

**Classic Poetry Series**

**George Wither**

**- 34 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](http://www.poemhunter.com/edmund-spenser/) ... through a group of poets ... ranging from [Shakespeare](http://www.poemhunter.com/william-shakespeare/), [Drayton](http://www.poemhunter.com/michael-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](http://www.poemhunter.com/william-henry-drummond/) of Hawthornden, [George Sandys](http://www.poemhunter.com/george-sandys/) and [Joshua Sylvester](http://www.poemhunter.com/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.

<http://www.poemhunter.com/charles-lamb/> 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 editions. Several 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 allegorical. The 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 them. They 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 sheepcotes 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 gaggling 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 strowed 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

## **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

## 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 mewing.  
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 lonesness, 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

## 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 scorned 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 despised power

Greater is, by far, than your.  
And, whate'er you think of me,  
In your minds you poorer be.

You are pleased, 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-disposed nature  
Joined 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 ago,**

I wandered out a while ago,  
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

## 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 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 Lover's Resolution

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 think not well of me,  
What care I how fair she be?

Shall my silly heart be pined  
'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-deservings known  
Make me quite forget my own?  
Be she with that goodness blest  
Which may merit 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?  
She that bears a noble mind,  
If not outward helps she find,  
Thinks what with them he would do  
That without them dares her 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

## 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 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, appeares;  
Which, is a Type, of Transitory things:  
The Circled-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 stufte, 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