

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-43275-8 - Abraham Cowley: Poems: Miscellanies, the Mistress,  
Pindarique Odes, Davideis, Verses Written on Several Occasions

The Text Edited by A. R. Waller

Excerpt

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# ELEGIA

## DEDICATORIA, ad ILLUSTRISSIMAM Academiam *CANTABRIGIENSEM.*

**H**Oc tibi de *Nato ditissima Mater* *egeno*  
 Exiguum immensi pignus *Amoris* habe.  
 Heu meliora tibi depromere dona volentes  
 Astringit gratas parciore arca manus.  
 Tunc tui poteris *vocem* hic agnoscere *Nati*  
 Tam male formatam, dissimilemque; *tuæ*?  
 Tunc hic *materni* vestigia sacra decoris,  
 Tu *Speculum* poteris hic reperire tuum?  
 Post longum, dices, *Coulei*, sic mihi tempus?  
 Sic mihi speranti, *perfide*, multa redis?  
 Quæ, dices, *Sagæ Lemurisque; Dææque; nocentes,*  
 Hunc mihi in *Infantis* supposuere loco?  
 At *Tu*, sancta *Parens, crudelis tu quoque, Nati*  
 Ne tractes dextrâ vulnera cruda rudi.  
 Hei mihi, quid *Fato Genetrix* accedis iniquo?  
 Sit *Sors*, sed non sis *Ipsa Noverca* mihi.  
 Si mihi natali *Musarum* adolescere in arvo,  
 Si bene dilecto luxuriare solo,  
 Si mihi de doctâ licuisset pleniùs undâ  
 Haurire, ingentem si satiare sitim,  
 Non ego degeneri *dubitabilis* ore redirem,  
 Nec legeres *Nomen* fusa rubore meum.  
 Scis bene, scis quæ me *Tempesta publica Mundi*  
 Raptatrix vestro sustulit è gremio,

c.

A

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Nec pede adhuc firmo, nec firmo dente, negati  
 Poscentem querulo murmure *Laëtis* opem.  
 Sic quondam ærium *Vento* bellante per æquor,  
 Cum gravidum *Autumnum* sæva flagellat *Hyems*.  
 Immatura suâ velluntur ab arbore poma  
 Et vi victa cadunt; *Arbor* & ipsa gemit.  
 Nondum succus inest terræ generosus avitæ,  
 Nondum *Sol* roseo redditur ore *Pater*.  
 O mihi jucundum *Grantæ* super omnia *Nomen!*  
 O penitûs toto corde receptus *Amor!*  
 O pulchræ *sine Luxu* *Ædes*, vitæq; beatæ,  
*Splendida Paupertas*, ingenuûsq; decor!  
 O chara ante alias, magnorum nomine *Regum*  
 Digna *Domus!* *Trini* nomine digna *Dei!*  
 O nimium *Cereris* cumulati munere *Campi*,  
 Posthabitis *Ennæ* quos colit illa jugis!  
 O sacri *Fontes!* & sacræ *Vatibus Umbræ*,  
 Quas recreant *Avium Pieridumq;* chori!  
 O *Camus!* *Phœbo* nullus quo gratior amnis!  
 Amnibus *auriferis* invidiosus *inops!*  
 Ah mihi si vestræ reddat bona gaudia sedis,  
 Detq; Deus doctâ posse quiete frui!  
 Qualis eram cum me tranquillâ mente sedentem  
 Vidisti in ripâ, *Came* serene, tuâ;  
 Mulcentem audisti puerili flumina cantu;  
 Ille quidém immerito, sed tibi gratus erat.  
 Nam, meminî ripâ cum tu dignatus utrâq;  
 Dignatum est totum verba referre nemus.  
 Tunc liquidis tacitisq; simul mea vita diebus,  
 Et similis vestræ candida fluxit aquæ.  
 At nunc cænosæ luces, atq; obice multo  
 Rumpitur ætatis turbidus ordo meæ.  
 Quid mihi *Sequanâ* opus, *Tamesisve* aut *Thybridis unda?*  
 Tu potis es nostram tollere, *Came*, sitim.  
 Fœlix qui nunquam plus uno viderit *amne!*  
 Quiq; eadem *Salicis* littora more colit!  
 Fœlix cui *non tentatus* sordescere *Mundus*,  
 Et cui *Pauperies nota* nitere potest!  
 Tempore cui nullo misera *experientia* constat,  
 Ut res humanas sentiat esse *Nihil!*

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At nos exemplis *Fortuna* instruxit opimis,  
 Et documentorum satq; supérq; dedit.  
 Cum *Capite* avulsum *Diadema*, infraçtâq; *sceptra*,  
 Contusâsq; *Hominum Sorte* minante minas,  
*Parcarum ludos*, & non traçtabile *Fatum*,  
 Et versas fundo vidimus orbis opes.  
 Quis poterit fragilem post talia credere puppim  
 Infami scopulis naufragiisq; *Mari*?  
 Tu quoque in hoc *Terræ* tremuisti, *Academia*, *Motu*,  
 (Nec frustra) atq; ædes contremuère tuæ.  
 Contremuère ipsæ *pacatæ Palladis* arces;  
 Et timuit *Fulmen Laureæ* sancta novum.  
 Ah quanquam iratum, pestem hanc avertere *Numen*,  
 Nec saltem *Bellis ista* licere, velit!  
 Nos, tua progenies, pereamus; & ecce, perimus!  
 In nos jus habeat: Jus habet omne malum.  
 Tu stabilis brevium genus immortale nepotum  
 Fundes; nec tibi *Mors* ipsa *superstes* erit.  
 Semper plena manens uteri de fonte perenni  
 Formosas mittes *ad mare Mortis* aquas.  
 Sic *Venus* humanâ quondam, *Dea* saucia dextrâ,  
 (Namq; solent ipsis *Bella* nocere *Deis*)  
 Imploravit opem superûm, questûsq; cievit,  
 Tinxit adorandus candida membra cruor.  
 Quid quereris? contemne *breves* securo dolores;  
 Nam tibi ferre *Necem vulnera* nulla valent.

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# THE PREFACE

## OF THE AUTHOR.

AT my return lately into *England*, I met by great accident (for such I account it to be, that any Copy of it should be extant any where so long, unless at his house who printed it) a *Book* entituled, *The Iron Age*, and published under *my name*, during the time of my absence. I wondred very much how one who could be so *foolish* to write so ill Verses, should yet be so *Wise* to set them forth as another *Mans* rather than his *own*; though perhaps he might have made a better choice, and not fathered the *Bastard* upon such a person, whose stock of Reputation is, I fear, little enough for maintenance of his own numerous *Legitimate Off-spring* of that kind. It would have been much less injurious, if it had pleased the *Author* to put forth some of my Writings under his *own name*, rather than his own under *mine*: He had been in that a more pardonable Plagiary, and had done less wrong by *Robbery*, then he does by such a *Bounty*; for no body can be *justified* by the *Imputation* even of anothers *Merit*; and our own course *Cloathes* are like to become us better, then those of another mans, though never so *rich*: but these, to say the truth, were so *beggarly*, that I my self was ashamed to *wear* them. It was in vain for me, that I avoided censure by the concealment of my own writings, if my reputation could be thus *Executed in Effigie*; and impossible it is for any good *Name* to be in safety, if the malice of *Witches* have the power to consume and destroy it in an *Image* of their own making. This indeed was so ill made, and so *unlike*, that I hope the *Charm* took no effect. So that I esteem my self less prejudiced by it, then by that which has been done to me since, almost in the same kinde, which is the publication of some

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things of mine without my consent or knowledge, and those so mangled and imperfect, that I could neither with honour acknowledge, nor with honesty quite disavow them. Of which sort, was a *Comedy* called *The Guardian*, printed in the year 1650. but made and acted before the *Prince*, in his passage through *Cambridge* towards *York*, at the beginning of the late unhappy War; or rather neither *made* nor *acted*, but *rough-drawn* onely, and *repeated*; for the haste was so great, that it could neither be *revised* or *perfected* by the *Author*, nor *learned without-Book* by the *Aētors*, nor set forth in any measure tolerably by the *Officers* of the *College*. After the *Representation* (which, I confess, was somewhat of the *latest*) I began to look it over, and changed it very much, striking out some whole parts, as that of the *Poet* and the *Souldier*; but I have lost the *Copy*, and dare not think it deserves the pains to writ it again, which makes me omit it in this publication, though there be some things in it which I am not ashamed of, taking the excuse of my age and small experience in humane conversation when I made it. But as it is, it is only the hasty *first-sitting* of a *Picture*, and therefore like to resemble me accordingly. From this which has hapned to my self, I began to reflect on the fortune of almost all *Writers*, and especially *Poets*, whose *Works* (commonly printed after their deaths) we finde stuffed out, either with *counterfeit pieces*, like *false Money* put in to fill up the *Bag*, though it adde nothing to the *sum*; or with such, which though of their own *Coyn*, they would have called in themselves, for the baseness of the *Allay*: whether this proceed from the indiscretion of their *Friends*, who think a vast *heap* of *Stones* or *Rubbish* a better *Monument*, then a little *Tomb* of *Marble*, or by the unworthy avarice of some *Stationers*, who are content to diminish the value of the *Author*, so they may encrease the price of the *Book*; and like *Vintners* with sophisticate mixtures, spoil the whole vessel of wine, to make it yield more *profit*. This has been the case with *Shakespear*, *Fletcher*, *Johnson*, and many others; part of whose *Poems* I should take the boldness to prune and lop away, if the care of replanting them in print did belong to me; neither would I make any scruple to cut off from some the unnecessary young *Suckers*, and from others the old withered *Branches*; for a great *Wit* is no more tyed to live in a *Vast Volume*, then in a *Gigantick*

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*Body*; on the contrary, it is commonly more vigorous the less space it animates. And as *Statius* says of little *Tydeus*,

.....*Totos infusa per artus*  
*Major in exiguo regnabat corpore virtus*\*.

I am not ignorant, that by saying this of others, I expose my self to some Raillery, for not using the same severe discretion in my own case, where it concerns me nearer: But though I publish here, more then in strict wisdom I ought to have done, yet I have suppress and cast away more then I *publish*; and for the ease of my self and others, have *lost*, I believe too, more then *both*. And upon these considerations I have been perswaded to overcome all the just repugnances of my own *modesty*, and to produce these *Poems* to the light and view of the World; not as a thing that I approved of in it self, but as a less evil, which I chose rather then to stay till it were done for me by some body else, either surreptitiously before, or avowedly after my death: and this will be the more excusable, when the *Reader* shall know in what respects he may look upon me as a *Dead*, or at least a *Dying Person*, and upon my *Muse* in this action, as appearing, like the *Emperor Charls the Fifth*, and assisting at her own *Funeral*.

For to make my self absolutely dead in a *Poetical* capacity, my resolution at present, is never to exercise any more that faculty. It is, I confess, but seldom seen that the *Poet* dyes before the *Man*; for when we once fall in love with that bewitching *Art*, we do not use to court it as a *Mistress*, but marry it as a *Wife*, and take it for better or worse, as an *Inseparable Companion* of our whole life. But as the *Mariages* of *Infants* do but rarely prosper, so no man ought to wonder at the diminution or decay of my affection to *Poesie*; to which I had contracted my self so much under *Age*, and so much to my own prejudice in regard of those more profitable matches which I might have made among the *richer Sciences*. As for the *Portion* which this brings of *Fame*, it is an *Estate* (if it be any, for men are not oftner deceived in their hopes of *Widows*, then in their opinion of, *Exegi monumentum ære perennius*) that hardly ever comes in whilst we are *Living* to enjoy it, but is a *fantastical kind of Reversion to our own selves*:

\* *Stat. l. l. Theb.*

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neither ought any man to envy *Poets* this posthumous and imaginary happiness, since they find commonly so little in present, that it may be truly applyed to them, which *S. Paul* speaks of the first *Christians*, *If their reward be in this life, they are of all men the most miserable.*

And if in quiet and flourishing times they meet with so small encouragement, what are they to expect in rough and troubled ones? if *Wit* be such a *Plant*, that it scarce receives heat enough to preserve it alive even in the *Summer* of our cold *Clymate*, how can it choose but wither in a long and a sharp *winter*? a warlike, various, and a tragical age is best to *write of*, but worst to *write in*. And I may, though in a very unequal proportion, assume that to my self, which was spoken by *Tully* to a much better person, upon occasion of the *Civil Wars* and *Revolutions* in his time, *Sed in te intuens, Brute, doleo, cujus in adolescentiam per medias laudes quasi quadrigis vebentem transversa incurrit misera fortuna Reipublicæ\**.

Neither is the present constitution of my *Mind* more proper then that of the *Times* for this exercise, or rather divertisement. There is nothing that requires so much serenity and chearfulness of *Spirit*; it must not be either overwhelmed with the cares of *Life*, or overcast with the *Clouds of Melancholy* and *Sorrow*, or shaken and disturbed with the storms of injurious *Fortune*; it must like the *Halcyon*, have *fair weather* to breed in. The *Soul* must be filled with bright and delightful *Idea's*, when it undertakes to communicate delight to others; which is the main end of *Poesie*. One may see through the stile of *Ovid de Trist.* the humbled and dejected condition of *Spirit* with which he wrote it; there scarce remains any footsteps of that *Genius*,

*Quem nec Jovis ira, nec ignes, &c.*

The *cold* of the *Countrey* had stricken through all his faculties, and benumbed the very *feet* of his *Verses*. He is himself, methinks, like one of the *Stories* of his own *Metamorphosis*; and though there remain some weak *resemblances* of *Ovid at Rome*, It is but as he says of *Niobe*,

*In vultu color est sine sanguine, lumina maestis  
Stant immota genis; nihil est in Imagine vivum,  
Flet tamen.....†*

\* *Cic. de Clar. Orator.*† *Ovid. Metam. l. 6.*

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The truth is, for a man to write well, it is necessary to be in good humor; neither is *Wit* less eclipsed with the unquietness of *Mind*, then *Beauty* with the *Indisposition* of *Body*. So that 'tis almost as hard a thing to be a *Poet* in despite of *Fortune*, as it is in despite of *Nature*. For my own part, neither my obligations to the *Muses*, nor expectations from them are so great, as that I should suffer my self on no considerations to be divorced; or that I should say like *Horace*,

*Quisquis erit vitæ, Scribam, color\*.*

I shall rather use his words in another place,

*Vixi Camænis nuper idoneus,  
Et militavi non sine gloriâ,  
Nunc arma defunctumq; bello  
Barbiton hic paries habebit†.*

And this resolution of mine does the more befit me, because my desire has been for some years past (though the execution has been accidentally diverted) and does still vehemently continue, to retire my self to some of our *American Plantations*, not to seek for *Gold*, or enrich my self with the traffick of those parts (which is the end of most men that travel thither; so that of *these Indies* it is truer then it was of the former,

*Improbis extremos currit Mercator ad Indos  
Pauperiem fugiens...)*

But to forsake this world for ever, with all the *vanities* and *Vexations* of it, and to bury my self there in some obscure retreat (but not without the consolation of *Letters* and *Philosophy*)

*Oblitusq; meorum, obliviscendus & illis.*

As my former *Author* speaks too, who has inticed me here, I know not how, into the *Pedantry* of this heap of *Latine Sentences*. And I think *Doctõr Donnes Sun Dyal* in a grave is not more useless and ridiculous then *Poetry* would be in that *retirement*. As this therefore is in a true sense a kind of *Death* to the *Muses*, and a real *literal quitting* of this *World*: So, methinks, I may make a just claim to the undoubted priviledge of *Deceased Poets*, which is to be read with more *favor*, then the *Living*;

*Tanti est ut placeam tibi, Perire‡.*

\* *Hor. Sat. 1. l. 2. ser.* † *L. 3. Car. Ode 26. Vixi puellis, &c.* ‡ *Mart.*



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Having been forced for my own necessary *justificatio[n]* to trouble the *Reader* with this long Discourse of the *Reasons* why I trouble him also with all the rest of the *Book*; I shall only add somewhat concerning the several Parts of it, and some other pieces, which I have thought fit to reject in this publication: As first, all those which I wrote at *School* from the age of ten years, till after fifteen; for even so far backward there remain yet some *traces* of me in the little *footsteps* of a *child*; which though they were then looked upon as *commendable extravagances* in a *Boy* (men setting a value upon *any kind of fruit* before the usual *season* of it) yet I would be loth to be bound now to read them all over *my self*; and therefore should do ill to expect that patience from *others*. Besides, they have already past through several *Editions*, which is a longer *Life* then uses to be enjoyed by *Infants* that are born before the ordinary *terms*. They had the good fortune then to find the world so *indulgent* (for considering the time of their production, who could be so hard-hearted to be *severe*?) that I scarce yet apprehend so much to be censured for *them*, as for not having made *advances* afterwards proportionable to the speed of my *setting out*, and am obliged too in a manner by Discretion to conceal and suppress them, as *Promises* and *Instruments* under my own hand, whereby I stood *engaged* for more then I have been able to *perform*; in which truly, if I have failed, I have the real excuse of the *honestest* sort of *Bankrupts*, which is, to have been made *Unsolvable*, not so much by their own *negligence* and *ill-husbandry*, as by some notorious accidents and publick disasters. In the next place, I have cast away all such pieces as I wrote during the time of the late troubles, with any relation to the differences that caused them; as among others, *three Books of the Civil War it self*, reaching as far as the first *Battel of Newbury*, where the succeeding *misfortunes* of the *party* stopt the *work*.

As for the ensuing *Book*, it consists of four parts: The first is a *Miscellanie* of several Subjects, and some of them made when I was very young, which it is perhaps *superfluous* to tell the *Reader*; I know not by what chance I have kept *Copies* of them; for they are but a very few in comparison of those which I have lost, and I think they have no extraordinary virtue in them, to deserve more care in preservation, then was bestowed

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upon their *Brethren*; for which I am so little concerned, that I am ashamed of the *arrogancy* of the *word*, when I said, *I had lost them*.

The *Second*, is called, *The Mistress*, [or] *Love-Verses*; for so it is, that *Poets* are scarce thought *Free-men* of their *Company*, without paying some duties, and obliging themselves to be true to *Love*. Sooner or later they must all pass through that *Trial*, like some *Mahumetan Monks*, that are bound by their *Order*, once at least, in their life, to make a *Pilgrimage* to *Meca*,

*In furias ignemq; ruunt; Amor omnibus idem.*

But we must not always make a judgment of their *manners* from their *writings* of this kind; as the *Romanists* uncharitably do of *Beza*, for a few lascivious *Sonnets* composed by him in his youth. It is not in this sense that *Poesie* is said to be a kind of *Painting*; it is not the *Picture* of the *Poet*, but of *things* and *persons* imagined by him. He may be in his own practice and disposition a *Philosopher*, nay a *Stoick*, and yet speak sometimes with the softness of an amorous *Sappho*.

*Feret & rubus asper Amomum.*

He professes too much the use of *Fables* (though without the malice of deceiving) to have his testimony taken even against himself. Neither would I here be misunderstood, as if I affected so much gravity, as to be ashamed to be thought really in *Love*. On the contrary, I cannot have a good opinion of any man who is not at least capable of being so. But I speak it to excuse some expressions (if such there be) which may happen to offend the severity of supercilious *Readers*; for much *Excess* is to be allowed in *Love*, and even more in *Poetry*; so we avoid the two unpardonable vices in both, which are *Obscenity* and *Prophane-ness*, of which I am sure, if my *words* be ever guilty, they have ill represented my *thoughts* and *intentions*. And if, notwithstanding all this, the lightness of the matter here displease any body; he may find wherewithal to content his more serious inclinations in the weight and height of the ensuing Arguments.

For as for the *Pindarick Odes* (which is the third part) I am in great doubt whether they will be understood by most *Readers*; nay, even by very many who are well enough acquainted with