

PART 1

Natural Encounters

1 Sonnet 129

1

Sonnet 129

O joyous, blossoming, ever-blessed flowers!
'Mid which my queen her gracious footstep sets;
O plain, that keep'st her words for amulets
And hold'st her memory in thy leafy bowers!
O trees, with earliest green of spring-time hours,
And spring-time's pale and tender violets!
O grove so dark, the proud sun only lets
His blithe rays gild the outskirts of your towers!
O pleasant country-side! O purest stream,
That mirrorest her sweet face, her eyes so clear,
And of their living light can catch the beam!
I envy you her haunts so close and dear.
There is no rock so senseless but I deem
It burns with passion that to mine is near.

Petrarch (14th century); T W Higginson (translated 1867)

2

The Bird

Hither thou com'st: the busy wind all night
Blew through thy lodging, where thy own warm wing
Thy pillow was. Many a sullen storm
(For which course man seems much the fitter born)
 Rained on thy bed
 And harmless head.

And now as fresh and cheerful as the light
Thy little heart in early hymns doth sing
Unto that *Providence*, whose unseen arm
Curbed them, and clothed thee well and warm.
 All things that be, praise him; and had
 Their lesson taught them, when first made.

So hills and valleys into singing break,
And though poor stones have neither speech nor tongue,
While active winds and streams both run and speak,
Yet stones are deep in admiration.
Thus praise and prayer here beneath the sun
Make lesser mornings, when the great are done.

2 The Bird

For each inclosèd spirit is a star
 Enlightening his own little sphere,
Whose light, though fetched and borrowèd from far,
 Both mornings makes, and evenings there.

But as these birds of light make a land glad,
Chirping their solemn Matins on each tree:
So in the shades of night some dark fowls be,
Whose heavy notes make all that hear them, sad.

The turtle then in palm-trees mourns,
 While owls and satyrs howl;
The pleasant land to brimstone turns
 And all her streams grow foul.

Brightness and mirth, and love and faith, all fly,
Till the Day-spring breaks forth again from high.

Henry Vaughan (1655)

3

Of Many Worlds in This World

Just like as in a nest of boxes round,
Degrees of sizes in each box are found:
So, in this world, may many others be
Thinner and less, and less still by degree:
Although they are not subject to our sense,
A world may be no bigger than two-pence.
Nature is curious, and such works may shape,
Which our dull senses easily escape:
For creatures, small as atoms, may be there,
If every one a creature's figure bear.
If atoms four, a world can make, then see
What several worlds might in an ear-ring be:
For, millions of those atoms may be in
The head of one small, little, single pin.
And if thus small, then ladies may well wear
A world of worlds, as pendants in each ear.

Margaret Cavendish (1668)

4 *from* The Offering

4

from *The Offering*

1

Accept, my God, the Praises which I bring,
The humble Tribute from a Creature due:
 Permit me of thy Pow'r to sing,
That Pow'r which did stupendous Wonders do,
And whose Effects we still with awful Rev'rence view:
That mighty Pow'r which from thy boundless Store,
 Out of thy self where all things lay,
 This beauteous Universe did call,
This Great, this Glorious, this amazing All!
And fill'd with Matter that vast empty Space,
 Where nothing all alone
Had long unrival'd sat on its triumphant Throne.
 See! now in every place
 The restless Atoms play:
 Lo! High as Heav'n they proudly soar,
 And fill the wide-stretch'd Regions there;
In Suns they shine Above, in Gems Below,
And roll in solid Masses thro' the yielding Air:
In Earth compacted, and diffus'd in Seas;
In Corn they nourish, and in Flow'rs they please:
 In Beasts they walk, in Birds they fly,

6

from The Offering 4

And in gay painted Insects croud the Skie:
In Fish amid the Silver Waves they stray,
And ev'ry where the Laws of their first Cause obey:
 Of them, compos'd with wondrous Art,
 We are our selves a part:
And on us still they Nutriment bestow;
To us they kindly come, from us they swiftly go,
And thro' our Veins in Purple Torrents flow.
 Vacuity is no where found,
Each Place is full: with bodies we're encompass'd round:
 In Sounds they're to our Ears convey'd,
In fragrant Odors they our Smell delight,
And in Ten thousand curious Forms display'd,
 They entertain our Sight:
 In luscious Fruits our Tast they court,
And in cool balmy Breezes round us sport,
The friendly Zephyrs fan our vital Flame,
And give us Breath to praise his holy Name,
From whom our selves, and all these Blessings came.

Lady Mary Chudleigh (1710)

5 To the Nightingale

5

To the Nightingale

Exert thy Voice, sweet Harbinger of Spring!
 This Moment is thy Time to sing,
 This Moment I attend to Praise,
And set my Numbers to thy Lays.
 Free as thine shall be my Song;
 As thy Musick, short, or long.
Poets, wild as thee, were born,
 Pleasing best when unconfined,
 When to Please is least design'd,
Soothing but their Cares to rest;
 Cares do still their Thoughts molest,
 And still th' unhappy Poet's Breast,
Like thine, when best he sings, is plac'd against a Thorn.
She begins, Let all be still!
 Muse, thy Promise now fulfill!
Sweet, oh! sweet, still sweeter yet
Can thy Words such Accents fit,
Canst thou Syllables refine,
Melt a Sense that shall retain
Still some Spirit of the Brain,
Till with Sounds like these it join.

To the Nightingale 5

'Twill not be! then change thy Note;
Let division shake thy Throat.
Hark! Division now she tries;
Yet as far the Muse outflies.
Cease then, prithee, cease thy Tune;
Trifler, wilt thou sing till *June*?
Till thy Bus'ness all lies waste,
And the Time of Building's past!
Thus we Poets that have Speech,
Unlike what thy Forests teach,
If a fluent Vein be shown
That's transcendent to our own,
Criticize, reform, or preach,
Or censure what we cannot reach.

Anne Finch (1713)

6 To the Insect of the Gossamer

6

To the Insect of the Gossamer

Small, viewless Æronaut, that by the line
Of Gossamer suspended, in mid air
Float'st on a sun beam – Living Atom, where
Ends thy breeze-guided voyage; – with what design
In Æther dost thou launch thy form minute,
Mocking the eye? – Alas! before the veil
Of denser clouds shall hide thee, the pursuit
Of the keen Swift may end thy fairy sail! –
Thus on the golden thread that Fancy weaves
Buoyant, as Hope's illusive flattery breathes,
The young and visionary Poet leaves
Life's dull realities, while sevenfold wreaths
Of rainbow light around his head revolve.
Ah! soon at Sorrow's touch the radiant dreams dissolve!

Charlotte Smith (1797)