

Pi37 Ye gastly Spiritts that haunt the gloomy night

Notes. Unlike most of the “Buckingham-in-hell” libels, this striking and lengthy (though possibly incomplete) poem depicts the Duke in a horrifyingly realistic—rather than a comic or classicized—hell. Although the poet lays bare many of the favourite’s sins, he does not dwell on specifics and arguably generates a certain amount of sympathy for the tormented sinner.

“The Duke of Buck: his Gohst”

Ye gastly Spiritts that haunt the gloomy night
With fearefull howlings all approach my sight
Lett your sad shreeks like Mandrakes fatal groanes¹
m’assistants bee t’expresse the depth of moanes
and with Infernall Tapers² round this place 5
that each eye may behould my dismall face
and there those bloody characters unfould
engraven in envy and ambitious mould
O let each Accent with compassion pearce
the Brazen³ Bulwark of this Universe 10
That whilst my glowing tongue shall scorch your ears
your hearts may thawe into a dewe of Teares.
From pitchy darknes and eternall woes
Greifes Laborinth, where gnashing sorrowes flowes
From fyery draggons, and from croaking Toades 15
With dyrefull yellings, ecchoing dolefull Oades
From loathsome stench of feinds, from flashing flakes
from fearfull shadowes and from poysoned lakes
From darkest dungeon of hells deepe Abisse,
where joy’s unknowne, but all confusion is, 20
Loe my poore soule (exil’d to broyling flames
and doom’d to crall⁴ in everlasting streames
of woe and bitternes) from lowest grave

(through that seald priviledge wee damned have
 to walke in death; till those immortall steynes 25
 hatch't in the bosome of our youthfull veynes
 be purg'd from of the earth) with horror sounds
 (then those prodigious Ecchoes which rebounds
 from the fell Nightbirds⁵ tunelesse beake) salutes
 the Machine of this world; which prostitutes 30
 her knees, to things degenerate from kinde
 things mortall seeing, but immortall blinde.
 I Caytiffe⁶ now, not long since wing'd with fame
 made glorious by that stile of Buckinghame
 the Eye of Kings; chief Steeresman to a state 35
 Imperious; in honour fortunate
 A sceptre Scociate,⁷ a Sovereign deere
 the Loadstarr⁸ of Great Brittaines hemisphere
 Fixt in a Royal cave, for none to see
 but the transparent Eye of Majestye 40
 Like uncarv'd pumice in a file of pearle
 A Prince, a duke, a Marquesse & an Earle
 A Count, a Viscount, Lord & Knight⁹ and all
 of vyolent birth; but of more vyolent fall
 Who kick't at heavens bright browe with scornefull heele 45
 making Olimpus¹⁰ stoope, and Atlas¹¹ kneele
 As if in Phoebus¹² chaire he meant to Raigne
 and court bright Cinthia¹³ in great Charles wayne¹⁴
 and with the gods from Pole to Pole rechase
 Heaven's starry Nymphs,¹⁵ along the Milky rase¹⁶ 50
 Much like that Piramyde by Gyant built,
 Whose furious pride att heaven did run a tilt
 Striving to scale Joves Towers,¹⁷ make gods to yeild
 and pitch the collours in Elizeums feilds¹⁸

Even soe my thoughts, back't on, with strong desire 55
 Like Lebanons tall cedars¹⁹ still aspires
 For as the Nurse the little babe doth shew
 first how to stand, then by degrees to goe
 Soe nature taught mee, ere I gan to rise
 being prompt by subtile art, to Nimrodize²⁰ 60
 Till that my wings reaching supernal²¹ Thrones
 singeing thei're plumes against the burning zoanes
 Downe tumbled Pelion, uppon Ossa steepe²²
 and both on Icarius in Icarian deepe²³
 Thus when I deem'd my acts by fortunes cherish't 65
 my Anchor broke, and all my fortunes perish't
 Oft by aspiring wee assume to gett
 but thereby prove unto ourselves a Nett
 For when securitye had dul'd desire
 Which with scorching had pass'd ambitious fyre 70
 Even in the bloome and springtide of my dayes
 Fearlesse of wrath and gardlesse of my wayes
 Amid'st my imperfecions full of bread,
 heaven showred contagion on my fearing head
 barring mee out those lasting dores of glorye 75
 and shutt mee in this fearfull Consistorye
 Whose utmost secretts to relate and tell
 the strange inactures²⁴ of our bayfull²⁵ cell
 O man 'twould make thee horidly to looke
 as if with some revengefull Plannett strooke²⁶ 80
 disbulke thy Microfine²⁷ make thy bloud
 start from thy azure channells²⁸ like a flood
 shatter thy soule to atomes, change thy sight
 like to the sheeted visions of the night
 but theise ymmortall blazons²⁹ are forebidd 85

To carnall intellects and therefore hidd.
 Thou greate directresse of the night³⁰ stand still
 till I have gorg'd each yawning eare with fill
 of direfull storye, make each stepp a station
 till I have consumate this sadd Narration 90
 And all yow hoast of heaven withdrawe your eyes
 least from their vengefull frontletts³¹ should arise
 more horride deluges of cominacion³²
 against this wretched compound of damnacion
 Oh what is man whose Origine and birth 95
 Conceives their structure from a clodd of earth
 from a poore abject mould his some of life
 a living death a magozine of strife
 Indeede the soule it is Etheriall
 extract from breath, eterne,³³ which never shall 100
 suffer corrupcion, else were sinners blest
 and in the end our sins should fynde a rest
 If voyd of reason with the soulesse creature
 we should reteyne, but only sense & feature
 would I had been a beast, to bee noe more 105
 Or still lock't upp in Natures unknowne store
 within those inesentiall shades of peace
 before conception gave my life increase
 Oh heaven most cruell to ordeyne creation
 the harbinger and prologue to damnacion 110
 To snatch att fraylty by the Infant heele
 and dash her braines 'gainst hell with hands of steele
 was I unto my parents acts agreeing?
 Or did I seale consent unto my being?
 punish th'offenders, let the act goe free 115
 offences without actors cannot bee

But sin takes life and soe it chaunces
 the roote being wither'd, still survives the branches
 Thus I of our first parents sin partaker³⁴
 did reassay³⁵ to justle with my Maker 120
 Till all the elements did gaze with wonder
 to heare the heavens rebound with earthly thunder
 Oh ye Inhabitants on th'Elizean dales³⁶
 and did I c'leap³⁷ yow cruell? reason fayles
 and they were words on passions anvile forg'd 125
 temper'd with drugs of woe & so disgorg'd;
 Ye girded mee with wisdomes swadling cloathes
 to knowe the Thistle from Vermillion Rose
 T'have shun'd the perill of that poysonous grape
 when hell did court mee in an angells shape 130
 Had grace stept in 'twixt me and Satans kisse
 I had been rang'd among the Saints ere this,
 presented Orizons;³⁸ to greate Johva'hs³⁹ shrine
 and chaunted Halleluiah to the Tryne;⁴⁰
 But when the gods did lend their hand to save mee 135
 I grapled fast what hell and nature gave mee,
 Till sinne through custome cauteriz'd my soule
 makeing lardge passage in't; I dranke that boule
 Of Hecatts triple ban;⁴¹ scorn'd prohibition
 made my heart thunderproof gain'st all contrition 140
 On gloryes ayery topp I strive to fix
 the standard of my hopes, there to commix
 the fullnes of my will; though to attaine it
 I harrow'd⁴² (hell) I would throug hell to gaine it
 Oh sacriledge to heaven, when humane reason 145
 thus traytors 'gainst her self with blast of treason
 O nature most accur'st thus to assay

with sugred pills, thy Infant, to betray
 the bosome suckling which thy paps⁴³ did cherish
 thy selfe hath slaughtered by thy hands did perish 150
 Most like a Stepdame, with Hyena's guiles⁴⁴
 steeping foule murder under fawning smiles
 But though thy face to veiwe presents noe steynes
 yet sable⁴⁵ sins lurke in thy purple veynes
 From fayrest flowers strong poyson oft proceedes 155
 and fayrest shows, oft harbour fowlest deedes
 O would Cymerean⁴⁶ darknes had possest thee
 when first to my composure⁴⁷ thou adressed thee
 My pensill had bin guiltlesse of thy forme
 if metamorphis'd to the vilest worme 160
 And I in concaves of my Mothers wombe
 had chang'd my Mansion to a peacefull Tombe.
 I emulate⁴⁸ the happines of Flyes;
 the least of Natures wonders, in what wise
 they spend the little breuiate of their tyme 165
 in harmlesse solace, subject to noe cryme
 and when the destinyes have clipt their wings
 from their interments no memoriall springs
 Noe swelling eylidds, nor obsequious rites
 theire dust no marble cerements⁴⁹ invites 170
 Noe weeping Elegye, noe mournfull freind
 about theire funerall hearses doe attend
 Noe sting of conscience doth affright their grave
 in Brasen⁵⁰ volumes they their Quietues⁵¹ have
 In mirth they live, peace they dye, & than 175
 they are noe more; but 'tis not soe with man
 When our portent⁵² is com'd, that we must goe
 it is our entrance into greater woe.

The dawne and solstice⁵³ of our days are sinn
 and with our Autume doth our feares beginne 180
 Oh lett that day bee subject of all scorne
 wherein they said there is a Manchild borne
 and lett it from all light exiled bee
 least it disteine lights native puritye
 Let darknes shadowe it and vayle of Night 185
 with direful apparitions dread each sight
 Whil'st howling doggs the night crow and the drake⁵⁴
 to Goblins, Goasts and Fayryes musicke make
 And buzzing Screechowles, boding ruthfull things
 beating each casement with their fatall wings 190
 and lett their Echoes like to passing bells
 in order chime my ever dying knells.
 What bleareye Plannett, gloring on my birth⁵⁵
 Could not even then returne mee to the earth
 O may it bee a gazing stock to all 195
 and beare the bitter curses of my fall
 May it bee ever out of course and jarre
 and by a nickname called the wandring starre
 Let heaven make warre against it & on earth
 Let wolves with howlings chardg it with my birth; 200
 My life is made the glasse, the Schoole, the booke
 wherein each eye may learne may reade, may looke
 O lett it drawe from thence a brinish sea
 and stretch compassion to the highest kea
 and with my carcase I beseech you all 205
 graunt my yet living name a funerall.
 When first my name in Englands corte was spred
 and in the eares of all men registred
 unto some humble cottage would I'd gone

remote from sorrowe, to have liv'd alone 210
or in oblivions darkest cell, to have
turn'd Anchorite,⁵⁶ and digg'd myself a grave
And with Heraclitus⁵⁷ bewayld our ages
whose present acts, their future woes presages
Would on tymes swiftest wings I had been borne 215
into some desert, helpless and forlorne
and there both night and day ever to weepe
till age should charme me with eternall sleepe
Would I had led my life uppon the playnes
guiding my flocks 'mong'st other Shepard swaines 220
and there worne out my little phyle of dayes
chaunting my pretty lambs with roundelayes⁵⁸
then had my acts, and with my acts my name
perish't togeather, and escaped shame.
But wounds past cure cannot be film'd⁵⁹ with care 225
but every thought still adds unto despaire
What the impartiall preassign'd to bee
Inviolat standeth, as the Medes decree,
Mortalles may strive and striving often gayne
but when gainst heaven they strive, tis all in vayne.⁶⁰ 230
Now did my glorye spred its goulden wings
and by the sacred influence of Kings
like to the flowers in continewall prime
Covers the face of Brittaines beauteous clyme
As some portenteous figure in the Ayre 235
(precedent to some Omen) doth declare
The fearce occurences of strange events
drawne the eyes of all the Elements
as wondergazers and attendants on it,
Whil'st each conjecture ruminates uppon it:⁶¹ 240

Soe flock't together all the kingdomes eyes
 Contract as in one browe to my arrise;
 Not dreaming that my blazing did prefate⁶²
 a declination to their palmye state
 or my advancement groundwork and imitation⁶³ 245
 to Murders, Treasons, Incest⁶⁴ and ambition.
 But as a huge and massy cannon, if
 rays'd on the sommets of some towring cliffe
 with greater violence and more commaund
 batters all oppositions that withstand 250
 his potent volleys, whilst the neighbouring rocks
 start at the roare of his Cyclopean shocks⁶⁵
 and with the terror of his thunder fills
 the fields, the valleys and the lesser hills;
 Soe I advanced by a Regall powre 255
 on each repugnant Thunderbolts did showre
 subduing Heroes to my conquering beck⁶⁶
 setting my foote on each retorting⁶⁷ necke
 that durst presume to parallell my grace
 or cover mischief with a better face. 260
 Greate Albions Monarch⁶⁸ whose divinest hand
 first fix't my foot steppes upon gloryes land
 (whereto I rush't as to a second birth)
 where every hillock was perfum'd with mirth,
 each sprigg was gould, each field a spangled mead⁶⁹ 265
 bestraw'd with dyamonds and with a purple spread
 whose glittering paths my servile⁷⁰ heele unus'd
 to tread with majesty, I base abusd
 deceaving him whose heart was foe to guile
 guilding my Temples with a Judas⁷¹ smile 270
 And as the kidd which pastimes on the plaines

forsakes the tender dugg,⁷² the wanton traines⁷³
 of bubbling founteines and the honyed feild
 with abundance doth her fatness yeild
 And battons on some craggy mounteyne, where 275
 the eye of safety never slept, but feare
 Fills hope with desperacion; I soe did I
 Clyming to chaunge honnors for Sovereignty
 But two things lack't to perfect my renowne
 the countryes favour, and the kingdomes crowne 280
 Oft att the Throne I peeped through my spheare
 but then the sunne did in myne eyes appeare
 whose burning splendor sealed on my face
 made hopings frustrate of that glorious place.
 My name that scarce ere while could ratifye 285
 a positive knowledge in the meanest eye
 Which irrespect, att most vulgaritye
 free from commerce of popularitye,⁷⁴
 Coop'd in oblivion with those wretched bratts,
 Bratts on whome triumphing fortune conculcates⁷⁵ 290
 As if confined to her boundlesse hate
 by power of some irrevocable fate.
 I but of late in Midnights mantle caught
 from publique speculation, where noe thought
 borne with Mercurian wing⁷⁶ in my pursuite 295
 or humane eye could ever prosecute
 Nor did my revolucions once surmise
 this gloomy sett, should ever hope for rise
 Loe now the glorious god of day⁷⁷ awakes
 and from my feete these darkened fetters shakes 300
 Lights from his Chariott, and with powerful charmes
 Clippes⁷⁸ Hyacinth's⁷⁹ in his sacred armes

Now greate Apollo on my cheeke doth laugh
 and every knee bowes to the golden calfe⁸⁰
 I daunce on honnors goulden mounting topp 305
 a Prince⁸¹ my scociate, and a King my propp
 Elbowe my betters and my equalls sleight
 as the proud Eagle doth the Region Kyte⁸²
 The statelye pynes and Cedars⁸³ of the feild
 submissive homage to my greatnes yield 310
 The little fountaines pratling to the wayles⁸⁴
 telling of Buckingham each other tayles
 Each optique⁸⁵ passed this ravish't from the deepe
 of desperations Sea, begins to creepe
 and fynding motion through that sacred fyre 315
 sent from Majesticke rayes how to aspire
 direccions foggy vapours doth deride
 Striving with Dedal:⁸⁶ to bee dyefyed
 and made although a peacefull Empyres scarr
 in majestys bright heaven a regnant starr 320
 And now ambition swelling to her brim
 Conniving deluges to each rotten limbe
 of the distracted state, burst's forth & rages
 to th'utter ruine of ensuing ages
 And least those now blowne sparks of wanton will 325
 whose ardor each superbious⁸⁷ act doth fill
 with vigirous flames, should hide in their creacion
 through want of nutrimentall applicacion.
 I lur'd unto my fist an ayry crewe
 of fawning Cicophants, that could renew 330
 And with their oyley bellowings reinsense
 the wayning light of my concupisence
 Vertue I made a Curtezan to vyce

wherewith being masked might the more entice
Glories Pavillion⁸⁸ changed to a styne
of loathsome lust, and base Hipocrisy
I pluck't the Lillyes from fayre honnors bedd
and planted seede of Draggons in their stedd
Transform'd their beautye to deformed hewe
the Rose to Nettle & sweete Tyme to Rewe.⁸⁹

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Source. Bodleian MS Ashmole 36-37, fols. 6r-10v

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¹ *Mandrakes fatal groanes*: when pulled from the ground, the mandrake plant was supposed to emit a horrific scream that could strike unwary listeners dead.

² *Tapers*: candles.

³ *Brazen*: literally brass, or hardened.

⁴ *crall*: i.e. crawl.

⁵ *the fell Nightbirds*: the screech owl's.

⁶ *Caytiffe*: i.e. caitiff; villain.

⁷ *A sceptre Scociate*: an associate of a sceptre; a king's associate.

⁸ *the Loadstarr*: i.e. the lodestar; the pole or guiding star, by which sailors navigated.

⁹ *A Prince...Lord & Knight*: Buckingham held numerous aristocratic titles (including Earl, Marquis and Duke of Buckingham, Viscount Villiers, Earl of Coventry, and Baron Whaddon), as well as a knighthood.

¹⁰ *Olimpus*: Mount Olympus, the seat of the gods.

¹¹ *Atlas*: in classical myth, Atlas held up the heavens.

¹² *Phoebus*: god of the sun.

- ¹³ *Cynthia*: goddess of the moon.
- ¹⁴ *Charles wayne*: “Charles’s wain” (wagon) was a group of seven stars in the Great Bear constellation.
- ¹⁵ *Heaven’s starry Nymphs*: female goddesses.
- ¹⁶ *Milky rase*: i.e. the Milky rays; alluding to the galaxy the Milky Way, or, more generally, to a heavenly path. The phrase could also have a sexual connotation, alluding to the female breast.
- ¹⁷ *that Piramyde by Gyant built...Joves Towers*: in the classical myth of the giants’ war with the gods, the giants attempted to scale Mount Olympus by piling Mount Pelion upon Mount Ossa.
- ¹⁸ *Elizeums fields*: the Elysian Fields, the realm of the blessed souls in the afterlife; here meaning heaven.
- ¹⁹ *Lebanons tall cedars*: “For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low: And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan” (Isaiah 2.12-13).
- ²⁰ *to Nimrodize*: to act like a tyrant. Nimrod is depicted in Genesis 10:8-12 as “a mighty one in the earth” and “a mighty hunter”.
- ²¹ *supernal*: on high; heavenly.
- ²² *Downe tumbled Pelion, uppon Ossa steepe*: Pelion and Ossa were the two mountains the giants attempted to pile upon each other to scale Olympus during their war with the gods.
- ²³ *Icarius in Icarian deepe*: in the classical myth, Icarus flew too close to the sun which melted the wax holding on his wings, plunging him to his death in the waters below, thereafter known as the Icarian Sea.
- ²⁴ *inactures*: the *OED* hesitantly defines “enacture” as a “carrying into act, fulfilment”.
- ²⁵ *bayfull*: baleful; or, perhaps, full of baying, the howling of dogs.
- ²⁶ *with some revengefull Plannett strooke*: in astrological thinking, to be under the influence of a revengeful planet.
- ²⁷ *disbulke thy Microfine*: obscure. In context, it should refer to another type of severe bodily reaction (possibly the shedding of skin) that would occur if the true nature of hell were revealed to the living.
- ²⁸ *azure channells*: blue veins.

- 29 *blazons*: sights, shows.
- 30 *Thou greate directresse of the night*: the moon.
- 31 *frontletts*: foreheads.
- 32 *cominacion*: i.e. commination; threat of divine punishment.
- 33 *eterne*: eternal.
- 34 *of our first parents sin partaker*: all humans were understood to have inherited original sin from Adam and Eve.
- 35 *reassay*: try again.
- 36 *th'Elizean dales*: the Elysian Fields, resting place of the blessed in the afterlife; heaven.
- 37 *c'leap*: i.e. clepe; call.
- 38 *Orizons*: prayers.
- 39 *Johva'hs*: i.e. Jehova's; God's.
- 40 *Tryne*: the Holy Trinity—God, Christ and the Holy Spirit.
- 41 *Hecatts triple ban*: the triple curse of Hecate. Hecate was a three-headed goddess of the underworld, patron of demons and instructor in witchcraft.
- 42 *harrow'd*: plundered.
- 43 *paps*: breasts.
- 44 *Hyena's guiles*: the hyena was associated with falsity and treachery.
- 45 *sable*: black.
- 46 *Cymerean*: in classical myth, the Cimmerii lived in a land enshrouded in darkness.
- 47 *composure*: making, composition.
- 48 *emulate*: envy, aspire to.
- 49 *cerements*: shrouds for the dead.

- 50 *Brasen*: brass.
- 51 *Quietues*: i.e. quietus; rest.
- 52 *portent*: doom.
- 53 *solstice*: mid-point.
- 54 *drake*: serpent, dragon.
- 55 *What bleareyde Plannett...birth*: astrological theory contended that the dominant planet (here “gloring”; shining or glowering) at the time of a child’s birth would influence the child’s destiny.
- 56 *Anchorite*: hermit.
- 57 *Heraclitus*: an ancient Greek philosopher.
- 58 *roundelayes*: songs.
- 59 *film’d*: covered up.
- 60 *What the impartiall preassign’d...in vayne*: presumably a reference to the divine predestination of human fates. Predestination is immutable, like the laws (“decree”) of the Medes and Persians (see Daniel 6.8).
- 61 *As some portenteous...ruminates uppon it*: the analogy is to a portent, an aberrant occurrence in nature that was presumed to presage some future event or calamity.
- 62 *prefate*: preface, or perhaps predict.
- 63 *imition*: i.e. immission; introduction to, insertion in.
- 64 *Incest*: unlike murder, treason and ambition, this charge was not usually levelled at Buckingham.
- 65 *Cyclopean shocks*: some mythic traditions assert that the one-eyed Cyclops giants gave Zeus his thunderbolts, while others depict them as workers in the god Vulcan’s metal forge. Both traditions might therefore explain the noise to which this line alludes.
- 66 *beck*: gesture of command and control.
- 67 *retorting*: resisting, refusing.
- 68 *Greate Albions Monarch*: James I.

69 *mead*: meadow.

70 *servile*: Buckingham's relatively humble (yet undoubtedly gentle) social origins were a target of much criticism.

71 *Judas*: i.e. Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ.

72 *dugg*: udder, teat.

73 *traines*: currents.

74 *popularitye*: in early seventeenth-century political discourse, "popularity" could often imply popular rebelliousness.

75 *conculcates*: tramps under foot.

76 *Mercurian wing*: the god Mercury, messenger of the gods, was often depicted with winged sandals.

77 *god of day*: Apollo-Phoebus.

78 *Clipps*: embraces.

79 *Hyacinth's*: Hyacinth was a Spartan youth loved by Apollo.

80 *the golden calfe*: the golden idol worshipped by the Israelites in the wilderness (Exodus 32).

81 *a Prince*: Prince Charles.

82 *the Region Kyte*: the scavenger bird (kite) of the sky.

83 *The statelye pynes and Cedars*: the great and powerful; the English nobility.

84 *wayles*: i.e. wales; waves or currents.

85 *optique*: unclear; perhaps "eye" works best.

86 *Dedal*: Daedalus, whose invention of wings allowed him to fly free from captivity in Crete.

87 *superbious*: arrogant.

88 *Gloryes Pavillion*: the royal court.

89 *sweete Tyme to Rewe*: the herbs thyme and rue. Thyme is sweet, rue bitter.
