Classic Poetry Series

William Dunbar

- poems -

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In Honour of the City of London

LONDON, thou art of townes A per se.
  Soveraign of cities, seemliest in sight,
Of high renoun, riches and royaltie;
  Of lordis, barons, and many a goodly knyght;
  Of most delectable lusty ladies bright;
Of famous prelatis, in habitis clericall;
  Of merchauntis full of substaunce and of myght:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

Gladdith anon, thou lusty Troynovaunt,
  Citie that some tyme cleped was New Troy;
In all the erth, imperiall as thou stant,
  Pryncesse of townes, of pleasure and of joy,
  A richer restith under no Christen roy;
For manly power, with craftis naturall,
  Fourmeth none fairer sith the flode of Noy:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

Gemme of all joy, jasper of jocunditie,
  Most myghty carbuncle of vertue and valour;
Strong Troy in vigour and in strenuytie;
  Of royall cities rose and geraflour;
  Empress of townes, exalt in honour;
In beawtie beryng the crone imperiall;
  Swete paradise precelling in pleasure;
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

Above all ryvers thy Ryver hath renowne,
  Whose beryall stremys, pleasaunt and preclare,
Under thy lusty wallys renneth down,
  Where many a swan doth swymme with wyngis fair;
  Where many a barge doth saile and row with are;
Where many a ship doth rest with top-royall.
  O, towne of townes! patrone and not compare,
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

Upon thy lusty Brigge of pylers white
  Been merchauntis full royall to behold;
Upon thy stretis goeth many a semely knyght
  In velvet gownes and in cheynes of gold.
  By Julyus Cesar thy Tour founded of old
May be the hous of Mars victoryall,
  Whose artillary with tonge may not be told:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

Strong be thy wallis that about thee standis;
  Wise be the people that within thee dwellis;
Fresh is thy ryver with his lusty strandis;
  Blith be thy chirches, wele sownyng be thy bellis;
  Rich be thy merchauntis in substaunce that excellis;
Fair be their wives, right lovesom, white and small;
  Clere be thy virgyns, lusty under kellis:

London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

Thy famous Maire, by pryncely governaunce,
   With sword of justice thee ruleth prudently.
No Lord of Parys, Venyce, or Floraunce
   In dignitye or honour goeth to hym nigh.
   He is exampler, loode-ster, and guye;
Principall patrone and rose orygynalle,
   Above all Maires as maister most worthy:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

William Dunbar

Lament for the Makers

I THAT in heill was and gladness
Am trublit now with great sickness
And feblit with infirmitie:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Our plesance here is all vain glory,
This fals world is but transitory,
The flesh is bruckle, the Feynd is slee:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

The state of man does change and vary,
Now sound, now sick, now blyth, now sary,
Now dansand mirry, now like to die:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

No state in Erd here standis sicker;
As with the wynd wavis the wicker
So wannis this world's vanitie:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Unto the Death gois all Estatis,
Princis, Prelatis, and Potestatis,
Baith rich and poor of all degree:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He takis the knichtis in to the field
Enarmit under helm and scheild;
Victor he is at all mellie:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

That strong unmerciful tyrand
Takis, on the motheris breast sowkand,
The babe full of benignitie:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He takis the campion in the stour,
The captain closit in the tour,
The lady in bour full of bewtie:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He spairis no lord for his piscence,
Na clerk for his intelligence;
His awful straik may no man flee:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Art-magicianis and astrologgis,
Rethoris, logicianis, and theologgis,
Them helpis no conclusionis slee:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

In medecine the most practicianis,
Leechis, surrigianis, and physicianis,

Themself from Death may not supplee:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

I see that makaris amang the lave
Playis here their padyanis, syne gois to grave;
Sparit is nocht their facultie:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He has done petuously devour
The noble Chaucer, of makaris flour,
The Monk of Bury, and Gower, all three:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

The good Sir Hew of Eglintoun,
Ettrick, Heriot, and Wintoun,
He has tane out of this cuntrie:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

That scorpion fell has done infeck
Maister John Clerk, and James Afflek,
Fra ballat-making and tragedie:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Holland and Barbour he has berevit;
Alas! that he not with us levit
Sir Mungo Lockart of the Lee:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Clerk of Tranent eke he has tane,
That made the anteris of Gawaine;
Sir Gilbert Hay endit has he:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He has Blind Harry and Sandy Traill
Slain with his schour of mortal hail,
Quhilk Patrick Johnstoun might nought flee:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He has reft Merseir his endite,
That did in luve so lively write,
So short, so quick, of sentence hie:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

He has tane Rowll of Aberdene,
And gentill Rowll of Corstorphine;
Two better fallowis did no man see:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

In Dunfermline he has tane Broun
With Maister Robert Henrysoun;
Sir John the Ross enbrast has he:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

And he has now tane, last of a,
Good gentil Stobo and Quintin Shaw,
Of quhom all wichtis hes pitie:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Good Maister Walter Kennedy
In point of Death lies verily;
Great ruth it were that so suld be:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Sen he has all my brether tane,
He will naught let me live alane;
Of force I man his next prey be:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

Since for the Death remeid is none,
Best is that we for Death dispone,
After our death that live may we:--
   Timor Mortis conturbat me.

William Dunbar

On the Nativity of Christ

RORATE coeli desuper!
   Hevins, distil your balmy schouris!
For now is risen the bricht day-ster,
   Fro the rose Mary, flour of flouris:
   The cleir Sone, quhom no cloud devouris,
Surmounting Phebus in the Est,
   Is cumin of his hevinly touris:
   Et nobis Puer natus est.

Archangellis, angellis, and dompnationis,
   Tronis, potestatis, and marteiris seir,
And all ye hevinly operationis,
   Ster, planeit, firmament, and spheir,
   Fire, erd, air, and water cleir,
To Him gife loving, most and lest,
   That come in to so meik maneir;
   Et nobis Puer natus est.

Synnaris be glad, and penance do,
   And thank your Maker hairtfully;
For he that ye micht nocht come to
   To you is cumin full humbly
   Your soulis with his blood to buy
And loose you of the fiendis arrest--
   And only of his own mercy;
   Pro nobis Puer natus est.

All clergy do to him inclyne,
   And bow unto that bairn benyng,
And do your observance divyne
   To him that is of kingis King:
   Encense his altar, read and sing
In holy kirk, with mind degest,
   Him honouring attour all thing
   Qui nobis Puer natus est.

Celestial foulis in the air,
   Sing with your nottis upon hicht,
In firthis and in forrestis fair
   Be myrthful now at all your mycht;
   For passit is your dully nicht,
Aurora has the cloudis perst,
   The Sone is risen with glaidsum licht,
   Et nobis Puer natus est.

Now spring up flouris fra the rute,
   Revert you upward naturaly,
In honour of the blissit frute
   That raiss up fro the rose Mary;
   Lay out your levis lustily,
Fro deid take life now at the lest
   In wirschip of that Prince worthy

Qui nobis Puer natus est.

Sing, hevin imperial, most of hicht!
Regions of air mak armony!
All fish in flud and fowl of flicht
Be mirthful and mak melody!
All Gloria in excelsis cry!
Heaven, erd, se, man, bird, and best,--
He that is crownit abone the sky
Pro nobis Puer natus est!

William Dunbar

To a Lady

SWEET rois of vertew and of gentilness,
Delytsum lily of everie lustynes,
   Richest in bontie and in bewtie clear,
   And everie vertew that is wenit dear,
Except onlie that ye are mercyless

Into your garth this day I did persew;
There saw I flowris that fresche were of hew;
   Baith quhyte and reid most lusty were to seyne,
   And halesome herbis upon stalkis greene;
Yet leaf nor flowr find could I nane of rew.

I doubt that Merche, with his cauld blastis keyne,
Has slain this gentil herb, that I of mene;
   Quhois piteous death dois to my heart sic paine
   That I would make to plant his root againe,--
So confortand his levis unto me bene.

William Dunbar

To the City of London

London, thou art of town{.e}s A per se.
Soveraign of cities, semeliest in sight,
Of high renoun, riches, and royaltie;
Of lordis, barons, and many goodly knyght;
Of most delectable lusty ladies bright;
Of famous prelatis in habitis clericall;
Of merchauntis full of substaunce and myght:
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Where many a swanne doth swymme with wyngis fare;
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