

Poetry Series

**Joshua Sylvester**  
**- poems -**

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## Joshua Sylvester(1563 - 1618)

English poet, the son of a Kentish clothier, was born in 1563. In his tenth year he was sent to school at Southampton, where he gained a knowledge of French. After about three years at school he appears to have been put to business, and in 1591 the title-page of his *Yvry* states that he was in the service of the Merchant Adventurers' Company. He was for a short time a land steward, and in 1606 Prince Henry gave him a small pension as a kind of court poet. In 1613 he obtained a position as secretary to the Merchant Adventurers. He was stationed at Middelburg, in the Low Countries, where he died on the 28th of September 1618.

He translated into English heroic couplets the scriptural epic of Guillaume du Bartas . His *Essay of the Second Week* was published in 1598; and in 1604 *The Divine Weeks of the World's Birth* .

The ornate style of the original offered no difficulty to Sylvester, who was himself a disciple of the Euphuists and added many adornments of his own invention. The *Sepmaines of Du Bartas* appealed most to his English and German co-religionists, and the translation was immensely popular. It has often been suggested that Milton owed something in the conception of *Paradise Lost* to Sylvester's translation.

His popularity ceased with the Restoration, and Dryden called his verse "abominable fustian."

His works were reprinted by Dr A. B. Grosart (1880) in the "Chertsey Worthies Library."

# A Contented Mind

I weigh not Fortune's frown or smile,  
I joy not much in earthly joys;  
I seek not state, I reckon not style,  
I am not fond of fancy's toys;  
I rest so pleased with what I have,  
I wish no more, no more I crave.  
I quake not at the thunder's crack,  
I tremble not at noise of war,  
I swoon not at the news of wrack,  
I shrink not at a blazing star:  
I fear not loss, I hope not gain,  
I envy none, I none disdain.  
I see ambition never pleased,  
I see some Tantals starved in store;  
I see gold's dropsy seldom eased,  
I see e'en Midas gape for more.  
I neither want, nor yet abound:  
Enough's a feast; content is crown'd.  
I feign not friendship where I hate,  
I fawn not on the great in show,  
I prize, I praise a mean estate,  
Neither too lofty nor too low;  
This, this is all my choice, my cheer,  
A mind content, a conscience clear.

Joshua Sylvester

# Constancy

Were I as base as is the lowly plain,  
And you, my Love, as high as heaven above,  
Yet should the thoughts of me, your humble swain,  
Ascend to heaven in honor of my love.  
Were I as high as heaven above plain,  
And you, my Love, as humble and as low  
As are the deepest bottoms of the main,  
Wheresoe'er you were, with you my love should go.  
Were you the earth, dear Love, and I the skies,  
My love should shine on you like to the sun,  
And look upon you with ten thousand eyes  
Till heaven waxed blind, and till the world were dun.  
Wheresoe'er I am, below, or else above you,  
Wheresoe'er you are, my heart shall truly love you. .

Joshua Sylvester

# Du Bartas, His Divine Weeks And Works (Excerpt)

...

--2--

But ev'n as many (or more) quarrels cumber

--2--

Th' old heathen schools about the heavens' number.

--2--

One holds but one; making the world's eyes shine

--2--

Through the thin-thickness of that chrystal line,

--2--

(As through the ocean's clear and liquid flood

--2--

The slippery fishes up and down do scud).

--2--

Another, judging certain by his eye,

--2--

And, seeing sev'n bright lamps mov'd diversely,  
--2--

Turn this and that way: and, on th' other side,  
--2--

That all the rest of the heav'ns' twinkling pride  
--2--

Keep all one course; ingeniously, he varies  
--2--

The heav'ns' rich building into eight round stories.  
--2--

Others, amid the starriest orb, perceiving  
--2--

A triple cadence, and withal conceiving  
--2--

That but one natural course one body goes,  
--2--

Count nine, some ten; not numb'ring yet (with those)

--2--

Th' empyreal palace, where th' eternal treasures

--2--

Of nectar flow, where everlasting pleasures

--2--

Are heaped-up, where an immortal May

--2--

In blissful beauties flourisheth for ay,

--2--

Where life still lives, where God his sises holds

--2--

Environ'd round with seraphins and souls

--2--

Bought with his precious blood, whose glorious flight

--2--

Erst mounted earth above the heavens bright.

--2--

Nor shall my faint and humble Muse presume

--2--

So high a song and subject to assume.

...

THE THIRD DAY OF THE FIRST WEEK (excerpts)

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Joshua Sylvester

# Love's Omnipresence

Where I was base as is the lowly plain,  
And you, my Love, as high as heaven above,  
Yet should the thoughts of me your humble swain  
Ascend to heaven, in honour of my Love.

Where I as high as heaven above the plain,  
And you, my Love, as humble and as low  
As are the deepest bottoms of the main,  
Whereso'er you were, with you my love should go.

Were you the earth, dear Love, and I the skies,  
My love should shine on you like to the sun,  
And look upon you with thousand eyes  
Till heaven wax'd blind, and till the world were done.

Whereso'er I am, below, or else above you,  
Whereso'er you are, my heart shall truly love you.

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# The Father

ALPHA and Omega, God alone:  
Eloi, My God, the Holy-One;  
Whose Power is Omnipotence:  
Whose Wisedome is Omni-science:  
Whose Beeing is All Sovereigne Blisse:  
Whose Worke Perfection's Fulnesse is;  
Under All things, not under-cast;  
Over All things, not over-plac't;  
Within All things, not there included;  
Without All things, not thence excluded:  
Above All, over All things raining;  
Beneath All, All things aye sustayning:  
Without All, All conteyning sole:  
Within All, filling-full the Whole:  
Within All, no where comprehended;  
Without All, no where more extended;  
Under, by nothing over-topped:  
Over, by nothing under-propped:

Unmov'd, Thou mov'st the World about;  
Unplac't, Within it, or Without:  
Unchanged, time-lesse, Time Thou changest:  
Th' unstable, Thou, still stable, rangest;  
No outward Force, nor inward Fate,  
Can Thy drad Essence alterate:

To-day, To-morrow, yester-day,  
With Thee are One, and instant aye;  
Aye undivided, ended never:  
To-day, with Thee, indures for-ever.

Thou, Father, mad'st this mighty Ball;  
Of nothing thou created'st All,  
After th' Idea of thy Minde,  
Conferring Forme to every kinde.

Thou wert, Thou art, Thou wilt be ever:  
And Thine Elect, rejectest never.



# The Glorious Stars Of Heaven

I'll ne'er believe that the Arch-Architect  
With all these fires the heavenly arches decked  
Only for show, and with their glistening shields  
To amaze the poor shepherds watching in the fields:  
I'll ne'er believe that the least flower that pranks  
Our garden borders, or the common banks,  
And the least stone that in her warming lap  
Our kind nurse Earth doth covetously wrap  
Hath some peculiar virtue of its own,  
And that the glorious stars of Heaven have none,  
But shine in vain, and have no charge precise,  
But to be walking in Heaven's galleries,  
And through the palace up and down to clamber  
As golden gulls about a presence-chamber.

Joshua Sylvester

# They Say That Shadows Of Deceased Ghosts

They say that shadows of deceased ghosts  
Do haunt the houses and the graves about,  
Of such whose life's lamp went untimely out,  
Delighting still in their forsaken hosts:  
So, in the place where cruel Love doth shoot  
The fatal shaft that slew my love's delight,  
I stalk, and walk, and wander day and night,  
Even like a ghost with unperceived foot.  
But those light ghosts are happier far than I,  
For, at their pleasure, they can come and go  
Unto the place that hides their treasure so,  
And see the name with their fantastic eye:  
Where I, alas, dare not approach the cruel  
Proud moment that doth enclose my jewel.

Joshua Sylvester

# To His Coy Love

I pray thee, leave, love me no more,  
Call home the heart you gave me!  
I but in vain that saint adore  
That can but will not save me.  
These poor half-kisses kill me quite  
Was ever man thus served?  
Amidst an ocean of delight  
For pleasure to be starved?  
Show me no more those snowy breasts  
With azure riveters branched,  
Where, whilst mine eye with plenty feasts,  
Yet is my thirst not stanch'd;  
O Tantalus, thy pains ne'er tell!  
By me thou art prevented:  
'Tis nothing to be plagued in Hell,  
But thus in Heaven tormented.  
Clip me no more in those dear arms,  
Nor thy life's comfort call me,  
O these are but too powerful charms,  
And do but more enthrall me!  
But see how patient I am grown  
In all this coil about thee:  
Come, nice thing, let thy heart alone,  
I cannot live without thee!

Joshua Sylvester

