

Piii17 Death come thy selfe and let thy Image sleepe

Notes. This Buckingham elegy, attributed in the only known source to “Mr AT” is especially notable for its references to libellers, depicted as snakes who bite what “once they kist”, and as cannibals who feed on the dead Duke’s remains.

“On the Death of the Duke of Bucckingam”

Death come thy selfe and let thy Image sleepe

Her quiet face and comick action keepe

Nor with strain’d lookes and gestures night by night

Thy trajedyes ere thou canst act recite

Let ies not blindfold search the booke of fate

5

And sleeping our misfortunes antidate

Growst thou so feeble men must now ly still

And thou strike twice before thy dart can kill

Must shadowes and dumb showes in ambush lye

To wound the spirrit ere the body dye

10

Then men most wretched and of men much more

Then all the rest, the deprived poore

Ours was the night though rich men gott the day

And must sweet sleepe our bedfellow betray

Our secret store and all times issue bee

15

Our mortall foes and leave no minuet¹ free

The morning dreames and midnight visions flye

A soule prepar’d for any trajedy.

Something mee thought did something to my eyes

That made mee sleeping see the destinyes

20

Sett in an Amphitheater design’d

By no man’s hands, nor by a wall confin’d

But free and open as the æthereall skye

Bounded alone by the beholders eye

Clowdes were their cloathing here and there made fast 25
 With a small starr that sullen beames forth cast
 The plannetts lent their aery actors light
 And for ther sceanes they borrowd blackes of night
 A shewer² of threads each to a spindle ty'd
 Like a small rayne fell thicke on ery³ side. 30
 Which never left twisting and turning round
 Till most made dewes as they aproacht the ground
 Some broke before some att the very touch
 Some scarce halfe full some that were fil'd too much
 All that lay still and soe forbore to spin 35
 Our mother earth strayt gap't and tooke them in
 Among the rest one lookt so cleare so bright
 As round about it cast a liberall⁴ light
 On whose outside no æquall eye could looke
 But every turne and ev'ry motion tooke 40
 Soe gentle too as toucht one would have thought
 The silkworme onely on that web had wrought
 And yet soe firme as felt one might bee bould
 Rather then thread to say t'was wire of gold
 Nice virgins fear'd t'was part of that same shower 45
 That onrebuickd once pierct a golden tower⁵
 Mirsirs⁶ beleev'd theire Mamon did descend
 And chimists welcom'd their long look'd for frind⁷
 Travellers thought the fam'd fleece⁸ scarce so fayre
 And lovers tooke it for their mistrisse hayre. 50
 Poets would wright upon no other theame
 Supposing it a flexible sun beame
 Not what, but whose ambitious now to know
 The Fates⁹ that seldome such a secrett show
 Open their bookes and in their lists of names 55

That lovely thread I found was Buckingham
 Million of harts and myriads of eyes
 Lighting upon it covered it like flyes
 Till one a sodayne one could hardly tell
 Why ore wherefore thousands dropt of and fell 60
 Transform'd to snakes biting wher once they kist
 Aloft they bus'd,¹⁰ but now beloy they hist
 Rays'd by this spell out of the stygian lake¹¹
 Swifter then thought a fourth fell¹² fury¹³ brake
 Arm'd with a blade that in a trice dispatcht 65
 That web the world must longing leave unmatched
 Atropos scorning her prefixt decrees
 Should stoupe to human mutabilityes
 Snatcht up her sheeres¹⁴ intending in a rage
 For that one stroake to leave an empty stage 70
 Cinthia¹⁵ drew back; and mercury let fall
 His charming rod¹⁶ as of no use at all
 Venus afresh bewayld Adonis slaine¹⁷
 As twice alive and now new dead againe
 The sun rose slowly and made hast to bedd 75
 And fiery mars¹⁸ never apear'd so redd
 Tost lightning flasht out of the thunderers¹⁹ eye
 And Saturne²⁰ walkt like a sad mourner bye
 Nature cry'd out and up sterne Justice²¹ stept
 Ceres²² lay downe Heaven and the graces²³ wept 80
 An universall compound shrieke and shoute
 As if the worlds great soule were new breath'd out
 Startle'd my senses then a sodayne ill
 Apear'd as dismall as the sound was shrill
 With sad presages frighted from my bed 85
 A rumour rays'd confusd of Duke and dead

Looking and lisoning I walkt on perplext
 Till I had heard such comments on that text
 As made me with Deucalions race of men
 Rays'd out of stones²⁴ newly reviv'd againe 90
 Ore thoesse men monsters which though armed sprung
 From dragons teeth²⁵ wanted a killing tounge
 Some wer to that excesse of bounty growne
 They freely gave him faults that were their owne
 And some to shame him with such slips²⁶ began 95
 As to have mist hee had bin more then man
 Some were so æquall to his actions still
 They would condemne whether good or ill
 And some were so with vigilance possest
 When hee was dead they would not let him rest 100
 But did (like Anthropophagi)²⁷ entreate
 His very corps as if they kill'd to eate
 Amongst these weeds some eares of corne were found
 That hung their heads after his fell to ground
 Some Flowers soe full of Heavenly dew they bent 105
 Under their load though they retayn'd their sent
 Some tempers taken from the truest steele
 That still the touch of the lov'd loadstone²⁸ feele
 But that faire mirrour²⁹ in whose spotlesse breast
 Hee left an Image of himselfe impreast 110
 To whome all trees that in the garden grow
 Sett by that cædar are meere shrubbs in show
 All corne but chaff all flowers in garden sett
 Smelt but like crowfoote³⁰ to that violet
 What hands held up what folded armes acrossse 115
 What sighes breathes she after her Deare Lords losse
 Mee thinkes I see her like an Alpe of snow

Melt till her teares in to a torrent grow
 Then by degrees the calme resemblance take
 Not of a river but a standing lake 120
 Which if no frindly Diety bee bent
 To turne in to a christall monument³¹
 Like Arethusa she will shyly run
 To worlds unknowne and meete the new sett sun³²
 Ore the mayne sea strive with her teares to swell 125
 Like sad Cornelia when her Pompey fell.³³
 I like poor Codrus that can onely picke
 Up here a stone and ther a litle sticke
 To build an Alter and to make a blaze
 That a rude winde may soone put out ore rayse³⁴ 130
 Wish him a pile that sett on fire may light
 His darkend fame thorough detractions night
 And obeliske that might his urne convay
 Shining in gold up to the gods halfe way
 And when his tombe shall like a Trophy rise 135
 glorious enough to putt out envyes eyes
 Such Epitaphs and Elegies as sung
 By a sweet muse may silence slanders tounge.

Source. Huntington MS HM 904, fols. 49r-52r

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¹ *minuet*: scribal error; read “minute”.

² *shewer*: i.e. shower.

³ *ery*: i.e. every.

⁴ *liberall*: generous.

⁵ *Nice virgins fear'd...pierct a golden tower*: allusion to the myth of Danae who, though locked in a tower by her father, was nevertheless impregnated by Zeus/Jove in the form of a golden shower. "Onrebuickd" here is "unrebuked" (unchecked).

⁶ *Mirsirs*: i.e. misers.

⁷ *And chimists welcom'd...look'd for frind*: allusion to alchemists, who endeavoured to turn base metals into gold.

⁸ *the fam'd fleece*: the golden fleece of classical mythology.

⁹ *The Fates*: the three goddesses who determined the fate of things and individuals: Clotho, Lachesis and Atropos.

¹⁰ *bus'd*: i.e. buzzed.

¹¹ *the stygian lake*: the lake of Styx in the classical underworld.

¹² *fell*: cruel, fierce.

¹³ *fury*: the furies were avenging goddesses who punished the dead in the afterlife.

¹⁴ *Atropos...sheeres*: Atropos, one of the fates, was often depicted carrying the shears she used to cut the thread of life.

¹⁵ *Cinthia*: Cynthia, goddess of the moon.

¹⁶ *mercury let fall / His charming rod*: the messenger god Mercury carried a staff or caduceus.

¹⁷ *Venus afresh bewayld Adonis slaine*: in classical myth, the goddess Venus became besotted with the beautiful youth Adonis, who was killed by a boar.

¹⁸ *mars*: god of war.

¹⁹ *the thunderers*: i.e. Jove's.

²⁰ *Saturne*: ancient king of the gods, father of Jove.

²¹ *Justice*: the goddess Astraea is probably implied here.

²² *Ceres*: goddess of the earth, corn and argiculture.

²³ *the graces*: the three goddesses of beauty.

- ²⁴ *Deucalions race of men...stones*: after a destructive flood sent by Jove to punish the wickedness of mankind, Deucalion and his wife created new men and women from stones.
- ²⁵ *thoese men monsters...From dragons teeth*: allusion to the myth of Cadmus, who sowed the teeth of a dragon, from which there grew armed men.
- ²⁶ *slips*: errors.
- ²⁷ *Anthropophagi*: cannibals.
- ²⁸ *loadstone*: i.e. lodestone; magnet.
- ²⁹ *that faire mirrour*: introduces a passage on Buckingham's widow, Katherine.
- ³⁰ *crowfoote*: typically a name for the buttercup.
- ³¹ *if no frindly Diety...christall monument*: probably an allusion to the myth of Niobe, who, having lost her fourteen children, was metamorphosed into a weeping stone.
- ³² *Arethusa...new sett sun*: the nymph Arethusa, running from the river god Alpheus, became a fountain on the island of Ortygia.
- ³³ *Like sad Cornelia when her Pompey fell*: Book 8 of Lucan's *Pharsalia* (sig.P3v ff.) describes how, in 48 BC, the Roman leader Pompey was assassinated as he approached the Egyptian shore in a boat. Pompey's wife Cornelia witnessed the murder from a separate boat further out at sea. Katherine Villiers did not witness her husband's murder, but she was elsewhere in the same building when the crime occurred.
- ³⁴ *I like poor Codrus...put out ore rayse*: the poet here compares himself to Pompey's follower Codrus. According to Book 8 of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Codrus retrieved Pompey's decapitated body from the sea and, using driftwood and borrowed fire, improvised a funeral pyre for the remains.
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