

Pi31 Great Duke, Although I litle am acquainted

Notes. Rich in classical allusions, this poem is unique to William Davenport's collection.

“In Ducem”¹

Great Duke, Although I litle am acquainted,
with all the crymes, wherewith thy soule it² taynted:
yet doe thy faults, constrayne my tender muse,
to curse his harte, that did us all abuse:
Where is thy devill, and thy Doctor Lambe?³ 5
that purchased the, with Charles, so great a name:
what are they gone, unto the Stygean Lake?⁴
and would thee soe unkyndlye now forsake?
No no they went,⁵ but to prepare a seate
For thee accordinge to thy great estate; 10
Pluto⁶ proclaymed had a sollemme feaste
and bade thy soule to be cheefest gueste:
Oh strange at first, to get soe great promocion
with dis:⁷ (I saith) it was for pure devocoun,
thou bare to Lucyffer;⁸ then thinke off this 15
that Felton, meritts everlastinge bliss,
who caused thee, to gayne that exaltacion
and sent thee to such a place off recreacion,
theire maiste thou use, thy magyke and thy charmes,
thy spells, and figures,⁹ can doe litle harme: 20
with Sysyphus, theire maiste thou rowle the stonne,¹⁰
Or els with Tantalus,¹¹ goe make thy moane:
Yett all too litle for thy soule to feelee,
Ixion, shall sett thee on his rowlinge wheele;¹²
Oh: might thy soule, but come againe and tell,

the paynes and travells, that it had too hell:
 it would require some Homer,¹³ to endyte,
 and all the Poets sett a worke, to wrytte,
 with penne of steele; their Inike¹⁴ the Ocean sea,
 their paper, all the leaves that springe in Maye: 30
 but since it comes not; as I best can foarde,¹⁵
 Ile shew you, all it's progress in a worde:
 When it arrived in the Stygian baye,
 Caron¹⁶ expected then a mightye paye;
 to pass it over; which the soule soone spied, 35
 about it middle, at that tyme was tyed
 a girdle, wiche was off great worke and pryze,
 called Treacherie: wiche did the churle¹⁷ suffyze.
 A boarde they went; Caron began to rowe,
 but to remove it, he had much adooe, 40
 the soule so sinfull, waied the boate soe downe,
 that Charon stood in feare the boate should drowne,
 then rose the surges,¹⁸ over all the brime,
 it botes¹⁹ them not to practyse, then to swimme,
 for they had drenched bene in that vaste floode, 45
 but Pluto ayminge, alwayse at his good:
 was wandered past the bankes off Cocytus²⁰
 towards Stixe Lake, when that it happened thus,
 and seeinge both of them soe nighe bespent,
 it forced Dis, their case for to lament: 50
 since both were servaunts true without controule;
 Charon had brought him manye a welcome soule,
 And Gorge, as willinge came, as any other
 which made the devill, adopte him for his brother:
 hee toake his soul, and Proserpine,²¹ it cherishte, 55
 that but for them, throughe weight off sinns had perishte:

err that it could attayne th'appoynted place,
 wich Radamanthe²² out off a speciall grace,
 att the solycytinge off Docter Lambe,
 ordayned for it gainst it thither came. 60
 Thus have I shewed you in a worde or towe,
 the progress straunge, wich some maye judge untrewe,
 off Villeir's soule, from this our Brittish Ile,
 to pale Avernus²³ in a litle whyle;
 Mægera and Alecto²⁴ make it myrthe 65
 for Treacherie committed here on earth:
 but yett before I make a fynall ende,
 his vice, not vertue, needes I must commende,
 Iff Conjuracions, Carrecters and spells,
 Circles, and figures, furyes, feends of hell; 70
 and all enchauntments, were off any merrytte
 then might thy soule, Elyzean Joyes²⁵ enherrytte:
 wee weptt dere Duke: and sounge a dolefull sounge,
 because thou lived amounge us, here soe lounge
 but now thou art gone, our Joyes beginne to dubble, 75
 hopinge thy lyke will never more us troble:
 Caynns deare blessinge,²⁶ light uppon thy harte,
 Oedipus Joyes²⁷ unto thy soule revert:
 soe Duke, no otherwyse my leave I take,
 but unto God this sole request doe make; 80
 to villyffye all men off thy condicions
 and keepe our Charles, under his saffe tuition.

Source. CCRO MS CR 63/2/19, fols. 70v-71r

¹ *In Ducem*: “On the Duke”.

² *it*: probable scribal error; read “is”.

³ *thy devill, and thy Doctor Lambe*: John Lambe, astrologer-physician, convicted witch and alleged associate of the Duke, was sometimes dubbed “the Duke’s devil”. However, while this line could be read as “Doctor Lambe, thy devil and thy doctor”, the plural “they” in the next line but one implies that “thy devill” is not Lambe but a second person. One possible candidate is the Irishman Pierce Butler, who fled England in 1626 after the Commons began investigating stories that he had given Buckingham some kind of magical amulet which would keep him in royal favour.

⁴ *Stygean Lake*: the lake of Styx in the classical underworld.

⁵ *they went*: John Lambe was murdered by a London mob in June 1628. The line implies that the other “devill” was also dead by this time.

⁶ *Pluto*: ruler of the classical realm of the dead.

⁷ *dis*: i.e. Dis; another name for Pluto.

⁸ *Lucyffer*: Satan.

⁹ *thy magyke...and figures*: Buckingham allegedly used sorcery to maintain his power; usually this charge is connected to Buckingham’s relationships with John Lambe and his mother, Mary Compton, Countess of Buckingham.

¹⁰ *Sisyphus...rowle the stonne*: in the classical underworld, Sisyphus was punished by being forced in perpetuity to roll a stone up a hill only to watch it roll back down again.

¹¹ *Tantalus*: in the classical underworld, Tantalus was punished by being tormented with hunger and thirst while having water and food in sight but forever just beyond his grasp.

¹² *Ixion...rowlinge wheele*: in the classical underworld, Ixion was punished by being chained to a perpetually rolling wheel.

¹³ *Homer*: the ancient Greek epic poet. Book 11 of Homer’s *Odyssey* includes descriptions of Sisyphus’ and Tantalus’ torments in the underworld.

¹⁴ *Inike*: i.e. ink.

¹⁵ *foarde*: i.e. afford; perform.

¹⁶ *Caron*: Charon was the ferryman whose boat brought the shades of the dead across the rivers of the

underworld.

¹⁷ *churle*: base person; here meaning Charon.

¹⁸ *surgess*: i.e. surges.

¹⁹ *botes*: i.e. boots; benefits.

²⁰ *Cocytus*: a river in the underworld.

²¹ *Proserpine*: queen of the underworld, Pluto's wife.

²² *Radamanthe*: in Homeric myth Rhadamanthys was the ruler of the Elysian Fields, the realm of the blessed souls, and was also represented as one of the judges of the dead in the underworld.

²³ *Avernus*: Lake Avernus was located near to the passageway to the underworld allegedly found in the cave of the Cumaean Sibyl.

²⁴ *Mægera and Alecto*: two of the three furies, the avenging goddesses and tormenters of the damned.

²⁵ *Elyzean Joyes*: the pleasures of the Elysian Fields, the resting place of the blessed souls.

²⁶ *Caynns deare blessinge*: Cain's punishments for the murder of Abel (see Genesis 4); or, more generally, the eternal torments due to murderers.

²⁷ *Oedipus Joyes*: Oedipus was the King of Thebes who unwittingly killed his father and married his mother. Upon learning what he had done, Oedipus blinded himself before being taken from earth by the furies.
