

# MDCC

(2004)



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The first six poems are pastiches of 17<sup>th</sup> century English metaphysical poetry. The length of lines and rhyme scheme are derived from poems by Thomas Traherne.

The Reverend William Blaxton (1595–1675) was an early British settler in New England, and the first European settler of modern day Boston and Rhode Island. His sonnet here is pure conjecture.

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## Silver

Oh, Yankee me, display my art.  
Where is the thing sets me apart?  
Is it a false peace that I crave?  
An indolence that I would save?

What is it that divorces me  
From that which I can wholly see?  
Is there no mending every day  
That makes the warts of sin go way?

O Light, O Counsel let me heed  
The Word which ev'ry hour I need  
That makes all hindrance disappear  
That I may by His side appear.

I clear should by His side pay care  
For eloquence of Heav'nly flair.  
Let planets in me mainly see  
This reckless maze, identity.

It is His crust of Love that shines  
As bright as silver in the mine,  
That ore that groundless we deplore  
Despite that goodness at the core.

For here what's 'round is tranquil sound  
That cannot e'en by earth be bound.  
And silver shines His heart instead  
Of gold's resplendence made by lead.

## Belief

*You can only believe what you do not know.*

Thomas Merton

When sixteen years my life had pass'd  
I came to know belief.  
But knowing did not make it last.  
It was a rabbit of relief.  
I look'd for angels to descend,  
But more like hawks they flew aloof.  
Above my crying to ascend.  
They gathered as a roof.  
As in a cave,  
More like a grave,  
My scheme, my fleeting belief had no proof.

Although I lay interr'd in shame  
Of knowing while I slept  
My thought the same as walking lame  
Was wak'd in ignorance bereft.  
Yet what was known would ne'er undo  
The grace and mystery I felt  
That was not knowing but a new  
Belief that would not melt.  
But still unknown,  
It languish'd lone.  
What passes understanding was a belt.

My inability was cinch'd.  
Knowing was not a way.  
My cure from awareness was pinch'd  
By thinking just what I could say.  
Believing more than I could think  
Still stood a colony remote.  
Just knowing then my thought would sink  
As an uncertain boat.  
The lathworks creak,  
Ready to leak.  
Where was the solvent draught that I might drink?

When sixty years my life had pass'd  
Belief came to know me.  
The change was very slow but vast.  
What great relief to be at sea!  
The waves rise up and loving leaps  
To surrender all ambition  
My wat'ry human brain now keeps  
Its limits' addition.  
The changing leaf  
Does not feel grief.  
What we think, the world we know, is fiction.

## Grace

A mist across my roving mind impell'd  
A crush of craving's rash  
Intolerable morass.  
No line nor shape of a sign I beheld —  
Only barren dry fields of brier  
And no apprehension of meaning higher.  
What strength I had was all to sigh  
Over the odor that pass'd through my cry.  
— A breath that's lost,  
Unchang'd, misspent, into a grim void toss'd.

But in that gasp of addictive remorse  
A faint complaint stood 'lone,  
Promise of sweeter tone,  
That sang, perhaps, "There is a clearer course  
Beyond the moan of anguish'd gall."  
Then in that bleak and numbing pall  
Peek'd through the foggéd stagnant air  
A timid supplication, perhaps pray'r  
Of form still dim  
Suggesting lowly, "Kiss the hem of Him."

Am I to seek an elusive garment  
Shredded by poverty,  
A robe whose edge is key  
To freeing me from sterile containment?  
Unlikely bold instruction  
To cathect a new direction  
From fabric to Wearer to soul  
— Is this designed to make my craving whole?  
A kiss in Faith  
Will from thankless misery make me safe?

The mind constructs, invents, commands, obstructs.  
It is not close, but loud  
Millions of words in cloud,  
A crown of banishment by squawking ducks.  
I shudder at what's possible  
But fear no longer the improbable.  
Indeed in Trust I now take heart  
And feel the want of gratitude depart.  
That warm relief  
Can't come from cold propounding disbelief.

This saving opportunity unsought  
We have been freely giv'n  
From bindings to be riv'n  
From doubt, from dread, from death to be uncaught.  
How peaceful here the silent cloth  
That intimate radiance bearing forth  
A Body framed in Heaven's Womb  
A Body that did not accept the tomb.  
O raiment fair!  
Your protection allow me now to share.

## Smoke

A shapeless burning lifted to the ceil,  
No phrase could trace its pattern wild.  
No solid there that one can feel,  
A kindl'd message waiting to be told,  
Weak as a child,  
So evident is its appeal.  
It gives no clue to us its bearing to unfold,  
This air futile.

Then midst the weeds a bud I found was born  
That crossed my senses – sight and scent.  
My nose could see the odor borne  
By waft of unseen wings that also bear  
The firmament.  
My eyes could smell the drifting form  
That clears and scours and purifies our breath with pray'r  
To Heaven's sent.

Enjoin'd I then God's eye to be  
The gray translucence shifting there  
That flew aloft my stain to free.  
And then my tongue did hear a wordless cloud  
Apart sin tear.  
As if to claim this mystery  
The thurifer's unspoken word did raise its fragrance loud  
Again as pray'r.

Thus flow'd the evanescent healing spring  
Of embers' heirs, the cleansing soot  
That rises as we weeping sing:  
Dear Lord, incinerate our errant way,  
Our grim pursuit,  
We pray. We pray our fierce ailing  
Will be as dreams that float away when glows the day  
As ashes' fruit.

## Seeing

In shadow I complain of dark,  
Condemning me to shame,  
Lost to an Angel's song of "Hark,  
From Heav'nly Light He came."

How can I see at all anew  
The radiance so near  
With opportunities so few  
To make my vision clear?

E'en closed I know I'm not so weak  
My eyes cannot improve.  
The grief whose great relief I seek  
His Love could fast remove.

I need to give that glow a place  
Where rays may gladly fall,  
And in my sight of such rare space  
Allow enchantment's call.

The nimbus flown around His head  
Is mine to view it there  
If I will ope my lids instead  
Of bowing to my care

And give my troubles to His light  
And gaze beyond the wall  
Where there surrender is so bright  
It does illumine all.

## Remission

Forgiving is the air that swarms,  
That quakes remorse in all its forms,  
That breaks the knot of sin  
As if it were a whim.  
The scold's throat is harness'd in twine.  
The Peace achiev'd is genuine.  
Forgiv'n or forgiving's Heav'n's choice.  
To make both live is Heav'n's voice.  
The sword is cased in mud;  
The Word is understood.  
"You are not my enemy.  
You cannot mean harm to me."

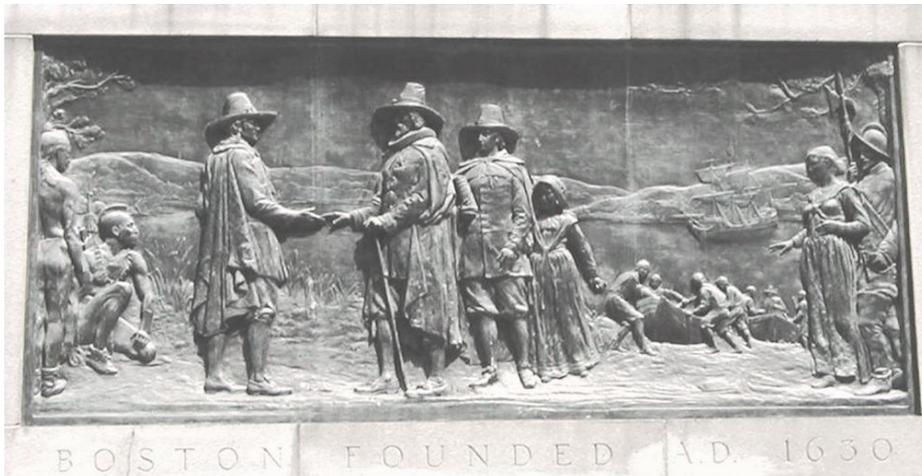
The cheek abus'd serves as a muse.  
The welt is left for me to lose.  
And healing comes to nest  
In our Eternal Rest.  
To suffer and to pray are right.  
The evil drowns in Jesus' Light.

Space 'tween forgiv'n and forgiving's  
Slim as dust 'tween death and living.  
God knows both are flowers  
That He would have as ours  
To press among the Words of Love  
That strive to gain the Place Above.

## Reverend William Blaxton's Sonnet

As fair moon's light through boughs doth move  
So through these bones Thy Mercy's Love.  
This wine our tongues and lips doth stain  
And thus Thy Caring Truth remain.  
As cures of sickness may be lost  
Yet are redeemed by the Ghost,  
Love in thy Blood and Body keep  
The King of Kings in us sea deep.

Men's tenets tended as a flock  
Of sheep is not Thy Martyr's mark.  
E'en power of the sun is made  
To cower in Thy Garden's shade.  
Their thoughts and mine are not divine.  
Thy precious Love demands our mind.



The Reverend William Blaxton welcomes John Winthrop's party to Shawmut in 1630



