

Pi9 Lord, what are wee, that thou shouldst thus respect

Notes. The sole known version of this poem is found in a manuscript that also contains a copy of the religious scholar Sebastian Benefield's commentary on the biblical book of Amos. Depicting Buckingham variously as the overgrown branch of the vine, the worm, the ravenous beast, the weeds corrupting the biblically resonant "vineyard" of the nation, this poem interprets (and legitimizes) the Duke's assassination as God's providential intervention to save his suffering Englishmen. In this context, the assassin Felton is reduced to the walk-on role of the husbandman, the agent of God's larger purpose. The poem concludes with the fond hope of national renewal in the wake of Buckingham's death, a strain of optimism found in other writings from the period that naïvely imagined Buckingham's removal as the cure for all of England's ills.

Lord, what are wee, that thou shouldst thus respect

The sonnes of men? that thou shouldst still protect

This Land of ours, this Vineyard¹ of thine owne

This Englands Eden,² wherein thou hast sown

Thy Word,³ the tree of life,⁴ and as it were

Hast fenc't it round with walls of seas, loe here

We blesse thy name, and in these sacred layes⁵

Open our lipps to speake thy glorious prayse:

And now, mee thinks our eyes behould thy power,

Thy judgements lord, our hearts ar not to tower

Soe highe as them to reach; but loe we see

Thou prunest the vineyard as it pleaseth thee.

That branch that did of late oretop the rest,

And with his fruitlesse weight the stemme opprest

That worme that eate the stocke, and spoyled the fruite,

Or else devoured it like a ravenous brute,

That spreading weed, which choakt the corne, that tare⁶

Which grew soe fast, and did soe much impayre

The soyle, in harvest loe the husbandman

Doth weede him out, and with the shortest spanne

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Affoord him time, and cuts him of that all
Might take example of his sudden fall
And now, O Lord, sith thou hast prun'd thy vine
Preferre the roote with that same hand of thine
That is Allmightie, lett the branches spring
And in a thousand fould her fruit forth bring.
Soe when thou commest unto thy Vineyard, thou
Maist see th'encrease, and lett thy blessing flow.

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Source. BL MS Sloane 1199, fol. 70v

Pi9

- ¹ *this Vineyard*: this may allude to Christ's parable of the vineyard (e.g. Matthew 21.28-46).
- ² *Eden*: the earthly paradise (Genesis 1-3).
- ³ *thou hast sown / Thy Word*: i.e. established the true religion, Protestantism.
- ⁴ *the tree of life*: the Tree of Life was located in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2.9), but here refers to the Word, and thus the Protestant religion, that will bring salvation.
- ⁵ *layes*: songs.
- ⁶ *tare*: a type of weed that features prominently in Christ's parables of the sower and "the tares of the field" (Matthew 13).
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