

Mii8 When you awake, dull Brittons, and behold

Notes. This poem in support of Francis Bacon, written after his impeachment, is attributed in more than one source to William Lewis, provost of Oriel College, Oxford, and Bacon's former chaplain (Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. f.10; BL Add. MS 25303; BL MS Stowe 962), and in one source is dated June 1621 (Bodleian MS Rawl. B. 151). It takes the form of an anti-libel, directly responding to attacks on its subject, and adopts throughout an elegiac tone. Readers were not generous in their responses. In at least two instances it is titled a "foolish invective" (BL Add. MS 25303; BL MS Harley 3910), and at least one source appends a poem written in response (BL Add. MS 25303; see "Blame not the Poet though he make such moane").

When you awake, dull Brittons, and behold

What treasure you have throwne into your mould;

Your ignorance in pruning of a state;

You shall confesse, and shall your rashnes hate:

For in a senceles furie you have slaine

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A man, as farre beyond your spungie braine

Of common knowledge, as if¹ heaven from hell:

And yet you tryumph, thinke you have done well.

Oh, that the monster multitude should sit

In place of justice, reason, conscience, witte,

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Nay in a throne or speare above them all!

For tis a supreame power² that can call

All these to barre:³ and with a frowning brow,

Make Senatours, nay mightie Counsellors bow.

Bould Plebeans the day will come I know

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When such as Cato, such as Cicero,⁴

Shalbe more worth then the firste borne can be,

Of all your auncestours, or posterie.

But hees not dead you say: oh, that the soule

Once checkt, controwld, that once used to controwle

10

Cowcheth her downie wings! and scornes to flye

At any game, but faire eternitie.
Each spirit is retir'd to a roome,
And makes his living body but a toombe;
On which such Epitaphes may well be read 25
As would the gazer strike with sorrow dead.
Oh that I could but give his worth a name
That if not you, your sonne may blush for shame!
Who in arithmatick hath greatest skill
His good partes cannot number, yet his ill 30
Cannot be call'd a number; since tis knowne
He had but few that could be call'd his owne:
And those in other men (even in these times)
Are often prais'd, and vertues call'd, not crimes.
But as in purest thinges the smalest spott 35
Is sooner found, then either staine or blott
In baser stuff; even so his chance was such
To have of faults to few, of worth to much.
So by the brightnes of his owne cleare light
The moates⁵ he had lay even to each sight. 40
If yee would have a man in all points good
You must not have him made of flesh and bloud:
An act of Parliament you first must settle
And force dame Nature worke in better mettle.
Some faults he had no more then serve to proove 45
He drew his line from Adam not from Jove.
And those small staines nature for its offence,
Like moones in armorie⁶ made a difference
Twixt him and angells; beeing sure noe other
Then markes to know him for their younger brother. 50
Such spotts remooved (not to prophane) he then
Might well be call'd a demieGod mongst men.

A diamond flawed, saphyres and rubies stained
But undervalewed are not quite disdaind;
Which by a file recoverd they become 55
As worthie of esteeme, yeeld no lesse summe.
The gardner finding once a cankar growne
Upon a tree, that hee hath frutefull knowne,
Grubs it not up; but with a carefull hand
Opens the roote, remoovs the clay or sand 60
That cawsd the cancar, or with cunning arte
Pares of some rynde, but comes not nere the harte:
Only such trees the axes adge endure
As nere bare fruite, or else are past all cure.
The prudent husbandman thrusts not his sheare 65
Into his corne because some weeds are there,
But takes his hooke and gently as he may
Walke through the field and takes them all away.
A house of many roomes one may command,
But yet it shall require many a hand 70
To keepe it cleane: and if some filth be found
Crope in by negligence, is't cast toth grownde?
Fie no; but first the supream owner comes,
Examines everie office, views the roomes,
Makes them be cleans'd, and on some certaine paine 75
Commands they never be found so againe.
The temple else should overthrowne have bin,
Because some money-brokers were therein.⁷
The arke⁸ had sunke and perisht in the floud,
Because some beasts crope in that were not good. 80
Adam had with a thunderbolt bin strooke,
When he from Eve the golden apple tooke.
But should the maker of mankinde doe soe

Whoe should write Man? who should to mans state grow?
Shall he be then put to th'extreame of law, 85
Because his conscience had a little flaw?
Will ye want conscience cleane, because that he
Stumbled or tript but in a small degree?
No; first looke back to all your owne past acts
Then passe your censure, punish all the facts 90
By him committed: Then Ile sweare he shall
Confesse that you are upright Chancellors all:
And for the time to come with all his might
Strive to out doo you all in doeing right.
Oh could his predicessours goast⁹ appeare, 95
And tell how foule his master¹⁰ left the chaire!
How each feather that he satt upon
Infectious was, and that ther was no stone
On which some contract was not made to fright
The fatherlesse and widdow from their right. 100
No stoole, no boord, no rush, no bench, on which
The poore man was not sould unto the rich.
It would have longer time the roome to aire
And what yee now call foule yee would thinke faire.
He tooke to keepe, (tis knowne) this but to live 105
He robd to purchase land and this to give.
And had this beene so blest in his owne treasure
He would have given much more with much more pleasure.
The nights greate lampe from the rich sea will take
To lend the thirstie earth and from each lake 110
That hath an overplus borrow a share
Not to its proper use, but to repair
The rivers of some parcht and updried hill:
So this unconstant planet (for more ill

Envie cannot speake of him) took from some floud 115
Not for's owne use, but to doe others good.
But such misfortune dogg'd his honest will
That what he tooke by wrong he gave as ill.
For those his bountie nurst, as all suppose
(Not those he injured) prov'd his greatest foes. 120
So foolish mothers from their wiser mates
Oft filch and steale, weaken their owne estates
To feede the humor of some wanton boy;
They sillie women hoping to have joy
Of this ranke plant when they are saplesse growne 125
But seld or never hath it yet bin knowne
That pamperd youth gave parents more releefe
Then what increaste their age with care and greefe
These oversights of Nature former times,
Have rather pittied, then condem'd as crimes. 130
Then wher is charitie become of late
Is her place beggd? her office given state?
Is their a pattent got for her restrainte
Or monopoly gain'd by false complaint?
If so? pursue the patentees, for sure 135
Falce information did the writt procure:
The seale is counterfeict, the referrees
Have taken bribes: then first examine these,
Restore faire Charitie to her place againe,
And he that suffers now may then complaine: 140
Set her at Justice feete, then let the poize¹¹
By them directed be, and not by noise.
Let them his merritts weigh with his offence,
And you shall finde a mightie difference.
Race not a goodly buildinge for a toy:¹² 145

Tis better to repaire then to destroy.
 You will not force his ashes to the urne,
 Tush, thats not it; himselfe, himselfe will burne.
 When he but findes his honours sound retreat,
 Like a cag'd foule, himselfe to death will beate; 150
 And leave the world, when thers no healpe at all
 To sight¹³ and greeve for his untimely fall.
 The skilfull surgeon cutts not of a limme
 Whilst there is hope: oh deale you so with him!
 He wants not fortitude but can endure 155
 Cutting, incision, so they promise cure:
 Nay more, shew him but where the ey-sore stands,
 And he will search and drest with his owne hands.
 Would yee anatomize? would you desect
 For your experience? oh, yee may elect 160
 Out of that house,¹⁴ where yee as Judges sit,
 Diverse for execution far more fitt.
 And when ye finde a monster overgrowne
 With foule corruption, oh let him be throwne
 At Justice feete, let him be sacrificz'd 165
 And let new tortures new plagues be devised:
 Such as may fright the living from their crimes,
 And be a president¹⁵ to after times.
 Which long-liv'd records to enseuinge daies
 Shall still proclaime, to your eternall praise. 170

Source. BL MS Sloane 826, fols. 4r-6v

Other known sources. Bodleian MS Ashmole 38, p. 10; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. f.10, fol. 104r; Bodleian MS Rawl. B. 151, fol. 101r; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 26, fol. 101r; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 84, fol. 64v; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 160, fol. 25r; BL Add. MS 10309, fol. 128v; BL Add. MS 25303, fol. 83r; BL Add. MS 29303, fol. 3v; BL MS Egerton 2725, fol. 43r; BL MS Harley 3910, fol. 8r; BL MS Harley 6917, fol. 101r; BL MS Sloane 1792, fol. 109r; BL MS Stowe 962, fol. 52v; Brotherton MS

Lt. q. 44, fol. 10r; NLS MS 2060, fol. 53r; Nottingham MS Portland PW V 37, p. 226; TCD MS 806, fol. 570r; Beinecke MS Osborn b.197, p. 139; Folger MS V.a.162, fol. 2r; Folger MS V.a.192, part 2, fol. 7r; Folger MS V.a.345, p. 127; Huntington MS HM 198, 1.37

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¹ *if*: probable scribal error, read “is”.

² *supreame power*: i.e. the King.

³ *call...to barre*: bring to court; also, more generally, “bring to justice” or “call to account”.

⁴ *Cato...Cicero*: Roman writers and politicians invoked here, presumably, as men who faced death in preference to recanting views out of line with those of their rulers. Cato defended the Roman republic and bitterly opposed Julius Ceasar; Cicero was put to death for a number of speeches he made after the death of Caesar, attacking Mark Antony.

⁵ *moates*: spots, blemishes.

⁶ *moones in armorie*: i.e. like images of moons used in heraldry.

⁷ *The temple...therin*: allusion to Christ driving money-changers out of the temple—although, as the poem suggests, leaving the temple standing (Matthew 25.26-28; Mark 11.14-16; John 2.14-16).

⁸ *The arke*: i.e. Noah’s ark.

⁹ *his predicessours goast*: reference to Thomas Egerton, Lord Ellesmere, who died in 1617.

¹⁰ *his master*: presumably the “master” is Egerton himself, as opposed to the spirit.

¹¹ *poize*: balance (of justice).

¹² *Race not...toy*: do not demolish (“rase”) a fine building for mere sport.

¹³ *sight*: probable scribal error; read “sigh”.

¹⁴ *that house*: the House of Commons.

¹⁵ *president*: i.e. precedent.
