

ELEGY III  
*On the Death of the Bishop of Winchester*  
Written at the age of seventeen

by  
Henry Walters,  
*after a poem of the same name by*  
John Milton

Sick at heart in an empty, silent room,  
With sorrows working on me like a collar  
Chafing around the neck, I sat, a blank.

An image, a vision of the thing itself  
—Death—entered, swinging a lantern that shuddered  
Floor and ceiling and walls with its black light.  
I knelt with all of England as the plague  
Moved through us unopposed, a general  
Parading troops of pomp and grief and graves,  
And so continued through the vanquished, through  
Their marbled, pillared halls until he stood  
Upon our very thrones. Whatever shone  
Was snuffed and discarded. Great walls toppled.  
Suns, moons failed. Light was put to the sword.  
(For death heeds nothing, hesitating not.)  
Behind him followed faces that I knew:  
Kings, princes, soldiers, men of any fame,  
Men of legendary action—lost, all lost,  
Plucked out of time and stowed away in earth.

I wept for them, but most of all for you,  
The body of the spirit Winchester.  
Tears scored rivulets across my voice:

“Death plays a second fiddle to his god  
As cruelty serves the famished pangs of hatred.  
The woods suffer his continual siege  
Through the mellowing year; grass on the knoll  
Grows brown; all that ripens, falls. His breathing quells  
The fire that lives in the lily, the upturned eyes  
Of crocuses, roses pinned to a girl’s breast.  
The river oak whose roots embrace the banks

Will gaze at currents sliding past its shadow,  
But not forever. Everything is ripened,  
And all that ripens, dies. The wingings of birds  
Foretell a future they will not behold.  
(Death’s augur says, *Those feathers shall be dust.*)  
A thousand creatures creep through black unknowns,  
And cattle may find shelter from the weather,  
But all must cease. Death, is this not enough?  
Insatiate power curdles in your palm,  
Forever grasping. What pleasure do you reap  
From human death by staining pale hands red?  
You pin up living hearts like trophies hung  
Upon your wall, cleaving the mortal form  
From a soul which most approaches the divine.”

These thoughts welled up like tears and rumbled down  
Beneath my heart, while in the dimming west,  
The day-long sun glimmered and dipped and sank.  
There the first star of evening, bright, arose.  
I threw myself face-first upon a bed,  
Hoping to ease my mind with sleep and dark,  
When suddenly I seemed to be adrift  
In a wide field, wandering quite alone.

I fear my pen is not up to this task.

All that I gazed on gushed a purple light  
As when the mountains hide the sun at dawn  
And make the sky grow livid with impatience.  
The earth was a layered palette of flowers  
Where rain and light had mingled into colors  
More stunning than a rainbow could imagine.  
No lady sowing lupine, nor the spring

Itself could usher such gardens into being.  
Eel-smooth silvery streams wound through lush fields,  
And spits of sand glittered against their banks.  
A breeze meandered through a wealth of smells  
So sweet, I thought the roses were exhaling.  
Perhaps Columbus, had he sailed full circle  
And reached the rising of the morning star,  
Would have feasted his eagle eyes upon  
A countryside as beautiful as this.  
From shadows deepening under thick vines  
To broad swatches everywhere steeped in sunlight,  
My eye moved in amazement.

Suddenly

The late Bishop appeared to me, bedecked  
With robes that tumbled down like liquid glass  
Upon his sandaled feet, a white cloth ribbon  
Tied around his head. The whole of his face  
Exuded an unearthly satin shine  
As though his very life were overflowing.  
All dignity, he slowly angled toward me.

Flowers reverberated at the sound  
Of every silent footfall. Senses may fail,  
But I could swear I heard the beats of wings  
That were not birds', and somewhere a trumpet answered.  
As though from far away, I felt his arms  
Enclose me, heard his voice, like violin  
Strings playing themselves, say these very words:

*You have been born into the world—therefore,  
Partake of it, and be content. Designs  
Are all foreknown. Now, always, assume them.*

Again I thought I heard the muted pluck  
Of harps, far off, by some fine-fingered hands.

And so it ended, whatever sleep it was.  
Pricked from the darkness by the dawn, I wept  
To find the dream had shrunk to memory  
And was no more. I wish it may return.

*Elegia tertia, Anno ætatis 17  
In obitum Præsulis Wintoniensis*

*by  
John Milton*

Moestus eram, & tacitus nullo comitante sedebam,  
Hærebantque animo tristia plura meo,  
Protinus en subiit funestæ cladis imago  
Fecit in Angliaco quam Libitina solo;  
Dum procerum ingressa est splendentes marmore tures [ 5 ]  
Dira sepulchrali mors metuenda face;  
Pulsavitque auro gravidos & jaspide muros,  
Nec metuit satrapum sternere falce greges.  
Tunc memini clarique ducis, fratrisque verendi  
Intempestivis ossa cremata rogis. [ 10 ]  
Et memini Heroum quos vidit ad æthera raptos,  
Flevit & amissos Belgia tota duces.  
At te præcipuè luxi dignissime præsul,  
Wintoniæque olim gloria magna tuæ;  
Delicui fletu, & tristi sic ore querebar, [ 15 ]  
Mors fera Tartareo diva secunda Jovi,  
Nonne satis quod sylva tuas persentiat iras,  
Et quod in herbosos jus tibi detur agros,  
Quodque afflata tuo marcescant lilia tabo,  
Et crocus, & pulchræ Cypridi sacra rosa, [ 20 ]  
Nec sinis ut semper fluvio contermina quercus  
Miretur lapsus prætereuntis aquæ?  
Et tibi succumbit liquido quæ plurima cælo  
Evehitur pennis quamlibet augur avis,  
Et quæ mille nigris errant animalia sylvis, [ 25 ]  
Et quod alunt mutum Proteos antra pecus.  
Invida, tanta tibi cum sit concessa potestas,  
Quid juvat humanâ tingere cæde manus?  
Nobileque in pectus certas acuisse sagittas,  
Semideamque animam sede fugâsse suâ? [ 30 ]  
Talia dum lacrymans alto sub pectore volvo,  
Roscidus occiduis Hesperus exit aquis,  
Et Tartessiaco submerserat æquore currum  
Phœbus ab eöo littore mensus iter.

Nec mora, membra cavo posui refovenda cubili, [ 35 ]  
Condiderant oculos noxque soporque meos.  
Cum mihi visus eram lato spatiarier agro,  
Heu nequit ingenium visa referre meum.  
Illic puniceâ radiabant omnia luce,  
Ut matutino cum juga sole rubent. [ 40 ]  
Ac veluti cum pandit opes Thaumantia proles,  
Vestitu nituit multicolore solum.  
Non dea tam variis ornavit floribus hortos  
Alcinoi, Zephyro Chloris amata levi.  
Flumina vernantes lambunt argentea campos, [ 45 ]  
Ditior Hesperio flavet arena Tago.  
Serpit odoriferas per opes levis aura Favoni,  
Aura sub innumeris humida nata rosis.  
Talis in extremis terræ Gangetidis oris  
Luciferi regis fingitur esse domus. [ 50 ]  
Ipse racemiferis dum densas vitibus umbras  
Et pelluentes miror ubique locos,  
Ecce mihi subito præsul Wintonius astat,  
Sydereum nitido fulsit in ore jubar;  
Vestis ad auratos defluxit candida talos, [ 55 ]  
Infula divinum cinxerat alba caput.  
Dumque senex tali incedit venerandus amictu,  
Intremuit læto florea terra sono.  
Agmina gemmatis plaudunt cælestia pennis,  
Pura triumphali personat æthra tubâ. [ 60 ]  
Quisque novum amplexu comitem cantuque salutat;  
Hosque aliquis placido misit ab ore sonos;  
Nate veni, & patrii felix cape gaudia regni,  
Semper ab hinc duro, nate, labore vaca.  
Dixit, & aligeræ tetigerunt nablia turmæ, [ 65 ]  
At mihi cum tenebris aurea pulsa quies.  
Flebam turbatos Cephaleiâ pellice somnos,  
Talia contingant somnia sæpe mihi.

Literal Translation  
of  
*Elegia tertia*

By Henry Walters

Silent and alone I sat in sorrowful mood, and many griefs laid hold upon my soul, when suddenly arose the phantom of the deadly plague which Libitina sent upon England, when bitter Death, fearful with her sepulchral torch, entered the gleaming marble palaces of the great, smote the walls heavy with jasper and gold, and feared not with her scythe to mow down troops of nobles. Then I remembered that famous duke and his revered brother-in-arms, whose bones were consumed on untimely pyres; I remembered the heroes that all Belgia saw caught up to heaven, the lost leaders whom she wept.

But I chiefly lamented for you, most noble Bishop, once the crowning glory of your beloved Winchester. I melted in tears, and thus sadly complained: "Cruel Death, goddess next in power to Tartarean Jove, is it not enough that the forests suffer under your wrath, that power is given you over the grass of the field, that the lily, the crocus, and the rose sacred to lovely Cypris, droop at the touch of your withering breath? Nor do you permit the oak that stands by the river to gaze for ever at the flow of the passing water. And the birds, as many as are borne on wings through the liquid heaven, although they are diviners of the future; all the thousand wild beasts that wander in the dark forests; the dumb herds that find shelter in the caves of Proteus; all succumb to you. You are envious? But, endowed with such power, what joy is it to stain your hands with human blood, to sharpen your unerring bolts to pierce a noble breast, and to drive a soul half-divine from its home?"

While thus in tears I pondered such matters deep in my heart, dewy Hesperus arose from the Western sea, and Phoebus, having finished his course from the shores of dawn, had submerged his chariot in the Iberian ocean. Straightway I laid myself on my yielding bed to find repose, and night and sleep had closed my eyes, when, as it seemed, I was wandering in a wide field — but, alas! I have no gift to tell what I saw. There all things glowed with a purple light, as when the mountain-peaks grow red in the morning sun; and, even, as when the daughter of Thaumias has scattered her rich offspring, the earth was luxuriant in many-colored robes. Chloris, the goddess beloved of gentle Zephyr, did not adorn the garden of Alcinous with flowers so varied. Through verdant fields flowed silver streams whose sands shone a richer gold than those of Hesperian Tagus. Through the fragrant leaves the soft breath of Favonius trembled, the moist breath born beneath countless roses. Such a place, it is supposed, is the home of royal Lucifer, in a land on the farthest shores of the Ganges. As I gazed in wonder at these sunlit spaces everywhere, and the deep shadows under the clustering vines, suddenly before me stood the Bishop of Winchester. From his face shone a heavenly light like the radiance of the stars, his robe of dazzling white swept down to his golden sandals, and a white band encircled his divine head. As the venerable man in such raiment advanced, the flowery earth trembled with joyous sound. The heavenly hosts clapped their jeweled wings, and the clear air resounded with the triumphal horn. Each saluted his new companion with embrace and song, and one with placid lips uttered these words: "Come, my son, take of the joy and gladness of your Father's kingdom, and from hard labor henceforth and for ever be free." He spoke, and the winged companies touched their harps. But my golden peace was dispelled with the night, and I wept for my dreams shattered by the mistress of Cephalus. May such dreams often return.