

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-66976-5 - Edmund Spenser: The Fowre Hymnes
 Edited by Lilian Winstanley
 Excerpt
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FOWRE HYMNES,

MADE BY

EDM. SPENSER.

TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE AND MOST VERTUOUS LADIES,
 THE LADIE MARGARET,
 COUNTESSE OF CUMBERLAND, AND
 THE LADIE MARIE,
 COUNTESSE OF WARWICKE.

HAVING in the greener times of my youth, composed these former two Hymnes in the praise of Love and Beautie, and finding that the same too much pleased those of like age and disposition, which being too vehemently caried with that kind of affection, do rather sucke out poyson to their strong passion, then hony to their honest delight, I was moved by the one of you two most excellent Ladies, to call in the same. But, being unable so to doe, by reason that many copies thereof were formerly scattered abroad, I resolved at least to amend, and, by way of retractation, to reforme them, making, in stead of those two Hymnes of earthly or naturall love and beautie, two others of heavenly and celestiall. The which I doe dedicate joyntly unto you two honorable sisters, as to the most excellent and rare ornaments of all true love and beautie, both in the one and the other kinde; humbly beseeching you to vouchsafe the patronage of them, and to accept this my humble service, in lieu of the great graces and honourable favours which ye dayly shew unto me, untill such time as I may, by better means, yeeld you some more notable testimonie of my thankfull mind and dutifull devotion. And even so I pray for your happinesse. Greenwich this first of September, 1596. Your Honors most bounden ever,

in all humble service,

ED. SP.

W.

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AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF LOVE.

LOVE, that long since hast to thy mighty powre
 Perforce subdude my poore captivèd hart,
 And, raging now therein with restlesse stowre,
 Doest tyrannize in everie weaker part ;
 Faine would I seeke to ease my bitter smart
 By any service I might do to thee,
 Or ought that else might to thee pleasing bee.

And now t' asswage the force of this new flame,
 And make thee more propitious in my need,
 I meane to sing the praises of thy name, 10
 And thy victorious conquests to areed,
 By which thou madest many harts to bleed
 Of mighty Victors, with wyde wounds embrewed,
 And by thy cruell darts to thee subdewed.

Onely I feare my wits enfeebled late,
 Through the sharpe sorrowes which thou hast me bred,
 Should faint, and words should faile me to relate
 The wondrous triumphs of my great god-hed :
 But, if thou wouldst vouchsafe to overspred
 Me with the shadow of thy gentle wing, 20
 I should enabled be thy actes to sing.

Come, then, O come, thou mightie God of Love,
 Out of thy silver bowres and secret blisse,
 Where thou doest sit in Venus lap above,
 Bathing thy wings in her ambrosiall kisse,
 That sweeter farre then any Nectar is ;
 Come softly, and my feeble breast inspire
 With gentle furie, kindled of thy fire.

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AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF LOVE 3

And ye, sweet Muses! which have often proved
 The piercing points of his avengefull darts; 30
 And ye, faire Nimphs! which oftentimes have loved
 The cruell worker of your kindly smarts,
 Prepare your selves, and open wide your harts
 For to receive the triumph of your glorie,
 That made you merie oft when ye were sorie.

And ye, faire blossomes of youths wanton breed,
 Which in the conquests of your beautie bost,
 Wherewith your lovers feeble eyes you feed,
 But sterve their harts that needeth nourtur most,
 Prepare your selves to march amongst his host, 40
 And all the way this sacred hymne do sing,
 Made in the honor of your Sovereigne king.

GREAT GOD OF MIGHT, that reignest in the mynd,
 And all the bodie to thy hest doest frame,
 Victor of gods, subduer of mankynd,
 That doest the Lions and fell Tigers tame,
 Making their cruell rage thy scornefull game,
 And in their roring taking great delight;
 Who can expresse the glorie of thy might?

Or who alive can perfectly declare 50
 The wondrous cradle of thine infancie,
 When thy great mother Venus first thee bare,
 Begot of Plentie and of Penurie,
 Though elder then thine owne nativitie,
 And yet a chyld, renewing still thy yeares,
 And yet the eldest of the heavenly Peares?

For ere this worlds still moving mightie masse
 Out of great Chaos ugly prison crept,
 In which his goodly face long hidden was

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4 AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF LOVE

From heavens view, and in deepe darknesse kept, 60
 Love, that had now long time securely slept
 In Venus lap, unarmed then and naked,
 Gan reare his head, by Clotho being waked :

And, taking to him wings of his owne heate,
 Kindled at first from heavens life-giving fyre,
 He gan to move out of his idle seate ;
 Weakely at first, but after with desyre
 Lifted aloft, he gan to mount up hyre,
 And, like fresh Eagle, make his hardie flight
 Through all that great wide wast, yet wanting light. 70

Yet wanting light to guide his wandring way,
 His owne faire mother, for all creatures sake,
 Did lend him light from her owne goodly ray ;
 Then through the world his way he gan to take,
 The world, that was not till he did it make,
 Whose sundrie parts he from themselves did sever
 The which before had lyen confused ever.

The earth, the ayre, the water, and the fyre,
 Then gan to raunge them selves in huge array,
 And with contràry forces to conspyre 80
 Each against other by all meanes they may,
 Threatning their owne confusion and decay :
 Ayre hated earth, and water hated fyre,
 Till Love relented their rebellious yre.

He then them tooke, and, tempering goodly well
 Their contrary dislikes with loved meanes,
 Did place them all in order, and compell
 To keepe them selves within their sundrie raines,
 Together linkt with Adamantine chaines ;
 Yet so, as that in every living wight 90
 They mixe themselves, and shew their kindly might.

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AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF LOVE 5

So ever since they firmly have remained,
 And duly well observed his behest;
 Through which now all these things that are contained
 Within this goodly cope, both most and least,
 Their being have, and dayly are increast
 Through secret sparks of his infused fyre,
 Which in the barraine cold he doth inspyre.

Thereby they all do live, and moved are
 To multiply the likenesse of their kynd, 100
 Whylest they seeke onely, without further care,
 To quench the flame which they in burning fynd;
 But man that breathes a more immortall mynd,
 Not for lusts sake, but for eternitie,
 Seekes to enlarge his lasting progenie;

For, having yet in his deducted spright
 Some sparks remaining of that heavenly fyre,
 He is enlumind with that goodly light,
 Unto like goodly semblant to aspyre;
 Therefore in choice of love he doth desyre 110
 That seemes on earth most heavenly to embrace,
 That same is Beautie, borne of heavenly race.

For sure of all that in this mortall frame
 Contained is, nought more divine doth seeme,
 Or that resembleth more th' immortall flame
 Of heavenly light, then Beauties glorious beame.
 What wonder then, if with such rage extreme
 Fraile men, whose eyes seek heavenly things to see,
 At sight thereof so much enravisht bee?

Which well perceiving, that imperious boy 120
 Doth therwith tip his sharp empoynded darts,
 Which glancing through the eyes with countenance coy

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6 AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF LOVE

Rest not till they have pierst the trembling harts,
 And kindled flame in all their inner parts,
 Which suckes the blood, and drinketh up the lyfe,
 Of carefull wretches with consuming grieffe.
 Thenceforth they playne, and make ful piteous mone
 Unto the author of their balefull bane:
 The daies they waste, the nights they grieve and grone,
 Their lives they loath, and heavens light disdaine; 130
 No light but that, whose lampe doth yet remaine
 Fresh burning in the image of their eye,
 They deigne to see, and seeing it still dye.
 That whilst thou tyrant Love doest laugh and scorne
 At their complaints, making their paine thy play,
 Whylest they lye languishing like thrals forlorne,
 The whyles thou doest triumph in their decay;
 And otherwhyles, their dying to delay,
 Thou doest emmarble the proud hart of her
 Whose love before their life they doe prefer. 140
 So hast thou often done (ay me, the more!)
 To me thy vassall, whose yet bleeding hart
 With thousand wounds thou mangled hast so sore,
 That whole remainse scarce any little part;
 Yet, to augment the anguish of my smart,
 Thou hast enfrosen her disdainefull brest,
 That no one drop of pitie there doth rest.
 Why then do I this honor unto thee,
 Thus to ennoble thy victorious name,
 Since thou doest shew no favour unto mee, 150
 Ne once move ruth in that rebellious Dame,
 Somewhat to slacke the rigour of my flame?
 Certes small glory doest thou winne hereby,
 To let her live thus free, and me to dy.

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AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF LOVE 7

But if thou be indeede, as men thee call,
 The worlds great Parent, the most kind preserver
 Of living wights, the soveraine Lord of all,
 How falles it then that with thy furious fervour
 Thou doest afflict as well the not-deserver,
 As him that doeth thy lovely heasts despize, 160
 And on thy subjects most doest tyrannize?

Yet herein eke thy glory seemeth more,
 By so hard handling those which best thee serve,
 That, ere thou doest them unto grace restore,
 Thou mayest well trie if they will ever swerve,
 And mayest them make it better to deserve,
 And, having got it, may it more esteeme;
 For things hard gotten men more dearly deeme.

So hard those heavenly beauties he enfyred
 As things divine, least passions doe impresse, 170
 The more of stedfast myndes to be admyred,
 The more they stayed be on stedfastnesse;
 But baseborne myndes such lamps regard the lesse,
 Which at first blowing take not hastie fyre;
 Such fancies feele no love, but loose desyre.

For love is Lord of truth and loialtie,
 Lifting himselfe out of the lowly dust
 On golden plumes up to the purest skie,
 Above the reach of loathly sinfull lust,
 Whose base affect through cowardly distrust 180
 Of his weake wings dare not to heaven fly,
 But like a moldwarpe in the earth doth ly.

His dunghill thoughts, which do themselves enure
 To dirtie drosse, no higher dare aspyre,
 Ne can his feeble earthly eyes endure

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8 AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF LOVE

The flaming light of that celestiall fyre
 Which kindleth love in generous desyre,
 And makes him mount above the native might
 Of heavie earth, up to the heavens hight.
 Such is the powre of that sweet passion, 190
 That it all sordid basenesse doth expell,
 And the refyned mynd doth newly fashion
 Unto a fairer forme, which now doth dwell
 In his high thought, that would it selfe excell,
 Which he beholding still with constant sight,
 Admires the mirrour of so heavenly light.
 Whose image printing in his deepest wit,
 He thereon feeds his hungrie fantasy,
 Still full, yet never satisfyde with it;
 Like Tantale, that in store doth sterved ly, 200
 So doth he pine in most satiety;
 For nought may quench his infinite desyre,
 Once kindled through that first conceived fyre.
 Thereon his mynd affixed wholly is,
 Ne thinks on ought but how it to attaine;
 His care, his joy, his hope, is all on this,
 That seemes in it all blisses to containe,
 In sight whereof all other blisse seemes vaine:
 Thrise happie man! might he the same possesse,
 He faines himselfe, and doth his fortune blesse. 210
 And though he do not win his wish to end,
 Yet thus farre happie he himselfe doth weene,
 That heavens such happie grace did to him lend,
 As thing on earth so heavenly to have seene
 His harts enshrined saint, his heavens queene,
 Fairer then fairest, in his fayning eye,
 Whose sole aspect he counts felicitye.

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AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF LOVE 9

Then forth he casts in his unquiet thought,
 What he may do, her favour to obtaine;
 What brave exploit, what perill hardly wrought 220
 What puissant conquest, what adventurous paine,
 May please her best, and grace unto him gaine;
 He dreads no danger, nor misfortune feares,
 His faith, his fortune, in his breast he beares.

Thou art his god, thou art his mightie guyde,
 Thou, being blind, letst him not see his feares,
 But cariest him to that which he hath eyde,
 Through seas, through flames, through thousand swords
 and speares;
 Ne ought so strong that may his force withstand,
 With which thou arimest his resistlesse hand. 230

Witnesse Leander in the Euxine waves,
 And stout Æneas in the Trojane fyre,
 Achilles preassing through the Phrygian glaives,
 And Orpheus, daring to provoke the yre
 Of damned fiends, to get his love retyre;
 For both through heaven and hell thou makest way
 To win them worship which to thee obay.

And if, by all these perils and these paynes,
 He may but purchase lyking in her eye,
 What heavens of joy then to himselfe he faynes! 240
 Eftsoones he wypes quite out of memory
 Whatever ill before he did aby:
 Had it bene death, yet would he die againe,
 To live thus happie as her grace to gaine.

Yet, when he hath found favour to his will,
 He nathemore can so contented rest,
 But forceth further on, and striveth still

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T' approach more neare, till in her inmost brest
 He may embosomd bee and loved best;
 And yet not best, but to be lov'd alone; 250
 For love can not endure a Paragone.

The feare whereof, O how doth it torment
 His troubled mynd with more then hellish paine!
 And to his fayning fansie represent
 Sights never seene, and thousand shadowes vaine,
 To breake his sleepe, and waste his ydle braine:
 Thou that hast never lov'd canst not beleeve
 Least part of th' evils which poore lovers greeve.

The gnawing envie, the hart-fretting feare,
 The vaine surmizes, the distrustfull showses, 260
 The false reports that flying tales doe beare,
 The doubts, the daungers, the delayes, the woes,
 The fayned friends, the unassured foes,
 With thousands more then any tongue can tell,
 Doe make a lovers life a wretches hell.

Yet is there one more cursed then they all,
 That cancker-worme, that monster, Gelosie,
 Which eates the hart and feedes upon the gall,
 Turning all loves delight to miserie,
 Through feare of loosing his felicitie. 270
 Ah, Gods! that ever ye that monster placed
 In gentle love, that all his joyes defaced!

By these, O Love! thou doest thy entrance make
 Unto thy heaven, and doest the more endeere
 Thy pleasures unto those which them partake,
 As after stormes, when clouds begin to cleare,
 The Sunne more bright and glorious doth appeare;
 So thou thy folke, through paines of Purgatorie
 Dost beare unto thy blisse, and heavens glorie.