The Poetry of John Gray

Fletcher, Ian

Published by ELT Press

Fletcher, Ian.
The Poetry of John Gray.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/25263.

⇒ For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/25263

🔗 For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=894114
Poems Rejected

from

'Spiritual Poems'
Rosary of the Cross  *

( Oliver Prays )

Holy Christ, upon thy cross of torture,
Deign to see the sinner at thy feet,
Ignorant, besotted,
Even in despair effete.

Holy Christ, thy sorry feet are swollen,
Heavy with the iron of their woe,
All inflamed, and clotted
With thy blood, which still doth flow.

Holy Christ, thy knees are cramped and palsied
For thy father's wrath upon our race
Bright with rubies dotted,
Fallen from thy blessed face.

Holy Christ, thy painful waist is girdled
Sinister, with blood from thy torn side.
'Tis the wage allotted
Of my sin, thou crucified.

Holy Christ, thy breast is wrung and anxious,
Stabbed with wounds unseen thy heart did quake,
Mighty heat which plotted
This atonement for my sake.

Holy Christ, thine arms outstretched are helpless;
See thy finger tips with anguish pearled;
Thus thy mercy wotted
Must thine arms embrace the world .]

Holy Christ, thy face is marred and ugly
More than any man's, but kinder yet;
Furrowed, streaked and spotted,
Bleared with spittle, blood and sweat.

Holy Christ, the eyes of thy compassion
Turn to earth, ah well, ah, well, for me;
Be they not too blotted
My forlorn estate to see.

Holy Christ, thy head doth bear a garland,
Leafless vine, with fruit of many a thorn;
Poems Rejected from 'Spiritual Poems'

Oh so sharp and knotted,
Sharper symbol of my scorn.

Holy Christ, had not thy rood been bitter,
Racked and ruined hung thy holy frame,
Man had lain and rotted
In his slough of sin and shame.

Holy Christ, upon thy cross of pity,
Deign to see the Sinner at thy feet,
Ignorant, besotted...
Be thy work for me complete.

Variations on Santeuil  *

All dead and living men,
Bear witness how a clammy pen
Went into the fire of God and came forth new.
  Let certain further days to praise
Who lifts weak feet from smooth inclining ways
Renews the shrunken brain, restores the withered thew.

Forth came I, as I said,
Snatched up by quaking heels and head
I saw the naked stand before the Lord
  Whose hair like wool, whose feet like brass(,)
Was starred with flowers, were pressed in dewless grass
And all his lively look lay far horizonward.

Hereof what is thine own
(Oblivion let for mine atone)
What truth is, holy, take; be mine the blame
To have set good truth in shabby thought
My aim to have been, in sacred things, ah! not
To pleasure thee; but poet's pride, which is my shame.

That thou shouldst take my testament across thy lips?
Thou gavest me songs to praise
Thee; gave me prayers and tearful days
To wash me, lest thine arrow pierce my hips —
Thy servant David's word — therefor:
"What hast thou to declare my statutes, or
That thou should'st take my testament athwart thy lips."

148
He made me sound and whole[,]  
Gave me to drink from out his bowl  
A drain of life to serve my journey's length  
And then, lest I should be distressed  
My early years with quiet ease he blessed  
To compensate me for a little flair of strength.

They fed my infant brain,  
They set therin with little pain  
Some ancient smattering of strange alphabets  
Whereon I gave away my toys  
And went to school and mixed with other boys  
Learned what the test of which is that the boy forgets.

Then and still being young[,]  
I liked it I went among  
Whose art it is to make a useful thing.  
There many a long year I learnt  
To make a thing, where living is well earned  
Where men set up the engines of their suffering.

A certain time expired[;]  
I dared confess that I was tired  
Of whirring lathe and rank machine-oil's smell.  
I lied; I loved them one and both;  
Truth being vanity in me was loth  
That wit like mine should cut no harder stuff than steel.

Ah! that I thought to face  
The world! to elbow me a place!  
Ah Lord! I thank thee for that chastening.  
I hungered, body, soul and wraith[,]  
Thou couldst not choose but own a desperate faith  
Albeit I all but missed thee Lord. So thou didst bring

Me into a dry land  
Wherein, looking to every hand,  
Marking its baldness, and an unfilled sky,  
I thought to plant the one with flowers,  
The other with stars so madly to mark hours  
Of drowsy summer night that could not fade nor fly.

Walking upon my hands  
I hoed and tilled my sandy lands  
And watered all my plants with many tears.  
Their rank roots did affright the worm[.]
Poems Rejected from 'Spiritual Poems'

They grew and were my children in their term
And then they were my masters and consumed my years...

Saint John of the Cross  *

The Living Flame of Love

O living flame of love!
O tender wounding wonder,
Wounding my soul in its most secret centre!
I do not smart enough;
Perfect thy work; asunder
Tear thou the veil in this sublime encounter.

Sweet burning of heart's kernel!
O delicious wound!
O hand most bland! o touch as soft as breath,
Tasting of life eternal,
And all my debt condoned,
How, slaying, hast thou given life for death!

O burning lamps of pure
Fire! whereof the glitter,
Lighting the deepest caverns of the sense,
The which were blind, obscure,
Give light and heat together
To the beloved, of unknown excellence.

How amorous and mild
Hast thou my breast renewed,
Where thou dost dwell alone and secretly!
In thy sweet breathing, filled
With glory and all good
How daintily hast thou enamoured me!

Martin Opitz von Boberfeld  *

Done out of the Latin of Blessed Jacopone

What hath become of Solomon?
Where are his wit and high estate?
With what is Samson clad upon
Whose bodily prowess was so great?
Absolon also is all pale.
Ah! where be now his golden hairs?
And Jonathan, did he not fail
Though much beloved, and all awares?

Where is great Caesar at this day,
Who conquered many a folk and state?
Where have the rich all gone away
Who drank so costlily and ate?

Hath Cicero not disappeared?
Who recked what he did or did not tell[.]
Where can he be, whilom revered,
Old Greece's flower, Aristotle?

So many an unvanquished lord!
Such time agone and long years spent!
So many heads gone—whitherward?
And so much royal ornament!

So many princes and their bliss!
Such power and mightiness and strength!
All in a moment come to this:
Rolled over, cold, and stretched at length.

The deeds and valour of this earth
Are just a fleeting holiday;
Its fame—the swiftest shadow's worth
Is scarce a symbol, in a way.

Its pleasures only give to lose
The good reward of constant rest,
Its purpose but that men should choose
The fields of error to be blest.

O miserable food of worms,
O dust and muck of ancient time,
Why dost thou sparkle in such terms?
Dew seem, o vanity's rank slime?

Well mayest thou doubt if life indeed
Will even last until tomorrow.
Give whilst thou hast the gift to feed
A hunger or to staunch a sorrow.
This flesh, which runneth so to grip,
'Give me reward and fame,' which saith,
The same is called, in holy Scrip,
A floweret that withereth.

Like as the light leaves float and skate,
If wind but blow with small increase,
What we call life in this estate
Must soon succumb and shortly cease.

Say not that doth belong to thee
Which soon can only be but lost.
Things the world holdeth jealously,
Can it reclaim, the boundary crossed?

Yeann then beyond and, heart upraised,
Heavenward be thy longing hurled;
Blessed, and greatly to be praised,
Who lightly can despise the world.

To the Blessed Sacrament *

Gomberville

As on the earth in flesh thou didst appear
Now show thyself great God to this bold age;
Where, armed against thy truth, men dare to wage
Their war against thy Godhead without fear.

Thou that didst burst through stone a passage clear
To bear thy earthly body from its cage,
Sunder this other tomb, and disengage
Thyself a sun from out this crystal sphere.

Lighten the earth as thou dost light the skies.
Warming my heart strike blindness from my eyes.
No longer twain, be heat and light one whole.

Forgive me, Lord, my brain in transport reels.
Enough that Faith exhibits to my soul
What to my body's eyes a crumb conceals.
Desbarreaux *

Great God, thy ways are full of righteousness;  
Thy clemency would spare us all; but oh,  
I have done so much ill that nothing less  
Than death can soothe thy injured justice—No!

My God, the greatness of my wickedness  
Leaves only to thy power the choice of woe;  
Thy laws are foreign to my happiness;  
Thy very grace demands the extremest blow.

Fulfil thy will all glorious and all wise,  
Be angry at the tears which blear my eyes;  
Strike, thunder; it is time; give thrall for thrall.

Damned, I adore thee. — Mercy hath sufficed. —  
If wrath can find a spot, whereon to fall,  
Which is not covered with the blood of Christ.

Confession—Paul Fleming *

I have lived hitherto more bad than bad;  
Cold piety great fervour did pretend[,]  
Deceiving heaven, my neighbour and my friend,  
Seldom above myself and cloudward led,  
To earth's mean vanities fast rivetted,  
Done things whereof the joy did swiftly end;  
Debtor to all the Law, as who would spend  
And break and spoil the whole and yet be glad.

I witness to my sin in spite of me;  
My judgment penalty and death decree.  
This have I done, and this, and this, and worse.

Why seek I here to tell the untold tale  
Of all my wickedness? God reads too well  
Upon my forehead written, all the curse.
Madame Guyon  *

My God, to do thy will
Caged I can rejoice;
Hearken to my voice:
[']Tis my election still:
Direct my choice,
My God, to do thy will.

I sing the live day long,
Lord, thyself, to please:
Extreme miseries
But make my love more strong;
No one near to tease
I sing the live day long[.]

Thou understandest, Lord,
Syllables of love,
Wise men know not of,
Within the chaste heart stored
Speech all speech above:
Thou understandest, Lord.

Freedom my soul doth fill
Though I am a slave:
Love is all I crave[,] Affection, holy will.
In my little cave
Freedom my soul doth fill[.]

Repentance  *

The flawless sovereign law!
Barbed grappling hook from Heaven's foundations sent;
Dangling in Hell's own maw,
To aid a man's ascent
Therefrom; sure pardon shall a man repent.

This hook the masterkey
To open that dear wound, the very door
Of Heaven presently;
The Father's promise; nor
Shall any find another key there for.

Give me repentance, Lord;
Lest otherwise I have no hope to win
Thy life, thy sweet award;  
For Lord, I find not in  
Thy word repentance promised when I sin.

**Madame Guyon**

Delightful solitude,  
Prison, beloved tower;  
Without solicitude  
I pass my every hour;  
No torment hath withstood  
Love's overwhelming power.

Misfortunes are my joys,  
My suffering my delight,  
Punishment equipoise  
To goals of passion's flight;  
All that my hours employs  
Is love and longing sighed.

I do not shrink from pain,  
Affliction or rebuff,  
Certain it is my gain,  
That gall is sweet enough.  
His beauty doth disdain  
All love but perfect love.

Suffering, my suffering  
Vouchsafes my happiness;  
God's neighbourhood the thing  
Which doth my heart possess;  
Himself my patience' spring,  
My strength's and my sweetness'.