

Ben Jonson

E P I G R A M S .

LXXX. — OF LIFE AND DEATH.

The ports of death are sins ; of life, good deeds ;
Through which our merit leads us to our needs.
How wilful blind is he, then, that would stray,
And hath it, in his powers, to make his way !
This world death's region is, the other life's ;
And here, it should be one of our first strifes,
So to front death, as men might judge us past it :
For good men but see death, the wicked taste it

Andrew Marvell

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE SOUL
AND BODY

Soul. O, WHO shall from this dungeon raise
A soul enslaved so many ways ?
With bolts of bones, that fettered stands
In feet, and manacled in hands ;
Here blinded with an eye, and there
Deaf with the drumming of an ear ;
A soul hung up, as 'twere, in chains
Of nerves, and arteries, and veins ;
Tortured, besides each other part,
In a vain head, and double heart ?

Body. O, who shall me deliver whole,
From bonds of this tyrannic soul ?
Which, stretched upright, impales me so
That mine own precipice I go ;
And warms and moves this needless frame,
(A fever could but do the same).

And, wanting where its spite to try,
Has made me live to let me die
A body that could never rest,
Since this ill spirit it possessed.

Soul.

What magic could me thus confine
Within another's grief to pine ?
Where, whatsoever it complain,
I feel, that cannot feel, the pain ;
And all my care itself employs,
That to preserve which me destroys ;
Constrained not only to endure
Diseases, but, what's worse, the cure ;
And, ready oft the port to gain,
Am shipwrecked into health again.

Body.

But Physic yet could never reach
The maladies thou me dost teach ;
Whom first the cramp of hope does tear,
And then the palsy shakes of fear ;
The pestilence of love does heat,
Or hatred's hidden ulcer eat ;
Joy's cheerful madness does perplex,
Or sorrow's other madness vex ;
Which knowledge forces me to know,
And memory will not forego ;
What but a soul could have the wit
To build me up for sin so fit ?
So architects do square and hew
Green trees that in the forest grew.

LXX.

The World.

Catherine
Phillips

We falsly think it due unto our Friends,
That we should grieve for their untimely ends.
He that surveys the World with serious eyes,
And strips her from her gross and weak disguise,
Shall find 'tis Injury to mourn their Fate;
He onely dies untimely who dies late.
For if 'twere told to Children in the Womb,

To what a Stage of Mischiefs they must come;
 Could they foresee with how much toil and sweat
 Men court that guilded nothing, being Great; 10
 What pains they take not to be what they seem,
 Rating their bliss by others false esteem,
 And sacrificing their Content, to be
 Guilty of grave and serious Vanity;
 How each Condition hath its proper Thorns,
 And what one man admires, another scorns;
 How frequently their Happiness they miss,
 And so far from agreeing what it is,
 That the same Person we can hardly find
 Who is an hour together in one mind: 20
 Sure they would beg a Period of their breath,
 And what we call their Birth would count their Death.
 Mankind are mad, for none can live alone
 Because their Joys stand by comparison:
 And yet they quarrel at Society,
 And strive to kill they know not whom, nor why.
 We all live by Mistake, delight in Dreams,
 Lost to our selves, and dwelling in Extremes;
 Rejecting what we have, though ne're so good,
 And prizing what we never understood. 30
 Compar'd t'our boisterous inconstancy
 Tempests are calm, and Discords harmony.
 Hence we reverse the World, and yet do find
 The God that made can hardly please our Mind.
 We live by chance, and slip into Events;
 Have all of Beasts except their Innocence.
 The Soul, which no man's pow'r can reach, a thing
 That makes each Woman Man, each Man a King,
 Doth so much lose, and from its height so fall,
 That some contend to have no Soul at all. 40
 'Tis either not observ'd, or at the best
 By Passion fought withall, by Sin deprest.
 Freedom of Will (God's Image) is forgot;
 And, if we know it, we improve it not.
 Our Thoughts, though nothing can be more our own,
 Are still unguided, very seldom known.
 Time 'scapes our hands as Water in a Sieve,
 We come to die e're we begin to live.
 Truth, the most sutable and noble prize,
 Food of our Spirits, yet neglected lies. 50
 Errour and Shadows are our choice, and we

Owe our perdition to our own decree.
 If we search Truth, we make it more obscure;
 And when it shines, we can't the light endure.
 For most men now, who plod, and eat, and drink,
 Have nothing less their bus'ness then to think.
 And those few that enquire, how small a share
 Of Truth they find, how dark their Notions are!
 That serious Evenness that calms the Breast,
 And in a Tempest can bestow a Rest, 60
 We either not attempt, or else decline,
 By ev'ry trifle snatch'd from our design.
 (Others he must in his deceits involve,
 Who is not true unto his own Resolve.)
 We govern not our selves, but loose the Reins,
 Courting our Bondage to a thousand chains;
 And with as many Slaveries content
 As there are Tyrants ready to torment,
 We live upon a Rack extended still
 To one Extreme or both, but always ill. 70
 For since our Fortune is not understood,
 We suffer less from bad then from the good.
 The Sting is better drest and longer lasts,
 As Surfeits are more dangerous then Fasts.
 And to complete the misery to us,
 We see Extremes are still contiguous.
 And as we run so fast from what we hate,
 Like Squibs on Ropes, to know no middle state;
 So outward storms strengthned by us, we find
 Our Fortune as disordered as our Mind. 80
 But that's excus'd by this, it doth its part;
 A trech'rous World befits a trech'rous Heart.
 All ill's our own, the outward storms we lothe
 Receive from us their Birth, their Sting, or both.
 And that our Vanity be past a doubt,
 'Tis one new Vanity to find it out.
 Happy are they to whom God gives a Grave,
 And from themselves as from his wrath doth save.
 'Tis good not to be born; but if we must,
 The next good is, soon to return to dust. 90
 When th'uncag'd Soul fled to Eternity
 Shall rest, and live, and sing, and love, and see.
 Here we but crawl and grapple, play and cry;
 Are first our own, then others, enemy:

But there shall be defac'd both stain and score,
For Time, and Death, and Sin shall be no more.

Margaret Cavendish, A World in an Eare-Ring

An *Eare-ring* round may well a *Zodiacke* bee,
Wherein a *Sun* goeth round, and we not see.
And *Planets seven* about that *Sun* may move,
And *Hee* stand still, as *some wise men* would prove.
And *fixed Stars*, like *twinkling Diamonds*, plac'd
About this *Eare-ring*, which a *World* is vast.
That same which doth the *Eare-ring* hold, the *hole*,
Is that, which we do call the *Pole*.
There *nipping Frosts* may be, and *Winter* cold,
Yet never on the *Ladies Eare* take hold.
And *Lightings*, *Thunder*, and great *Winds* may blow
Within this *Eare-ring*, yet the *Eare* not know.
There *Seas* may *ebb*, and *flow*, where *Fishes* swim,
And *Islands* be, where *Spices* grow therein.
There *Christall Rocks* hang dangling at each *Eare*,
And *Golden Mines* as *Jewels* may they wear.
There *Earth-quakes* be, which *Mountaines* vast downe fling,
And yet nere stir the *Ladies Eare*, nor *Ring*.
There *Meadowes* bee, and *Pastures fresh*, and *greene*,
And *Cattell* feed, and yet be never seene:
And *Gardens* fresh, and *Birds* which sweetly sing,
Although we heare them not in an *Eare-ring*.
There *Night*, and *Day*, and *Heat*, and *Cold*, and so
May *Life*, and *Death*, and *Young*, and *Old*, still grow.
Thus *Youth* may *spring*, and severall *Ages* dye,
Great *Plagues* may be, and no *Infections* nigh.
There *Cityes* bee, and stately *Houses* built,
Their inside *gaye*, and finely may be gilt.
There *Churches* bee, and *Priests* to teach therein,
And *Steeple* too, yet heare the *Bells* not ring.
From thence may pious *Teares* to *Heaven* run,
And yet the *Eare* not know which way they're gone.
There *Markets* bee, and things both bought, and sold,
Know not the price, nor how the *Markets* hold.
There *Governours* do rule, and *Kings* do Reigne,
And *Battels* fought, where many may be slaine.
And all within the *Compass* of this *Ring*,
And yet not tidings to the *Wearer* bring.
Within the *Ring* wise *Counsellors* may sit,
And yet the *Eare* not one wise word may get.
There may be *dancing* all Night at a *Ball*,

And yet the *Eare* be not disturb'd at all.
There *Rivals Duels* fight, where some are slaine;
There *Lovers mourne*, yet heare them not complaine.
And *Death* may dig a *Lovers Grave*, thus were
A *Lover* dead, in a faire *Ladies Eare*.
But when the *Ring* is broke, the *World* is done,
Then *Lovers* they into *Elysium* run.

John Milton

Anno ætatis 17.

On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough

I.

O Fairest flower no sooner blown but blasted,
Soft silken Primrose fading timeleslie,
Summers chief honour if thou hadst out-lasted
Bleak winters force that made thy blossome drie;
For he being amorous on that lovely die [5]
That did thy cheek envermeil, thought to kiss
But kill'd alas, and then bewayl'd his fatal bliss.

II.

For since grim Aquilo his charioter
By boistrous rape th' Athenian damsel got,
He thought it toucht his Deitie full neer, [10]
If likewise he some fair one wedded not,
Thereby to wipe away th' infamous blot,
Of long-uncoupled bed, and childless eld,
Which 'mongst the wanton gods a foul reproach was held.

III.

So mounting up in ycie-pearled carr, [15]
Through middle empire of the freezing aire
He wanderd long, till thee he spy'd from farr,
There ended was his quest, there ceast his care.
Down he descended from his Snow-soft chaire,
But all unwares with his cold-kind embrace [20]
Unhous'd thy Virgin Soul from her fair biding place.

IV.

Yet art thou not inglorious in thy fate;
For so *Apollo*, with unweeting hand
Whilome did slay his dearly-loved mate

Young *Hyacinth* born on *Eurotas* strand, [25]
Young *Hyacinth* the pride of *Spartan* land;
But then transform'd him to a purple flower
Alack that so to change thee winter had no power.

V.

Yet can I not persuade me thou art dead
Or that thy coarse corrupts in earths dark wombe, [30]
Or that thy beauties lie in wormie bed,
Hid from the world in a low delved tombe;
Could Heav'n for pittie thee so strictly doom?
Oh no? for something in thy face did shine
Above mortalitie that shew'd thou wast divine. [35]

VI.

Resolve me then oh Soul most surely blest
(If so it be that thou these complaints dost hear)
Tell me bright Spirit where e're thou hoverest
Whether above that high first-moving Spheare
Or in the Elisian fields (if such there were.) [40]
Oh say me true if thou wert mortal wight
And why from us so quickly thou didst take thy flight.

VII.

Wert thou some Starr which from the ruin'd roof
Of shak't Olympus by mischance didst fall;
Which carefull *Jove* in natures true behoofe [45]
Took up, and in fit place did reinstall?
Or did of late earths Sonnes besiege the wall
Of sheenie Heav'n, and thou some goddess fled
Amongst us here below to hide thy nectar'd head.

VIII.

Or wert thou that just Maid who once before [50]
Forsook the hated earth, O tell me sooth,
And cam'st again to visit us once more?
Or wert thou that sweet smiling Youth!
Or that crown'd Matron sage white-robed truth?
Or any other of that heav'nly brood [55]
Let down in cloudie throne to do the world some good.

IX.

Or wert thou of the golden-winged hoast,
Who having clad thy self in humane weed,

To earth from thy præfixed seat didst poast,
And after short abode flie back with speed, [60]
As if to shew what creatures Heav'n doth breed,
Thereby to set the hearts of men on fire
To scorn the sordid world, and unto Heav'n aspire.

X.

But oh why didst thou not stay here below
To bless us with thy heav'n-lov'd innocence, [65]
To slake his wrath whom sin hath made our foe
To turn Swift-rushing black perdition hence,
Or drive away the slaughtering pestilence,
To stand 'twixt us and our deserved smart
But thou canst best perform that office where thou art. [70]

XI.

Then thou the mother of so sweet a child
Her false imagin'd loss cease to lament,
And wisely learn to curb thy sorrows wild;
Think what a present thou to God hast sent,
And render him with patience what he lent; [75]
This if thou do, he will an off-spring give
That till the worlds last end shall make thy name to live.

Robert Herrick,

a contemporary of John Donne, wrote the poem whose first line has become the *carpe diem* cliché:

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may
Old Time is still a-Flying;
And this same flower that smiles today,
Tomorrow will be dying.
The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.
That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer;
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.
Then be not coy, but use your time;
And while ye may, go marry:
For having lost but once your prime,
You may forever tarry.

Death, Be Not Proud

By John Donne

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

Andrew Marvell. 1621–1678

357. To His Coy Mistress

HAD we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, Lady, were no crime
We would sit down and think which way
To walk and pass our long love's day.
Thou by the Indian Ganges' side 5
Shouldst rubies find: I by the tide
Of Humber would complain. I would
Love you ten years before the Flood,
And you should, if you please, refuse
Till the conversion of the Jews. 10
My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires, and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise

Thine eyes and on thy forehead gaze;
Two hundred to adore each breast, 15
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, Lady, you deserve this state,
Nor would I love at lower rate. 20
But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.
Thy beauty shall no more be found, 25
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song: then worms shall try
That long preserved virginity,
And your quaint honour turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust: 30
The grave 's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
And while thy willing soul transpires 35
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than languish in his slow-chapt power. 40
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Thorough the iron gates of life:
Thus, though we cannot make our sun 45
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

MAC FLECKNOE

by: John Dryden

ALL human things are subject to decay,
And, when fate summons, monarchs must obey.
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young
Was called to empire, and had governed long;
In prose and verse was found without dispute,
Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute.
This aged prince, now flourished in peace,
And blessed with issue of a large increase,
Worn out with business, did at length debate
To settle the succession of the state;
And, pondering which of all his sons was fit
To reign, and wage immortal war with wit,
Cried,--"Tis resolved! for nature pleads, that he
Should only rule, who most resembles me.
Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dulness from his tender years;
Shadwell alone, of all my sons, is he,
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
But Shadwell never deviates into sense;
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,
Strike through, and make a lucid interval;
But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,
His rising fogs prevail upon the day.
Besides, his goodly fabric fills the eye,
And seems designed for thoughtless majesty;
Thoughtless as monarch oaks, that shade the plain,
And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign.
Heywood and Shirley were but types of thee,
Thou last great prophet of tautology!
Even I, a dunce of more renown than they,
Was sent before but to prepare the way;
And, coarsely clad in Norwich drugget, came
To teach the nation in thy greater name."