

#### B4 Watt I wot well thy over weaning witt

*Notes.* Sir Walter Raleigh was arrested in mid-July 1603 on suspicion of involvement in two related plots against James I: the Bye Plot, a plan to kidnap the King to ensure he granted toleration to Catholics; and the Main Plot, a plan to engineer a Spanish invasion, the deposition of James I and his replacement by his cousin Arabella Stuart. Raleigh was tried and convicted for treason at Winchester on 17 November 1603, reprieved from execution on 9 December 1603, and spent the next twelve years or so imprisoned in the Tower. In one source (Folger MS X.d.241), the poem is attributed to Thomas Rogers (c.1573-1610), author of *Celestiall elegies of the goddesses and the Muses* (1598), and of the poem *Leycesters Ghost* (written c.1605 printed 1641), an attack on the early Elizabethan favourite Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester.

Watt<sup>1</sup> I wot<sup>2</sup> well thy overweeninge<sup>3</sup> witt

lead by ambitious humours wrought thy fall

Like Phaeton that did presume to sitt

in Phoebus chaire to guide the golden ball

Which overturn'd did sett the worlde on fire

& burnt him selfe in prime of his desire.<sup>4</sup>

5

So thou that didst in thought aspire so hie

to manage the affaires for Englands Crowne

And didst like Icarus<sup>5</sup> attempt to flie

beyond thy limitts, now art tumbling downe

Thy waxen winges are melted by the Sunne

& in thy fall the thred of life is spunn.

10

From thee the Sonne doth turne away his face

from thee the pale faced Moone doth take hir flight

From thee the Starres do fall away a pace

from thee thy freinds are fled & shun thy sight

All fly from thee exceptinge only hope

which yet to breathe sad accents give thee scope.

15

Thou hast byn counted passinge wise & wittie  
hadst thou hast grace high treason to avoyed 20  
Then give me leave dread soveraigne Lord to pittie  
so rare a witt should be so ill imployed  
    Yea suche a witt as I could praise in reason  
    for any point, exceptinge only treason

I pittie that the Sommers Nightingale 25  
immortall Cinthia<sup>6</sup> sometime dere delighte  
that us'd to singe so sweete a Madrigale  
should like an Owle go wander in the nighte  
    Hated of all, but pittied of none  
    though Swan-like now he makes his dyinge mone 30

Hadst thou continued loyall to the kinge<sup>7</sup>  
as to the Queene thou evermore was true  
My Muse thy praise might uncontrolled singe  
which now is forcst thy dismall happ to rue.  
    And in this sable Characters to wrighte 35  
    the downfall of a sometime worthy Knighte.

Ah where is Cinthia now whose golden thred  
mighte leade thee from this laborinth of errours<sup>8</sup>  
She to hir soliar<sup>9</sup> Celestiall back is fledd  
& nothings lefte for thee but shame & terrours 40  
    Thy Candle is put out, thy glass<sup>10</sup> is ronne  
    the grave must be thy Tombe when all is donn

Proude Gaveston & both the Spencers fell  
yet theis were sometime favorites of a Kinge<sup>11</sup>  
But thou against thy Soveraigne didst rebell 45  
which to thy Conscience needes must be a stinge

Ill was their happ farr worse is thy estate  
whom both the Prince doth scorne & People hate.

Humilitie in Statesmen is a praise  
yet to imbrace this vertue thou didst scorne, 50  
Supposinge that faire Cinthias golden daies  
should still on earth this Iron age<sup>12</sup> adorne  
The Common people that did hate thy pride  
in change of state thy follies to deride.

Renowned Essex<sup>13</sup> as he past the streets 55  
would vaile his Bonnett<sup>14</sup> to an Oyster wife  
And with a kinde of humble Congie<sup>15</sup> greete  
the vulger sorte that did admire his life  
And now sith he hath spent his livinge breath  
they will not cease yet to lament his death 60

But thou like Midas surfettinge with golde<sup>16</sup>  
those gentle salutacions didst reject  
And when thou wast in greatest Pompe extolde  
not poore Mens love but feare thou didst effect.  
This makes those Men whom thou didst lately scorne 65  
Disdaine thee now, & laugh while thou dost moorne.

Perhapps likewise that Essex angrie spirite  
pursues thy life & for revenge doth crie<sup>17</sup>  
And so the Heavens accordinge to thy merite  
in his behalfe do acte this Tragedie. 70  
Essex was made the Prologue to the playe  
which thou didst penn in an unluckie daye

Herein the Kinge should play a tragique parte  
Graye<sup>18</sup> as a Champion stoutly should have fought

Rawleigh should play the Divell by his Arte, 75  
Cobham<sup>19</sup> should play the foole as he was taught  
Lame Brooke<sup>20</sup> should holde the booke & sitt him still  
to prompt if any mist or Acted ill

This Tragedy was plotted but not acted,  
herein was treason cunningly contrived, 80  
By thee o Rawlye was the same compacted  
for which of worldly Joye thou art deprived  
Thy life, thy wealth thy liberty & lande  
only at mercy of the Kinge doth stande.

If please the Kinge to pardon thy offence 85  
no doubt thou maist a faithfull Subject prove  
And by thy witt & wisdomes Quintessence  
recover to thy selfe thy Soveraignes love,  
But little hope remaines when faith is fled  
& when thy handes seeke bloud beware thy head 90

God that foresaw thy treason did reveale it  
and blest the Kinge in crossinge thy intent  
In vaine could man by policie conceale it  
when Heaven against thy purposes is bent.  
And Man that unto worldlinges seemeth wise 95  
is but a foole to him that rules the skies.

**Source.** BL Add. MS 22601, fols. 64r-65v

**Other known sources.** Raleigh, *Poems* 182-85; Bodleian MS Don. c.54, fol. 9v; Bodleian MS Eng. Hist. c.272, fol. 46v; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 172, fol. 14r; BL Add. MS 38139, fol. 192v; BL MS Harley 3910, fol. 14r; BL MS Harley 6947, fol. 212r; BL MS Stowe 962, fol. 84r; Folger MS V.a.339, fol. 211v; Folger MS V.a.345, p. 177; Folger MS X.d.241, fol. 1v

- 1 *Watt*: common contraction of Walter.
- 2 *wot*: know; and a pun on Wat/Walter.
- 3 *overweeninge*: arrogant, presumptuous, conceited.
- 4 *Like Phaeton...prime of his desire*: allusion to the mythological story of Phaeton, who persuaded his father Phoebus, the sun god, to allow him to drive the chariot of the sun, with disastrous consequences. The myth was widely used in this period to attack courtiers who overstepped the proper bounds of their station.
- 5 *Icarus*: Icarus, son of Daedalus, escaped from Minos with his father, flying with wings attached by wax; when he flew too near the sun, the wax melted and Icarus plunged to his death.
- 6 *immortall Cinthia*: Elizabeth I. Poets and painters routinely portrayed the Queen as Cynthia, goddess of the moon.
- 7 *the kinge*: James I.
- 8 *Cinthia now...laborinth of errours*: allusion to the myth of Ariadne, whose thread helped Theseus escape from the Labyrinth.
- 9 *soliar*: Rudick (Raleigh, *Poems* 183), working from Folger MS X.d.241, reads this word as “spheare”.
- 10 *glass*: i.e. hourglass.
- 11 *Proude Gaveston...favorites of a Kinge*: allusion to the falls of the favourites of King Edward II (reigned 1307-1327): Piers Gaveston, and the Spensers (or Despencers), Hugh the elder and Hugh the younger.
- 12 *this Iron age*: in classical mythology, the decayed, present age.
- 13 *Essex*: Raleigh’s bitter court rival in the 1590s, Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, who was executed for treason in 1601.
- 14 *vaile his Bonnett*: remove his hat.
- 15 *Congie*: congee; a bow.
- 16 *But thou like Midas...golde*: King Midas of Phrygia was granted his wish that all he touched should

turn to gold. This line might refer to the riches Raleigh accumulated as the holder of various lucrative patents and monopolies under Elizabeth I.

<sup>17</sup> *Essex angrie spirite...doth crie*: Raleigh was widely suspected of involvement in the alleged plot to destroy Essex. This charge is the main theme of the contemporary verse, “To whome shall cursed I my Case complaine”.

<sup>18</sup> *Graye*: Thomas, Lord Grey of Wilton, participant in the Bye Plot.

<sup>19</sup> *Cobham*: Henry Brooke, Lord Cobham, implicated in both the Bye and Main Plots, whose evidence was crucial to the prosecution case against Raleigh.

<sup>20</sup> *Brooke*: George Brooke, younger brother of Lord Cobham, and participant in the Bye Plot.

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