

Classic Poetry Series

Robert Greene
- poems -

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Robert Greene(1560-1592)

Robert Greene (baptized 11 July 1558, died 3 September 1592) was an English author popular in his day, and now best known for a posthumous pamphlet attributed to him, *Greenes, Groats-worth of Witte*, bought with a million of Repentance, widely believed to contain an attack on William Shakespeare. He is said to have been born in Norwich. He attended Cambridge, receiving a B.A. in 1580, and an M.A. in 1583 before moving to London, where he arguably became the first professional author in England. Greene published in many genres including romances, plays and autobiography.

Greene is thought to have attended the free grammar school at Norwich, although this cannot be confirmed as enrolment documents for the relevant years are lost. Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, provided scholarships for students from the Norwich grammar school, and for this reason Greene's matriculation as a sizar at St John's College, Cambridge, has been considered 'strange'. A reason offered for Greene's enrolment at St John's is that some of the gentry of South Yorkshire attended St John's, and among the dedicatees of, or authors of commendatory verses for, Greene's books were members of the Darcy, Portington, Lee, Stapleton and Rogers families, all centered at Snaith, Yorkshire; according to Richardson, the Robert Greene from Norwich who was an innkeeper may have been an immigrant from Yorkshire connected to 'a large family of Greenes' who lived in the parish of Snaith, and may actually have left Norwich to reside at Snaith from 1571 to 1577.

There is no record of Greene's having taken part in the dramatic productions at Cambridge in 1579 and 1580, although 18 of his classmates and Fellows of the Cambridge colleges acted in *Hymenaeus*, and 46 in *Richardus Tertius*. His academic performance as an undergraduate at Cambridge was mediocre; on 22 January 1580 he took his BA, graduating 38th out of 41 students in his college, and 115th out of the total university graduating class that year of 205 students. He 'apparently transferred to Clare College for his 1583 MA', where he placed 5th out of 12 students in his college, and 29th of the 129 students at the university. It was 'rare for a student to migrate to another college (as Greene did) after he had received the baccalaureate', and no record of Greene's transfer to Clare College has been discovered, nor does his name appear in the Clare Hall Buttery Book for 1580-84. Greene's claim to association with Clare College is found in the second part of *Mamillia*, which was not published until 1593, after Greene's death, in which the dedicatory epistle to Robert Lee and Roger Portington is signed 'Robert Greene. From my Studie in Clarehall the vii. Of Julie'.

Greene died 3 September 1592. His death and burial were announced by Gabriel Harvey in a letter to Christopher Bird of Saffron Walden dated 5 September, first published as a 'butterfly pamphlet' about 8 September, and later expanded as *Four Letters and Certain Sonnets*, entered in the Stationers' Register on 4 December 1592. Harvey attributed Greene's demise to 'a surfeit of pickle herring and Rhenish wine', and claimed he had been buried in 'the new churchyard near Bedlam' on 4 September. No record of Greene's burial has been found.

Cupid Abroad Was Lated

CUPID abroad was lated in the night,
His wings were wet with ranging in the rain;
Harbor he sought, to me he took his flight
To dry his plumes. I heard the boy complain:
I oped the door and granted his desire,
I rose myself, and made the wag a fire.

Looking more narrow by the fire's flame,
I spied his quiver hanging by his back.
Doubting the boy might my misfortune frame,
I would have gone, for fear of further wrack;
But what I drad did me, poor wretch, betide,
For forth he drew an arrow from his side.

He pierced the quick, and I began to start,
A pleasing wound but that it was too high;
His shaft procured a sharp yet sugared smart.
Away he flew, for why is wings were dry;
But left the arrow sticking in my breast,
That sore I grieved I welcomed such a guest.

Robert Greene

Farewell To Folly

- 1 Sweet are the thoughts that savour of content;
- 2 The quiet mind is richer than a crown;
- 3 Sweet are the nights in careless slumber spent;
- 4 The poor estate scorns fortune's angry frown:
- 5 Such sweet content, such minds, such sleep, such bliss,
- 6 Beggars enjoy, when princes oft do miss.

- 7 The homely house that harbours quiet rest;
- 8 The cottage that affords no pride nor care;
- 9 The mean that 'grees with country music best;
- 10 The sweet consort of mirth and music's fare;
- 11 Obscured life sets down a type of bliss:
- 12 A mind content both crown and kingdom is.

Robert Greene

Maesia's Song

SWEET are the thoughts that savor of content;
The quiet mind is richer than a crown;
Sweet are the nights in careless slumber spent;
The poor estate scorns Fortune's angry frown.
Such sweet content, such minds, such sleep, such bliss,
Beggars enjoy, when princes oft do miss.

The homely house that harbors quiet rest;
The cottage that affords no pride nor care;
The mean that 'grees with country music best;
The sweet consort of mirth and music's fare;
Obscurèd life sets down a type of bliss:
A mind content both crown and kingdom is.

Robert Greene

Menaphon: Sephesta's Song To Her Child

-
Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee,

-
When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.

-
Mother's wag, pretty boy,

-
Father's sorrow, father's joy;

-
When thy father first did see

-
Such a boy by him and me,

-
He was glad, I was woe,

-
Fortune changed made him so,

-
When he left his pretty boy

-
Last his sorrow, first his joy.

-
Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee,

-
When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.

-
Streaming tears that never stint,

-
Like pearl-drops from a flint,

-
Fell by course from his eyes,

-
That one another's place supplies;

-
Thus he griev'd in every part,

-
Tears of blood fell from his heart,

-
When he left his pretty boy,

Father's sorrow, father's joy.

-

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee,

-

When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.

-

The wanton smil'd, father wept,

-

Mother cried, baby leapt;

-

More he crow'd, more he cried,

-

Nature could not sorrow hide:

-

He must go, he must kiss

-

Child and mother, baby bless,

-

For he left his pretty boy,

-

Father's sorrow, father's joy.

-

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee,

-

When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.

Robert Greene

Sephestia's Lullaby

WEEP not, my wanton, smile upon my knee;
When thou art old there 's grief enough for thee.
 Mother's wag, pretty boy,
 Father's sorrow, father's joy;
 When thy father first did see
 Such a boy by him and me,
 He was glad, I was woe;
 Fortune changed made him so,
 When he left his pretty boy,
 Last his sorrow, first his joy.
Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee;
When thou art old there 's grief enough for thee.
 Streaming tears that never stint,
 Like pearl-drops from a flint,
 Fell by course from his eyes,
 That one another's place supplies;
 Thus he grieved in every part,
 Tears of blood fell from his heart,
 When he left his pretty boy,
 Father's sorrow, father's joy.
Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee;
When thou art old there 's grief enough for thee.
 The wanton smiled, father wept,
 Mother cried, baby leapt;
 More he crow'd, more we cried,
 Nature could not sorrow hide:
 He must go, he must kiss
 Child and mother, baby bliss,
 For he left his pretty boy,
 Father's sorrow, father's joy.
Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee,
When thou art old there 's grief enough for thee.

Robert Greene

Sweet Are The Thoughts That Savour Of Content

Sweet are the thoughts that savour of content;
The quiet mind is richer than a crown;
Sweet are the nights in careless slumber spent;
The poor estate scorns fortune's angry frown:
Such sweet content, such minds, such sleep, such bliss,
Beggars enjoy, when princes oft do miss.

The homely house that harbours quiet rest;
The cottage that affords no pride nor care;
The mean that 'grees with country music best;
The sweet consort of mirth and music's fare;
Obscured life sets down a type of bliss:
A mind content both crown and kingdom is.

Robert Greene

The Description Of Sir Geoffrey Chaucer

HIS stature was not very tall,
Lean he was, his legs were small,
Hosed within a sock of red,
A buttoned bonnet on his head,
From under which did hang, I ween,
Silver hairs both bright and sheen.
His beard was white, trimmèd round,
His countenance blithe and merry found.
His sleeveless jacket large and wide,
With many plights and skirts side,
Of water camlet did he wear;
A whittle by his belt he wear,
His shoes were cornered, broad before,
His inkhorn at his side he wore,
And in his hand he bore a book.
Thus did this ancient poet look.

Robert Greene

The Shepherd's Wife's Song

Ah, what is love? It is a pretty thing,
As sweet unto a shepherd as a king,
And sweeter, too:
For kings have cares that wait upon a crown,
And cares can make the sweetest love to frown:
Ah then, ah then,
If country loves such sweet desires do gain,
What lady would not love a shepherd swain?

His flocks are folded; he comes home at night
As merry as a king in his delight,
And merrier, too:
For kings bethink them what the state require,
Where shepherds, careless, carol by the fire:

He kisseth first, then sits at blithe to eat
His cream and curds, as doth a king his meat,
And blither, too:
For kings have often fears when they do sup,
Where shepherds dread no poison in their cup:

To bed he goes, as wanton then, I ween,
As is a king in dalliance with a queen;
More wanton, too:
For kings have many griefs, affects to move,
Where shepherds have no greater grief than love:

Upon his couch of straw he sleeps as sound
As doth the king upon his bed of down;
More sounder, too:
For cares cause kings full oft their sleep to spill,
Where weary shepherds lie and snort their fill:

Thus, with his wife, he spends the year as blithe
As doth the king at every tide or sithe,
And blither, too:
For kings have wars and broils to take in hand,
Where shepherds laugh and love upon the land:
Ah then, ah then,

Since country loves such sweet desires do gain,
What lady would not love a shepherd swain?

Robert Greene

Weep Not, My Wanton

WEEP not, my wanton, smile upon my knee:
When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.
Mother's wag, pretty boy,
Father's sorrow, father's joy.
When thy father first did see
Such a boy by him and me,
He was glad, I was woe:
Fortune changèd made him so,
When he left his pretty boy,
Last his sorrow, first his joy.

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee:
When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.
Streaming tears that never stint,
Like pearl drops from a flint,
Fell by course from his eyes,
That one another's place supplies:
Thus he grieved in every part, Tears of blood fell from his heart,
When he left his pretty boy,
Father's sorrow, father's joy.

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee:
When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.
The wanton smiled, father wept;
Mother cried, baby lept;
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Child and mother, baby bliss;
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