "Epithalamion," published in 1595.
Edgecombe argues Spenser's autobiographical poem, discussing his wedding on summer solstice, has parallels to Donne's poem, discussing the separation of lovers, on St. Lucy's Day; therefore, he reasons Donne's poem may be autobiographical in nature, describing his separation from Anne (142-144). Still yet, scholar Kate Frost believes Donne's poem is written upon Anne's death, because of Donne's biographical linkages to St. Lucy's Day the day he did such things as preach memorial sermons, date his will, reveal his choice to take Orders, and maybe even marry (154). The debate between scholars will likely never be resolved; however, it is interesting to examine the possible allusions in this poem to Donne's earlier poetry in an effort to support the notion the speaker and his lover of this poem are Donne and Anne, respectively.

For example, Donne is known to have discussed the influence of Anne's life and death on him in his poem "Since She whom I Loved." In this poem, Donne specifically refers to Anne as his "good" in the phrase "my good is dead" (line 2). After his "good" is dead, Donne focuses on celestial things as he, like Adam before Eve's creation, is surrounded by the loneliness deemed "not good" by God (Dipasquale 185). In line nineteen, "All others, from all things, draw all that's good," of "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day," the speaker believes he has no "good" as a result of love's "new alchemy. Because of her death, he becomes the "quintessence" of "nothingness," making him worse than nothingness. The religious connotation of "quintessence" and the phrases
"dull privations" and "lean emptiness" conveys the speaker seems to be experiencing the same primordial loneliness Adam suffered in the absence of Eve. Comparing the use of "good" in these two poems may suggest the deceased lover in "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day" is Anne.

Donne's "The Anniversary," which he wrote for Anne upon the one-year anniversary of their meeting, briefly mentions the sun as something which ages with them. Donne writes: "The sun itself, which makes times, as they pass/ Is elder by a year now than it was/ when thou and I first one another saw" (lines 3-5). If the sun keeps aging with them, it may be predicted it dies when one or both of them die. In "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day," the sun's setting upon the death of the speaker's lover" displays the aforementioned idea. However, unlike "The Anniversary," the sun in "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day" takes a more direct metaphorical role, representing the speaker's source of light, which is the female lover, and by extension, possibly Anne. Since Donne wrote "The Anniversary" for Anne, the display of this idea in "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day" may suggest speaker's lover was Anne.

Lastly, different parts of "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day" also resemble parts of Donne's "A Valediction of Weeping," written for Anne, suggesting the possibility the lover may be Anne. In line seven of "A Valediction of Weeping," the speaker calls his lover's tears "emblems of
more," creating a pun on Anne's maiden name "More." The speaker believes these tears could diminish him to "nothing." In "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day," Donne plays on the concept of "More" being his "all" by insisting the speaker has been reduced to "nothing" (Guibbory 218). Another example involves line thirteen of "A Valediction of Weeping," which reads "And quickly make that, which nothing, all." Similarly, in "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day" the lover positively influences the speaker, who believes he is nothing without her. Additionally, lines fourteen through eighteen of "A Valediction of Weeping," which convey the idea Donne and Anne's tears, mixed together, could overflow the world, are similar to lines twenty-three through twenty-four of "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day," which express the speaker and his lover's tears, together, could drown the entire world. This connection is perhaps the most persuasive connection in favor of the argument Donne wrote "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day" upon Anne's death, because the aforementioned ideas, regarding the lovers' tears, are extremely parallel.

Many people believe love, in its purest form, can conquer death. Although it is possible those who share spiritual love may meet again in the afterlife, the intense emotional pain someone feels after the loss of a loved is extremely difficult to cope with while still on earth. Overall, setting and literary devices in "A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day, Being the Shortest Day," convey
the speaker's anguish upon his lover's death, while allusions to Donne's other poetry suggest Donne wrote this poem upon Anne's death. As Achsah Guibbory states, this poem may have conveyed Donne's fear that he may end up with nothing, because of his desire for "More" (220).
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