

The Devout Man Prays to His Relations

by William Herebert

Thou wommon bouthe fere
Thin owne fader bere.
Gret wonder this was
That on wommon was moder
To fader and hire brother,
So never other nas.

Thou my suster and moder
And thy sone my brother —
Who shulde thenne drede?
Whoso haveth the king to broder
And eek the quene to moder
Well aughte for to spede.

Dame, suster and moder,
Say thy sone, my brother,
That is domes-mon,
That for thee that him bere,
To me be debonere —
My robe he haveth opon.

Sethe he my robe tok,
Also ich finde in Bok,
He is to me ibounde;
And helpe he wole, ich wot,
For love the chartre wrot,
The enke om of his wounde.

Ich take to witnessinge
The spere and the crowninge,
The nailes and the rode,
That he that is so cunde
This ever haveth in munde,
That boughte us with his blode.

When thou geve him my wede,
Dame, help at the nede —
Ich wot thou might fol well,
That for no wreched gult
Ich be to helle ipult —
To thee ich make apel.

Now, Dame, ich thee biseche,
At thilke day of wreche
Be by thy sones trone,
When sunne shall ben sought
In werk, in word, in thought,
And spek for me, thou one.

When ich mot nede apere
For mine gultes here
Tofore the domes-mon,
Suster, be ther my fere
And make him debonere
That my robe haveth opon.

For habbe ich thee and him
That markes berth with him,
That charite him tok —
The woundes all bloody,
The toknes of mercy,
Ase techeth Holy Bok —
Tharf me nothing drede;
Sathan shall nout spede
With wrenches ne with crok.

Margaret Cavendish, "An Apology for her Poetry"

I language want to dress my fancies in,
The hair's uncurled, the garment's loose and thin.
Had they but silver lace to make them gay,
They'd be more courted than in poor array;
Or, had they art, would make a better show; 5
But they are plain; yet cleanly do they go.
The world in bravery doth take delight,
And glistening shows do more attract the sight:
And every one doth honor a rich hood,
As if the outside made the inside good. 10
And every one doth bow and give the place,
Not for the man's sake but the silver lace.
Let me intreat in my poor book's behalf,
That all will not adore the golden calf.
Consider, pray, gold hath no life therein, 15
And life, in nature, is the richest thing.
Be just, let Fancy have the upper place,
And then my verses may perchance find grace.

Emily Dickinson, "I am ashamed—I hide—"

I am ashamed—I hide—
What right have I—to be a Bride—
So late a Dowerless Girl—
Nowhere to hide my dazzled Face—
No one to teach me that new Grace— 5
Nor introduce—my Soul—

Me to adorn—How—tell—
Trinket—to make Me beautiful—
Fabrics of Cashmere—
Never a Gown of Dun—more— 10
Raiment instead—of Pompadour—
For Me—My soul—to wear—

Fingers—to frame my Round Hair
Oval—as Feudal Ladies wore—
Far Fashions—Fair— 15
Skill to hold my Brow like an Earl—
Plead—like a Whippoorwill—
Prove—like a Pearl—
Then, for Character—
Fashion My Spirit quaint—white— 20
Quick—like a Liquor—
Gay—like Light—
Bring Me my best Pride—
No more ashamed—
No more to hide— 25
Meek—let it be—too proud—for Pride—
Baptized—this Day—a Bride—

Mark Doty, "Couture"

1.

Peony silks,
in wax-light:
that petal-sheen,
gold or apricot or rose
candled into- 5
what to call it,
lumina, aurora, aureole?
About gowns,
the Old Masters,
were they ever wrong? 10
This penitent Magdalen's
wrapped in a yellow
so voluptuous
she seems to wear
all she's renounced; 15
this boy angel
isn't touching the ground,
but his billow
of yardage refers
not to heaven 20
but to pleasure's
textures, the tactile
sheers and voiles
and tulles
which weren't made 25
to adorn the soul.
Eternity's plainly nude;
the naked here and now
longs for a little
dressing up. And though 30
they *seem* to prefer
the invisible, every saint
in the gallery
flaunts an improbable
tumble of drapery, 35
a nearly audible liquidity
(bright brass embroidery,
satin's violin-sheen)
raveled around the body's
plain prose; exquisite 40
(dis?)guises; poetry,
music, clothes.

2.

Nothing *needs* to be this lavish.
Even the words I'd choose
for these leaves; 45
intricate, stippled, foxed,
tortoise, mottled, splotched
-jeweled adjectives
for a forest by Fabergé,
all cloisonné and enamel, 50
a yellow grove golden
in its gleaming couture,
brass buttons
tumbling to the floor.
Who's it for? 55
Who's the audience
for this bravura?
Maybe the world's
just *trompe l'oeil*,
appearances laid out 60
to dazzle the eye;
who could see through this
to any world beyond forms?
Maybe the costume's
the whole show, 65
all of revelation
we'll be offered.
So? Show me what's not
a world of appearances.
Autumn's a grand old drag 70
in torched and tumbled chiffon
striking her weary pose.
Talk about your mellow
fruitfulness! Smoky alto,
thou hast thy music, 75
too; unforgettable,
those October damasks,
the dazzling kimono
worn, dishabile,
uncountable curtain calls 80
in these footlights'
dusky, flattering rose.
The world's made fabulous
by fabulous clothes.

William Shakespeare, Sonnet 20, "A woman's face with nature's own hand painted"

A woman's face with nature's own hand painted
Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion;
A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
With shifting change as is false women's fashion;
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling, 5
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
A man in hue, all hues in his controlling,
Which steals men's eyes and women's souls amazeth.
And for a woman wert thou first created, 10
Till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
 But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,
 Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure.

Elizabeth Smither, "Mourning Garb"

If only we went into mourning half/mourning
Black, grey/black, purple
I'd know what to wear this morning.

Sitting in front of a one-bar heater
Is not the same as wearing purple
Small movements do not equal black.

5

I feel the need for veils and capes
Long gloves, violets, layers that rustle
As the heart and soul are bared.

To my father/PM'sC

Michael Waters, "Wedding Dress"

That Halloween I wore your wedding dress,
our children spooked & wouldn't speak for days.
I'd razored taut calves smooth, teased each blown tress,
then—lipsticked, mascaraed, & self-amazed—
shimmied like a starlet on the dance floor. 5
I'd never felt so sensual before—
Catholic schoolgirl & neighborhood whore.
In bed, dolled up, undone, we fantasized:
we clutched & fused, torn twins who'd been denied.
You were my shy groom. Love, I was your bride. 10

From John Keats, "Eve of St. Agnes."

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest, 220
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint:
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven:—Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint. 225

XXVI.

Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,
Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;
Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;
Loosens her fragrant boddice; by degrees 230
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:
Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,
Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,
In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,
But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.

XXVII.

Soon, trembling in her soft and chilly nest,
In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,
Until the poppi'd warmth of sleep oppress'd
Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away;
Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day; 240
Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain;
Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again. 235

XXVIII.

Stol'n to this paradise, and so entranced,
Porphyro gazed upon her empty dress, 245
And listen'd to her breathing, if it chanced
To wake into a slumberous tenderness;
Which when he heard, that minute did he bless,
And breath'd himself: then from the closet crept,
Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness, 250
And over the hush'd carpet, silent, stept,
And 'tween the curtains peep'd, where, lo!—how fast she slept.

The Mask

William Butler Yeats

"PUT off that mask of burning gold
With emerald eyes."

"O no, my dear, you make so bold
To find if hearts be wild and wise,
And yet not cold."

"I would but find what's there to find,
Love or deceit."

"It was the mask engaged your mind,
And after set your heart to beat,
Not what's behind."

"But lest you are my enemy,
I must enquire."

"O no, my dear, let all that be;
What matter, so there is but fire
In you, in me?"

We Wear the Mask

By Paul Laurence Dunbar

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask!