

When you awake, dull Brittons, and behold

Notes. This poem in support of Francis Bacon, written after his impeachment, is attributed in more than one source to William Lewis, provost of Oriel College, Oxford, and Bacon's former chaplain (Bodleian MS Eng. Poet. f.10; BL Add. MS 25303; BL MS Stowe 962), and in one source is dated June 1621 (Bodleian MS Rawl. B. 151). It takes the form of an anti-libel, directly responding to attacks on its subject, and adopts throughout an elegiac tone. Readers were not generous in their responses. In at least two instances it is titled a "foolish invective" (BL Add. MS 25303; BL MS Harley 3910), and at least one source appends a poem written in response (BL Add. MS 25303; see "Blame not the Poet though he make such moane").

When you awake, dull Brittons, and behold
What treasure you have throwne into your mould;
Your ignorance in pruning of a state;
You shall confesse, and shall your rashnes hate:
For in a senceles furie you have slaine
A man, as farre beyond your spungie braine
Of common knowledge, as if heaven from hell:
And yet you tryumph, thinke you have done well.
Oh, that the monster multitude should sit
In place of justice, reason, conscience, witte,
Nay in a throne or spheare above them all!
For tis a supream power that can call
All these to barre: and with a frowning brow,
Make Senatours, nay mightie Counsellors bow.
Bould Plebeans the day will come I know
When such as Cato, such as Cicero,
Shalbe more worth then the firste borne can be,
Of all your auncestours, or posterie.
But hees not dead you say: oh, that the soule
Once checkt, controwld, that once used to controwle
Cowcheth her downie wings! and scornes to flye
any game, but faire eternitie.
Each spirit is retir'd to a roome,
And makes his living body but a toombe;
On which such Epitaphes may well be read

At

As would the gazer strike with sorrow dead.
Oh that I could but give his worth a name
That if not you, your sonne may blush for shame!
Who in arithmatick hath greatest skill
His good partes cannot number, yet his ill
Cannot be calld a number; since tis knowne
He had but few that could be calld his owne:
And those in other men (even in these times)
Are often praisd, and vertues calld, not crimes.
But as in purest thinges the smalest spott
Is sooner found, then either staine or blott
In baser stuff; even so his chance was such
To have of faults to few, of worth to much.
So by the brightnes of his owne cleare light
The moates he had lay even to each sight.
If yee would have a man in all points good
You must not have him made of flesh and bloud:
An act of Parliament you first must settle
And force dame Nature worke in better mettle.
Some faults he had no more then serve to prove
He drew his line from Adam not from Jove.
And those small staines nature for its offence,
Like moonies in armorie made a difference
Twixt him and angells; beeing sure noe other
Then markes to know him for their younger brother.
Such spotts remooved (not to prophane) he then
Might well be call'd a demieGod mongst men.
A diamond flawed, saphyers and rubies stained
But undervalewed are not quite disdained;
Which by a file recoverd they become
As worthie of esteeme, yeeld no lesse summe.
The gardner finding once a cankar growne
Upon a tree, that hee hath frutefull knowne,
Grubs it not up; but with a carefull hand

Opens the roote, remoovs the clay or sand
That cawsd the cancar, or with cunning arte
Pares of some rynde, but comes not nere the harte:
Only such trees the axes adge endure
As nere bare fruite, or else are past all cure.
The prudent husbandman thrusts not his sheare
Into his corne because some weeds are there,
But takes his hooke and gently as he may
Walke through the field and takes them all away.
A house of many roomes one may command,
But yet it shall require many a hand
To keepe it cleane: and if some filth be found
Crope in by negligence, is't cast toth grownde?
Fie no; but first the supreame owner comes,
Examines everie office, views the roomes,
Makes them be cleans'd, and on some certaine paine
Commands they never be found so againe.
The temple else should overthrowne have bin,
Because some money-brokers were therin.
The arke had sunke and perisht in the floud,
Because some beasts crope in that were not good.
Adam had with a thunderbolt bin strooke,
When he from Eve the golden apple tooke.
But should the maker of mankinde doe soe
Whoe should write Man? who should to mans state grow?
Shall he be then put to th'extreame of law,
Because his conscience had a little flaw?
Will ye want conscience cleane, because that he
Stumbled or tript but in a small degree?
No; first looke back to all your owne past acts
Then passe your censure, punish all the facts
By him committed: Then Ile sweare he shall
Confesse that you are upright Chancellors all:
And for the time to come with all his might

Strive to out doo you all in doeing right.
Oh could his predicessours goast appeare,
And tell how foule his master left the chaire!
How each feather that he satt upon
Infectious was, and that ther was no stone
On which some contract was not made to fright
The fatherlesse and widdow from their right.
No stoole, no boord, no rush, no bench, on which
The poore man was not sould unto the rich.
It would have longer time the roome to aire
And what yee now call foule yee would thinke faire.
He tooke to keepe, (tis knowne) this but to live
He robd to purchase land and this to give.
And had this beene so blest in his owne treasure
He would have given much more with much more pleasure.
The nights greate lampe from the rich sea will take
To lend the thirstie earth and from each lake
That hath an overplus borrow a share
Not to its proper use, but to repair
The rivers of some parcht and updried hill:
So this unconstant planet (for more ill
Envie cannot speake of him) took from some floud
Not for's owne use, but to doe others good.
But such misfortune dogg'd his honest will
That what he tooke by wrong he gave as ill.
For those his bountie nurst, as all suppose
(Not those he injured) proov'd his greatest foes.
So foolish mothers from their wiser mates
Oft filch and steale, weaken their owne estates
To feede the humor of some wanton boy;
They sillie women hoping to have joy
Of this ranke plant when they are saplesse growne
But seld or never hath it yet bin knowne
That pamperd youth gave parents more releefe

Then what increaste their age with care and greefe
These oversights of Nature former times,
Have rather pittied, then condem'd as crimes.
Then wher is charitie become of late
Is her place beggd? her office given state?
Is their a pattent got for her restraite
Or monopoly gain'd by false complaint?
If so? pursue the patentees, for sure
Falce information did the writt procure:
The seale is counterfeit, the referrees
Have taken bribes: then first examine these,
Restore faire Charitie to her place againe,
And he that suffers now may then complaine:
Set her at Justice feete, then let the poize
By them directed be, and not by noise.
Let them his merritts weigh with his offence,
And you shall finde a mightie difference.
Race not a goodly buildinge for a toy:
Tis better to repaire then to destroy.
You will not force his ashes to the urne,
Tush, thats not it; himselfe, himselfe will burne.
When he but findes his honours sound retreat,
Like a cag'd foule, himselfe to death will beate;
And leave the world, when thers no healpe at all
To sight and greeve for his untimely fall.
The skilfull surgeon cutts not of a limme
Whilst there is hope: oh deale you so with him!
He wants not fortitude but can endure
Cutting, incision, so they promise cure:
Nay more, shew him but where the ey-sore stands,
And he will search and drest with his owne hands.
Would yee anatomize? would you desect
For your experience? oh, yee may elect
Out of that house, where yee as Judges sit,

Diverse for execution far more fitt.
And when ye finde a monster overgrowne
With foule corruption, oh let him be throwne
At Justice feete, let him be sacrificz'd
And let new tortures new plagues be devised:
Such as may fright the living from their crimes,
And be a president to after times.
Which long-liv'd records to enseuinge daies
Shall still proclaime, to your eternall praise.

Source. BL MS Sloane 826, fols. 4r-6v