

## Pii12 You auntient Lawes of Right; Can you, for shame

*Notes.* Formal legal proceedings against Felton were delayed while authorities endeavoured in vain to track down the conspirators they were convinced had helped the assassin plan his crime. Eventually, the authorities abandoned the search and on 27 November 1628 Felton was tried for murder in the court of King's Bench, convicted and sentenced to death. The poet—who is identified in at least one source as James Smith (Bodleian MS Ashmole 36-37)—challenges the justice of this verdict and subverts the meaning of Felton's execution. On Smith, see Raylor 55-56. On the poem, see discussions by McRae, who examines its use of legal and political discourse (Literature 133-34), and Norbrook, who notes how the poet took "the instruments of [Felton's] punishment and sublimated them into spiritual ornaments" (57).

### "On Feltons Arraignement"<sup>1</sup>

You auntient Lawes of Right; Can you, for shame,

You, the late Bondmen<sup>2</sup> of great Buckingham,

That at his beck<sup>3</sup> hurl'd Justice round the Orbe

Of Indirection, and could afford

Noe pleasing Plea to the afflicted sence,

Noe remedy to Wrong, but Patience.

Can you (I say) speake death in your decrees,

To one whose life procur'd your Liberties?

Or you, late tongue-ty'd Judges of the land,

Passe sentence on his Act, whose valient hand

Wrencht off your Muzzells, and enfranchiz'd all

Your shackl'd Consciences from one Mans thrall?<sup>4</sup>

But O! his Countrie! What can you verdict on?

If guiltie? 'Tis of your Redemption.

And if there can bee honour in a sinne,

His well Complotting starrs have wrought him in,

Thy fetters (ransom'd England) and thy Feares,

Triumphant, Trophie-like, stout<sup>5</sup> Felton wears

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On him like seemely Ornaments, They deck  
 His Armes and Wrists, and hang about his Neck 20  
 Like gingling<sup>6</sup> Braceletts, And as rich they bee;  
 So much the cause can alter Miserie.  
 But wherefore liv'st thou in thy doomes suspence?  
 The Tyrant Law has double violence:  
 For all thy fellow Saints have waited long, 25  
 And wearied time with expectation.  
 It is thy End that must begin thy Glorie,  
 No finis shalbee period to thy Storie.  
 Dye bravely then: For, till thy death be writt,  
 Thy honour wants a Seale to perfect it. 30  
 With peacefull praiers to heaven wee'l waft thy soule,  
 While every Bell thy Funerall shall toll,  
 Then each choice spirit ring thee to thy grave,  
 And with their shouts fright Eccho<sup>7</sup> from her cave.  
 Next, write thyne Epitaph. Now, from your Spring 35  
 Post, Post yee Sisters, and help Mee to sing,<sup>8</sup>  
 Lest my unskillfull muse should faile in painting  
 The worth of one whom Jove<sup>9</sup> was proud in sainting.

#### Epitaph

Loe, heere he lies, that with one Arm could more  
 Than all the Nerves of Parliament before.<sup>10</sup> 40  
 A Kingdome drunke, and death around it hover'd,  
 Hee pluckt the sicklie Plume,<sup>11</sup> and it recover'd.  
 Then England turn Idolatrix<sup>12</sup> at his shrine,  
 That lost his owne life for restoring thine.

**Source.** BL MS Sloane 826, fols. 194r-195r

**Other known sources.** Bodleian MS Ashmole 36-37, fol. 31r; Bodleian MS Malone 23, p. 208

- <sup>1</sup> *Arraignment*: an arraignment is a formal preliminary stage in a criminal trial, but the word was often used to refer generally to the trial itself.
- <sup>2</sup> *Bondmen*: servants, slaves.
- <sup>3</sup> *beck*: command.
- <sup>4</sup> *thrall*: bondage, captivity.
- <sup>5</sup> *stout*: brave.
- <sup>6</sup> *gingling*: i.e. jingling.
- <sup>7</sup> *Eccho*: in classical mythology, the nymph Echo lost physical form to become only an echo.
- <sup>8</sup> *Now, from your Spring...to sing*: the poet here calls upon the nine Muses (“yee Sisters”) to come from their home near the Castalian spring on Mount Parnassus, to help him write Felton’s epitaph.
- <sup>9</sup> *Jove*: king of the gods; here meaning God.
- <sup>10</sup> *that with one Arm...Parliament before*: i.e. Felton alone was able to achieve what parliament had attempted but failed to achieve in 1626 and 1628—Buckingham’s removal.
- <sup>11</sup> *Plume*: literally a feather, and here figuratively presenting Buckingham as a kind of poisonous adornment that had to be plucked off if the nation was to revive.
- <sup>12</sup> *Idolatrix*: idol worshipper.
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