

Classic Poetry Series

Abraham Cowley
- poems -

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Abraham Cowley(1618 – 28 July 1667)

His father, a wealthy citizen, who died shortly before his birth, was a stationer. His mother was wholly given to works of devotion, but it happened that there lay in her parlour a copy of *The Faerie Queene*. This became the favourite reading of her son, and he had twice devoured it all before he was sent to school.

As early as 1628, that is, in his tenth year, he composed his *Tragicall History of Piramus and Thisbe*, an epic romance written in a six-line stanza, a style of his own invention. It is not too much to say that this work is the most astonishing feat of imaginative precocity on record; it is marked by no great faults of immaturity, and possesses constructive merits of a very high order.

Two years later the child wrote another and still more ambitious poem, *Constantia and Philetus*, being sent about the same time to Westminster School. Here he displayed extraordinary mental precocity and versatility, and wrote in his thirteenth year the *Elegy on the Death of Dudley, Lord Carlton*. These three poems of considerable size, and some smaller ones, were collected in 1633, and published in a volume entitled *Poetical Blossoms*, dedicated to the head master of the school, and prefaced by many laudatory verses by schoolfellows.

The author at once became famous, although he had not, even yet, completed his fifteenth year. His next composition was a pastoral comedy, entitled *Love's Riddle*, a marvelous production for a boy of sixteen, airy, correct and harmonious in language, and rapid in movement. The style is not without resemblance to that of Randolph, whose earliest works, however, were at that time only just printed.

In 1637 Cowley was elected into Trinity College, Cambridge, where he betook himself with enthusiasm to the study of all kinds of learning, and early distinguished himself as a ripe scholar. It was about this time that he composed his scriptural epic on the history of King David, one book of which still exists in the Latin original, the rest being superseded in favour of an English version in four books, called the *Davideis*, which were published after his death. The epic, written in a very dreary and turgid manner, but in good rhymed heroic verse, deals with the adventures of King David from his boyhood to the smiting of Amalek by Saul, where it abruptly closes.

In 1638 *Love's Riddle* and a Latin comedy, the *Naufragium Joculare*, were printed, and in 1641 the passage of Prince Charles through Cambridge gave occasion to the production of another dramatic work, *The Guardian*, which was acted before the royal visitor with much success. During the civil war this play

was privately performed at Dublin, but it was not printed till 1650. It is bright and amusing, in the style common to the "sons" of [Ben Jonson](http://www.poemhunter.com/ben-jonson/), the university wits who wrote more for the closet than the public stage.

Royalist in Exile

The learned quiet of the young poet's life was broken up by the Civil War; he warmly espoused the royalist side. He became a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, but was ejected by the Parliamentarians in 1643. He made his way to Oxford, where he enjoyed the friendship of Lord Falkland, and was tossed, in the tumult of affairs, into the personal confidence of the royal family itself

After the battle of Marston Moor he followed the queen to Paris, and the exile so commenced lasted twelve years. This period was spent almost entirely in the royal service, "bearing a share in the distresses of the royal family, or labouring in their affairs. To this purpose he performed several dangerous journeys into Jersey, Scotland, Flanders, the Netherlands, or wherever else the king's troubles required his attendance. But the chief testimony of his fidelity was the laborious service he underwent in maintaining the constant correspondence between the late king and the queen his wife. In that weighty trust he behaved himself with indefatigable integrity and unsuspected secrecy; for he ciphered and deciphered with his own hand the greatest part of all the letters that passed between their majesties, and managed a vast intelligence in many other parts, which for some years together took up all his days, and two or three nights every week."

In spite of these labours he did not refrain from literary industry. During his exile he met with the works of Pindar, and determined to reproduce their lofty lyric passion in English. It must be noted, however, that Cowley misunderstood Pindar's metrical practice and therefore his reproduction of the Pindaric Ode form in English does not accurately reflect Pindar's poetics. But despite this problem, Cowley's use of iambic lines of irregular length, pattern, and rhyme scheme was very influential and is still known as English "Pindarick" Ode, or Irregular Ode. One of the most famous odes written after Cowley in the Pindaric tradition is Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality."

During this same time, Cowley occupied himself in writing a history of the Civil War (which did not get published in full until 1973). In the preface to his 1656 Poems, Cowley mentioned that he had completed three books of an epic poem on the Civil War, but had left it unfinished after the First Battle of Newbury when the Royalist cause began to lose significant ground. In the preface Cowley indicated that he had destroyed all copies of the poem, but this was not precisely

the truth. In 1697, twelve years after Cowley's death, a shortened version of the first book of the poem, called *A Poem on the Late Civil War* was published. It was assumed that the rest of the poem had indeed been destroyed or lost until the mid-20th century when scholar Allan Pritchard discovered the first of two extant manuscript copies of the whole poem among the Cowper family papers. Thus, the three completed books of Cowley's great (albeit unfinished) English epic, *The Civill Warre* (otherwise spelled "The Civil War"), was finally published in full for the first time in 1973.

In 1647 a collection of his love verses, entitled *The Mistress*, was published, and in the next year a volume of wretched satires, *The Four Ages of England*, was brought out under his name, with the composition of which he had nothing to do.

In spite of the troubles of the times, so fatal to poetic fame, his reputation steadily increased, and when, on his return to England in 1656, he published a volume of his collected poetical works, he found himself without a rival in public esteem. This volume included the later works already mentioned, the *Pindarique Odes*, the *Davideis*, the *Mistress* and some *Miscellanies*. Among the latter are to be found Cowley's most vital pieces. This section of his works opens with the famous aspiration:

"What shall I do to be for ever known,
And make the coming age my own?"

It contains elegies on Wotton, Vandyck, Falkland, William Hervey and Crashaw, the last two being among Cowley's finest poems, brilliant, sonorous and original; the amusing ballad of *The Chronicle*, giving a fictitious catalogue of his supposed amours; various gnomic pieces; and some charming paraphrases from Anacreon. The *Pindarique Odes* contain weighty Lines and passages, buried in irregular and inharmonious masses of moral verbiage. Not more than one or two are good throughout, but a full posy of beauties may easily be culled from them. The long cadences of the Alexandrines with which most of the strophes close, continued to echo in English poetry from Dryden down to Gray, but the *Odes* themselves, which were found to be obscure by the poet's contemporaries, immediately fell into disesteem.

The Mistress was the most popular poetic reading of the age, and is now the least read of all Cowley's works. It was the last and most violent expression of the amatory affectation of the 17th century, an affectation which had been endurable in Donne and other early writers because it had been the vehicle of sincere emotion, but was unendurable in Cowley because in him it represented nothing but a perfunctory exercise, a mere exhibition of literary calisthenics. He

appears to have been of a cold, or at least of a timid, disposition; in the face of these elaborately erotic volumes, we are told that to the end of his days he never summoned up courage to speak of love to a single woman in real life. The "Leonora" of *The Chronicle* is said to have been the only woman he ever loved, and she married the brother of his biographer, Sprat.

Return to England

Soon after his return to England he was seized in mistake for another person, and only obtained his liberty on a bail of £1000. In 1658 he revised and altered his play of *The Guardian*, and prepared it for the press under the title of *The Cutter of Coleman Street*, but it did not appear until 1661. Late in 1658 Oliver Cromwell died, and Cowley took advantage of the confusion of affairs to escape to Paris, where he remained until the Restoration brought him back in Charles's train. He published in 1663 *Verses upon several occasions*, in which *The Complaint* is included.

Cowley obtained permission to retire into the country; and through his friend, Lord St Albans, he obtained a property near Chertsey, where, devoting himself to botany and books, he lived in comparative solitude until his death. He took a practical interest in experimental science, and he was one of those advocating the foundation of an academy for the protection of scientific enterprise. Cowley's pamphlet on *The Advancement of Experimental Philosophy*, 1661, immediately preceded the foundation of the Royal Society; to which Cowley, in March 1667, at the suggestion of John Evelyn, addressed an ode. He died in the Porch House, in Chertsey, in consequence of having caught a cold while superintending his farm-labourers in the meadows late on a summer evening. On 3 August, Cowley was buried in Westminster Abbey beside the ashes of <a href="

The works of Cowley were collected in 1668, when Thomas Sprat brought out an edition in folio, to which he prefixed a life of the poet. There were many reprints of this collection, which formed the standard edition till 1881, when it was superseded by Alexander Balloch Grosart's privately printed edition in two volumes, for the Chertsey Worthies library. The *Essays* have frequently been revived.

A Supplication

Awake, awake, my Lyre!
And tell thy silent master's humble tale
In sounds that may prevail;
Sounds that gentle thoughts inspire:
Though so exalted she
And I so lowly be
Tell her, such different notes make all thy harmony.

Hark, how the strings awake!
And, though the moving hand approach not near,
Themselves with awful fear
A kind of numerous trembling make.
Now all thy forces try;
Now all thy charms apply;
Revenge upon her ear the conquests of her eye.

Weak Lyre! thy virtue sure
Is useless here, since thou art only found
To cure, but not to wound,
And she to wound, but not to cure,
Too weak too wilt thou prove
My passion to remove;
Physic to other ills, thou'rt nourishment to love.

Sleep, sleep again, my Lyre!
For thou canst never tell my humble tale
In sounds that will prevail,
Nor gentle thoughts in her inspire;
All thy vain mirth lay by,
Bid thy strings silent lie,
Sleep, sleep again, my Lyre, and let thy master die.

Abraham Cowley

A Vote (Excerpt)

...

This only grant me: that my means may lie
Too low for envy, for contempt too high.

Some honour I would have,
Not from great deeds, but good alone;
Th' ignote are better than ill-known,

Rumour can ope the grave.
Acquaintance I would hug, but when 't depends
Not from the number, but the choice of friends.

Books should, not bus'ness, entertain the light,
And sleep, as undisturb'd as death, the night.

My house a cottage, more
Than palace, and should fitting be
For all my use, no luxury.

My garden painted o'er
With Nature's hand, not Art's, and pleasures yield
Horace might envy in his Sabine field.

Thus would I double my life's fading space,
For he that runs it well, twice runs his race.

And in this true delight,
These unbought sports and happy state
I would not fear, nor wish my fate,
But boldly say each night,
To-morrow let my sun his beams display,
Or in clouds hide them; I have liv'd to-day.

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Abraham Cowley

Against Fruition

No; thou'rt a fool, I'll swear, if e'er thou grant;
Much of my veneration thou must want,
When once thy kindness puts my ignorance out,
For a learn'd age is always least devout.
Keep still thy distance; for at once to me
Goddess and woman too thou canst not be;
Thou'rt queen of all that sees thee, and as such
Must neither tyrannize nor yield too much;
Such freedom give as may admit command,
But keep the forts and magazines in thine hand.
Thou'rt yet a whole world to me, and dost fill
My large ambition; but 'tis dang'rous still,
Lest I like the Pellæan prince* should be,
And weep for other worlds, having conquered thee.
When Love has taken all thou hast away,
His strength by too much riches will decay.
Thou in my fancy dost much higher stand
Than women can be placed by Nature's hand;
And I must needs, I'm sure, a loser be,
To change thee, as thou'rt there, for very thee.
Thy sweetness is so much within me placed,
That shouldst thou nectar give, 'twould spoil the taste.
Beauty at first moves wonder and delight;
'Tis Nature's juggling trick to cheat the sight;
We admire it, whilst unknown, but after more
Admire ourselves for liking it before.
Love, like a greedy hawk, if we give way,
Does overgorge himself with his own prey;
Of very hopes a surfeit he'll sustain
Unless by fears he cast them up again:
His spirit and sweetness dangers keep alone;
If once he lose his sting, he grows a drone.

Abraham Cowley

Against Hope

HOPE, whose weak Being ruin'd is,□
Alike if it succeed, and if it miss ;□
Whom Good or Ill does equally confound,□
And both the Horns of Fates Dilemma wound.□
 Vain shadow! which dost vanish quite,□
 Both at full Noon, and perfect Night !□
The Stars have not a possibility□
 Of blessing Thee ;□
If things then from their End we happy call,□
'Tis Hope is the most Hopeless thing of all.□

 Hope, thou bold Taster of Delight,□
Who whilst thou shouldst but tast, devour'st it quite !□
Thou bringst us an Estate, yet leav'st us Poor,□
By clogging it with Legacies before !□
 The Joys which we entire should wed,□
 Come deflowr'd Virgins to our bed ;□
Good fortunes without gain imported be,□
 Such mighty Custom's paid to Thee.□
For Joy, like Wine, kept close does better tast ;□
If it take air before, its spirits wast.□

 Hope, Fortunes cheating Lottery !□
Where for one prize an hundred blanks there be ;□
Fond Archer, Hope, who tak'st thy aim so far,□
That still or short, or wide thine arrows are !□
 Thin, empty Cloud, which th' eye deceives□
 With shapes that our own Fancy gives !□
A Cloud, which gilt and painted now appears,□
 But must drop presently in tears !□
When thy false beams o'er Reasons light prevail,□
By Ignis fatui for North-Stars we sail.□

 Brother of Fear, more gaily clad !□
The merr'ier Fool o' th' two, yet quite as Mad :□
Sire of Repentance, Child of fond Desire !□
That blow'st the Chymicks, and the Lovers fire !□
 Leading them still insensibly'on□
 By the strange witchcraft of Anon !□

By Thee the one does changing Nature through□
Her endless Labyrinths pursue,□
And th' other chases Woman, whilst She goes□
More ways and turns than hunted Nature knows.

Abraham Cowley

An Answer To A Copy Of Verses Sent Me To Jersey

As to a northern people (whom the sun
Uses just as the Romish church has done
Her prophane laity, and does assign
Bread only both to serve for bread and wine)
A rich Canary fleet welcome arrives;
Such comfort to us here your letter gives,
Fraught with brisk racy verses; in which we
The soil from whence they came, taste, smell, and see:
Such is your present to us; for you must know,
Sir, that verse does not in this island grow,
No more than sack; one lately did not fear
(Without the Muses' leave) to plant it here;
But it produc'd such base, rough, crabbed, hedge-
Rhymes, as ev'n set the hearers' ears on edge:
Written by — — Esquire, the
Year of our Lord six hundred thirty-three.
Brave Jersey Muse! and he's for this high style
Call'd to this day the Homer of the Isle.
Alas! to men here no words less hard be
To rhyme with, than * Mount Orgueil is to me;
Mount Orgueil! which, in scorn o' th' Muses' law,
With no yoke-fellow word will deign to draw.
Stubborn Mount Orgueil! 't is a work to make it
Come into rhyme, more hard than 't were to take it.
Alas! to bring your tropes and figures here,
Strange as to bring camels and elephants were;
And metaphor is so unknown a thing,
'T would need the preface of 'God save the King.'
Yet this I'll say, for th' honour of the place,
That, by God's extraordinary grace
(Which shows the people have judgment, if not wit)
The land is undefil'd with Clinches yet;
Which, in my poor opinion, I confess,
Is a most singular blessing, and no less
Than Ireland's wanting spiders. And, so far
From th' actual sin of bombast too they are,
(That other crying sin o' th' English Muse)
That even Satan himself can accuse
None here (no not so much as the divines)

For th' motus primò primi to strong lines.
Well, since the soil then does not naturally bear
Verse, who (a devil) should import it here?
For that to me would seem as strange a thing
As who did first wild beasts into islands bring;
Unless you think that it might taken be
As Green did Gondibert, in a prize at sea:
But that's a fortune falls not every day;
'Tis true Green was made by it; for they say
The parliament did a noble bounty do,
And gave him the whole prize, their tenths and fifteens too.

Abraham Cowley

Anacreontics, Drinking

THE thirsty earth soaks up the rain,
And drinks and gapes for drink again;
The plants suck in the earth, and are
With constant drinking fresh and fair;
The sea itself (which one would think
Should have but little need of drink)
Drinks twice ten thousand rivers up,
So fill'd that they o'erflow the cup.
The busy Sun (and one would guess
By 's drunken fiery face no less)
Drinks up the sea, and when he 's done,
The Moon and Stars drink up the Sun:
They drink and dance by their own light,
They drink and revel all the night:
Nothing in Nature 's sober found,
But an eternal health goes round.
Fill up the bowl, then, fill it high,
Fill all the glasses there--for why
Should every creature drink but I?
Why, man of morals, tell me why?

Abraham Cowley

Anacreontics, The Epicure

UNDERNEATH this myrtle shade,
On flowerly beds supinely laid,
With odorous oils my head o'erflowing,
And around it roses growing,
What should I do but drink away
The heat and troubles of the day?
In this more than kingly state
Love himself on me shall wait.
Fill to me, Love! nay, fill it up!
And mingled cast into the cup
Wit and mirth and noble fires,
Vigorous health and gay desires.
The wheel of life no less will stay
In a smooth than rugged way:
Since it equally doth flee,
Let the motion pleasant be.
Why do we precious ointments shower?--
Nobler wines why do we pour?--
Beauteous flowers why do we spread
Upon the monuments of the dead?
Nothing they but dust can show,
Or bones that hasten to be so.
Crown me with roses while I live,
Now your wines and ointments give:
After death I nothing crave,
Let me alive my pleasures have:
All are Stoics in the grave.

Abraham Cowley

Anacreontics, The Swallow

FOOLISH prater, what dost thou
So early at my window do?
Cruel bird, thou'st ta'en away
A dream out of my arms to-day;
A dream that ne'er must equall'd be
By all that waking eyes may see.
Thou this damage to repair
Nothing half so sweet and fair,
Nothing half so good, canst bring,
Tho' men say thou bring'st the Spring.

Abraham Cowley

Bathing In The River

The fish around her crowded, as they do
To the false light that treacherous fisher shew,
And all with as much ease might taken be,
 As she at first took me;
 For ne'er did light so clear
 Among the waves appear,
Though every night the sun himself set there.

Why to mute fish shouldst thou thyself discover
And not to me, thy no less silent lover?
As some from men their buried gold commit
 To ghosts, that have no use of it;
 Half their rich treasures so
 Maids bury; and for aught we know,
(Poor ignorants!) They're mermaids all below.

The amorous waves would fain about her stay,
But still new amorous waves drive them away,
And with swift current to those joys they haste
 That do as swiftly waste:
 I laugh'd the wanton play to view;
 But 't is, alas! at land so too,
And still old lovers yield the place to new.

Kiss her, and as you part, you amorous waves
(My happier rivals, and my fellow-slaves)
Point to your flowery banks, and to her shew
 The good your bounties do;
 Then tell her what your pride doth cost,
 And how your use and beauty's lost,
When rigorous winter binds you up with frost.

Tell her, her beauties and her youth, like thee,
Haste without stop to a devouring sea;
Where they will mix'd and undistinguish'd lie
 With all the meanest things that die;
 As in the ocean thou
 No privilege dost know
Above th' impurest streams that thither flow.

Tell her, kind flood! When this has made her sad,
Tell her there's yet one remedy to be had;
Show her how thou, though long since past, dost find
Thyself yet still behind:
Marriage (say to her) will bring
About the self-same thing.
But she, fond maid, shuts and seals-up the spring.

Abraham Cowley

Beauty

LIBERAL Nature did dispence
To all things Arms for their defence;
And some she arms with sin'ewy force,
And some with swiftness in the course;
Some with hard Hoofs, or forked claws,
And some with Horns, or tusked jaws.
And some with Scales, and some with Wings,
And some with Teeth, and some with Stings.
Wisdom to Man she did afford,
Wisdom for Shield, and Wit for Sword.
What to beauteous Woman-kind,
What Arms, what Armour has she'assigne'd?
Beauty is both; for with the Faire
What Arms, what Armour can compare?
What Steel, what Gold, or Diamond,
More Impassible is found?
And yet what Flame, what Lightning ere
So great an Active force did bear?
They are all weapon, and they dart
Like Porcupines from every part.
Who can, alas, their strength express,
Arm'd when they themselves undress,
Cap a pe* with Nakedness?

Abraham Cowley

Concealment

No; to what purpose should I speak?
No, wretched heart! swell till you break.
She cannot love me if she would;
And, to say truth, 'twere pity that she should.
No; to the grave thy sorrows bear;
As silent as they will be there:
Since that lov'd hand this mortal wound does give,
So handsomely the thing contrive,
That she may guiltless of it live;
So perish, that her killing thee
May a chance-medley, and no murder, be.

'Tis nobler much for me, that I
By her beauty, not her anger, die:
This will look justly, and become
An execution; that, a martyrdom.
The censuring world will ne'er refrain
From judging men by thunder slain.
She must be angry, sure, if I should be
So bold to ask her to make me,
By being hers, happier than she!
I will not; 't is a milder fate
To fall by her not loving, than her hate.

And yet this death of mine, I fear,
Will ominous to her appear;
When, sound in every other part,
Her sacrifice is found without an heart;
For the last tempest of my death
Shall sigh out that too with my breath.
Then shall the world my noble ruin see,
Some pity and some envy me;
Then she herself, the mighty she,
Shall grace my funerals with this truth;
' 'T was only Love destroy'd the gentle youth.'

Abraham Cowley

Constantia's Song

Time fly with greater speed away,
Add feathers to thy wings,
Till thy haste in flying brings
That wished-for and expected Day.

Comfort's Son we then shall see,
Though at first it darkened be
With dangers yet, those clouds but gone,
Our Day will put his lustre on.

Then though Death's sad night appear,
And we in lonely silence rest;
Our ravish'd Souls no more shall fear,
But with lasting day be blest.

And then no friends can part us more,
Nor no new death extend its power;
Thus there's nothing can dissever
Hearts which Love hath joined together.

Abraham Cowley

Cousel

AH! what advice can I receive!
No, satisfy me first;
For who would physick-potions give
To one that dies with thirst?

A little puff of breath, we find,
Small fires can quench and kill;
But, when they're great, the adverse wind
Does make them greater still.

Now whilst you speak, it moves me much,
But straight I'm just the same;
Alas! th' effect must needs be such
Of cutting through a flame.

Abraham Cowley

Dauids: A Sacred Poem Of The Troubles Of David (Excerpt)

BOOK I (excerpt)

I sing the man who Judah's sceptre bore
In that right hand which held the crook before;
Who from best poet, best of kings did grow;
The two chief gifts Heav'n could on man bestow.
Much danger first, much toil did he sustain,
Whilst Saul and Hell cross'd his strong fate in vain.
Nor did his crown less painful work afford;
Less exercise his patience, or his sword;
So long her conqueror fortunes spite pursued;
Till with unwearied virtue he subdued
All homebred malice, and all foreign boasts;
Their strength was armies, his the Lord of Hosts.

Thou, who didst David's royal stem adorn,
And gav'st him birth from whom thy self wast born;
Who didst in triumph at death's court appear,
And slew'st him with thy nails, thy cross and spear,
Whilst Hell's black tyrant trembled to behold,
The glorious light he forfeited of old;
Who Heav'ns glad burden now, and justest pride,
Sit'st high entron'd next thy great Father's side,
(Where hallowed flames help to adorn that head
Which once the blushing thorns environed,
Till crimson drops of precious blood hung down
Like rubies to enrich thine humble crown.)
Even thou my breast with such blest rage inspire,
As mov'd the tuneful strings of David's lyre,
Guide my bold steps with thine old travelling flame,
In these untrodden paths to sacred fame;
Lo, with pure hands thy heav'enly fires to take,
My well-chang'd Muse I a chaste vestal make!
From earth's vain joys, and love's soft witchcraft free,
I consecrate my Magdalene to thee!
Lo, this great work, a temple to thy praise,
On polish'd pillars of strong verse I raise!
A temple, where if thou vouchsafe to dwell,

It Solomon's, and Herod's shall excel.
Too long the Muses-land have heathen bin;
Their gods too long were devils, and virtues sin;
But thou, Eternal Word, has call'd forth me
Th' apostle, to convert that world to thee;
T' unbind the charms that in slight fables lie,
And teach that truth is purest poesy.

...

Abraham Cowley

Epitaph

Underneath this marble stone,
Lie two beauties joyn'd in one.

Two whose loves, death could not sever,
For both liv'd, both dy'd together.

Two whose soules, being too divine
For earth, in their own spheare now shine,

Who have left their loves to Fame,
And their earth to earth againe.

Abraham Cowley

Hymn To Light

First-born of Chaos, who so fair didst come
From the old Negro's darksome womb!
Which, when it saw the lovely child,
The melancholy mass put on kind looks and smiled,

Thou tide of glory which no rest dost know,
But ever ebb and ever flow!
Thou golden shower of a true Jove,
Who does in thee descend, and heaven to earth make love!

Hail, active nature's watchful life and health,
Her joy, her ornament and wealth!
Hail to thy husband Heat, and thee!
Thou the world's beauteous bride, the lusty bridegroom he!

Say, from what golden quivers of the sky
Do all thy winged arrows fly?
Swiftness and power by birth are thine:
From thy great Sire they came, thy Sire the Word divine.

'Tis, I believe, this archery to show,
That so much cost in colors thou,
And skill in painting, dost bestow
Upon thy ancient arms, the gaudy heavenly bow.

Swift as light thoughts their empty career run,
Thy race is finished when begun;
Let a post-angel start with thee,
And thou the goal of earth shalt teach as soon as he.

Thou in the moon's bright chariot, proud and gay,
Dost thy bright wood of stars survey,
And all the year dost with thee bring,
Of thousand flowery lights, thine own nocturnal spring.

Thou Scythian-like dost round thy lands, above
The sun's gilt tent, forever move,
And still, as thou in pomp dost go,
The shining pageants of the world attend thy show.

Nor amidst all these triumphs dost thou scorn
The humble glowworms to adorn,
And with those living spangles gild -
O greatness without pride! - the bushes of the field.

Night and her ugly subjects thou dost fright,
And sleep, the lazy owl of night;
Ashamed and fearful to appear,
They screen their horrid shapes with the black hemisphere.

With 'em there hastes, and wildly takes the alarm,
Of painted dreams, a busy swarm;
At the first openings of thine eye,
The various clusters break, the antic atoms fly.

The guilty serpents and obscener beasts
Creep conscious to their secret rests;
Nature to thee does reverence pay;
Ill omens and ill sights removes out of thy way.

At thy appearance, Grief itself is said
To shake his wings and rouse his head.
And cloudy Care has often took
A gentle beamy smile reflected from thy look.

At thy appearance, Fear itself grows bold;
Thy sunshine melts away his cold.
Encouraged at the sight of thee,
To the cheek color comes, and firmness to the knee.

Even Lust, the master of a hardened face,
Blushes if thou beest in the place,
To darkness' curtains he retires;
In sympathizing night he rolls his smoky fires.

When, goddess, thou list'st up thy wakened head
Out of the morning's purple bed,
Thy quire of birds about thee play,
And all the joyful world salutes the rising day.

The ghosts and monster spirits that did presume

A body's privilege to assume
Vanish again invisibly,
And bodies gain again their visibility.

All the world's bravery that delights our eyes
Is but thy several liveries;
Thou the rich dye on them bestow'st;
Thy nimble pencil paints this landscape as thou go'st.

A crimson garment in the rose thou wear'st;
A crown of studded gold thou bear'st;
The virgin blies in their white
Are clad but with the lawn of almost naked light.

The violet, spring's little infant, stands
Girt in thy purple swaddling-bands;
On the fair tulip thou dost dote;
Thou cloth'st it in a gay and parti-colored coat.

With flame condensed thou dost the jewels fix,
And solid colors in it mix;
Flora herself envies to see
Flowers fairer than her own, and durable as she.

Ah, goddess! would thou couldst thy hand withhold
And be less liberal to gold;
Didst thou less value to it give,
Of how much care, alas! mightst thou poor man relieve!

To me the sun is more delightful far,
And all fair days much fairer are,
But few, ah wondrous few, there be
Who do not gold prefer, O goddess, even to thee.

Through the soft ways of heaven, and air, and sea,
Which open all their pores to thee,
Like a clear river thou dost glide,
And with thy living stream through the close channels slide.

But where firm bodies thy free course oppose,
Gently thy source the land o'erflows,
Takes there possession, and does make

Of colors mingled, light, a thick and standing lake.

But the vast ocean of unbounded day

In the empyrean heaven does stay.

Thy rivers, lakes, and springs below

From thence took first their rise, thither at last must flow.

Abraham Cowley

Inconstancy

FIVE years ago (says Story) I lov'd you,
For which you call me most inconstant now;
Pardon me, Madam! you mistake the man,
For I am not the same that I was then;
No flesh is now the same 'twas then in me;
And that my mind is chang'd, yourself may see.
The same thoughts to retain still, and intents,
Were more inconstant far; for accidents
Must of all things most strangely inconstant prove,
If from one subject they t' another move;
My members then the father-members were
From whence these take their birth which now are here.
If then this body love what th' other did,
'T were incest; which by Nature is forbid.
You might as well this day inconstant name,
Because the weather is not still the same
That it was yesterday — or blame the year,
'Cause the spring flowers, and autumn fruit, does bear.
The world's a scene of changes; and to be
Constant, in Nature were inconstancy;
For 't were to break the laws herself has made:
Our substances themselves do fleet and fade;
The most fix'd being still does move and fly,
Swift as the wings of time 't is measur'd by.
T' imagine then that Love should never cease
(Love, which is but the ornament of these)
Were quite as senseless, as to wonder why
Beauty and colour stay not when we die.

Abraham Cowley

Life

Life's a name
That nothing here can truly claim;
This wretched inn, where we scarce stay to bait,
We call our dwelling-place!
And mighty voyages we take,
And mighty journeys seem to make,
O'er sea and land, the little point that has no space.
Because we fight and battles gain,
Some captives call, and say, 'the rest are slain';
Because we heap up yellow earth, and so
Rich, valiant, wise, and virtuous seem to grow;
Because we draw a long nobility
From hieroglyphic proofs of heraldry-
We grow at last by Custom to believe,
That really we Live;
Whilst all these Shadows, that for Things we take,
Are but the empty Dreams which in Death's sleep we make.

Abraham Cowley

Not Fair

'T IS very true, I thought you once as fair
As women in th' idea are;*
Whatever here seems beauteous, seem'd to be
But a faint metaphor of thee:
But then, methoughts, there something shin'd within,
Which casts this lustre o'er thy skin;
Nor could I choose but count it the sun's light,
Which made this cloud appear so bright.
But, since I knew thy falsehood and thy pride,
And all thy thousand faults beside,
A very Moor, methinks, plac'd near to thee,
White as his teeth would seem to be.
So men (they say) by hell's delusions led,
Have ta'en a succubus to their bed;
Believe it fair, and themselves happy call,
Till the cleft foot discovers all:
Then they start from 't, half ghosts themselves with fear;
And devil, as 't is, doth appear.
So, since against my will I found thee foul,
Deform'd and crooked in thy soul,
My reason straight did to my senses shew,
That they might be mistaken too:
Nay, when the world but knows how false you are,
There's not a man will think you fair;
Thy shape will monstrous in their fancies be,
They'll call their eyes as false as thee.
Be what thou wilt, hate will present thee so,
As Puritans do the Pope, and Papists Luther do.

Abraham Cowley

Of Wit

TELL me, O tell, what kind of thing is Wit,□
Thou who Master art of it.□
For the First matter loves Variety less ;□
Less Women love 't, either in Love or Dress.□
A thousand different shapes it bears,□
Comely in thousand shapes appears.□
Yonder we saw it plain ; and here 'tis now,□
Like Spirits in a Place, we know not How.□

London that vents of false Ware so much store,□
In no Ware deceives us more.□
For men led by the Colour, and the Shape,□
Like Zeuxes Birds fly to the painted Grape ;□
Some things do through our Judgment pass□
As through a Multiplying Glass.□
And sometimes, if the Object be too far,□
We take a Falling Meteor for a Star.□

Hence 'tis a Wit that greatest word of Fame□
Grows such a common Name.□
And Wits by our Creation they become,□
Just so, as Tit'lar Bishops made at Rome.□
'Tis not a Tale, 'tis not a Jest□
Admir'd with Laughter at a feast,□
Nor florid Talk which can that Title gain ;□
The Proofs of Wit for ever must remain.□

'Tis not to force some lifeless Verses meet□
With their five gouty feet.□
All ev'ry where, like Mans, must be the Soul,□
And Reason the Inferior Powers controul.□
Such were the Numbers which could call□
The Stones into the Theban wall.□
Such Miracles are ceast ; and now we see□
No Towns or Houses rais'd by Poetrie.□

Yet 'tis not to adorn, and gild each part ;□
That shows more Cost, than Art.□
Jewels at Nose and Lips but ill appear ;□

Rather than all things Wit, let none be there.□
Several Lights will not be seen,□
If there be nothing else between.□
Men doubt, because they stand so thick i' th' skie,□
If those be Stars which paint the Galaxie.□

'Tis not when two like words make up one noise ;□
Jests for Dutch Men, and English Boys.□
In which who finds out Wit, the same may see□
In An'grams and Acrostiques Poetrie.□
Much less can that have any place□
At which a Virgin hides her face,□
Such Dross the Fire must purge away ; 'tis just□
The Author Blush, there where the Reader must.□

'Tis not such Lines as almost crack the Stage□
When Bajazet begins to rage.□
Nor a tall Meta'phor in the Bombast way,□
Nor the dry chips of short lung'd Seneca.□
Nor upon all things to obtrude,□
And force some odd Similitude.□
What is it then, which like the Power Divine□
We only can by Negatives define ?□

In a true piece of Wit all things must be,□
Yet all things there agree.□
As in the Ark, joyn'd without force or strife,□
All Creatures dwelt ; all Creatures that had Life.□
Or as the Primitive Forms of all□
(If we compare great things with small)□
Which without Discord or Confusion lie,□
In that strange Mirror of the Deitie.□

But Love that moulds One Man up out of Two,□
Makes me forget and injure you.□
I took you for my self sure when I thought□
That you in any thing were to be Taught.□
Correct my error with thy Pen ;□
And if any ask me then,□
What thing right Wit, and height of Genius is,□
I'll onely shew your Lines, and say, 'Tis This.

On The Death Of Mr. Crashaw

Poet and Saint! to thee alone are given
The two most sacred names of earth and heaven,
The hard and rarest union which can be
Next that of godhead with humanity.
Long did the Muses banish'd slaves abide,
And built vain pyramids to mortal pride;
Like Moses thou (though spells and charms withstand)
Hast brought them nobly home back to their Holy Land.

Ah wretched we, poets of earth! but thou
Wert living the same poet which thou'rt now.
Whilst angels sing to thee their airs divine,
And joy in an applause so great as thine,
Equal society with them to hold,
Thou need'st not make new songs, but say the old.
And they (kind spirits!) shall all rejoice to see
How little less than they exalted man may be.
Still the old heathen gods in numbers dwell,
The heavenliest thing on earth still keeps up Hell.
Nor have we yet quite purg'd the Christian land;
Still idols here like calves at Bethel stand.
And though Pan's death long since all oracles broke,
Yet still in rhyme the fiend Apollo spoke:
Nay with the worst of heathen dotage we
(Vain men!) the monster Woman deify;
Find stars, and tie our fates there in a face,
And Paradise in them by whom we lost it, place.
What different faults corrupt our Muses thus
Wanton as girls, as old wives fabulous!

Thy spotless Muse, like Mary, did contain
The boundless Godhead; she did well disdain
That her eternal verse employ'd should be
On a less subject than eternity;
And for a sacred mistress scorn'd to take
But her whom God himself scorn'd not his spouse to make.
It (in a kind) her miracle did do;
A fruitful mother was, and virgin too.

How well, blest swan, did fate contrive thy death;
And make thee render up thy tuneful breath
In thy great mistress' arms! thou most divine
And richest offering of Loretto's shrine!
Where like some holy sacrifice t' expire
A fever burns thee, and Love lights the fire.
Angels (they say) brought the fam'd chapel there,
And bore the sacred load in triumph through the air.
'Tis surer much they brought thee there, and they,
And thou, their charge, went singing all the way.

Pardon, my Mother Church, if I consent
That angels led him when from thee he went,
For even in error sure no danger is
When join'd with so much piety as his.
Ah, mighty God, with shame I speak't, and grief,
Ah that our greatest faults were in belief!
And our weak reason were even weaker yet,
Rather than thus our wills too strong for it.
His faith perhaps in some nice tenents might
Be wrong; his life, I'm sure, was in the right.
And I myself a Catholic will be,
So far at least, great saint, to pray to thee.

Hail, bard triumphant! and some care bestow
On us, the poets militant below!
Oppos'd by our old enemy, adverse chance,
Attack'd by envy, and by ignorance,
Enchain'd by beauty, tortured by desires,
Expos'd by tyrant Love to savage beasts and fires.
Thou from low earth in nobler flames didst rise,
And like Elijah, mount alive the skies.
Elisha-like (but with a wish much less,
More fit thy greatness, and my littleness)
Lo here I beg (I whom thou once didst prove
So humble to esteem, so good to love)
Not that thy spirit might on me doubled be,
I ask but half thy mighty spirit for me;
And when my Muse soars with so strong a wing,
'Twill learn of things divine, and first of thee to sing.

On The Death Of Mr. William Hervey

IT was a dismal and a fearful night:
Scarce could the Morn drive on th' unwilling Light,
When Sleep, Death's image, left my troubled breast

By something liker Death possess'd.
My eyes with tears did uncommanded flow,

And on my soul hung the dull weight

Of some intolerable fate.
What bell was that? Ah me! too much I know!

My sweet companion and my gentle peer,
Why hast thou left me thus unkindly here,
Thy end for ever and my life to moan?
 O, thou hast left me all alone!
Thy soul and body, when death's agony
 Besieged around thy noble heart,
 Did not with more reluctance part
Than I, my dearest Friend, do part from thee.

My dearest Friend, would I had died for thee!
Life and this world henceforth will tedious be:
Nor shall I know hereafter what to do
 If once my griefs prove tedious too.
Silent and sad I walk about all day,
 As sullen ghosts stalk speechless by
 Where their hid treasures lie;
Alas! my treasure 's gone; why do I stay?

Say, for you saw us, ye immortal lights,
How oft unwearied have we spent the nights,
Till the Ledaean stars, so famed for love,
 Wonder'd at us from above!
We spent them not in toys, in lusts, or wine;
 But search of deep Philosophy,
 Wit, Eloquence, and Poetry--
Arts which I loved, for they, my Friend, were thine.

Ye fields of Cambridge, our dear Cambridge, say
Have ye not seen us walking every day?
Was there a tree about which did not know

The love betwixt us two?
 Henceforth, ye gentle trees, for ever fade;
Or your sad branches thicker join
 And into darksome shades combine,
Dark as the grave wherein my Friend is laid!

Large was his soul: as large a soul as e'er
Submitted to inform a body here;
High as the place 'twas shortly in Heaven to have,
 But low and humble as his grave.
So high that all the virtues there did come,
 As to their chiefest seat
 Conspicuous and great;
So low, that for me too it made a room.

Knowledge he only sought, and so soon caught
As if for him Knowledge had rather sought;
Nor did more learning ever crowded lie
 In such a short mortality.
Whene'er the skilful youth discoursed or writ,
 Still did the notions throng
 About his eloquent tongue;
Nor could his ink flow faster than his wit.

His mirth was the pure spirits of various wit,
Yet never did his God or friends forget;
And when deep talk and wisdom came in view,
 Retired, and gave to them their due.
For the rich help of books he always took,
 Though his own searching mind before
 Was so with notions written o'er,
As if wise Nature had made that her book.

[illegible]

Abraham Cowley

On The Death Of Sir Henry Wootton

What shall we say, since silent now is he
Who when he spoke, all things would silent be?
Who had so many languages in store,
That only fame shall speak of him in more;
Whom England now no more return'd must see;
He's gone to heaven on his fourth embassy.
On earth he travell'd often; not to say
H' had been abroad, or pass loose time away.
In whatsoever land he chanc'd to come,
He read the men and manners, bringing home
Their wisdom, learning, and their piety,
As if he went to conquer, not to see.
So well he understood the most and best
Of tongues, that Babel sent into the West;
Spoke them so truly, that he had (you'd swear)
Not only liv'd, but been born every-where.
Justly each nation's speech to him was known,
Who for the world was made, not us alone;
Nor ought the language of that man be less,
Who in his breast had all things to express.
We say that learning's endless, and blame Fate
For not allowing life a longer date:
He did the utmost bounds of knowledge find,
He found them not so large as was his mind;
But, like the brave Pellæan youth, did moan
Because that art had no more worlds than one;
And, when he saw that he through all had past,
He dy'd, lest he should idle grow at last.

Abraham Cowley

Platonick Love

INDEED I must confess,
When souls mix 't is an happiness;
But not complete till bodies too do combine,
And closely as our minds together join:
But half of heaven the souls in glory taste,
Till by love in heaven, at last,
Their bodies too are plac'd.

In thy immortal part
Man, as well as I, thou art;
But something't is that differs thee and me;
And we must one even in that difference be.
I thee, both as a man and woman, prize;
For a perfect love implies
Love in all capacities.

Can that for true love pass,
When a fair woman courts her glass?
Something unlike must in love's likeness be;
His wonder is, one, and variety:
For he, whose soul nought but a soul can move,
Does a new Narcissus prove,
And his own image love.

That souls do beauty know,
'T is to the bodies' help they owe;
If, when they know 't, they straight abuse that trust,
And shut the body from't, 't is as unjust
As if I brought my dearest friend to see
My mistress, and at th' instant he
Should steal her quite from me.

Abraham Cowley

Reason, The Use Of It In Divine Matters

Some blind themselves, 'cause possibly they may
Be led by others a right way;
They build on sands, which if unmov'd they find,
'T is but because there was no wind.
Less hard 't is, not to err ourselves, than know
If our forefathers err'd or no.
When we trust men concerning God, we then
Trust not God concerning men.

Visions and inspirations some expect
Their course here to direct;
Like senseless chemists their own wealth destroy,
Imaginary gold t' enjoy.
So stars appear to drop to us from sky,
And gild the passage as they fly:
But when they fall, and meet th'opposing ground,
What but a sordid slime is found?

Sometimes their fancies they 'bove reason set,
And fast, that they may dream of meat;
Sometimes ill spirits their sickly souls delude,
And **** forms obtrude:
So Endor's wretched sorceress, although
She Saul through his disguise did know,
Yet, when the devil comes up disguis'd, she cries,
' Behold! the Gods arise.'

In vain, alas! these outward hopes are try'd;
Reason within's our only guide;
Reason, which (God be prais'd!) still walks, for all
Its old original fall:
And, since itself the boundless Godhead join'd
With a reasonable mind,
It plainly shows that mysteries divine
May with our reason join.

The holy book, like the eighth sphere, does shine
With thousand lights of truth divine:
So numberless the stars, that to the eye

It makes but all one galaxy.
Yet Reason must assist too; for, in seas
So vast and dangerous as these,
Our course by stars above we cannot know,
Without the compass too below.

Though Reason cannot through Faith's mysteries see,
It sees that there and such they be;
Leads to heaven's door, and there does humbly keep,
And there through chinks and key-holes peep;
Though it, like Moses, by a sad command,
Must not come in to th' Holy Land,
Yet thither it infallibly does guide,
And from afar 't is all descry'd.

Abraham Cowley

Resolved To Be Loved

'Tis true, I've lov'd already three or four,
And shall three or four hundred more;
I'll love each fair one that I see,
Till I find one at last that shall love me.

That shall my Canaan be, the fatal soil,
That ends my wandrings, and my toil.
I'll settle there and happy grow;
The Country does with Milk and Honey flow.

The Needle trembles so, and turns about,
Till it the Northern Point find out:
But constant then and fixt does prove,
Fixt, that his dearest Pole as soon may move.

Then may my Vessel torn and shipwrackt be,
If it put forth again to Sea:
It never more abroad shall rove,
Though't could next voyage bring the Indies home.

But I must sweat in Love, and labour yet,
Till I a Competency get.
They're slothful fools who leave a Trade,
Till they a moderate fortune by't have made.

Variety I ask not; give me One
To live perpetually upon.
The person Love does to us fit,
Like Manna, has the Taste of all in it.

Abraham Cowley

Sleep

In vain, thou drowsy God! I thee invoke;
For thou, who dost from fumes arise—
Thou, who man's soul dost overshadow
With a thick cloud by vapours made—
Canst have no power to shut his eyes,
Or passage of his spirits to choke,
Whose flame's so pure that it sends up no smoke.

Yet how do tears but from some vapours rise?
Tears, that bewinter all my year?
The fate of Egypt I sustain,
And never feel the dew of rain,
From clouds which in the head appear;
But all my too much moisture owe
To overflowings of the heart below.

Thou, who dost men (as nights to colours do)
Bring to an equality!
Come, thou just God! and equal me
Awhile to my disdainful She:
In that condition let me lie,
Till Love does the favour shew:
Love equals all a better way than you.

Then never more shalt thou b' invok'd by me;
Watchful as spirits and Gods I'll prove:
Let her but grant, and then will I
Thee and thy kinsman Death defy;
For, betwixt thee and them that love,
Never will an agreement be;
Thou scorn'st th' unhappy, and the happy, thee!

Abraham Cowley

Sport

The merry waves dance up and down, and play,
Sport is granted to the sea;
Birds are the choristers of the empty air,
Sport is never wanting there.
The ground doth smile at the spring's flowery birth,
Sport is granted to the earth;
The fire its cheering flame on high doth rear,
Sport is never wanting there,
If all the elements, the earth, the sea,
Air, and fire, so merry be,
Why is man's mirth so seldom and so small,
Who is compounded of them all?

Abraham Cowley

The Change

LOVE in her sunny eyes does basking play;
Love walks the pleasant mazes of her hair;
Love does on both her lips for ever stray
And sows and reaps a thousand kisses there.
In all her outward parts Love's always seen;
But, oh, He never went within.

Within Love's foes, his greatest foes abide,
Malice, Inconstance, and Pride.
So the Earth's face, trees, herbs, and flowers do dress,
With other beauties numberless;
But at the center, darkness is, and Hell;
There wicked spirits, and there the Damned dwell.

With me alas, quite contrary it fares;
Darkness and death lies in my weeping eyes,
Despair and paleness in my face appears,
And grief, and fear, Love's greatest enemies;
But, like the Persian tyrant, Love within
Keeps his proud court, and ne're is seen.

Oh take my heart, and by that means you'll prove
Within, too stor'd enough of Love;
Give me but yours, I'll by that change so thrive,
That Love in all my parts shall live.
So powerful is this change, it render can,
My outside woman, and your inside man.

Abraham Cowley

The Chronicle

A BALLAD.

MARGARITA first possest,
 If I remember well, my brest,
 Margarita first of all;
But when awhile the wanton maid
With my restless heart had play'd,
 Martha took the flying ball.

Martha soon did it resign
 To the beauteous Catharine.
 Beauteous Catharine gave place
(Though loth and angry she to part
With the possession of my heart)
 To Eliza's conquering face.

Eliza till this hour might reign,
 Had she not evil counsels ta'en.
 Fundamental laws she broke,
And still new favorites she chose,
Till up in arms my passions rose,
 And cast away her yoke.

Mary then, and gentle Anne,
 Both to reign at once began;
 Alternately they sway'd;
And sometimes Mary was the fair,
And sometimes Anne the Crown did wear,
 And sometimes both I obey'd.

Another Mary then arose
 And did rigorous laws impose;
 A mighty tyrant she!
Long, alas! should I have been
Under that iron-scepter'd queen,
 Had not Rebecca set me free.

When fair Rebecca set me free,
 'Twas then a golden time with me:
 But soon those pleasures fled;

For the gracious princess dy'd,
In her youth and beauty's pride,
And Judith reigned in her stead.

One month, three days, and half an hour,
Judith held the sovereign power:
Wondrous beautiful her face!
But so weak and small her wit,
That she to govern was unfit,
And so Susanna took her place.

But when Isabella came,
Arm'd with a resistless flame,
And th' artillery of her eye;
Whilst she proudly march'd about,
Greater conquests to find out,
She beat out Susan by the bye.

But in her place I then obey'd
Black-ey'd Bess, her viceroy-maid;
To whom ensu'd a vacancy:
Thousand worse passions than possess
The interregnum of my breast;
Bless me from such an anarchy!

Gentle Henriette then,
And a third Mary, next began;
Then Joan, and Jane, and Audria;
And then a pretty Thomasine,
And then another Katharine,
And then a long et cætera.

But should I now to you relate,
The strength and riches of their state;
The powder, patches, and the pins,
The ribbons, jewels, and the rings,
The lace, the paint, and warlike things,
That make up all their magazines;

If I should tell the politic arts
To take and keep men's hearts;
The letters, embassies, and spies,

The frowns, and smiles, and flatteries,
The quarrels, tears, and perjuries
 (Numberless, nameless, mysteries!)

And all the little lime-twigs laid,
 By Machiavel the waiting-maid;
 I more voluminous should grow
(Chiefly if I like them should tell
All change of weathers that befell)
 Than Holinshed or Stow.

But I will briefer with them be,
 Since few of them were long with me.
 An higher and a nobler strain
My present Emperess does claim,
Heleonora, first o' th' name;
 Whom God grant long to reign!

Abraham Cowley

The Despair

Beneath this gloomy shade,
By Nature only for my sorrows made,
I'll spend this voyce in crys,
In tears I'll waste these eyes

By Love so vainly fed;
So Lust of old the Deluge punished.
Ah wretched youth! said I,
'Ah, wretched youth!' twice did I sadly cry:
'Ah, wretched youth!' the fields and floods reply.

When thoughts of Love I entertain,
I meet no words but 'Never,' and 'In vain.'
'Never' alas that dreadful name
Which fuels the infernal flame:

'Never,' My time to come must waste;
'In vain,' torments the present and the past.
'In vain, in vain!' said I;
'In vain, in vain!' twice did I sadly cry;
'In vain, in vain!' the fields and floods reply.

No more shall fields or floods do so;
For I to shades more dark and silent go:
All this world's noise appears to me
A dull ill-acted comedy:

No comfort to my wounded sight,
In the suns busy and impertinent Light.
Then down I laid my head;
Down on cold earth; and for a while was dead,
And my freed soul to a strange somewhere fled.

'Ah, sottish Soul' said I,
When back to its cage again I saw it fly;
'Fool to resume her broken chain!
And row her galley here again!'

'Fool, to that body to return

Where it condemn'd and destin'd is to burn!
Once dead, how can it be,
Death should a thing so pleasant seem to thee,
That thou should'st come to live it o're again in me?'

Abraham Cowley

The Epicure

FILL the bowl with rosy wine,
Around our temples roses twine.
And let us cheerfully awhile,
Like the wine and roses smile.
Crown'd with roses we condemn
Gyge's wealthy diadem.
Today is ours; what do we fear?
Today is ours; we have it here.
Let's treat it kindly, that it may
Wish, at least, with us to stay.
Let's banish business, banish sorrow;
To the Gods belongs tomorrow.

Abraham Cowley

The Given Heart

I wonder what those lovers mean, who say
They have giv'n their hearts away.
Some good kind lover tell me how;
For mine is but a torment to me now.

If so it be one place both hearts contain,
For what do they complain?
What courtesy can Love do more,
Than to join hearts that parted were before?

Woe to her stubborn heart, if once mine come
Into the self-same room;
'Twill tear and blow up all within,
Like a granado shot into a magazine.

Then shall Love keep the ashes, and torn parts,
Of both our broken hearts:
Shall out of both one new one make,
From hers, th' allay; from mine, the metal take.

For of her heart he from the flames will find
But little left behind:
Mine only will remain entire;
No dross was there, to perish in the fire.

Abraham Cowley

The Given Love

I'LL on; for what should hinder me
From loving and enjoying thee?
Thou canst not those exceptions make,
Which vulgar, sordid mortals take—
That my fate's too mean and low;
'T were pity I should love thee so,
If that dull cause could hinder me
In loving and enjoying thee.

It does not me a whit displease,
That the rich all honours seize;
That you all titles make your own,
Are valiant, learned, wise, alone:
But, if you claim o'er women too
The power which over men ye do;
If you alone must lovers be;
For that, Sirs, you must pardon me.

Rather than lose what does so near
Concern my life and being here,
I'll some such crooked ways invent,
As you, or your forefathers, went:
I'll flatter or oppose the king,
Turn Puritan, or any thing;
I'll force my mind to arts so new:
Grow rich, and love as well as you.

But rather thus let me remain,
As man in paradise did reign;
When perfect love did so agree
With innocence and poverty,
Adam did no jointure give;
Himself was jointure to his Eve:
Untouch'd with avarice yet, or pride,
The rib came freely back t' his side.

A curse upon the man who taught
Women, that love was to be bought!
Rather dote only on your gold,

And that with greedy avarice hold;
For, if woman too submit
To that, and sell herself for it,
Fond lover! you a mistress have
Of her that's but your fellow-slave.

What should those poets mean of old
That made their God to woo in gold?
Of all men, sure, they had no cause
To bind love to such costly laws;
And yet I scarcely blame them now;
For who, alas! would not allow,
That women should such gifts receive,
Could they, as he, be what they give?

If thou, my dear, thyself shouldst prize,
Alas! what value would suffice?
The Spaniard could not do't, though he
Should to both Indies jointure thee.
Thy beauties therefore wrong will take,
If thou shouldst any bargain make;
To give all, will befit thee well;
But not at under-rates to sell.

Bestow thy beauty then on me,
Freely, as nature gave't to thee;
'T is an exploded popish thought
To think that heaven may be bought.
Prayers, hymns, and praises, are the way,
And those my thankful Muse shall pay:
Thy body, in my verse enshrin'd,
Shall grow immortal as thy mind.

I'll fix thy title next in fame
To Sacharissa's well-sung name.
So faithfully will I declare
What all thy wondrous beauties are,
That when, at the last great assize,
All women shall together rise,
Men straight shall cast their eyes on thee
And know at first that thou art she.

The Grasshopper

Happy insect, what can be
In happiness compared to thee?
Fed with nourishment divine,
The dewy morning's gentle wine!
Nature waits upon thee still,
And thy verdant cup does fill;
'Tis filled wherever thou dost tread,
Nature's self's thy Ganymede.
Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing,
Happier than the happiest king!
All the fields which thou dost see,
All the plants belong to thee;
All the summer hours produce,
Fertile made with early juice.
Man for thee does sow and plow,
Farmer he, and landlord thou!
Thou dost innocently enjoy;
Nor does thy luxury destroy.
The shepherd gladly heareth thee,
More harmonious than he.
Thee country hinds with gladness hear,
Prophet of the ripened year!
Thee Phoebus loves, and does inspire
Phoebus is himself thy sire.
To thee, of all things upon earth,
Life is no longer than thy mirth.
Happy insect! happy thou,
Dost neither age nor winter know;
But when thou'st drunk, and danced, and sung
Thy fill, the flowery leaves among,
(Voluptuous and wise withal,
Epicurean animal!)
Sated with thy summer feast,
Thou retir'st to endless rest.

Abraham Cowley

The Heart Breaking

It gave a piteous groan, and so it broke;
In vain it something would have spoke:
The love within too strong for 't was,
Like poison put into a Venice-glass.

I thought that this some remedy might prove;
But oh, the mighty serpent Love,
Cut by this chance in pieces small,
In all still liv'd, and still it stung in all.

And now, alas! each little broken part
Feels the whole pain of all my heart;
And every smallest corner still
Lives with that torment which the whole did kill.

Even so rude armies, when the field they quit,
And into several quarters get;
Each troop does spoil and ruin more
Than all join'd in one body did before.

How many Loves reign in my bosom now!
How many loves, yet all of you!
Thus have I chang'd with evil fate
My Monarch-love into a Tyrant-state.

Abraham Cowley

The Innocent Ill

Though all thy gestures and discourses be
Coin'd and stamp'd by modesty;
Though from thy tongue ne'er slipp'd away
One word which nuns at th' altar might not say;
Yet such a sweetness, such a grace,
In all thy speech appear,
That what to th' eye a beauteous face,
That thy tongue is to th' ear:
So cunningly it wounds the heart,
It strikes such heat through every part,
That thou a tempter worse than Satan art.

Though in thy thoughts scarce any tracks have been
So much as of original sin,
Such charms thy beauty wears as might
Desires in dying confess'd saints excite:
Thou, with strange adultery,
Dost in each breast a brothel keep;
Awake all men do lust for thee,
And some enjoy thee when they sleep.
Ne'er before did woman live,
Who to such multitudes did give
The root and cause of sin, but only Eve.

Though in thy breast so quick a pity be,
That a fly's death 's a wound to thee;
Though savage and rock-hearted those
Appear, that weep not ev'n Romance's woes;
Yet ne'er before was tyrant known,
Whose rage was of so large extent;
The ills thou dost are whole thine own;
Thou 'rt principal and instrument:
In all the deaths that come from you,
You do the treble office do
Of judge, of torturer, and of weapon too.

Thou lovely instrument of angry Fate,
Which God did for our faults create!
Thou pleasant, universal ill,

Which, sweet as health, yet like a plague dost kill!
Thou kind, well-natur'd tyranny!
Thou chaste committer of a rape!
Thou voluntary destiny,
Which no man can, or would, escape!
So gentle, and so glad to spare,
So wondrous good, and wondrous fair,
(We know) ev'n the destroying-angels are.

Abraham Cowley

The Motto

Tentanda via est, etc.

What shall I do to be forever known,

And make the age to come my own?

I shall like beasts or common people die,

Unless you write my elegy;

Whilst others great by being born are grown,

Their mothers' labor, not their own.

In this scale gold, in th'other fame does lie,

The weight of that mounts this so high.

These men are fortune's jewels, molded bright,

Brought forth with their own fire and light;

If I her vulgar stone, for either look,

Out of myself it must be strook.

Yet I must on : what sound is't strikes mine ear?

Sure I Fame's trumpet hear;

It sounds like the last trumpet, for it can

Raise up the buried man.

Unpassed Alps stop me, but I'll cut through all,

And march, the Muses' Hannibal.

Hence, all the flattering vanities that lay

Nets of roses in the way;

Hence, the desire of honors or estate

And all that is not above fate;

Hence, Love himself, the tyrant of my days,

Which intercepts my coming praise.

Come, my best friends, my books, and lead me on:

'Tis time that I were gone.

Welcome, great Stagirite, and teach me now

All I was born to know;

Thy scholar's vict'ries thou dost far outdo,

He conquered th'earth, the whole world you.

Welcome, learn'd Cicero, whose blest tongue and wit

Preserve Rome's greatness yet:

Thou art the first of orators; only he

Who best can praise thee, next must be.

Welcome the Mantuan swan, Vergil the wise,

Whose verse walks highest, but not flies;

Who brought green poesy to her perfect age,

And made that art which was a rage.

Tell me, ye mighty three, what shall I do
To be like one of you?
But you have climbed the mountain's top, there sit
On the calm flour'ishing head of it,
And whilst with wearied steps we upward go,
See us and clouds below.

Abraham Cowley

The Parting

As Men in Greenland left beheld the sun
From their horizon run;
And thought upon the sad half-year
Of cold and darkness they must suffer there:

So on my parting mistress did I look;
With such swoln eyes my farewell took;
Ah, my fair star! said I;
Ah, those blest lands to which bright Thou dost fly!

In vain the men of learning comfort me,
And say I 'm in a warm degree;
Say what they please, I say and swear
'T is beyond eighty at least, if you're not here.

It is, it is; I tremble with the frost,
And know that I the day have lost;
And those wild things which men they call,
I find to be but bears or foxes all.

Return, return, gay planet of mine East,
Of all that shines thou much the best!
And, as thou now descend'st to sea,
More fair and fresh rise up from thence to me!

Thou, who in many a propriety,
So truly art the sun to me,
Add one more likeness (which I'm sure you can)
And let me and my sun beget a man!

Abraham Cowley

The Praise Of Pindar In Imitation Of Horace His Second Ode, Book 4

Pindarum quisquis studet oemulari, &c.

I.

Pindar is imitable by none;
The phoenix Pindar is a vast species alone.
Whoe'er but Daedalus with waxen wings could fly
And neither sink too low nor soar too high?
What could he who followed claim
But of vain boldness the unhappy fame,
And by his fall a sea to name?
Pindar's unnavigable song,
Like a swollen flood from some steep mountain, pours along;
The ocean meets with such a voice
From his enlarged mouth as drowns the ocean's noise.

II.

So Pindar does new words and figures roll
Down his impetuous dithyrambic tide,
Which in no channel deigns to abide,
Which neither banks nor dikes control.
Whether the immortal gods he sings
In a no less immortal strain,
Or the great acts of god-descended kings,
Who in his numbers still survive and reign,
Each rich embroidered line,
Which their triumphant brows around
By his sacred hand is bound,
Does all their starry diadems outshine.

III.

Whether at Pisa's race he please
To carve in polished verse the conquerors' images,
Whether the swift, the skillful, or the strong
Be crowned in his nimble, artful, vigorous song,
Whether some brave young man's untimely fate
In words worth dying for he celebrate,

Such mournful and such pleasing words
As joy to his mother's and his mistress' grief affords,
He bids him live and grow in fame;
Among the stars he sticks his name;
The grave can but the dross of him devour,
So small is death's, so great the poet's power.

Lo, how the obsequious wind and swelling air
The Theban swan does upwards bear
Into the walks of clouds, where he does play,
And with extended wings opens his liquid way,
Whilst, alas, my timorous Muse
Unambitious tracks pursues;
Does, with weak, unballast wings,
About the mossy brooks and springs,
About the trees' new-blossomed heads,
About the gardens' painted beds,
About the fields and flowery meads,
And all inferior beauteous things,
Like the laborious bee,
For little drops of honey flee,
And there with humble sweets contents her industry.

Abraham Cowley

The Request

I'AVE often wish'd to love; what shall I do?
Me still the cruel boy does spare;
And I a double task must bear,
First to woo him, and then a mistress too.
Come at last and strike, for shame,
If thou art any thing besides a name;
I'll think thee else no God to be,
But poets rather Gods, who first created thee.

I ask not one in whom all beauties grow;
Let me but love, whate'er she be,
She cannot seem deform'd to me;
And I would have her seem to others so.
Desire takes wings and straight does fly,
It stays not dully to inquire the Why.
That happy thing, a lover, grown,
I shall not see with others' eyes, scarce with mine own.

If she be coy, and scorn my noble fire;
If her chill heart I cannot move;
Why I'll enjoy the very love,
And make a mistress of my own desire.
Flames their most vigorous heat do hold,
And purest light, if compass'd round with cold:
So, when sharp winter means most harm,
The springing plants are by the snow itself kept warm.

But do not touch my heart, and so be gone;
Strike deep thy burning arrows in!
Lukewarmness I account a sin,
As great in love as in religion.
Come arm'd with flames; for I would prove
All the extremities of mighty Love.
Th' excess of heat is but a fable;
We know the torrid zone is now found habitable.

Among the woods and forests thou art found,
There boars and lions thou dost tame;
Is not my heart a nobler game?

Let Venus, men; and beasts, Diana, wound!
Thou dost the birds thy subjects make;
Thy nimble feathers do their wings o'ertake:
Thou all the spring their songs dost hear;
Make me love too, I'll sing to' thee all the year!

What service can mute fishes do to thee?
Yet against them thy dart prevails,
Piercing the armour of their scales;
And still thy sea-born mother lives i'th' sea.
Dost thou deny only to me
The no-great privilege of captivity?
I beg or challenge here thy bow;
Either thy pity to me, or else thine anger, show.

Come! or I 'll teach the world to scorn that bow:
I'll teach them thousand wholesome arts
Both to resist and cure thy darts,
More than thy skilful Ovid e'er did know.
Musick of sighs thou shalt not hear,
Nor drink one wretched lover's tasteful tear:
Nay, unless soon thou woundest me,
My verses shall not only wound, but murder, thee.

Abraham Cowley

The Spring

THOUGH you be absent here, I needs must say□
The Trees as beauteous are, and flowers as gay,□
As ever they were wont to be ;□
Nay the Birds rural musick too□
Is as melodious and free,□
As if they sung to pleasure you:□
I saw a Rose-Bud ope this morn ; I'll swear□
The blushing Morning open'd not more fair.□

How could it be so fair, and you away ?□
How could the Trees be beauteous, Flowers so gay ?□
Could they remember but last year,□
How you did Them, They you delight,□
The sprouting leaves which saw you here,□
And call'd their Fellows to the sight,□
Would, looking round for the same sight in vain,□
Creep back into their silent Barks again.□

Where e'er you walk'd trees were as reverend made,□
As when of old Gods dwelt in every shade.□
Is 't possible they should not know,□
What loss of honor they sustain,□
That thus they smile and flourish now,□
And still their former pride retain ?□
Dull Creatures! 'tis not without Cause that she,□
Who fled the God of wit, was made a Tree.□

In ancient times sure they much wiser were,□
When they rejoyc'd the Thracian verse to hear ;□
In vain did Nature bid them stay,□
When Orpheus had his song begun,□
They call'd their wondring roots away,□
And bad them silent to him run.
How would those learned trees have followed you ?□
You would have drawn Them, and their Poet too.□

But who can blame them now ? for, since you're gone,□
They're here the only Fair, and Shine alone.□
You did their Natural Rights invade ;□

Where ever you did walk or sit,□
The thickest Boughs could make no shade,□
Although the Sun had granted it :□
The fairest Flowers could please no more, neer you,□
Then Painted Flowers, set next to them, could do.□

When e'er then you come hither, that shall be□
The time, which this to others is, to Me.□
The little joys which here are now,□
The name of Punishments do bear ;□
When by their sight they let us know□
How we depriv'd of greater are.□
'Tis you the best of Seasons with you bring ;□
This is for Beasts, and that for Men the Spring

Abraham Cowley

The Thief

Thou robb'st my days of business and delights,
Of sleep thou robb'st my nights ;
Ah, lovely thief, what wilt thou do?
What? rob me of heaven too?
Even in my prayers thou hauntest me:
And I, with wild idolatry,
Begin to God, and end them all to thee.
Is it a sin to love, that it should thus
Like an ill conscience torture us?
Whate'er I do, where'er I go—
None guiltless e'er was haunted so!—
Still, still, methinks, thy face I view,
And still thy shape does me pursue,
As if, not you me, but I had murdered you.
From books I strive some remedy to take,
But thy name all the letters make;
Whate'er 'tis writ, I find thee there,
Like points and commas everywhere.
Me blessed for this let no man hold,
For I, as Midas did of old,
Perish by turning every thing to gold.
What do I seek, alas, or why do I
Attempt in vain from thee to fly?
For, making thee my deity,
I gave thee then ubiquity.
My pains resemble hell in this:
The divine presence there too is,
But to torment men, not to give them bliss.

Abraham Cowley

The Thraldom

I came, I saw, and was undone;
Lightning did through my bones and marrow run;
 A pointed pain pierc'd deep my heart;
A swift cold trembling seiz'd on every part;
 My head turn'd round, nor could it bear
 The poison that was enter'd there.

So a destroying angel's breath
Blows-in the plague, and with it hasty death;
 Such was the pain, did so begin,
To the poor wretch, when Legion enter'd in.
 'Forgive me, God!' I cry'd; for I
Flatter'd myself I was to die.

But quickly to my cost I found,
'T was cruel Love, not Death, had made the wound;
 Death a more generous rage does use;
Quarter to all he conquers does refuse:
 Whilst Love with barbarous mercy saves
 The vanquish'd lives, to make them slaves.

I am thy slave then; let me know,
Hard master! the great task I have to do:
 Who pride and scorn do undergo.
In tempests and rough seas thy galleys row;
 They pant, and groan, and sigh; but find
 Their sighs increase the angry wind.

Like an Egyptian tyrant, some
Thou weariest out in building but a tomb;
 Others, with sad and tedious art,
Labour i' th' quarries of a stony heart:
 Of all the works thou dost assign
 To all the several slaves of thine,
Employ me, mighty Love! to dig the mine.

Abraham Cowley

The Tree Of Knowledge

THAT THERE IS NO KNOWLEDGE.

Against the Dogmatists.

THE sacred tree 'midst the fair orchard grew;
The Phoenix truth did on it rest,
And built his perfum'd nest;
That right Porphyrian tree which did true Logick shew,
Each leaf did learned notions give,
And th' apples were demonstrative;
So clear their colour and divine,
The very shade they cast did other lights out-shine.

'Taste not,' said God; ' 't is mine and angels' meat;
' A certain death doth sit,
' Like an ill worm, i' th' core of it.
'Ye cannot know and live, nor live or know and eat.'
Thus spoke God, yet man did go
Ignorantly on to know;
Grew so more blind, and she
Who tempted him to this, grew yet more blind than he.

The only science man by this did get,
Was but to know he nothing knew:
He strait his nakedness did view,
His ignorant poor estate, and was asham'd of it.
Yet searches probabilities,
And rhetorick, and fallacies,
And seeks by useless pride,
With slight and withering leaves that nakedness to hide.

'Henceforth,' said God, 'the wretched sons of earth
' Shall sweat for food in vain,
' That will not long sustain;
'And bring with labour forth each fond abortive birth.
' That serpent too, their pride,
' Which aims at things deny'd;
' That learn'd and eloquent lust;
'Instead of mounting high, shall creep upon the dust.'.

The Usurpation

Thou 'adst to my soul no title or pretence;
I was mine own, and free,
Till I had given myself to thee;
But thou hast kept me slave and prisoner since.
Well, since so insolent thou 'rt grown,
Fond tyrant! I'll depose thee from thy throne;
Such outrages must not admitted be
In an elective monarchy.

Part of my heart by gift did to thee fall;
My country, kindred, and my best
Acquaintance, were to share the rest;
But thou, their covetous neighbour, drav'st out all:
Nay more; thou mak'st me worship thee,
And wouldst the rule of my religion be:
Did ever tyrant claim such power as you,
To be both emperor and pope too?

The public miseries, and my private fate,
Deserve some tears; but greedy thou
(Insatiate maid!) wilt not allow
That I one drop from thee should alienate:
Nor wilt thou grant my sins a part,
Though the sole cause of most of them thou art;
Counting my tears thy tribute and thy due,
Since first mine eyes I gave to you.

Thou all my joys and all my hopes dost claim;
Thou ragest like a fire in me,
Converting all things into thee;
Nought can resist, or not encrease the flame:
Nay, every grief and every fear
Thou dost devour, unless thy stamp it bear:
Thy presence, like the crowned basilisk's breath,
All other serpents puts to death.

As men in hell are from diseases free,
So from all other ills am I;
Free from their known formality:

But all pains eminently lie in thee!
Alas, alas! I hope in vain
My conquer'd soul from out thine hands to gain;
Since all the natives there thou 'ast overthrown,
And planted garrisons of thine own.

Abraham Cowley

The Vote (Excerpt)

.

This only grant me: that my means may lie
Too low for envy, for contempt too high.

Some honour I would have,
Not from great deeds, but good alone;
Th' ignote are better than ill-known,
Rumor can ope the grave.

Acquaintance I would hug, but when 't depends
Not from the number, but the choice of friends.
Books should, not business, entertain the light,
And sleep, as undisturbed as death, the night.

My house a cottage more
Than palace, and should fitting be
For all my use, no luxury.

My garden painted o'er
With nature's hand, not art's, and pleasures yield
Horace might envy in his Sabine field.
Thus would I double my life's fading space,
For he that runs it well twice runs his race.

And in this true delight,
These unbought sports and happy state
I would not fear, nor wish my fate,
But boldly say each night,
To-morrow let my sun his beams display,
Or in clouds hide them; I have lived to-day.

Abraham Cowley

The Welcome

Go, let the fatted calf be kill'd;
My prodigal's come home at last,
With noble resolutions fill'd,
And fill'd with sorrow for the past:
No more will burn with love or wine;
But quite has left his women and his swine.

Welcome, ah! welcome, my poor heart!
Welcome! I little thought, I'll swear
('T is now so long since we did part),
Ever again to see thee here:
Dear wanderer! Since from me you fled,
How often have I heard that thou wert dead!

Hast thou not found each woman's breast
(The lands where thou hast travelled)
Either by savages possest,
Or wild and uninhabited?
What joy couldst take, or what repose,
In countries so unciviliz'd as those?

Lust, the scorching dog-star, here
Rages with immoderate heat;
Whilst pride, the rugged Northern bear,
In others makes the cold too great:
And, where these are temperate known,
The soil's all barren sand or rocky stone.

When once or twice you chanc'd to view
A rich, well-govern'd heart,
Like China, it admitted you
But to the frontier-part.
From Paradise shut for evermore,
What good is 't that an angel kept the door?

Well fare the pride, and the disdain,
And vanities, with beauty join'd;
I ne'er had seen this heart again,
If any fair-one had been kind:

My dove, but once let loose, I doubt
Would ne'er return, had not the flood been out.

Abraham Cowley

The Wish

WELL then! I now do plainly see
 This busy world and I shall ne'er agree.
 The very honey of all earthly joy
 Does of all meats the soonest cloy;
 And they, methinks, deserve my pity
 Who for it can endure the stings,
 The crowd and buzz and murmurings,
 Of this great hive, the city.

Ah, yet, ere I descend to the grave
May I a small house and large garden have;
And a few friends, and many books, both true,
Both wise, and both delightful too!

 & And since love ne'er will from me flee,
A Mistress moderately fair,
And good as guardian angels are,

 & Only beloved and loving me.

O fountains! when in you shall I
Myself eased of unpeaceful thoughts espy?
O fields! O woods! when, when shall I be made
Thy happy tenant of your shade?

 Here 's the spring-head of Pleasure's flood:
Here 's wealthy Nature's treasury,
Where all the riches lie that she
 Has coin'd and stamp'd for good.

Pride and ambition here
Only in far-fetch'd metaphors appear;
Here nought but winds can hurtful murmurs scatter,
And nought but Echo flatter.

The gods, when they descended, hither
From heaven did always choose their way:
And therefore we may boldly say
That 'tis the way too thither.

Hoe happy here should I
And one dear She live, and embracing die!
She who is all the world, and can exclude

In deserts solitude.

 I should have then this only fear:

Lest men, when they my pleasures see,

Should hither throng to live like me,

 And so make a city here.

Abraham Cowley

Thisbe's Song

Come, love, why stay'st thou? The night
Will vanish ere wee taste delight.
The moone obscures her selfe from sight,
Thou absent, whose eyes give her light.

Come quickly deare, be briefe as time,
Or we by morne shall be o'retane,
Love's Joy's thing owne as well as mine,
Spend not therefore, time in vaine.

Abraham Cowley

To Sir William Davenant

UPON HIS TWO FIRST BOOKS OF GONDIBERT
FINISHED BEFORE HIS VOYAGE TO AMERICA.

METHINKS heroick poesy till now,
Like some fantastick fairy-land did show;
Gods, devils, nymphs, witches and giants' race,
And all but man, in man's chief work had place.
Thou, like some worthy knight with sacred arms,
Dost drive the monsters thence, and end the charms:
Instead of those dost men and manners plant,
The things which that rich soil did chiefly want.
Yet ev'n thy Mortals do their Gods excel,
Taught by thy Muse to fight and love so well.

By fatal hands whilst present empires fall,
Thine from the grave past monarchies recall;
So much more thanks from human-kind does merit
The Poet's fury than the zealot's spirit.
And from the grave thou mak'st this empire rise,
Not like some dreadful ghost t' affright our eyes,
But with more lustre and triumphant state,
Than when it crown'd at proud Verona sate.
So will our God rebuild man's perished frame,
And raise him up much better, yet the same:
So God-like poets do past things rehearse,
Not change, but heighten, Nature by their verse.

With shame, methinks, great Italy must see
Her conquerors rais'd to life again by thee:
Rais'd by such pow'rful verse, that ancient Rome
May blush no less to see her wit o'ercome.
Some men their fancies like their faith, derive,
And think all ill but that which Rome does give;
The marks of Old and Catholick would find;
To the same chair would truth and fiction bind.
Thou in those beaten paths disdain'st to tread,
And scorn'st to live by robbing of the dead.
Since time does all things change, thou think'st not fit
This latter age should see all new but wit;
Thy fancy, like a flame, its way does make,
And leave bright tracks for following pens to take.
Sure 't was this noble boldness of the Muse

Did thy desire to seek new worlds infuse;
And ne'er did Heaven so much a voyage bless,
If thou canst plant but there with like success.

Abraham Cowley

To The Lord Falkland

FOR HIS SAFE RETURN FROM THE NORTHERN
EXPEDITION AGAINST THE SCOTS.

Great is thy Charge, O North! be wise and just,
England commits her Falkland to thy trust;
Return him safe; Learning would rather choose
Her Bodley or her Vatican to lose:

All things that are but writ or printed there,
In his unbounded breast engraven are.

There all the sciences together meet,
And every art does all her kindred greet,
Yet jostle not, nor quarrel; but as well
Agree as in some common principle.

So in an Army govern'd right, we see
(Though out of several countries rais'd it be)
That all their order and their place maintain,
The English, Dutch, the Frenchman, and the Dane:
So thousand divers species fill the air,
Yet neither crowd nor mix confus'dly there;
Beasts, houses, trees, and men together lie,
Yet enter undisturb'd into the eye.

And this great prince of knowledge is by Fate
Thrust into th' noise and business of a state.

All virtues, and some customs of the court,
Other men's labour, are at least his sport;
Whilst we, who can no action undertake,
Whom idleness itself might learned make;
Who hear of nothing, and as yet scarce know,
Whether the Scots in England be or no;
Pace dully on, oft tire, and often stay,
Yet see his nimble Pegasus fly away.

'Tis Nature's fault, who did thus partial grow,
And her estate of wit on one bestow;
Whilst we, like younger brothers, get at best
But a small stock, and must work out the rest.
How could he answer't, should the state think fit
To question a monopoly of wit?

Such is the man whom we require the same
We lent the North; untouch'd, as is his fame.
He is too good for war, and ought to be

As far from danger, as from fear he's free.
Those men alone (and those are useful too)
Whose valour is the only art they know,
Were for sad war and bloody battles born;
Let them the state defend, and he adorn.

Abraham Cowley

To The Royal Society (Excerpts)

Philosophy the great and only heir
Of all that human knowledge which has bin
Unforfeited by man's rebellious sin,
Though full of years he do appear,
(Philosophy, I say, and call it, he,
For whatso'ere the painter's fancy be,
It a male-virtue seems to me)
Has still been kept in nonage till of late,
Nor manag'd or enjoy'd his vast estate:
Three or four thousand years one would have thought,
To ripeness and perfection might have brought
A science so well bred and nurst,
And of such hopeful parts too at the first.
But, oh, the guardians and the tutors then,
(Some negligent, and some ambitious men)
Would ne'er consent to set him free,
Or his own natural powers to let him see,
Lest that should put an end to their authority.

That his own business he might quite forget,
They' amus'd him with the sports of wanton wit,
With the desserts of poetry they fed him,
Instead of solid meats t' encrease his force;
Instead of vigorous exercise they led him
Into the pleasant labyrinths of ever-fresh discourse:
Instead of carrying him to see
The riches which do hoarded for him lie
In Nature's endless treasury,
They chose his eye to entertain
(His curious but not covetous eye)
With painted scenes, and pageants of the brain.
Some few exalted spirits this latter age has shown,
That labour'd to assert the liberty
(From guardians, who were now usurpers grown)
Of this old minor still, captiv'd Philosophy;
But 'twas rebellion call'd to fight
For such a long oppressed right.
Bacon at last, a mighty man, arose
Whom a wise King and Nature chose

Lord Chancellor of both their laws,
And boldly undertook the injur'd pupil's cause.

Authority, which did a body boast,
Though 'twas but air condens'd, and stalk'd about,
Like some old giant's more gigantic ghost,
To terrify the learned rout
With the plain magic of true reason's light,
He chas'd out of our sight,
Nor suffer'd living men to be misled
By the vain shadows of the dead:
To graves, from whence it rose, the conquer'd phantom fled;
He broke that monstrous god which stood
In midst of th' orchard, and the whole did claim,
Which with a useless scythe of wood,
And something else not worth a name,
(Both vast for show, yet neither fit
Or to defend, or to beget;
Ridiculous and senseless terrors!) made
Children and superstitious men afraid.
The orchard's open now, and free;
Bacon has broke that scarecrow deity;
Come, enter, all that will,
Behold the ripen'd fruit, come gather now your fill.
Yet still, methinks, we fain would be
Catching at the forbidden tree,
We would be like the Deity,
When truth and falshood, good and evil, we
Without the senses aid within our selves would see;
For 'tis God only who can find
All Nature in his mind.

From words, which are but pictures of the thought,
Though we our thoughts from them perversely drew
To things, the mind's right object, he it brought,
Like foolish birds to painted grapes we flew;
He sought and gather'd for our use the true;
And when on heaps the chosen bunches lay,
He press'd them wisely the mechanic way,
Till all their juice did in one vessel join,
Ferment into a nourishment divine,
The thirsty soul's refreshing wine.

Who to the life an exact piece would make,
Must not from other's work a copy take;
No, not from Rubens or Vandyke;
Much less content himself to make it like
Th' ideas and the images which lie
In his own fancy, or his memory.
No, he before his sight must place
The natural and living face;
The real object must command
Each judgment of his eye, and motion of his hand.
From these and all long errors of the way,
In which our wand'ring predecessors went,
And like th' old Hebrews many years did stray
In deserts but of small extent;
Bacon, like Moses, led us forth at last,
The barren wilderness he past,
Did on the very border stand
Of the blest promis'd land,
And from the mountain's top of his exalted wit,
Saw it himself, and shew'd us it.
But life did never to one man allow
Time to discover worlds, and conquer too;
Nor can so short a line sufficient be
To fathom the vast depths of Nature's sea:
The work he did we ought t' admire,
And were unjust if we should more require
From his few years, divided 'twixt th' excess
Of low affliction, and high happiness.
For who on things remote can fix his sight,
That's always in a triumph, or a fight?

From you, great champions, we expect to get
These spacious countries but discover'd yet;
Countries where yet in stead of Nature, we
Her images and idols worshipp'd see:
These large and wealthy regions to subdue,
Though learning has whole armies at command,
Quarter'd about in every land,
A better troop she ne're together drew.
Methinks, like Gideon's little band,
God with design has pick'd out you,
To do these noble wonders by a few:

When the whole host he saw, they are (said he)
Too many to o'ercome for me;
And now he chooses out his men,
Much in the way that he did then:
Not those many whom he found
Idly extended on the ground,
To drink with their dejected head
The stream just so as by their mouths it fled:
No, but those few who took the waters up,
And made of their laborious hands the cup.

...

With courage and success you the bold work begin;
Your cradle has not idle bin:
None e're but Hercules and you could be
At five years age worthy a history.
And ne're did fortune better yet
Th' historian to the story fit:
As you from all old errors free
And purge the body of philosophy;
So from all modern follies he
Has vindicated eloquence and wit.
His candid style like a clean stream does slide,
And his bright fancy all the way
Does like the sun-shine in it play;
It does like Thames, the best of rivers, glide,
Where the god does not rudely overturn,
But gently pour the crystal urn,
And with judicious hand does the whole current guide.
'T has all the beauties Nature can impart,
And all the comely dress without the paint of art.

Abraham Cowley

Written In Juice Of Lemon

Whilst what I write I do not see,
I dare thus, ev'n to you, write poetry.
Ah, foolish Muse! which dost so high aspire,
And know'st her judgment well,
How much it does thy power excel,
Yet dar'st be read by, thy just doom, the fire.

Alas! thou think'st thyself secure,
Because thy form is innocent and pure:
Like hypocrites, which seem unspotted here;
But, when they sadly come to die,
And the last fire their truth must try,
Scrawled o'er like thee, and blotted, they appear.

Go then, but reverently go,
And, since thou needs must sin, confess it too:
Confess 't, and with humility clothe thy shame;
For thou, who else must burned be
An heretick, if she pardon thee,
Mayst like a martyr then enjoy the flame.

But, if her wisdom grow severe,
And suffer not her goodness to be there;
If her large mercies cruelly it restrain;
Be not discourag'd, but require
A more gentle ordeal fire,
And bid her by love's flames read it again.

Strange power of heat! thou yet dost show
Like winter-earth, naked, or cloth'd with snow:
But as, the quickening sun approaching near,
The plants arise up by degrees;
A sudden paint adorns the trees,
And all kind Nature's characters appear.

So, nothing yet in thee is seen;
But, when a genial heat warms thee within,
A new-born wood of various lines there grows;
Here buds an A, and there a B,

Here sprouts a V, and there a T,
And all the flourishing letters stand in rows.

Still, silly paper! thou wilt think
That all this might as well be writ with ink:
Oh, no; there's sense in this, and mystery—
Thou now mayst change thy author's name,
And to her hand lay noble claim;
For, as she reads, she makes, the words in thee.

Yet — if thine own unworthiness
Will still that thou art mine, not hers confess—
Consume thy self with fire before her eyes,
And so her grace or pity move:
The gods, though beasts they do not love,
Yet like them when they 're burnt in sacrifice.

Abraham Cowley