



Present in Absence

John Donne
(1633)

In this love poem the poet develops his belief that the union of two souls is stronger than that of their bodies.

Absence, hear thou my protestation
Against thy strength,
Distance, and length;
Do what thou canst for alteration¹:
5 For hearts of truest mettle²
Absence doth join, and Time doth settle³.

Who loves a mistress of such quality,
His mind hath found
Affection's ground
10 Beyond time, place, and all mortality.
To hearts that cannot vary
Absence is present, Time doth tarry⁴.

My senses want their outward⁵ motion
Which now within
15 Reason doth win,
Redoubled by her secret notion:
Like rich men that take pleasure
In hiding more than handling⁶ treasure.

By absence this good means I gain⁷,
20 That I can catch her,
Where none can watch her,
In some close corner of my brain:
There I embrace and kiss her;
And so enjoy her and none miss⁸ her.

1 alteration. Variazione.

2 truest mettle. La più vera tempra.

3 doth settle. Does settle. Risolve.

4 tarry. Indugia, si muove lentamente.

5 outward. Verso l'esterno.

6 handling. Maneggiare.

7 gain. Ottengo.

8 miss. Sento la sua mancanza.

READING COMPETENCE

1 READ the text and find the words which mean the following.

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1 claim | 4 reinforced |
| 2 link | 5 instrument |
| 3 sweetheart | 6 hug |

2 READ the text again and do the following activities.

1 What does the poet state in the poem?

- A He will not be able to be with his beloved.
- B He will be able to be with his beloved while he is away thanks to their deep love.
- C He will not be able to love his beloved deeply because of his absence.

2 Who is the poet addressing?



3 Consider stanzas 1-2.

- 1 What is the meaning of the nouns 'strength, /Distance, and length' (lines 2-3)?
 - A Accumulation.
 - B Repetition.
 - C Progression.
 - D Contrast.
- 2 Say what the sentences 'Absence doth join, and Time doth settle' in line 6 mean.
- 3 Highlight words and phrases linked to the poet's beloved in the second stanza.
- 4 What is the poet's love like?
- 5 Why does the poet say 'Time doth tarry' in line 12? Because
 - A time moves slowly when there is absence.
 - B absence can make love grow.
 - C time destroys love.
 - D absence reveals true love.

4 Read stanza 3.

- 1 What does the poet really want to do?
- 2 Analyse the three elements of the simile in lines 17-18.

Tenor

Vehicle

Common ground

5 Focus on the last stanza.

- 1 What does the poet idealise?
 - A His beloved.
 - B His mental relationship with his love.
 - C The power of his mind.
 - D His being far away from his beloved.
- 2 What is the meaning of the last two lines of the poem?

6 Write down the rhyme scheme. What/who does the rhyme point out in lines 23-24?

7 Match the number of the stanzas (1-4) to the corresponding content (A-D).

- 1 The first stanza
- 2 The second stanza
- 3 The third stanza
- 4 The fourth stanza

- A idealises the poet's mental relationship with his love. No one can take her away from his mind and he can have some comfort in this fact.
- B regrets that the poet loves one he cannot be with and that time moves slowly with absence around.
- C says the poet's senses want to see her, but his mind is happy enjoying just the thought of her.
- D explains the power of absence and that no one with a true heart can overcome the pain of absence except through time.