

Pii10 Enjoy thy Bondage; make thy Prison know

Notes. On 26 October 1628, Attorney-General Robert Heath questioned Ben Jonson as the suspected author of this widely circulated poem on the assassin Felton. Jonson admitted having read the verses at the antiquarian Sir Robert Cotton's house, but assured Heath that he was not the author. "Common fame", Jonson confessed, attributed the poem to the Oxford scholar, Zouch Townley (Original Papers 72-73). On 14 November, John Pory informed Joseph Mead that Townley, "a minister of rare parts, that should have come into the Star Chamber, ore tenus, for writing of verses 'To his confined friend, Mr. Felton,' is got safe over to the Hague where some say he will print an apology for the fact" (Court and Times of Charles I 1.427). A number of sources (see list below) transcribe the final four lines as a discrete poem; one, the commonplace book of Sir John Perceval, probably compiled c.1646-49 while Perceval was a student at Magdalene College, Cambridge (BL Add. MS 47111), transcribes lines 11-20 as a discrete poem. Bellany ("Libels in Action" 108) reads the poem as a subversion of the authorities' punitive rituals that had been designed to demonize the assassin, while Barton (315-17) offers an appreciation of the poem's Jonsonian style.

"To his confined Friend, Mr Felton"

Enjoy thy Bondage; make thy Prison know

Thou hast a Libertie thou canst not owe

To those base Punishments; keep't entire, since

Nothing but guilt shackles the Conscience.

I dare not tempt they¹ valient blood to whay,²

Enfeebling it to pittie, nor dare pray

Thy Act may Mercie finde, least thy great Storie

Loose somewhat of its Miracle and Glorie.

I wish thy Meritt, labourd Crueltie;³

Stout Vengeance best befittes thy Memorie.

For I would have posteritie to heare,

Hee that can bravely do, can bravely beare.

Tortures seeme great in a Cowards Eye.

'Tis no great thing to suffer, lesse to die.

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Should all the clowdes fall out, and in that strife, 15
 Lightning and thunder send to take my life,
 I would applaude the Wisdome of my Fate,
 Which knew to valew mee at such a rate,
 As at my Fall to trouble all the skie,
 Emptying upon mee Joves full Armorie.⁴ 20
 Serve in your sharpest Mischiefs: use your Rack;⁵
 Enlarge each Joint, and make each sinew crack:
 Thy soule before was streightned,⁶ Thanke thy doome,
 To shew her vertue shee hath larger roome.
 Yet, sure, if every Arterie were broke, 25
 Thou wouldst finde strength for such another stroke.
 And now I leave thee unto death and Fame,
 Which lives, to shake Ambition with thy name:
 And if it were not sinne, the Court by it
 Should hourelly swear before the Favourite. 30
 Farewell: for thy brave sake wee shall not send
 Henceforth Commaunders Enemies to defend:⁷
 Nor will it ever our just Monarch please
 To keep an Admiral⁸ to loose our Seas.
 Farewell: undaunted stand, and joy to bee 35
 Of publique sorrow the Epitomie.
 Let the Duke's name solace and Crowne thy thrall:⁹
 All wee by him did suffer, Thou for all.
 And I dare boldlie write, as thou dar'st dye,
 Stout¹⁰ Felton, Englands Ransome, heere doth lye. 40
 If idle Passingers aske, who lies heere,
 Let the Dukes toomb this for Inscription beare.
 Paint Cales and Ree:¹¹ Make French and Spanish laugh,
 Add Englands shame, And there's his Epitaph.

Source. BL MS Sloane 826, fols. 192v-193v

Other known sources. *Court and Times of Charles I* 1.427; *Wit Restor'd* 56; Bodleian MS CCC. 328, fol. 51r; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. e.14, fol. 14v; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. e.97, p. 91; Bodleian MS Malone 21, fol. 4r; Bodleian MS Malone 23, p. 205; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 26, fol. 34r; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 142, fol. 42v; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 199, p. 62; BL Add. MS 29492, fol. 63v; BL Add. MS 30982, fol. 86r; BL Add. MS 33998, fol. 42v; BL Add. MS 47111, fol. 4v; BL MS Egerton 2026, fol. 65r; BL MS Harley 6383, fol. 28v; BL MS Harley 6931, fol. 48r; BL MS Harley 7319, fol. 2r; BL MS Sloane 1199, fol. 74v; BL MS Sloane 1792, fol. 114v; BL MS Sloane 4178, fol. 63r; St. John's MS S.32, fol. 29r; V&A MS F48.G.2/1, item 3; Beinecke MS Osborn Box 12 no. 5, fol. 18v; Folger MS V.a.97, p. 21; Folger MS V.a.125, fol. 11r; Folger MS V.b.43, fol. 33v; Houghton MS Eng. 1278, item 11; Huntington MS HM 198, 2.152; Rosenbach MS 239/27, p. 45; Rosenbach MS 240/2, fol. 93r

Known sources of shorter version. Bodleian MS Don. b.8, p. 212 and p. 368; Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. c.50, fol. 26r; Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 153, fol. 10r; BL Add. MS 44963, fol. 40r; BL MS Egerton 2026, fol. 12r

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¹ *they*: probable scribal error; read “thy”.

² *whay*: in this context, the whey is the watery part or serum of the blood.

³ *labourd Crueltie*: torture. Reports were widespread that Felton was to be or had been tortured in the Tower of London.

⁴ *Joves full Armorie*: thunderbolts were the weapons of Jove, the king of the gods.

⁵ *Rack*: an instrument of torture that inflicted great pain by forcibly stretching the victim's limbs.

⁶ *streightned*: cramped, confined, imprisoned.

⁷ *Commaunders Enemies to defend*: Buckingham was popularly blamed for the failures of the military expeditions under his command, in particular the 1627 expedition to Ré, the disastrous outcome of which was attributed to Buckingham's cowardice, incompetence and treachery (see Section O).

⁸ *Admiral*: Buckingham had been appointed Lord Admiral in 1619.

⁹ *thrall*: captivity, suffering.

¹⁰ *Stout*: brave.

¹¹ *Cales and Ree*: the two great failed military expeditions of the 1620s: to Cadiz in 1625 and to the Ile de Ré in 1627. Buckingham commanded the latter in person and was responsible for planning the former.
