

Piii18 Hee that can reade a sigh, or spell a teare

Notes. In one source, this poem is attributed to “ Dr. Lewis” (Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 26). Another variant preserves only the first six lines, and titles the abbreviated poem “On a Learned Nobleman” (Bodleian MS Sancroft 53). The poem’s conclusion celebrates the birth of Buckingham’s posthumous son, Francis Villiers, which implies that the verse was completed after Francis’s birth in April 1629.

“To my Lord Duke of Buckingham his memory”

Hee that can reade a sigh, or spell a teare,

Pronounce amazement, and accent wilde feare,

Or get all greif by hart; hee, onely hee,

Is fitt to reade, or write thy Elegie.

Unvalued Lord! whoe wer’t so hard a text:

5

Writt in one age, but understood ith’ next.

Write Elegyes, for those that dye: my Lord

(Though halfe the age wear Feltons) can afford

Vertue enough, for to survive the rage

Of a tumultous & self-cursing age;

10

Nor greives it mee, the Cittie-wives are slacke

To mourne for thee in clarrett or burnt-sacke:¹

Whoe for their husbands doe not use to weepe:

Unlesse the wyne be hott, and they drunck deepe.

Their children shall lament thee, when they knowe

15

What t’was to loose such bloud, and loose it soe.

T’is yet too soone for them to knowe; such things,

As Buckingham, none can esteeme but kings.

And you² (shame of your nation) whose bold strife

Is to pourtraict a monster backe to life;

20

That hee may live within a fewee yeeres pawse

The witsse of your curse, That was the cause,

Yow that cann prayse applaud, you that cann paynt
 Such a prodigious villayne to a Saynt
 And while yow think't Idolatry to glaunce 25
 Upon a bleeding Crucifix by chaunce;
 Can yett create an Idoll divell t'adore,
 And deck your Oratryes with such store.³
 Yow that would kill his dust, doe yow not see
 Howe god derydes your wickednes: whilest hee 30
 Hathe given those ashes life, and made his tombe
 Of posthume issue,⁴ such a fruitefull wombe.
 See yow not howe the Phenixe⁵ is renew'd
 And to him from his death, more yeers accru'd!
 Yow tooke him hence, when he had spent for yow 35
 Thirtie fyve⁶ carefull yeers; heaven would renew
 His lease; and send him to a wilfull thronge
 An Infant backe agayne, t'expound the wronge,
 His innocency felt, when the beleefe
 Of a deceyvll⁷ world, sign'd their owne greife. 40
 Should I bewaile thee then? or byd myne eyes
 Write on thy joyfull cradle, Elegyes?
 When I assured am this short disguise
 Of Infancie, wherein oure feare-drown'd eyes
 Discover thee, cann at the furthest last 45
 Not above twenty yeeres, and then thy fast
 Sprouting and growing glory will in strength
 (Though short now) yet be writt agayne at length.
 When the uncoozend⁸ world shall all confesse
 Thou wert sent backe to earth agayne, to blesse 50
 Thyne Enemies and to revenge their all,
 By blessing them once more against their will.

Source. Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 26, fols. 37v-38r

Other known sources. Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. e.97, p. 60; Bodleian MS Sancroft 53, p. 46

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¹ *To mourne for thee...burnt-sacke*: wines (“clarrett”, “burnt-sacke”) were traditionally served to mourners at funerals.

² *you*: the “you” addressed in this and the next eleven lines are the English people who have celebrated Buckingham’s death (“kill[ed] his dust”) and turned the assassin Felton into their “Idoll divell”.

³ *And while yow think’t...such store*: the poet accuses Felton’s supporters of turning the assassin into an idol and of decorating their places of prayer (“Oratryes”) with his image (presumably his engraved picture). The poet implies that these Felton-worshippers are (stereotypically hypocritical) Puritans, who are just the kind of people so obsessed by the dangers of Catholicism that they would label as idolatry even an accidental glance at the kind of religious images (here a “bleeding Crucifix”) found in Catholic churches.

⁴ *posthume issue*: Buckingham’s son Francis was born after his father’s death, in April 1629.

⁵ *Phenixe*: i.e. the phoenix, the mythological bird that could miraculously regenerate itself.

⁶ *Thirtie fyve*: Buckingham was murdered five days before his thirty-sixth birthday.

⁷ *deceyvll*: i.e. deceitful.

⁸ *uncoozend*: i.e. uncozened; undeceived.
