

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **James Shirley**

**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

## **A Hymn**

O FLY, my Soul! What hangs upon  
Thy drooping wings,  
And weighs them down  
With love of gaudy mortal things?

The Sun is now i' the east: each shade  
As he doth rise  
Is shorter made,  
That earth may lessen to our eyes.

O be not careless then and play  
Until the Star of Peace  
Hide all his beams in dark recess!  
Poor pilgrims needs must lose their way,  
When all the shadows do increase.

James Shirley

## **Cease, Warring Thoughts**

Cease, warring thoughts, and let his brain  
No more discord entertain,  
But be smooth and calm again.

Ye crystal rivers that are nigh,  
As your streams are passing by,  
Teach your murmurs harmony.

Ye winds that wait upon the spring,  
And perfumes to flowers do bring,  
Let your amorous whispers here  
Breathe soft music to his ear.

Ye warbling nightingales repair  
From every wood to charm this air,  
And with the wonders of your breast  
Each striving to excel the rest.  
When it is time to wake him, close your parts,  
And drop down from the trees with broken hearts.

James Shirley

## **Death the Leveller**

The glories of our blood and state  
Are shadows, not substantial things;  
There is no armour against Fate;  
Death lays his icy hand on kings:  
Sceptre and Crown  
Must tumble down,  
And in the dust be equal made  
With the poor crookèd scythe and spade.

Some men with swords may reap the field,  
And plant fresh laurels where they kill:  
But their strong nerves at last must yield;  
They tame but one another still:  
Early or late  
They stoop to fate,  
And must give up their murmuring breath  
When they, pale captives, creep to death.

The garlands wither on your brow,  
Then boast no more your mighty deeds!  
Upon Death's purple altar now  
See where the victor-victim bleeds.  
Your heads must come  
To the cold tomb:  
Only the actions of the just  
Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.

James Shirley

## **Death's Subtle Ways**

Victorious men of earth, no more  
Proclaim how wide your empires are;  
Though you bind in every shore  
And your triumphs reach as far  
As night or day,  
Yet you, proud monarchs, must obey  
And mingle with forgotten ashes when  
Death calls ye to the crowd of common men.

Devouring Famine, Plague, and War,  
Each able to undu mankind,  
Death's servile emissaries are;  
Nor to these alone confined,  
He hath at will  
More quaint and subtle ways to kill;  
A smile or kiss, as he will use the art,  
Shall have the cunning skill to break a heart.

James Shirley

## Peace Restored

You virgins, that did late despair  
To keep your wealth from cruel men,  
Tie up in silk your careless hair:  
Soft peace is come again.

Now lovers' eyes may gently shoot  
A flame that will not kill;  
The drum was angry, but the lute  
Shall whisper what you will.

Sing Io, Io! for his sake  
That hath restored your drooping heads;  
With choice of sweetest flowers make  
A garden where he treads;

Whilst we whole groves of laurel bring,  
A petty triumph for his brow,  
Who is the master of our spring  
And all the bloom we owe.

James Shirley

## **Song of Nuns**

O fly, my soul! what hangs upon  
Thy drooping wings,  
And weighs them down  
With love of gaudy mortal things?

The Sun is now i' the east; each shade,  
As he doth rise,  
Is shorter made,  
That earth may lessen to our eyes.

Oh, be not careless then and play  
Until the star of peace  
Hide all his beams in dark recess.  
Poor pilgrims needs must lose their way  
When all the shadows do increase.

James Shirley

## The Fair Felon

In Love's name you are charged hereby  
To make a speedy hue and cry,  
After a face, who t'other day,  
Came and stole my heart away;  
For your directions in brief  
These are best marks to know the thief:  
Her hair a net of beams would prove,  
Strong enough to capture Jove,  
Playing the eagle; her clear brow  
Is a comely field of snow.  
A sparkling eye, so pure a gray  
As when it shines it needs no day.  
Ivory dwelleth on her nose;  
Lilies, married to the rose,  
Have made her cheek the nuptial bed;  
Her lips betray their virgin red,  
As they only blushed for this,  
That they one another kiss.  
But observe, beside the rest,  
You shall know this felon best  
By her tongue; for if your ear  
Shall know this felon best  
By her tongue; for if your ear  
Shall once a heavenly music hear,  
Such as neither gods nor men  
But from that voice shall hear again,  
That, that is she, oh, take her t'ye,  
None can rock heaven asleep but she.

James Shirley

## The Garden

This Garden does not take my eyes,  
Though here you show how art of men  
Can purchase Nature at a price  
Would stock old Paradise again.

These glories while you dote upon,  
I envy not your spring nor pride,  
Nay, boast the summer all your own,  
My thoughts with less are satisfied.

Give me a little plot of ground,  
Where might I with the Sun agree,  
Though every day he walk the round,  
My Garden he should seldom see.

Those Tulips that such wealth display,  
To court my eye, shall lose their name,  
Though now they listen, as if they  
Expected I should praise their name.

But I would see my self appear  
Within the Violet's drooping head,  
On which a melancholy tear  
The discontented morn hath shed.

Within their buds let Roses sleep,  
And virgin Lilies on their stem,  
Till sighs from lovers glide, and creep  
Into their leaves to open them.

I'th'center of my ground compose  
Of Bays and Yew my summer room,  
Which may so oft as I repose,  
Present my arbor, and my tomb.

No woman here shall find me out,  
Or if a chance do bring one hither,  
I'll be secure, for round about  
I'll moat it with my eyes' foul weather.

No bird shall live within my pale,  
To charm me with their shames of art,  
Unless some wandering Nightingale  
Come here to sing and break her heart.

Upon whose death I'll try to write  
An epitaph in some funeral stone,  
So sad, and true, it may invite  
My self to die, and prove mine own.

James Shirley

## **The Glories of our Blood and State**

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Are shadows, not substantial things;  
There is no armour against fate;  
Death lays his icy hand on kings.  
Sceptre and crown  
Must tumble down,  
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And plant fresh laurels where they kill;  
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Your heads must come  
To the cold tomb;  
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Smell sweet and blossom in their dust.

James Shirley

## **To a Lady Upon a Looking-Glass Sent**

When this crystal shall present  
Your beauty to your eye,  
Think that lovely face was meant  
To dress another by.  
For not to make them proud,  
These glasses are allowed  
To those are fair,  
But to compare  
The inward beauty with the outward grace,  
And make them fair in soul as well as face.

James Shirley

## To the Painter Preparing to Draw M.M.H.

Be not too forward, painter; 'tis  
More for thy fame, and art, to miss  
All other faces, than come near  
The Lady, that expecteth here.  
Be wise, and think it less disgrace  
To draw an angel, than her face;  
For in such forms, who is so wise  
To tell thee where thy error lies?  
But since all beauty (that is known)  
Is in her virgin sweetness one,  
How can it be, that painting her  
But every look should make thee err?  
But thou art resolute I see;  
Yet let my fancy walk with thee:  
Compose a ground more dark and sad,  
Than that the early Chaos had,  
And show, to the whole sex's shame,  
Beauty was darkness till she came.  
Then paint her eyes, whose active light  
Shall make the former shadows bright,  
And with their every beam supply  
New day, to draw her picture by.  
Now, if thou wilt complete the face,  
A wonder paint in every place.  
Beneath these, for her fair neck's sake,  
White as the Paphian Turtles, make  
A pillar, whose smooth base doth show  
It self lost in a mount of snow;  
Her breast, the house of chaste desire,  
Cold, but increasing others' fire.  
But how I lose (instructing thee)  
Thy pencil, and my poetry!  
For when thou hast expressed all art,  
As high as truth, in every part,  
She can resemble at the best,  
One, in her beauty's silence dressed,  
Where thou, like a dull looker-on,  
Art lost, and all thy art undone;  
For if she speak, new wonders rise  
From her teeth, chin, lip, and eyes;  
So far above that excellent  
Did take thee first, thou should repent  
To have begun, and lose i'th'end  
Thy eyes with wonder how to mend.  
At such a loss, here's all thy choice,  
Leave off, or paint her with a voice.

James Shirley

## Two Gentlemen That Broke Their Promise

There is no faith in claret, and it shall  
Henceforth with me be held apocryphal.  
I'll trust a small-beer promise, nay, a troth  
Washed in the Thames, before a French wine oath.  
That grape, they say, is binding; yes, 'tis so,  
And it has made your souls thus costive too.  
Circe transformed the Greeks; no hard design,  
For some can do as much with claret wine  
Upon themselves; witness you two, allowed  
Once honest, now turned air, and à la mode.  
Begin no health in this, or if by chance  
The King's 'twill question your allegiance;  
And men will, after all your ruffling, say  
You drink as some do fight, in the French way:  
Engage and trouble many, when 'tis known  
You spread their interest to wave your own.  
Away with this false Christian: it shall be  
An excommunicate from mirth, and me;  
Give me the Catholic diviner flame,  
To light me to the fair Odelia's name;  
'Tis sack that justifies both man and verse,  
Whilst you in Lethe-claret still converse.  
Forget your own names next; and when you look  
With hope to find, be lost in the church-book.

James Shirley