

Q4 My life is done my heart prepard for death

Notes. This unique poem, copied at the end of several pages of documents on the Castlehaven case, incorporates the widely circulated “I neade noe Trophies, to adorne my hearse” as its concluding lines. The main body of the poem takes the form of a versified “last-dying speech”, the statement of faith and repentance expected from a convicted felon awaiting execution. The poet seems to have deliberately crafted this speech to allow the possibility of alternative readings, dependent upon one’s interpretation of the term “flesh and blood”. The Earl’s lament at his betrayal by his “flesh and blood” could be read as an admission of his guilt, acknowledging the root of his crime in his inability to temper his bodily lusts. A more compelling interpretation, however, would identify Castlehaven’s wife and son as his “flesh and blood”, and thus take the poem as an attack on their malice. The latter reading, of course, is strengthened by the addition of “I neade no Trophies, to adorne my hearse” at the end of the verse.

My life is done my heart prepard for death

My trust in God who first did give me breath.

My saviour Christ hath paid my debt, and I

Am free from death and hell eternally.¹

And yet my heart from sorrow is not free

5

To thinke that my owne flesh should injure mee.

My flesh and blood from flesh and blood is parted,

Wee once were one but now are double hearted.²

My ill from evill sprong and malice wrought

My sinfull action which was first in thought.

10

And what remains in after age to blame mee

My flesh and blood did worke my death to shame mee

Ah whorish flesh what more is to bee knowne

To thy disgrace more then to name mine owne.

I need noe Tropheys to adorne my hearse

15

My wife exalts my hornes³ in every verse,

And placed hath soe fully on my tombe,

that for my armes⁴ is left no vacant roome.

Who would take such a Countesse to his bed,
That first gives hornes and then cutts of his head.

20

Source. BL MS Lans. 491, fol. 229v

Q4

¹ *My life is done...hell eternally*: the convicted felon was supposed to offer a theologically correct testimony to his hope in salvation. Castlehaven—a suspected Catholic—made a declaration of his Protestant faith at his execution. The statement in this poetic version would also pass Protestant muster.

² *My flesh and blood...hearted*: punning on divergent meanings of “flesh and blood”. Castlehaven’s own “flesh and blood” (i.e. body) is parted from his familial “flesh and blood” (i.e. his wife and son), as a result of an unnatural division between them (signified in the term “double hearted”).

³ *hornes*: cuckold’s horns.

⁴ *armes*: Castlehaven’s coat-of-arms. Heraldic devices were commonly added to tomb monuments.