

1633

TO HIS MISTRESS GOING TO BED

John Donne

Donne, John (1572-1631) - First and greatest of the English metaphysical poets. Donne's work was popular upon its initial (posthumous) publication, but it was not until the early 20th century that he was first considered a major poet. His poems are admired for their wit, beauty, and perception. To His Mistress Going to Bed (1633) - Opening lines: Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defy, / Until I labour, I in labour lie. ...

TO HIS MISTRESS GOING TO BED

Come, Madam, come, all rest my powers defy,
 Until I labour, I in labour lie.
 The foe oft-times having the foe in sight,
 Is tired with standing though they never fight.
 Off with that girdle, like heaven's zone glistening,
 But a far fairer world encompassing.
 Unpin that spangled breastplate which you wear,
 That th' eyes of busy fools may be stopped there.
 Unlace yourself, for that harmonious chime
 Tells me from you, that now 'tis your bed time.
 Off with that happy busk, which I envy,
 That still can be, and still can stand so nigh.
 Your gown going off, such beauteous state reveals,
 As when from flowery meads th' hill's shadow steals.
 Off with that wiry coronet and show
 The hairy diadem which on you doth grow;
 Now off with those shoes, and then safely tread
 In this love's hallowed temple, this soft bed.
 In such white robes heaven's angels used to be
 Received by men; thou angel bring'st with thee
 A heaven like Mahomet's paradise; and though
 Ill spirits walk in white, we easily know
 By this these angels from an evil sprite,
 Those set our hairs, but these our flesh upright.
 License my roving hands, and let them go
 Before, behind, between, above, below.
 O my America, my new found land,
 My kingdom, safest when with one man manned,
 My mine of precious stones, my empery,
 How blessed am I in this discovering thee!
 To enter in these bonds, is to be free;
 Then where my hand is set, my seal shall be.
 Full nakedness, all joys are due to thee
 As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be,
 To taste whole joys. Gems which you women use
 Are like Atlanta's balls, cast in men's views,
 That when a fool's eye lighteth on a gem,
 His earthly soul may covet theirs, not them.
 Like pictures, or like books' gay coverings made
 For laymen, are all women thus arrayed;

Themselves are mystic books, which only we
Whom their imputed grace will dignify
Must see revealed. Then since I may know,
As liberally, as to a midwife, show
Thyself: cast all, yea, this white linen hence,
Here is no penance, much less innocence.
To teach thee, I am naked first, why then
What needst thou have more covering than a man.

THE END

"Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed", originally spelled "To His Mistris Going to Bed", is a poem written by the metaphysical poet John Donne. The elegy was refused a licence for publishing in Donne's posthumous collection, "Poems", in 1633, but was printed in an anthology, "The Harmony of the Muses" in 1654. The poem is classified as one of Donne's love poems, "marked by an energetic, often bawdy wit, a new explicitness about sexual desire and experience, and an irreverent new attitude towards... LibriVox volunteers bring you 12 recordings of To His Mistress Going to Bed by John Donne. This was the Fortnightly Poetry project for February 12, 2017. Read in English by Algy Pug; Dafni Ma; Newgatenovelist; Greg Giordano; Jenny Adamson; Jason in Panama; Matthew Datcher; Patrick Wallace; Tony Addison; Tomas Peter; tovarisch and Vickie Rayhill. John Donne was an English poet and cleric in the Church of England. He is considered the pre-eminent representative of the metaphysical poets. His works are noted for their strong, sensual style and include sonnets, love poems, religious poems, Latin translations, epigrams, elegies, songs, satires and sermons. The next lines of "To His Mistress Going to Bed" are simpler. He has, at least mentally, taken off all of her clothes. What's left are her shoes. Then all she has to do is walk across the floor to "love's hallow'd temple" or more clearly, the bed. When she reclines there she will be covered in "white robes" just like "heaven's Angels." She always seems like an angel to him, but now that she's in bed, she'll physically look like one. Her body will be draped in white and she'll bring "Mahomet's Paradise" to their bed. This is a reference to the prophet Muhammad of Islam. Continuing the talk of angels, he makes sure his listener knows that she is not sinning by sleeping with him. Your gown going off such beautiful state reveals, As when from flowery meads th' hill's shadow steals. Off with your wiry coronet, and show The hairy diadems which on you do grow. Off with your hose and shoes ; then softly tread In this love's hallow'd temple, this soft bed.Â Gems which you women use Are like Atlanta's ball cast in men's views ; That, when a fool's eye lighteth on a gem, His earthly soul might court that, not them. Like pictures, or like books' gay coverings made For laymen, are all women thus array'd. Themselves are only mystic books, which we "Whom their imputed grace will dignify" Must see reveal'd.