

Classic Poetry Series

George Wither
- poems -

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George Wither(11 June 1588 – 2 May 1667)

George Wither was an English poet, pamphleteer, and satirist. He was a prolific writer who adopted a deliberate plainness of style; he was several times imprisoned. C. V. Wedgwood wrote "every so often in the barren acres of his verse is a stretch enlivened by real wit and observation, or fired with a sudden intensity of feeling".

Context and poetic reputation

Wither has been classified as a Spenserian, with Michael Drayton, Giles Fletcher, Phineas Fletcher, and Henry More. The early Jacobean Spenserians were generally republican rather than imperial (at least in terms of ancient Rome), of the "country party" rather than the "court party", nostalgic for Elizabeth I, and in favour of the older ornateness rather than the plain style of James I.

According to Christopher Hill:

"... we can trace a line from Spenser ... through a group of poets ... ranging from Shakespeare, Drayton, the two Fletchers, William Browne and Samuel Daniel to George Wither".

Or again:

"A line of poets could be traced from Sidney and Spenser through Sylvester and Browne to Wither— not, admittedly, of a rising quality, but of a consistent political attitude."

Where Hill identifies connections via the aristocratic patrons and politics, Alastair Fowler takes Drayton to be the poetic centre of a group, which besides Wither comprised Browne, John Davies of Hereford, William Drummond of Hawthornden, George Sandys and Joshua Sylvester.

From c.1640 onwards, Wither assumed an overtly prophetic voice. His wide range of publication, in prose as well as various poetic genres over nearly half a century, has left a very uneven impression of his interests and affected his poetic reputation. George Gilfillan wrote that "Wither was a man of real genius, but

seems to have been partially insane". Herbert Grierson found something to praise in early love poems, but spoke of "endless diffuse didactic and pious poems, if they can be called poems".

Biography

Early life

Wither was born in Bentworth, near Alton, in the heart Hampshire, the son of George Wither Senior of that place and his wife, Mary, who was possibly from the family of Hunt. His grandfather, Richard Wither, lived at Manydown in Wootton St Lawrence, where the family had resided since at least 1344. His early schooling took place under Rev. John Greaves, the father of John, Sir Edward and Thomas Greaves. Between the ages of fifteen and seventeen he studied at Magdalen College, Oxford. Despite his neighbors' advice that his father put him to some mechanic trade, he was sent to one of the Inns of Chancery, eventually obtaining an introduction at Court.

It is thought that he spent some time in Ireland, perhaps with Adam Loftus at Rathfarnham Castle. He wrote what amounted to a masque for a wedding that took place there in 1610, of the parents of Francis Willughby.

He wrote an elegy (1612) on the death of Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales, and a volume of gratulatory poems (1613) on the marriage of the princess Elizabeth.

Imprisonment and release

Some time between 1611 and 1613 he wrote *Abuses Stript and Whipt*, twenty satires directed against Revenge, Ambition, Lust. These satires — aimed at exposing "th'abuses of these wicked Times" — achieved some popular success and there were seven printings from 1613 to 1617.] The volume included a poem called "The Scourge", in which the Lord Chancellor was attacked, and a series of epigrams. Despite the fact that the satires referenced nobody by name, and that Wither had published them a year before with no trouble, he was arrested for libel "on or about 20 March 1614" and held in the Marshalsea prison for four months before being released.

In *A Satyre: Dedicated to His Most Excellent Majestie*, Wither made a bold appeal to King James for his release, claiming that he had "not sought to scandalize the state, nor sowne sedition." The cause for his initial imprisonment is somewhat unclear, as the *Abuses* were in fact very general, and had not satirized any one person by name.

[Charles Lamb](http://www.poemhunter.com/charles-lamb/) commented "that a man should be convicted of libel when he named no names but Hate, and Envy, and Lust, and Avarice, is like one of the indictments in the Pilgrim's Progress, where Faithful is arraigned for having 'railed on our noble Prince Beelzebub, and spoken contemptibly of his honourable friends, the Lord Old Man, the Lord Carnal Delight, and the Lord Luxurious'."

This view has been held by most later critics and scholars, in addition to the possibility of earlier editions containing text which was erased in later al scholars in the late 19th and early 20th centuries also claimed that Wither had offended Lord Chancellor Ellesmere with one of the verses in Abuses. This claim, however, was rejected by Pritchard, who blames the misreading of the verses.

Pritchard makes the case that the reason for Wither's imprisonment was that he angered Henry Howard, 1st Earl of Northampton, by accusing him and others of colluding with the Spanish—and Catholic—government. Pritchard mentions that Northampton was at the height of his power when Wither was arrested, and notes that he was not able to secure his release until after Northampton's death in June 1614.

Pastoral and later satires

He was early known in the pastoral genre. He had figured as one of the interlocutors, Roget, in his friend William Browne's *Shepherds Pipe*, with which were bound up eclogues by other poets, among them one by Wither. During his imprisonment he wrote what may be regarded as a continuation of Browne's work, *The Shepherd's Hunting* (printed 1615)—eclogues in which the two poets appear as Willie and Roget (in later editions Philarete). It is largely fourth of these eclogues contains a famous passage in praise of poetry; the poets are explicit that pastoral is just a preliminary to other work.

After his release he was admitted (1615) to Lincoln's Inn, and in the same year he printed privately *Fidelia*, a love elegy, of which there is a unique copy in the Bodleian Library. Other editions of this book, which contained the lyric "Shall I, wasting in despair", appeared in 1617 and 1619.

In 1621, he returned to the satiric vein with Wither's *Motto: Nec habeo, nec careo, nec curo* (Latin for "I have not, I want not, I care not"). Over 30,000 copies of this poem were sold, according to his own account, within a few months. Like his earlier invective, it was said to be libellous, and Wither was again imprisoned, but shortly afterwards released without formal trial on the plea

that the book had been duly licensed. In 1622 appeared his *Faire-Virtue, The Mistresse of Phil Arete*, a long panegyric of a mistress, partly real, partly allegorical, written chiefly in the seven-syllabled verse of which he was a master. Ben Jonson turned satire back on Wither, portrayed as the Chronomastix of the masque *Time Vindicated*. Wither avenged himself, by a reference to Jonson's drunken conclave. He was obliged to print this book with his own hand, in consequence of his quarrel with the Stationers Company.

Psalmody and hymnody

Wither had begun as a moderate in politics and religion, but his Puritan leanings became more pronounced, as he moved from an Arminian to a more Calvinist position. His later work consists of religious poetry, and of controversial and political tracts. From 1614 he began to work on a new psalm translation, a project in tune with the circle round Sir Edwin Sandys that Wither frequented. *Preparation to the Psalter* (1619) was an early work in English on literary aspects of the Bible, and initiated a campaign by Wither to substitute his own writings for the dominant psalms.

His *Hymnes and Songs of the Church* (1622–1623) were aimed to counter exclusive psalmody, represented by the Sternhold and Hopkins Psalter. Orlando Gibbons provided tunes for some of were issued under a patent of King James I ordaining that they should be bound up with every copy of the authorized metrical psalms offered for sale. This patent was opposed, as inconsistent with their privilege to print the singing-psalms, by the Stationers Company, to Wither's great mortification and loss, and a second similar patent was finally disallowed by the House of Lords. Wither defended himself in *The Schollers Purgatory* (1624).

Some more of Wither's religious poetry is contained in *Heleluiah: or Britain's Second Remembrancer*, which was printed in Holland in 1641. This work assumed the knowledge of metrical psalms. Besides hymns, the book contains songs, especially the *Cradle Song*, Part 1 No. 50 ("Sleep, baby, sleep, what ails my dear"), the *Anniversary Marriage Song*, Part 2 No. 17 ("Lord, living here are we"), the *Perambulation Song*, Part 2 No. 24 ("Lord, it hath pleased Thee to say"), the *Song for Lovers*, Part 3 No. 20 ("Come, sweet heart, come, let us prove"), the *Song for the Happily Married*, Part 3 No. 21 ("Since they in singing take delight") and the *Song for a Shepherd*, Part 3 No. 41 ("Renowned men their herds to keep").

Under Charles I

Wither was in London during the plague of 1625, and in 1628 published Britain's Remembrancer, a voluminous poem on the subject, interspersed with denunciations of the wickedness of the times, and prophecies of the disasters about to fall upon England.

In 1635 he was employed by Henry Taunton, a London publisher, to write English verses illustrative of the allegorical plates of Crispin van Passe, originally designed for the emblem book Gabriel Rollenhagens Nucleus emblematum selectissimorum (1610–1613). The book was published as a Collection of Emblemes, Ancient and Moderne, of which the only perfect copy known is in the British Museum. In 1636 he translated The Nature of Man by Nemesius.

Civil War soldier

Wither had served as captain of horse in 1639 in the expedition of Charles I against the Scottish Covenanters, and his religious rather than his political convictions must be accepted as the explanation of the fact that, three years after the Scottish expedition, at the outbreak of the English Civil War, he is found definitely siding with the Parliament. He sold his estate to raise a troop of horse, and was placed by a parliamentary committee in command of Farnham Castle. After a few days occupation he left the place undefended, and marched to London. His own house near Farnham was plundered, and he himself was captured by a troop of Royalist horse, owing his life to the intervention of Sir John Denham, on the ground that so long as Wither lived he himself could not be accounted the worst poet in England.

A reported episode from 1642 or 1643 has Wither with Henry Marten mocking the coronation regalia. At this time, in any case, Wither's views were converging with those of the advocates of true popular sovereignty, and his political poem Vox Pacifica called for a purge of Parliament.

He was promoted to the rank of major. He was present at the siege of Gloucester (1643) and at Naseby (1645). He had been deprived in 1643 of his nominal command, and of his commission as justice of the peace, in consequence of an attack upon Sir Richard Onslow, who was, he maintained, responsible for the Farnham disaster. In the same year parliament made him a grant of £2000 for the loss of his property, but he apparently never received the full amount, and complained from time to time of his embarrassments and of the slight rewards he received for his services. An order was made to settle a yearly income of £150 on Wither, chargeable on Sir John Denham's sequestered estate, but there is no evidence that he ever received it.

Commonwealth and Restoration

He became a political and religious writer using verse as his medium. He is considered to stand out as a supporter of the Commonwealth who also proposed a more egalitarian social vision.] His *Respublica Anglicana* (1650) was a reply to the *Anarchia Anglicana* (1649) of Theodorus Verax (Clement Walker), a Presbyterian opponent of the Independents. It defended 'engagement', the notion that recognition of the Parliamentary regime should be required.

A small place given him by the Protector was forfeited after Wither expressed criticism of Cromwell. He was involved in 11 court cases, from 1643 to 1661, including Onslow's libel suit over the poem *Justiarius Justificatus*. At the Restoration he was arrested, and remained in prison for three years.

He was a conforming Anglican; but by this time he had moved closer to the Quakers. In *Parallelogrammaton* (1662) he compared to them as predecessors the prophets Ezekiel and Habakkuk.

He died in London.

Works

His extant writings, noted by Thomas Park in Brydges's *British Bibliographer*, number over a hundred. Wither wrote, generally, in a pure English idiom, and preferred the reputation of rusticity. According to the *Dunciad* "Withers, Ward, and Gildon rest" together "Safe, where no Critics damn, no duns molest".

After a period of neglect, George Ellis anthologised Wither in *Specimens of the Early English Poets* (1790). Samuel Egerton Brydges published *The Shepherds Hunting* (1814), *Fidelia* (1815) and *Fair Virtue* (1818), and a selection appeared in Ezekiel Sanford's *Works of the British Poets*, vol. v. (1819).

Most of Wither's works were edited in twenty volumes for the Spenser Society (1871–82); a selection was included by Henry Morley in his *Companion Poets* (1891); *Fidelia* and *Fair Virtue* are included in Edward Arber's *English Garner* (vol. iv, 1882; vol. vi, 1883), and *The Poetry of George Wither* was edited by Frank Sidgwick in 1902.

A selection of Wither's hymns was published in 2011 by The Phoenix Press in *The Gibbons Songbook*. Whilst primarily a realisation of the tunes Orlando Gibbons wrote for *The Hymns and Songs of the Church* a selection of verses from the hymns is paired with the original verses from the King James Bible which inspired

Wither to create the hymns.

A Christmas Carol

So now is come our joyful'st feast,
Let every man be jolly.
Each room with ivy leaves is drest,
And every post with holly.
Though some churls at our mirth repine,
Round your foreheads garlands twine,
Drown sorrow in a cup of wine,
And let us all be merry.

Now all our neighbors' chimneys smoke,
And Christmas blocks are burning;
Their ovens they with bak'd-meats choke,
And all their spits are turning.
Without the door let sorrow lie,
And if for cold it hap to die,
We'll bury 't in a Christmas pie,
And evermore be merry.

Now every lad is wondrous trim,
And no man minds his labor;
Our lasses have provided them
A bag-pipe and a tabor.
Young men and maids and girls and boys
Give life to one another's joys,
And you anon shall by their noise
Perceive that they are merry.

Rank misers now do sparing shun,
Their hall of music soundeth,
And dogs thence with whole shoulders run,
So all things there aboundeth.
The country folk themselves advance,
For crowdy-mutton's come out of France.
And Jack shall pipe and Jill shall dance,
And all the town be merry.

Ned Swash hath fetch'd his bands from pawn,
And all his best apparel;
Brisk Nell hath bought a ruff of lawn

With droppings of the barrel;
And those that hardly all the year
Had bread to eat or rags to wear,
Will have both clothes and dainty fare,
And all the day be merry.

Now poor men to the justices
With capons make their arrants,
And if they hap to fail of these
They plague them with their warrants.
But now they feed them with good cheer,
And what they want they take in beer,
For Christmas comes but once a year,
And then they shall be merry.

Good farmers in the country nurse
The poor, that else were undone.
Some landlords spend their money worse,
On lust and pride at London.
There the roisters they do play,
Drab and dice their land away,
Which may be ours another day;
And therefore let's be merry.

The client now his suit forbears,
The prisoner's heart is eased,
The debtor drinks away his cares,
And for the time is pleased.
Though others' purses be more fat,
Why should we pine or grieve at that?
Hang sorrow, care will kill a cat,
And therefore let's be merry.

Hark how the wags abroad do call
Each other forth to rambling;
Anon you'll see them in the hall
For nuts and apples scrambling.
Hark how the roofs with laughters sound!
Anon they'll think the house goes round,
For they the cellar's depth have found,
And there they will be merry.

The wenches with their wassail bowls
About the streets are singing,
The boys are come to catch the owls,
The wild mare in is bringing.
Our kitchen boy hath broke his box,
And to the dealing of the ox
Our honest neighbors come by flocks,
And here they will be merry.

Now kings and queens poor shepcotes have,
And mate with everybody;
The honest now may play the knave,
And wise men play at noddy.
Some youths will now a-mumming go,
Some others play at rowlandhoe,
And twenty other gameboys moe,
Because they will be merry.

Then wherefore in these merry days
Should we, I pray, be duller?
No, let us sing some roundelays
To make our mirth the fuller.
And, whilst thus inspir'd we sing,
Let all the streets with echoes ring,
Woods and hills and everything,
Bear witness we are merry.

George Wither

A Poet's Home

Two pretty rills do meet, and meeting make
Within one valley a large silver lake:
About whose banks the fertile mountains stood
In ages passèd bravely crowned with wood,
Which lending cold-sweet shadows gave it grace
To be accounted Cynthia's bathing-place;
And from her father Neptune's brackish court,
Fair Thetis thither often would resort,
Attended by the fishes of the sea,
Which in those sweeter waters came to plea.
There would the daughter of the Sea God dive,
And thither came the Land Nymphs every eve
To wait upon her: bringing for her brows
Rich garlands of sweet flowers and beechy boughs.
For pleasant was that pool, and near it then
Was neither rotten marsh nor boggy fen,
It was nor overgrown with boisterous sedge,
Nor grew there rudely then along the edge
A bending willow, nor a prickly bush,
Nor broad-leaved flag, nor reed, nor knotty rush.
But here well-ordered was a grove with bowers,
There grassy plots set round about with flowers.
Here you might through the water see the land
Appear, strowed o'er with white or yellow sand;
Yon deeper was it, and the wind by whiffs
Would make it rise and wash the little cliffs
On which, oft pluming, sat unfrighted than
The gagging wild-goose and the snow-white swan,
With all those flocks of fowls which to this day,
Upon those quiet waters breed and play.
For though those excellences wanting be
Which once it had, it is the same that we
By transposition name the Ford of Arle,
And out of which, along a chalky marle,
That river trills whose waters wash the fort
In which brave Arthur kept his royal court.
North-east, not far from this great pool, there lies
A tract of beechy mountains, that arise,
With leisurely ascending, to such height

As from their tops the warlike Isle of Wight
You in the ocean's bosom may espy,
Though near two furlongs thence it lie.
The pleasant way, as up those hills you climb,
Is strewèd o'er with marjoram and thyme,
Which grows unset. The hedgerows do not want
The cowslip, violet, primrose, nor a plant
That freshly scents: as birch, both green and tall;
Low sallows, on whose blooming bees do fall;
Fair woodbines, which about the hedges twine;
Smooth privet, and the sharp-sweet eglantine,
With many moe whose leaves and blossoms fair
The earth adorn and oft perfume the air.

When you unto the highest do attain
An intermixture both of wood and plain
You shall behold, which, though aloft it lie,
Hath downs for sheep and fields for husbandry,
So much, at least, as little needeth more,
If not enough to merchandise their store.

In every row hath nature planted there
Some banquet for the hungry passenger.
For here the hazel-nut and filbert grows,
There bullice, and, a little farther, sloes.
On this hand standeth a fair weilding-tree,
On that large thickets of blackberries be.
The shrubby fields are raspice orchards there,
The new felled woods like strawberry gardens are,
And had the King of Rivers blessed those hills
With some small number of such pretty rills
As flow elsewhere, Arcadia had not seen
A sweeter plot of earth than this had been.

George Wither

A Rocking Hymn

Sweet baby, sleep! what ails my dear,
What ails my darling thus to cry?
Be still, my child, and lend thine ear
To hear me sing thy lullaby.
My pretty lamb, forbear to weep;
Be still, my dear; sweet baby, sleep.

Thou blessed soul, what canst thou fear?
What thing to thee can mischief do?
Thy God is now thy father dear,
His holy Spouse, thy mother too.
Sweet baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep.

Though thy conception was in sin,
A sacred bathing thou hast had;
And, though thy birth unclean hath been,
A blameless babe thou now art made.
Sweet baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still, my dear; sweet baby, sleep,

While thus thy lullaby I sing,
For thee great blessings ripening be;
Thine eldest brother is a King,
And hath a kingdom bought for thee.
Sweet baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep.

Sweet baby, sleep and nothing fear,
For whosoever thee offends,
By thy protector threat'ned are,
And God and angels are thy friends.
Sweet baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep.

When God with us was dwelling here,
In little babes he took delight;
Such innocents as thou, my dear,
Are ever precious in His sight.

Sweet baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep.

A little infant once was He,
And, strength in weakness, then was laid
Upon His virgin-mother's knee,
That power to thee might be conveyed.
Sweet baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep.

In this, thy frailty and thy need,
He friends and helpers doth prepare,
Which thee shall cherish, clothe and feed;
For of thy weal they tender are.
Sweet baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep.

The King of kings, when he was born,
Had not so much for outward ease;
By Him such dressings were not worn,
Nor such like swaddling-clothes as these.
Sweet baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep.

Within a manger lodged thy Lord
Where oxen lay and asses fed;
Warm rooms we do to thee afford,
An easy cradle or a bed.
Sweet baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep.

The wants that He did then sustain
Have purchased wealth, my babe, for thee;
And by His torments and His pain
Thy rest and ease secured be.
My baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep.

Thou hast (yet more) to perfect this,
A promise and an earnest got
Of gaining everlasting bliss,
Though thou, my babe, perceiv'st it not;

Sweet baby, then forbear to weep;
Be still, my babe; sweet baby, sleep.

George Wither

A Sonnet Upon A Stolen Kiss

Now gentle sleep hath clos'd up those eyes
Which waking kept my boldest thoughts in awe,
And free access unto that sweet lip lies,
From whence I long the rosy breath to draw;
Methinks no wrong it were if I should steal
From those two melting rubies one poor kiss;
None sees the theft that would the thief reveal,
Nor rob I her of aught which she can miss;
Nay, should I twenty kisses take away,
There would be little sign I had done so;
Why then should I this robbery delay?
Oh! she may wake and therewith angry grow.
Well, if she do, I'll back restore that one,
And twenty hundred thousand more for loan.

George Wither

A Widow's Hymn

How near me came the hand of Death,
When at my side he struck my dear,
And took away the precious breath
Which quicken'd my beloved peer!¹
How helpless am I thereby made!
By day how grieved, by night how sad!
And now my life's delight is gone,
—Alas! how am I left alone!
The voice which I did more esteem
Than music in her sweetest key,
Those eyes which unto me did seem
More comfortable than the day;
Those now by me, as they have been,
Shall never more be heard or seen;
But what I once enjoy'd in them
Shall seem hereafter as a dream.
Lord! keep me faithful to the trust
Which my dear spouse reposed in me:
To him now dead preserve me just
In all that should perform'd be!
For though our being man and wife
Extendeth only to this life,
Yet neither life nor death should end
The being of a faithful friend.

George Wither

Amarillis I Did Woo

Amarillis I did woo,
And I courted Phillis too;
Daphne, for her love, I chose;
Cloris, for that damask rose
In her cheek, I held as dear;
Yea, a thousand liked well near.
And, in love with all together,
Fearèd the enjoying either;
'Cause to be of one possest,
Barred the hope of all the rest.

George Wither

Change

The voice which I did more esteem
Than music in her sweetest key,
Those eyes which unto me did seem
More comfortable than the day,
These now by me as they have been
Shall never more be heard or seen,
But what I once enjoyed in them
Shall seem hereafter as a dream.

All earthly comforts vanish thus,
So little hold of them have we;
That we from them, or they from us,
May in a moment vanished be:
Yet we are neither just nor wise,
If present mercies we despise;
Or mind not how there may be made
A thankful use of what we had.

George Wither

For Anniversary Marriage-Days

Lord, living, here are we
As fast united, yet
As when our hands and hearts by Thee
Together first were knit,
And, in a thankful song,
Now sing we will Thy praise,
For, that Thou dost as well prolong
Our loving as our days.

Together we have now
Begun another year;
But how much time Thou wilt allow
Thou mak'st it not appear.
We, therefore, do implore
That live and love we may,
Still so, as if but one day more
Together we should stay.

Let each of other's wealth
Preserve a faithful care,
And of each other's joy and health,
As if one soul we were.
Such conscience let us make,
Each other not to grieve,
As if we, daily, were to take
Our everlasting-leave.

The frowardness that springs
From our corrupted kind,
Or from those troublous outward things,
Which may distract the mind,
Permit Thou not, O Lord,
Our constant love to shake;
Or to disturb our true accord,
Or make our hearts to ache.

But let these frailties prove
Affection's exercise;
And that discretion teach our love

Which wins the noblest prize.
So Time which wears away
And ruins all things else
Shall fix our love on Thee for aye
In Whom perfection dwells.

George Wither

For Seasonable Weather

Lord! should the sunne, the clouds, the winde,
The ayre and seasons be
To vs so froward unkind,
As we are false to thee,
All fruites would quite away be burn'd,
Or lye in water drown'd,
Or blasted be, or ouerturn'd,
Or chilled on the ground.

But from our duty though we swarue,
Thou still dost mercy shew,
And daign thy creatures to preserue,
That men might thankfull grow;
Yet though from day to day we sinne,
And thy displeasure gaine,
No sooner we to cry beginne,
But pittie we obtaine.

The weather now thou changed hast
That put vs late to feare,
And when our hopes were almost past,
Then comfort did appeare;
The heauen the earth's complaints hath heard,
They reconciled be,
And thou such weather hast prepar'd
As we desired of thee.

For which, with lifted hands and eyes,
To thee we doe repay
The due and willing sacrifice
Of giving thanks to-day;
Because such offrings we should not
To render thee be slowe,
Nor let thy mercie be forgot,
Which thou art pleased to showe.

George Wither

From A Satire Written To King James I

Did I not know a great man's power and might
In spite of innocence can smother right,
Colour his villainies to get esteem,
And make the honest man the villain seem?
I know it, and the world doth know 'tis true,
Yet I protest if such a man I knew,
That might my country prejudice or thee
Were he the greatest or the proudest he,
That breathes this day; if so it might be found
That any good to either might redound,
I unappalled, dare in such a case
Rip up his foulest crimes before his face,
Though for my labour I were sure to drop
Into the mouth of ruin without hope.

George Wither

From 'The Motto'

And first, that no man else may censure me
For vaunting what belongeth not to me,
Heare what I have not, for Tie not deny
To make confession of my poverty.
I have not of myselfe the powre or grace
To be, or not to be ; one minute-space
I have not strength another word to write,
Or tell you what I purpose to indite ;
Or thinke out halfe a thought, before my death,
But by the leave of him that gave me breath.
I have no native goodnes in my soul,
But I was over all corrupt and foul:
And till another cleans'd me I had nought
That was not stain'd within me : not a thought.
I have no propper meritt ; neither will,
Or to resolve, or act, but what is ill;
I have no meanes of safety, or content,
In ought which mine owne wisdom can invent.
Nor have I reason to be desperate tho,
Because for this a remedy I know.
I have no portion in the world like this,
That I may breathe that ayre which common is,
Nor have I seen within this spacious round
What I have worth my joy or sorrow found,
Except it hath for these that follow binn,
The love of my Redeemer, and my sinn.
I none of those great priviledges have
Which makes the minions of the time so brave;
I have no sumptuous pallaces, or bowers
That overtop my neighbours with their tow'rs;
I have no large demeanes or princely rents,
Like those heroes, nor their discontents;
I have no glories from mine auncesters,
For want of reall worth to bragg of theirs ;
Nor have I baseness in my pedigree:
For it is noble, though obscure it be.
I have no golde those honours to obtaine,
Which men might heretofore by vertue gaine;
Nor have I witt, if wealth were given me,

To thinke bought place, or title, honour'd me.
I (yet) have no beliefe that they are wise
Who for base ends can basely temporise :
Or that it will at length be ill for me,
That I liv'd poore to keepe my spirit free.
I have no causes in our pleading courts,
Nor start I at our Chancery reports;
No fearfull bill hath yet affrighted me,
No motion, order, judgement, or decree.
Nor have I forced beene to tedious journeys
Betwixt my counsellors and my attorneys.
I have no neede of these long-gowned warriors,
Who play at Westminster, unarm'd, at barriers
For gamster for those Common-pleas am I
Whose sport is marred by the Chancery.

* * * *

I have no complements, but what may show
That I doe manners and good breeding know;
For much I hate the forced apish tricks
Of these our home-disdaining politicks :
Who to the forraine guises are affected,
That English honesty is quite rejected
And in the stead thereof, they furnisht home
With shadowes of humanity doe come.
Oh! how judicious, in their owne esteeme,
And how compleatly travelled they seem,
If, in the place of reall kindnesses,
(Which nature could have taught them to expresse,)
They can, with gestures, lookes, and language sweet,
Fawne like a curtezan on all they meete ;
And vie in humble and kind speeches, when
They doe most proudly and most falsely meane.
On this too many falsely set their face,
Of courtship and of wisdom ; but 'tis base.
For servile unto me it doth appeare
When we descend to soothe and flatter, where
We want affection : yea, I hate it more
Than to be borne a slave, or to be poore.
I have no pleasure or delight in ought
That by dissembling must to passe be brought

If I dislike, I'll sooner tell them so,
Then hide my face beneath a friendly show
For he who to be just hath an intent,
Needs nor dissemble nor a lie invent.
I rather wish to faile with honestie,
Then to prevaile in ought by treacherie.
And with this minde I'll safer sleep, then all
Our Macavillian polititians shall.
I have no minde to flatter ; though I might
Be made some lord's companion, or a knight;
Nor shall my verse for me on begging goe,
Though I might starve unlesse it did doe so.

* * * *

I cannot (for my life) my pen compell,
Upon the praise of any man to dwell:
Unlesse I know (or thinke at least) his worth
To be the same which I have blazed forth.
Had I some honest suit, the gaine of which
Would make me noble, eminent, and rich,
And that to compasse it no meanes there were,
Unlesse I basely flatter'd some great peere;
Would with that suite my mine I might get,
If on those terms I would endeavour it.
I have not bin to their condition borne
Who are enclyned to respect, and scorne,
As men in their estates doe rise or fall:
Or rich or poore, I vertue love in all.
And where I find it not, I doe despise
To fawn on them ; how high soe're they rise ;
For where proud greatnesse without worth J see
Old Mordecay had not a stiffer knee.
I cannot give a plaudit (I protest)
When, as his lordship thinks, he breakes a jeast,
Unles it move me ; neither can I grin
When he a causeles laughter doth begin ;
I cannot sweare him truly honourable,
Because he once received me to his table,
i And talk't as if the Muses glad might be
That he vouchsafed such a grace to me :
I His slender worth I could not blazen so

By strange hyperboles, as some would do;
Or wonder at it, as if none had bin
His equall, since King William first came in.
Nor can I thinke true vertue ever car'd
To give or take (for praise) what I have heard.
For, if we pryze them well, what goodly grace
Have outward beauties, riches, titles, place,
Or such, that we the owners should commend,
When no true vertues doe on these attend ?
If beautiful he be, what honor's that ?
As fayre as he is many a beggar's brat.
If we his noble titles would extoll,
Those titles he may have, and be a fool.
If seats of justice he hath climbed (we say),
So tyrants and corrupt oppressors may.
If for a large estate his praise we tell,
A thousand villains may be praised as well.
If he his prince's good esteeme be in,
Why so hath many a bloudy traytor bin.
And if in these things he alone excell,
Let those that list upon his praises dwell.
Some other worth I find ere I have sense
Of any praise deserving excellence.
I have no friends that once affected were,
But to my heart they sit this day as neare
As when I most endear'd them (though they seeme
To fall from my opinion or esteeme :)
For pretious time in idle would be spent,
If I with all should alwayes complement ;
And till my love I may to purpose show,
I care not wher' they think I love or no.
For sure I am, if any find me chang'd,
Their greatnes,not their meannesse, me estranged.

George Wither

Her Beauty

Her true beauty leaves behind
Apprehensions in my mind
Of more sweetness than all art
Or inventions can impart;
Thoughts too deep to be expressed,
And too strong to be suppressed....
... What pearls, what rubies can
Seem so lovely fair to man,
As her lips whom he doth love
When in sweet discourse they move:
Or her lovelier teeth, the while
She doth bless him with a smile!
Stars indeed fair creatures be;
Yet amongst us where is he
Joys not more the whilst he lies
Sunning in his mistress' eyes.
Than in all the glimmering light
Of a starry winter's night?
Note the beauty of an eye,
And if aught you praise it by
Leave such passion in your mind,
Let my reason's eye be blind.
Mark if ever red or white
Anywhere gave such delight
As when they have taken place
In a worthy woman's face.

George Wither

I Loved A Lass

I loved a lass, a fair one,
As fair as e'er was seen;
She was indeed a rare one,
Another Sheba Queen:
But, fool as then I was,
I thought she loved me too:
But now, alas! she's left me,
Falero, lero, loo!

Her hair like gold did glister,
Each eye was like a star,
She did surpass her sister,
Which pass'd all others far;
She would me 'honey' call,
She'd—O she'd kiss me too!
But now, alas! she's left me,
Falero, lero, loo!

In summer time to Medley
My love and I would go;
The boatmen there stood read'ly
My love and me to row.
For cream there would we call,
For cakes and for prunes too;
But now, alas! she's left me,
Falero, lero, loo!

Her cheeks were like the cherry,
Her skin was white as snow;
When she was blithe and merry
She angel-like did show;
Her waist exceeding small,
The fives did fit her shoe:
But now, alas! she's left me,
Falero, lero, loo!

In summer time or winter
She had her heart's desire;
I still did scorn to stint her
From sugar, sack, or fire;
The world went round about,
No cares we ever knew:
But now, alas! she's left me,

Falero, lero, loo!
To maidens' vows and swearing
Henceforth no credit give;
You may give them the hearing,
But never them believe;
They are as false as fair,
Unconstant, frail, untrue:
For mine, alas! hath left me,
Falero, lero, loo!

George Wither

Lilies Without, Lilies Within

Can I think the Guide of Heaven
Hath so beautifully given
Outward features, 'cause He meant
To have made less excellent
Your divine part? Or suppose
Beauty, goodness doth oppose;
Like those fools, who do despair
To find any, good and fair?
Rather there I seek a mind
Most excelling, where I find
God hath to the body lent
Most-beseeming ornament,
And I do believe it true,
That, as we the body view
Nearer to perfection grow;
So, the soul herself doth show:
Other more and more excelling
In her powers; as in her dwelling.

George Wither

Lord! When Those Glorious Lights I See

Lord! when those glorious lights I see
With which thou hast adorned the skies,
Observing how they moved be,
And how their splendor fills mine eyes,
Methinks it is too large a grace,
But that thy love ordained it so,--
That creatures in so high a place
Should servants be to man below.

The meanest lamp now shining there
In size and lustre doth exceed
The noblest of thy creatures here,
And of our friendship hath no need.
Yet these upon mankind attend
For secret aid or public light;
And from the world's extremest end
Repair unto us every night.

O, had that stamp been undefaced
Which first on us thy hand had set,
How highly should we have been graced,
Since we are so much honored yet!
Good God, for what but for the sake
Of thy beloved and only Son,
Who did on him our nature take,
Were these exceeding favors done?

As we by him have honored been,
Let us to him due honors give;
Let us uprightness hide our sin,
And let us worth from him receive.
Yea, so let us by grace improve
What thou by nature doth bestow,
That to thy dwelling-place above
We may be raised from below.

George Wither

Prelude

(From *_The Shepherd's Hunting_*)

Seest thou not, in clearest days,
Oft thick fogs cloud Heaven's rays?
And that vapours which do breathe
From the Earth's gross womb beneath,
Seem unto us with black steams
To pollute the Sun's bright beams,
And yet vanish into air,
Leaving it unblemished fair?
So, my Willy, shall it be
With Detraction's breath on thee:
It shall never rise so high
As to stain thy poesy.
As that sun doth oft exhale
Vapours from each rotten vale,
Poesy so sometime drains
Gross conceits from muddy brains;
Mists of envy, fogs of spite,
Twixt men's judgments and her light;
But so much her power may do,
That she can dissolve them too.
If thy verse do bravely tower,
As she makes wing she gets power;
Yet the higher she doth soar,
She's affronted still the more,
Till she to the highest hath past;
Then she rests with Fame at last.
Let nought, therefore, thee affright;
But make forward in thy flight.
For if I could match thy rhyme,
To the very stars I'd climb;
There begin again, and fly
Till I reached eternity.
But, alas, my Muse is slow,
For thy place she flags too low;
Yea, the more's her hapless fate,
Her short wings were clipt of late;
And poor I, her fortune ruing,

Am put up myself a mewling.
But if I my cage can rid,
I'll fly where I never did;
And though for her sake I'm crost,
Though my best hopes I have lost,
And knew she would make my trouble
Ten times more than ten times double,
I should love and keep her too,
Spite of all the world could do.
For though, banished from my flocks
And confined within these rocks,
Here I waste away the light
And consume the sullen night,
She doth for my comfort stay,
And keeps many cares away.
Though I miss the flowery fields,
With those sweets the spring-tide yields;
Though I may not see those groves,
Where the shepherds chaunt their loves,
And the lasses more excel
Than the sweet-voiced Philomel;
Though of all those pleasures past,
Nothing now remains at last
But Remembrance--poor relief!
That more makes than mends my grief:
She's my mind's companion still,
Maugre envy's evil will;
Whence she should be driven too,
Were't in mortal's power to do.
She doth tell me where to borrow
Comfort in the midst of sorrow,
Makes the desolatest place
To her presence be a grace,
And the blackest discontents
To be pleasing ornaments.
In my former days of bliss
Her divine skill taught me this,
That from everything I saw
I could some invention draw,
And raise pleasure to her height
Through the meanest object's sight;
By the murmur of a spring,

Or the least bough's rustling;
By a daisy, whose leaves spread,
Shut when Titan goes to bed;
Or a shady bush or tree;
She could more infuse in me,
Than all Nature's beauties can
In some other wiser man.
By her help I also now
Make this churlish place allow
Some things that may sweeten gladness
In the very gall of sadness:
The dull liveness, the black shade
That these hanging vaults have made;
The strange music of the waves
Beating on these hollow caves;
This black den which rocks emboss
Overgrown with eldest moss;
The rude portals that give light
More to terror than delight;
This my chamber of neglect,
Walled about with disrespect;
From all these, and this dull air,
A fit object for despair,
She hath taught me, by her might,
To draw comfort and delight.
Therefore, thou best earthly bliss,
I will cherish thee for this.
Poesy, thou sweet'st content
That e'er Heaven to mortals lent!
Though they as a trifle leave thee
Whose dull thoughts cannot conceive thee,
Though thou be to them a scorn
That to nought but earth are born
Let my life no longer be
Than I am in love with thee.
Though our wise ones call thee madness,
Let me never taste of gladness,
If I love not thy maddest fits
More than all their greatest wits.
And though some, too seeming holy,
Do account thy raptures folly,
Thou dost teach me to contemn

What makes knaves and fools of them.

George Wither

Psalm Cxlviii

Come, oh! come, with sacred lays,
Let us sound th' Almighty's praise;
Hither bring in true concert,
Heart, and voice, and instrument.
Let the orpharion sweet,
With the harp and viol meet:
To your voices tune the lute:
Let not tongue nor string be mute;
Nor a creature dumb be found,
That hath either voice or sound.

Let such things as do not live,
In still music praises give:
Lowly pipe, ye worms that creep
On the earth or in the deep;
Loud aloft your voices strain,
Beasts and monsters of the main,
Birds, your warbling treble sing;
Clouds, your peals of thunder ring;
Sun and moon exalted higher,
And you, stars, augment the choir.

Come, ye sons of human race,
In this chorus take your place,
And amid this mortal throng,
Be you masters of the song.
Angels and celestial powers,
Be the noblest tenor yours.
Let, in praise of God, the sound
Run a never-ending round;
That our holy hymn may be
Everlasting, as is He.

From the earth's vast hollow womb,
Music's deepest bass shall come.
Sea and floods, from shore to shore,
Shall the counter-tenor roar.
To this concert, when we sing,
Whistling winds, your descant bring:

Which may bear the sound above,
Where the orb of fire doth move;
And so climb from sphere to sphere,
Till our song th' Almighty hear.

So shall He from heaven's high tower
On the earth His blessing shower;
All this huge wide orb we see,
Shall one choir, one temple be;
There our voices we will rear,
Till we fill it everywhere:
And enforce the fiends that dwell
In the air to sink to hell.
Then, oh! come, with sacred lays,
Let us sound th' Almighty's praise.

George Wither

Psalm Lvii

Lord, grant, oh grant me thy compassion ;
For I in thee my trust haue placed ;
Display thy wings for my saluation,
Until my greefs are over-passed.
To thee I sue, Oh God most high,
To thee that canst all want supplie.

From their despights who seek to rend mee,
Let help, O Lord ! from heaven be daigned,
And let thy truth and loue defend me ;
For I with lions am detained:
With men inflam'd, whose biting words
Are shafts, and speares, and naked swords.

Let over heauen God's praise be reared,
And through the world his glorie showed;
For they who netts for mee prepared,
(They who my soul to ground had bowed,)
Eu'n they within those trapps are caught,
Which for my fall their hands had wrought.

Oh God ! my hart now ready maketh,
My hart is for thy praise preparing;
My tongue, my harpe, my lute awaketh,
And I myselfe betimes vprearing,
Will speak and sing in praise of thee,
Where greatest throngs of people be.

For, Lord, thy mercies forth are stretched,
As farr as are the spears extended;
Thy truth unto the clouds hath reached,
And thou thyself art high ascended.
Let still, thy fame and praise, Oh God!
Through heauen and earth be spread abrode.

George Wither

Rhomboidal Dirge

Ah me!
Am I the swain
That late from sorrow free
Did all the cares on earth disdain?
And still untouched, as at some safer games,
Played with the burning coals of love, and beauty's flames?
Was't I could dive, and sound each passion's secret depth at will?
And from those huge o'erwhelmings rise, by help of reason still?
And am I now, O heavens! for trying this in vain,
So sunk that I shall never rise again?
Then let despair set sorrow's string,
For strains that doleful be;
And I will sing,
Ah me!

But why,
O fatal time,
Dost thou constrain that I
Should perish in my youth's sweet prime?
I, but awhile ago, (you cruel powers!)
In spite of fortune, cropped contentment's sweetest flowers,
And yet unscornèd, serve a gentle nymph, the fairest she,
That ever was beloved of man, or eyes did ever see!
Yea, one whose tender heart would rue for my distress;
Yet I, poor I! must perish ne'ertheless.
And (which much more augments my care)
Unmoanèd I must die,
And no man e'er
Know why.

Thy leave,
My dying song,
Yet take, ere grief bereave
The breath which I enjoy too long,
Tell thou that fair one this: my soul prefers
Her love above my life; and that I died her's:
And let him be, for evermore, to her remembrance dear,
Who loved the very thought of her whilst he remained here.
And now farewell! thou place of my unhappy birth,

Where once I breathed the sweetest air on earth;
Since me my wonted joys forsake,
And all my trust deceive;
Of all I take
My leave.

Farewell!
Sweet groves, to you!
You hills, that highest dwell;
And all you humble vales, adieu!
You wanton brooks, and solitary rocks,
My dear companions all! and you, my tender flocks!
Farewell my pipe, and all those pleasing songs, whose moving strains
Delighted once the fairest nymphs that dance upon the plains!
You discontents, whose deep and over-deadly smart
Have, without pity, broke the truest heart.
Sighs, tears, and every sad annoy,
That erst did with me dwell,
And all other joys,
Farewell!

Adieu!
Fair shepherdesses!
Let garlands of sad yew
Adorn your dainty golden tresses.
I, that loved you, and often with my quill,
Made music that delighted fountain, grove, and hill;
I, whom you loved so, and with a sweet and chaste embrace.
Yea, with a thousand rather favours, would vouchsafe to grace,
I now must leave you all alone, of love to plain;
And never pipe, nor never sing again!
I must, for evermore, be gone;
And therefore bid I you,
And every one,
Adieu!

I die!
For, oh! I feel
Death's horrors drawing nigh,
And all this frame of nature reel.
My hopeless heart, despairing of relief,
Sinks underneath the heavy weight of saddest grief;

Which hath so ruthless torn, so racked, so tortured every vein,
All comfort comes too late to have it ever cured again.
My swimming head begins to dance death's giddy round;
A shuddering chillness doth each sense confound;
Benumbed is my cold sweating brow
A dimness shuts my eye.
And now, oh! now,
I die!

George Wither

Shall I Wasting In Despair

Shall I wasting in despair
Die because a woman's fair?
Or make pale my cheeks with care
'Cause another's rosy are?
Be she fairer than the day,
Or the flow'ry meads in May,
If she be not so to me,
What care I how fair she be?

Shall my heart be griev'd or pin'd
'Cause I see a woman kind?
Or a well-disposed nature
Joined with a lovely feature?
Be she meeker, kinder, than
Turtle dove or pelican,
If she be not so to me,
What care I how kind she be?

Shall a woman's virtues move
Me to perish for her love?
Or her well-deserving known
Make me quite forget mine own?
Be she with that goodness blest
Which may gain her name of best
If she be not such to me,
What care I, how good she be?

'Cause her fortune seems too high
Shall I play the fool and die?
Those that bear a noble mind,
Where they want of riches find,
Think what with them they would
That without them dare to woo;
And unless that mind I see,
What care I how great she be?

Great, or good, or kind, or fair,
I will ne'er the more despair;
If she love me, this believe,

I will die ere she shall grieve;
If she slight me when I woo,
I can scorn and let her go;
For if she be not for me,
What care I for whom she be?

George Wither

Song I

Lordly gallants! tell me this
(Though my safe content you weigh not),
In your greatness, what one bliss
Have you gained, that I enjoy not?
You have honours, you have wealth;
I have peace, and I have health:
All the day I merry make,
And at night no care I take.

Bound to none my fortunes be,
This or that man's fall I fear not;
Him I love that loveth me,
For the rest a pin I care not.
You are sad when others chaff,
And grow merry as they laugh;
I that hate it, and am free,
Laugh and weep as pleaseth me.

You may boast of favours shown,
Where your service is applied:
But my pleasures are mine own,
And to no man's humour tied.
You oft flatter, sooth, and feign;
I such baseness do disdain;
And to none be slave I would,
Though my fetters might be gold.

By great titles, some believe,
Highest honours are attained;
And yet kings have power to give
To their fools, what these have gained.
Where they favour there they may
All their names of honour lay;
But I look not raised to be,
'Till mine own wing carry me.

Seek to raise your titles higher;
They are toys not worth my sorrow;
Those that we to-day admire,

Prove the age's scorn to-morrow.
Take your honours; let me find
Virtue in a free born mind--
This, the greatest kings that be
Cannot give, nor take from me.

Though I vainly do not vaunt
Large demesnes, to feed my pleasure;
I have favours where you want,
That would buy respect with treasure.
You have lands lie here and there,
But my wealth is everywhere;
And this addeth to my store--
Fortune cannot make me poor.

Say you purchase with your pelf
Some respect, where you importune;
Those may love me for myself,
That regard you for your fortune.
Rich or born of high degree,
Fools as well as you may be;
But that peace in which I live
No descent nor wealth can give.

If you boast that you may gain
The respect of high-born beauties;
Know I never wooed in vain,
Nor preferred scornèd duties.
She I love hath all delight,
Rosy-red with lily-white,
And whoe'er your mistress be,
Flesh and blood as good as she.

Note of me was never took,
For my woman-like perfections;
But so like a man I look,
It hath gained me best affections.
For my love as many showers
Have been wept as have for yours:
And yet none doth me condemn
For abuse, or scorning them.

Though of dainties you have store,
To delight a choicer palate,
Yet your taste is pleased no more
Than is mine in one poor sallet.
You to please your senses feed
But I eat good blood to breed;
And am most delighted then
When I spend it like a man.

Though you lord it over me,
You in vain thereof have braved;
For those lusts my servants be
Whereunto your minds are slaved.
To yourselves you wise appear,
But, alas! deceived you are;
You do foolish me esteem,
And are that which I do seem.

When your faults I open lay,
You are moved, and mad with vexing;
But you ne'er could do or say
Aught to drive me to perplexing.
Therefore, my despisèd power
Greater is, by far, than your.
And, whate'er you think of me,
In your minds you poorer be.

You are pleasèd, more or less,
As men well or ill report you;
And show discontentedness,
When the times forbear to court you.
That in which my pleasures be,
No man can divide from me;
And my care it adds not to,
Whatso others say or do.

Be not proud, because you view
You by thousands are attended;
For, alas! it is not you,
But your fortune that's befriended.
Where I show of love have got,
Such a danger fear I not:

Since they nought can seek of me,
But for love, beloved to be.

When your hearts have everything,
You are pleasantly disposed:
But I can both laugh and sing,
Though my foes have me enclosed.
Yea, when dangers me do hem,
I delight in scorning them,
More than you in your renown,
Or a king can in his crown.

You do bravely domineer,
Whilst the sun upon you shineth:
Yet, if any storm appear,
Basely, then, your mind declineth.
But, or shine, or rain, or blow,
I my resolutions know--
Living, dying, thrall, or free,
At one height my mind shall be.

When in thraldom I have lain,
Me not worth your thought you prized;
But your malice was in vain,
For your favours I despised.
And, howe'er you value me,
I with praise shall thought on be
When the world esteems you not
And your names shall be forgot.

In these thoughts my riches are;
Now, though poor or mean you deem me,
I am pleased, and do not care
How the times or you esteem me.
For those toys that make you gay
Are but play-games for a day:
And when nature craves her due,
I as brave shall be as you.

George Wither

Song II

Shall I, wasting in despair,
Die, because a woman's fair?
Or make pale my cheeks with care
'Cause another's rosy are?
Be she fairer than the day,
Or the flow'ry meads in May;
If she be not so to me,
What care I how fair she be.

Should my heart be grieved or pined
'Cause I see a woman kind?
Or a well-disposèd nature
Joinèd with a lovely creature?
Be she meeker, kinder than
Turtle-dove or pelican:
If she be not so to me,
What care I how kind she be.

Shall a woman's virtues move
Me to perish for her love?
Or, her well-deserving known,
Make me quite forget mine own?
Be she with that goodness blest
Which may gain her name of best
If she be not such to me,
What care I how good she be.

'Cause her fortune seems too high,
Shall I play the fool and die?
Those that bear a noble mind,
Where they want or riches find,
Think what with them they would do
That without them dare to woo.
And unless that mind I see,
What care I though great she be.

Great, or good, or kind, or fair,
I will ne'er the more despair;
If she love me, this believe,

I will die ere she shall grieve.
If she slight me, when I woo,
I can scorn, and let her go.
For, if she be not for me,
What care I for whom she be.

George Wither

Sonnet 5 - I Wandered Out A While Agone,

I wandered out a while agone,
And went I know not whither;
But there do beauties many a one
Resort and meet together,
And Cupid's power will there be shown
If ever you come thither.

For like two suns, two beauties bright
I shining saw together,
And tempted by their double light
My eyes I fixed on either;
Till both at once so thrall'd my sight,
I loved, and knew not whether.

Such equal sweet Venus gave,
That I preferred not either;
And when for love I thought to crave,
I knew not well of whether,
For one while this I wished to have,
And then I that had liefer.

A lover of the curious't eye
Might have been pleas'd in either,
And so, I must confess, might I,
Had they not been together.
Now both must love or both deny,
In one enjoy I neither.

But yet at last I 'scaped the smart
I feared at coming hither;
For seeing my divided heart -
I, choosing, knew not whether -
Love angry grew and did depart,
And now I care for neither.

George Wither

Sonnet: On A Stolen Kiss

Now gentle sleep hath closèd up those eyes,
Which waking kept my boldest thoughts in awe,
And free access unto that sweet lip lies
From whence I long the rosy breath to draw.
Methinks no wrong it were if I should steal,
From those two melting rubies, one poor kiss.
None sees the theft that would the thief reveal,
Nor rob I her of aught which she can miss.
Nay, should I twenty kisses take away,
There would be little sign I had done so.
Why then should I this robbery delay?
Oh, she may wake, and therewith angry grow.
Well, if she do, I'll back restore that one,
And twenty hundred thousand more for loan.

George Wither

Sonnet: On The Death Of Prince Henry

Methought his royal person did foretell
A kingly stateliness, from all pride clear;
His look majestic seemèd to compel
All men to love him, rather than to fear.
And yet though he were every good man's joy,
And the alonely comfort of his own,
His very name with terror did annoy
His foreign foes so far as he was known.
Hell drooped for fear; the Turkey moon looked pale;
Spain trembled; and the most tempestuous sea,
(Where Behemoth, the Babylonish whale,
Keeps all his bloody and imperious plea)
Was swoln with rage, for fear he'd stop the tide
Of her o'er-daring and insulting pride.

George Wither

Sonnet: Philarete

Now that my body, dead aliue,
Bereau'd of comfort, lies in thrall,
Doe thou, my soul, begin to thriue,
And unto honie turne this gall;
So shall we both, through outward wo,
The way to inward comfort know.

For as that foode my flesh I giue
Doth keepe in me this mortall breath
So souls on meditations hue,
And shunne thereby immortall death:
Nor art thou euer neerer rest
Than when thou find'st me most opprest.

First thinke, my soule, if I haue foes
That take a pleasure in my care,
And to procure these outward woes,
Haue thus enwrapt me vnaware,
Thou should'st by much more carefull bee,
Since greater foes lay waite for thee.

Then when mew'd vp in grates of Steele,
Minding those ioyes mine eyes do misse,
Thou find'st no torment thou dost feele
So grieuous as privation is
Muse how the damn'd in flames that glow
Pine in the loss of bliss they know.

Thou seest there's giuen so great might
To some that are but clay as I,
Their very anger can affright
Which if in any thou espie,
Thus thinke : if mortal's frownes strike feare,
How dreadfull will God's wrath appeare !

By my late hopes, than none are crost,
Consider those that firmer bee ;
And make the freedome I have lost
A meanes that may remember thee;

Had Christ not thy redeemer bin,
What horrid thrall thou hadst been in !

These iron chaines, the bolts of Steele,
Which other poore offenders griend,
The wants and cares which they do feele
May bring some greater thing to mind;
For by their grieffe thou shalt doe well
To thinke upon the paines of hell.

Or when through me thou seest a man
Condemned vnto a mortall death,
How sad he lookes, how pale, how Wan,
Drawing with fear his panting breath;
Thinke if in that such grieffe thou see,
How sad will, Go, yee cursed ! bee.

Againe, when he that fear'd to dye,
Past hope, doth see his pardon brought,
Reade but the joy that's in his eye,
And then conuey it to thy thought;
There thinke betwixt my heart and thee
How sweet will, Come, yee blessed! bee.

Thus if thou doe, though closed here,
My bondage I shall deem the lesse;
I neither shall have cause to feare,
Nor yet bevvaile my sad distresse:
For whether Hue, or pine, or dye,
We shall haue blisse eternally.

Willy.

Trust me ! I see the cage doth some birds good ;
And if they do not suffer too much wrong,
Will teach them sweeter descants than the wood.
Beleeu't ! I like the subiect of thy song,
It shows thou art in no distempered mood;
But cause to heare the residue I long,
My sheep to-morrow I will nearer bring,
And spend the day to heare thee talk and sing.

Yet ere we part, Roget to, areed
Of whom thou learn'dst to make such songs as these ;
I neuer yet heard any shepheard's reede
Tune in mishap a straine that more could please.
Surely thou dost inuoke at this thy need
Some power that we neglect in other layes:
For here's a name and words that but few swaines
Haue mentioned at their meeting on the plaines.

Roget

Indeed 'tis true ; and they are sore to blame
That doe so much neglect it in their songs;
For thence proceedeth such a worthy fame
As is not subject vnto enue's wrongs ;
That is the most to be respected name
Of our true Pan, whose worth sits on all tongues,
And what the ancient shepherds vse to prayse
In sacred anthems sung on holy dayes.

Hee that first taught his musike such a straine,
Was that sweet shepheard who, vntill a king,
Kept sheepe upon the hony, milky plaine,
That is inricht by Jordan's watering:
He in his troubles eased the bodie's paines
By measures raised to the souJe's rauishing;
And his sweet numbers onely, most diuine,
Gau first the being to this song of mine.

Willy.

Let his good spirit euer with thee dwell,
That I might hear such musicke every day.

Philarete.

Thanks ! but would now it pleased thee to play.
Yet sure 'tis late, thy weather rings his bell,

And swaines to fold or homeward drive away.

Willy.

And yon goes Cuddy, therefore fare thou well!
Fie make his sheepe for me a little stay ;
And if thou thinke it fit I'll bring him too
Next morning hither. * * *

Philarete.

* * * Prithee, Willy ! do.

George Wither

St. Peter's Day

How watchful neede we to become,
And how devoutly pray,
That thee, O Lord, we fall not from,
Upon our tryall day !
For if thy great apostle said
He would not thee denie,
Whom he that very night denayd,
On what shall we relie ?

For of ourselues we cannot leaue
One pleasure for thy sake
No, nor one vertuous thought conceiue,
Till vs thou able make :
Nay, we not onely thee denie,
When persecutions be,
But or forget, or from thee flie,
When peace attends on thee.

O let those prayers vs auail,
Thou didst for Peter daigne,
That when our foe shall us assaile
His labour may be vaine
Yea, cast on vs those powerful eyes,
That mou'd him to lament
We may bemoane with bitter cries
Our follies, and repent.

And grant that such as him succeed
For pastors of thy fold,
Thy sheepe and lambes may guide and feede,
As thou appoint'st they should ;
By his example speaking what
They out in truth to say,
And in their lives confirming that
They teach them to obey.

George Wither

The Choice

Me so oft my fancy drew
Here and there, that I ne'er knew
Where to place desire before
So that range it might no more;
But as he that passeth by
Where, in all her jollity,
Flora's riches in a row
Do in seemly order grow,
And a thousand flowers stand
Bending as to kiss his hand;
Out of which delightful store
One he may take and no more;
Long he pausing doubteth whether
Of those fair ones he should gather.
First the Primrose courts his eyes,
Then the Cowslip he espies;
Next the Pansy seems to woo him,
Then Carnations bow unto him;
Which whilst that enamour'd swain
From the stalk intends to strain,
(As half-fearing to be seen)
Prettily her leaves between
Peeps the Violet, pale to see
That her virtues slighted be;
Which so much his liking wins
That to seize her he begins.
Yet before he stoop'd so low
He his wanton eye did throw
On a stem that grew more high,
And the Rose did there espy.
Who, beside her previous scent,
To procure his eyes content
Did display her goodly breast,
Where he found at full exprest
All the good that Nature showers
On a thousand other flowers;
Wherewith he affected takes it,
His belov'd flower he makes it,
And without desire of more

Walks through all he saw before.
So I wand'ring but erewhile
Through the garden of this Isle,
Saw rich beauties, I confess,
And in number numberless:
Yea, so differing lovely too,
That I had a world to do
Ere I could set up my rest,
Where to choose and choose the best.
Thus I fondly fear'd, till Fate
(Which I must confess in that
Did a greater favour to me
Than the world can malice do me)
Show'd to me that matchless flower,
Subject for this song of our;
Whose perfection having eyed,
Reason instantly espied
That Desire, which ranged abroad,
There would find a period:
And no marvel if it might,
For it there hath all delight,
And in her hath nature placed
What each several fair one graced.
Let who list, for me, advance
The admir'd flowers of France,
Let who will praise and behold
The reserv'd Marigold;
Let the sweet-breath'd Violet now
Unto whom she pleaseth bow;
And the fairest Lily spread
Where she will her golden head;
I have such a flower to wear
That for those I do not care.
Let the young and happy swains
Playing on the Britain plains
Court unblamed their shepherdesses,
And with their gold curl'd tresses
Toy uncensured, until I
Grudge at their prosperity.
Let all times, both present, past,
And the age that shall be last,
Vaunt the beauties they bring forth.

I have found in one such worth,
That content I neither care
What the best before me were;
Nor desire to live and see
Who shall fair hereafter be;
For I know the hand of Nature
Will not make a fairer creature.

George Wither

The Contented Man's Morice

False world, thy malice I espie
With what thou hast designed;
And therein with thee to comply,
Who likewise are combined:
But, do thy worst, I thee defie,
Thy mischiefs are confined.

From me, thou my estate hast torn,
By cheatings me beguiled:
Me thou hast also made thy scorn;
With troubles me turmoiled:
But to an heritage I'm born,
That never can be spoiled.

So wise I am not, to be mad,
Though great are my oppressions;
Nor so much fool as to be sad,
Though robb'd of my possessions:
For, cures for all sores may be had,
And grace for all transgressions.

These words in youth my motto were,
And mine in age I'll make them, -
I neither have, nor want, nor care;
When also first I spake them,
I thought things would be as they are,
And meekly therefore take them.

The riches I possess this day
Are no such goods of fortune
As kings can give or take away,
Or tyrants make uncertain:
For hid within myself are they
Behinde an unseen curtain.

Of my degree, but few or none
Were dayly so frequented;
But now I'm left of every one,
And therewith well contented:

For, when I am with God alone,
Much folly is prevented.

Then, why should I give way to grief?
Come, strike up pipe and tabor
He that affecteth God in chief,
And as himself his neighbour,
May still enjoy a happy life,
Although he lives by labor.

Not me alone have they made poor,
By whom I have been cheated;
But very many thousands more
Are of their hopes defeated;
Who little dreamed heretofore
Of being so ill treated.

Then, if my courage should be less
Than theirs who never prized
The resolutions I profess
(And almost idolized),
I well deserv'd in my distress
To be of all despised.

Our sad complaints, our sighs and tears,
Make meat nor clothing cheaper:
Vain are our earthly hopes and fears,
This life is but a vapor;
And therefore, in despite of cares,
I'll sing, and dance, and caper.

Though food nor raiment left me were,
I would of wants be dreadless;
For when I quickly should be there
Where bread and cloth are needless;
And in those blessings have my share,
Whereof most men are heedless.

I then should that attain unto
For which I now endeavour;
From my false lovers thither go,
Where friendship faileth never:

And, through a few short pangs of woe,
To joys that last for ever.

For service done, and love exprest,
(Though very few regard it)
My country owes me bread, at least;
But if I be debarr'd it,
Good conscience is a dayly feast
And sorrow never marr'd it.

My grand oppressors had a thought,
When riches they bereaved,
That then, my ruine had been wrought;
But, they are quite deceived:
For them the devil much mis-taught
When that weak snare they weaved.

If in those courses I had gone
Wherein they are employed,
Till such achievements had been won
As are by them enjoyed,
They might have wager'd ten to one
I should have been destroyed.

But proofs have now confirmed me
How much our vice offendeth,
And what small helps our virtues be
To that which God intendeth,
Till he himself shall make us free,
And our defects amendeth.

Not one is from corruption clear;
Men are depraved wholly,
Mere cruelties their mercies are
Their wisdom is but folly;
And, when most righteous they appear,
Then are they most unholy.

There is no trust in temp'ral things,
For they are all unsteady:
That no assurance from them springs,
Too well I find already;

And that ev'n parliaments and kings
Are frail, or false, or giddy.

All stands upon a tott'ring wheel,
Which never fixt abideth;
Both commonweals and kingdoms reel:
He that in them confideth,
(Or trusts their faith) shall mischiefs feel,
With which soe'er he sideth.

This wit I long ago was taught,
But then I would not heed it:
Experience must by fools be bought,
Else they'll not think they need it.
By this means was my ruin wrought;
Yet they are knaves who did it.

When to the ground deprest I was,
Our mushrooms and our bubbles,
Whom neither truth, nor wit, nor grace,
But wealth and pride ennobles
As cruel were as they are base,
And jeer'd me in my troubles.

And when their hate these had made known,
New mischiefs it begat me:
For ev'ry rascal durty clown
Presumed to amate me;
And all the curs about the town
Grinn'd, snarl'd, and barked at me.

Since, therefore, 'tis not in my power,
(Though oft I fore-discern them)
To shun the world's despights one hour,
Thus into mirth I'll turn them;
And neither grieve, nor pout, nor lowre,
But laugh, and sing, and scorn them.

This fit, at sev'nty years and two,
And thus to spend my hours,
The world's contempt inclines me to,
Whilst she my state devours;

If this be all that she can do,
A fig for all her powers.

Yet I and shee, my well agree,
Though we have much contented;
Upon as equal terms are we
As most who have offended:
For, I sleight her, and she sleights me,
And there's my quarel ended.

This only doth my mirth allay,
I am to some engaged,
Who sigh and weep, and suffer may,
Whilst thus I sing incaged:
But I've a God, and so have they
By whom that care's asswaged.

And he that gives us in these days
New lords, may give us new laws;
So that our present puppet-plays,
Our whimsies, brauls, and gew-gaws,
May turned be to songs of praise,
And holy hallelujahs.

George Wither

The Lamentation Of David Over Saul And Jonathan His Son

Thy beauty, Israel, is gone :
Slaine in the places high is he.
The mighty now are ouerthrowne !
Oh ! thus how commeth it to be ?
Let not this newes their streets throughout
In Gath or Askalon be told;
For fear Philistia's daughters flout,
Lest vaunt the vncircumcized should.

On you hereafter let no dewe,
You mountaines of Gilboa, fall:
Let there be neither showers on you,
Nor fields that breed an offering shall;
For there with shame away was throwne
The target of the strong, alas!
The shield of Saul, euen as of one
That neu'r with oile anoynted was.

Nor from their blood that slaughter'd lay,
Nor from the fatt of strong men slaine,
Came Jonathan his bow away,
Nor drew forth Saul his sword in vaine ;
In life time they were louely faire,
In death they undiuided ayre;
More swift than eagles of the air,
And stronger they than lions were.

Weepe, Israel's daughters ! vveepe for Saul,
Who you with skarlet hath aray'd,
Who clothed you with pleasures all,
And on your garments gold hath layd.
How comes it he that mighty was
The foyle in battell doth sustaine ?
Thou Jonathan ! oh, thou, alas!
Upon thy places high wert slaine.

And much distressed is my heart,

My brother Jonathan, for thee;
My very deare delight thou wert,
And wondrous was thy loue to me:
So wondrous it surpassed farre
The love of women eu'ry way.
Oh ! how the mighty fallen are!
How warlike instruments decay.

George Wither

The Lord Is King

The Lord is King, and weareth
A robe of glory bright:
He clothed with strength appeareth,
And girt with powerful might.

The earth He hath so grounded
That moved it cannot be;
His throne long since was founded,
More old than time is He.

The waters highly flowed,
And raised their voice, O Lord;
The seas their fury showed,
And loud their billows roar'd.

But God in strength excelleth
Strong seas and powerful deeps;
With Him all pureness dwelleth,
And firm His truth He keeps.

George Wither

The Manly Heart

Shall I, wasting in despair,
Die because a woman's fair?
Or my cheeks make pale with care
'Cause another's rosy are?
Be she fairer than the day
Or the flowery meads in May --
If she be not so to me,
What care I how fair she be?

Shall my foolish heart be pined
'Cause I see a woman kind;
Or a well dispos-ed nature
Join-ed with a lovely feature?
Be she meeker, kinder, than
Turtle-dove or pelican,
If she be not so to me,
What care I how kind she be?

Shall a woman's virtues move
Me to perish for her love?
Or her merit's value known
Make me quite forget mine own?
Be she with that goodness blest
Which may gain her name of Best;
If she seem not such to me,
What care I how good she be?

'Cause her fortune seems too high,
Shall I play the fool and die?
Those that bear a noble mind
Where they want of riches find,
Think what with them they would do
Who without them dare to woo;
And unless that mind I see,
What care I though great she be?

Great or good, or kind or fair,
I will ne'er the more despair;
If she love me, this believe,

I will die ere she shall grieve;
If she slight me when I woo,
I can scorn and let her go;
For if she be not for me,
What care I for whom she be?

George Wither

The Marigold

When with a serious musing I behold
The grateful and obsequious marigold,
How duly, ev'ry morning, she displays
Her open breast, when Titan spreads his rays;
How she observes him in his daily walk,
Still bending towards him her tender stalk;
How, when he down declines, she droops and mourns,
Bedew'd, as 'twere, with tears, till he returns;
And how she veils her flow'rs when he is gone,
As if she scorned to be looked on
By an inferior eye, or did contemn
To wait upon a meaner light than him;
When this I meditate, methinks the flowers
Have spirits far more generous than ours,
And give us fair examples to despise
The servile fawnings and idolatries
Wherewith we court these earthly things below,
Which merit not the service we bestow.

But, O my God! though groveling I appear
Upon the ground (and have a rooting here
Which hales me downward) yet in my desire
To that which is above me I aspire;
And all my best affections I profess
To Him that is the sun of righteousness.
Oh, keep the morning of His incarnation,
The burning noontide of His bitter passion,
The night of His descending, and the height
Of His ascension ever in my sight,
That imitating Him in what I may,
I never follow an inferior way.

George Wither

The Muse

She doth tell me where to borrow
Comfort in the midst of sorrow:
Makes the desolatest place
To her presence be a grace;
And the blackest discontents
Be her fairest ornaments,
In my former days of bliss,
Her divine skill taught me this,
That from everything I saw,
I could some invention draw,
And raise pleasure to her height,
Through the meanest object's sight;
By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rustleing.
By a daisy, whose leaves spread,
Shut when Titan goes to bed;
Or a shady bush or tree,
She could more infuse in me,
Than all Nature's beauties can
In some other wiser man.
By her help I also now
Make this churlish place allow
Some things that may sweeten gladness,
In the very gall of sadness.
The dull liveness, the black shade,
That these hanging vaults have made;
The strange music of the waves,
Beating on these hollow caves;
This black den which rocks emboss,
Overgrown with eldest moss:
The rude portals that give light
More to terror than delight;
This my chamber of neglect,
Walled about with disrespect.
From all these, and this dull air,
A fit object for despair,
She hath taught me by her might
To draw comfort and delight.
Therefore, thou best earthly bliss,

I will cherish thee for this.
Poesy, thou sweet'st content
That e'er heaven to mortals lent:
Though they as a trifle leave thee,
Whose dull thoughts cannot conceive thee,
Though thou be to them a scorn,
That to nought but earth are born,
Let my life no longer be
Than I am in love with thee,
Though our wise ones call thee madness,
Let me never taste of gladness,
If I love not thy madd'st fits
Above all their greatest wits.
And though some, too seeming holy,
Do account thy raptures folly,
Thou dost teach me to contemn
What makes knaves and fools of them.

George Wither

The Prayer Of Habakuk

Habak. iii.

Lord, thy answer I did heare,
And I grew therewith afear'd
When the times at fullest are,
Let thy work be then declar'd
When the time, Lord, full doth grow,
Then in anger mercy shew.

God Almightye, he came downe,
Downe he came from Theman-ward
And the matchlesse Holy One
From mount Paran forth appear'd ;
Heaven o'erspreading with his rayes,
And earth filling with his praise.

Sunne-like was his glorious light;
From his side there did appeare
Beaming rayes that shined bright,
And his pow'r he showed there;
Plagues before his face he sent:
At his feete hot coales there went.

Where he stood he measure tooke
Of the earth, and view'd it well;
Nations vanisht at his looke,
Auncient hils to powder fell;
Mountaines old cast lower were;
For his waies eternal are.

Cushan tents I saw diseas'd,
And the Midian curtaines quake.
Have the flouds, Lord, thee displeas'd ?
Did the flouds thee angry make ?
Was it else. the sea that hath
Thus prouoked thee to wrath ?

For thou rod'st thy horses there,

And thy saving charrets through;
Thou didst make thy bow appeare,
And thou didst performe thy vowe ;
Yea, thine oath and promise past,
To the tribes fulfilled hast.

Through the earth thou riftes didst make,
And the riuers there did flow;
Mountaines seeing thee did shake,
And away the flouds did goe.
From the deepe a voyce was heard,
And his hands on high he rear'd.

Both the sunne and moone made stay,
And remoud not in their spheares;
By thine arrowes' light went they,
By thy brightly shining speares:
Thou in wrath the lands did crush,
And in rage the nations thresh.

For thy people's safe releefe,
With thy Christ for ayd went'st thou ;
Thou hast also peirct their chiefe
Of the sinfull household through,
And display'd them till made bare
From the foote to necke they were.

Thou, with jaelines of their owne,
Didst their armies' leader strike;
For against me they came downe,
To deuoure me wherllwinde-like;
And they ioy in nothing more
Than vnseene to spoile the poore.

Through the sea thou mad'st a way,
And didst ride thy horses there,
Where great heapes of water lay ;
I the newes thereof did heare,
And the voyce my bowels shooke;
Yea, my lips a quiv'ring tooke.

Rottenesse my bones possest,

Trembling feare possessed me,
I that troublous day might rest;
For when his approches be
Onward to the people made,
His strong troups will them invade.

Bloomlesse shall the fig-tree bee,
And the vine no fruit shall yeeld;
Fade shall then the oliue-tree,
Meat shall none be in the field ;
Neither in the fold or stall
Flock or heard continue shall.

Yet the Lord my ioy shall be,
And in him I will delight,
In my God that saueth me,
God the Lord my only might;
Who my feet so guides, that I,
Hinde-like, pace my places high.

George Wither

The Steadfast Shepherd

Hence away, thou siren, leave me,
Pish! unclasp those wanton arms,
Sugared words can ne'er deceive me
Though thou prove a thousand charms.
Fie, fie, forbear, no common snare
Can ever my affection chain.
They painted baits and poor deceits
Are all bestowed on me in vain.

I'm no slave to such as you be,
Neither shall that snowy breast,
Rolling eye and lip of ruby,
Ever rob me of my rest.
Go, go, display thy beauty's ray
To some more soon enamoured swain,
Those common wiles of sighs and smiles
Are all bestowed on me in vain.

I have elsewhere vowed a duty,
Turn away that tempting eye,
Show me not a painted beauty,
These impostures I defy.
My spirit loathes where gaudy clothes
And feigned oaths may love obtain.
I love her so, whose looks swear no,
That all your labours will be vain.

George Wither

The Virtuous Man

Thus fears the man whom virtue, beacon-like,
Hath fix'd upon the hills of eminence;
At him the tempests of mad envy strike,
And rage against his piles of innocence;
But still, the more they wrong him, and the more
They seek to keep his worth from being known,
They daily make it greater than before,
And cause his fame the further to be blown.
When, therefore, no self-doting arrogance,
But virtues cover'd with a modest veil,
Break through obscurity, and thee advance
To place where envy shall thy worth assail,
Discourage not thyself, but stand the shocks
Of wrath and fury. Let them snarl and bite,
Pursue thee with detraction, slander, mocks,
And all the venom'd engines of despight.
Thou art above the malice; and the blaze
Of thy celestial fire shall shine so clear,
That their besotted souls thou shalt amaze,
And make thy splendours to their shame appear.

George Wither

Time Is A Fading-Flowre, That's Found

Five Termes, there be, which five I doe apply
To all, that was, and is, and shall be done.
The first, and last, is that ETERNITIE,
Which, neither shall have End, nor, was begunne.
BEGINNING, is the next; which, is a space
(Or moment rather) scarce imaginarie,
Made, when the first Materiall, formed was;
And, then, forbidden, longer time time tarry.
TIME entred, when, BEGINNING had an Ending,
And, is a Progresse, all the workes of Nature,
Within the circuit of it, comprehending,
Ev'n till the period, of the Outward-creature.
END, is the fourth, of those five Termes I meane;
(As briefe, as was Beginning) and, ordayned,
To set the last of moments, to that Scaene,
Which, on this Worlds wide Stage, is entertayned.
The fifth, we EVERLASTING, fitly, call;
For, though, it once begunne, yet shall it never
Admit, of any future-end, at all;
But, be extended onward, still, for ever.
The knowledge of these Termes, and of what action,
To each of them belongs, would set an end,
To many Controversies, and Distractions,
Which doe so many trouble, and offend.
TIME'S nature, by the Fading-flowre, appears;
Which, is a Type, of Transitory things:
The Circl'd-snake, ETERNITIE declares;
Within whose Round, each fading Creature, springs.
Some Riddles more, to utter, I intended,
But, lo; a sudden stop, my words have ended.

George Wither

Tobacco

The Indian weed, withered quite,
Green at noon, cut down at night,
Shows thy decay; all flesh is hay,
Thus thinke, then drinke tobacco.

The pipe that is so lily-white,
Shows thee to be a mortal wight;
And even such, gone with a touch,
Thus thinke, then drinke tobacco.

And when the smoke ascends on high,
Thinke thou beholdest the vanity
Of worldly stuffe, gone with a puffe,
Thus thinke, then drinke tobacco.

And when the pipe grows foul within,
Think on thy soule defil'd with sin,
And then the fire it doth require.
Thus thinke, then drinke tobacco.

The ashes that are left behind,
May serve to put thee still in mind,
That unto dust return thou must.
Thus thinke, then drinke tobacco.

George Wither

Veil, Lord, Mine Eyes Till She Be Past

Veil, Lord, mine eyes till she be past,
When Folly tempts my sight;
Keep Thou my palate and my taste
From gluttonous delight.
Stop Thou mine ear from sirens' songs,
My tongue from lies restrain;
Withhold my hands from doing wrongs,
My feet from courses vain.

Teach, likewise, ev'ry other sense
To act an honest part,
But chiefly settle innocence
And pureness in my heart;
So naught without me or within,
Shall work an ill effect,
By tempting me to act a sin,
Or virtues to neglect.

George Wither