Stephen Duck, â??To Death. An Irregular Odeâ?•

Description

STEPHEN DUCK

â??To DEATH. An Irregular ODEâ?•

I.

HAIL, formidable KING!
My Muse thy dreaded fame shall sing.
Why should old HOMERâ??S pompous lays
Immortalize ACHILLESâ?? Praise!
Or why should ADDISONâ??S harmonious Verse
Our MARLBROâ??S nobler Deeds rehearse?
Alas! no more these *Heroes* shine;
Their Powâ??r is all subduâ??d by *Thine*.
Where are these mighty *Leaders* now,
Great POMPEY, CAESAR, and Young AMMON too,
Who thought he drew immortal Breath ?
These bold ambitious Sons of MARS
Who dyâ??d the Globe with bloody Wars,
Are vanquishâ??d all by thee, victorious DEATH !

II.

Evâ??n while they livâ??d, their Martial Hate
But firmer fixâ??d thy Throne;
Nor, thoâ?? it hastenâ??d others Fate,
Could it delay their own.
Nor didst thou want *their* Rage to kill;
Thy own can execute thy Will;
Wheneâ??er thou dost exert thy Powâ??r,
A Thousand morbid Troops thy Call obey;
Sometimes thy wasting Plagues devour,
And sweep whole realms away.
Now with contagious Biles the City mourns,
And now thy scorching Fever burns,
Or trembling Quartan chills;
Of Heat and Cold the dire extremes
Now freeze, now fire the Blood with Flames,
Till various Torment kills.

III.

CONSUMPTIONS, and Rheumatic Pain,
And Apoplectic Fits, that rack the Brain;
Soul-panting Asthmas, Dropsy, and Catarrh,
Gout, Palsy, Lunacy and black Despair;
Pangs, that neglected Lovers feel;
Corroding Jealousy, their earthly Hell,
Which makes the injurâ??d Woman wild;
And powâ??rful Spleen that gets the *Man* with Child;
Physicians, surgeons, Bawds, and Whores, and Wine,
Are all obsequious servants of *Thine;*
Nay, and RELIGION, too
When Hypocrites their interest pursue,
Or frantic Zeal inspires,
It calls for Racks, and Wheels, and Fires:
Then all our mystic Articles of Faith
Instead of saving Life, become the Cause of DEATH.

IV.

GREAT MONARCH! how secure must be thy Crown,
When all these Things conspire to prop thy Throne?
Yet, in thy universal Reign,
Thou dost not use tyrannic Sway.
Whateâ??er the Weak and Timâ??rous say,
Who tremble at thy Frown;
Thou art propitious to our Pain,
And breakâ??st the groaning Prisâ??nerâ??s Chain,
Which Tyranny put on.
In *Thee* the Lover quits his Care,
Nor longer courts the cruel *Fair,*
Her Coldness mourns no more:
In *Thee* Ambition ends it Race,
And finds at length the destinâ??d Place,
It neâ??er could find before:
The Merchant too, who plows the Main,
In greedy Quest of Gain,
By Thee to happier Climes is brought,
Than those his wild, insatiate Avâ??rice sought.

V.

PROPITIOUS Succourer of the Distrest,
Who often, by the Dead, dost make the Living blest !
How could profusive *Heirs* attend
Their Mistress, Bottle, Ball, and Play,
If timely *Thou* wert not their Friend,
To snatch the scraping Sire away?
How would dull Poets weary Time

With their insipid Rhyme,
And teaze and tire the Readerâ??s Ears
With Party Feuds, and Paper Wars,
If *Thou*, great Critic! didst not use
Thy Powâ??r, to point a Period for their Muse?
The Bard, at thy decisive Will,
Discards his *mercenary Quill*,
Then all his mighty Volumes lie
Hid in the peaceful *Tomb* of vast Obscurity.

VI.

I, like the rest, advance my Lays;
With uncouth Numbers, rumble forth a Song,
Sedately dull, to celebrate thy Praise;
And lash, and spur the heavy labâ??ring Muse along:
But soon the fatal Time must come,
(Ordaninâ??d by Heavâ??nâ??s unerring Doom)
When Thou shalt cut the vital Thread,
And shove the verbal Embryos from my Head.
Thence, since Iâ??m sure to meet my Fate,
How vain would *Hope* appear?
Since *Fear* cannot protract the Date,
How foolish â??twere to *fear*?
Iâ??ll strive, at least, to stand prepared,
Thy Summons to obey;
Nor would I think thy Sentence hard,
Nor wish, nor fear the *Day;*
But live in conscious Peace, and die without Dismay.

VII.

FALLACIOUS Reasâ??ners wrong *Thee*, when
They call the Laws severe.
Severe! to whom? *To wicked Men*:
Then let the Wicked fear.
Thou judgest all with equal Laws,
No venal Witness backs thy Cause,
NoNo Bribes to *Thee* are known;
If thy impartial Hand but strike,
The Prince and Peasant fall alike,
The Courtier and the Clown.
What thoâ?? a-while the Beggar groans,
While Kings enjoy their gilded Thrones?
What are Distinctions, Pomp, and Regal Train,
And *Honours*, got with Care, and kept with Pain?
One friendly Stroke of *Thine* sets level all again.
All earthly Grandeur must decline;

Nay, evâ??n Great GEORGEâ??S Powâ??r submit to *Thine*:
But *thy Dominion* shall endure,
Till PHOEBUS measures Time no more:
Then all shall be in dark Oblivion cast,
And evâ??ry mortal Kingdom fall; but thine shall fall the last.

NOTES:

1 *King* King George II (1683-1760), reigned from 1727.

3 *Homer* (Precise birth/death unknown; estimated to be ~750BCE). Ancient classical Grecian poet, author of the epics *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*

4 *Achilles* Highly-acclaimed and famous warrior from Greek mythos; central character of *The Iliad*.

5 *Addison* Joseph Addison (1672-1719), author and co-founder of *The Spectator,* and poet.

6 *Marlboro* John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough (1650-1722). English statesman whose lengthy career earned him extreme fame, power, and wealth.

10 *Pompey* (106 BC-48 BC) Supremely successful military general of Ancient Rome; *Caesar* Julius Caesar (100 BC-44 BC), prominent Roman statesman, prose author, and dictator. Assassinated by his own senators; *Young Ammon* Possibly refers to Molech, an ancient God worshipped by Phoenicians and Canaanites.

12 *Mars* Mars was a figure of meaningful conflict and male aggression in the Roman mythos.

27 *Quartan* A malarial fever that reoccurs every 72 hours.

33 *Dropsy* Medical condition where swelling of fluid beneath the skin causes great pain.

33 *Catarrh* A disorder of inflammation of mucous membranes in an airway or bodily cavity.

38 *Spleen* Most often used in this period to describe the nature of melancholy or hysterical affectation. But in this context, used to describe the surge of emotion that man feels towards women; ends in pregnancy.

39 *Bawd* A prostitute.

44 *Racks, Wheels, Fires* Refers to various methods of torture associated with religious inquisitions; the rack stretched an individual to dislocate/break limbs; the wheel was an actual wagon wheel that an individual was strapped to, then beaten. Fires could refer to a funeral pyre or burning at the stake.

45 *Articles of Faith* Refers to passages of the Bible that suggest death as a solution for sins.

62 *Main* Refers to the merchant â??plowingâ?• the main street of a city; a peddler seeking profit.

117 *Phoebus* Another name for Apollo, the god of the Sun in classical Greek mythology.

Source: *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1738), pp. 99-104. [Google Books]

Edited by Spencer Lam